

**A Narrative Inquiry into the Lived Experiences of Racialized Teacher Candidates in an
Ontario Teacher Education Program**

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Dedication

This is no ordinary Ph.D. journey—
this is Your victory!

And in every fruit it shall bear,
I will sing glory and praise in Your name,

my Lord and my God,
May Your name be adored and glorified.

Abstract

This doctoral dissertation examines the lived experiences of racialized teacher candidates in an Ontario teacher education program, with the aim of understanding how systemic and interpersonal barriers shape their educational trajectories. Ontario offers a distinct context, with a highly centralized, neoliberal education system that makes implementing anti-racist reforms challenging (Shah et al., 2022). Despite efforts to diversify the teaching workforce, racialized educators remain underrepresented, revealing persistent structural and systemic barriers. Guided by Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Community Cultural Wealth (CCW), this study foregrounds the strengths, resources, and resilience of racialized teacher candidates rather than framing their experiences in deficit terms. Narrative inquiry serves as the methodological framework, emphasizing the relational, temporal, and contextual dimensions of experience. Across three rounds of interviews with seven participants, 21 transcripts were generated and analyzed using the NVivo software. Data analysis identified resonant threads, which are recurring and meaningful patterns across the narratives, showing how participants navigate personal, social, and institutional challenges while drawing on six types of cultural wealth: aspirational, familial, social, navigational, linguistic, and resistant.

This study contributes to research on teacher diversity by centering the voices of racialized teacher candidates, highlighting both the barriers they face and the strengths they bring to teacher education. The findings offer practical and policy insights, emphasizing the need for teacher education programs to move beyond symbolic diversity initiatives toward systemic, anti-racist reforms that recognize, honour, and build on the knowledge and cultural wealth of racialized teacher candidates.

Keywords: *racialized teacher candidates, teacher diversity, Critical Race Theory, Community Cultural Wealth, narrative inquiry*

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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Overview of the Study

By 2036, nearly one in two Canadians will come from racialized backgrounds (Statistics Canada, 2017b). This demographic shift means that Canada's schools will continue to become increasingly ethnically and racially diverse. Yet, this raises a critical question: Are our schools adequately prepared to meet the needs of a rapidly diversifying student population?

A growing body of literature underscores that one key factor in supporting diverse student populations is increasing the presence of racialized teachers in schools (Bascia, 1996; Bianco, 2018; Burke, 2023; Hammouda, 2025; Ladson-Billings, 1995b; Ryan et al., 2009). Scholars have long emphasized that racialized teachers bring valuable perspectives, pedagogical strengths, and cultural competencies to their classrooms. For instance, racialized educators are often more inclined to use culturally responsive teaching practices (Ladson-Billings, 1995), demonstrate deeper empathy toward multilingual learners due to shared cultural and linguistic experiences (Faez, 2012; Paterson, 2023; Vidwans & Faez, 2019), and advocate for racialized students' success to a greater extent than many of their white counterparts (Achinstein & Aguirre, 2008; Chapman & Hobbel, 2022; Dilworth & Coleman, 2014; Escayg, 2010). And thus, racialized educators contribute to stronger relationships with students and improved educational outcomes (Villegas & Irvine, 2010).

However, despite this evidence, the demographic profile of Canadian teacher candidates and practicing teachers remains largely homogeneous, that is, white, middle-class, and female (Childs & Ferguson, 2013; Eizadirad et al., 2023; Lund, 2024). The persistent underrepresentation of racialized teachers raises questions about the structures and processes of teacher education programs that continue to reproduce racial hierarchies. Ryan et al. (2009) use the metaphors of the leaky pipeline, bottleneck, and glass ceiling to describe the systemic barriers that racialized individuals face in becoming and remaining educators. The leaky pipeline represents the systemic inequities across K–12 education that hinder racialized students' academic progression and access to higher education. The bottleneck refers to the experiences of internationally educated teachers, many of whom are racialized, who face restrictive and often

exclusionary recredentialing policies imposed by regulatory bodies (Jimenez, 2003). The glass ceiling, meanwhile, speaks to the institutionalized racism that limits racialized educators' advancement and access to leadership positions (Ryan et al., 2009; Cooper & Wilson-Jones, 2023). Beyond these systemic challenges, social perceptions of teaching as a low-status or low-reward career further deter racialized individuals from entering the profession (Darling-Hammond & Wise, 1981; Rong & Preissle, 1997).

Recognizing the urgency of this issue, universities have begun to respond through targeted diversification initiatives in teacher education programs (Holden & Kitchen, 2018; Abawi & Eizadirad, 2024). For example, the University of Toronto and the University of Ottawa have introduced equity-based admission streams that reserve spaces for applicants from racialized and equity-deserving backgrounds (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 2023; University of Ottawa, n.d.). Although such measures acknowledge the importance of representation, they rarely engage with the underlying power relations and structural barriers that sustain racial inequities within teacher education. As emerging research makes clear, teacher diversification is not merely a question of recruitment but a matter of retention, inclusion, and belonging (Tamtik & Guenter, 2019; Paterson, 2023). When diversity initiatives concentrate only on admission numbers, they risk perpetuating tokenism and overlooking the everyday realities through which racialized teacher candidates navigate predominantly white institutional spaces.

In response to this enduring tension between Canada's increasingly diverse student population and its persistently homogenous teaching force, this study takes up the challenge of examining how racialized teacher candidates experience and navigate their teacher education programs. Specifically, the present research investigates the lived experiences of seven racialized teacher candidates enrolled in an Ontario teacher education program. Using narrative inquiry as the research methodology, the study seeks to understand how these teacher candidates interpret and respond to the institutional, cultural, and pedagogical contexts they encounter; how they make sense of their racialized and professional identities; and how they sustain their aspirations amid the systemic and everyday barriers embedded within their educational journeys.

However, the contribution of this study extends beyond documenting barriers or inequities. While existing research has made important contributions by highlighting experiences of exclusion, marginalization, and deficit positioning within teacher education (Brown, 2014; Marom, 2019; Ryan et al., 2009), it has often framed these challenges as individual issues rather

than as symptoms of systemic inequities. In many cases, the struggles of racialized teacher candidates are interpreted as personal deficiencies, obscuring the role of educational institutions in reproducing inequitable structures and denying equitable access to resources and support (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Yosso, 2005). This study directly challenges such deficit-oriented perspectives by employing Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) as its guiding theoretical and conceptual frameworks. CRT provides a critical lens for explicitly centering race in the analysis, uncovering how racism is embedded within teacher education policies, practices, and discourses. In doing so, it allows for a deeper interrogation of how structural inequities, and not individual shortcomings, shape the experiences of racialized teacher candidates. Complementing CRT, CCW shifts the analytical focus from what racialized candidates are presumed to "lack" to the cultural assets, knowledge, and strengths they bring from their homes and communities into their teacher education programs.

It is significant to note that, while CCW has been increasingly applied in K–12 contexts to challenge deficit thinking about racialized students, it remains underutilized in the study of racialized teachers (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018; Yosso, 2005), and even more so in research on racialized teacher candidates. Within the Canadian context, in particular, there is a notable absence of research that engages explicitly with the diverse forms of cultural wealth that racialized teacher candidates contribute to their programs. This study, therefore, argues for the importance of applying CCW to teacher education research as a way to uncover and validate the forms of community-based knowledge that sustain racialized candidates within often exclusionary institutional contexts.

By foregrounding aspirational, navigational, social, familial, linguistic, and resistant forms of capital (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Yosso, 2005), the present study demonstrates how these resources function as strategies of resilience, resistance, and survival. In doing so, it directly contests deficit-oriented narratives that dominate teacher education discourse and instead highlights the agency, adaptability, and critical consciousness that racialized candidates enact within constraining institutional spaces. Ultimately, by situating racialized teacher candidates' narratives within the frameworks of CRT and CCW, this study contributes to a growing body of scholarship that demands equity frameworks grounded in community, resilience, and belonging rather than assimilation or remediation (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018). This approach not only

deepens understanding of racialized candidates' lived experiences but also offers practical and conceptual insights into how teacher education programs might better recognize, affirm, and cultivate the cultural wealth that racialized candidates already possess.

1.2 Rationale and Context

Ontario's education system provides a particularly compelling and urgent context for this research. As one of Canada's most populous and demographically diverse provinces (Statistics Canada, 2023), Ontario's classrooms mirror a complex mosaic of racial, linguistic, and cultural identities. Yet, this increasing diversity also exposes ongoing struggle in how the province's teacher education programs respond to the realities of its student population.

The context of this study is the University of Ottawa's Teacher Education program, located in the nation's capital, that is Ottawa, and one of Ontario's major centres of ethnocultural and linguistic diversity (Statistics Canada, 2016). The university, by virtue of its location and bilingual structure, is uniquely positioned to reflect the province's demographic realities. Offering teacher education in both English and French, it has the institutional potential to develop educators who can respond to the diverse linguistic and cultural needs of Ontario's student population. However, as Holden and Kitchen (2018) report, there is a striking disparity between these two teacher education programs within the university: while the proportion of racialized teacher candidates in the French program has nearly doubled since 2012, the English program has seen a decline over the same period. This difference raises important questions about who gets access, who is represented, and who feels included within the very institutions meant to promote equity in education.

Teacher education, as Kaur and Szorenyi (2020) emphasize, is not merely a site of teacher preparation but a cornerstone of social development. It equips future educators with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to navigate increasingly complex classrooms and foster inclusive learning environments (Ingersoll et al., 2017; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). However, a substantial body of scholarship has critiqued teacher education programs for their persistent shortcomings in preparing teachers to effectively engage with culturally and linguistically diverse students (Delpit, 2006; Sleeter, 2001; Yuan, 2018). Sleeter (2001) emphasizes that the majority of white preservice teachers enter these programs with limited

cross-cultural knowledge and experiences, often resulting in unexamined assumptions that impede equitable teaching practice.

These concerns take on particular urgency in the context of the University of Ottawa's English teacher education program, where declining racial diversity among candidates risks reinforcing the very inequities that teacher education ought to challenge. Given Ontario's rapidly diversifying student population, the program holds both an ethical and pedagogical responsibility to prepare future teachers who can meet the needs of all learners. As Zoch and He (2020) assert, preservice teacher education represents a crucial opportunity, and indeed an obligation, to cultivate culturally and linguistically responsive educators capable of transforming classrooms into equitable spaces of learning.

1.3 Research Purpose and Questions

The central purpose of this study is to understand how racialized teacher candidates experience, navigate, and make meaning of their time in teacher education. This research seeks to illuminate both the challenges they encounter and the strategies they employ to persist, resist, and thrive within institutional structures that were not designed with them in mind. By bringing attention to these experiences, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how teacher education might better promote equity, diversity, and inclusion within its programs.

Specifically, this study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of racialized teacher candidates in an Ontario teacher education program?
2. What do these experiences reveal about the ways racialized teacher candidates navigate the challenges and opportunities within teacher education?
3. What lessons can teacher education programs learn from the narratives of racialized teacher candidates to promote equity, diversity, and inclusion?

Anchored in its guiding frameworks, it is worth mentioning that the aim of this study moves beyond documenting participants' lived experiences. It seeks to advance social justice and transformation in teacher education by disrupting deficit-oriented perspectives and foregrounding the assets that students bring into educational spaces.

1.4 Methodological Orientation

In examining the lived experiences of racialized teacher candidates, I employed narrative inquiry as my research methodology. Narrative inquiry offers a powerful way to understand how people make meaning of their experiences (Polkinghorne, 1988). Although widely used across disciplines such as the social sciences, psychology, and medicine, narrative inquiry entered the field of education through the work of Connelly and Clandinin (1990), who viewed human experience as an inherently storied phenomenon. Unlike other qualitative approaches, narrative inquiry requires not only skill in data collection but also the ability to think narratively—to interpret experiences as stories unfolding through time and relationships (Kim, 2016).

According to Clandinin (2023), thinking narratively involves attending to three interrelated dimensions of experience: temporality, sociality, and place. Temporality invites researchers to recognize how experiences evolve over time for both participants and themselves. Sociality draws attention to the personal and social contexts that shape those experiences, while place refers to the physical and contextual settings in which experiences occur (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Attending to these dimensions enabled me to look backward and forward in time, inward and outward in my relationships with participants, and within and across the places where our stories intersected. Moreover, engaging with these three dimensions helped me gain a deeper understanding of participants' lives (Downey & Clandinin, 2019) and guided me in composing their narrative accounts and individual annals.

To gather these narratives, I followed Seidman's (2013, 2019) three-interview series approach. I met with each of the seven participants three times, with each semi-structured interview serving a specific purpose. The extended time I spent with participants not only fostered trust but also enriched the relational space we shared. I found myself looking forward to each meeting, whether online or in person, and each encounter offered a new vantage point from which to observe how our experiences evolved through time and space. Each conversation allowed me to see participants in a new light as we discussed their past and present experiences and their aspirations as future educators. Additionally, in this relational space, I became increasingly mindful of my role as a researcher. Narrative inquiry, grounded in relational ethics (Almansori & Paskaran, 2025; Caine et al., 2019; Clandinin, 2006), demands attentiveness, care, and humility in responding to the mutual vulnerability that storytelling invites. As I

listened, I was also reflecting on my own personal and academic journey, my own narrative beginnings, and my positionality.

1.5 My Narrative Beginnings: Reflexivity and Research Positionality

Narrative inquiry demands an acknowledgment that the researcher is never neutral nor detached from the research process. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) emphasize, narrative inquirers are always “part of the landscape about which [they are] writing” (Clandinin, 2023, p. 1). Our identities, histories, and emotions shape how we enter the research field, how we relate to participants, and how we interpret their stories. Thus, articulating positionality and engaging in reflexivity are not only methodological considerations but ethical commitments that guide how knowledge is produced.

I began this doctoral journey five years ago, at a time when I was engulfed in grief following the loss of my father, who had passed a few years after my mother. The profound sense of loss plunged me into emotional darkness, leaving me consumed by questions of meaning, purpose, and belonging that felt impossible to answer. Life, at that point, seemed stripped of colour and direction. Yet amid that despair, there was a faint glimmer of hope— an intuition that perhaps by pursuing a PhD degree, I might rediscover meaning and begin to rebuild a sense of self and direction.

At the time, I had no clear plan for a research project, no defined topic, and no sense of what shape my scholarly life would take. What I did have was a fragile desire to find purpose again; a belief that perhaps through doctoral study, I might begin to see life differently. As I began my graduate coursework, I was also navigating the re-credentialling process with the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT). With eight years of teaching experience overseas, I was granted certification to teach in Ontario as an Internationally Educated Teacher (IET). Shortly after, I began working as an Occasional Teacher in a public-school board.

In my first few weeks of visiting schools, I was struck by the contrast between the ethnocultural and racial diversity of the students and the overwhelming whiteness of the teaching staff. There were other racialized adults in the school, but most of them were educational assistants. I often found myself scanning the hallways, hoping to see another racialized educator— someone whose presence might reassure me that I belonged, that teaching in Canada was a space for me too, despite my skin colour and distinct Filipino accent. I experienced what

scholars call hypervisibility, a constant awareness of how my body, voice, and presence marked me as “different” (Lander & Santoro, 2017; Settles et al., 2019).

My experience as a graduate student mirrored these feelings. For several semesters, I served as a teaching assistant for a diversity and equity course in the University of Ottawa’s teacher education program. Each time I entered the classroom, it felt like diving into what Ahmed (2007) calls a “sea of whiteness” (p. 157), where most of my students were white, female, and native English speakers. In that environment, I often felt the need to reaffirm my legitimacy as an educator. When my English faltered or my accent became more pronounced, I would silently remind myself that I am, as Yosso (2005) describes, a “place of multiple strengths” (p. 84). My experiences as a racialized woman, immigrant, and teacher are not deficits, but sources of cultural wealth that shape my pedagogy and scholarship. These reflections and encounters, within both the teacher education program and public schools, became central to my decision to pursue my dissertation topic.

As a first-generation Southeast Asian cis woman and an internationally educated teacher, I occupy the margins of predominantly white educational spaces. My positionality, as a racialized scholar navigating Canadian academia, inevitably shapes how I approach research, what questions I ask, and how I relate to my participants. Bettini et al. (2022) argue that those marginalized by their racial identity often share a commitment to dismantling white supremacy. My research emerges from this commitment and from a recognition that my participants’ stories are, in many ways, entangled with my own.

As the research progressed, the relationships I developed with my participants blossomed into friendships. Many of them shared that our conversations became a healing space— a place where they could finally tell stories they had long carried in silence. What they might not have realized was that such space was healing for me, too. As they recounted their struggles and triumphs, I found myself resonating deeply with their stories. In the narratives they shared, I saw my own pain— the profound loss I was carrying, and the longing to find meaning and purpose echoed back to me. I could not separate their narratives from my own; each story they shared invited me to revisit parts of my own journey that I had tucked away.

This mutual vulnerability became the heart of our encounter (Behar, 2022). As participants shared their stories, I received them with openness and care. In return, I shared parts of my life that I would typically reserve only for friends— memories, doubts, and lessons born of

hardship and strength. As Caine et al. (2021) note, friendship occupies a central and necessary place in narrative inquiry, as relational closeness enables deeper, more honest exchanges. This was reflected in my experience. Through these reciprocal encounters, our relationships extended beyond the interview protocols. We began checking in on one another, exchanging greetings during holidays, and sustaining our conversations long after the interviews concluded.

Yet this closeness also brought ethical tensions. Connelly and Clandinin (1988) note that in narrative inquiry, “intensive, close working relationships with participants” often bring “fundamental ethical issues close to the surface” (p. 273). I, too, wrestled with these complexities as I was torn between the roles of researcher and friend. At times, I felt guilty for needing to maintain boundaries. Still, I found solace in Tran's (2023) reflections that to live relationally and ethically with participants is not to compromise rigour, but to embody the very essence of narrative inquiry. This understanding reminded me that narrative inquiry is not an impersonal pursuit of knowledge but a profoundly human act, an encounter of stories, emotions, and lives in relation.

Throughout this research journey, particularly in moments of ethical and emotional uncertainty, I turned to reflexivity as both a methodological stance and an emotional practice. Reflexivity, as Finlay (2002) describes, is a process of “continual self-awareness and scrutiny” (p. 532), requiring researchers to critically examine how their identities, assumptions, and emotions shape the research encounter. For me, it became an intentional practice of pausing, slowing down, and attending to my thoughts, feelings, and interactions with participants as the research unfolded. I maintained a research journal in which I documented these reflections, recording internal dialogues, ethical dilemmas, and emergent insights that surfaced throughout the inquiry. Engaging in reflexivity allowed me to trace how my positionality influenced not only the ways I interpreted participants’ stories, but also how their narratives were, in turn, shaping me.

Indeed, I came to realize that as I was writing the stories of my participants, their stories were also writing me (Watt, 2007). Through our conversations, it became clear to me the profound power of storytelling, that is, as our stories intersect with the stories of our participants, they linger in our minds, reverberating long after the initial encounter, and ultimately transforming us (Caine et al., 2020). Listening to participants share their experiences of strength, resilience, and purpose became, for me, an act of personal healing. Their stories helped me

rediscover my own sources of strength, rekindle my sense of hope, and find renewed meaning in my life and work. Through their stories, I came to see that even when life is difficult, there is still so much hope in the work that we do. Their narratives reminded me that, as both a teacher and researcher, I hold the power and the possibility to help make this world a better place for humanity. I came to understand that my work carries the potential to be both voice and vessel, to amplify through my writing the experiences of those who have been silenced or oppressed, and to take part in the collective effort within teacher education to create classrooms that are more equitable and inclusive.

As Okri (1997) so beautifully writes, “when you no longer listen, [stories] lie silent in your brain... they lend amplifications to the promptings of conscience” (p. 43). In time, I came to understand that stories choose us and that they call on us to bring them into being for the profound needs of humankind (Okri, 1997). In this way, I came to see that this dissertation is not only about understanding my participants’ stories but also about how those stories, through their telling and retelling, have transformed me. Through this work, I found not only academic purpose but also personal healing, renewal, and hope.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

To ensure clarity and consistency throughout this dissertation, this section defines key terms as they are used in the study. The concepts discussed here are grounded in the theoretical frameworks and contexts that shape this research. Defining these terms provides a shared understanding of how they inform the analysis, interpretation, and representation of participants’ experiences.

Counterstory: A narrative that centers the experiences of marginalized individuals, highlighting racism, resistance, and social inequities (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). In this study, counter-stories are used as a theoretical tool to guide data analysis.

Counterstorytelling: The process of creating and sharing counter-stories, typically contrasting participants’ experiences with dominant narratives (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Within the context of this research, it focuses on participants’ lived experiences without directly engaging master narratives.

Diversity: Commonly used euphemistically to signify difference relative to the dominant category of people, but in this study, it refers to variance within a population across one or more dimensions, including race, class, ethnicity, ability, language, gender, religion, and more (Burke, 2023).

Equity: A concept rooted in fairness rather than sameness; it calls for systems of power to make judgments based on justice and personhood rather than protocol or technicality, actively addressing bias and discrimination (Burke, 2023).

Ethnocultural: Refers to the intersection of ethnicity and culture in shaping both collective and individual identity. This term recognizes how cultural traditions, language, and heritage are intertwined with social belonging and lived experience (McWayne et al., 2019).

Inclusion: While sometimes used to imply assimilation of minoritized individuals, here it denotes processes that provide access, voice, and choice, enabling individuals from historically minoritized groups to participate freely (Burke, 2023).

Multiplicity: Acknowledges that identity is fluid, layered, and constructed through intersecting histories, discourses, and social relations, rather than fixed or singular (Hall & Du Gay, 1996).

Narrative: A recounting of events organized temporally, through which people make sense of experiences and construct meaning (Bordens & Abbott, 2002).

Race: A socially constructed category used to differentiate and hierarchize groups based on perceived physical and cultural traits. Despite lacking biological grounding, race functions as a powerful organizing principle in social, political, and historical contexts (Du Bois, 2018; Mukhopadhyay & Henze, 2003).

Racism: A structural system of power that produces and sustains racial hierarchies, privileging whiteness while subordinating racialized groups. Racism operates at institutional, cultural, and interpersonal levels (Bonilla-Silva, 1997).

Racialization: The social process through which groups are ascribed racial meanings and positioned within hierarchies of power and value (Omi & Winant, 2014).

Racialized: In this study, refers to individuals socially constructed as non-white, who experience systemic disadvantage and discrimination based on race. The term emphasizes race as a socio-political process rather than a biological or cultural fact (Dei, 2001; Miles, 1989).

Racial Microaggression: Subtle, often automatic, everyday interactions that communicate hostile or derogatory racial messages toward people of colour (Sue et al., 2007).

Story: A structured account of events, temporally and meaningfully organized, that conveys how individuals interpret their experiences (Polkinghorne, 1988; Kim, 2016).

Teacher Candidate: Students enrolled in teacher education programs leading to professional certification. In this study, the term refers specifically to racialized teacher candidates in an Ontario faculty of education (Cochran-Smith, 2004).

Teacher Diversity Gap: The disparity between the racial and cultural composition of the student population and that of the teaching profession, which remains predominantly white in many educational contexts (Villegas & Irvine, 2010).

Teacher Education Program: Postgraduate university programs granting a Bachelor of Education degree that validates teacher certification, typically after completion of coursework and practical teaching components. In Canada, these programs usually span two years (Eizadirad et al., 2023).

Community Cultural Wealth (CCW): A framework developed by Yosso (2005) within Critical Race Theory, identifying six forms of capital—aspirational, familial, social, navigational, resistant, and linguistic—through which marginalized communities foster resilience and collective advancement.

Narrative Inquiry: A qualitative research methodology that treats experience as storied, exploring the meaning of those stories across dimensions of temporality, sociality, and place (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Racial Tokenism: The symbolic inclusion of individuals from marginalized racial groups to create the appearance of equality or diversity, without challenging underlying systems of racial privilege (Kanter, 1977, 2008).

White Supremacy: A historically rooted ideology and structural system that upholds the dominance of whiteness as the normative standard of humanity and civilization (Delgado & Stefancic, 1998; Du Bois, 2018; hooks, 2008).

1.7 Organization of the Dissertation

Guided by the conventions of narrative inquiry, this dissertation is structured into eight chapters:

Chapter 1 introduces the study, outlining its purpose, significance, and guiding frameworks.

Chapter 2 provides a review of literature on the underrepresentation of racialized teachers and the challenges within teacher education.

Chapter 3 elaborates CRT and CCW as theoretical and conceptual frameworks that guide the study, including the theoretical debates that surround it.

Chapter 4 discusses the methodology, emphasizing narrative inquiry and its philosophical and ethical foundations.

Chapter 5 presents the seven narrative accounts of participants.

Chapter 6 outlines the study's findings, identifying key resonant threads that illuminate how participants navigate teacher education.

Chapter 7 offers a discussion that interprets the findings in light of the study's theoretical frameworks.

Chapter 8 concludes the dissertation by addressing the personal, practical, and social justifications of the study and identifying implications for future research and practice.

1.8 Chapter Summary

In this introductory chapter, I have outlined the purpose, rationale, theoretical and methodological grounding, and structure of this dissertation. Central to this work is a commitment to understanding and honouring the lived experiences of racialized teacher candidates. By examining these narratives through the lenses of CRT and CCW, this research aims not only to critique systemic inequities but also to illuminate the forms of knowledge, resistance, and resilience that racialized teacher candidates bring into the teaching profession.

Chapter Two

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter begins by examining the importance of teacher diversity and providing a historical overview of the movement to diversify the teaching profession in Ontario. Focusing on Ontario is particularly significant, given the province's distinct challenges in addressing racism within its educational system. These challenges are shaped in large part by Ontario's highly centralized, neoliberal education structure, which can limit the effectiveness of accountability mechanisms designed to implement equitable and anti-racist reforms (Shah et al., 2022). The chapter then develops an argument to explain the persistent lack of racial diversity among teaching staff, highlighting the structural and systemic barriers that influence who enters and remains in the profession. To illustrate these challenges, I draw on metaphors that capture the experiences of racialized teachers and teacher candidates, both prior to entering the profession and during their teaching practice. Building on this foundation, the chapter reviews contemporary scholarship in teacher education, with particular attention to initiatives aimed at diversifying the student population within teacher education programs. Central to this review is an exploration of the lived experiences of racialized teacher candidates and the ways in which they navigate institutional and interpersonal forms of exclusion. The chapter concludes with a synthesis of literature addressing how race and racism shape teacher candidates' experiences within teacher education programs, highlighting key gaps and tensions that inform the focus of this dissertation.

2.1 Teacher Diversity: Why it Matters

In his seminal publications, Dewey (1909, 1933) asserts that both schools and their educators carry a moral responsibility toward society, including the promotion of its well-being and advancement. Part of this responsibility is for schools to not just inculcate academic knowledge but also to shape children's values and beliefs concerning a fair and just society (Keane & Goodwin, 2022). In recent decades, many societies globally have increasingly become multicultural due to immigration. For instance, cities like Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal in Canada have become primary destinations for over half of all immigrants and recent migrants in the country (Statistics Canada, 2017a). In the province of Ontario alone, almost three in ten Ontarians are from racialized

backgrounds (Government of Ontario, 2023). This increase in immigration is also mirrored in schools, such that Statistics Canada (2014) reports that in Canada as a whole, 2.32 million school-age children, representing 37.5% of the total population of children, adolescents, and young adults, were either foreign-born (first generation) or had at least one foreign-born parent (second generation). And yet, despite the increasing presence of racialized schoolchildren, Canadian schools remain predominantly white in terms of their teachers and staff (Alvi et al., 2023; Maharaj, 2023). In 2014, Turner Consulting Group (2014) reported that in Ontario, only 9% of elementary teachers identified as racialized. Even more alarming is the fact that enrollment in post-secondary teacher education programs continues to be predominantly white, able-bodied, middle-class, and monolingual females (Sulz et al., 2023). This teacher diversity gap, that is, the discrepancy in the proportion of racialized teachers to racialized students (Turner, 2015), is expanding rapidly. As Statistics Canada (2017b) reports that by 2036, nearly one in two Canadians could come from racialized backgrounds.

The Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy (1986), one of the earliest advocates of teacher diversification in schools, has long noted that teachers' racial background strongly indicate the authority and power dynamics within schools, significantly influencing children's attitudes towards education, their academic success, and their perceptions of self-worth and others' intrinsic value. Over time, an extensive literature has developed on the demand for greater diversity among teachers. The most common themes in the literature argue for the importance of students, particularly racialized students, learning from individuals who represent their diverse social identities (Evans, 1992; Klopfenstein, 2005); which in turn contributes to better educational outcomes and school experiences (Abawi, 2018; Artiles, 2019; Thomas, 2018). Several findings illustrate that the link between better student outcomes and racialized teachers is based on a number of factors as racialized teachers often have higher expectations for racialized students, employ culturally relevant teaching methods, and are more inclined to support the interests of racialized students to a greater extent than their white teacher counterparts (Achinstein & Aguirre, 2008; Chapman & Hobbel, 2022; Dilworth & Coleman, 2014; Escayg, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Villegas & Irvine, 2010). On the contrary, it is also important to acknowledge that simply having racialized teachers in schools does not automatically result in a richer school culture or guarantee enhanced experiences for all students. As Villegas and Davis (2007) highlight, the teacher's racial background alone does not ensure a more enriching educational environment for either white or

racialized students. In fact, Ryan et al. (2009) offer a strong counterpoint, arguing that not all racialized teachers will necessarily be exemplary in their teaching practices. They contend that many white teachers still possess valuable qualities that can benefit racialized students. However, as they explain:

White teachers – no matter how dedicated and skilled – can take their talents only so far. Although many may enrich the experiences of all their students, white educators... cannot stand as symbols, as teachers... of colour can. Nor will most be in a position to understand, communicate, or identify with students of colour the way educators of colour are able to do. (Ryan et al., 2009, p. 595)

Additionally, there is a broad consensus among policymakers that “when teachers are present that look like or have similar backgrounds to students, those students will be inspired by these ‘role models’ to engage with school” (Keane & Goodwin, 2022, p. 24). This aligns with the desire to be a ‘role model’ being identified as the motivation for entering teaching by many racialized teacher candidates (Brown, 2014; Colum & Collins, 2021; Hennessy & Lynch, 2017). Similarly, numerous parents and caregivers of racialized students have voiced a shared preference for educators who share their racial background to teach their children. In their report to the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), Munroe et al. (2022) cite racialized parents and caregivers stating that “it helped having the Black children see educators that look like them, that can relate to them” (p. 21). This shared identity cultivates a sense of belonging, self-worth, self-efficacy, and acceptance among children, adolescents, and young adults, thus profoundly enhancing their overall well-being (Shizha et al., 2020).

It is worth noting that a number of educational institutions, particularly in Ontario, recognize the compelling evidence of the significant impact of teachers who share a similar racial and cultural background with their students. For instance, in 2023, the Waterloo Region District School Board organized a dedicated job fair aimed at recruiting Black, Indigenous, and racialized staff (Maharaj, 2023). Subsequently, the Toronto Catholic District School Board (2023) followed suit. Similarly, the University of Waterloo held a Black excellence hiring event with the goal of increasing the representation of Black faculty members, which comprised only about one percent of their total staff (Shetty, 2023). However, Ahmed (2012) suggests that the formal commitment of institutions to institutionalize diversity does not necessarily mean they have opened up. While events like job fairs

and hiring initiatives may increase surface-level representation, it is crucial to examine the underlying issues that contribute to the lack of teacher diversity in schools.

2.2 Lack of Teacher Diversity in Schools: Leaky Pipeline, Bottleneck, and Glass Ceiling

Over the years, several scholars attempt to explain the causes or the underlying issues that contribute to the lack of teacher diversity in schools. Ryan and his colleagues (2009) use metaphors such as leaky pipelines, bottlenecks, and the glass ceiling to illustrate these issues. Essentially, a pipeline is a key part of a larger system, where every element has a specific function that helps keep the whole system functioning smoothly (Ryan et al., 2009). It is suggested that education plays a central role in most pipeline systems, serving as the crucial mechanism that moves students from one stage to the next, much like how pipelines transport oil (Ryan et al., 2009). In this system, students progress from elementary school to secondary and higher education, eventually entering the workforce and taking on professional roles such as teachers, engineers, doctors, and others (Nelson, 2024). Unfortunately, pipelines do not always function as intended—sometimes they leak, causing some students to drop out at various points along the way before they could even reach their full educational potential (Maharaj, 2023; Villegas & Lucas, 2004). As a result, by the time they reach the end of the journey, there are fewer students left (Ahmad & Boser, 2014; Banerjee & Graham, 2023; Ryan et al., 2009). The argument for the “leaky pipeline” metaphor is that students who spill out of the system experience barriers which can include factors like standardized testing and gaps in access in higher education (Berrios, 2016), systemic inequalities and financial constraints (Ahmad & Boser, 2014), and academic challenges, among others.

In spite of this, the report from Statistics Canada (2023) on educational attainment shows that the Canadian educational pipeline is not that leaky at all for some groups of racialized students. For instance, over half of Korean, Chinese, South Asian, and West Asian individuals, as well as more than 40% of Japanese and Arab populations, hold a bachelor’s degree or higher, surpassing the national average of 32.9%. As a result, these groups are well-represented in occupations requiring higher education. While this appears promising, the report also reveals that some racialized groups continue to face barriers and leak out of the Canadian educational pipeline. For example, although over 40% of Filipino individuals possess a bachelor’s degree or higher, they remain underrepresented in professions that require such credentials. Additionally, Southeast Asian

populations show lower educational attainment, with more than 20% lacking both a high school diploma and postsecondary credentials (Statistics Canada, 2023). Meanwhile, the educational outcomes for Black populations vary significantly. Notably, 46.3% of Black children of African immigrants hold a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to just 15.8% of Black children with Canadian-born parents (Statistics Canada, 2023).

While the “leaky pipeline” metaphor provides some insight into the shortage of racialized teachers in Canadian schools, it fails to capture the full complexity of the issue. This metaphor suggests that the uneven academic achievement of racialized students diminishes the potential pool of future educators (Ryan et al., 2009). However, this explanation overlooks another crucial aspect: the substantial pool of internationally educated teachers (IETs), many of whom are racialized, highly skilled, and experienced, that could be tapped to address teacher diversity gap. It is worth emphasizing that in early 2000s, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2002) reports that teaching is the largest profession among Canadian immigrants, indicating that a wealth of qualified immigrant educators is available to fill these gaps. Despite this, IETs face significant barriers in either securing employment or navigating the complex licensing processes required to teach in their respective provinces (Council of Ministers of Education, 2014; Guo, 2009; Othman, 2022). The barriers these professionals encounter have been aptly described as a “bottleneck,” where regulatory agencies struggle to assess and approve their qualifications, ultimately stalling their entry into the workforce (Jimenez, 2003; Liu et al., 2008). As Jimenez (2003) emphasizes, “Canada is recruiting the right kind of people, but they are stuck in a bottleneck, as the agencies and bodies that regulate the fields of medicine, engineering, teaching, and nursing struggle to assess their qualifications” (p. F9).

Furthermore, recent shifts in Canada's immigration policies have exacerbated the issue. By prioritizing highly skilled professionals in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields and trades to address labour shortages (Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2023), Canada's immigration strategy has inadvertently reduced the flow of immigrant teachers. This focus on STEM and trades has led to a decrease in the number of immigrant teachers entering the country in recent years. However, recognizing the overall ongoing teacher shortage, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) has recently taken steps to address this issue. On February 27, 2025, IRCC announced that they are reintroducing the education sector into the immigration stream, with a specific focus on prioritizing applicants for elementary and

secondary teaching positions to immigrate to Canada as permanent residents (Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2025). While this shift may be a step in the right direction, it remains to be seen whether it will overcome the systemic barriers that have long hindered the full integration of IETs into the Canadian teaching workforce.

Another metaphor frequently used in the literature to explain the lack of teacher diversity in schools is the "glass ceiling" phenomenon. Originally coined by feminists to describe the barriers women face in the business world, this metaphor highlights how both women and racialized individuals can see opportunities on the other side of the "ceiling" but are obstructed from reaching them (Boyd, 2008; Morrison et al., 1987). In essence, ceilings are barriers that limit individuals and groups from advancing in organizational hierarchies or accessing prestigious positions (Ryan et al., 2009). What makes this barrier even more insidious is that it is made of glass, rendering it largely invisible to those who believe in the liberal ideal of equal competition, assuming everyone has the same opportunity to succeed in the workforce (Cooper & Wilson-Jones, 2023). Ryan et al. (2009) argue that the same invisible barriers prevent IETs and racialized teachers, despite their qualifications, from entering the profession. As they note:

They bump up against this ceiling, and they can go no further... they will soon discover, and many members of racialized groups who have been in the system will already know, the competition for jobs and other rewards is not fair (Anisef et al., 2003). It occurs on unequal ground and routinely favors white, English-speaking, native born Canadians over immigrant teachers of colour. (Ryan et al., 2009, p. 608)

To illustrate this point, Othman (2022) provides a gripping example of the barriers faced by IETs. Despite her extensive teaching experience overseas and a master's degree from a reputable Canadian university, Othman (2022) encounters significant hurdles in her pursuit of becoming a licensed teacher in Canada. The Canadian licensing body for teachers demands that, in addition to acquiring classroom experience within the Canadian education system, she must also complete a full teacher education program. She notes with disappointment, "Where do IETs' previous years of teaching, their practical experience, knowledge, and skills fit into the admission application requirements for Canadian teacher education programs?" (Othman, 2022, p. 100). This may appear to be a "bottleneck" for Othman, suggesting that she could overcome this barrier by enrolling in the

teacher education program. However, while this obstacle may seem surmountable, the additional requirement of enrolling in a teacher education program reveals a more significant barrier—a glass ceiling—that could ultimately prevent her from advancing in her teaching career. Specifically, the program's admission criteria require an undergraduate degree that aligns with Canadian standards, placing Othman at a distinct disadvantage. Her overseas degree does not meet these specific requirements, thereby restricting her ability to move forward in the program.

While a comprehensive analysis of IETs' experiences, such as Othman's, falls outside the scope of this study, her case undeniably highlights a critical issue: teacher education programs play a central role in diversifying the teaching workforce. These programs serve as essential gateways for aspiring teachers, particularly those from racialized backgrounds. However, when access to these programs is limited or inequitable, they effectively marginalize a valuable pool of talent, undermining the potential for diversity within the profession. In the next section, I will explore the present condition of teacher education in Canada, paying particular attention to the broader political contexts that continue to shape it.

2.3 Teacher Education and the Struggle for Teacher Diversification

Teacher education programs play a crucial role in shaping teacher candidates' experiences, making them a critical site for exploration and analysis (Kohli & Pizarro, 2022; Robinson, 2003). They are “postgraduate university programs granting Bachelor of Education (BEd) degrees that validate teacher certification following completion of courses and practical components” (Eizadirad et al., 2023, p. 15). In Ontario, teacher education transitioned to university-based programs in the 1950s, requiring a bachelor's degree and professional certification for entry into the teaching profession (Kitchen & Petrarca, 2014; Minister's Committee on the Training of Secondary School Teachers, 1962). Currently, there are seventeen faculties of education in Ontario, authorized by the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) to grant education degrees to candidates who meet the criteria (Ontario College of Teachers, 2023). The current academic requirements for becoming a certified teacher in Ontario include completing at least three years of post-secondary education and a four-semester teacher education program (Ontario College of Teachers, 2023). In addition, Ontario teacher education programs consist of content courses, pedagogy courses, and practicum requirements (EQAO, 2000), with a minimum practicum duration of 80 days (Ontario College of Teachers, 2023).

Admission to teacher education programs in Ontario is highly competitive, favoring candidates with strong academic records in their undergraduate degrees (Ontario Teachers' Federation, 2023). For instance, the University of Ottawa weighs undergraduate grade point average at 50% for admission decisions (University of Ottawa, n.d.). Candidates must also demonstrate relevant teaching experience and skills in their Statement of Experience. At the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) at the University of Toronto, applicants need an undergraduate average grade equivalent to at least mid-B or higher and must provide a chart detailing instructional experience with specific learner groups (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 2023). Despite rigorous criteria, both institutions emphasize fostering inclusive, diverse, and equitable learning environments. The University of Toronto, for example, commits to admitting candidates reflective of Toronto's ethnic, cultural, and social diversity (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 2023), while the University of Ottawa reserves 9% of its admission quota for racialized candidates (University of Ottawa, n.d.).

While diversifying the admission process for teacher education shows promise, it has proven to be problematic. Several scholars argue that simply increasing visible representation of racialized individuals within educational institutions does little to confront the deep-seated colonial and racial structures that shape them. The focus on racialized students entering teaching programs, alongside well-meaning but superficial commitments to inclusivity, amounts to what some scholars call 'cosmetic diversity' (Tamtik & Guenter, 2019). To effect a much more meaningful change, Alvi et al. (2023) suggest that the application process for teacher education programs must also be critically examined. Given the predominantly white racial demographics of academia and teacher education in Canada, they argue that application questions are likely to implicitly center whiteness. One of their key recommendations is to ensure that the faculty responsible for evaluating applications reflects the demographic makeup of the students applying to the program. Additionally, Picower and Kohli (2017) assert, teacher education cannot be divorced from its broader social and political context. External pressures such as neoliberal reforms, privatization, and standardized accountability measures significantly shape teacher preparation programs, making it difficult to truly address issues of racial justice within these institutions.

This broader political context is particularly evident in recent actions in both the United States and Canada, where political leaders have sought to roll back equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) initiatives. In the U.S., President Donald Trump's executive orders issued on January 21,

2025, targeted the dismantling of EDI programs across federal, non-federal, and private sectors. These orders, framed as efforts to eliminate "wasteful spending" and address illegal discrimination, reversed previous policies that supported affirmative action (Hawkins, 2025; Ostrager et al., 2025). Within the Department of Education, EDI councils were dissolved, equity action plans rescinded, EDI training canceled, and EDI staff placed on administrative leave (Department of Education, 2025). Similarly, U.S. schools and universities were given a two-week ultimatum to cease using "racial preferences" in admissions and hiring, under the threat of losing federal funding (Binkley, 2025). The Trump administration's stance: that students should be assessed based on merit, achievement, and character—reflects a growing political movement that seeks to eliminate race-based considerations in education (Binkley, 2025).

In Canada, similar trends are emerging. At the United Conservative Party's 2023 and 2024 annual general meetings, members passed resolutions calling for the removal of EDI offices and EDI training in post-secondary institutions, including in the Alberta public service (Wakefield, 2025). In January 2025, University of Alberta President Bill Flanagan announced the university's decision to shift away from its EDI policies, rebranding them under a new focus on 'access, community, and belonging' (Flanagan, 2025). Critics like Quinn Benders, president of the University of Alberta's Non-Academic Staff Association, argue that this shift is a political move to appease funding bodies (Wakefield, 2025). In a nutshell, these political shifts, whether in the U.S. or Canada, make it painfully clear that EDI initiatives in education are precarious and fragile. While some teacher education programs may be making incremental efforts to diversify admissions, the reality is that teacher education in North America is still failing to address its deep-rooted inequities and the urgency for change is greater than ever before. In the following section, I will critically examine the role of teacher education programs as gatekeepers to the teaching profession.

2.4 Racialized Teacher Candidates in Ontario and the Cost of Racism

Despite attempts to enhance diversity in Canadian teacher education, it is noteworthy that there is a dearth of publicly accessible data concerning representation rates of teacher candidates (Jack-Davies & Lewis, 2022; Paterson, 2023). In the context of Ontario, the paucity of readily available data stands in stark contrast to the explicit objectives outlined by all teacher education programs in the province with regard to achieving diversity and equitable representation. To date, the only publicly accessible race-based data for Ontario teacher education programs was presented

in a publication by Holden and Kitchen (2018). The authors invited 15 teacher education institutions to provide data on the representation rates of racialized teacher candidates. Surprisingly, only the universities of York, Ottawa, and Nipissing supplied the requested information. The report highlights that in 2016, Nipissing's teacher education program did not have any recorded racialized teacher candidates. At York University, the representation of racialized teacher candidates declined slightly between 2012 and 2016 (Holden & Kitchen, 2018). Specifically, racialized applicants made up 25% of the overall applicant pool in 2012, but this proportion dropped to 20% by 2016. In contrast, at the University of Ottawa, the proportion of racialized students in the French teacher education program increased from 16% in 2012 to 23% in 2016. Although the authors did not provide statistics for the English program, they noted that the proportion in the program decreased slightly during the same period. However, the report identifies a deeper concern beyond the visible representation gap within teacher education programs— many Ontario universities offering teacher education programs do not track racialized minorities at all (Holden & Kitchen, 2018). If the fundamental goals of these programs include fostering equity and ensuring representation, it is only logical to anticipate that teacher educators and other stakeholders should have access to pertinent data to inform their decision-making processes and operationalize their stated objectives (Crocker & Dibbon, 2008; Holden & Kitchen, 2018). Nevertheless, many scholars argue that representation as a form of visibility is a tangential issue (Patel, 2022; Shah, 2022). Dovetailing with the aforementioned arguments, the dedication to diversity for ensuring equitable representation should extend beyond merely inclusion of racialized people into the organization. This is exemplified in the works of Pizarro and Kohli (2020), Matias (2016), and Abawi and Eizadirad (2020), where the urgent need for racialized teachers in academia further complicates representation. What is crucial, as Shah (2022), Patel (2022), Ahmed (2007), and other education scholars argue, is a focus on race and the dismantling of systemic barriers that hinder racialized people from fully participating in society. As Bonilla-Silva (1997) define, racism is a structural system of power that produces and sustains racial hierarchies, privileging whiteness while subordinating racialized groups. Racism, in this sense, is not merely interpersonal bias but an ongoing act of exclusion and violence (King et al., 2023).

At a systemic level, racism is manifested and embedded within policies, practices, and colour-blind approaches in educational spaces. In Ontario, the tensions and subtle forms of racism faced by racialized communities became prominent after the 2020 review of the Peel District

School Board by the Ministry of Education (Abawi & Eizadirad, 2022). The review highlighted prevalent and deeply ingrained racism, particularly targeting individuals of Black, Indigenous, South Asian, and Islamic backgrounds at various levels within the board (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2020). Additionally, similar findings have been revealed in ministry evaluations of additional Ontario school boards, such as the York Region District School Board and the Toronto District School Board (CBC News, 2021). As Abawi and Eizadirad (2022) illustrate, the Toronto District School Board Human Rights Office conducted a review of incidents of hate within its 245,000 students and 40,000 staff members from 2018 to 2020. The findings revealed that race-related complaints constituted 69 percent of all reported hate incidents during the 2019-2020 school year, with the predominant portion attributed to anti-Black racism (Abawi & Eizadirad, 2022). Reports and accounts detailing instances of racism experienced by racialized individuals, especially teacher candidates, indicate that despite the incorporation of terms such as social justice and multiculturalism within educational programs like teacher education, the prevailing values and practices still reinforce white privilege, power dynamics, and systemic racism (Cross, 2005). This failure of institutions to take meaningful action or create genuinely safe spaces for racialized individuals exposes how claims of inclusion are often an illusion.

2.5 Racial Tokenism under the Façade of Inclusion

In Canada, the existence of the Multiculturalism Act (1985) signifies an institutional commitment to enabling all racial and ethnic groups to preserve their cultures while participating in Canadian society; thus, operating on the premise that no single ethnic group's culture dominates or influences educational practices and content. However, this statement is a fraught one. Several scholars argue that Canada's claim to multiculturalism is a mechanism to ignore the operations of racism and colonialism, neglecting the needs and aspirations of racialized, immigrants, and religiously marginalized individuals, thus perpetuating the status quo of whiteness (Henry & James, 2022; Simpson et al., 2011).

Critical scholarship highlights that this dynamic of superficial inclusion also manifests within teacher education, where commitments to diversity often mask deeper patterns of exclusion. Marom's (2023) findings, for instance, reveal a stark contradiction between institutional rhetoric and lived experience. Although the language of "diversity" and "inclusion" is highly visible in policy documents, course titles, and syllabi, racialized teacher candidates

continue to experience pressure to conform to a white normative teaching model. This dissonance exemplifies what many scholars identify as racial tokenism, that is, the symbolic inclusion of racialized individuals within predominantly white institutions without any substantial transformation of the structures that center whiteness (Ahmed, 2012; Marom, 2023).

The dominance of whiteness in teacher education, as Paterson (2023) aptly observes, means that “white teacher candidates are the blueprint upon which initial teacher education is designed, patterned, and normed” (p. 20). Consequently, racialized candidates are not invited to reshape this blueprint but are instead expected to fit within it. They must learn to teach, speak, and perform according to pedagogical models that were never designed with their cultural or epistemological perspectives in mind (Bruno-Jofré, 2020; Milner, 2008; Tamtik & Guenter, 2019). Such expectations reinforce whiteness as the normative standard while positioning racialized teacher candidates as visible primarily to legitimize the institution’s diversity initiatives.

This kind of representation, devoid of genuine power or influence, epitomizes tokenism. Racialized teacher candidates are celebrated as evidence of institutional inclusivity, yet their knowledge, experiences, and cultural identities are frequently marginalized or dismissed. As a result, many internalize feelings of inadequacy and alienation. One participant in Marom’s (2023) study poignantly described the emotional toll of this process: “I remember just going home and crying after every school day in the practicum, [feeling] that I wasn’t good enough. But actually, I wasn’t good enough through their eyes, and I had to remind myself of that” (p. 195). Such accounts expose how token inclusion without structural change can reproduce the very hierarchies it claims to dismantle. Ultimately, racial tokenism in teacher education serves as a mechanism of control rather than liberation, allowing institutions to appear progressive while keeping whiteness at the center. True inclusion requires more than visibility; it demands a critical examination of whose knowledge and experiences are valued.

2.6 Chapter Summary

In this literature review I have made evident the critical need for increasing teacher diversity in schools, while also addressing the underlying factors contributing to the teacher diversity gap. I have further highlighted the significant issue of the lack of accessible data on the representation rates of racialized teacher candidates within teacher education, a situation that stands in direct

contradiction to the stated EDI commitments of these institutions. Another central point in this review is the ongoing, pervasive role of racism as a fundamental barrier to the full participation of racialized teacher candidates. Research by Abawi (2018), Marom (2019, 2023), and Ogunfeibo et al. (2021) demonstrates that exposure to microaggressions significantly affects both the academic success and overall well-being of racially marginalized individuals. Given this, it is crucial to examine the lived experiences of racialized teacher candidates in order to identify and address the barriers preventing their equitable representation and involvement in teacher education programs. In the next chapter, I draw upon critical race theory (CRT) and community cultural wealth (CCW) as the guiding frameworks to explore the role of race and racism in shaping these lived experiences.

Chapter Three

THEREORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

The existing literature highlights systemic racism as a pervasive barrier that continues to hinder the full participation of racialized teacher candidates in the teaching profession (Kohli & Pizarro, 2022; Picower & Kohli, 2017). This underscores the necessity of examining the lived experiences of racialized teacher candidates through theoretical lenses that not only challenge racism but also advocate for a shift in the perception of racialized students: from being viewed as culturally impoverished to being recognized for their rich, diverse strengths (Yosso, 2005). To this end, this chapter will engage with Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) as frameworks for understanding and addressing these issues. Furthermore, it will unpack the ongoing debates surrounding the application of CRT within teacher education, highlighting the controversies and tensions that shape this discourse.

3.1 Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Critical race theory (CRT) did not emerge in a vacuum; rather, it is the product of a long history of legal battles against racial discrimination in the United States. Legal battles, such as the landmark Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), which mandated the desegregation of public schools, exposed the deep-seated racial injustices within American legal institutions (Lynn & Dixon, 2022). These legal battles set the stage for intellectual responses aimed at addressing enduring racial inequalities, laying the groundwork for the development of critical legal studies (CLS) and, ultimately, critical race theory. Emerging in the 1970s and 1980s, CLS was a significant precursor to CRT (Esposito, 2022). Inspired by the earlier work of Alan Freeman (1977), CLS scholars critiqued the neutrality of the law, arguing that legal structures inherently perpetuate societal power imbalances, including racial inequalities (Lynn & Dixon, 2022; Parker & Gillborn, 2020).

Eventually, many CLS scholars became increasingly disillusioned with the movement's failure to adequately address the struggles of racialized individuals, particularly Black communities. In response to this frustration and the political climate of the time (i.e., the Supreme Court dismantling legal protections for marginalized groups), a group of over twenty legal scholars,

lawyers, and activists gathered in a momentous workshop on July 8, 1989 in Madison, Wisconsin (Crenshaw, 2011; Onwuachi-Willig, 2009). This first-ever CRT workshop, organized by Kimberlé Crenshaw, Neil Gotanda, and Stephanie Phillips, brought together prominent scholars and lawyers, including Derrick Bell, Richard Delgado, and Mari Matsuda, among others. The goal of the workshop was to collectively develop CRT as a response to the shortcomings of both traditional civil rights approaches and the broader CLS movement (Parker & Gillborn, 2020). These CRT scholars were particularly concerned with how the civil rights slogan of judging people based on character and not by skin colour — once a powerful tool for advancing the rights of marginalized groups now being appropriated to justify the dismantling of programs intended to address the historical effects of racial oppression (Lynn & Dixon, 2022). This workshop, therefore, marked a pivotal moment for CRT, reflecting the culmination of years of scholarship, activism, and a shared commitment to addressing racial inequality through a framework that would fundamentally challenge conventional understandings of race and racism in the law. Today, CRT has expanded across various disciplines in the United States and around the world, evolving into numerous subdisciplines, such as the Latino-critical movement (LatCrit), Disability Critical Race Theory (DisCrit), and queer-crit studies, among others (Delgado & Stefancic, 2023). In the subsection that follows, I delve deeper into the literature of CRT by exploring its core tenets.

3.2 The Core Tenets of CRT

As noted, one of the key factors driving the emergence of CRT was the frustration among several CLS advocates over the movement's inability to offer practical strategies and a constructive framework on how to support marginalized groups (Dalton, 1987; Ladson-Billings, 2020; Matsuda, 1987). At its core, CRT is driven by two defining themes: first, understanding “how a regime of white supremacy and its subordination of people of colour have been created and maintained... and second, a desire not only to understand the complex relationship between law and racial power but also to change it” (Crenshaw et al., 1995, p. xvi). To achieve these goals, CRT scholars critically interrogate concepts such as white privilege, colour-blindness, and the very definitions of race and racism (Kim, 2015; James & Shah, 2022). Specifically, they challenge colour-blindness as a dominant ideological stance, arguing that it represents a deliberate ignorance of race (Dixon & Rousseau, 2005). Despite being well-intentioned, colour-blindness fails to acknowledge the unique experiences of racialized individuals and instead imposes an assimilationist view that treats racial

differences as irrelevant. This denial of race is positioned as a virtuous act that, ironically, reflects a biased and unjustly "neutral" stance (Thompson, 2013).

One of the central tenets of CRT is the permanence of race and racism (Crenshaw, 2011; Delgado & Stefancic, 2023). CRT scholars argue that race is a social construct “written and designed to assign various groups different places on the ladder of race and racial categories, with whites holding fast to the upper rung” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2023, p. 481). Despite scientific evidence justifying that race is not biologically real (Mukhopadhyay & Henze, 2003), it continues to be used to describe one’s ethnicity or national identity and as the colour of a person’s skin (Ahmed, 2004; Patel, 2022; Clair & Denis, 2015). This attribution of meaning to specific biological features of human beings is known as racialization (Miles, 1989, 2015). The concept of racialization, therefore, underscores how race is not only a marker of identity but also a mechanism of power and exclusion within societies, influencing access to resources, opportunities, and social status based on perceived racial categories.

Moreover, one of the contentions of CRT scholarship is that racism is “normal, not aberrant, in American society” (Delgado, 1995, p. xiv). Within the context of the broader Canadian society, this claim is perhaps a difficult concept to grasp. With the existence of its Multiculturalism Act, “Canadians wish to portray to the world [an image] that it is one with racial and cultural tolerance, a mecca for the oppressed of the world” (Aylward, 1999, p. 40). Hence, the assumption that, if racism occurs within the country, it is considered an exception, attributed to a handful of misguided individuals, and should not be viewed as a reflection of Canadian society as a whole. This pervasive denial of the existence of racism in Canada is extremely problematic, especially given the country’s extensive history of racist government policies and practices. To cite a few: the enslavement of Black people in New France and British North America (Henry-Dixon, 2022), the 1923 Chinese Immigration Act (Stanley, 2024), the refusal of Jewish immigrants after World War II and the internment of Japanese-Canadians during the war (DeMelo, 2025), among others.

In education, the residential school system aimed to assimilate Indigenous children into Euro-Canadian culture, and the 1850 Common School Act in Ontario institutionalized segregation, particularly affecting Black children (Tyndall & Raza, 2024). Ontario’s last segregated school closed in 1964, with legal segregation not fully ending until the late 1960s (Aladejebi, 2024; Henry-Dixon, 2022). To this day, systemic racism remains entrenched in both Ontario and across Canada,

impacting the lives of racialized individuals through disparities in education, economic conditions, incarceration rates, and health outcomes (Douglas et al., 2022).

To further the discussion on the core tenets of CRT, it is also crucial to discuss the notion of interest convergence. As Bell (1989) and Milner (2008) contend, the progress of racial equality and equity for marginalized communities is not simply a matter of justice, but rather depends on whether these goals align with the interests, needs, and ideologies of white individuals. Bell (1980) further emphasizes that the desegregation of schools in the U.S. following the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* was not driven by a shift in racial attitudes or a genuine concern for Black people's struggles. Instead, it was a response to economic and geopolitical factors, particularly the fear of racial unrest and the erosion of the United States' international moral standing after World War II (Bell, 1980; Delgado & Stefancic, 2023). The advancement of Black civil rights, in this case, was less about equality and more about serving the U.S. government's self-interest on the global stage.

A more recent example of interest convergence can be found in the work of Trawalter et al. (2024), which shows that white support for race-conscious policies aimed at addressing COVID-19 inequities increased when these policies were framed as benefiting white people. However, when policies were presented as exclusively benefiting Black people, white support decreased. This contemporary example illustrates that racial progress is more likely when it aligns with the interests of the dominant group, confirming Bell's assertion that true equality often occurs only when it serves the majority's interests. Moreover, this notion of interest convergence has significant ramifications for teacher education programs given overwhelming whiteness of its staff and students (Fylkesnes, 2018; Levine-Rasky, 2000); thus, raising questions as to how the interests of the dominant group influence the curriculum design, student recruitment and selection, faculty recruitment and support, the program's responsiveness to issues of race and racism, and the support provided to faculty members addressing these issues (Sleeter, 2017).

As a theoretical lens, CRT does not only challenge the permanence of racism and whose interest is being served, but it also questions who tells the dominant narratives. Dominant or majoritarian narratives favor whites, men, the middle and/or upper class, and heterosexual individuals by portraying these social positions as natural or standard points of reference (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002a). CRT fundamentally critiques this structure by emphasizing the importance of

"voice" or naming one's own reality (Delgado, 1989). This approach calls for the use of parables, chronicles, counter-stories, poetry, fiction, and revisionist histories—tools that challenge the dominant, often biased, narratives that perpetuate oppression (Ladson-Billings, 1998, 2020). As Ladson-Billings (2020) points out, this "voice" provides a crucial means of expressing the lived experiences of the oppressed, serving as the first step in unraveling the complexities of racism and initiating a process of judicial redress.

In a similar vein, scholars like Parker (2019) and Ledesma and Calderón (2015) argue that educational research utilizing CRT should prioritize the experiences and stories of historically underrepresented groups. By centering the experiential knowledge of racialized communities, CRT advocates for counter-storytelling—defined by Solórzano and Yosso (2002) as "the telling of the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told (i.e., those on the margins of society)" (p. 32). Counter-stories serve as powerful tools to disrupt complacency, challenge dominant narratives, and expose white dominance, ultimately offering racially just perspectives on the experiences of oppressed individuals (Delgado, 1989).

Ladson-Billings (2020) also notes that the power of counter-storytelling is what makes CRT particularly appealing to educators. A notable example of using counter-storytelling in educational research is Collins (2021) doctoral study, which explores the experiences of Black students who have been placed in special education programs in Quebec English schools. Further discussion of counter-storytelling as a research tool will be provided in my conceptual framework section. In what follows, I will critically examine the existing literature on CRT within the field of education.

3.3 CRT in Education

CRT in education began as a small but powerful movement among scholars seeking to address the systemic inequities within the American education system. Just as the foundational principles of CRT were birthed in a gathering of legal scholars, its influence in education formally began in a departmental colloquium led by Gloria Ladson-Billings and her colleagues in the late 1990s. While Ladson-Billings (2020) recalls that the session was widely welcomed by many, it also faced considerable resistance from others who challenged the emphasis on race, arguing instead for the adoption of multicultural paradigms, which were more dominant in educational systems at the

time. This skepticism, however, did not deter Ladson-Billings and her colleagues; rather, they took it as an opportunity to advance their work on CRT in education.

In their seminal article entitled, *Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education*, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) provided a direct critique of the prevailing multicultural paradigm in American education. They argue that multiculturalism, as commonly practiced in schools, often reduces complex issues of race and power to superficial or celebratory representations of culture. Activities like eating ethnic foods, dancing, or reading folktales are touted as multicultural practices, and thus, masking the deeper structural and institutional challenges faced by marginalized racial groups. Instead of fostering true social justice or challenging entrenched inequalities, these practices sometimes reduce culture to mere spectacle—entertainment rather than meaningful engagement with the lived experiences and struggles of racialized individuals. As Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) claim, “as critical race theory scholars we unabashedly reject a paradigm that attempts to be everything to everyone and consequently becomes nothing for anyone, allowing the status quo to prevail” (p. 33). In other words, CRT extends beyond theoretical exercise, it demands tangible action for social justice.

In Canada, multiculturalism had already been subject to significant criticism long before CRT was formally developed in the U.S. In 1985, for instance, the Ontario Ministry of Education formed an Advisory Committee on Race Relations, tasked with developing a race and ethnocultural equity policy for all school boards in the province (Rezai-Rashti et al., 2015). The committee argued that multicultural policies were ineffective due to their lack of coordination, reliance on untested assumptions, and focus on superficial cultural aspects, such as food, dress, and holidays (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1987). In response to these critiques, anti-racist education emerged as a means of addressing the deficiencies in multiculturalism. Anti-racist education sought to uncover the ways in which social institutions, including schools, perpetuate racism and inequality based on race, gender, sex, and class (Harper, 1997; Rezai-Rashti et al., 2015). This shift mirrored the critiques of multiculturalism raised by CRT scholars in the U.S., particularly in terms of how multicultural education often fails to confront the power dynamics that underlie racial and ethnic disparities in education. However, it was not until 1993 that the Ontario Ministry of Education formally implemented an anti-racism and ethnocultural equity policy across its school boards (Rezai-Rashti et al., 2015). This policy marked a significant step toward addressing the systemic racism that CRT scholars had long been critiquing in the U.S. While the policy did not adopt CRT

explicitly, it shared many of the same goals—namely, to acknowledge the role of race and racism in shaping educational outcomes and to create an equitable learning environment for all students.

By and large, CRT examines how concepts like fairness, meritocracy, colour-blindness, and neutrality are shaped by dominant perspectives, often overlooking the shared experiences of race and racism that influence the lives of Black, Indigenous, and racialized students (James & Shah, 2022). It serves as a critical lens through which to analyze the educational system, offering an in-depth understanding of how race and racism function within schools. One of the most notable contributions in the CRT educational scholarship is Ladson-Billings' (1998, 2020) critique of the school curriculum, instruction, assessment practices, school funding, and desegregation policies. Ladson-Billings (1998) points out that the school curriculum is itself a culturally specific construct that is designed to uphold white supremacy. By privileging Western ways of knowing and learning, the curriculum marginalizes non-white perspectives and perpetuates racial inequalities. CRT scholars argue that educational policies and practices must account for the structural inequalities that racialized individuals face, rather than assuming that simply integrating diverse students into existing systems will lead to equality.

In addition to curriculum and instruction, Ladson-Billings contends that school funding and desegregation policies often fail to address the root causes of educational disparities. For example, school funding is often tied to local property taxes, which means that schools in wealthier, predominantly white neighbourhoods receive more resources than those in low-income, racially diverse communities (Cuban, 2013; Westheimer, 2015). Similarly, desegregation policies have often been insufficient, as they have failed to address the underlying socioeconomic disparities that continue to affect marginalized communities. Furthermore, CRT highlights how racialized students are often presumed to be deficient in academic settings. The term “at-risk” is frequently used to describe students from marginalized racial and ethnic backgrounds, assuming that their struggles in school are the result of individual deficiencies rather than systemic factors. CRT challenges this assumption by arguing that students' difficulties are not inherent but are instead a consequence of the educational system's failure to provide equitable resources and support (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Yosso, 2005).

Another prominent contention in the CRT scholarship in education is the intersection of race and property rights. Drawing on Harris' (1993) earlier paper on whiteness as property, several CRT

scholars contend that property functions of whiteness (i.e., rights of disposition, rights to use and enjoyment, reputation and status property, and the absolute right to exclude) are present within schools and in the broader education system (Anderson & Cross, 2021; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). In the field of teacher education, scholars have applied this concept to explain how white supremacy is embedded in curricula, experiences, and expectations within teacher education programs (Anderson & Cross, 2021; Dixon & Rousseau, 2005). To illustrate, issues like the requirement for unpaid student teaching, which disproportionately impacts racialized teacher candidates who must work full-time to support themselves and their families (Rogers-Ard et al., 2013), the lack of focus on race-related topics in teacher training (Chapman, 2011), and the invisibility of racialized candidates' experiences in teacher education programs (Evans-Winters & Twyman Hoff, 2011) all contribute to the perpetuation of white dominance in teacher education. As Dixon et al. (2006) assert, these practices effectively position teacher education as the "property" of white teacher candidates.

3.3 Controversies and Attacks on CRT in Education

The implementation and influence of CRT in education have ignited intense debate and controversy, particularly in recent years. While CRT aims to confront systemic racial inequalities within the education system, its introduction into schools has faced harsh opposition from various political, social, and academic groups. In the U.S., for example, public school teachers have been prohibited from teaching about colonization in history courses and from introducing concepts like racial hierarchy, the problematization of race, and white supremacy (Gómez et al., 2023). School boards have become arenas of conflict, with teachers' jobs on the line for discussing the merits of CRT (Schwartz, 2021). States such as Florida, Georgia, and Mississippi have passed legislation to regulate how educators address racism, sexism, and systemic inequality in the classroom (Skelton, 2025). One of the most prominent criticisms of CRT comes from U.S. President Donald Trump, who, in a commentary published on the *RealClearPolitics* website, stated:

In classrooms across the nation, students are being subjected to a new curriculum designed to brainwash them with ridiculous left-wing dogma known as “critical race theory”... it teaches them that America is systemically evil and that the hearts of our people are full of hatred and malice. (Trump, 2021, para. 3)

As highlighted earlier, just days after being reinstated as president, Trump issued an order for U.S. schools to cease teaching what he defined as CRT, along with any other content related to race and sexuality, and threatened to withdraw federal funding for non-compliance (Associated Press, 2025). This directive was part of a wider political backlash not only against CRT but also against broader equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) initiatives in education (Bender, 2025). Such measures reflect an effort to curtail discussions of systemic inequality and identity in the classroom, framing them as politically motivated or divisive rather than as educational practices aimed at fostering critical understanding and inclusion.

In Canada, CRT has also faced some pushback, although it has not sparked the same level of controversy as in the United States. In fact, the response to its implementation in schools has been mixed (Skelton, 2025). As an example, in the Waterloo Region District School Board in Ontario, some parents expressed concerns that teaching CRT and white privilege in classrooms could lead their children, particularly those who are white, to internalize feelings of shame and guilt (Weidner, 2023). Similarly, in Durham Catholic District School Board, a new anti-racism policy was developed, but board members objected to the use of terms like "white supremacy" and "colonialism," arguing they reflected CRT, leading to the removal of such terminologies from the policy (Follert, 2022). Despite this resistance, the actions of two of Canada's largest school boards suggest growing support for the social justice principles advocated by CRT scholarship. In his article published in the *National Post*, Blackwell (2022) reports that the Toronto District School Board has emphasized the importance of addressing racism and confronting the notion of white supremacy within its schools. Similarly, the York Region District School Board has acknowledged that the education system operates within structures shaped by colonialism and white supremacy, which are reflected in school policies and practices. Both boards have cited the disproportionately negative outcomes experienced by Black students, such as higher suspension and dropout rates, as justification for integrating CRT-informed perspectives into the curriculum (Blackwell, 2022).

Indeed, attacks on CRT are inevitable given that CRT fundamentally challenges and deconstructs the assumptions and practices that shape our everyday reality (Gillborn, 2024). However, a significant part of the problem lies in the flawed understanding of CRT by its critics.

CRT scholars do not argue that white students should feel ashamed or guilty about their race (Skelton, 2025). Instead, it seeks to raise awareness of how dominant racial perspectives often overshadow the lived experiences of marginalized communities, particularly Indigenous and racialized groups (James & Shah, 2022). James and Shah (2022) further explain that when racism is reduced to individual actions and beliefs, discussions about whiteness and white supremacy can be perceived as threatening by white individuals. However, racism is systemic, encompassing laws, institutional policies, and individual attitudes; therefore, feeling threatened by discussions of whiteness or white supremacy is not an example of racism (James & Shah, 2022; Onwuachi-Willig, 2009). Critics of CRT, as Kendi (2021) claims, often fail to engage with the true nature of the theory, “the attacks are not against CRT scholars, they are attacks against themselves” (para. 2). In other words, instead of addressing the ideas themselves, these attacks are aimed at discrediting CRT scholars and silencing conversations about systemic racism. According to Solórzano and Yosso (2002), those who benefit from racial inequality—whether consciously or unconsciously—have a vested interest in suppressing discussions of race and racism. This desire to silence the conversation, as Gillborn (2024) asserts, is not about clarifying issues but about obstructing efforts to mobilize antiracism in policy and practice. The ongoing debate over CRT is less about the validity of its ideas and more about shutting down the conversation entirely, preventing meaningful progress toward racial justice (Crenshaw, 2021).

In the preceding discussion, I presented critical arguments in support of CRT as my theoretical framework. I examined three of its fundamental principles and emphasized how CRT can facilitate meaningful change in education. These reflections lay the groundwork for a more profound understanding of the key concepts that underpin the influence of CRT as a framework. Building on this understanding, I now move to the next section, where I present Yosso’s (2005) concept of community cultural wealth (CCW).

3.4 Community Cultural Wealth (CCW)

Drawing on the foundations of CRT, Yosso’s (2005) concept of community cultural wealth (CCW) critically challenges the traditional theory of cultural capital. The traditional theory of cultural capital suggests that individuals not born into families possessing culturally valuable knowledge can access the resources of the middle and upper classes—and, by extension, the opportunity for social mobility—only through formal education (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). This

traditional theory of cultural capital reinforces the “banking model of education,” an idea that schooling exists primarily to fill supposedly passive students with knowledge deemed valuable by the dominant society (Freiré, 2000). This has often been used to explain the academic underachievement of many racialized students, attributing their struggles to a presumed cultural deficiency in comparison to their white peers (Yosso, 2005). Hence, the educational system is positioned as the primary mechanism for compensating for these supposed cultural deficits. For the purposes of this research, I adopt Yosso’s (2005) definition of culture as “behaviours and values that are learned, shared, and exhibited by a group of people” (p. 120). Culture is often equated with race and ethnicity, and the idea of cultural deficiency implies that the values and practices transmitted through racialized families are inherently dysfunctional, which contributes to their lower educational and occupational outcomes (Solorzano, 1997; Yosso, 2005). Additionally, it is crucial to recognize that these deficit ideologies extend not only to children and families, but also to entire racialized communities (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018).

Leveraging community cultural wealth, Yosso (2005) critiques the assumption that racialized students come to the classroom with cultural deficiencies. She calls into question the presumption of white, middle-class communities serving as the standard against which all other communities are judged and shifts the lens to various cultural assets that racialized students bring with them from their homes and communities into the classroom. Her CCW framework underscores “an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by communities of Colour to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression” (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). These cultural assets manifest in at least six forms: aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capitals. Below is a description of each type:

1. *Aspirational capital* involves maintaining hopes and aspirations despite obstacles. For example, parents allow themselves and their children to dream possibilities beyond their present circumstances. Nurturing a culture of possibility as they represent the creation of a history that would break the links between parents’ current occupational status and their children’s future academic attainment.
2. *Linguistic capital* suggests that racialized students bring diverse language and communication skills to school. These students are often active participants in storytelling traditions, which may involve listening to and

sharing oral histories, parables, stories, and proverbs. Their storytelling repertoire includes skills like memorization, attention to detail, dramatic pauses, comedic timing, facial expressions, vocal tone, volume, rhythm, and rhyme. This capital also encompasses communication through visual art, music, or poetry. Just as students use different vocal registers to whisper, whistle, or sing, they often draw on various language styles to engage with different audiences.

3. *Familial capital* refers to cultural knowledge within the family, embodying community history, memory, and cultural intuition. This form of cultural wealth emphasizes a commitment to community well-being and broadens the concept of family to include extended kinship ties, teaching the importance of maintaining strong connections to both community and its resources.
4. *Social capital* refers to networks of people and community resources that provide instrumental and emotional support to navigate societal institutions. For example, these networks can help a student identify and secure a college scholarship, assist with the application process, and offer emotional reassurance throughout their pursuit of higher education.
5. *Navigational capital* refers to the skills needed to navigate social institutions, particularly those not designed with racialized individuals in mind. For example, strategies to cope with racially hostile university environments draw on academic invulnerability, where students maintain high achievement despite stressful conditions that would jeopardize their success and retention.
6. *Resistant capital* refers to knowledge and skills developed through oppositional behaviour that challenges inequality. It also includes maintaining and passing on the various aspects of community cultural wealth. This also includes cultural knowledge of the structures of racism and motivation to transform such oppressive structures. (Yosso, 2005, pp. 77-80)

Furthermore, Yosso (2005) emphasizes that these forms of CCW are not fixed; instead, they are fluid, interconnected, may occur simultaneously, and continually evolving over time. Yosso explains, “aspirations are developed within social and familial contexts, often through linguistic storytelling and advice (*consejos*) that offer specific navigational goals to challenge (resist) oppressive conditions” (p. 77). Additionally, Yosso emphasizes that these cultural assets abound among racialized students; however, they are frequently overlooked, under-utilized, or largely unrecognized. In this regard, the CCW framework not only provides a lens to recognize and appreciate the cultural strengths of racialized students but also challenges the Eurocentric view of cultural capital and helps us examine how racialized students use their cultural wealth to resist educational inequities (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018).

In recent years, Yosso’s (2005) CCW framework has been gaining attention in the Canadian education literature. To cite a few studies, Abdulkadir (2020) examines how two Somali university students utilize their cultural wealth to navigate their academic journeys, while Brown (2019) investigates how women from racialized backgrounds in doctoral programs leverage their CCW to successfully complete their degrees. Seiki’s (2023) study on the Toisanese-Chinese sisterhood support system, “*hung dee moy*”, offers another insightful example that mirrors CCW. The research examines the lived experiences of two teacher participants, highlighting how CCW plays a crucial role in nurturing collective strength through intergenerational resistance. However, the application of CCW within the context of teacher education remains a largely underexplored area, particularly in Canada.

Although primarily situated in the American context, one of the earliest and most influential works emphasizing the importance of recognizing the cultural wealth of racialized teacher candidates is Solórzano’s (1997) seminal paper. In it, Solórzano argues, “As educators, we need to identify the resources and strengths of Students of Colour and place them at the center of our research, curriculum, and teaching... critical race theory provides a framework for teacher education faculty and students to utilize these resources in order to create, recreate, and recover knowledge and art in Communities of Colour” (p. 15). His work, along with Yosso, laid the groundwork for subsequent studies in the U.S. that have applied CCW to understand how racialized teacher candidates leverage cultural assets to navigate teacher education.

Indeed, much of the research on CCW within teacher education continues to focus on the American context. Studies of Li (2022), Martin-Beltrán et al. (2018), Moeller and Bielfeldt (2011), Tolbert and Eichelberger (2016), and Zoch and He (2020), among others, illustrate how CCW provides a lens for examining the various cultural assets racialized teacher candidates draw upon to succeed in teacher education programs. Yet, while these studies highlight the importance of CCW in challenging deficit models and promoting resilience, very few studies (to my knowledge) have examined its potential to challenge deficit ideologies within Canadian teacher education. While Cho's (2010) work represents an important step, as it documents the counter-stories of immigrant preservice teachers and their linguistic capital, it is one of the few studies to directly engage with CCW in the Canadian context. Thus, there is an urgent need for further research to examine how CCW can challenge the prevailing deficit narratives within Canadian teacher education programs, particularly as they relate to the experiences of racialized teacher candidates.

In light of these considerations, the decision to adopt CRT and CCW as theoretical frameworks was driven by the goal of not only addressing a gap in the Canadian teacher education literature but also elucidating the lived experiences of racialized teacher candidates and highlighting the cultural assets that shape their educational journeys. To achieve these aims, CRT played a crucial role in ensuring that participants' lived experiences were examined and analyzed within racialized contexts. At the same time, CCW served as a guiding framework, focusing particularly on the cultural assets and resources that were intrinsic and abundant among racialized teacher candidates. The following conceptual framework provides a more detailed explanation of this approach.

3.5 Conceptual Framework

Doing CRT-informed research is not merely engaging with race as a matter for "abstract analysis" (Delgado, 2003, p. 151), but it is recognizing that race is a site of struggle. Integrating CCW with CRT is explicitly naming an array of knowledges, skills, abilities, and networks of historically marginalized people, uplifting their experiences and giving them voice (Patel, 2023). Thus, race ceases to be a mere exercise in abstract analysis; instead, it becomes an active participation in the larger effort to confront and combat racism (Yosso & Burciaga, 2016). By incorporating both CCW and CRT into my conceptual framework, I am able to take part in this ongoing struggle for racial and social justice through research.

The preponderance of whiteness in teacher education results in racialized teacher candidates being viewed as ‘deficient’ (Paterson, 2023) and lacking ‘cultural literacy’ (Marom, 2019). Hence, they are expected to enter into the program to acquire requisite cultural and social capital to succeed academically (Yosso & Burciaga, 2016). By employing CRT and CCW as overarching frameworks for the current study, I am able to expose racism underlying this cultural deficit perspective and shift the perception of racialized teacher candidates from being viewed as culturally impoverished to being recognized for their multiple strengths (Yosso, 2005). Additionally, by inquiring about their lived experiences within overwhelmingly white teacher education programs (Amos, 2016), I am prioritizing their experiential knowledge and acknowledging its significance in analyzing contexts of racial subordination. In doing so, this study aligns with the defining principles of CRT— examining the ways in which whiteness is perpetuated in educational settings and exposing the racism embedded within.

In the current study, participants’ experiential knowledge are drawn from the responses relating to the first and second research questions. Their experiential knowledge are analyzed through the lens of CCW to create counter-stories. Counter-stories, as defined by Miller et al. (2020) and Yosso (2006) recount experiences of racism and resistance from the perspectives of those marginalized in society. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) and Yosso (2006) identify three types of counter-stories: autobiographical (personal stories), biographical (other people’s stories), and composite stories. They describe these categories as follows:

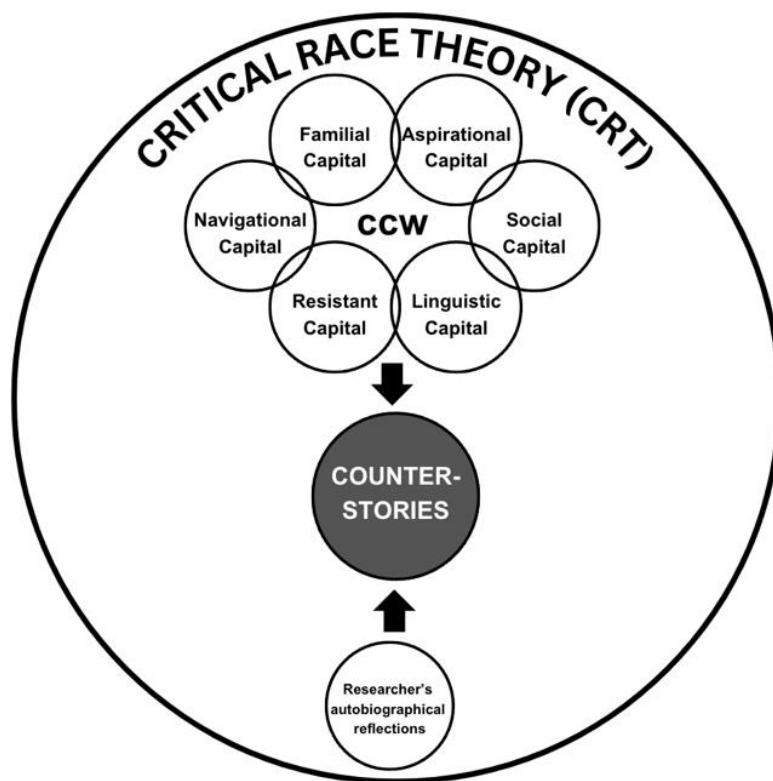
Personal stories are autobiographical reflections in which authors examine their own experiences, often using a critical race lens. In contrast, other people’s stories share another individual’s experiences, typically from a third-person perspective, providing a biographical analysis of encounters with racism and sexism. Composite stories combine multiple sources of “data” to depict the racialized, sexualized, and class-based experiences of people of colour, blending autobiographical and biographical elements to situate characters within social, historical, and political contexts and address various forms of marginalization. (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 33)

This research uses a biographical counterstory approach, focusing on the lived experiences of racialized teacher candidates. It highlights their personal stories while connecting them to larger social, historical, and institutional patterns of racism and other forms of inequality. By centering

their voices, the study shows how individual experiences are shaped by systemic barriers, making visible the challenges and strengths of racialized teachers in education.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework of the Study



Note. In the study, counter-stories function as a theoretical tool.

However, it is crucial to clarify that, unlike studies that use critical race methodology and employ counter-storytelling as a methodological tool, my study adopts counter-stories as a theoretical tool to support data analysis. While my research is deeply rooted in CRT and CCW as theoretical frameworks, its primary focus is on the unfolding of the lived experiences of the participants in the study (a detailed discussion of this is provided in the methodology section). Unlike traditional counter-storytelling methods, which begin by establishing a master narrative, followed by collecting institutional stories and contrasting them with participants' experiences (Collins, 2021, 2024), my study does not directly engage with master narratives (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Focusing solely on master narratives risks allowing them to dominate the discourse (Ikemoto, 1991). As Yosso (2006) notes, counter-stories take various forms. She argues:

Likewise, counter-stories do not focus on trying to convince people that racism exists. Instead, counter-stories seek to document the persistence of racism from the perspectives of those injured and victimized by its legacy. Furthermore, counter-stories bring attention to those who courageously resist racism and struggle toward a more socially and racially just society. So while counter-stories challenge mainstream society's denial of the ongoing significance of race and racism, they do so by offering a critical reflection on the lived experiences and histories of People of Colour. In its multiple forms, counter-storytelling can strengthen traditions of social, political, and cultural survival and resistance.

(p. 10)

In summary, the use of CRT and CCW as theoretical frameworks in this research offers a means to build a nuanced understanding of the experiences of racialized teacher candidates in teacher education programs. CRT exposes systemic racism and promotes counter-storytelling, while CCW illuminates the diverse strengths of racialized individuals, challenging deficit ideologies. By employing these frameworks, I endeavour to transform race from a site of struggle to a place of healing and empowerment—where whiteness is decentered, while strengths and stories of resilience of the historically marginalized are emphasized.

3.6 Chapter Summary

In conclusion, this literature review emphasizes the urgent need to tackle the ongoing underrepresentation of racialized teacher candidates in education, focusing on both the systemic barriers that sustain this disparity and the lack of accessible data on their participation in teacher education programs. It highlights that racism, manifested through microaggressions and other discriminatory practices, continues to be a significant barrier for racialized individuals, negatively impacting their academic success and overall well-being. Additionally, the review identifies Critical Race Theory (CRT) as an essential framework for analyzing how race and racism influence the experiences of racialized students, exposing systemic inequalities and supporting counter-storytelling. By prioritizing the voices of marginalized individuals, CRT provides a means to challenge dominant narratives that perpetuate racial disparities in education. Moreover, Yosso's

(2005) concept of Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) offers a valuable perspective for recognizing the strengths and cultural assets of racialized teacher candidates, countering deficit-oriented views that have historically justified their exclusion.

As I argued here, my adoption of CRT and CCW as theoretical frameworks is not merely a scholarly pursuit but a commitment to actively engage in the broader, ongoing fight for equity, diversity, inclusion, and social justice in education. Research such as this, exploring the intersection of CRT and CCW, is critical not only to expose racism within teacher education but also to contribute to the transformation of teacher education programs. This transformation is necessary to ensure that these programs are more inclusive, accessible, and supportive for all teacher candidates, regardless of race. By centering the voices and experiences of racialized individuals, we can work toward a future where education is truly reflective of and responsive to the diverse communities it serves. Building on the findings discussed in this literature review, the next chapter outlines the research methodology employed to examine the lived experiences of racialized teacher candidates within an Ontario teacher education program.

Chapter Four

METHODOLOGY

I am interested in learning about the lived experiences of racialized teacher candidates, in the hopes that by learning about them, I might understand how their experiences shape the ways they navigate teacher education. And in taking a glimpse of the ways they navigate teacher education, we might learn what teacher education programs can do to better support them. With experience as my starting point, I am drawn to narrative inquiry as my chosen methodological framework for the study. Narrative inquiry is an intimate study of individual experience over time and in context (Caine et al., 2019), and “it begins and ends with respect for ordinary lived experience” (Clandinin, 2019, p. 377). Even though there are other research methodologies that look upon experience as phenomenon under study, in this chapter I discuss the defining features that make narrative inquiry distinctive. I will start with an examination of the historical roots of narrative inquiry. From understanding its historical roots, we may be able to gain appreciation of the epistemological and ontological underpinnings of narrative inquiry. I argue that the articulation of these philosophical underpinnings is crucial as I attempt to live out what it truly means to conduct narrative inquiry. I conclude this chapter with a discussion of the ethical considerations in conducting this research.

4.1 Brief Historical Overview of Narrative Inquiry

It is argued that the impulse to narrate, or the urge to tell stories, dates back thousands of years. Some of the earliest examples of narratives are believed to be as old as 100,000 years (Sugiyama, 2001). For example, Palaeolithic cave art is rich in narrative content, often exhibiting complex literary features such as composition, juxtaposition, association, and scene (Dobrez, 2013). This illustrates that our ability to tell stories, to imagine, and to use myths to make sense of the world around us has been crucial to human survival and essential to our rise within the animal kingdom (Harari, 2015). In other words, storytelling and narrative have not only been central to human survival but are intrinsic to human existence itself (Smith et al., 2017; Sugiyama, 2001). Therefore, it is plausible to say that narratives are one of the oldest and most sophisticated means of acquiring knowledge and understanding.

However, with the rise of the scientific movement in the nineteenth century, a strong belief in the scientific method came to dominate the intellectual landscape of Western society (O’Leary, 2021). Driven by Auguste Comte’s claim that empirical science is the only legitimate path to knowledge, while dismissing human pursuits such as mysticism and metaphysics as mere pseudo-knowledge (Kim, 2016), quantitative approaches to research (highly reliant on quantified data) pushed narratives to the periphery of academic inquiry. Although, later on, this marginalization, prompted an increasing dissatisfaction among scholars who criticized quantitative research for its failure to capture the complexity, uncertainty, uniqueness, instability, ambiguity, and value-conflict inherent in human experience (Kim, 2016). Polkinghorne (1988) laments the “loss of faith in the ability of research in the human disciplines to deliver on their original promise of helping to solve human and social problems” (p. ix).

In response, many scholars across disciplines turned to qualitative research. Borrowing Denzin and Lincoln’s (1994) definition, qualitative research is “multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive naturalistic approach to its subject matter... qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 2). As this definition suggests, qualitative research primarily employs an interpretive and naturalistic approach to studying research phenomena, focusing on understanding the meanings individuals assign to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Although quantitative research offers numerical data and statistical insights, qualitative research explores the depth of human experience and viewpoint, capturing the contexts and subtleties that are often overlooked in numerical analysis (Lim, 2024).

With the rise of qualitative research methodologies, especially within the social sciences and humanities, the use of stories and narratives as tools for acquiring knowledge and understanding has resurged in prominence. Narrative inquiry is seen for its potential to offer deeper insight into the meaning of human experience (Polkinghorne, 1988). Mitchell (1981) further observes, “the study of narrative is no longer the province of literary specialists or folklorists borrowing their terms from psychology and linguistics but has now become a positive source of insight for all the branches of human and natural science” (p. ix).

The foundations of narrative inquiry can be traced back to the pioneering work of theorists like Todorov, Roland Barthes, and Gerard Genette, who developed narratology, which

is the study of narratives (Kim, 2016). Narratology is characterized as a refined field of study with international and interdisciplinary roots, scope, and objectives, notable for its careful and thorough approach in achieving significant insights (Smith, 1981). Building on narratology, narrative inquiry has expanded across various disciplines, each developing its own distinct approach. For example, Czarniawska (2004) employs a more organizational orientation in using narratives in social science research, while Lieblich et al. (1998) apply a psychological approach to reading, analyzing, and interpreting narrative data in the same field. In the early 1980s, many psychologists also began drawing on narrative inquiry to explore the practice of psychoanalysis (Kim, 2016). Around this time, researchers in the medical field recognized the potential of narrative inquiry to address the growing distrust between patients and doctors, fueled by rising ethical scandals (Hurwitz et al., 2004). However, it was not until 1990 that Connelly and Clandinin introduced narrative inquiry into the field of education (Kim, 2016).

As Clandinin and Rosiek (2019) point out, these brief historical overviews of narrative inquiry's development across various disciplines reveal a strong connection between narrative approaches to understanding phenomena and the evolving methodologies used in these fields. With such a diverse range of approaches, Clandinin (2023) stresses the importance for researchers to clearly articulate the epistemology and ontology that underpin their work, and to define what "narrative" means within their specific research context. In the following section, I discuss the philosophical and epistemological underpinnings of narrative inquiry that shape this study.

4.2 Philosophical and Epistemological Underpinnings of Narrative Inquiry

In utilizing narrative inquiry, Clandinin and Rosiek (2019) caution researchers to carefully consider their theoretical framing, as narrative inquiry involves much more than a simple affinity for stories. As Clandinin et al. (2007) aptly note:

Narrative inquiry is so much more than deciding at the last minute that a paper or dissertation or talk would be more compelling if a researcher was to tell a story. When researchers say they want to “do narrative” and what they want to do is to take their data and turn it into a story, that is, they want to somehow incorporate story in their research texts, this is not what we think of

as narrative inquiry. For those of us engaged in narrative inquiry, we work from a set of ontological and methodological assumptions and the questions of representational form follow from these. (p. 31)

In his books on research methodology, Creswell (2003, 2019) presents narrative inquiry as a relatively straightforward process, outlining a clear sequence that begins with assessing the way the research problem aligns with the design, followed by selecting participants who has pertinent stories to tell, collecting and analyzing those stories, and ultimately reporting the results. However, Clandinin (2019) challenges this oversimplified perspective, arguing that “for some, narrative inquiry appears to be a way of only representing data... a representational form, one way of representing from a range of representational forms” (p. 374). In response to this reductionist view, Clandinin argues for the necessity of understanding narrative inquiry as a distinct way of knowing rooted in a particular epistemological stance toward experience. To this end, a significant starting point is to critically examine Dewey's (1929, 1933) theory of experience, as it provides the philosophical foundation for the way narrative inquiry approaches and interprets lived experiences.

In his pragmatist interpretation of experience, Dewey highlights two key criteria: continuity and interaction, both of which are enacted within specific situations (Downey & Clandinin, 2019). By continuity, it means that “experiences grow out of other experiences, and experiences lead to further experiences” (Clandinin et al., 2000, p. 2). Regardless of where one situates themselves in this continuum, whether in the present, a remembered past, or an anticipated future, each moment is rooted in past experiences and leads to future experiential possibilities (Clandinin et al., 2000). Epistemologically, this implies that meaning and understanding are always in process; what can be known at any given moment is shaped by past experiences and open to revision as new experiences unfold. In other words, growth is an essential aspect of continuity, and from this perspective, it is crucial to see experience as dynamic, evolving, and emerging, rather than fixed and predetermined. In this study, where my research puzzle begins with a "wonder" about the ordinary lived experiences of participants, it is essential to understand that continuity is an ontological principle for narrative inquiry, and that experiences are inherently continuous.

Conversely, interaction as the other key criterion for experience, encompasses the interplay between the “objective” and “internal” conditions (Dewey, 1986). Dewey argues that experience is shaped by the ongoing interaction between human thought and the personal, social, and material environment—between the self and the world. Experiences cannot be reduced to being solely physical or mental. This challenges positivist assumptions that knowledge can be produced through researcher detachment or objectivity. Instead, knowledge emerges through relational engagement and is shaped by the contexts in which experiences occur. Essentially, Dewey (1981) asserts that:

Experiences are products of discrimination, and hence can be understood only as we take into account the total normal experience in which both inner and outer factors are so incorporated... In an experience, things and events belonging to the world, physical and social, are transformed through the human context they enter, while the lived creature is changed and developed through its intercourse with things previously external to it. (p.251)

Within this context, Clandinin and Rosiek (2019) argue that Dewey’s view of experience is not transcendental; rather, it is transactional. This perspective is pivotal for narrative inquirers, as it significantly alters how experience should be approached in research. For instance, when exploring the lived experiences of racialized teacher candidates, I initially presumed these experiences were fixed, hidden, and simply awaiting to be discovered; much like searching “behind the veil” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2019, p. 166). Adopting this view led me to believe that I needed to remain detached from my participants and maintain an objective stance to preserve the integrity of the research process, assuming that such an approach would yield a pure, untainted representation of participants’ experiences. Narrative inquiry, however, requires a different epistemological stance, that is, knowledge is co-constructed through relationships, dialogue, and interpretation. By adopting narrative inquiry, I am committed to understanding knowledge as relational and situated. This requires reflexively unlearning assumptions shaped by positivist research traditions and recognizing myself as an active participant in the meaning-making process. As Clandinin and Rosiek emphasize, the crux of narrative inquiry lies in fostering a new relationship between individuals and their environment—spanning their life, community, and the world around them. This new relationship enables individuals to engage with their surroundings in a more meaningful way, ultimately creating “a new kind of experienced object,

not more real than those which preceded but more significant, and less overwhelming and oppressive” (Dewey, 1981, p. 175).

In a nutshell, understanding Dewey’s ontology and epistemology of experience, grounded in the principles of continuity and interaction, is a crucial starting point for narrative inquirers. These principles underpin the three metaphorical dimensions, also referred to as "commonplaces," within the narrative inquiry framework. In the subsequent section, I will explore these three commonplaces and demonstrate the way they shape the methodological approach of this study.

4.3 The Narrative View of Experience

The argument for narrative inquiry is grounded in the belief that human beings, both individually and socially, live storied lives (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, 2006). For Connelly and Clandinin (2006), stories are a “portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful” (p. 375). This view underscores the centrality of stories in shaping human experience. To adopt narrative inquiry as a methodology, therefore, is to view experience as a storied phenomenon. And this sets narrative inquiry apart from other qualitative methods, as it requires not only mastering standard qualitative data collection techniques, but also developing the ability to think narratively (Kim, 2016). Clandinin (2023) further asserts that thinking narratively involves situating experiences within the metaphorical three dimensions or commonplaces of inquiry: temporality, sociality, and place.

Temporality captures the changing, unfolding nature of experiences, for both participants and researchers. Drawing on Dewey’s continuity of experience, it reminds us that lived experiences are not fixed but constantly evolving (Caine et al., 2020). Accordingly, narratives must be revisited and revised throughout the inquiry, reflecting the ongoing shaping of experience (Carr, 1986).

Sociality attends to both personal conditions (feelings, hopes, moral dispositions) and social contexts in which experiences unfold (Clandinin, 2023). In line with Dewey’s notion of interaction, sociality emphasizes that people are always engaged with their situations (Clandinin

& Rosiek, 2019). As Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) note, researchers and participants exist in dynamic, contextual relationships, bringing histories and worldviews into the inquiry:

In this turn toward narrative inquiry, the researcher not only understands that there is a relationship between the humans involved in the inquiry but also who the researcher is and what is researched emerged in the interaction. In this view, the researched and the researcher are seen to exist in time and in a particular context. They bring with them a history and worldview. They are not static but dynamic and growth and learning are part of the research process. (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 14)

Entering a research relationship with participants requires balance. As the researcher, I must be willing to be vulnerable to remain authentic, without abandoning boundaries or allowing “anything personal goes” (Behar, 2022, p. 13). Tierney (1998) frames vulnerability as a methodological tool, enabling researchers to participate as narrative characters alongside participants, thereby deepening understanding of lived experiences.

The third commonplace of narrative inquiry is place, defined as “the specific concrete, physical, and topological boundaries...where the inquiry and events take place” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 25). Place and experience are interconnected, shaping who we are and who we become (Clandinin, 2023). As a researcher, I reflect on my own landscapes: where I grew up, the schools I attended, my church, and other past and present settings, as they influence how I see the world. Narrative inquirers are embedded in these dimensions, engaging with participants within shared spaces (Downey & Clandinin, 2019).

Taking these arguments into account, it becomes clear that narrative inquiry transcends the simple act of telling or collecting stories. It involves immersing oneself within the metaphorical three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, living alongside participants throughout the research process (Clandinin, 2023). In essence, narrative inquiry is fundamentally a collaborative form of research, one that thrives on co-researching with participants. As Connelly and Clandinin (1990) assert:

In our storytelling, the stories of our participants merged with our own to create new stories, ones that we have labelled collaborative stories. The thing finally written on paper.. the research paper or book, is a collaborative

document; a mutually constructed story created out of the lives of both researcher and participant. (p.12)

This encapsulates what Clandinin (2019) alludes to when she emphasizes that narrative inquiry goes far beyond the mere representation of data or “generating a list of understandings achieved by analyzing the stories” (p. 385). At its core, “narrative inquiry is the study of experience as it is lived” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2019, p. 447). It is within this context that narrative inquiry is understood as both a phenomenon under study and a research methodology. In the following section, I will explore my critical positioning in adopting narrative inquiry to examine the lived and storied experiences of the participants in this study.

4.4 Narrative Inquiry Through a Critical Lens

As previously discussed, narrative inquiry is not solely concerned with storytelling or the “researchers’ and participants’ penchant to tell stories” (Parker & Craig, 2023, p. 92). Rather, it is a process that “not only valorizes individuals’ experience, but also explores the social, cultural, familial, linguistic, and instructional narratives within which individuals’ experiences were and are constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted” (Clandinin, 2023, p. 8). In this study, my goal in examining the lived experiences of racialized teacher candidates encompasses more than just collection, organization, and re-storying of their narratives to fit a preordained framework. While this work is philosophically grounded in Dewey’s theory of experience, I explicitly recognize the tensions that arise when Deweyan pragmatism is placed in dialogue with a critical lens, such as Critical Race Theory. Dewey’s emphasis on continuity, interaction, and meaning-making offers a valuable foundation for attending to lived experience in narrative inquiry. However, as Ray (2004) argues, pragmatism “could not explain slavery and racism nor the systematic exclusion of women from the workplace... [and] ignored the structural forces of domination” (p. 310). In this sense, Dewey’s framework is limited in its capacity to account for the structural and historical dimensions of racism that shape racialized lives. As Clandinin and Rosiek (2019) assert, these systemic forces “do find their way into narrative inquiries because they are a part of people’s lives and lived stories” (p. 250). If the objective of my research is to offer a nuanced understanding of the lived experiences of racialized teacher candidates in Ontario, I must adopt a critical approach to narrative inquiry—one that not only examines but actively challenges the narratives that have historically limited and marginalized racialized individuals.

Additionally, it is crucial to emphasize that not all narrative research adopts a critical perspective (Pino Gavidia & Adu, 2022). While narrative inquiry offers a means to explore personal biographical data (Foster Walters, 2024), it is through the application of a critical framework rooted in CRT and CCW that I am able to foreground power dynamics and inequities that may underlie participants' experiences. Conversely, narrative inquiry is not without its challenges, particularly for those adopting a critical stance. As Connelly and Clandinin (1990) note, in contrast to traditional methods, narrative inquiry evolves in response to real-world phenomena rather than being guided by rigid, predetermined research principles. This flexibility is central to its strength, but it also demands careful navigation. To impose theory prematurely or too rigidly risks distorting the authenticity of participants' experiences. For the narrative inquirer, "a person's experience must be listened to on its own terms first, without the presumption of deficit or flaw, and critique needs to be motivated by the problematic elements within that experience" (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2019, p. 241). This means that even though interpretation in narrative inquiry is inevitably shaped by the researcher's own constructs, whether implicit or explicit, the integrity of the inquiry depends on privileging participants' lived experiences above any preconceived theoretical lens (Eisner, 1988). As Clandinin et al. (2000) warn, relying on external "strategies, tactics, rules, and techniques" (p. 188) risks imposing the researcher's framework onto the data, disrupting the organic flow of the inquiry and potentially obscuring the realities of those whose stories are being studied.

In response to these tensions, I designed my data analysis as a two-level analytic process that intentionally holds in balance the prioritization of participants' voices and the application of my critical conceptual framework. The first level of analysis was inductive and experience-centered. At this stage, I privileged participants' accounts as they were told, attending closely to the three commonplaces or dimensions (e.g., temporality, sociality, and place) of experience. Through repeated readings of interview transcripts and my field notes, I constructed narrative accounts that remained grounded in participants' meanings, language, and sense-making. This phase focused on honouring the wholeness and complexity of each participant's story without filtering it through CRT or CCW. In doing so, I sought to ensure that the narrative accounts emerged from the participants' lived experiences rather than from my analytic categories.

The second level of analysis was deductive and theoretically informed. After the narrative accounts were constructed, I returned to the data using CRT and CCW as interpretive lenses. At this stage, the conceptual framework guided the analytic process as I examined how participants'

lived experiences could be understood in relation to racialized power structures, systemic inequities, and various forms of CCW. In this way, theory did not precede or dictate the stories, but was instead brought into dialogue with them. This layered approach allowed me to remain faithful to participants' experiences while also situating those experiences within broader sociopolitical and racialized contexts.

This analytic structure responds directly to Dewey's (1929) caution against "casting a cloud over the things of ordinary experience." By allowing experience to lead in the first analytic phase, I resisted the urge to control or abstract participants' stories prematurely. As Parker and Craig (2023) note, it is by letting experience lead the way that our studies truly become narrative inquiries. Yet, by engaging in a second, theoretically guided phase of analysis, I was also able to fulfill the critical purpose of the study, that is, to interrogate how structural forces shape, constrain, and are resisted within participants' lives.

These commitments are further informed by Clandinin and Connelly's (1996) work on exploring teachers' professional knowledge, demonstrating the transformative potential of counter-stories to challenge dominant narratives. At the time, they referred to these counter-stories as "cover stories," a means for teachers to resist the influence of "sacred stories" or the dominant, institutionalized narratives imposed upon them (Parker & Craig, 2023). In the context of my research, my conceptual framework centered on counter-stories have proven useful in helping me make sense of participants experiences. However, it is my sustained commitment to thinking narratively, and to prioritizing experience before theory, that ultimately grounds this study as a genuine narrative inquiry.

In the following section, I outline the research procedure, detailing the processes of participant recruitment, entry into the research field, data collection methods, and the procedures for data analysis. However, it is essential to recognize that one of the key design considerations in narrative inquiry is the researcher's entry into relationships with participants amidst the unfolding of their experiences. This relational aspect is not merely a procedural step, but a fundamental component of the inquiry process itself. In light of this, I position the research procedure within this dynamic and evolving methodological design of entering in the midst, transitioning from field to field texts, and ultimately, moving from interim field texts to final research texts.

4.5 Entering in the Midst: Negotiating Entry into the Field

What draws me to narrative inquiry is not only its clear departure from traditional research methodologies but also its attention to the relational dynamics between the researcher and participants (Caine, 2007). For narrative inquiry, entry into the research field, that is, the “relational space” (Clandinin, 2023, p. 27) denotes entering in the midst of the ongoing experiences of both participants and the inquirer. As Clandinin (2023) describes it:

Our lives “meet in the midst of each of our unfolding complex and multiple experiences, [then], we begin to shape time, places, and spaces where we come together and negotiate ways of being together and ways of giving accounts of our work together. (p. 26)

There are two ways to enter this relational space: either by listening to individuals share their stories or by immersing oneself alongside participants as they live and tell their stories (Caine, 2007; Chung, 2016; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Regardless of whether the starting point is living or telling stories, it is important to recognize the nested set of lives in which both researcher and participants live, where individual narratives are deeply embedded in broader social, cultural, and institutional contexts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). For this study, I entered this relational space by listening to individuals share their stories. I elaborate on this concept in the forthcoming sections by describing the recruitment process and the inclusion criteria for participants in the study.

4.5.1 Recruitment

Following approval of my research ethics application, I implemented the recruitment strategy outlined in my research proposal. I contacted professors within the teacher education program in the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa. Ottawa is a region known for its diversity (Statistics Canada, 2016), providing a valuable context for examining various racialized experiences in an academic setting. I asked the professors if I could do an in-person contact visit in one of their teacher education classes. The primary goal of the contact visit was straightforward: to present the study to students at the beginning of their lecture and ultimately recruit participants. Seidman (2013, 2019) points out that group contact visits are highly efficient, saving both time and reducing the researcher’s burden by allowing one explanation to

reach several individuals simultaneously. Nonetheless, this approach was not just about convenience. It played a fundamental role in the recruitment process, especially considering the nature of the in-depth interviews I required. It was vital that potential participants not only understood the study but also their role within it, and the purpose behind the series of interviews (Seidman, 2013). During the contact visits, I shared my professional website with the class, where I had posted the official call for participants. This call included my contact information, allowing participants to reach out to me via email or text message if they were interested in the study. Additionally, I distributed bookmark-sized flyers with a QR code that, when scanned by a mobile phone, directed to my website. These flyers were handed out in ten teacher education classes. My aim was to recruit at least six participants, and I was fortunate to receive responses from seven volunteers. It is important to note that four of these participants were previous students in the classes where I served as a teaching assistant during their first year in the program. This prior familiarity raised specific ethical considerations, which I address further in the ethical considerations section of this chapter.

4.5.2 Participants

Among the seven participants who volunteered to participate in the study, two were biologically male (Emery and Maddox) and five were biologically female (Sage, Arden, Neve, Jamie, and Lark). The inclusion criteria in the study were twofold: first, the teacher candidate must self-identify as a racialized individual, and second, they must be enrolled in the teacher education program at the University of Ottawa, Faculty of Education, for the 2024-2025 academic year. Out of the seven participants, four are of South Asian descent, while the rest have East Asian, East African, and Southeast Asian backgrounds. To protect the participants' identities and avoid any risk of inadvertent identification, especially given the small population of racialized teacher candidates in the program, other identifying details have been deliberately excluded. A summary table of participant characteristics can be found in Appendix A.

Additionally, participants were given the option to have our series of interviews either online or in person, at a time and place that worked best for them. If they chose the latter, they were free to select the meeting location. Emery, Maddox, and Neve decided on in-person meetings after their classes. While I made it clear that they could choose the venue for our meetings, Maddox and Neve asked me to decide for them. In that moment, I realized I had

stepped fully into the relational space— a space, as Kubota (2017) and Clandinin and Connelly (2000) remind me, born of negotiation and nurtured through ongoing dialogues about purpose, transitions, and intentions. In this regard, I am aware that I step into the midst of their lives, where my presence must be one of respect, careful not to impose or burden them further, as they are graciously offering me something I want (Seidman, 2019). Considering their class schedules, I suggested that we meet in one of the vacant graduate offices within the Faculty of Education building. Maddox and Neve consented, while Emery enthusiastically offered to bring me to his “favourite spot at the university.” His favourite spot was an open-air area, where lush turfgrass stretched beneath a few scattered picnic tables.

Figure 2

Emery’s favourite spot at the university



Note. This photograph shows the research site where Emery and I met for the next three weeks during data collection.

As we arrived for our first meeting, a group of students had already claimed one of the tables. Even as faint voices filled the air, the space felt peaceful and inviting, a serene escape from the concrete labyrinth of the campus buildings. I immediately understood why Emery loved it. It was not just a place; it was the sanctuary where our relational space would grow over the weeks to come. Conversely, Sage, Arden, Jamie, and Lark preferred online interviews, all of which were conducted through the Zoom online platform at a schedule we mutually agreed upon. I now turn to the discussion of the data collection process.

4.6 From Field to Field Texts: The Three-part Conversation Series

As mentioned, there are two possible starting points for collecting data in narrative inquiry: listening to participants as they tell stories or living alongside participants as they live and tell stories. Clandinin (2023) observes that the typical starting point in narrative inquiry is telling stories, with the most frequently used methods being conversations or interviews framed as conversations. For this study, I employed a series of semi-structured interviews in the form of conversations. As Clandinin (2023) suggests, conversations offer a space where the stories of both participants and researchers can be co-constructed and heard. Specifically, I adopted Seidman's (2013, 2019) three-interview series, which I refer to in this study as the three-part conversation series, to structure the interview process. Although Seidman's model was originally developed as a phenomenological approach to in-depth interviewing, it proved highly effective in fostering narrative conversations for the study.

The purpose of the first phase of the three-part conversation series was to build rapport with participants and explore their past life experiences leading up to their current self. I utilized conversation prompts to explore their schooling experiences during childhood and how their family backgrounds had shaped their educational journeys and aspirations to become teachers. In the second phase, I inquired about their practical experiences and asked specific questions, such as how their typical day unfolded as a racialized teacher candidate and how they managed their time and resources throughout the program. Additionally, I explored their interactions with staff, experiences with the curriculum, relationships with professors, and dynamics with peers within the teacher education program. In the final conversation stage, I encouraged participants to step back from their daily routines, pause, and reflect on the personal significance of their experiences (Seidman, 2013). The goal of the third phase was not merely to seek clarifications

but to understand what it personally meant for them to be a racialized teacher candidate and how they expected their teacher education program to support their aspirations of becoming teachers.

While Seidman's model offers a structured approach, I recognize that narrative conversations do not follow a linear path or a chronological sequence (Sarris, 1993), as "they do not necessarily move from point A to point B" (hooks, 1998, p. xx). This was evident in my study, where, despite the semi-structured nature of the conversations — with interview prompts designed to guide the process — the majority of the conversations were largely participant-led. I was struck by the fact that, even with an interview guide in hand, most participants required no prompting or additional questions from me.

The three-part conversation series spanned four months, from September to December 2024, with each phase lasting 60 minutes. It is important to emphasize that the first and second phases for each participant were separated by one week, while the third phase allowed up to three weeks, varying between participants. This gap is critical, as it provides participants with enough time to reflect on the prior conversations without allowing too much time to pass, ensuring the continuity and momentum of the dialogues (Seidman, 2013). Overall, I engaged with each participant for 180 minutes across the three phases. These conversations were transcribed using Otter.ai, an online transcription software. These transcripts became the primary field texts for this study. In the context of narrative inquiry, "field text" refers to the data collected (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). In addition to the transcripts, the field texts also included my field notes which were documented in my research journal. Clandinin (2013) reminds me of the importance of reflecting on my own lived experiences as I intentionally enter the relational space with participants. The research journal proved valuable as it helped me stay attentive to the unfolding of my own experiences while in the research relationship. I carefully documented the features of the physical space where our conversations took place, my emotions and aesthetic responses before, during, and after the conversations, as well as my assumptions and reflections. By doing so, I was able to remain reflexive, preserving my own voice and narratives while simultaneously gathering the voices and stories of my participants (Mahoney, 2007). This process also ensured that my own experiences, values, and assumptions were transparently acknowledged, which helped minimize personal biases and enhanced the credibility of my research (Creswell, 2018, 2023).

Moreover, I remained open and flexible to the possibility of generating other forms of field texts that could arise from the relational space, such as artifacts. Initially, I considered asking participants to share artifacts, like course assignments, to complement their narratives. However, I realized that even the creation of field texts is a negotiated process. This aligns with Clandinin's (2023) assertion that field texts are co-composed by both researchers and participants. While having a carefully planned approach is important, it is equally essential to remain responsive to the direction set by participants (Swanson, 2019). To my surprise, although participants did not share course assignments, some offered written pieces and photographs. I regarded these contributions, including the stories behind the photographs, as artifacts. Similarly, I personally captured photographs while in the field and developed personal annals, created in consultation with participants, as part of the artifact collection. Together, these materials form integral components of the overall field texts for this study. Building on this discussion of field texts, the following section outlines the data analysis procedures employed in this research.

4.7 Moving from Field Texts to Interim and Final Research Texts

According to Bateson (2001) and Clandinin (2023), dissection plays a crucial role in the scientific method, and it becomes especially tempting to break down lived experiences when narrative researchers leave the field and start analyzing and interpreting from a distance. This notion particularly resonated with me as I stepped away from the research field, my pockets brimming with field texts. As I prepared myself for data analysis, I was quickly reminded that this was not a traditional research project where applying a rigid framework to the field texts would lead to a neat and straightforward analysis. In this moment, I found myself in agreement with Clandinin (2023) and other narrative inquirers, such as Caine (2007), Chung (2016), Kubota (2017), and Vigneau (2022), among others, who argue that narrative inquiry is not a conventional approach; rather, it requires a flexible, relational engagement that honours the complexity of participants' experiences.

Further, the process of moving from interim texts to final research texts was not linear. Instead, I found myself repeatedly reading and rereading, reviewing and re-reviewing conversation transcripts, and continuously listening and relistening to the audio recordings. As previously mentioned, I employed two levels of analysis or interpretation in this study. The first

level involved creating narrative accounts of my unique interactions with each participant. These narrative accounts were crucial as they provided a detailed representation of the unfolding experiences of both the participants and me, particularly in those moments and spaces where our stories intersected and were shared (Clandinin, 2023). Once the narrative accounts were written, I shared them with participants not only for member-checking but also to invite them to reconstruct the accounts in ways that best represented their experiences. The finalized narrative accounts are presented in Chapter 4.

The second level of analysis sought to identify resonant threads or patterns within the field texts. To do this, I broadly utilized Braun's and Clarke's (2006, 2013, 2023) thematic analysis. Within this approach, I began by familiarizing myself with the field texts, followed by a coding process to identify resonant threads from my conversations with participants. Coding typically involved two cycles: open coding, where field text is broken into meaningful units or 'codes,' and axial coding, which examines relationships between these codes (Saldaña, 2021). During open coding, I identified keywords, phrases, expressions, and metaphors that participants emphasized or used repeatedly to form initial codes (Bernfeld, 2023). Then, in axial coding, I used my conceptual framework, as outlined in Chapter 2, to explore connections between the identified codes, focusing on the resonant threads. I provided an illustrative example of this coding process in Appendix B. To enhance the efficiency of the coding process, I employed NVivo software, a qualitative data analysis (QDA) tool.

In both levels of analysis, I was careful not to fall into the trap that Gergen (2004) describes as the “analytical method of deconstructing stories into coded piles” (p. 272), which dilutes the very purpose of narrative inquiry by pulling focus away from a narrative understanding of experience (Clandinin, 2023). To avoid this pitfall as I compose the final research texts, I focused on bringing forward the three metaphorical dimensions or commonplaces—temporality, sociality, and place (Schaefer et al., 2019)—and continually revisited the personal, practical, and social justifications for my research. As Clandinin (2023) points out, it is only through attending to all these dimensions that we can recognize the disruptions, silences, gaps, and contradictions within both participants' and our own shared experiences. In the following section, I will explore the ethical considerations of the study.

4.8 Ethical Considerations: An Emphasis on the Relational Ethics of Care

Ethics live at the very heart, perhaps is the very heart, of every work of narrative inquirers (Clandinin, 2019). Because narrative inquiry is deeply rooted in the ontological commitments of being in relation with participants, ethical issues become central to the inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, 2006; Kubota, 2017).

As mentioned, four of the participants who volunteered in the study were previously known to me. Sage, Ardeen, Neve, and Jamie were teacher candidates in the classes where I worked as a teaching assistant during their first year in the program. I recognize that this prior familiarity could have influenced their decision to participate. Although our formal teaching assistant–student relationships had long ended, I remained attentive to the subtle power dynamics that might persist. This required ongoing reflexivity on my end and a conscious effort to heed Hannah Arendt’s (1958) assertion on being “with others and neither for nor against them” (p. 180). Arendt cautions that when interactions are driven solely by being for or against others, “human togetherness is lost” (p. 8). Guided by this, I aimed to cultivate a relational presence in which the participants’ welfare took precedence over my own interests as a researcher or the demands of the study (Caine, 2007; Noddings, 1984). In this sense, relational ethics is enacted through sheer human togetherness: being present with participants without instrumentalizing the relationship for research purposes (Park et al., 2016).

Relational ethics, therefore, served as a guiding principle throughout this study. As I design and execute this study, my foremost obligation is to the participants (Caine, 2007). In preparing my application for approval from the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board, I kept in mind Noddings’ (1984) notion of the ethics of care, where in every step of the data collection process, I carefully positioned myself as the ‘carer’ and my participants as the ‘cared for.’ For example, when recruiting participants, I made sure they were fully informed about the nature of their participation, including potential risks and harms. I also honoured confidentiality, upheld informed consent and reassured participants that they could withdraw at any time, with the assurance that any data related to their participation would be deleted immediately.

4.9 Chapter Summary

To conclude, this chapter on research methodology has provided an overview of the historical and philosophical foundations of narrative inquiry. As discussed, a solid understanding of these philosophical foundations is crucial for fully appreciating narrative inquiry, both as a phenomenon and as a research methodology. The key insights presented here lay the groundwork for the following chapter, where I will present individual narrative accounts for each participant in the study. These accounts have been carefully negotiated with the participants and are written with close attention to relational ethics and the three metaphorical dimensions or commonplaces of narrative inquiry. Finally, it is important to mention that the names used in the narrative accounts are pseudonyms, selected with the participants' consent, in order to protect their identities.

Chapter Five

NARRATIVE ACCOUNTS

In this chapter, I present seven narrative accounts. Drawing on Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional narrative inquiry framework: temporality, sociality, and place, this chapter engages with participants' experiences across time, through relationships, and within broader sociocultural and institutional contexts. The narrative accounts presented here are thus intentionally designed to reveal the complex life histories that inform participants' present experiences in teacher education. Additionally, to create these narrative accounts, I adopt Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) narrative writing approach. In constructing each participant's narrative, personal annals served as a guiding tool—chronologies of memories, events, and significant dates that scaffold the telling of oral histories (Clandinin, 2023). These annals were presented to participants for feedback and approval, supporting the narrative construction process and reinforcing their agency in the representation of their stories.

It is crucial to offer a caution here: the seven narrative accounts presented in this chapter are not intended as exhaustive or definitive representations of participants' lives (Dewey, 1981). Rather, they are interpretive constructions that are partial, situated, and relational, emerging from my sustained engagement with participants in the relational research space and through the analytic process. The vignettes in this chapter, which introduce each narrative account, were developed based on the participants' transcripts. These were thoughtfully selected for their meaningful effect and enduring resonance with both the participants and me as a researcher. This approach is grounded in the principles of narrative inquiry, which challenge the notion of the researcher as a neutral or detached observer. As Geertz (2009) reminds us, researchers are always implicated in meaning-making. In this spirit, I hold closely Leslie Marmon Silko's (1997) assertion, "I am as much a part of the landscape as the boulders I stand on" (p. 27). The narratives presented here thus reflect not only participants' unfolding lives but also the interwoven moments in which their stories and mine met.

Furthermore, the objective of these narrative accounts is not to claim access to an ultimate "truth" about participants' lives. Instead, I employ the concept of fidelity as a criterion

for assessing credibility. Drawing on Blumenfeld-Jones (1995), I understand fidelity not as a matter of verifying factual accuracy, but as a practice of honouring the meanings participants ascribe to their experiences. Fidelity requires attentiveness to what participants explicitly share, as well as sensitivity to what remains implicit, emotionally nuanced, or difficult to articulate. To uphold this ethical commitment, each narrative was prepared in consultation with participants, including decisions about pseudonyms, the inclusion or exclusion of events or places, and the overall tone of the account. In doing so, I sought to preserve the integrity of participants' voices while remaining critically and reflexively engaged with my interpretive role as researcher.

Finally, in presenting these accounts, I invite readers to enter into aspects of participants' life histories and, in so doing, to cultivate a deeper understanding of and compassion toward their journeys. This aspiration draws on Lugones' (1987) notion of "world-travelling," which calls for moving across social and cultural worlds with openness and with what she terms a "loving perception." Such perception entails an attentiveness that is affirming, responsive, and grounded in respect for the complexities of others' lives. In this spirit, the narratives offered here are not presented merely as data, but as invitations to witness, to accompany, and to regard participants with the kind of loving curiosity that narrative inquiry makes possible. In the section that follows, I present Sage's narrative account. Sage, a Southeast Asian teacher candidate, was the first to respond to my call for research participants. I have known her a year before the interviews, she was one of the few racialized teacher candidates in the class where I used to serve as a teaching assistant.

5.1 Sage's Narrative Account

There was a sudden thud, followed by a frantic pounding on the door of the small wooden hut. The echoes of machine-gun fire crackled in the distance. From outside came the hysterical voice of a man. "Hurry! Open the door!" The man burst inside, splinters breaking loose from the frail wooden frame. His eyes swept the room and fell upon his wife. His wife stood frozen, her face tense with fear. Their two young children, just two and three years old, clung tightly to the hem of her long dress. They had been hiding behind a wooden closet tucked into the corner of the room, their small bodies trembling as they tried to hold back tears.

“Take only what you can carry,” the man said quickly, his voice uneven with fear. “We have to leave now. The war has started. We need to go where the others are going.” His wife’s hands shook as she reached for a small bag and began stuffing clothes inside. She was heavily pregnant, her movements slow and strained. “But what about my parents, my brothers and sisters?” she asked, her voice breaking as she glanced at the children, who followed her every move. “We don’t have time,” he replied firmly, though his face betrayed his own fear. “They will be leaving too. I heard there’s a camp, two nights away from here. That’s where we must go.”

After taking what they could only carry, the family left quickly and slipped into the forest. The man had a bag strapped to his back and held his son around his neck. His wife held their daughter’s hand, guiding her small steps as she struggled to keep pace, her other hand clutching the bag tightly against her hip. Before disappearing into the trees, the man turned to look back at their hut. Dusk was settling in, yet he could still see it. In the dim light, it is standing quietly beside the other abandoned houses, a stark reminder of the life they were being forced to leave behind. Only days before, the village had been full of children’s laughter and neighbours calling to each other as they went about their daily routines. Now it was dead silent.

Suddenly, a deafening explosion shook the ground beneath them. The sound of a bomb tore through the air. When they turned their back, they saw fire rising from their village, flames devouring the houses, the smoke spreading quickly into the night sky. In an instant, the place they had built together, the home where they had begun their family, was gone. There was nothing left to return to. The man tightened his grip on his son. The woman clutched her daughter closer. There was no turning back. Only forward, into the uncertain darkness.

The child in the woman’s womb was Sage. And the memory of her family fleeing a civil war in Southeast Asia was like a precious heirloom passed on from one generation to another. When Sage shared this with me, I felt deeply honoured by her trust. She then revealed that her family made it to the camp safe, but the young girl clinging to her mother did not make it. That girl was Sage’s older sister. She had been sick. “She died during the escape,” Sage recounted. “There were no doctors, no hospitals. She passed away in the middle of the forest. I never met her, but she’s still part of us, something we carry,” she added. While she was narrating this, I tried to pause for a moment. The heaviness of her story was filling up my chest that I could not

find the words to say next. Perhaps, Sage sensed it, so she gently reassured me. “I wasn’t born yet when it happened. I was born in a refugee camp and spent the first seven years of my life there. I don’t remember much from that time.”

Although Sage shared this story during our first session, it stayed with me well beyond it ended. The images of her whole family fleeing the war, her pregnant mother struggling to keep pace in their exodus towards a safe place, and the young girl dying on the way— perhaps, who was not even given a proper burial, lingered in my head longer than I thought. This picture of intergenerational trauma was a very important piece in Sage’s narrative. In her words, her family “endured so much” before she was born, and she carried that with her. Throughout the three interview sessions we had, Sage would always return to the suffering and sacrifices of her parents. “They were always in the back of my mind,” she would constantly mention.

It was in 2007 when Sage and her family moved to Canada. Immediately after the move, she was registered in the first grade. “I didn’t know a single word of English, not one,” she shared. She recounted walking to school beside her father, asking him how to spell her name, an innocent but revealing glimpse into the linguistic and cultural chasm she was asked to cross. “Since I didn’t know the [English] alphabet, it just didn’t register.” Sage described her early years of schooling as largely positive. Sage described the school’s diverse student demographic made her felt supported, which also extended to the kind of support she received from her teachers. She shared vividly how one educator made a huge impact in her life. She recalled:

“She wasn’t my homeroom teacher, but she was incredibly warm and welcoming. I still remember her face and how kind she was. She would take me out of class to work with me one-on-one. I think she was the one who first taught me the alphabet.”

This act of care became foundational to Sage’s later motivation to pursue teaching. For her, the most significant influence in becoming an educator was the compassion and patience her teachers showed her as a newcomer. While Sage described her early school experiences as largely positive, she was not immune to the pressures of assimilating into the dominant Canadian culture. Near the end of high school, she made the decision to legally change her birth name. She felt that her distinctive Southeast Asian name might become a barrier as she grew older, particularly in academic and professional spaces. With a hint of worry in her voice, she reflected,

“I kept wondering how would I introduce myself. Would people understand my name the same way my friends did? Would there be any judgment?”

While listening to Sage as she spoke about her decision to change her birth name, I felt a growing sense of admiration for her. Making such a deeply personal and culturally loaded decision at such a young age must have carried considerable emotional weight. From my Southeast Asian background, changing one’s legal name can be seen as an act of breaking ties, almost the same with letting go of lineage, history, and self. I asked if her decision was made in consultation with her family. “No, it was entirely mine. My family didn’t want me to change it, especially my dad. He always said, ‘You have a beautiful name. Why would you want to change it?’” Sage’s response was because of the pressure of assimilation, the pressure from society to conform. Despite the cost of assimilation that Sage had to pay such as changing her birth name, she admitted that migrating to Canada at a young age made it easier for her to learn the language and adapt to the dominant Canadian culture. In other words, her transition was softer, buffered by the adaptability of childhood.

Sage’s desire to becoming an educator is rooted in her aspiration to make her parents proud. She revealed to me that she was the first in her family to attend the university as well as the very first who would soon become an educator. However, the path to achieving her goals was far from easy. Throughout her academic journey, she had to remain focused and continually remind herself of how much her success would mean to her family. “I wanted to get the top grades and be on the honour roll. That kind of thinking always motivated me,” she explained. Sage wanted to become someone important and who would inspire the generation following her.

I could not forget how Sage’s eyes brightened as she spoke about her aspirations for her future classroom: “I want to create a classroom where culture and diversity are celebrated every single day... I want to create a space where students can see the beauty in our differences,” she shared. Coming from one of the many ethnic communities in Southeast Asia, Sage explained her desire to raise awareness that “there’s so many diverse groups of people out there... that aren’t really talked about... minorities that you don’t hear about often because there’s just no coverage about them... and they have a rich culture and tradition.”

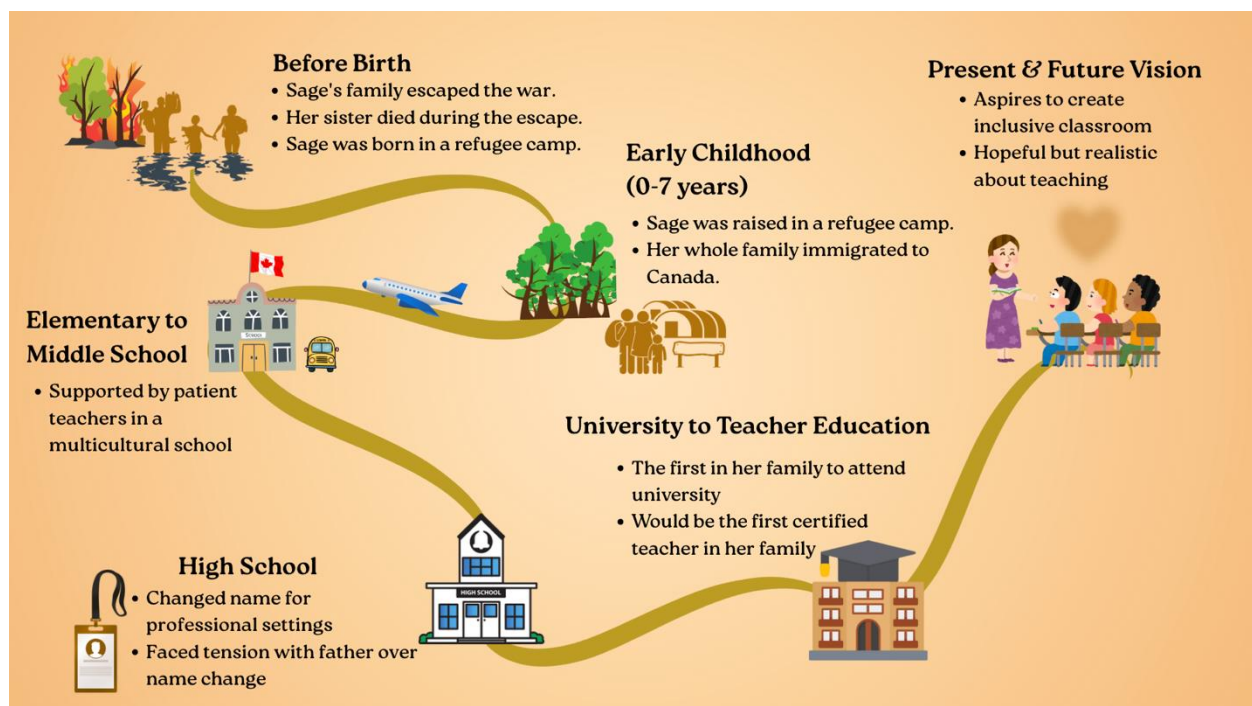
Yet alongside these aspirations, Sage also spoke candidly about her ongoing fears. She worried about the uncertainty of securing a permanent teaching position after completing her

teacher education program. Her biggest fear, she explained, was remaining a supply teacher who “goes to different schools” and where “kids only know you for one day.” She shared that this reality is often reinforced by some of her teachers in the program, noting that many teachers work as occasional teachers for years. Sage knew that finding greater employment opportunity might require leaving her family, especially her parents, but this was something she deeply struggled with. She did not want to move to a place far away from them.

In the figure below, I highlight key moments from Sage’s personal narrative. Some events are not explored in detail here, as they will re-emerge and be discussed more fully in the following chapter.

Figure 3

Sage’s annal



Note. The figure above shows Sage’s annal, highlighting significant events in her life prior to joining the teacher education program.

In the section that follows, I present Lark’s narrative account. Lark was the second participant who expressed interest in the study. She was one of the teacher candidates whose class I have visited to present my research for the purpose of recruitment. Before joining the

study, Lark and I had no prior acquaintance. However, she shared that she recognized the value of my research and the importance of amplifying the voices of racialized teacher candidates in the program, which led her to respond to my call for participation.

5.2 Lark's Narrative Account

With her small left hand, Lark gripped the handle of her little suitcase. In her right hand she held tightly to Lala, her doll, as she struggled to match her mother's hurried strides through the busy corridors of Toronto International Airport. They were on a brief stopover from a long-haul flight out of Dubai, rushing toward the gate of their connecting flight. In the blur of movement, Lark felt as though the changes of the past few weeks had swept over her just as swiftly: the endless packing, the parting from beloved possessions, and the act of letting go to make everything fit into a single suitcase. "Lark, darling, please hurry up," her mother urged gently as they boarded the plane.

Only months earlier, her mother had gathered Lark and her sister in the comfort of her bedroom to share the news: the family would immigrate to Canada. Confusion clouded Lark's face as she protested, "But Mom, what about my friends? My classmates? I will miss them." Her mother's reassurances—that she would make new friends and love her new school—brought some comfort, but the sadness of leaving lingered.

Her reflections were interrupted when the pilot announced their descent into Ottawa International Airport. From her window seat, Lark gazed down at the unfamiliar landscape. Unlike Dubai's towering skyscrapers and endless stretches of desert, she was met with a patchwork of crimson, yellow, and green trees scattered among rows of brick-roofed houses. Her jaw slackened in awe. The sight of the autumn leaves, bursting in vivid colours, filled her with wonder at the beauty of the place that was now to be her new home.

Lark, her mother, and her sister arrived in Canada in the fall of 2010. They settled in Ottawa's affluent west end, a neighbourhood characterized by manicured lawns, quiet streets, and a predominantly white population—a striking contrast to the demographic richness she had known in Dubai. In Dubai, Lark's mother had been a teacher at an international school, and Lark had grown up surrounded by people from all over the world. Her teachers and friends came from

Europe, Asia, Africa, and beyond. “It was a really well-rounded experience,” Lark recalled. Even at a young age, her schooling in Dubai had shaped her global perspective on education. Throughout our conversations, I noticed that she would frequently return to these memories, as if they had unfolded only yesterday, holding onto them with a palpable sense of fondness.

Lark noted that when they arrived in Canada, the academic year had already begun. She attributed her late arrival as a key reason it was difficult for her to make new friends. As she explained, “...that's really important when you're young... kids notice you on the first day... you kind of build from there.” Arriving after friendships had already formed, Lark’s hopes of quickly making connections were immediately dampened. She vividly remembered that she and her sister were the only Brown students in the school, which made them visible targets. Lark experienced bullying for multiple reasons. One was the way she spoke as a newcomer. “I had a bit of an accent, like a [South Asian] accent mixed with a bit of a British accent... because most of my teachers were from the UK,” she shared. Within that single year in third grade, she recalled actively changing the way she spoke by listening to peers and adjusting her speech in an effort to adopt a Canadian accent.

She was also bullied for the way she dressed. Although she did not wear traditional South Asian clothing, her everyday attire was different from that of other children, and she was “teased for the clothes” she wore. Perhaps most painful, however, was the way her food marked her as “other.” Lark recalled instances when her mother packed her favourite South Asian rice for lunch, only for her to be teased all day. She begged her mother to hide her food in a thermos, but even then, she was still targeted because of its smell.

“I love [South Asian] food. But obviously people don't like the smell. So, I couldn't bring anything to school, and I didn't like Western food... how kids bring sandwiches and cheese strings... that stuff was just not appetizing to me at that age,” Lark recalled.

After these experiences, her mother began packing only juice boxes and crackers for school lunches. Lark would wait until she got home “to eat the food she actually enjoyed.” Beyond the bullying that marked her early schooling in Canada, Lark faced significant academic challenges. She explained that the British system she had experienced in Dubai had allowed her to thrive academically there. She received strong support from her teachers and excelled in her subjects, particularly in mathematics. Upon arriving in Canada, however, she was placed in the

third grade despite being a full grade level ahead. “They never gave me more challenging work. They just kept assigning the same things I already knew, even though we told them,” Lark recalled. Over time, her academic performance especially in the subjects in which she had previously excelled has declined. She attributed this to the lack of academic challenge and teacher support:

“At such a young age, it’s so easy to forget what you know if no one keeps you in a pattern. And that’s what happened. My grades just went down... And it wasn’t me. I know it wasn’t me. It was that no one challenged me.”

Despite repeated efforts, Lark was never able to regain her previous level of academic excellence and eventually had to retake math during summer school in high school. Yet, in the face of these setbacks, she persisted. She went on to complete her undergraduate degree in Child Studies and immediately pursued a teacher education program. From the outset, she noticed the stark absence of racial and cultural representation among both faculty and peers. Yet this was not unfamiliar territory for her. She had developed a strategy she called “tunnel vision,” which involved focusing on her classes and work while minimizing social engagement: “go to class, do my work, and go home.”

Even so, Lark sought opportunities to bring her experiences into the classroom. For example, in one class, she described how students in Dubai begin writing exams as early as grade four, a practice unfamiliar to her Canadian peers. The response, however, was dismissive: “Teachers almost seem like they’re resisting the conversation... like, ‘Oh, we would never do that to our kids here.’” She gently challenged this perspective: “That education system’s working... dismissing it just because it’s unfamiliar feels unfair.” Her insistence reflects a refusal to accept Western schooling as the uncontested norm and underscores her commitment to recognizing diverse educational practices. She explained, “Learning about diverse education systems is extremely useful... it’s one of the best ways to understand what works for students on a global scale.”

Exclusion extended beyond overt disagreement to subtle forms of erasure. Lark recounted moments when seemingly neutral references, such as a professor’s comment that “you’ve had reading buddies since kindergarten” silently excluded students who had not attended school in Canada. “We just can’t relate. But when we try to share... it’s brushed off. ‘Okay, that’s

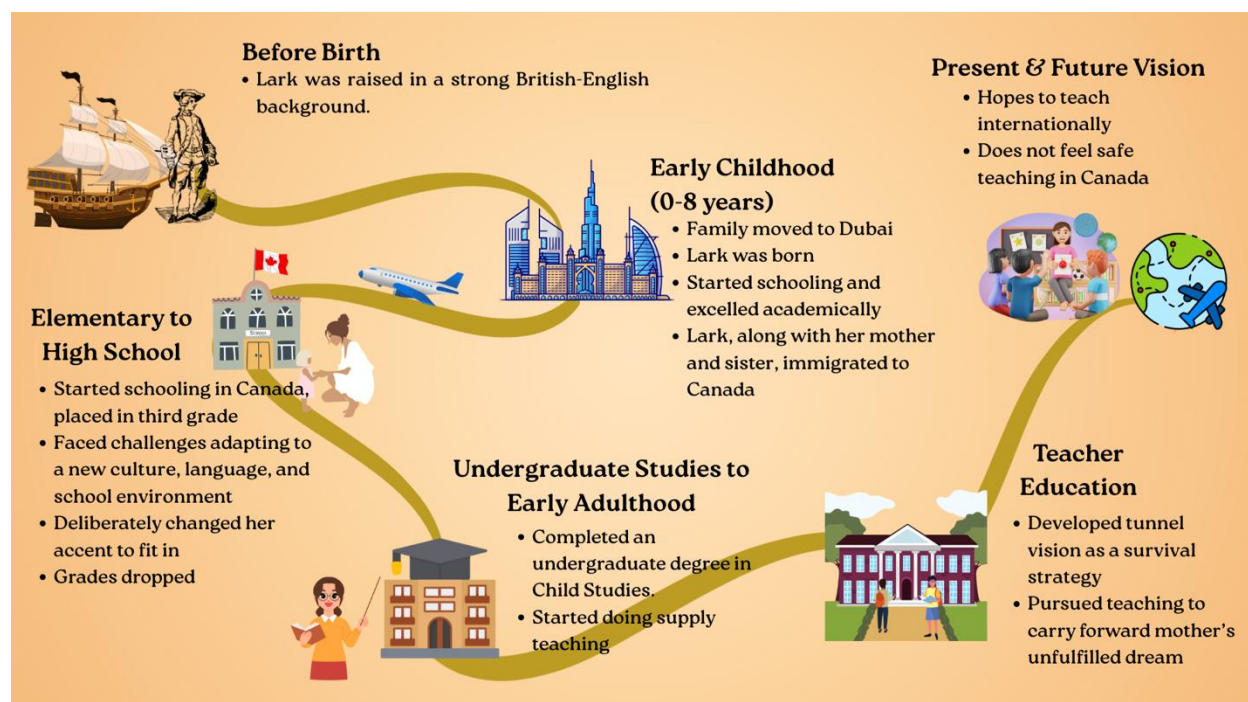
interesting,’ and then they just move on.” For Lark, participation in classroom discussions became an emotional negotiation. While her perspectives were occasionally acknowledged, the lack of engagement reinforced a persistent message: your story is not part of the curriculum.

These experiences, spanning from her early schooling in Canada to her teacher education, have shaped Lark’s vision of what she believed education should be. She imagines her future classroom as a safe and affirming space for racialized individuals like her. At the time of data collection, Lark was focused on completing her program, with aspirations to teach internationally for much of her career and hoping to return to Dubai or work elsewhere in the world to continue learning from diverse educational contexts. Yet her reflections also conveyed a sense of alienation and caution: “I feel like maybe my culture isn’t really accepted [in Canada] anymore. With everything going on now... I don’t feel safe enough to teach here. Not now.”

Below, is Lark’s personal annal that offers a glimpse into her life story, situating these experiences within the broader narrative of her educational journey.

Figure 4

Lark’s Annal



Note. The figure above captures some of the highlights in Lark’s shared narrative.

In the section that follows, I present Ardeen’s narrative account. I had known Ardeen for one year prior to the interviews. During a visit to a teacher education class to recruit participants, I was pleasantly surprised to find her among the candidates present. She was the third participant to volunteer for the study. Here, I begin her account with the moment she identified as one of her most unforgettable experiences at school — a moment when she keenly felt her culture was different.

5.3 Ardeen’s Narrative Account

Ardeen could hardly contain her excitement as she walked toward the bus stop, where the school bus would pick her up. Today was Pajama Day at her elementary school, and from the sounds of it, she imagined it to be like a costume party. She had never been to a Pajama Day before, and the unknown thrilled her. Last night, she and her mother had stayed up late, rifling through her tiny dresser in search of the perfect pajamas. “But what do pajamas even look like, Ardeen?” her mother asked, her voice tired and slightly exasperated.

“Mom, pajamas are what kids wear to sleep,” Ardeen replied.

“Oh, then why are we making such a fuss?” her mother said.

“But this! I’ve never worn this before, right?!” Ardeen exclaimed. From the deepest part of her dresser, she pulled out a pair of soft green cotton pants, with delicate golden vines embroidered in looping patterns around the ankles. She held them up, her eyes glowing. “They’re so beautiful, Mom!” she gasped, running her fingers over the intricate patterns.

Her mother smiled and selected a flowing fuchsia pink skirt and a matching fitted blouse from their wardrobe. “Okay, so you have your pajamas, and we’ll pair them with this beautiful dress,” she said. “Now, time for bed,” her mother added. She tucked Ardeen into bed and gave her a gentle kiss, her mother whispered, “Sweet dreams darling.”

Ardeen’s thoughts about the night before were cut short as the bus arrived and came to a stop just right in front of her. She climbed aboard slowly, holding carefully the hem of her satin skirt. She felt radiant in her fuchsia dress. As she walked to her seat, she noticed the piercing stares of other students. Were they admiring her dress or mocking it? She could not tell.

Sliding into her seat, she found her best friend, Grace, already seated beside her.

“Ardeen, it’s Pajama Day! Why are you wearing that beautiful dress?” Grace whispered. “But these are my pajamas! Look at the embroidery, aren’t they pretty?” Ardeen replied proudly as she pointed at the golden stitches on the ankles of her pants. Grace giggled.

When the bus reached the school, students quietly disembarked. Ardeen felt the eyes of everyone on her as she walked toward the entrance gate of her school. “Ardeen, why are you wearing pants under that dress?” a boy from another grade shouted, and the other kids laughed. Ardeen’s face flushed but she brushed it off and kept walking. As she arrived at her classroom, she saw that her classmates were indeed wearing pajamas: soft, familiar, and simple, but hers was different.

As Ardeen was sharing this story with me, I could not forget the shy smile that crossed her face as she said, “My parents didn’t really understand that at the time, like what [pajama day] meant.” In her culture, she explained, there was no tradition of wearing a matching set of pajamas to bed, instead, “home clothes” were considered perfectly acceptable for sleeping. This small but meaningful experience left a lasting impression on Ardeen, revealing to her young mind the nuances of cultural expectations. Despite experiencing this, she described her elementary years to be mostly positive and affirming. Most of her teachers were racialized, where “maybe one or two were not” and that the student body was also very diverse. It was a very culturally affirming educational environment that nurtured both her academic success and her profound sense of self-worth and belonging. Her memories of elementary school are vivid and characterized by joy. During those formative years, Ardeen experienced a powerful sense of capability and possibility, recalling: “I always felt like I was capable of anything... I always felt that I could always do better, too.” The classroom, for Ardeen, became an extension of community, a shared space where cultural identities were normalized rather than suppressed. “All of my friends were immigrants... like we were very new to the country.” And in this affirming environment, academic achievement was not tied to the need of proving oneself. Ardeen reflected, “I was kind of smart back in elementary... I didn’t really have to study, like things would just come to me.”

As she progressed into high school, Ardeen continued to find cultural familiarity, particularly among her peers in the Advanced Placement (AP) program, many of whom were also South Asian. “They all had the same sort of like upbringing, same sort of family

values,” she noted, highlighting how shared experiences contributed to a smoother academic and social transition. However, she began to observe a shift in the demographic composition of her teachers. Unlike her elementary school years, her high school teachers were predominantly white. “There were a lot more teachers that were... white,” she observed. She wondered whether this shift may have contributed to the noticeable decline in her academic performance, particularly in mathematics. “I felt like I didn't ever receive any sort of support from my teacher because I wasn't great at maths specifically,” she shared, suggesting that the lack of cultural understanding or support from teachers may have impacted her learning experience.

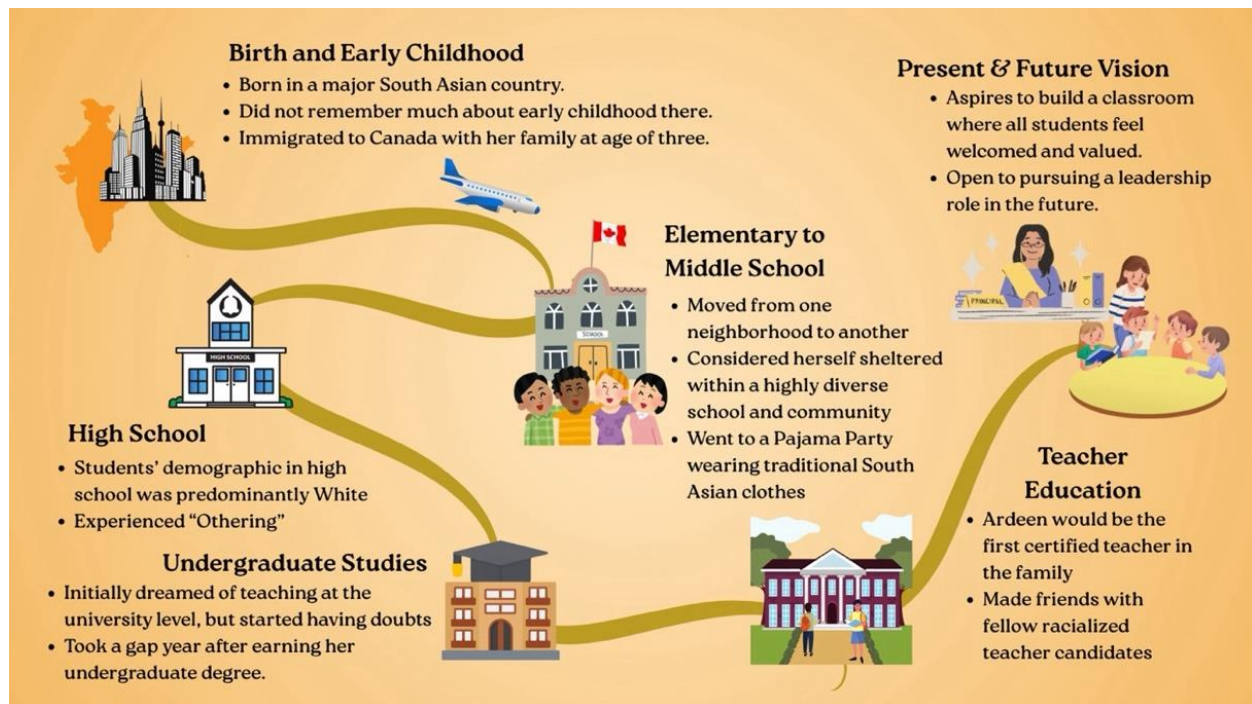
Even so, Ardeen described her educational journey up to high school graduation as “sheltered” not in the sense of being shielded from difficulty, but in being surrounded by people who mirrored her cultural values and identity. “I’ve always been surrounded by people that look like me... I had a lot of connections to my culture, and I never really felt discriminated or out of place,” she shared. However, it was not until entering university that Ardeen encountered the dissonance of cultural isolation. Having completed the AP program in high school, she transitioned directly to Wilfrid Laurier University. She vividly described her first day at the university as “shocking.” She remembered how she walked into the classroom for her first class, when she noticed the absence of racialized individuals. For the first time in her life, it hit her that she was a minority. Throughout her undergraduate experience, Ardeen struggled to forge meaningful connections. “Nobody really understood the upbringing that I had or the values that my parents had, it was so much different. Their [university peers] life was so much more different than mine was,” she reflected.

After completing her undergraduate degree, Ardeen took a gap year to reflect on her career path. “I always knew I wanted to teach,” she explained. Entering the teacher education program, however, initially brought back memories of feeling out of place during her earlier post-secondary experiences. “I didn’t want to go to classes. I’d often skip them,” she recalled. “When I feel unwelcome or out of place, I don’t want to stay.” Ardeen’s experience began to shift when she discovered that her cohort was more diverse than she had anticipated. She fondly remembered meeting another racialized teacher candidate with whom she felt an immediate connection. “I remember thinking, ‘Wow, another person of colour that maybe I can relate to, that I could talk to.’ So that was really nice,” she said. This moment of recognition not only

fostered a sense of belonging but also positively influenced Ardeen's engagement in the program. The presence of peers from diverse backgrounds provided both relational and cultural validation, shaping her emerging professional identity and easing anxieties rooted in past experiences of marginalization. In the figure below, I present Ardeen's personal annal, which provides an overview of key milestones in her life. Several of these milestones will be discussed further in the findings section.

Figure 5

Ardeen's Annal



Note. The figure above illustrates key moments from Ardeen's narrative.

I now present Neve's narrative account. Same with Sage and Ardeen, Neve was a student in the teacher education class I used to work as a teaching assistant. When our paths crossed again during one of my class visits to recruit participants, I learned that Neve was in her final year at the program. I begin Neve's narrative account at a moment in her life when a huge decision had to be made— when she decided to move to the United States to pursue undergraduate studies.

5.4 Neve's Narrative Account

Neve cast one final, longing look around her bedroom. Her study desk now stood bare. Her towering bookshelf, filled with the books she had read, seemed to watch her silently. Even the dresser, now nearly empty, spoke of her imminent departure. A pang of nostalgia swept over her as she knew it would be a long time before she returned. She glanced at her wristwatch, it read 10:30 a.m. In half an hour, her uncle's car would pull into the driveway, ready to take her to the airport. And in twenty-four hours, her life would change forever. She was leaving for the United States to pursue her undergraduate studies.

Neve fought back her tears. She did not want her parents, who were waiting in the living room, to see how heavy her heart felt. This was a decision she had made herself, and she wanted to reassure them that she was okay. She picked up her small suitcase and headed out of the room. Her parents were seated on the living room sofa. Her father was watching television, a cup of coffee in one hand. Her mother, who was holding a brown envelope, smiled at her lovingly as she entered the room. Neve sat on the single chair next to her.

"I've checked everything in this envelope. Your documents should all be good," her mother said, her voice tinged with sadness. "I can't believe this day has come. You're finally leaving us to chase your dreams," she added, then, handed the envelope to Neve.

Neve's mother was a white American who had moved to South Asia after marrying Neve's father. She had left everything behind to build a life and a family with him. Now, Neve was heading to the U.S., reconnecting with the roots her mother had once left behind.

"I'll be okay, Mom," Neve said, trying to smile. But deep inside, she was worried. She would be living with her grandparents, whom she had not seen in years. "Besides, Grandma and Grandpa will be there with me," she added.

Then she moved to her mother's side of the seat and gave her the tightest hug she could. Her mother had always been there for her, she was her best friend. Moments later, the sound of a car engine rumbled outside. It must be her uncle. Her father turned off the TV and stood up. "It's time, my child," he said gently. Neve and her mother released their embrace and stood up together. Neve walked to the door and peeked outside. "It's Uncle," she confirmed.

She walked over to her father and hugged him tightly. He had always been a man of few words, but she knew, without a doubt, how deeply he loved her. Her father picked up her larger

suitcase while her mother carried the smaller one. They could not come with her to the airport as there was not enough room in the car.

Her uncle stepped out of the car and patted her father's shoulder. "Is our Neve ready?" he asked with a smile. "I believe she is," her mother replied. Neve gave both her parents one last hug before heading to the other side of the street where the passenger seat was. As she walked slowly away from their home, her tears welled in her eyes while her chest heavy. This would be her first time traveling overseas without her family. Neve took a deep breath and forced a big smile. "I will be okay," she uttered under her breath and got into the car.

Neve was only eighteen years old when she moved to the United States to pursue her undergraduate education. "I was very nerdy and serious. I just... I didn't see myself going to [universities in South Asia]," she shared. Her decision to study abroad was shaped by a deep sense of academic ambition and the knowledge that her maternal grandparents in the U.S. would support her. "They really wanted me," she recalled. Being born with an American passport also eased the practical aspects of her move. Convincing her father was relatively straightforward, but the transition itself was far from simple.

Upon arrival, Neve found reconnecting with her grandparents to be emotionally complex. "The distance had to be traveled from my side," she reflected. While she was certain of their love and effort, she also knew she was different. Her grandparents were active Catholic church members, whereas Neve was visibly Muslim, wearing a headscarf and long, modest garments. "It was hard for them to accept that their grandkid was Muslim. I might've looked 'normal' in the house, but I could feel the mental adjustment they were making," she recounted.

While working on her relationship with her grandparents, Neve simultaneously immersed herself in her studies. She got "straight A's that first semester" until it had become an obsession for her to get straight A's every year. She has put her head down and ensured she was the best student in her class. Yet Neve was also reflective why she pushed herself so hard in school. She shared that her drive for perfection came not only from wanting to succeed, but also from fear. "If you excel, that's your best protection," she said. "They can't touch you as easily." For Neve, doing well in school became both a way to cope and a way to protect herself. Academic success

helped her feel safer, more accepted, and less exposed in spaces where she felt vulnerable. By excelling, she found a way to avoid judgment and guard herself from further harm.

Despite feeling relatively safe within the classroom, Neve was not immune to the broader societal challenges of being a visibly Muslim woman in post-September 11 America. She recounted moments of racial microaggression, although the term was unfamiliar to her at the time. For example, there were times when she would go for a walk in the neighbourhood and “someone would drive by, slow down, and toss garbage out the window in front of her” or “someone would roll down their window and yell something loud before speeding off.” It did not occur to Neve at the time that people were being mean to her, she was “too oblivious to understand what was really going on.”

One of the greatest challenges Neve faced was the tension between the expression of her faith and the expectations of dominant American culture. “I always felt self-conscious about praying,” she admitted. In school, she often hid while performing her prayers, “behind bookshelves” or in isolated corners. Eventually, the burden of constant concealment led her to stop praying at school altogether and waited until she could come home. Over time, she began shedding the visible markers of her Muslim identity in an effort to feel “more integrated.” As she put it, “I’ve slowly shed those things... sadly... because you end up giving up parts of yourself just to fit in.”

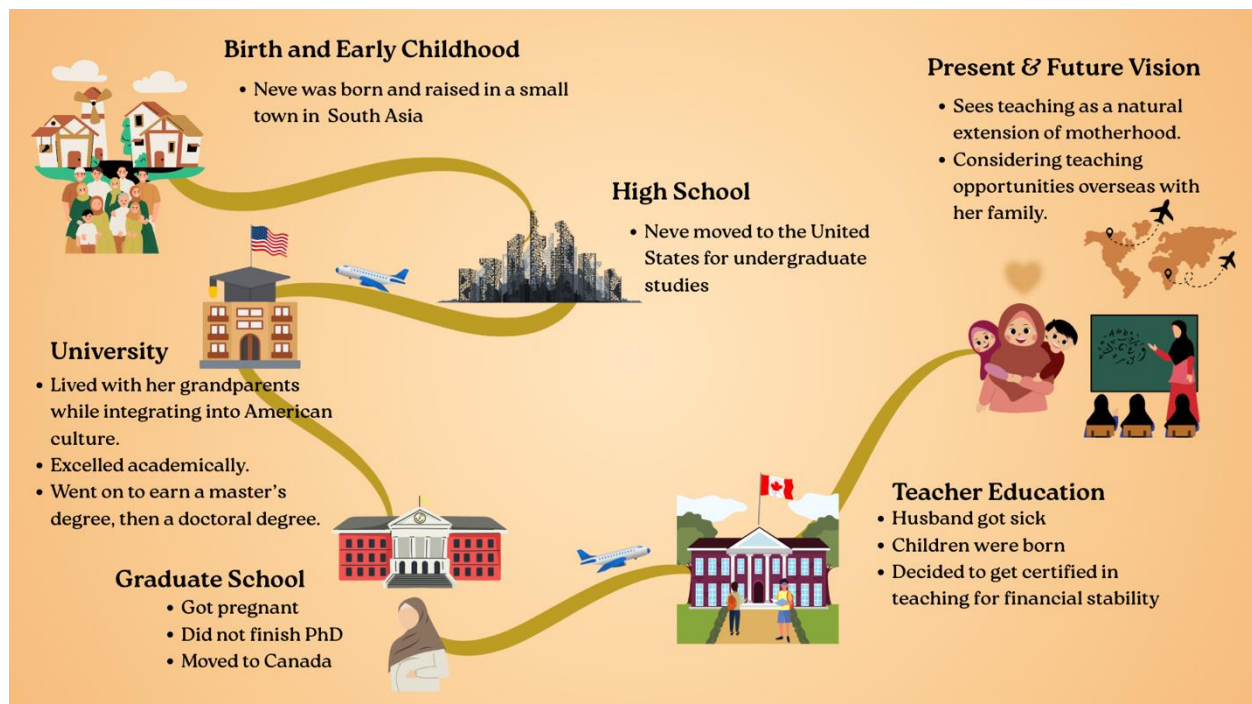
After completing her undergraduate degree, Neve went on to pursue a master’s, and later began her Ph.D. She was well into the process, approaching her dissertation, when life shifted course for her. “My children were born, my husband got sick... and I spent basically a decade dealing with those things,” Neve recounted. When her family eventually moved to Canada, which was her husband’s home country, Neve felt that returning to graduate school was no longer a viable option. It was at that point she decided to pursue a career in teaching and applied to the teacher education program at the University of Ottawa.

As our conversations drew to a close, I asked Neve how she views teaching as a teacher candidates. She responded gently, “Teaching feels like an extension of motherhood... you care for your own children, and then suddenly you are caring for many more, and their needs matter

just as much.” She also spoke about her future with a mix of hope and uncertainty. Her husband’s illness shapes what feels possible. When I asked about her plans after earning her teaching certificate, she laughed and said, “I honestly don’t know... my husband is too sick to make plans, but his plan is clear. He says, ‘You need to get your teaching certificate, and then we go.’” Smiling softly, she added that her husband dreams of moving to places like China, Malaysia, or Singapore. She noted, “maybe... possibly.” Neve’s reflections reveal how caregiving, familial responsibility, and professional hopes are woven together in her life. For her, teaching is not just a job, but a deeply meaningful calling shaped by both uncertainty and hope. The following is Neve’s personal annal, highlighting key moments in her life.

Figure 6

Neve’s Annal



Note. Shown above is Neve’s annal, showcasing important moments she identified in her life story prior to and during her teacher education journey.

In the next section, I present Emery’s narrative account. Emery and I had no prior connection before his participation in the study. In fact, he was not part of the class I visited for recruitment; rather, a racialized friend had shared my invitation with him. Upon receiving it, Emery promptly reached out and arranged an in-person meeting. At the time of data collection,

he was in his second year of the teacher education program. His narrative begins with the most emotional moment of his journey as a racialized teacher candidate, a moment that encapsulates the compounded pain and suffering he has experienced as a Black individual navigating the education system.

5.5 Emery's Narrative Account

Emery gently closed his Associate Teacher's (AT) laptop after finalizing his log for the day. "Ugh, finally tomorrow is the weekend!" he sighed softly, letting out a heavy breath. He had taught only two learning blocks, yet the rest of his hours were consumed with helping his AT prepare materials for the following week. His AT had already left for the day, but Emery had stayed behind to complete his weekly log. Now, at last, he was ready to head home.

Just then, a knock sounded at the classroom door. "Emery, would you like to go for a drink?" called Charles, his practicum buddy. Both were in their first year of the University of Ottawa's Teacher Education program. Emery enjoyed working alongside Charles, a white classmate, as they navigated the challenges of being newcomers in the classroom. Normally, Emery would have declined as he was not fond of alcohol. But it was going to be a long weekend, so he decided to let his guard down. "Yes, sure! I'll meet you in the hallway," he replied. Charles nodded and left. Emery packed his backpack, joined him, and together they signed out at the school office before heading into the evening.

A few blocks away, their light conversation was interrupted when a woman appeared, stumbling toward them. At first, Emery assumed she was addressing Charles, but her finger pointed straight at him. Her hair was disheveled, her clothes torn, and the stench of alcohol lingered in the air. "Hey, do I know you?" the woman shouted. Startled, Emery replied, "Oh, no, I don't think so." He expected her to leave it at that, but instead, her anger grew. "You owe me money," she snapped, charging toward him. Before he could react, her fists were already flying, striking his chest and arms. "Where's my money?" she screamed, pounding against him.

Emery kept walking. He knew he could not fight back. He was a tall Black man, and he understood the optics: "The second I defend myself, I become the threat," he thought to himself. The woman's blows continued, now landing against his legs, each strike sharper than the last. His body ached, but he pressed forward, absorbing every hit. When they finally reached the bar, Emery's hands trembled as he rushed through the entrance. His chest tightened and his breath

quickened as he searched desperately for the washroom. The moment he found it, he locked himself inside a stall and collapsed. A muffled scream escaped his throat as tears streamed down his cheeks. He was stunned, bewildered, and intensely shaken.

As Emery was narrating this story to me, two years after the incident, I found myself holding back my own tears. The pain of that evening remained vivid. According to him, what was most haunting was not the physicality of the attack, but the social apathy that surrounded it. Charles, his practicum partner and friend, had stood by silently. The people around him remained spectators to his suffering. The next day, when he returned to his practicum, everything outwardly looked the same. But inside, everything had changed. He now carried trauma, and a gnawing fear that something similar could happen again, right outside a place he believed was supposed to be safe.

Emery reported the incident to the Faculty of Education, but the response left him disheartened. They offered him Uber rides to his placement. Although he appreciated the gesture, it missed the point. “What was traumatic for me wasn’t the walk,” he explained. “It was how I was treated by the world. The coldness, the lack of care, they hurt more than the blows.” His report to the school yielded no better outcome either. “Did it happen on school property?” was the first question they asked. When Emery said no, the incident was dismissed without record. He hoped the school would at least notify parents, since children walked that same route daily. But nothing was done.

By the end of that first year, Emery felt drained. The spark that had once driven him toward teaching had dimmed, and he decided to take a year off. He had never been physically attacked in public before. But being misidentified, wrongly accused, and treated with suspicion was not new to him. He recalled being twelve years old when a woman accused him of trespassing in her yard while he was outside his house, playing with his friends. “I saw you,” Emery recounted how the woman shouted at his younger self. “The police are on their way, and you’re going to pay,” the woman added. At that time, Emery had just returned from church before joining his friends outside. He was completely bewildered by the accusation. He quickly ran inside the house in tears. When his mother learned about it, she was very furious. She stormed to the woman’s house to confront her. When she returned, the matter was settled. But for Emery, the memory stirred a profound confusion within him.

From childhood, Emery learned what it meant to live under suspicion. At just seven, he realized he could “be in trouble without doing anything.” He remembered vividly a recess in first grade when he asked a teacher for permission to use the washroom. It was early in the recess, with plenty of time left, yet the teacher refused. Frustrated, he walked across the field to ask another teacher, who quickly gave him permission. But before he could go, the first teacher stormed over, accusing him of having been violent with other boys. Emery was shocked because he knew it never happened. “I saw how quickly I was believed to be guilty,” he later reflected. When he said these words, I saw deep sorrow in his eyes.

These layers of trauma gradually accumulated. By second grade, Emery was already bearing emotional burdens far too heavy for a child. His parents, refugees who had fled genocide in East Africa, had experienced continual displacement. Although they initially settled in Montreal, it was not until after they moved to London, Ontario that Emery was born. Then, a devastating house fire destroyed what little stability they had managed to build in that small town, which prompted yet another move— this time to Ottawa. Emery’s father enrolled in the University of Ottawa’s teacher education program. After his father completed his studies, the family relocated again to Newmarket where he had secured a teaching position. Soon after the relocation, Emery’s parents went through a divorce. Emery spent the remainder of his second-grade year in Scarborough, where the emotional toll reached its breaking point. At only 7 years old, Emery contemplated climbing over the balcony of his thirteenth-floor apartment. He was unsuccessful, but the attempt would weigh on him for years to come. And the relocations did not end there. Now living with his single mother and older brother, Emery recalled several more changes of address. They lived briefly in a condominium, only to be uprooted after a woman down the hall was sexually assaulted. Then came a move to a cramped basement apartment, until finally his mother was able to buy their first home. Amid these traumatic experiences, Emery also endured the death of his father in a car accident, adding another crushing blow to an already overwhelming burden of grief.

Emery shared with me that although aspects of his trauma intermittently resurfaced over time, the majority of its effects have only manifested more prominently recently. For years, he had learned to shut off his emotions, channeling all his energy into becoming the “perfect student.” To him, anything that is less than a grade of A was fatal. To his parents and teachers, he appeared to be a success story: high achieving, disciplined, and thriving. However, school was

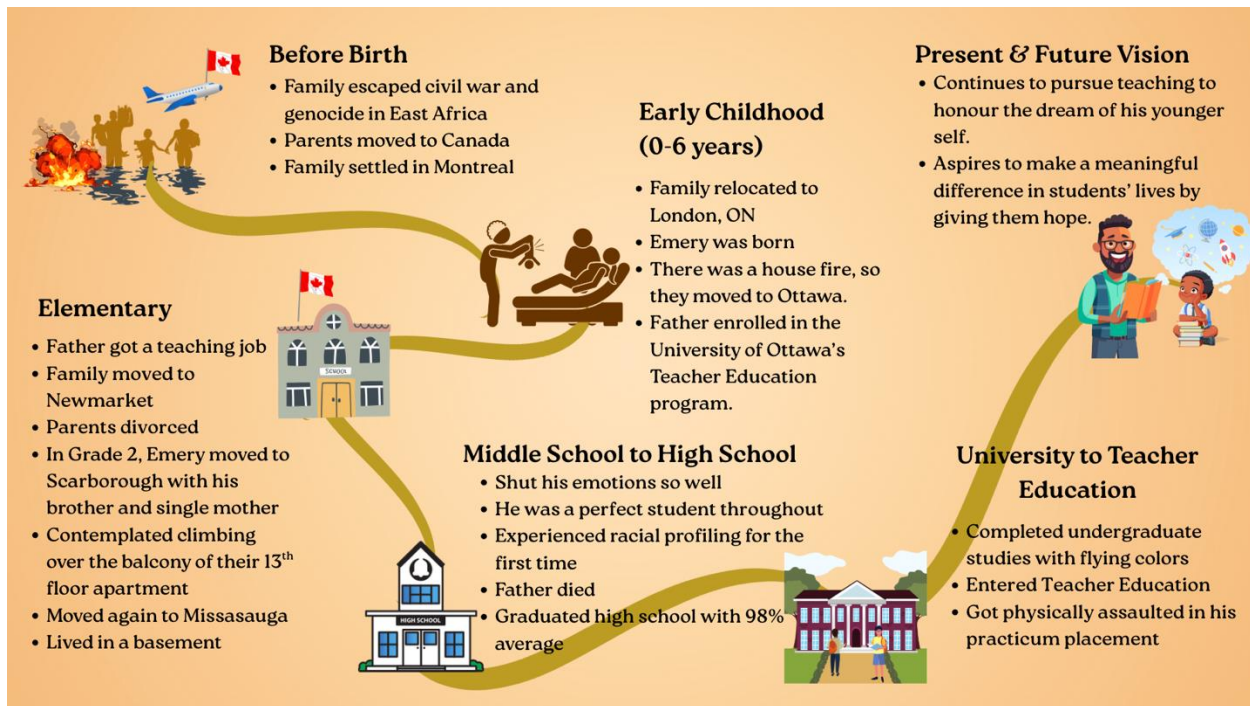
more than just about grades; it was Emery's escape. "That was why I did so well," he admitted. "So that I could convince myself my life wasn't falling apart." His academic achievements, while impressive on the surface, served as a fragile illusion of a stable future in the midst of the turmoil he lived through over the years.

By the end of Emery's first year in the teacher education program, he had reached a breaking point. "It wasn't that I didn't want to be a teacher... I just didn't know if I could keep spending time in places I always had to heal from," he explained. Emery decided to take a year off and worked at a Cree School Board in Northern Quebec. He returned to the program a year later for practical reasons. "I need stability," he said. "...A license. The pay difference. The opportunities. It all matters now." In his final year, Emery became more active and well-known in Ottawa's creative circles— as a poet, photographer, and participant in the city's ballroom scene. Through these communities, he found connection and hope. Reflecting on his childhood self, the boy who wept while reading because the worlds in books felt unreachable, he now had a message for him: "Hey. There's more to the world, so don't lose hope."

Before we parted, I asked Emery about his views of teaching as a teacher candidate. His response left a strong impression. He no longer feels it is his job to save students. "Their futures aren't in my hands," he said. "That's not my place. I'm here to notice. To care. To respond." Further details of Emery's journey through teacher education are presented in the next chapter. Meanwhile, the annal on the next page provides a summary of the key moments in his life story.

Figure 7

Emery's Annal



Note. Depicted above is Emery's annal, outlining significant life events in his life as he shared in our conversations.

In what follows, I present the narrative account of Maddox, the sixth participant in the study. Prior to the interviews, Maddox and I had no prior acquaintance. When I first entered his classroom during the recruitment stage, what stood out immediately was the predominantly white student population. Interestingly, I did not initially register Maddox's presence. However, shortly after my visit, he reached out promptly via email to schedule our interview sessions. Maddox chose to meet with me in person.

5.6 Maddox's Narrative Account

The hall lights dimmed, and a hush rippled through the audience like a single, drawn breath. Slowly, darkness pressed in, broken only by the soft creaking of the velvet curtain as it shifted in its frame. Then, a warm light cut across the stage while tiny bits of dust floated in the air. From the corner, a lone violin started playing. This was Maddox's cue. His heart pounded as he tiptoed toward the centre of the stage, each movement careful and deliberate. The

floorboards gave a faint groan under his small steps, but he kept his eyes fixed forward. Taking a deep breath, he opened his mouth to deliver the very first lines.

Moments later, the performance unfolded with so much energy. The audience was swept along, some were laughing, others were moved to tears. With each line delivered, the cheers grew louder. The actors' words and presence reached across the stage, drawing the audience into their world until they were fully connected. Then, the play came to an end. As Maddox held hands with his fellow actors and took a deep bow, he felt his heart swell. Maddox knew that he was always made for the theatre; it was where he felt most alive.

Maddox is a professional actor in the Canadian theatre scene. Prior to joining teacher education, he had performed a wide range of roles on stage. Among them, he regarded playing Mike Chao in the acclaimed play *Banana Boys* as one of his most meaningful achievements. "It resonated with a lot of people," he said. "It was very successful... it even got remounted a few years later." The play was a theatrical adaptation of a novel about five young Asian-Canadian men, who used satire to challenge the stereotype of Asian-Canadians, particularly the Chinese-Canadians, as "bananas"—yellow on the outside, white on the inside. I asked Maddox how this stereotype resonated with his own life and how much truth, if any, he felt it held. Maddox explained that his mother was East Asian from Hong Kong, while his father was a second-generation East Asian-Canadian. Born in Canada himself, Maddox considered his identity as East Asian, but as a child he remembered how strongly he "wanted to be very Canadian." In fact, he never learned to speak his parents' ancestral tongue. Later in our conversation, he expressed regret over this, particularly because it had prevented him from speaking directly with his grandparents, who had lived with them when he was younger. "We always needed a translator," he recalled.

Growing up, Maddox excelled academically, particularly in his STEM subjects. "Getting good grades was definitely something that was instilled in us," he admitted. "Especially with [East Asian] parents, there was that 'where's the other 11%?' thing if you got an 89." In elementary school, he was placed in the gifted stream and later focused on computer engineering in high school. When it came time to prepare his university applications, however, Maddox realized he needed to strengthen his extracurricular profile. He joined the school's drama class and "ended up really loving it." Rather than continuing strictly in the sciences, he switched to senior drama courses. He was eventually admitted to the University of Toronto's joint program

with Sheridan College for theatre and drama studies. Overall, Maddox described his schooling experience as largely positive. Reflecting on it, he said, “I was good at school in the way it was presented to me.”

Maddox also described the schools he went to, particularly in elementary and high school, as “fairly diverse... where a lot of kids [come] from different races.” And yet, despite this richness in racial diversity, Maddox shared that a lot of the kids were rejecting their own racialized identity. He reflected: “There was a lot of trying to reject your own culture. Saying things like, ‘I’m Chinese, but I’m not like... not like a FOB, not Fresh Off the Boat. I’m Asian, but not too Asian.’” But perhaps, one of the most poignant observations Maddox shared was that many racialized kids would make fun of their own culture first, “so it wouldn’t bother them if other people made fun of it.”

I asked Maddox if there had ever been a defining moment in his life when he felt marginalized. He immediately reflected on a seemingly mundane situation that had nonetheless shaped the way he thought about himself as a young child. Maddox never liked bringing East Asian food to school, so he asked his mother to pack him a Western lunch. She made him a simple cheese sandwich, which contained just bread and Kraft Singles. During lunchtime, Maddox remembered, another white student began mocking his sandwich, which left him feeling upset. He reported the teasing to his teacher, but instead of validation, he vividly recalled how the teacher mocked him. She “basically told me to stop making a fuss,” Maddox said. Maddox shared how that moment made him feel “very small, like it didn’t matter.” Although the incident may have seemed trivial to the adults around him, it had lasting consequences. It reinforced a powerful message to him about whose experiences were validated in the classroom. Maddox added, “I was just trying to have what I thought of as a normal lunch, and still, I got made fun of...”

However, this was neither the first nor the only time Maddox had been forced to negotiate between the value of his presence and his right to self-expression within academic spaces. As an adult, he carried with him the sobering awareness that speaking up often means standing alone. “You must be ready to be the only person who might feel that way,” he reflected. A recent situation in one of his teacher education classes illustrates this tension. The class was discussing instructional strategies, and one proposed activity involved asking students to write down stereotypes they associated with certain ethnicities and then inviting the class to discuss whether

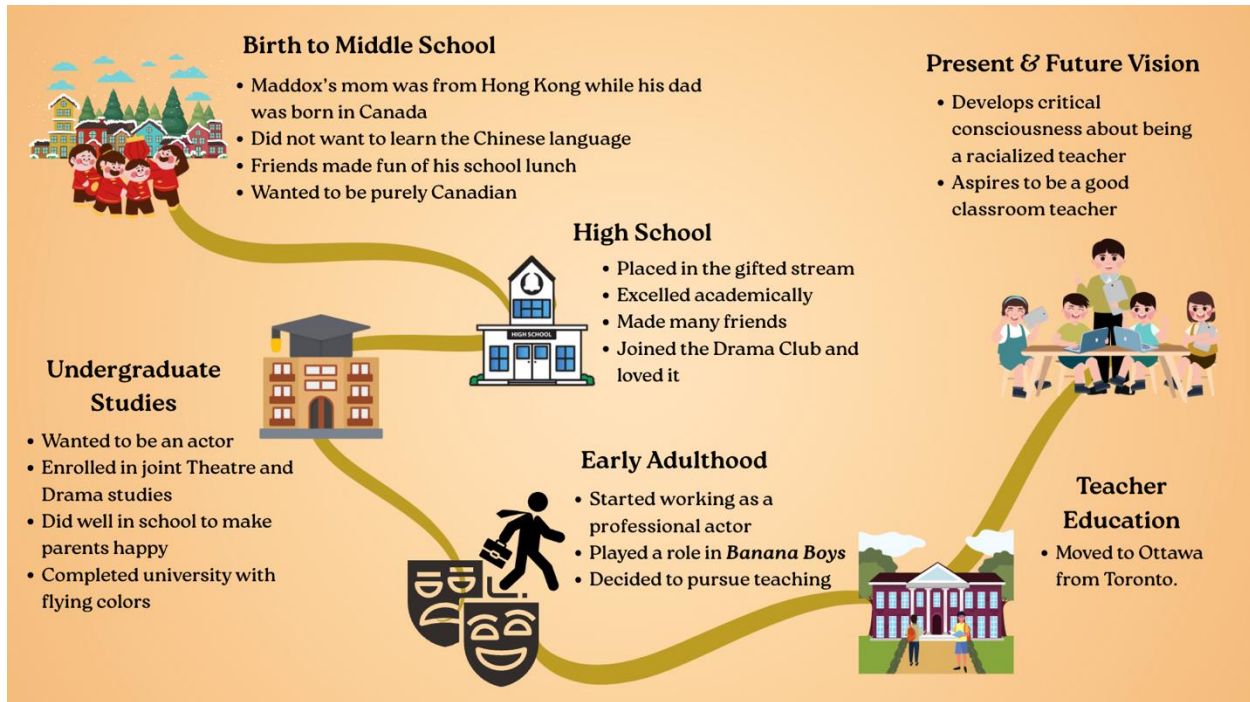
those stereotypes were true. While Maddox recognized the pedagogical intent behind the activity, he worried it would cause more harm than good. Such an exercise, he thought, risked not only reinforcing existing biases but also erasing the historical trauma tied to those biases. “Stereotypes about Italians and stereotypes about Black people do not carry the same weight,” he pointed out, particularly “in the harm they have caused historically.” Yet Maddox chose not to raise his concern. “I didn’t feel like stopping the class for that,” he explained. “So, there’s always that decision... do I want to put myself out there and potentially be the only person who has an issue with this?”

These experiences shaped Maddox’s vision for his own classroom. He imagines a space where students feel a sense of belonging the moment they walk in. “Racialized students might see someone who looks like them and feel valued. And white students see that other identities matter too,” he noted. This vision extends to his pedagogical choices. He plans to advocate for student-centered projects that encourage personal storytelling, cultural exploration, and self-directed inquiry. “It engages them. It makes the work meaningful,” he explained. Maddox credits much of his clarity to the structure and discourse provided by his teacher education program. “It’s helped me articulate what kind of teacher I want to be... and how to get there,” he said.

More of Maddox’s experiences in teacher education, along with his reasons for pursuing the teaching profession and his aspirations as a future educator, will be examined alongside those of other participants in the findings chapter. Below, I present his personal annal, which encapsulates some of the key events in his life story.

Figure 8

Maddox's Annal



Note. Maddox's life events, as shared through our conversations.

Finally, in the following chapter, I present Jamie. Jamie is the last participant to express interest in the study. Like several others, Jamie and I had known each other a year prior to the interviews, when she was enrolled in a teacher education class where I served as a teaching assistant. For our interview sessions, Jamie chose to meet with me online.

5.7 Jamie's Narrative Account

The final roar of her parents' car engine faded down the winding campus road, leaving a sudden, hollow stillness that made Jamie ache with loneliness. She locked the door of her room behind her and, her footsteps heavy, moved toward the single study desk standing quietly beside her bed. Moments ago, her parents and younger brother had been there, laughing and teasing, trying to soothe the sadness they knew would come once they left.

Jamie was one of the first arrivals to the campus dorm, and the silence weighed heavily on her, intensifying her sense of isolation. She dropped her backpack onto the floor and sank into

the chair, running her fingers over the smooth desk surface. The walls were bare, the room stark and unfamiliar. Although this was not her first time as a university student, it felt different. Her undergraduate campus had been close to home in Toronto, but Ottawa was far, and the distance made her nostalgia sting. She slowly rose and sank onto the bed, the thin blanket prickling her skin. She exhaled a breath she had not realized she was holding. It was almost sunset; she could see the diminishing golden light filtered through the window, casting elongated shadows across the floor. Jamie had imagined this day countless of times, rehearsing the excitement, the independence it would bring, but the reality was heavier than she expected. Overwhelmed, she started to cry.

“My first week in Ottawa was actually pretty terrible,” Jamie recalled. On that session of our interview, we were talking about the first time she arrived in Ottawa for her teacher education program. “I cried so much the day they left,” she added. She admitted that she went through a “mini depression” during her first few weeks in Ottawa. She could not get out of bed. It was only through her mother’s persistent encouragement, which included regular calls to remind her to eat and purchase groceries, that she was able to regain her footing.

Jamie noted that her decision to attend the University of Ottawa for her Bachelor of Education was largely motivated by a desire to reclaim her independence. Having completed her undergraduate degree shortly “after COVID hit,” Jamie had spent the entirety of the pandemic living with her parents. The family was tightly knit; they spent considerable time together, often watching movies and maintaining close daily routines. Jamie described her father as Southeast Asian, having immigrated to Canada at a young age, and her mother as South Asian, raised in East Africa. Born in Canada to a biracial family, Jamie has continually navigated the complexities of her intersecting cultural identities. Because her mother’s upbringing was rooted in East African traditions, Jamie found herself more familiar with that heritage than with South Asian culture. Her father, on the other hand, had largely assimilated into Canadian society, having lived in the country most of his life.

Jamie expressed regret over not having a stronger connection to her cultural roots, wondering why she had not grown up with a deeper understanding or experience of them. She noted, for instance, that she never learned to speak either of her parents’ ancestral languages. “I

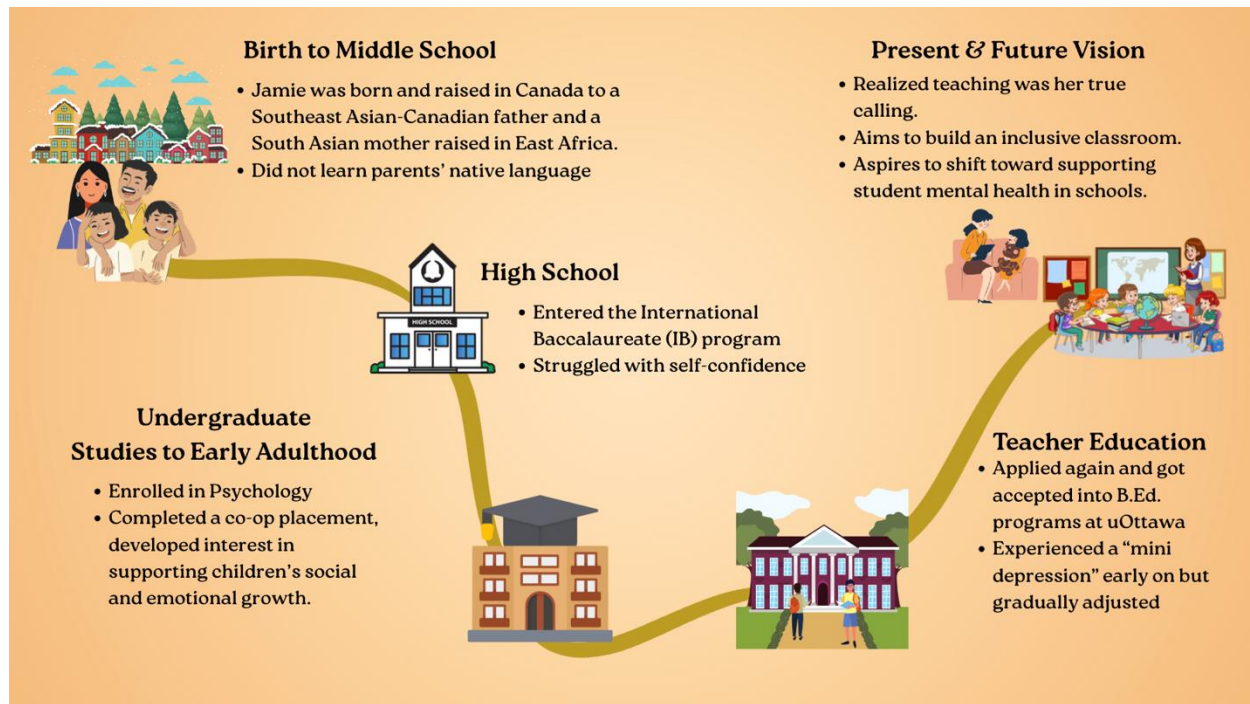
honestly didn't know what traditions we had," she admitted. Jamie also reflected on the possibility that her parents' own experiences with bullying and racial prejudice may have influenced their decision to raise their children with a stronger emphasis on Canadian cultural norms. She described this as "almost like a very mild version of intergenerational trauma."

School, meanwhile, offered little in the way of affirmation. Throughout Jamie's schooling, the absence of cultural representation heightened her feelings of otherness. Racialized teachers were rare, "maybe a handful," and it was not until Grade 9 that she encountered a South Asian teacher. She shared, "I accidentally called her 'Mom' once," revealing the deep hunger for someone who reflects her cultural identity. "I think I did feel some sort of connection toward her... she probably reminded me of my mom," Jamie reflected. Despite being an academically strong student, someone who "enjoyed school" and was "really good at it," Jamie faced internal battles. She entered high school through the International Baccalaureate (IB) program, not entirely by choice. "It was more like my parents wanted me there." For Jamie, despite the prestige that comes with the program, it introduced a new kind of pressure and disorientation. She admitted, "I went from thinking I was smart to feeling like I was one of the dumbest people there." The transition was intensified by a move to a new city and the loss of familiar friendships. In the midst of this disruption, Jamie began to grapple with mental health challenges. "I don't think I adjusted well," she said. But those struggles eventually led her to taking up psychology, both as a field of study and as a pathway to healing. "Because I struggled so much, especially with the bullying... it became my goal to help other kids become resilient."

Jamie's narrative will be explored in greater depth in the following chapter. Below, I highlight several key moments from her story that will re-emerge and be further analyzed in the next chapter.

Figure 9

Jamie's Annal



Note. Above is Jamie's annal, highlighting key events in her life.

5.8 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I presented seven narrative accounts, each carefully selected from the participants' broader life stories. As noted in the introduction, these accounts are not intended to represent the entirety of each participant's narrative. Rather, they spotlight some of the most poignant moments—moments that offer meaningful insight, if not a brief glimpse, into the complex realities that shape their lives. These narratives are intentionally partial and open-ended, as their continuation will unfold in the next chapter, where I place each of participants' narratives in conversation with one another to offer a more layered understanding of their experiences within the teacher education program.

Chapter Six

FINDINGS

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on the teacher diversity gap by examining the lived experiences of racialized teacher candidates within an Ontario teacher education program. Specifically, it seeks to illuminate the personal, social, and institutional challenges encountered by racialized teacher candidates, with the aim of informing teacher education practices. By foregrounding these experiences, this research aspires to support the development of more equitable and inclusive teacher education programs for students from racialized backgrounds. To achieve these aims, the study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of racialized teacher candidates in an Ontario teacher education program?
2. What do these experiences reveal about the ways racialized teacher candidates navigate the challenges and opportunities within teacher education?
3. What lessons can teacher education learn from the narratives of racialized teacher candidates to promote equity, diversity, and inclusion within the program?

In this chapter, I address the first and second research questions. To answer these two questions, I identify and interpret what narrative inquirers refer to as resonant threads, which are emotionally and intellectually compelling patterns that recur across the stories of the seven participants. These resonant threads do not emerge from a search for consensus or uniformity, but rather from a close, thoughtful engagement with the narratives participants shared. I paid particular attention to the nuanced ways they make meaning of their identities, their struggles, and their aspirations. As Clandinin (2023) notes, resonant threads “echo and reverberate,” offering insight into the unfolding, storied lives individuals compose over time (p. 87).

In this study, the threads reflect layered expressions of agency, resistance, and identity, and they offer a deeper understanding of how racialized teacher candidates engage with, and often challenge, dominant narratives within teacher education. To interpret these threads, I draw on the conceptual framework introduced in Chapter 4. To exemplify, Yosso’s (2005) Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) framework served as a central analytic lens, allowing me to examine

how participants mobilized six forms of cultural capital: aspirational, familial, navigational, resistant, social, and linguistic. Simultaneously, Critical Race Theory (CRT) offered me the theoretical grounding as I examined how structures of race and power shape participants' experiences, while also illuminating how they persist and resist within these inequitable structures or systems. Together, CCW and CRT provided a robust conceptual framework for illuminating how participants transformed experiences of marginalization into sources of knowledge, resistance, and resilience.

The data analysis was conducted using NVivo qualitative data analysis (QDA) software. I began by importing the interview transcripts into the program. As I did three one-hour interviews with each participant, I generated a total of 21 transcripts and approximately 1,050 single-spaced pages of data. I first engaged in close, immersive readings to develop a holistic understanding of the data. From there, I began the initial stage of my data analysis which involved constructing the narrative accounts for each participant. Following that, I conducted open coding, using each form of capital in the CCW framework to categorize relevant text segments. Text segments are sentences or paragraphs from the transcripts that relate to specific codes (Creswell, 2012). Next, I moved into axial coding, examining recurring patterns to generate themes. These themes formed the key resonant threads, or the major themes presented in this chapter. A key challenge during this phase was that many data segments did not fit neatly into a single category; participants' experiences often overlapped across multiple forms of capital. Rather than force boundaries, I intentionally preserved these intersections and interconnections within the findings.

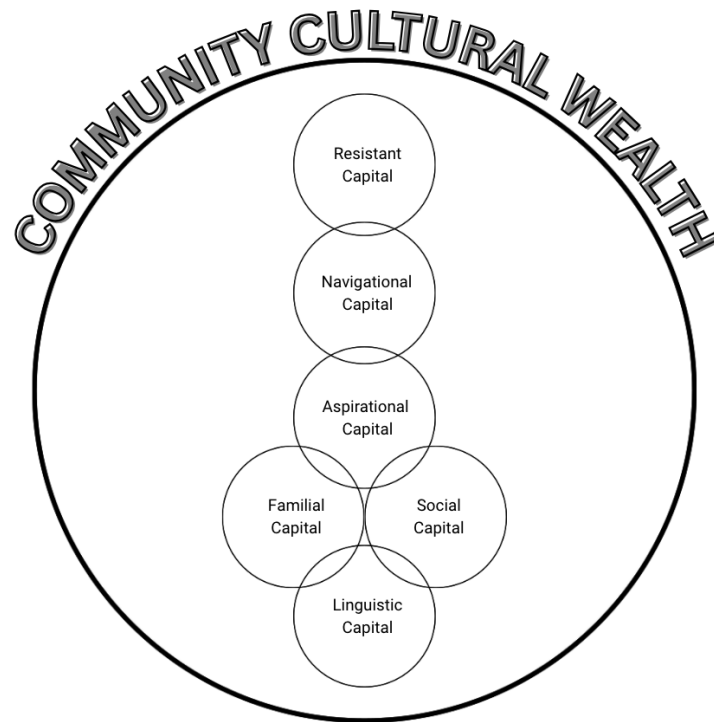
After identifying the key resonant threads (major themes) within each form of capital, I conducted a deeper level of analysis to uncover interconnections within and across threads, which evolved into sub-threads (minor themes). It is important to note that some sub-threads once again overlapped, hence, they may resonate across more than one thread. These interwoven threads are further explored in the discussion chapter, where I discuss how they intersect and inform one another. Finally, this entire analytical process unfolded over seven months, beginning from when the transcripts were imported to the QDA software to the development and writing of the findings. It is also worth emphasizing that throughout this chapter, I use the terms threads and themes interchangeably.

6.1 The six forms of Community Cultural Wealth (CCW)

Guided by the conceptual framework of this study, I identified key resonant threads that reflected the characteristics of each form of CCW. The most surprising finding of this study is that among the seven forms of cultural wealth, resistant capital appeared most notably across participants' narratives. Choosing the teaching profession as an act of resistance emerged as one of the most salient and pervasive threads in participants' coded excerpts. This was followed by navigational capital, as participants consistently described their encounters with systemic barriers, beginning in childhood, through their K–12 education, and into their teacher education programs. Their stories revealed patterns of strategic decision-making and resilience in navigating these obstacles. Participants also shared reflections on their aspirations, underscoring the presence of aspirational capital. This capital was often driven by a desire to contribute to a more socially just society or by a deep sense of responsibility and love for their families. Closely following this was familial capital, with participants identifying family as a key source of motivation not only for entering the teaching profession but also for persevering through challenges within and beyond the classroom. Social capital appeared with equal frequency, often intertwined with familial capital. This overlap is consistent with participants' descriptions of their social networks and extended communities as equally important sources of emotional, academic, and professional support. Lastly, linguistic capital emerged as a meaningful, although less frequently mentioned, thread. Participants emphasized the value of multilingualism as a pedagogical tool to promote equity and inclusion in their future classrooms. The figure below illustrates how the CCW findings emerged from participants' responses. It is important to clarify, however, that this does not imply that any single form of cultural wealth holds greater significance over the others.

Figure 10

Summary of CCW Findings



Note. The visual above depicts the ordering of different forms of cultural wealth as they emerged from participants' narratives. This hierarchy, however, is not intended to suggest relative dominance of one form of CCW among the forms.

6.2 Resistant Capital

Resistant capital, as conceptualized by Yosso (2005), encompasses the knowledge, skills, and behaviours cultivated through oppositional practices that confront systemic inequality. This form of capital reflects not only participants' understanding of the structures of racism but also their agency and motivation to transform oppressive systems. The findings in this study reveal the multiple ways participants exercise resistant capital. Specifically, five resonant threads emerged: (a) institutional critique and anti-tokenism, (b) identity assertion as resistance, (c) teaching as transformative resistance, (d) academic and pedagogical resistance, and (e) quiet, strategic, and internal resistance. In the sections that follow, I further unpack each of these

resonant threads by identifying emergent sub-threads and supporting them with direct excerpts from participants' interview transcripts.

6.2.1 Resonant Thread 1: Institutional Critique and Anti-Tokenism

Participants offered emotional reflections on their experiences in teacher education that underscore a deep disconnect between institutional diversity discourse and their lived realities. Their narratives illuminate a shared disillusionment with performative equity efforts, a lack of racial representation among faculty, and the emotional toll of tokenization, where racialized individuals are asked to represent entire communities, often in superficial ways.

a) Superficial Representation and Performative Diversity

It is notable that a significant number of participants critiqued how conversations about diversity within the faculty felt symbolic rather than substantive. Lark's frustration is especially poignant: "It felt almost like a formality sometimes to be talking about that stuff...like diversity in classrooms... It wasn't like we were actually looking for...a change or to like actually implement it." Similarly, Neve expressed fatigue and skepticism toward repeated discussions on racism that "don't penetrate very deeply" or lead to meaningful institutional shifts. These remarks suggest that mandatory diversity sessions may do more to signal compliance than generate authentic engagement or structural change. Lark similarly characterized such sessions as "checking it off your list," a description that raises important questions about the depth, effectiveness, and sincerity of equity training initiatives.

b) Lack of Racial Representation in the Faculty

Several participants highlighted the lack of racial diversity among faculty as a major issue, both in symbolic and practical terms. Ardeen articulated how culturally responsive teaching is rendered hollow when it is not embodied by the educators themselves, stating, "being taught how to teach a racialized student by a white professor is not as meaningful as being taught by a racialized professor." This lack of representation was not just noticed, it was felt. Emery described sitting in a classroom and looking at the faculty and not seeing anyone reflecting his experiences as "a personal slap in the face," making him feel like an "outlier." This captures the emotional toll of persistent exclusion. He recalled an experience when he was asked, along with other Black peers, to speak on behalf of the entire Black community underscores how institutions often lean on racialized students for visibility without offering systemic support or change.

c) Emotional Toll of Tokenization

Participants also discussed the psychological and emotional toll of being the “only one” in predominantly white spaces. Maddox’s reflection, that “you feel like an annoyance” for being the one racialized person pointing out racism, reveals the invisible burden racialized students are expected to bear, often at the cost of their own sense of belonging. This burden is compounded by a silencing effect. As Neve described how “we are not allowed to speak about it” without being labeled as “having a chip on [our] shoulder.” This chilling effect contributes to a culture where racialized students are made to feel hyper-visible and simultaneously unheard, a double bind that sustains racial inequities under the guise of civility.

6.2.2 Resonant Thread 2: Identity Assertion as Resistance

The data reveal several nuanced ways participants assert their identities as forms of resistance to societal pressures, stereotypes, and cultural expectations. These assertions manifest both internally, through personal reflection and self-acceptance, and externally, through interactions with others. Three prominent sub-threads emerge: (1) self-awareness and authenticity, (2) resisting external imposition, and (3) negotiating cultural belonging.

a) Self-Awareness and Authenticity

Ardeen’s reflections underscore the significance of cultivating a grounded sense of self. She articulates a conscious effort to stay true to personal values despite external expectations: “I know, to stay true to myself, despite what other people around me are saying. And I know my values. And again, I’m like very rooted in in those values.” This demonstrates identity assertion as an internalized form of resistance, where self-knowledge enables the individual to navigate social pressures without compromising personal integrity. Similarly, Sage emphasizes the enduring presence of culture and tradition, noting that these elements remain “in the back of my mind” and are carried forward in daily life. Both instances suggest that maintaining connection to one’s heritage and values serves as a protective mechanism against assimilation pressures.

b) Resisting External Imposition and Stereotypes

Emery’s account highlights resistance in response to microaggressions and dehumanizing behaviours, such as unsolicited physical contact. He reflects on how his peers would casually touch his hair without consent—an act that, while often dismissed as harmless curiosity, he experienced as a clear signal that he was not seen as “equally human.” When he pushed back, he

was met with dismissive justifications such as, "Oh, but you can touch my hair." Emery challenged this logic by asking a critical question: "Do people walk around in this world with the casual expectation that others will reach out and touch their hair?" He underscored the violation by imagining the reversal: "What if I did that to a stranger? Would it be welcome... how dehumanizing that would be to do to someone?" Emery refused to normalize this behaviour. He directly interrogated the instinct behind it: "Why was it instinctual for you to do to me, even if it wasn't malicious, or you're just curious. You know, my hair type is different... [that] just dehumanizes my entire existence." For Emery, resistance came not in silence or tolerance, but in confronting these normalized violations and asserting his full humanity. As he powerfully noted, "I had to rewire my mindset, not change who I was as a person." Ardeen's experience reflects a different, yet related, form of resistance. She shared that she was encouraged to pursue socially valorized professions (e.g., law, medicine, engineering), illustrating how external expectations can conflict with personal aspirations. Her decision to remain committed to teaching, despite advice to conform, reflects a thoughtful push against externally imposed expectations. These findings collectively demonstrate that identity assertion is not merely about self-confidence or personal affirmation. It involves actively navigating, questioning, and at times resisting powerful social and community pressures.

c) Negotiating Cultural Belonging

Neve's reflections offer insight into the emotional toll of negotiating cultural differences and immigrant identity. By choosing communities that demand less emotional energy, she selectively engages with others while preserving self-integrity:

"I picked the immigrant group that takes the least amount of emotional energy... You know, it's too hard to try to cross the gap. I gave up... the most important thing is to have a morally upright life, to support my family, to make money and to get through it."

Neve expressed feeling fundamentally different from her peers and colleagues, noting that this perceived difference often prevents her from fully immersing herself in social or professional environments. As she put it, "they are not comfortable." Her reflection reveals the unspoken burden of emotional work placed on marginalized individuals to ease the discomfort of others. She articulated this clearly in a striking statement: "The emotional work of having to make other people constantly comfortable is too much." Neve's account underscores how the

demand to prioritize others' comfort becomes a barrier to authentic connection and belonging, highlighting a subtle but persistent form of exclusion.

Meanwhile, Maddox's uncertainty in self-identifying racially underscores the broader challenges of cultural belonging in multicultural contexts, particularly when individuals feel compelled to make their differences visible. This tension was especially apparent during a teacher education class activity, where students were asked to verbally describe their physical appearance to increase accessibility for students with visual impairments. Maddox recalled feeling discomfort as one of only two racialized individuals in a class of 40 students. He and the other student quietly deliberated over whether to name their race as part of their description, recognizing that, unlike their white peers, their visible difference carried a social weight. "It puts a lot of pressure on people of colour or anyone with any kind of visible difference or like any kind of disability... it forces you to highlight it in a way that you might not be comfortable with," Maddox explained. He ultimately chose to say, "I was Asian," although he admitted uncertainty and discomfort about the appropriate terminology to describe his skin colour, remarking, "I don't know what word I would use... I don't know what word is the most appropriate for that." This moment illustrates the subtle, yet powerful ways institutional settings can unintentionally impose expectations of disclosure and representation on minoritized individuals, forcing them into moments of self-definition that may feel misaligned with their own evolving identities.

6.2.3 Resonant Thread 3: Teaching as Transformative Resistance

Participants articulated a shared sense of responsibility and hope to reshape the classroom as a site of affirmation, healing, and justice. Rather than viewing teaching as a neutral act, they positioned it as an intentional intervention, rooted in personal experiences of marginalization, empathy for their students, and a desire to reimagine what education can and should feel like. Across their narratives, teaching emerges not merely as a profession, but as a transformative political and emotional commitment.

a) Teaching to Heal, Transforming Pain into Purpose

Many participants described their decision to become educators as emerging from personal experiences of harm, exclusion, or silence in school settings. Ardeen, for instance, made a direct connection between her own alienation and her motivation to teach: "I don't want any

student to feel the way that I did... where they felt like their teachers didn't care or like their teacher thought they were stupid [and] didn't want to help them." Ardeen was reflecting on her high school experience, particularly after entering the Advanced Placement (AP) program, where she felt unsupported and isolated by her teachers. This sense of alienation became a catalyst for her commitment to ensure no student under her care would endure the same neglect. Sage echoed these sentiments. As a racialized student herself, she developed a heightened sensitivity to the needs of students with similar identities and experiences: "I pay more attention to them in the sense that I want to make sure they're fitting right in. I wanna make sure their classmates are treating them right. I pay more attention to ensure they're comfortable," she explained. Her vigilance stems from a desire not only to protect but also to affirm the presence and worth of students who may otherwise go unnoticed. Emery's narrative revealed the emotional depth of this transformation: "I wanted to be that person that I so desperately wanted to be in someone's life... someone that can really give you back the will to live." These profound expressions demonstrate how personal trauma can be reimagined as a source of empathy, strength, and advocacy. For Ardeen, Sage, and Emery, teaching becomes an act of healing—a way to interrupt cycles of harm and to restore what was once lost: confidence, belonging, and dignity.

b) Embodying Representation as Resistance

Participants also recognized that their very presence in the classroom as racialized, queer, or otherwise marginalized educators, carried meaning and potential impact. Maddox captured this poignantly: "I'm proud to be able to do for students... to have a subset of students see themselves in me when they are not used to seeing that." For Sage, the desire to "go into a classroom and [have] students see other representations" was central. Jamie echoed this sense of mission, saying it became her goal "to help kids become resilient." Ardeen, in contrast, emphasized that being a racialized teacher goes beyond embodying representation; for her, it is a "responsibility." She explained that it is her duty to inspire students who share her background and to motivate them to pursue better outcomes for themselves and their careers. These reflections underscore how representation itself becomes a form of resistance, especially in systems where marginalized students rarely see themselves reflected in positions of authority or care.

c) Actively Creating Inclusive, Humanizing Spaces

Transformative resistance also showed up in participants' visions for their future classrooms. For many, inclusion was not about tolerance, but it was also about celebration. Sage emphasized wanting students to "tell me all about [your culture], and teach it to me, and I would also love to try the food," showing how inclusion can be joyful, curious, and reciprocal. Jamie expanded the definition of inclusion to encompass gender and ability. She reflected: "working with students of diverse backgrounds... also means people of different gender identities or sexual identities or abilities." Lark emphasized relational ethics: "make sure your classroom is full of good students, like good people" while Emery offered a powerful vision of a truly humanizing classroom environment, one in which he "should be able to walk into the class... look around the room, and not worry about bringing my own child into the school." These visions move far beyond the checklist approach to equity. They reflect a desire to build classrooms where students are seen, valued, and protected, and where identity is not a barrier but a bridge.

6.2.4 Resonant Thread 4: Academic and Pedagogical Resistance

Participants illuminated the subtle yet powerful ways they navigated and pushed back against normative expectations, both cultural and institutional, through academic excellence, professional ambition, and cultural authenticity. For the participants, identity was not static, but it was something they had to actively navigate each day. The act of asserting one's identity, especially in contexts where racialized students are often smoothed into stereotypes or made invisible, emerged as a key form of resistance. I illuminate on this through three interconnected sub-threads: academic excellence as survival and defiance, resisting cultural erasure, and rejecting misconceptions and stereotypes.

a) Academic Excellence as Survival and Defiance

For many participants, achievement in school functioned as both a personal coping mechanism and a strategic defense against marginalization. As demonstrated in Neve's narrative account, she had to put her head down and excel academically because if she excels, it is her best safeguard against racism, because "they can't touch you as easily." Emery echoed this when describing how academic success masked personal pain: "School was the one place I could play with time that I had a future." But the cost of this strategy is also clear. As Emery admitted, the emotional emptiness that followed even perfect grades left him questioning the sustainability of

this performance. Similarly, Sage and Maddox both emphasized their consistent pursuit of top grades, not just as personal ambition, but as part of a larger effort to be seen as capable and worthy in systems that often expect otherwise.

b) Contesting Stereotypes around Teaching

Ardeen critically reflects on how immigrant South Asian communities often devalue teaching as a legitimate or prestigious career, instead steering children toward more traditionally respected professions such as medicine, engineering, or law. She identifies this cultural pressure as a key reason why many young people from her background do not view teaching as a desirable career path. Lark echoes this perspective, openly acknowledging that she and her peers held a “misconception” about teaching, believing it to be simple “like there’s not much that goes into it... like you just show up and teach.” However, once she entered teacher education, she was quickly confronted with the complexity and demands of the profession. She described the meticulous nature of lesson planning and the constant need to engage students across multiple subjects: “you have to do something with the kids every single day and in... different subjects. So, it’s a lot of work.”

Conversely, Maddox offers an alternative perspective. Coming from an East Asian background, he shared that while his parents were supportive of his initial career pursuit in acting, it was ultimately his late mother’s desire that he explore a career in teaching. He remembered her saying, “if acting didn’t work, consider teaching.” For Maddox, teaching has always been seen as a respected profession in his culture. He explained: “With that respect for education comes a respect for teachers... a lot of the community would be respectful to teachers.” Indeed, the respect for teachers is deeply rooted in cultural beliefs that view education as a path to both personal virtue and social success. Together, these reflections reveal how future educators are not only challenging cultural and societal assumptions about the teaching profession but are also developing a deeper appreciation for the labour, skill, and dedication the role requires.

c) Rejecting Cultural Erasure and Stereotypes

For Ardeen, identity assertion meant holding fast to her cultural background even when dominant norms made that difficult. She shared:

“I didn’t want to give up like my culture, my heritage... I wanted to keep eating the foods that I really liked. I wanted to keep doing the things that I really enjoyed... watching the

movies that I enjoyed. But it's very hard... As an educator, I don't want the students in my classroom to feel like they have to give up a part of themselves, just to make friends.”

This desire to preserve cultural practices and pass on that affirmation to future students underscores how identity can challenge the status quo and create deeper connections in teaching. Meanwhile, several participants pushed back against simple or narrow assumptions about their identities. Jamie spoke candidly about the impact of microaggressions: “Oh, you're Asian, you're smart... it kind of undermines the work that I put into studying.” These racialized assumptions may appear complimentary on the surface but ultimately diminish the labour and individuality of the person. Maddox described a particularly harmful narrative: white classmates implying that racialized students had it easier because of diversity quotas: “It was making sort of commodifying our ethnicity.” These reflections show that resistance is not always loud or visible. Sometimes it is internal, and quiet, choosing to keep doing the work, keep showing up, and refusing to let others define your worth.

6.2.5 Resonant Thread 5: Quiet, Strategic, and Internal Resistance

As mentioned, resistance is not always loud or visible. It does not always look like confrontation; sometimes, it takes the form of quiet survival, strategic silence, or subtle presence in spaces that often render them invisible or misread altogether. For the participants in my study, identity assertion is not a singular or consistent act, but it is situational, often constrained, and deeply shaped by feelings of risk, exhaustion, and care. Further examination of this central theme revealed three interrelated sub-themes: silencing the self as a form of survival, navigating visibility and safety, and resisting through presence and positivity.

a) Silencing the Self as Survival

Participants frequently described the need to silence themselves in order to stay emotionally or physically safe in predominantly white or unfamiliar institutional spaces. For many, this self-silencing was not simply a passive response but an active, strategic practice shaped by repeated encounters with marginalization. Emery, for instance, described learning to “shut myself off” and to remain hyper-vigilant about his behaviour at all times. This hyper-vigilance reflects a learned survival strategy, where constant assessment of social cues and potential risks informs every action. Even the expression of anger required careful modulation: he noted, “I come across very angry [weekly course reading responses] because that’s the only

space I could be angry and not perceived as violence.” In this way, Emery’s emotional expression is deliberately confined to contexts where it will not threaten his safety or position. Neve echoed this careful management of her emotions in her own experiences. She recalled a moment during her placement when her associate teacher made a discriminatory remark about a student from the same background as Neve. The teacher suggested that a student was “okay with women” because “he’s not Muslim... he’s a Brown kid,” while implying that Muslim students were more likely to be disrespectful or have “problems with women.” Neve observed that similar behaviours were interpreted differently depending on a child’s perceived background: what was seen as normal boundary-testing for some students became a cultural or religious flaw for others, reflecting subtle Islamophobic and racialized disciplinary biases.

“I sit there with a completely straight face... I don’t like to fight; it doesn’t change anything.” Here, Neve demonstrates a form of strategic restraint. By controlling her immediate emotional reactions, she preserves her safety and avoids confrontation. Taken together, these narratives underscore how self-silencing functions as a form of survival in spaces that for participants do not feel safe.

b) Negotiating Visibility and Safety

Resistance also took the form of strategic boundary-setting. Neve, for example, described a long-term coping strategy she developed to manage potential isolation in educational spaces. She shared that she always carries a book with her, creating a self-contained, controlled space within the classroom:

“I have a book, okay? Now, if I’m listening and people are saying something that interests me, I’ll jump in and I’ll say a comment... then we might have a short amount of chit chat. I’ll just get back to my book, which is all good.”

Here, the book becomes more than a reading tool for Neve, but it also serves as a protective boundary, allowing her to selectively participate in a conversation when it feels safe or meaningful, and to retreat when it does not. This deliberate engagement reflects a careful negotiation of visibility, agency, and emotional safety. Neve also spoke about initially carving out space for prayer during her placement, a form of self-expression that ultimately felt too risky to sustain: “I stopped, because I realized I don’t feel safe... my own self-expression doesn’t feel

safe.” This decision reflects a difficult trade-off: Neve chose to protect her sense of safety, even if it meant keeping an important part of herself hidden.

Maddox’s narrative reveals a similarly complex negotiation. He described the impulse to minimize his presence: “Not wanting to seem like a bother... not wanting to take up too much space.” He also spoke about the emotional weight that comes with deciding whether or not to speak up: “Every time you decide to say something, you are prepared to be the only one who feels that way.” This kind of emotional preparation, that is, expecting to stand alone or not be understood, creates a constant balancing act: speak up and risk being misunderstood or dismissed, or stay quiet to protect your sense of safety. For both Maddox and Neve, resistance is not always outward or confrontational. Instead, it is quiet, intentional, and deeply shaped by context. It means constantly deciding how much of themselves to show, and when, in order to protect their well-being.

c) Resisting Through Presence and Positivity

If for Maddox and Neve, resistance means setting strategic boundaries, for Sage, it takes the form of simply remaining visible and choosing to hold space even when conditions are far from ideal. She captured this in her reflection: “At least they see me. Like you know, someone different... At least they have that visualization and representation in front of them.” While not overtly confrontational, Sage’s stance represents a conscious act of resistance: being present, staying grounded, and allowing students to see difference embodied in a position of authority and care. Sage also shared a commitment to optimism in the face of difficulty: “I try to not let it get to me and still be positive... at the end of the day, it’s all about the students.” The choice to prioritize joy and student impact while quietly bearing the emotional toll of racial difference, is itself a form of sustained, embodied resistant capital.

6.3 Navigational Capital

Navigational capital, in Yosso's (2005) words, refers to the skills and strategies racialized individuals use to successfully navigate social institutions not originally designed with them in mind. This includes overcoming racially hostile environments and systemic barriers in education and beyond. Rooted in concepts like academic invulnerability and resilience, navigational capital involves both personal agency and the support of family, community, and social networks. In this study, participants’ navigational capital surfaced through five interrelated themes: (1)

institutional barriers and strategic navigation, (2) persistence and reframing setbacks as growth, (3) learning through observation and improvisation, and (4) cultural dissonance and adaptation.

6.3.1 Resonant Thread 1: Institutional Barriers and Strategic Navigation

Participants in this study described a range of strategies used to navigate institutional spaces that were often misaligned with their identities, personal circumstances, or learning needs. Their narratives reveal nuanced ways of coping with systemic structures while also highlighting moments of resilience, compromise, and resistance. Resonant threads clustered around three sub-themes: isolation and cultural mismatch in school settings, inflexibility and lack of institutional support, and self-management as a survival strategy.

a) Isolation and Cultural Mismatch in School Settings

For some participants, the prospect of entering predominantly white school environments raised deep concerns about belonging and comfort. Ardeen described this anticipation clearly: “If I end up at a school where I’m the only person of colour there, I’m going to feel very, very awkward, and not have a good time.” Her concern was not about teaching itself, but about the affective toll of navigating an environment where racial identity might render her hyper-visible and unsupported. Although she found some reassurance in informal relationships with other racialized educators, “[our teaching partner] is also a minority. So that’s kind of like nice to have...,” these connections appear to be ad hoc rather than systemically supported.

Similarly, Neve reflected on the lack of warmth or community in school spaces: “When you’re walking in the halls... nobody’s asking, so I’m not overly troubled by it.” Her words suggest a sense of resignation, a minimalist approach to navigating institutional culture by doing what is necessary and emotionally detaching from the rest. While this strategy may help participants get through placements, it also highlights a missed opportunity for schools to foster inclusion, belonging, and mentorship.

b) Inflexibility and Lack of Institutional Support

Emery’s account revealed a deeper institutional failure, particularly in moments of personal crisis. During his undergraduate degree, his mother required “a major surgery” and he requested time to care for her. His thesis supervisor’s response: “You have priorities. Oh my God,” was jarring in its dismissal. Rather than receiving understanding or flexibility, he was met

with judgment. This moment, in his own words, was a realization: “Your partners in the institutions are not necessarily your partners in education.” While this experience is not unique to racialized students, for Emery it occurred within the broader context of navigating university as a racialized learner, where seeking care-based accommodations already carried emotional risk. His experience highlights how institutional cultures that prioritize productivity over relational care can disproportionately strain students whose lives are shaped by interdependence and family responsibility.

Emery also recalled how difficult it was to navigate academic bureaucracy when he considered leaving his undergraduate program. An academic counselor explained that while his credits would still allow him to graduate, leaving the program would “take away” his chance to pursue graduate studies. Ultimately, Emery decided to step away, explaining that he no longer wanted “whatever dream [he] had there [graduate school].” These experiences show how institutional policies may present choices in theory but often overlook the deeper emotional and cultural realities that drive students to consider leaving.

c) Self-Management as a Survival Strategy

Faced with ambiguous or unhelpful institutional structures, participants developed individual strategies to stay afloat. Jamie emphasized organization and time management as key tools: “I’ve always found being organized to be very helpful.” She described using a planner, to-do lists, and early deadlines to manage workload and protect her mental health. Her reflections: “just for my own mental health, I try to work on things sooner rather than later,” shows how everyday academic habits can carry a different weight when they are about survival and well-being, not simply productivity.

6.3.2 Resonant Thread 2: Persistence and Reframing Setbacks as Growth

Setbacks are often framed as barriers to progress, yet across these participants’ stories, such moments became opportunities to reflect, reimagine, and reorient. Rather than surrender to disappointment or loss, participants described how they stayed the course, often reframing their struggles as meaningful steps in their larger journey. Persistence, in these cases, was not simply about continuing forward, it was about reshaping their own narratives of failure, re-evaluating their goals, and redefining success on their own terms. Three sub-threads emerged within this theme: (1) pausing to heal and return, (2) shifting direction with intention, and (3) finding

meaning through long detours. Each thread highlights how participants resisted finality in moments of difficulty, instead choosing opportunities for growth and renewal.

a) Pausing to Heal and Return

For some participants, persistence required first stepping away. Emery's narrative reveals a critical pause, one that was necessary for mental and emotional healing. After the physical assault incident that happened outside of his placement during his first year in the teacher education program, Emery took a year off. A consistently strong student who graduated high school with a 98% average, Emery reflected, "I had really separated the trauma," revealing how deeply his academic success was entangled with unresolved pain. Stepping away created space for him to "sit with" his trauma and confront what he had previously suppressed. His decision to return to the teacher education program was not merely about completing a degree but about rebuilding himself. Emery described his healing process as a "hard winter," yet remained resolute in telling himself, "I'm going to come back." As he explained, "I believe that I am spiritual in that way, where I don't think struggling means that it's all bad... and there's no good or lessons to be found in it. But yeah, struggling and falling apart is an ugly process." Emery's story underscores that persistence is not always about forward momentum, it can also mean pausing, regrouping, and returning with renewed purpose.

a) Shifting Direction with Intention

Neve and Jamie's trajectories, although distinct and shaped by necessity, both demonstrated determination rather than defeat. In particular, Neve's academic excellence was evident from the outset. Upon completing her undergraduate degree, she advanced directly into graduate studies, successfully earning her master's and progressing through her doctoral program with the goal of entering academia. However, complex family needs, including giving birth, an ill husband, and immigration barriers, prompted her to "somehow move on emotionally" from that path. Teaching, for her, became a grounding choice amidst instability: "Since he isn't [well], and I need to do something stable for myself, of course, the only thing I know is teaching." And thus, she pursued teacher education. Her words carry both practicality and pride. She asserts agency in her statement, "choose your own battles," a reminder that persistence is also about knowing when and how to move forward within constraint. Jamie, on the other hand, faced the emotional toll of rejection when none of the teacher education programs she applied to accepted her on the first try. For her, teaching was initially a "Plan B," yet it quickly became the source of

identity and motivation. Her reflection, “if I can't even get into this, what am I going to do with my life?” describes a moment of vulnerability. But her decision to try again, to apply to more teacher programs and put in “a lot of work,” shows the power of reframing rejection not as a sign to give up, but as a call to re-engage more intentionally.

b) Finding Meaning Through Long Detours

Maddox’s story illustrates how a non-linear path can still lead to purpose. After completing his degree in Theatre and Drama Studies through the joint program at the University of Toronto and Sheridan College, he landed significant roles as a professional actor and spent ten years working in that industry. But as he admitted, it was a difficult field. Between acting and auditioning, he held “different jobs on the side,” including a long stint as a barista at Starbucks and work as a “standardized patient... where you pretend to be a patient for doctor’s exams.” After years of juggling “little odd jobs here and there,” Maddox eventually found his way to teacher education. Although such a path might be characterized by some as indicative of occupational drift, his experience offers a critical alternative perspective of persistence through survival. Teaching was not the first plan, but it became the path forward, chosen with the wisdom of lived experience. Sage’s reflection echoes this sentiment, although through a different lens. For her, growth itself is the measure of success: “Growth in every aspect... teaching and not just teaching but learning itself is growth.” This philosophy of lifelong learning reframes persistence not as endurance alone, but as openness, a willingness to expand, shift, and evolve.

6.3.3 Resonant Thread 3: Learning Through Observation and Improvisation

Learning to teach did not happen only through coursework or theoretical preparation. Across participants’ reflections, the most impactful learning moments often came through doing, watching, responding, improvising, and adjusting in real time. Teaching, in these stories, emerges as a craft honed through both mindful observation and the necessity to act in unpredictable contexts. Participants repeatedly described how being thrown into the unfamiliar classroom settings, whether it was a new age group, a new system, or a last-minute supply call, forced them to adapt and grow in unexpected ways. Lark’s experience of being placed in a kindergarten class, entirely outside her comfort zone, quickly became a transformative moment. She admitted that she was not “normally good with little kids,” making her very nervous. But what began as nervousness turned into insight: “those small things that really matter... as a

beginning teacher, those things really help.” Her learning in this context was not about big curriculum pieces but the everyday logistics of managing young learners, like getting them ready five minutes before the bell. Similarly, Sage recounted a moment in her practicum when “no one picked up the shift for another teacher that was absent” and so she took it. With no cooperating teacher to rely on, she was suddenly in full control of a classroom: “I would say it definitely made me grow as a teacher because it was my own class to run.” This context of improvisation allowed Sage to experiment with and apply her developing pedagogical approach into practice. Neve's story adds another layer, speaking to the disorientation of navigating an unfamiliar school culture. Having never attended school in Canada, placement became her first embodied encounter with how Canadian classrooms worked. “I didn’t go to school here... this setup is completely different.” In Neve’s case, improvisation meant learning how to be present in a new system, reading the room when you do not yet speak the cultural language of schooling. Emery’s learning, on the contrary, emerged outside traditional classrooms entirely. While working up north in a Cree Nation, he encountered radically different ways of teaching and knowing. He explained, “I am trying to teach students about combustion, but they make their whole fire, right?... I can teach students about the science of the Northern Lights while they’re watching, and that’s magnetism... that’s about atmosphere.” For Emery, he was seeing “education in a different language.” In this context, improvisation was about cultural responsiveness, allowing lived experience inform how science could be taught through land-based learning.

6.3.4 Resonant Thread 4: Cultural Dissonance and Adaptation

Participants in this study shared powerful accounts of cultural dissonance and the complex work of navigating and adapting to environments where their cultural identities were often misunderstood, devalued, or misrepresented. These moments were not isolated; rather, they reflected enduring patterns of cultural tension in both educational spaces and everyday life. Participants recounted experiences of feeling alienated or pressured to explain or perform aspects of their identity in ways that underscored their difference rather than their belonging. In these moments, adaptation was not simply a choice, it was often a strategy for survival, emotional protection, and professional continuity.

a) Experiencing Isolation and Cultural Invisibility

Ardeen and Emery offered distinct but overlapping narratives of what it felt like to be culturally invisible in predominantly white academic and social environments. Ardeen's disorientation began on the very first day of university when she realized she was the only racialized student in her class. She reflected on her deep sense of not belonging not only with white peers but also with racialized students who, in her view, had culturally assimilated. A seemingly benign school event, such as the Pajama Day, became an early marker of difference. Wearing cultural clothing misunderstood by peers, she was met with condescending questions that, even at a young age, left her feeling awkward and misunderstood. These early moments of dissonance remained with her into adulthood, shaping how she read and moved through predominantly white institutions.

Similarly, Emery described a lingering sense of not belonging. Despite a deep love for his family's languages and food, he remarked that these things were "not valued by the world around me." His critique extended into his teacher education program, where the curriculum felt disconnected from his lived reality. "I feel like a stranger in the program... I feel like I live in a different reality than the reality that I get sitting in classes," he explained. For him, the program's content often excluded racialized perspectives, reinforcing his sense of cultural alienation.

b) Complexity of Cultural Identity

For other participants, cultural dissonance emerged not only from exclusion but from misrecognition. Lark's experience was shaped by what she described as a disconnect between how others perceived her and her actual upbringing. Because of her racial identity, she was often expected to conform to certain cultural norms. "People would see me... they'd see Brown. So they'd expect me wearing [South Asian] cultural outfits," she said, adding that this left others confused and sometimes judgmental. Her struggle was not with her cultural background itself, but with the limiting and monolithic representations imposed upon it. Jamie also spoke about cultural multiplicity, but in her case, it was less about how others perceived her and more about how she observed cultural dynamics from what she called a "third-party perspective." Navigating multiple cultural and religious influences from both sides of her family, Jamie came to see cultural identity not as fixed but as layered, contextual, and often conflicting.

c) Navigating Racialized Experiences Under Pressure

Neve's contribution, while more politically charged, underscored the emotional toll of moving through a world that routinely devalues Brown lives. Her statement: "our civil liberties

are meaningless... being proved to us over and over and over again that Brown lives don't matter" reveals the emotional fatigue and hypervigilance that comes with navigating public spaces as a racialized person. She described coping by withdrawing into routine and focus, saying, "I only focus on I have to go here... I'm going to go there... and then I'm going to come home, and then I'm going to make dinner." Here, adaptation functions as emotional self-preservation, involving minimal engagement with the external world.

6.4 Aspirational Capital

Yosso (2005) describes aspirational capital as the capacity to sustain hopes and dreams for the future despite encountering significant barriers. In this study, participants reflected this form of cultural wealth most prominently through their resilience and perseverance, envisioning possibilities that extend beyond their current circumstances. This finding is particularly telling as it aligns with existing CCW scholarship, which emphasizes that aspirational capital often manifests as resilience even in the absence of clear or accessible pathways to achieve them (Yosso, 2005). Alongside resilience and perseverance, three additional themes emerged: professional identity and the desire to create meaningful impact, familial influence and the pursuit of generational dreams, and aspirations for a relevant, inclusive, and transformative teacher education.

6.4.1 Resonant Thread 1: Resilience and Perseverance

The following narratives speak to the determination and inner strength participants drew upon to persist through uncertainty, self-doubt, grief, and the competitive nature of teacher education. Their paths were rarely straightforward. Several took time off, re-evaluated their goals, or doubted whether they belonged in the field at all. Yet, across these accounts, a shared thread emerged: the will to continue, to test possibilities, and to choose teaching with intention, even when that choice was difficult. In this section, I group the findings under three sub-themes that reflect the varied ways resilience and perseverance were expressed.

a) Taking Time to Reflect and Recommit

For some participants, perseverance did not come in the form of relentless forward motion, it emerged through deliberate pauses and reflection. Ardeen described a year-long break

after her undergraduate degree as a critical time to decide what she truly wanted. She explained that the time off allowed her to clarify her sense of purpose: “this is what I want to do, and this is what I'm good at.” Similarly, Emery took a year off after his first year in the teacher education program, unsure whether teaching was truly the right path. His reflection was deeply personal and ongoing, noting, “there’s a picture in my mind of what it would look like if I chose that life... but I never saw myself in it.” Still, he remained open to possibility, and it was this openness that sustained him: “it just doesn’t make sense to say no.” These accounts suggest that for Ardeen and Emery, perseverance was not about certainty, it was about being willing to stay with the question and return to the work when it felt right. Their stories resist linear narratives of success, revealing that uncertainty and resilience can co-exist.

b) Pushing Through Doubt and Difficulty

Other participants spoke of pushing forward despite doubts about their abilities or the competitiveness of the field. Lark admitted she did not think she would be accepted into the teacher education program at the University of Ottawa. “Why not?” she said, reflecting on her decision to accept the offer once it came. Her response was understated but reveals courage, one that resists the fear of rejection and embraces opportunity even when self-confidence is low. Meanwhile, Jamie shared a similar experience but with a more proactive tone. After not succeeding the first time, she recommitted herself: “the second year I put in a lot of work into my applications.” Her efforts were rewarded with acceptances from most of the programs she applied to. In both cases, the act of continuing to try, even without the assurance of success, was an expression of perseverance.

c) Resilience Rooted in Purpose and Legacy

For Neve, motivation was grounded in duty rather than self-achievement. She said, “I only noticed I’m going to go to this class... this is my next assignment... I’m doing this to safeguard others [family]... you know, it’s no longer for yourself.” Her words reflect a kind of purposeful resilience. She moved through the program not by dwelling on challenges but by staying fixed on her goals. While Maddox’s story, albeit brief, carried emotional weight. He recalled the words of his mother before she passed: “if acting did not work out, consider teaching.” That memory stayed with him, shaping his decision to pursue education. For Maddox,

perseverance was intergenerational, a continuation of a dream tied to love and memory. Ultimately, Sage's reflection offered perhaps the most distilled articulation of this sub-theme: "just keep going." She repeated the phrase in different ways, grounding it in the belief that small reminders such as encouragements, signs of progress, are enough to fuel endurance. Her words were both personal and universal, a mantra for surviving the long road.

6.4.2 Resonant Thread 2: Professional Identity and Desire for Impact

Across participants' narratives, teaching was never framed as a neutral profession. It was described as an intentional act, deeply connected to who they are and who they hope to become. Teaching was not just about employment, it was about enacting change, embodying care, and striving to leave a meaningful imprint. In this section, I analyze how participants articulated their evolving professional identities and their desire to make an impact. Their stories are grouped into three sub-themes that reflect different expressions of professional purpose: a commitment to enacting change, an ethics of care, and an evolving sense of self through teaching.

a) Enacting Change as a Driving Force

Some participants positioned their professional goals explicitly in terms of structural or systemic change. Ardeen spoke with clarity about wanting to be "a classroom teacher for a good portion," but her long-term aspirations extended beyond the classroom. She imagined working in a position where she could "do something about the gaps that I see in education and do something about diversity and inclusivity." Her undergraduate thesis that focused on immigrant families and access to educational resources reflect an early commitment to educational equity. She carried this concern into her teacher education journey, questioning how to translate theoretical learning into practice: "How could I actually put this into practice? What could I have done better?" Her sense of professional identity was not fixed but always in motion, shaped by reflection, curiosity, and a clear commitment to justice.

Emery's words were more refined but equally powerful. His comment, "I want to be the best educator I know how to be. Sometimes, loving education is leaving the education you don't want to be a part of," underscored a critical self-awareness. His vision of professional identity included the possibility of rejecting aspects of the system that felt misaligned with his values. In doing so, Emery demonstrated that commitment to education does not mean passive acceptance, it means staying true to a vision of what education should be.

Jamie also expressed a desire to teach differently, on her own terms. Coming from a family with a strong professional background, she noted, “I don’t want to just do what everyone in my family is gonna do... I want to choose my own path.” That path led her to teaching, where she found not just personal fulfillment but a sense of responsibility: “I want to reflect [equity and inclusion] in my curriculum.” Jamie’s comments showed a merging of identity, vocation, and transformative vision.

b) Teaching as Ethical Care and Moral Formation

Others emphasized teaching as a form of relational and moral work. Lark shared that her primary goal was not academic performance but character development. “Teach kids about acceptance... make them good people before making them good learners,” she explained. Her statement reflected a clear moral philosophy that placed empathy and humanity at the center of her teaching identity. Neve echoed this sense of responsibility but focused more on developmental care. She recognized that children “need so much help” as they grow. Her view of education was expansive, encompassing academic, social, and emotional needs. For both Lark and Neve, teaching was not just a job, it was a duty to nurture, protect, and guide.

Sage’s narrative beautifully combined both care and representation. She traced her own journey back to teachers who had supported her with “compassion and patience” when she was a newcomer. That experience seeded her desire to be “that person for other students.” For Sage, being a teacher also meant becoming a symbol, someone who reflected back to students that teachers come from diverse backgrounds. Her desire to be seen, and to help others feel seen, was central to her professional identity.

c) Developing Sense of Self and Professional Identity

Some participants spoke about teaching as a form of self-actualization. For Maddox, this took a humble form: “I just want to be a good teacher... the best teacher I can be.” His words were simple but sincere, reflecting his commitment to continuous growth. Meanwhile, Sage and Jamie both described their paths as something that “felt right.” Jamie shared, “It just feels right... this is what I was supposed to do all along,” suggesting that her teaching identity aligned with a deeper sense of purpose. Sage spoke of improving student learning and “improving myself as an educator as well.” This reveals her understanding that growth is mutual, teachers are always learning too. Even small moments mattered. Sage recalled student gestures like notes or drawings as reminders: “You’re making a difference.” These small acts validated her effort and

reaffirmed her purpose. Her words emphasized that impact is not always grand, it often lives in the simple acknowledgments of students.

6.4.3 Resonant Thread 3: Familial Influence and Generational Dreams

In this section, I analyze participants' narratives to illustrate how family expectations, role modeling, and intergenerational values about education informed their trajectories into teaching. While the influence of family surfaced in various ways, it consistently shaped participants' understanding of education as both a vehicle for stability and a means of honouring intergenerational aspirations. Three sub-threads emerged within this theme: parental aspirations for stability and success, generational legacies in teaching, and first-generation pride and informal educational lineage.

a) Parental Aspirations for Stability and Success

For many participants, their families emphasized education as a pathway to financial security and life stability. Ardeen spoke at length about the pressure to follow a path that would lead to comfort and respectability, often clashing with her own sense of purpose. Her parents prioritized employment and financial independence over marriage, she shared:

“A lot of my girlfriends, their parents want them to finish their education and then get married right away. So they started looking for... arranged marriages, that sort of thing. My parents have always been like, we don't care if you get married or not, as long as you have a job, as long as you get a degree... That was their view on education. It's the most important thing in their life, and it should be the most important thing in our life.”

Maddox echoed this emphasis on higher education, stating simply, “They wanted us all to go to university. It was very important to them.” Similarly, Jamie reflected on how her entry into the International Baccalaureate (IB) program in high school was strongly influenced by her parents, particularly her father. His oft-repeated warning, “If you don't have education, then you're gonna be a bum on the street,” stayed with her. While she acknowledged that this kind of motivation felt harsh, she recognized it stemmed from her parents' lived experiences:

“I think it's because, my parents... neither of them has university degrees. They both did college diplomas... even though he [dad] says it, maybe sometimes in the wrong way. I know he's saying it from experience, because he had to work harder to get the jobs that he has... he didn't have as much education and he also saw how his parents struggled...”

Jamie also shared that her decision to remain in Ontario for her teacher education program was influenced by a desire to do what was “best for them,” highlighting the role of familial obligation in her educational decision-making. Across these narratives, education emerged as a non-negotiable priority for parents who viewed academic achievement not only as a means to personal success, but as a safeguard against the hardships they themselves had endured. Therefore, highlighting the intergenerational transmission of aspiration, responsibility, and sacrifice.

b) Generational Legacies in Teaching

Some participants described coming from families where teaching was already part of the lineage, either formally or aspirationally. For Emery, this connection was embodied somewhat literally, his father completed the teacher education program at the same university, and his photo is still displayed in the building: “on the third floor of Lamoureux... his face is one of those pictures there.” Meanwhile, Lark’s account was more emotionally charged. Her mother, once a passionate teacher in Dubai, was unable to transfer her teaching credentials upon immigrating to Canada. Lark described this systemic barrier as painful but also motivating: “It was really sad... but I saw how passionate she was about it... So then I was like... because I’m already in the system. It’s ten times easier for me. So let me follow through.” Likewise, Jamie traced teaching across generations, naming her grandmother and extended family members as educators. In a nutshell, teaching became more than a profession for these participants, it was a familial inheritance, either interrupted by systemic inequities or carried forward with renewed purpose.

c) First-Generation Pride and Informal Educational Lineage

The narratives of Sage, Ardeen, and Maddox highlight a compelling dynamic between formal academic achievement and the enduring influence of informal educational traditions within first-generation families. These participants expressed a strong sense of pride and purpose in being the first in their families to formally enter the teaching profession, despite coming from backgrounds where formal education was limited or non-traditional.

Sage’s story vividly illustrated the emotional landscape of first-generation pride. Her parents did not impose expectations or pressure her toward academic success, but their visible pride became a powerful motivator. “They were so proud. They didn’t push beyond that, they were just happy I got in,” she shared, reflecting on how their joy affirmed the significance of her

educational journey. Beyond formal education, Sage also recalled her father's informal teaching experience in Southeast Asia. "He didn't have a teaching certificate... it was more informal," she explained. Her father's role as an informal educator made her path into formal teaching feel like a tribute to her family's role in learning, even when that learning took place in an informal context. Similarly, Ardeen and Maddox identified themselves as the first in their immediate families to become certified teachers, linking their aspirations to a broader intergenerational narrative. Their aspirations were grounded not only in career goals but also in honouring the educational dreams and values carried forward through their families.

6.4.4 Resonant Thread 4: Aspiration for Relevant, Inclusive, and Transformative Teacher Education

Throughout participants' accounts, it becomes clear that they were not passive recipients of the program but critical observers who carried clear hopes for how teacher education could better prepare them. Whether it was through requests for more inclusive content, more meaningful placement experiences, or more alignment between what was taught and how it was taught, participants called for a more dynamic, relevant, and responsive teacher education experience. Two sub-threads emerged: desire for racial and cultural relevance teaching pedagogies and aspiration for more streamlined course design.

a) Desire for Racially and Culturally Relevant Teaching Pedagogies

Some participants expressed a strong desire for their teacher education program to more explicitly address how to support students from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds. Ardeen called for deeper preparation in how to interact with racialized students, naming a need for "strategies... resources... more classes on teaching racialized students." This was not just a passing suggestion, Ardeen made it clear she was actively looking to gain this knowledge from the program and felt its absence. Jamie similarly gestured toward a lack of visible integration of diversity, noting that while it sometimes appeared in teaching examples, it was far from embedded practice. Echoing this, Maddox expressed his desire for greater coherence between the pedagogical ideals taught and the methods used to teach them. He explained, "the stuff they're teaching us is like... here's how you should engage students... hands on activities, differentiation, getting students engaged... And then, the way that we're being taught these things is usually, is often not that way."

Meanwhile, Emery entered the program with a deep commitment to authenticity. His statement, “I had lost a lot of hope of doing it in the Canadian context,” hints at earlier disappointments or disillusionments yet he still arrived with a determination to push toward something better. In this thread, aspirational capital extends beyond the conventional notion of ‘aspirations’ as individual goals or ambitions. Instead, it emerges through their critical observations of what is absent in their teacher education programs and enduring hope for systemic change.

b) Aspiration for More Streamlined Course Design

Several participants voiced a clear aspiration for a more streamlined and coherent course design within their teacher education programs. A recurring point of frustration stemmed from perceived redundancies and a lack of progression across coursework. Lark, for example, articulated her concerns about repetition across classes: “I would love if the teacher education [program] be re-evaluated... like some of the classes we’re finding it a bit repetitive... I have a Monday class and my Thursday class... we’re doing the same activities in both classes.” Similarly, Neve questioned the necessity of the number of courses, expressing that certain modules might have been consolidated: “Some of the courses could have been condensed... fewer classes and more placement would make sense.” Drawing on her experience, she added: “There’s no replacement for being in the classroom [placement].” Maddox echoed these concerns, describing a lack of meaningful progression in the curriculum: “We have a part two of something... it’s the same thing we did last year.” Collectively, these reflections highlight a perception that course content was, at times, fragmented or unnecessarily repetitive. Participants were not only able to identify these redundancies but also connect them to a broader desire for a curriculum that evolves meaningfully over time and prioritizes authentic, in-classroom experiences.

6.5 Familial Capital

The CCW literature positions familial capital as the cultural knowledge, values, and support systems cultivated within kinship networks that extend beyond the immediate family to encompass a broader “familia” of relatives, ancestors, and close community members (Yosso, 2005). Findings in this study reinforce and extend these arguments, revealing that familial support functions not only as a primary source of motivation for racialized teacher candidates to

persist in their teacher education programs, but also as a vital safeguard against the isolation they often experienced in institutions where their representation is limited. Data analysis identified five interconnected themes within this form of cultural wealth: (1) family as motivation and moral anchor, (2) intergenerational influence and educational legacy, (3) familial capital as resistance and resilience, (4) community, kinship, and extended family networks, and (5) cultural transmission through family practice.

6.5.1 Resonant Thread 1: Family as Motivation and Moral Anchor

Participants expressed that family served as both a motivational force and a moral reference point in their educational and personal development. Their narratives demonstrate that familial relationships are not only emotional support systems but also guideposts that shape their values, decisions, and sense of responsibility. Several sub-themes emerged, capturing the ways family members have influenced participants' resilience, ethical frameworks, and academic drive. These insights are grouped into three primary sub-threads: family as academic motivation, family as emotional anchor, and family as moral compass.

a) Family as Academic Motivation

In several accounts, family expectations, sacrifices, and encouragement served as significant motivational drivers for academic persistence and excellence. Ardeen emphasized a deep desire to meet the expectations of her parents by striving to be a good teacher, explicitly stating, “I know my parents want me to be a good teacher, so I have to push myself to do well... and take every opportunity that I can... to be the best teacher.” Similarly, Maddox shared that academic achievement was framed as a form of gift-giving in childhood. He explained that when he was younger, he would ask his parents what they want for their birthdays, and his parents’ response: “I just want you to get good grades... that's all you need to do.” And because of this, Maddox was driven to do well in school to “make them happy.” These expressions show that parental expectations were internalized as personal goals, resulting in a sense of duty and responsibility to succeed not only for oneself, but as a form of familial reciprocation. For Sage, the drive to excel is rooted in a broader intergenerational narrative: “I constantly think about how I can help make their lives better.” These accounts reflect a strong ethic of care toward parents, making academic performance a relational act.

b) Family as Emotional Anchor

Beyond academic motivation, family served as an emotional lifeline, particularly during moments of transition and isolation. Jamie's experience upon arriving in Ottawa is a moving example. She explained that she could have not survived the "mini depression" she went through had it not of her mother's urging to eat and go grocery shopping. Her mother's constant phone calls provided her the emotional regulation needed to regain a sense of control. Similarly, Ardeen's decision to choose University of Ottawa was driven by her sister's emotional needs while doing her undergraduate studies: "she felt very isolated... all of us were back in Brampton and she was alone here." This reflects a reciprocal sense of responsibility within the family unit, where emotional well-being is shared and actively maintained. Neve framed her family as a steady emotional resource, saying: "every day that I leave the house, I think how wonderful to come back to my family." This ongoing presence of family in her mental landscape provided reassurance and comfort in the face of daily challenges. Moreover, Emery's reflection added a unique layer to this sub-thread. While he did not live with his father, the routine of being picked up from school instilled a sense of predictability and emotional stability for him. This core memory encapsulates how small acts of consistency during formative years create long-lasting emotional anchors. His statement, "there was a consistency for me... I had a life to bring it into," reflects how even fragmented family structures can offer profound emotional grounding.

c) Family as Moral Compass

Several participants described how their families shaped their moral and social behaviour. Lark, for example, recalled her mother teaching her to show respect, especially around food. That lesson stayed with her and later influenced how she interacted with others. She shared a moment with a roommate who called a traditional East Asian dish "gross." Lark responded, "Don't say it's gross, it's not gross, you just don't like it." This response reflects how deeply her family values continue to guide her everyday choices, especially in shared or cross-cultural spaces. For Lark, manners and respect were not abstract ideals, they were clear expectations from home that she now carries into university life. Sage's account reflects similar themes, as her moral compass is closely tied to her parents' sacrifices and life experiences. In everything she does, she considers how her parents raised her, what they have endured in life, and how she can contribute to improving it. For Sage, her family remains a constant source of motivation and grounding.

6.5.2 Resonant Thread 2: Education as Pathway Out of Familial Hardship

For some participants, education is more than personal achievement but a pathway to stability and a reflection of sacrifice and hope across generations. This is especially true for racialized and immigrant families, where schooling carries both opportunity and protective guidance. Participants' stories reveal how family histories, migration experiences, and encounters with systemic barriers shape the value placed on education. From parents emphasizing education as a shield against hardship to experiences of privilege or racial exclusion, these narratives illustrate how intergenerational legacies shape engagement with schooling.

Ardeen offered a detailed look at how education is positioned as a way out of hardship within immigrant families. Her parents, who continue to experience financial pressure while supporting three children in university, see education as the singular route to stability: "nothing else matters to them except all of their kids getting a good education and getting a good job..." Their influence was not only in the prioritization of school but also in the specific careers chosen, often guided by perceived financial returns. This is not presented as controlling but as protective, a reflection of the struggles they endured upon arrival in Canada. As well, Jamie's story echoes this connection between hardship and aspiration. Her father's insistence that "education is everything" came from personal experience, wherein he lacked a university degree and saw how that limited his opportunities. In contrast to Ardeen's family, who are still in the thick of supporting multiple children through university, Jamie's parents had already navigated those limitations, and their message to her was clear, that is, education shields you from instability.

On the one hand, Lark, reflecting on her experience in Dubai, noted that students there seemed to "really appreciate their education" because it was expensive and selective. The contrast she observed after moving to Canada pointed to how educational privilege in some countries sharpens awareness of its value, especially when it is tied to class or migration histories. Neve, on the other hand, added a different dimension through her husband's early experiences of racism in Canadian schools. She described his early schooling as "reliving those years," difficult, isolating, and shaped by racial trauma. While Neve did not frame this experience as her own, it formed part of her awareness of how education can reproduce exclusion even as it is celebrated.

6.5.3 Resonant Thread 3: Familial Capital as Resistance and Resilience

Across participants' responses, the significant ways familial networks function as a source of both resistance and resilience in the face of systemic, emotional, and cultural challenges are evident. Their narratives expose how familial presence, either physically, emotionally, or symbolically, equips them with strength to navigate educational, social, and personal spaces that may otherwise feel isolating or adversarial. Several meaningful sub-themes emerged from the data.

a) Emotional Anchoring Through Familial Presence and Memory

Participants described how familial memory or presence provided emotional reinforcement in unfamiliar or challenging environments. To cite, Ardeen's reflection highlights how a familiar food brought by a colleague in her placement immediately connected her to her mother, evoking not only nostalgia but also a deeper emotional support. She stated that it made her "feel less alone," emphasizing how the sensory reminder acted as a substitute for her mother's presence. This shows how the symbolic capital of family, through food, memory, or shared culture, acts as a stabilizing force. Ardeen's use of phrases such as "like a crutch" and "help me when I feel out of place" suggests how deeply familial connections support emotional resilience. Similarly, Neve speaks about extended family as a structural and emotional support system, emphasizing the collective resilience that can emerge when multiple generations live together. She recalled, "I didn't live with extended family all the time, but anytime my aunts would get sick, or someone had a baby... they all show up at my father's house, suddenly we would have beds on the floor and five people on the bed... you could always expect things to be happening." This reflection illustrates how family presence offers practical and emotional support, reinforcing her point that "the resource of family is a thing that helps us to cope in this hostile world." In this context, multigenerational living is not a burden, but a meaningful and strategic form of resilience, often misunderstood in Western frameworks that prioritize individual independence.

b) Role Modeling and Intergenerational Learning

For others, family serves as a model for navigating failure, persistence, and care. Lark draws strength from observing her mother cope with unrealized dreams. Witnessing her mother's resilience becomes a reference point for how to manage failure during her own practicum: "I was able to connect that to my placement... when things didn't work out." Her narrative suggests that

familial stories of adaptation can shape one's internal narrative of perseverance. In a more implicit way, Emery gestures toward the weight of his life experiences and how they shape his relationship to effort and purpose: "there's no satisfaction I can get from not doing enough." While his statement is less overtly connected to family, it suggests an ingrained ethic of striving, which may be understood as a reflection of familial or cultural expectations, particularly given the broader themes in his narrative.

c) Family Encouragement and Flexible Support System

Maddox's experience highlights how familial support can be unexpectedly affirming, especially in cases where cultural stereotypes might suggest otherwise. He describes anticipating "pushback" from his East Asian immigrant parents when he decided to pursue a creative path, yet they responded with unreserved support. This moment of affirmation: "if this is what you want to do, then we support you," reflects a form of familial capital that runs counter to deficit-based assumptions about immigrant families being rigid or unsupportive. It also reveals how emotional validation from family can embolden career and identity choices, even in paths that carry uncertainty.

d) Navigating Adult Duties and Responsibilities

Sage describes a more complex form of familial capital, shaped by the responsibilities she was expected to carry from a young age. As the child of immigrant parents, she had to assist with "documents or anything related to school or government" and that she had to figure out how to fill out forms despite not understanding them herself. She recalls, "I had to navigate those adult responsibilities at a young age." While this early adultification introduced stress and uneven burden, it also honed her skills in advocacy, navigation, and care, capacities that have likely shaped her orientation as a future educator. Her story is a reminder that familial capital sometimes emerges through challenge and expectation, not just comfort and support.

6.5.4 Resonant Thread 4: Community, Kinship, and Extended Family Networks

Participants offered a range of reflections that revealed the sustaining power of familial and cultural ties both within households and across broader communal relationships. Their responses offer textured insights into how connections beyond the nuclear family can support identity, belonging, and even professional growth in teacher education spaces. This theme

emerges across two main sub-threads: (1) recognition and connection through shared culture, and (2) support and resilience through extended family systems.

a) Recognition and Connection Through Shared Culture

Lark's account is particularly compelling in the way it illustrates how cultural recognition fostered kinship in her practicum placement. When students and their parents saw Lark, someone who shared their South Asian background, they responded with warmth and familiarity. The classroom became a site of cultural resonance, rather than cultural distance. What stands out is not just the sense of connection with the children, but how this extended to the parents. This moment reflects how representation in classrooms can invite comfort, trust, and relational closeness, particularly for families who often do not see themselves reflected in school settings. Jamie echoed similar sentiments, but from a peer-oriented perspective. She described how having colleagues who shared her cultural background allowed her to build closer, more intuitive relationships. Her understanding of family, rooted in culture, influenced how she connected with others and felt understood herself. For Jamie, the sense of shared understanding was not just interpersonal; it shaped her professional identity and sense of ease within the teacher education program.

b) Support and Resilience Through Extended Family Systems

For Neve, kinship operated on a dynamic and flexible model. Her description of extended family showing up during illness or major life events leading to a house full of people sleeping on floors, emphasized a deeply communal response to life's unpredictability. What is striking is the normalcy of this model in her narrative: the unpredictability was expected, and support was mobilized naturally. This ability to call upon an extended network when needed not only shapes how she sees family but also how she understands care and responsibility, which are values that surely inform her emerging teaching practice. Maddox similarly described a large, tight-knit extended family, citing its size and frequent gatherings as a consistent source of support. He linked this support directly to feelings of affirmation, noting that being surrounded by others who shared his identity helped him manage persistent insecurities: "While I still struggled with insecurities... there was a light... there's a lot of other people like me around and who I knew

would have similar experiences.” For Maddox, the presence of culturally similar others offered a stabilizing influence, creating a sense of shared experience that made him feel less alone.

6.5.5 Resonant Thread 5: Cultural Transmission Through Family Practices

Participants shared powerful reflections that illuminate how their families actively passed down cultural values, practices, and worldviews, which are often in dynamic, embodied, and intentional ways. Their narratives show how culture was not simply taught, but lived, travelled, eaten, and worn. What stands out is how family plays a key role in building both a strong sense of cultural identity and ideas about how to teach. Two sub-threads help organize these findings: (1) embodied cultural immersion through experience, and (2) cultural continuity and the complex negotiation with identity.

a) Embodied Cultural Immersion Through Experience

Lark’s story offers one of the most vivid illustrations of this sub-thread. Her mother viewed travel as a vehicle for cultural learning, extending far beyond traditional classroom or textbook methods. Whether it was visiting Cambodia during their time in Dubai or traversing Canada’s diverse regions after moving here, her mother intentionally exposed Lark to different places as a way of teaching cultural appreciation and citizenship. What stands out is the relational effort behind this, that is, cultural learning was not just about absorbing information but about seeing and feeling places firsthand. The trips within Canada are particularly notable, not only for their geographic range, including Iqaluit and the Northwest Territories, but also for the complexity of reactions they provoked. Her ambivalence toward places like Manitoba suggests that cultural exposure does not always lead to immediate appreciation, but it does create lasting impressions. Lark’s grateful, humorous, and reflective tone also reveals how these early practices continue to inform her worldview and likely influence how she approaches teaching.

This idea of cultural experience as pedagogy also appears in Ardeen’s reflection, although with a different focus. Ardeen’s family did not just celebrate culture, they celebrated it in community. She described participating in festivals, wearing traditional dresses, and enjoying her mother’s cooking with a strong sense of pride. What made it especially impactful was that these experiences were mirrored by others around her. The feeling of cultural celebration being shared, rather than isolated, created a sense of ease and belonging. Ardeen’s lack of hesitation to

express her culture, even as a child, speaks to the power of growing up in an environment where that culture was visible, valued, and alive in daily practice.

b) Cultural Continuity and the Complex Negotiation with Identity

Maddox's response anchors this sub-thread by highlighting the value of cultural celebrations such as Lunar New Year and the Dragon Boat Festival. What is especially interesting here is his recognition that these experiences were accessible not solely through his immediate family, but because of his connection to a broader cultural community. Reflecting on the tradition of giving red envelopes during the New Year, he remarked, "I might not have had [that] experience if it was just my family. Because if we were the only ones, like, who would we have given red envelopes to?" For Maddox, being part of a larger East Asian community offered "a lot of different perspectives on my own culture," ultimately enriching his sense of cultural identity. Similarly, Sage highlighted the importance of cultural transmission through family practices. Since immigrating to Canada, many of her relatives from Southeast Asia have also joined her family, bringing with them traditions that remain central to their shared identity. She described how her family "brought our culture and traditions with us," including their unique way of celebrating the New Year. For Sage, this familial continuity not only "creates a bond," but also provides motivation to succeed, as she feels supported and inspired by relatives who believe in her and whom she wants to make proud.

In contrast, Jamie introduced a more complex and challenging dynamic. She spoke about the "mild intergenerational trauma" her parents may have experienced upon immigrating to Canada, which contributed to the absence of cultural practices in her upbringing, especially on her father's side. A pivotal moment came during Asian Heritage Month when a teacher showcased a traditional dance from Jamie's cultural background. She recalled, "I remembered thinking I had no idea what it was... and I really felt bad." It led her to critically reflect on her cultural identity, wondering whether a lack of cultural knowledge made her any less Southeast Asian. Collectively, these narratives demonstrate that cultural identity is not uniformly transmitted; rather, it is shaped through the complex interplay of community engagement, familial continuity, and intergenerational experiences.

6.6 Social Capital

Social capital refers to the networks of people and community resources that provide instrumental and emotional support for navigating societal institutions (Yosso, 2005). CCW scholars further note that, historically, racialized individuals have drawn on social capital to access education, legal justice, employment, and healthcare, subsequently reinvesting the knowledge and resources gained back into their communities (Gómez-Quíñones, 1973; Stevenson, 1997). Findings from this study reinforce these assertions, revealing that social connections serve as vital emotional and academic anchors for participants. The data also highlight that within networks where participants share identities, they find safety, affirmation, and refuge. Notably, one of the most compelling findings aligning with CCW literature is that participants strategically leverage their social capital as a tool for fostering inclusion and engaging in socially responsive practice. To illuminate these findings further, five interrelated themes emerged within this form of cultural wealth: (1) peer networks as emotional and academic anchors, (2) safe spaces through shared identity, (3) cultural communities as identity and support structures, and (4) mentorship and professional guidance, and (5) social capital as a tool for inclusion and future practice.

6.6.1 Resonant Thread 1: Peer Networks as Emotional and Academic Anchors

Across participants' accounts, peer networks surfaced as crucial sources of social capital. These connections not only helped participants manage the pressures of teacher education but also created environments of belonging and mutual accountability. While each participant described their peer relationships differently, three sub-threads emerged clearly: (1) emotional anchoring through peer support, (2) early awareness of social exchange and belonging, and (3) peer networks as academic accountability systems.

a) Emotional Anchoring Through Peer Support

Ardeen offers a multifaceted look into the emotional landscape of peer support. Her peers, some of whom also come from racialized backgrounds, serve not only as academic motivators who “push her to work harder” but also as emotional anchors. She frequently meets a close friend on campus to de-stress, talk, and reflect on their day. This daily rhythm builds consistency and provides emotional cushion within an otherwise demanding academic environment. Perhaps the most compelling insight arises in how Ardeen's racialized peers within

the B.Ed. program support her during moments of self-doubt. She describes them as her “rock” whenever she questions her potential to become a good teacher. Their support is tangible and affirming, as they offer direct reassurances: “we’re here to support you... we totally understand,” along with concrete reminders of her accomplishments. This peer validation carries particular weight because it is grounded in shared lived experience. They are not just emotional supporters; they are credible ones because they are living the same challenges.

b) Early Awareness of Social Reciprocity and Belonging

Emery recalls an emotional childhood friendship rooted in material and emotional generosity. He describes how their bond began when a classmate regularly shared snacks with him, treats which his own family could not afford, such as “chocolate chip banana muffins.” Each time his friend offered something, Emery would respond with heartfelt gratitude, saying things like, “You’re my best buddy. I love you...” to which his friend would casually reply, “I don’t even want to have too many snacks.” While simple, this memory speaks volumes about how children intuitively understand social dynamics and reciprocity. Emery’s reflection, delivered with humor and warmth, also surfaces early experiences of economic disparity and the gratitude that can shape deep interpersonal ties. This early form of social capital, founded on care rather than academic achievement, suggests that emotional support systems begin forming long before formal schooling becomes rigorous. It also highlights how small gestures carry significant emotional weight, especially for children navigating environments with limited resources.

c) Peer Networks as Academic Accountability Systems

Jamie, Maddox, and Sage each describe how peer networks function as informal systems of accountability and academic reinforcement. Maddox, for instance, finds value in a smaller core group of peers who are “going through the same experiences” and “struggling with the same things.” His use of the word “support system” captures how these peers help him process insecurities and failures, offering not only sympathy but shared insight. This mutual learning creates a space for vulnerability that is not isolating. Along the same lines, Jamie speaks to group work, noting how her friends’ shared values, such as caring about school, completing tasks on time, delivering quality work, foster trust. She contrasts this with previous experiences of unreliable group members, making the case that social capital is not just about emotional support but also about operational reliability. For her, being surrounded by like-minded peers increases both confidence and performance. Sage further illustrates this with a layer of cultural nuance.

Her group not only functions effectively on academic tasks but also includes two racialized peers with whom she shares “we already have that connection in that sense... like that belonging, that mutual respect, and appreciation for each other.” Together, these stories show that peer groups formed among racialized students do more than just offer friendship, they create a space where they hold each other accountable, support one another emotionally, and feel a sense of shared understanding and trust. This kind of support helps them feel more confident, stay motivated, and succeed both personally and academically.

6.6.2 Resonant Thread 2: Safe Spaces Through Shared Identity

Participants consistently described the power of identity-based connections in shaping their sense of safety, belonging, and openness within teacher education program. While all participants valued peer and professional relationships, it was in moments of shared racial or cultural identity that many expressed a deeper sense of comfort and authenticity. These relationships, whether with peers, professors, or even young students, created micro-spaces of solidarity where participants could be more vulnerable, feel seen, and communicate without fear of misunderstanding or dismissal.

a) Shared Identity and Relational Authenticity

Participants like Ardeen and Emery shared how connecting with racialized colleagues or professors enabled a level of trust and comfort not always present in their interactions with others. Ardeen described her ease in seeking support from her teaching partner, also a racialized educator, rather than her white associate teacher, highlighting how identity played a role in determining who felt safe to approach. This dynamic was further evident in Ardeen’s reflection on a course within teacher education taught by a racialized professor. She explained:

It was quite different... Saba's class... I felt she understood us a little bit better, like racialized teacher candidates a little bit better... I felt a lot more comfortable going to her because she was also a visible minority. Whereas some of my other teachers, although, they're very outgoing, and they are always there to help... I feel less comfortable going to those professors just because I don't find a way to kind of relate to them.

Emery offered a complementary yet more complex perspective. While he too described the value of learning in diverse environments, particularly in helping him shift his understanding of racism from a personal issue to a systemic one, his experience also illustrated how trust could

be built across racial lines. Reflecting on a meaningful relationship with a white professor, Emery shared, “She brings a lot of her human self into practice... I can let my guard down a little bit because she actually listens. She doesn’t listen to accommodate professionally. She just listens.” Emery’s insight adds an important nuance to this sub-thread. While shared identity often facilitated trust, he emphasized that trust was also built when educators engaged with him on a human level, that is, beyond the confines of professional decorum or institutional expectations. His professor’s willingness to “just listen” without performativity created space for honest dialogue and self-reflection.

Yet, it is important to note that Emery’s experience was an exception rather than the rule. Most participants consistently pointed to the absence of shared identity as a barrier to fully accessing mentorship and support. The difference, as articulated by both Ardeen and Emery, was not merely about who was available to help, but about who felt relatable, safe, and capable of understanding their lived realities without requiring justification. Even when white professors were described as friendly and helpful, their inability to relate to the racialized experiences of their students often limited the depth of trust and openness in those relationships.

b) Reflexivity Through Safe and Relational Spaces

Across the narratives, participants consistently emphasized the emotional safety that emerged from peer relationships rooted in shared cultural or racial identities. These connections offered a form of kinship through which they could navigate their teacher education experiences with less emotional work. Maddox encapsulated this sentiment succinctly, stating, “I don’t need to explain what it’s like to be the only person of colour in the room.” This sense of mutual understanding enabled participants to vent, process frustration, and receive validation without the burden of contextualizing their experiences.

For Jamie, emotional safety was found in identifying what she described as “her people” beyond the familial sphere—peers with whom she could speak candidly about identity, struggle, and the nuances of navigating teacher education as a racialized individual. Sage similarly highlighted the vital role of peer connection, noting that without the support of fellow racialized teacher candidates, her experience in the program would have felt far more isolating: “Without them it would be so hard for me to get through the program.” These relationships offered more than friendship; they served as critical spaces of affirmation, solidarity, and resilience.

The research interview itself emerged as a safe space for reflection and honesty. Emery articulated this dynamic clearly, contrasting the constraints of academic assessments with the openness of the interview. He explained, “It’s therapeutic for me to have a space to be honest, because I felt like I can’t be honest... You can’t be honest in your assessments... And by the time you do... it’s affecting your grade.” For Emery, the interview setting created a rare opportunity to engage in unfiltered self-expression. Sage echoed this sentiment, describing her participation in the study as a uniquely reflective and healing experience: “We’re talking about things that we’ve never really talked to someone about to this extent.” She described the research process itself as feeling like a “therapy session,” highlighting the scarcity of such safe spaces in formal academic settings. Meanwhile, Ardeen further illuminated this absence, pointing to a broader institutional gap in supporting racialized teacher candidates. She noted the lack of discourse around navigating teacher education from a racialized lens. She shared, “There wasn’t really much discussion about this topic happening at all.” In her view, the program lacked both structured opportunities and informal spaces to learn from racialized colleagues or mentors about how to connect with minority students: “There’s nothing about it... we didn’t really have much discussion around that topic.” Together, these narratives highlight the significance of shared identity in cultivating emotional safety and the urgent need for institutional spaces that centre and validate the experiences of racialized teacher candidates.

6.6.3 Resonant Thread 3: Cultural Communities as Identity and Support Structures

Participants across the study spoke with clarity and depth about the ways cultural communities shaped their sense of belonging, identity, and support. For many, these communities provided more than cultural familiarity, but they were protective spaces where they could feel seen, understood, and emotionally grounded. For example, Ardeen and Emery both described the profound impact of growing up in culturally familiar environments. Ardeen’s reflections on her elementary school years highlight how a community of immigrants shaped her earliest sense of educational belonging: “All of my friends were immigrants... we were very new to the country.” This early exposure to shared cultural and migration experiences laid a foundation of safety and social ease that she did not take for granted later in life. Similarly, Emery described feeling free and unburdened as a child among East African refugees: “Our moms would talk in a language that I don’t speak, but it’s the language of my last name... that’s

when I was the most troublesome as a kid, because I was so free.” These moments of freedom and familiarity within a cultural context suggest that early exposure to community-built environments can significantly shape a young person’s sense of ease and expressive freedom that persist into adulthood.

This is also demonstrated in Sage reflections as to how cultural traditions and diasporic networks continue to serve as an anchor into adulthood. Although Sage does not remember every detail of her country of origin, the cultural ties remain vivid and meaningful for her where her family and relatives gather during special cultural occasions. As a result, her culture and tradition are “not erased at all, it’s still very present.” This continuity of tradition was not only personally meaningful but helped foster community ties and a sense of rootedness, even across generations. Just as Maddox’s reflections demonstrate when he spoke about how networks within his East Asian community in Hamilton, Mississauga, and New York offered both practical and emotional support. Whether it was shared meals, community recognition, or informal access to resources, Maddox emphasized, “having that larger sense of community did help... it’s made me feel part of a bigger community.”

While many participants described cultural communities as foundational and supportive, others articulated the complexity and occasional gaps in those connections. Ardeen, for example, noted that when she entered a predominantly white space during her undergraduate studies, she observed cultural dissonance even within and among few racialized groups that were present. She explained, “They don’t really speak the same languages as me. They don’t have the same culture as me. So that’s a bit weird.” Neve’s account further illustrates this tension. While she expressed a strong desire to form deeper cultural friendships, “I would like to see that they go really, genuinely two ways,” she had not yet found those relationships. Her words speak to the emotional toll of seeking meaningful connection and not quite finding it, even in diverse settings.

6.6.4 Resonant Thread 4: Mentorship and Professional Guidance

Participants’ narratives underscored the pivotal role of mentorship in shaping their sense of belonging, confidence, and professional development within educational and practicum settings. For Emery, a meaningful connection with his program supervisor, who is “a white man,” proved especially impactful. Despite not sharing the same lived experiences, the supervisor offered consistent affirmation and empathy. Emery reflected, “he was very human...

very validating,” which made “the year so much more doable.” This highlights the importance of mentors who can hold space for vulnerability with care and humility. Emery also recalled a different supervisor from Nova Scotia who brought levity into stressful moments: “Let’s go grab some margaritas... and call it a day.” These examples of mentorship, both emotionally supportive and humanizing, provided not just academic or professional direction, but a sense of psychological safety. Sage similarly emphasized the relational element of mentorship. Her associate teacher encouraged a sense of shared ownership and agency, telling her, “I want you to feel like this is your classroom as much as it is mine.” This approach demonstrated a shift away from hierarchical models of mentorship toward more collaborative and empowering dynamics. Echoing this, Neve described a mentor who was “cordial” and “professional,” and who expressed pride in supporting student teachers. As Neve described, “she gave me everything I needed to succeed.” While this relationship lacked overt emotional expression, it nonetheless demonstrated intentionality and a clear commitment to her success. Meanwhile, Lark’s practicum experiences showed her how different mentorship can be depending on the context. One mentor, a young kindergarten teacher, reminded her that “too much changes in kindergarten... too much happening” and shared her lesson plans as a guide, while explaining that they might not work in every classroom. Lark also reflected on the broader impact of having diverse professors in her teacher education program. She reflected, “I think it’s good to see the different kinds of teaching through our different professors. It’s good to see what you like and what you don’t like.” Even experiences that lacked strong mentorship value were meaningful, helping her discern the kind of educator she hopes to become.

6.6.5 Resonant Thread 5: Social Capital as a Tool for Inclusion and Future Practice

Participants’ reflections reveal how personal histories, cultural awareness, and meaningful relationships within community spaces have shaped their educational values and approaches. The analysis below is organized into two key sub-themes that illustrate how participants connect their past with their professional vision, namely: (1) from lived experience to intentional practice, and (2) community as the bedrock of inclusive practice.

a) From Lived Experience to Intentional Practice

A clear underlying thread across participant responses is the desire to transform personal experiences of support (or lack thereof) and connection into inclusive educational practices.

Ardeen's response reflects this directly. She expressed a commitment to extending the kind of attentiveness she wished she received to her future students. Her words signal a values-driven approach to teaching that is not only reactive to students in need but anticipates those needs with empathy. She framed this not as a teaching strategy, but as an extension of how she believes people should show up for one another. Drawing on her lived experience as South Asian, she underscored the importance of having an educator who understand where another South Asian student is coming from. She explained:

“When they're [students] getting stressed over a mark... I can't just say it's just a mark or get over it... or it's just a mark, you'll be fine. No, I understand their stress over that mark because they're coming from a family where education is like super important. They're coming from a culture where, like you have to try hard.”

For Ardeen, this understanding is crucial to help students move forward and help them grow and “be more confident, and at the end of the day, be more successful.” Similarly, Sage spoke to the idea of carrying personal insight forward, but with an emphasis on visibility and representation. She discussed her own experience of being racialized and how this gives her a unique opportunity to make often-ignored cultures and histories more visible to her students. For her, inclusion is not only about welcoming all students but also about actively teaching them that marginalized groups exist, matter, and have deep cultural value. Her future practice is shaped not just by who she is, but by what she knows has been missing.

b) Community as the Bedrock of Inclusive Practice

Emery's reflection brings in a broader view of social capital not just as something operating within the classroom but as something cultivated in and through the community. His experience in a setting where the school was deeply embedded in community life left a lasting impression. He described meeting students, parents, and community members all in one space. Watching students work outside the classroom, such as in local cashier roles, gave him a sense of how education and daily life can be deeply interconnected. For Emery, the community was not a separate influence but the very foundation on which everything else should be built on. He made it clear that in his future practice, community would not be an afterthought or an outreach effort, it would be the starting point. This speaks to a relational, place-based understanding of inclusion, where school is not isolated from lived experience but deeply responsive to it.

6.7 Linguistic Capital

Linguistic capital covers the intellectual and social skills cultivated through experiences with multiple languages, diverse communication styles, and varied expressive forms (Yosso, 2005). Rooted in research on bilingual education, it acknowledges that racialized students often enter school possessing rich linguistic repertoires shaped by storytelling traditions, oral histories, and cultural expressions such as music, art, and poetry. For many, bilingualism also involves real-world responsibilities, such as translating for family members that further enhance metalinguistic awareness, teaching skills, civic engagement, and social maturity. While the participants' experiences in this study align with existing literature on linguistic capital, this research adds nuance by highlighting how participants actively draw on their multilingual abilities to promote equity and inclusion within their teaching practice. The following sections elaborate on three key themes that emerged: (1) language as a pedagogical and relational tool for equity and inclusion, (2) voice, agency, and resistance through language, and (3) strategic code-switching, the cost of assimilation, and the desire to reclaim.

6.7.1 Resonant Thread 1: Language as a Pedagogical and Relational Tool for Equity and Inclusion

Participants shared insightful reflections on how language shapes not only their instructional practices but also their relationships with students, their own sense of identity, and their visions of equitable classrooms. They articulated how their lived experiences with language, whether multilingualism or linguistic exclusion, informed their teaching philosophies and day-to-day decisions. Their insights highlight the nuanced role language plays in both building bridges and confronting barriers within educational spaces.

a) Multilingualism as a Relational Asset

Ardeen offered the most expansive reflections on this thread. As a multilingual educator, she described language not merely as a tool for instruction but as a bridge to empathy and cultural connection. Her excitement when teaching students who shared her cultural background was palpable: “when they get excited, they're like, ‘Oh, I want to share my stories.’ And I'm like, ‘Yeah, that's like super exciting.’” Ardeen's ability to switch between languages allowed her to scaffold student understanding more meaningfully, noting:

“Being multilingual myself gives me a different avenue to connect with them, and to help them better understand the content if they don't understand it in English... for example, if something is similar in English, like maybe the sentence structure is similar in English, and in Hindi I can connect that for them and say, ‘You know what like. It's just like it's the same as when we speak Hindi like you can use that same sentence structure. But you just need different vocabulary...’”

Here, Ardeen demonstrates a type of pedagogical responsiveness that points to how language fluency, paired with cultural sensitivity, cultivates a more inclusive and affirming classroom experience. Similarly, Maddox positioned language as intertwined with identity, stating that it “can be a strength in terms of connecting with other students... who are going through similar experiences or similar backgrounds.” Here, the ability to connect linguistically became a strategy for relational teaching that acknowledges shared struggle and solidarity.

b) Language and Inclusive Teaching Practice

Several participants emphasized the role of language in shaping inclusive, affirming pedagogical approaches. Jamie shared an awareness of how seemingly small changes in language can signal inclusion: “instead of saying, like boys and girls, I’ll just say... friends,” or “instead of saying, Oh, tell your parents, I’ll say... tell your grownups.” These shifts, while subtle, reflect a deliberate effort to create classroom environments where all students feel seen. Likewise, Sage emphasized the importance of linguistic diversity in fostering equity. She wanted students to recognize that “there’s so many different languages in the world that you might not even know of,” expressing a commitment to carrying that awareness into her future classroom. She also advocated for racially diverse faculty voices, noting that they offer “a different lens” necessary for preparing teachers to serve diverse student populations. Both Jamie and Sage revealed how linguistic choices are inseparable from broader commitments to justice-oriented education.

c) Language and Broader Systemic Observations

Several other participants reflected on the broader sociopolitical and institutional dimensions of language. Emery critiqued performative practices at the teacher education program, commenting, “you’re not incentivized to engage with the truest nature of the pedagogy that uOttawa talks about... even when they do the land acknowledgement.” His remarks underscore a disconnect between institutional language and meaningful engagement with the communities they claim to represent. Lark’s commentary expanded on this, pointing out that

discussions around English language learners often reduce their challenges to comprehension issues, neglecting the emotional and cultural burden of navigating a new country. She asserted, “It’s not just a language barrier... it’s hard for them to fit in socially,” illustrating the complexity of linguistic capital in practice. She also noted that a lack of racial diversity among faculty limited open discussion and meaningful perspective-sharing. Furthermore, Neve added a developmental perspective by discussing how language immersion during childhood shaped her cognitive development. She noted, “they might speak English as their first language, but they’re not really thinking deeply in it,” suggesting that linguistic fluency alone does not guarantee critical or analytical literacy. This comment also implies a pedagogical gap in cultivating deep, reflective thought among students.

6.7.2 Resonant Thread 2: Voice, Agency, and Resistance Through Language

Across narratives, participants revealed how language operates as a powerful site of identity negotiation, resistance, and relational practice. Their insights offered nuanced views into how speech, both verbal and embodied, became a mechanism for claiming agency, naming injustice, and creating space for students and communities often overlooked. Participants used language to surface discomfort, to challenge dominant assumptions, and to model pedagogy of care.

a) Confronting Dominant Narratives through Critical Awareness

Emery's reflections offered one of the most vulnerable insights in this sub-thread. He spoke about how language connects deeply to who he is as a racialized person, saying: “Because who else did you expect me to be in this body? ... I didn't choose this height. I didn't choose the skin colour. I didn't choose this manner of existing.” His words challenged the assumptions people often make about Black and racialized bodies, assumptions that come before someone even speaks or acts. Instead of trying to meet narrow ideas of what it means to be “excellent” by other people’s standards, Emery pushed for honesty in teaching, saying: “You just kind of have to say, ‘This is me.’” For him, language became a way to both let go and push back: letting go of the pressure to fit in, while also standing strong in his identity. His reflection shows the emotional toll of teaching while being racialized, and how speaking honestly can be a powerful way to claim one’s humanity in systems that often value fitting in more than being real.

Lark's reflections extend this resistance by foregrounding a more explicit critique of dominant cultural narratives. Having grown up travelling and being exposed to different cultures, she described how her time in Nunavut challenged mainstream understandings of Canadian life. Recalling criticisms of Inuit hunting practices, she noted:

"I remember hearing this issue, like the whole animal cruelty thing... And I was like, 'yeah, that's their only food,'... They can't grow anything. It's all rock... The Canadian culture, like people, don't know anything about it... like, oblivious to how they just speak from such a privilege."

Lark used language to name gaps in dominant knowledge and to speak back to assumptions rooted in privilege. Her insights revealed how cultural narratives can erase the realities of marginalized communities, and how speech can be a tool to challenge that erasure.

b) Language as a Site of Resistance and Emotional Support

For Maddox, speaking up was a hard-earned act of courage. He described the emotional struggle of calling out racial issues: "I feel proud of myself for being able to speak out... because I just haven't always felt confident to do that... but... you feel like [an] annoyance." Here, Maddox demonstrates internal negotiations racialized individuals often engage in before deciding to voice dissent. For him, speaking was not simply communication, it carried weight, visibility, and risk. This shows how language can be both empowering and a source of hypervisibility, especially when one's voice challenges the comfort of others.

While Maddox's experience highlights the courage and risks tied to speaking out against racial injustice, Jamie's reflections reveal a different but equally important form of linguistic capital. Jamie described how she and her team managed "hot moments" with children by guiding them toward a "cool calm" through intentional conversations. Drawing on her background in psychology, Jamie used language as a tool to model care, helping students regulate their emotions, calm down, and develop reflective habits. Her story also points to the often-overlooked emotional work that educators perform to create safe and supportive classroom environments.

Neve adds a powerful and deeply personal layer to this sub-thread. She reflects on the gaps she has witnessed in parental understanding, particularly among immigrant families navigating unfamiliar educational systems. Recounting her own experience as a newcomer to

Canada, Neve shared a painful memory of trying to register her child at a public school. The school principal repeatedly dismissed her concerns, stating that there was "no space in the school for problem children." She recalled the frustration and helplessness she felt in that moment, unable to challenge the principal's assumptions: "I didn't have the courage or the language to call her out." In hindsight, Neve reflected, "This is racism at its finest."

Eventually, Neve made the difficult decision to enroll her children in a private school. In the aftermath, she began speaking with other immigrant parents and discovered a shared struggle. Many parents, she noted, were able to sense that "there is a hostile vibe," but lacked the linguistic and cultural tools to identify and name the subtle cues embedded in institutional interactions. As Neve explained, some first-generation immigrant parents "haven't lived here long enough to master all the subtext. They don't have the language to understand that their children are being sort of boxed into different categories." Neve's reflections pointed to the complexities of linguistic capital, how fluency in English does not necessarily equate to fluency in cultural subtext. Her experience reveals how language can be both a barrier and a site of resistance and highlights the urgent need to support families in navigating and decoding the unspoken messages within educational systems. Together, these stories illustrate how language is never neutral; it can empower or silence, soothe or expose, depending on who is speaking, to whom, and in what context. And thus, revealing the layered ways linguistic capital shapes voice, agency, and belonging within educational spaces.

6.7.3 Resonant Thread 3: Strategic Code-Switching, the Cost of Assimilation, and the Desire to Reclaim

Participants shared experiences that speak to the ways language functions both as a survival strategy and a means of building connection and resilience in educational and social settings. Across these narratives, participants revealed that these survival strategies to reshape language and identity often come at a cost that can fracture ties to family, ancestry, and cultural belonging. Yet, alongside this loss, participants expressed a deep yearning to reconnect, repair, or reclaim what was stripped away by migration, assimilation, or personal circumstances. From these reflections, three interrelated sub-threads emerged: (1) strategic code-switching for

survival, (2) disconnection from culture through language loss, and (3) longing and intentions to reclaim ancestral language.

a) Strategic Code-Switching for Survival

A number of participants described actively modifying or masking their speech to assimilate into the dominant norms of whiteness and Canadian culture, especially during childhood. Lark, for example, shared how her accent had to change in Grade 3, highlighting how early the pressure to conform begins: “I had to... my accent literally had to change... trying to hear how people talked and then trying to adjust my speech to eventually have the Canadian accent.” Similarly, Neve recalled performing linguistic inauthenticity to avoid discomfort or stigma: “I learned to speak English with a fake accent so that I would not sound weird.” These examples suggest how early racialized students learn to reshape their voices in response to dominant norms. While these strategies demonstrate adaptability and survival, they also hint at a potential cost: erasure of one's authentic self in the process of fitting in. Maddox's response adds further nuance, pointing to how language and racial visibility intersect with the pressure to self-identify in uncomfortable or unsafe contexts. His decision to reveal or withhold his ethnic identity depending on others' racial declarations illustrates a deeper layer of code-switching beyond language, that is, a form of watching how they speak as a way to protect themselves in racialized environments.

b) Disconnection from Culture through Language Loss

As mentioned, the pressure to reshape language and identity for survival comes at a cost. Many participants spoke with clarity and pain about what has been lost in the process of assimilating into the dominant Canadian culture: a connection to their people, culture, and histories. Emery's reflections were particularly powerful in tracing this disconnection: “If my mom passes away, I don't have any link to my culture... I don't speak the language.” His awareness that language is a vessel for cultural continuity was echoed by Jamie, who shared: “I feel now, like after my parents moved here, it was all kind of lost... I don't speak Tagalog.” In both cases, the language is not just a medium of communication; it is the link between past, present, and future. Without it, participants feel untethered. A telling excerpt comes from Jamie, in her early rejection of her identity, taking a more internalized form. She recalled a childhood belief: “I want to marry a white guy because I don't want my kids to be [South or Southeast] Asian,” due to the racialized stereotypes she associated with her own background. This reflection

is painful and honest, and important. While language was not named directly in this quote, it highlights how internalized erasure is layered, affecting language, identity, and aspirations for one's future family. As an adult, she described this memory as "so messed up," pointing to her own evolving understanding of identity and worth.

c) Longing and Intentions to Reclaim Ancestral Language

Despite the pain and gaps, participants expressed a strong desire to reclaim what was lost. Emery's words were especially moving: "I want to learn how to read my language... that's what my DNA was made to do." His statement links language to a biological and ancestral calling, as if reclaiming it is not just an academic goal but a deep act of self-affirmation. Maddox also expressed regret and intention for not having learned the language of his parents: "I wish that was not the case... maybe once I have more time or money... I might take [Chinese] classes." These intentions are more than just casual or passing thoughts; they speak to a longing to repair relationships with grandparents, reclaim unspoken conversations, and re-enter cultural spaces that have felt inaccessible. Lark, too, reflected wistfully on what could have been: "Maybe if we had people around... we could have been doing that... like keeping our roots."

Taken together, these narratives underscore the multifaceted role of language as both a means of adapting to dominant cultural norms and a deeply personal site of identity, belonging, and cultural continuity. While strategic code-switching reflects resilience and survival, it often comes at the expense of linguistic and cultural disconnection. Yet, participants' powerful desire to reclaim what was lost speaks to the enduring role of language in shaping the self and its heritage.

6.8 Chapter Summary

By examining participants' narratives side by side, the six forms of community cultural wealth emerged with more clarity. The most significant and striking finding in this study is that participants' very presence in teacher education constitutes a powerful form of resistance. Throughout their life journeys, from birth or immigration to Canada, through K–12 schooling, and into their teacher education programs, participants have embodied multiple modes of resistance. Among these, resistant capital stands out as the most prominent theme. Participants not only named institutional barriers but demonstrated remarkable agency in navigating them

successfully. Moreover, participants articulated insightful and nuanced critiques regarding the systemic gaps and shortcomings within educational institutions, particularly within teacher education. Their reflections revealed a deep critical awareness of how policies, practices, and structures often fail to acknowledge or support their diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This critical consciousness not only underscores their ability to navigate these barriers but also positions them as active agents demanding institutional change and greater inclusivity.

The findings further reveal that as participants develop their professional identities as aspiring educators, their resilience and perseverance are key drivers of their aspirations. These motivations extend beyond personal success or familial devotion; they are fueled by a commitment to effect meaningful change for future generations. Participants envision leveraging various forms of cultural wealth to build inclusive and equitable classrooms that challenge systemic inequities. Finally, the data underscores the vital role of social support networks. Participants consistently emphasized the importance of their families alongside peers, social circles, and professional mentors in sustaining their success throughout the teacher education program. A comprehensive discussion of the broader implications of these findings, situated within existing literature, will be presented in the discussion chapter that follows.

Chapter Seven

DISCUSSION

Why are there so few of us? Why are there so few of me? These are questions I carry with me each time I step into an elementary school as an occasional teacher. Before the school day even begins, I often scan the staffroom, check the teacher roster, or walk the hallways, in search for signs of another racialized educator. The presence (or absence) of racialized colleagues has become an unspoken barometer for how my day might unfold. As I engaged more deeply into the study, I realized that this daily ritual is more than just a curiosity, but it is a manifestation of the deep, persistent underrepresentation of racialized educators like me in Canadian schools and the complex emotional terrain that accompanies such isolation. One participant in this study, Ardeen, shared during one of our interviews that she feels a wave of anxiety whenever she is placed in a predominantly white school. As she explained, “I know I won’t have a good time connecting with the teachers.” Her words resonated deeply with me. In that moment, I found not just validation but also a sense of allyship. Her experiences confirmed what I had long felt but had often doubted: that the anticipatory anxiety I experience is not imagined but rooted in accumulated experiences of marginalization and disconnection within predominantly white educational settings.

This study emerges from those lived tensions—both personal and professional. While existing scholarship has examined the experiences of racialized teacher candidates, particularly in relation to racial microaggressions within teacher education programs, limited studies have explored the strengths and resources these candidates bring with them. This study seeks to fill that gap by foregrounding the voices of racialized teacher candidates in an Ontario teacher education program, with particular attention to the personal, social, and institutional barriers they encounter. Central to this inquiry is an emphasis on the diverse forms of community cultural wealth (CCW), namely: aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant capital, embodied by these teacher candidates. By documenting and theorizing these forms of CCW, this study aims to shift the discourse from deficit-based narratives to one that recognizes racialized teacher candidates as knowledge holders whose lived experiences and resources can meaningfully inform and enrich teacher education.

In doing so, this research contributes to the broader literature on the teacher diversity gap in three key ways: (1) it amplifies the voices of racialized teacher candidates, (2) it highlights the community cultural wealth they bring into teacher education, and (3) it calls for a reimagining of teacher education, not only as a site for teacher professional training, but as a space that actively honours, engages with, and builds upon these assets in pursuit of equity and systemic change.

To provide a roadmap for the structure of this chapter, I begin by summarizing and analyzing the barriers participants faced, both before entering and while navigating the teacher education program. Then, I shift to the second part of this chapter, which involves mapping out the strengths and complexities of CCW. In this section, I highlight key findings on how participants embodied various forms of CCW in response to the challenges they encountered.

7.1 The Banging of One's Head Against the Brick Wall

The call for teacher diversification in Ontario is not new; it can be traced as far back as the 1980s. Childs and Ferguson (2013) cite a report based on a 1988 survey commissioned by Ontario's Ministry of Education, which found that 90% of teacher candidates in the province's teacher education programs were white and Anglo-Saxon. The report warned that such homogeneity posed a significant challenge to Canada's increasingly multicultural society. In the decades since, racialized scholars and researchers have repeatedly called for more studies, policy interventions, and the implementation of concrete programs to address this diversity gap and create equitable and inclusive spaces for racialized individuals in education (Abawi, 2018; Ahmed, 2007, 2012; Amos, 2010, 2016; Eizadirad et al., 2023; Kohli, 2009, 2012; Marom, 2023; Yosso & Burciaga, 2016). And yet, after decades of initiatives—nearly half a century on—the discourse of institutional diversity continues to create trouble. As Ahmed (2012) observes, such efforts often resemble the futility of striking one's head against a brick wall: the wall remains intact, unyielding, and immovable (p. 26).

Teacher education, I argue, is that metaphorical brick wall. For decades, it has resisted change. The whiteness of its administrators and faculty has remained entrenched, and the profession continues to be reproduced as the property of white, middle-class, female teacher candidates (Childs & Ferguson, 2013; Eizadirad et al., 2023). This study corroborates existing literature in teacher education that the institution's enduring whiteness is obscured by rhetorical commitments to equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). This is reflected in tokenistic or surface-

level reform commitments, such as targeted recruitment of racialized students, the nominal prioritization of hiring racialized faculty members, and the addition of “diversity” courses to curricula without deeper structural change (Brown, 2014; Burke, 2023). Such measures do not fundamentally shift the structural dynamics of whiteness in teacher education; rather, they exemplify interest convergence (Bell, 1980). Teacher education institutions support EDI initiatives not for the institutions’ transformation, but to serve their own vested interests: polishing their reputation to look good and appear equitable while ensuring that white teacher candidates gain exposure to “diverse” peers whose presence enriches their professional formation (Brown, 2014; Salazar Montoya, 2024).

Findings from my study challenge these tokenistic assumptions that frame the presence of racialized teacher candidates in teacher education. Through the lens of CCW, resistant capital emerged as the most salient expression of cultural wealth among participants. In other words, participants’ very presence in teacher education is a form of resistance. Their narratives demonstrate how, in pursuing the teaching profession, they have persistently “banged” their heads against the metaphorical brick wall of teacher education and the larger systemic barriers it sustains. Participants’ stories underscore the difficulty of this persistence. They described navigating what has been theorized as the “leaky pipeline” of education, where racialized students disproportionately “spill out” before completing K–12 schooling due to systemic barriers such as standardized testing, inequitable access to higher education, and exclusionary school climates (Ahmad & Boser, 2014; Berrios, 2016; Ryan et al., 2009). Emery’s narrative, for example, illustrates how his trauma related to racial profiling outside of his practicum placement, which even escalated to violence, threatened to derail his educational trajectory. Although this incident was not directly part of his teacher education program, it indirectly shaped his perceptions of the profession and deepened his understanding of racialized experiences both within and beyond teacher education. Despite these external pressures, Emery demonstrated resilience, resisting forces that might have pushed him out of the educational pipeline.

Neve recalled her arrival in the United States as a visible Muslim during the aftermath of the September 11 attack, when she became a target of racial microaggressions. Lark, Ardeen, Maddox, and Jamie spoke of classroom bullying that sought to silence them. These moments of hostility were not isolated events but part of broader systemic inequities that shape the educational trajectories of racialized students. What stands out about these participants is not that

they avoided obstacles, but that they refused to be defined by them. What connects their stories is their shared use of academic excellence as a form of resistance. By excelling in school, they created safe spaces for themselves and used their achievement to open up possibilities for future roles as educators.

Besides the “leaky pipeline” metaphor as an explanation for the lack of teacher diversity, Bianco and Marin-Paris (2019) emphasize the challenge of encouraging racialized students to pursue teaching. If schools have not been welcoming spaces for them as learners, it is reasonable to ask why they would return as educators to the same institutions where they once experienced marginalization. Jamie, for instance, described teaching as merely a “plan B,” while Neve initially imagined a career in academia. Similarly, Maddox never envisioned teaching as his career path, as his passion was for acting and theatre. These accounts reflect the ambivalence many racialized students feel toward teaching as a profession. Yet, despite their reluctance, all eventually found their way back to teacher education. Neve captured this tension when she remarked that teaching runs in her blood.

Additionally, prior research has consistently highlighted that negative community perceptions of the teaching profession serve as a significant deterrent to the participation of racialized individuals in teacher education programs. Such perceptions often frame teaching as a low-status, low-reward career, influenced not only by concerns around modest remuneration but also by the enduring presence of racial discrimination—both within the profession and broader society (Darling-Hammond & Wise, 1981; Rong & Preissle, 1997). In the United States, for instance, teaching is historically regarded as a profession of limited prestige among racialized communities, with familial and cultural pressures instead favouring careers perceived as more lucrative and socially esteemed (Gordon, 2000).

The findings of this study both affirm and complicate these narratives. On one hand, participants such as Lark and Ardeen echoed these prevailing community perceptions. Lark admitted that she and her peers often dismissed teaching as an “easy” or less ambitious career choice, while Ardeen described resisting her father’s expectations that she pursues a more “prestigious” path. These narratives underscore how cultural norms and intergenerational expectations can subtly, yet powerfully, shape professional aspirations in ways that marginalize teaching as a viable or respectable option.

However, the data also reveal important counter-narratives that challenge such deficit-based framings. Maddox, for instance, while initially not envisioning a future in teaching, recounted how his mother's encouragement positioned the profession as a respectable and meaningful alternative should his artistic aspirations not materialize. Importantly, he emphasized that within his East Asian community, teaching is indeed held in high regard, closely tied to the community's high valuing of education itself. Further, for participants such as Emery and Lark, teaching was not merely respected within their families, but it represented a continuation of a familial legacy. Their motivations to pursue the profession were firmly anchored in intergenerational aspirations. Lark spoke of realizing her mother's unfulfilled dream of becoming a teacher in Canada, while Emery viewed his career as a continuation of his father's legacy, who was himself a graduate of the University of Ottawa's Faculty of Education. These examples foreground how familial narratives can serve not just as constraints, but also as sources of inspiration and resilience.

In essence, these findings suggest that racialized teacher candidates do not enter teacher education programs as passive recipients of social norms or community expectations. Instead, they bring with them complex (and sometimes conflicting) understandings of what it means to become a teacher. Some of these views are shaped by family or cultural traditions while for others are formed in resistance to those norms. What is particularly striking is the resilience, persistent optimism, and commitment these participants expressed toward becoming educators, even in the face of prior negative experiences in K–12 education and community skepticism about the profession's value.

Even when racialized teacher candidates successfully navigate the so-called "leaky pipeline" and gain entry into teacher education programs, their struggle does not end but it simply takes on a different form. The metaphorical brick wall remains intact, exposing a deeper contradiction within institutions that profess to EDI. It is especially ironic, if not disingenuous, that teacher education programs advocate for the recruitment and retention of racialized candidates on the grounds that their lived experiences and perspectives uniquely position them to teach racialized K–12 students more effectively (Brown, 2014; Sleeter, 2001), yet these same programs often fail to engage substantively with that knowledge (Amos, 2016; Parker & Hood, 1995; Téllez, 1999). A compelling illustration emerges from Lark's narrative, in which she sought to contribute to a class discussion by sharing her educational experiences in Dubai where

students begin formal examinations as early as Grade 4. Rather than encouraging critical engagement, her teacher education instructor responded dismissively, stating, “Oh, we would never do that to our kids here,” thereby revealing a resistance to perspectives that challenge prevailing educational assumptions. Building on this example, the following section explores key findings that highlight the barriers participants encountered and the psychological and emotional toll of tokenization within teacher education.

7.2 Tokenism and Racial Battle Fatigue

This study affirms long-standing critiques of racial tokenism in educational spaces, particularly within teacher education programs. The concept of racial tokenism derives from Kanter's (1977, 2008) tokenism and proportion theory, initially formulated to explain the experiences of women working in male-dominated business environments. Within this framework, a “token” refers to a numerically small group of individuals perceived as distinct from the dominant majority in terms of phenotypical traits, gender, culture, or other characteristics (Boggs, 2018; Stichman et al., 2010). Kanter contends that tokens’ distinctiveness from the dominant group frequently results in negative workplace experiences. These experiences show up in how racialized individuals perceive and respond to their environment, for example, feeling pressure to fit in or forced assimilation, hypervisibility or being constantly aware of how their appearance sets them apart, or feeling out of place when their identity does not match expected norms or roles (Boggs, 2018). These dynamics were evident in the experiences of participants who consistently described being made to feel like outsiders, often carrying the burden of representing their entire communities.

Emery’s narrative, for instance, reveals how course content that fails to reflect racialized experiences contributes to a deep sense of disconnection. As Emery points out, despite program’s promotion of equity and inclusion in the classrooms, there is little encouragement to engage with these ideas in meaningful ways. Lark, who identifies as South Asian, shares a similar perspective. She criticizes the program’s diversity efforts as merely “for formality.” When she tried to contribute her own experiences from schooling in Dubai, her input was repeatedly ignored. To her, diversity work in the program feels like something to simply “check off a list.” Neve adds that conversations about racism rarely go beyond the surface, failing to challenge deeper systemic issues. These stories reflect what many researchers have already

emphasized about teacher education programs. Ladson-Billings (1995, 2021) and Sleeter (2017) argue that these programs often centre white, Western ways of knowing, while pushing aside the voices and experiences of students from diverse backgrounds. Ahmed (2012) further explains that many universities use the language of diversity to appear progressive but avoid doing the hard work of real institutional change. The experiences of Emery, Lark, and Neve show how these patterns play out in practice. Despite promoting diversity, teacher education programs can still leave racialized students feeling invisible and excluded. This raises critical questions about whether such programs are genuinely committed to equity or simply maintaining the status quo under the guise of inclusion.

Limited racial representation among faculty members further amplified these feelings of disconnection. As Escayg (2010) notes, the absence of role models who reflect students' diverse cultural and racial identities restricts opportunities for belonging and mentorship. Participants reported frustration at being positioned as unofficial spokespersons for their communities and feeling obligated to educate white peers and, at times, even faculty, on issues of racism, discrimination, and cultural difference. Emery recalled being asked to speak on behalf of the entire Black community about Black Lives Matter, while Maddox and Neve described the emotional toll of this tokenization. Maddox spoke of feeling like an “annoyance” for being the only student to point out racism in class, whereas Neve expressed fear that speaking up would mark her as someone with “a chip on the shoulder.”

This cumulative burden reflects what scholars call racial battle fatigue (Kohli, 2018; Kohli & Pizarro, 2022). Racial battle fatigue refers to the ongoing emotional and psychological strain experienced by racialized individuals who must continually confront racism, often while carrying this work alone (Villavicencio et al., 2024). Smith (2009) describes it as dealing simultaneously with external discrimination and internal pressures, including unfair criticism and chronic isolation. The consequences are profound: depression, burnout, anxiety, imposter syndrome, hypervigilance, disrupted sleep and eating habits, strained relationships, and, in some cases, attrition from the profession altogether (Kohli & Pizarro, 2022; Young, 2025).

Findings of the study reveal that the effects of racial battle fatigue on participants lead to a process of silencing oneself. Lark's repeated attempts to contribute to classroom discussions, for example, were met with indifference from instructors and white peers. Instructors and white classmates gave minimal responses and quickly moved on, showing little interest in engaging

with what she had to say. The gravity of this systemic silencing is evident in the survival strategies participants developed to endure and navigate their teacher education programs. For example, Lark adopted “tunnel vision” to blunt the emotional harm of speaking up, while Neve created a protective boundary from hostile spaces by always carrying a book. These strategies echo Amos’s (2010) assertion that, in predominantly white educational spaces, racialized students must learn “when to fight and when not to in order to avoid any unnecessary conflict and argument with white students” (p. 36). This dynamic is evident in Neve’s account of her practicum experience, where she responded to a discriminatory remark from her associate teacher with a “completely straight face.” Her silence in that moment was not an absence of resistance, but a strategic decision grounded in the belief that confrontation would not bring about meaningful change.

7.3 Impacts on Sense of Belonging and Internalized Racism

Another central finding of this study concerns the damaging effects of cultural alienation, isolation, and self-silencing on participants’ sense of belonging within their teacher education programs. These experiences illuminate how belonging is not a neutral or automatic condition but is shaped by power relations and institutional expectations. Drawing on Ahmed’s (2012) analysis of “arrival,” the heightened visibility of some bodies over others demonstrates an underlying norm about who is presumed to “naturally” belong in a space. In this sense, “welcome” operates less as an unconditional acceptance and more as an act that positions the racialized or culturally different individual as a perpetual outsider, that is, someone who is “not at home.” The notion of “conditional hospitality” is helpful here: hospitality is extended only on the understanding that the guest will reciprocate by adapting, integrating, or identifying with the host (Ahmed, 2004, 2007).

When applied to teacher education, this notion helps explain the pressure many participants felt to erase or minimize parts of their identities in order to be accepted. Much like a nation-state that promotes diversity while expecting assimilation, teacher education programs may claim to value diversity but often require conformity to white, Western norms. This contradiction was deeply felt by participants in this study and had long-lasting effects on their well-being and sense of belonging. Neve, for example, spoke about how she gradually began to shed visible aspects of her identity in order to feel more integrated. A powerful example she

shared was delaying her daily prayers until after school, knowing that expressing her faith openly might be unsafe for her. For Lark, the pressure to assimilate began as early as her arrival in Canada, where she learned to speak with a Canadian accent within a few months to avoid bullying from peers. Even small acts like bringing lunch from home became loaded with racialized meaning. She eventually stopped bringing her favourite South Asian dishes to school after being ridiculed for the way they looked or smelled. Maddox's earlier experience reflected a similar struggle. He deliberately asked his mother not to pack East Asian food and instead requested something more "Western" like a cheese sandwich. Yet, despite this attempt to blend in, he was still mocked by his classmates, reinforcing that assimilation, no matter how complete, does not guarantee acceptance.

These stories reveal the emotional cost of conditional belonging. Participants were not simply adjusting to new environments, but they were negotiating how much of themselves to suppress in order to avoid harm, ridicule, or isolation. The pressure to assimilate was not a one-time event but a continuous, often internalized process that shaped their everyday decisions and sense of self. Extant literature refers to this continual negotiation between one's identity and dominant cultural norms as internalized racism (Kohli, 2018; MacMullin, 2025; Seet, 2021). As these scholars argue, internalized racism emerges from the persistent mistreatment of racialized individuals, wherein one's racial identity is marginalized and positioned as inferior to that of the dominant group. Kirkland (2013) further expands on this through the concept of double consciousness, which describes how racial minorities come to view themselves through the eyes of the dominant culture, often seeking validation from that perspective while distancing themselves from their own communities.

One of the most poignant manifestations of internalized racism in the participants' narratives is reflected in Jamie's experience. Coming from a mixed Southeast Asian and South Asian background, Jamie acknowledged a limited connection to both her parents' cultural heritages. This sense of detachment was compounded by racialized stereotypes associated with her background. At one point, Jamie admitted she had wanted to marry a white man so her children would not look like her. Another powerful example is Sage's decision to legally change her name at a young age. Names are more than identifiers; they are deeply tied to one's identity and sense of personhood (Eizadirad et al., 2023). Sage's concern about how her name might be perceived speaks to deeper anxieties surrounding racialized identity and the internalization of

dominant cultural expectations. Her experience aligns with what scholars describe as name-based microaggressions (Srinivasan, 2019), a growing field of inquiry that explores subtle forms of racial discrimination linked to names. These microaggressions often involve mispronunciations, unwanted nicknaming, or pressure to adopt more "acceptable" names in various social contexts (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012). Research suggests that such experiences can disrupt one's sense of cultural belonging and contribute to identity confusion and disconnection from one's heritage (Head, 2022; Srinivasan, 2019).

Another significant finding that warrants attention is participants' narratives that relate to what the literature describes as the perpetual foreigner syndrome. This phenomenon refers to the experience of racialized individuals being persistently perceived as outsiders or foreigners in their own country, regardless of their citizenship or length of residence (Eizadirad et al., 2025). Such perceptions are often subtly communicated through questions like, "Where are you really from?" (Huynh, 2012; G. Kim et al., 2014). This tension is clearly reflected in the narratives of both Lark and Maddox. For instance, Maddox recounted how conversations among his racialized peers often included statements like, "I'm Chinese, but I'm not like... not like a FOB, not Fresh Off the Boat. I'm Asian, but not too Asian." These remarks highlight the internalized pressure to distance oneself from perceived markers of foreignness in order to be accepted. Similarly, Lark described being asked, often during job interviews, where she is "really" from. As a Canadian citizen who has lived in the country for many years, she expressed frustration at such questions, which subtly undermine her sense of belonging and national identity.

Indeed, for decades, if not half a century, the discourse of diversity has generated as much tension as it has promised. To be fair, teacher education programs have attempted reforms such as diversifying faculty and student demographics. However, the discussions presented here point to a central argument, that diversification by numbers alone does not guarantee equity and inclusion for racialized communities. Instead, it often reinforces racial tokenism, leaving participants burdened by the toll of racial battle fatigue. They continue to experience isolation, marginalization, and silencing. While the literature on teacher education is replete with studies documenting racialized teacher candidates' encounters with microaggressions, far fewer highlight the strengths and resources these candidates bring—qualities that enable them to persist in pursuing the teaching profession. The following section turns to the second part of this

chapter, where I examine in greater depth significant findings on how various forms of CCW manifested in participants' experiences and supported them in navigating teacher education.

7.4 Mapping the Strengths and Complexities of Community Cultural Wealth

Several studies examining how racialized communities draw upon various forms of CCW demonstrate that these forms are deeply interwoven and cannot be meaningfully analyzed in isolation (Brown, 2019; Burciaga & Kohli, 2018; Martin-Beltrán et al., 2018; Tolbert & Eichelberger, 2016). This observation holds true in the present study. As I analyzed participants' lived experiences through the CCW framework, the boundaries between each form of capital repeatedly blurred, revealing their dynamic and intersecting nature. My analysis supports Yosso's (2005) caution that these forms of capital are "not mutually exclusive or static, but rather are dynamic processes that build on one another as part of community cultural wealth" (p. 76). For instance, Martin-Beltrán et al. (2018) found that a Latinx English language teacher's students mobilized their aspirational capital as an act of resistance, discussing their educational and professional goals to challenge Donald Trump's anti-immigrant rhetoric and, by extension, the dominant deficit discourse surrounding immigrant communities. Similarly, in my research, these forms of capital do not operate in isolation but rather intersect and reinforce one another in complex ways. As I will demonstrate in the succeeding sections, the participants' narratives reveal how multiple forms of CCW converge as they navigate and respond to the systemic barriers they encounter within and beyond their teacher education programs.

7.5 Social Capital: Cultivating Sense of Belonging Through Peer Support

Earlier in this chapter, I outlined the deeply harmful impact of systemic barriers on participants' well-being and sense of belonging within educational spaces. Yet, what emerges most powerfully from their narratives is not only their awareness of these barriers but also their strategic and persistent efforts to resist them. At the heart of this resistance lies the strategic use of various forms of CCW, especially the leveraging of social capital. Participants did not passively endure marginalization; rather, they actively built and relied on peer networks to cultivate a sense of belonging within teacher education.

Social capital, as conceptualized within the CCW framework, refers to the networks of people and community resources that offer emotional, cultural, and even material support

(Yosso, 2005). In the context of teacher education, this form of capital became a vital tool for survival, solidarity, and affirmation. The stories of Ardeen, Sage, Jamie, and Maddox demonstrate the powerful role of peer relationships in shaping participants' sense of belonging. These relationships did not happen by chance; they were intentionally formed and sustained in response to alienation, and they functioned as critical spaces of care and validation.

For instance, Ardeen refers to her racialized peers as her “rock” or a stabilizing force that provides not only emotional support but also grounding, stability, and strength. Within a teacher education program where she often felt unseen, this peer network offered a counter-space of affirmation where her efforts and identity as a future educator were recognized. Similarly, Sage and Jamie underscore the importance of connection with those who share similar lived experiences. As Sage put it, “without them it would be so hard to get through the program.” Here, she highlights the extent to which peer relationships are not merely supportive but essential for persistence. Maddox’s reflection makes this point even more explicit. He emphasizes the importance of being surrounded by those who are “going through the same experiences” and “struggling with the same things,” which reveals how social capital can mitigate the isolation racialized students often face in predominantly white educational settings. Moreover, Jamie encapsulates this collective ethos of belonging when she speaks of an immediate sense of “connection,” “mutual respect,” and “appreciation” within her peer group. This underscores that social capital, in this case, operates through mutual care and the co-creation of safe, affirming spaces for learning and belonging.

Similar findings are evident in the study by Tolbert and Eichelberger (2016), which explored the experiences of teacher candidates enrolled in a “teacher education for diversity” program. One of their racialized participants, Serina, drew upon her social capital by forming connections with like-minded peers who provided her with crucial emotional and psychological support. These peer relationships not only encouraged her to persist but also helped her cultivate the confidence and resilience needed to navigate the challenges of the teacher education program. When considered alongside the findings of this study, it can be argued that belonging cannot be reduced to institutional gestures of inclusion, nor should it be treated as a privilege handed down by the institution. Instead, participants’ social capital reveals belonging as a form of collective resistance; a dynamic, co-constructed process through which racialized teacher candidates make space for themselves and for one another in a system that often renders them

invisible. Importantly, these findings challenge dominant narratives within teacher education that frame student success as an individual endeavor. Rather, participants' experiences demonstrate that persistence and belonging are often collective accomplishments, built through relational efforts among marginalized peers.

Another particularly noteworthy aspect of the evidence presented here is that social capital directly challenges deficit-based narratives that position students who struggle with a sense of belonging as inherently predisposed to problematic behaviour, mental health issues, or low academic achievement (Abdollahi et al., 2020; Allen et al., 2023). These narratives often individualize student struggles and pathologize racialized learners by framing their lack of belonging as a personal or cultural shortcoming; rather than interrogating the systemic and institutional conditions that actively produce exclusion.

The experiences shared by participants in this study expose the limitations of such deficit thinking. Rather than confirming assumptions that racialized students are disengaged or struggling, participants demonstrated significant agency in constructing alternative pathways to belonging. In particular, they leveraged social capital, such as peer networks, community connections, and culturally affirming relationships, to push back against the ways the institution ignored or excluded them. These support networks not only helped them cope but also challenged the harmful idea that racialized students do not have what it takes to succeed in higher education.

7.6 Sense of Belonging and the Role of Teacher Educators

Building on the theme of social capital and belonging, the findings of this study further suggest that having racialized professors in teacher education programs can significantly increase racialized students' sense of belonging. As research has shown, when students feel a sense of belonging, they are more likely to stay engaged, feel motivated to learn, perform better academically, seek help when they need it, and communicate comfortably with faculty (Bjorklund et al., 2020; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Goodenow, 1993; Strayhorn, 2012; Urdan & Schoenfelder, 2006). Findings of this study echoed these insights. For example, Ardeen shared how the presence of a racialized professor created a different and more comfortable learning environment for her:

It was quite different... Saba's class... I felt she understood us a little bit better, like racialized teacher candidates a little bit better... I felt a lot more comfortable going to her because she was also a visible minority. Whereas some of my other teachers, although, they're very outgoing, and they are always there to help... I feel less comfortable going to those professors just because I don't find a way to kind of relate to them.

Ardeen's reflection highlights how representation in faculty, particularly the presence of professors who share similar racial or cultural backgrounds, can foster trust, relatability, and a deeper sense of connection. This, in turn, enhances students' comfort in seeking support and engaging more fully in their learning experience. Shared identity and cultural understanding can thus function as powerful components of social capital that support student persistence. However, the findings from this study also add a layer of complexity to how social capital is understood and mobilized. While shared racial or cultural identity can be a valuable foundation for connection, it is not the only pathway through which students build supportive relationships. Emery's account illustrates this nuance. Although his professor was white, Emery found a strong sense of belonging in that relationship. What mattered most, he explained, was not shared identity but the humanizing approach the professor took, such as listening, engaging in honest dialogue, and creating space for self-reflection.

This demonstrates that social capital within teacher education is not limited to identity-based ties. It can also emerge from genuine, relational practices that affirm students' experiences and treat them as whole people. In both cases, whether through shared identity or empathetic engagement, students are able to access the emotional and academic support they need. These findings argue for a broader understanding of social capital as a dynamic and relational form of community cultural wealth, capable of being built across lines of difference when grounded in mutual respect and care.

To conclude this section, the findings make it clear that participants actively took ownership of their experiences, mobilizing social capital to intentionally build supportive spaces and relationships within their teacher education programs. Through these efforts, they asserted their presence, resisted exclusion, and cultivated networks of care that sustained them both academically and emotionally. In the section that follows, I shift focus to another critical dimension of their persistence: the strategic use of navigational and familial capital. These forms of CCW were pivotal in enabling participants to navigate the complex and, at times, exclusionary terrain of teacher education.

7.7 Leveraging Navigational Capital to Persist through Adversities

In their study on how a Latinx English language teacher drew on multiple forms of CCW among her newcomer high school students, Martin-Beltrán et al. (2018) found that resistant and navigational capital are deeply intertwined. As they contend, students rely on their lived experiences “not only to provide counter-stories but also to position themselves as expert navigators” (p. 111). This assertion resonates strongly with the present study, where participants demonstrated inner strength and resilience as they navigated personal and systemic challenges in their pursuit of a teaching career.

One of the most compelling findings regarding navigational capital lies in how participants reframed adversity as an opportunity for growth. For instance, in Emery’s narrative, the emotional aftermath of a physical assault outside his practicum site compelled him to take a one-year leave from his teacher education program. Yet rather than viewing this as a withdrawal or failure, Emery described this time as a period of intentional healing. He spoke of going through a “hard winter,” but emphasized that this process allowed him to return to the program with renewed clarity and purpose. Similarly, Jamie’s experience illustrates a redefinition of failure. Initially rejected by all the teacher education programs to which she applied, she refused to internalize the setback as a limitation of her ability or worth. Instead, she treated it as motivation to improve her application and persist in her goal. She applied again the following year and was ultimately accepted. Her persistence exemplifies the proactive, future-oriented mindset characteristic of navigational capital. Maddox’s trajectory further extends this understanding of navigational capital. Before entering teacher education, he spent years working “little odd jobs here and there,” navigating economic instability. His story underscores how perseverance in the face of structural and financial barriers reflects not mere endurance, but an active negotiation of life’s constraints toward a long-term vision.

Collectively, these narratives challenge deficit-based assumptions that frame marginalized students as lacking in resources to successfully navigate difficult situations whether inside or outside of academic settings. Instead, participants’ experiences affirm that they possess rich, embodied knowledge that enables them to persist through adversity. As Martin-Beltrán et al. (2018) and Yosso and García (2007) suggest, such agency exemplifies how racialized individuals draw from lived experience to chart their own pathways through inequitable systems.

7.8 How Familial Capital Fuels Navigational Resilience

Another key finding that emerged from the analysis is the deep interconnection between navigational capital and familial capital. Participants' capacity to navigate predominantly white, often alienating institutional spaces was inseparable from the emotional, moral, and cultural grounding provided by their families. In other words, their navigational strategies did not emerge in isolation; they were nurtured through familial relationships, values, and intergenerational experiences that collectively sustained them within their teacher education programs.

This interdependence is evident across participants' narratives. Ardeen, for example, describes the anxiety she felt entering a placement where most teachers were white, sharing that she often felt like an "outcast." Yet, the feeling of alienation was momentarily disrupted when one of the few racialized teachers brought a familiar dish reminiscent of her mother's cooking. Ardeen reflected that this simple gesture made her feel "less alone." What alleviated her isolation was not only the act itself but the sense of cultural familiarity and belonging it evoked. Similarly, Lark's story underscores how familial capital becomes an internal compass for navigating professional isolation. She recalled how the "cliquey" atmosphere in the staffroom made her feel excluded, yet she found strength by drawing on her mother's resilience. As she explained, her mother's persistence became her "reference point" for how to handle challenges in the workplace. In her words, "I was able to connect that to my placement... when things didn't work out." In this case, her mother's resilience became a navigational tool for Lark, shaping how she understood and dealt with the barriers she encountered in her practicum. Jamie's experience further illustrates the emotional dimension of this relationship. Upon arriving in Ottawa to begin her B.Ed. program, she fell into what she called a "mini depression," struggling to care for herself or get out of bed. Her mother's consistent phone calls and words of encouragement became a lifeline, helping her regain a sense of control and stability. In this way, maternal care functioned as both a form of familial love and a navigational resource that allowed Jamie to manage the emotional turbulence of her new environment.

These accounts resonate with Brown's (2019) doctoral research, which found that mothers played a pivotal role in their daughters' persistence through graduate school. Encouraged and emotionally sustained by their mothers, Brown's participants developed strategic resilience to endure marginalizing academic spaces. Likewise, in this study, familial

capital, particularly maternal influence, emerges as the emotional foundation upon which participants' navigational practices are built. Furthermore, findings of the study also reveal that the participants' capacity to persist in their programs is rooted in family values that place a high premium on education. Jamie, for instance, spoke of her father's firm belief that "education is everything," a message he consistently reinforced by saying, "if you don't have education, you're gonna be a bum on the street." While the language may be blunt, Jamie internalized this message not as a threat but as a reflection of her father's lived experience. His conviction was shaped by his own lack of access to higher education and the limitations it imposed on his life. Ardeen similarly recalled her parents' insistence that "it doesn't matter if we get married or not, as long as we get a degree," reflecting their understanding of education as a safeguard against financial precarity. Such values do more than motivate academic persistence, they structure participants' navigational outlooks, shaping how they interpret and respond to challenges in their education journey.

These findings advance Yosso and García's (2007) conceptualization of navigational capital as the capacity of racialized students to persist within institutions not designed for them. What this study underscores is that such persistence is rarely an individual endeavor, but it is relational, cultivated within families whose experiences, sacrifices, and values become integral to how their children learn to navigate inequitable systems. Seen this way, familial capital is not a distinct resource used in parallel with navigational capital; rather, it is the very foundation upon which navigational capital rests.

7.9 Reimagining Teacher Education through Aspirational Capital

The analysis of the findings reveals that familial capital is intricately intertwined with participants' aspirational capital. For the racialized teacher candidates in this study, aspirations to become educators were inseparable from their relationships with family and community, and from their lived experiences within systems of education that often failed to reflect or support their identities. These findings challenge dominant narratives that view educational ambition as an individualistic pursuit. Instead, participants positioned their goals within broader networks of familial responsibility, cultural continuity, and a desire for systemic change. Lark's story illustrates this dynamic vividly. Her determination to become a teacher was grounded not simply in personal interest, but in the unfulfilled aspirations of her mother, whose teaching credentials

were not recognized in Ontario. “Because I’m already in the system... it’s ten times easier for me. So let me follow through,” she explained. Lark’s experience highlights how intergenerational aspirations can serve as powerful tools of resilience and direction, particularly when navigating structures that have historically excluded or marginalized immigrant and racialized communities.

This theme recurred throughout participant narratives. Sage, Maddox, and Ardeen, for instance, expressed immense pride in being the first in their immediate families to pursue teaching. Their decisions were not made in isolation but were deeply informed by the encouragement and sacrifices of those around them. In these cases, families and communities functioned not just as emotional support systems, but as moral anchors, which are sources of affirmation that reinforced a sense of duty to give back and uplift others. These findings echo Quirocho and Rios’ (2000) study of African American preservice teachers, which found that familial and community encouragement was often understood as a moral duty to serve their communities through teaching.

Perhaps the most surprising finding, however, is that participants’ teaching aspirations went beyond traditional notions of professional ambition. Rather than envisioning teaching simply as a stable career or individual success story, participants framed it as a means to transform educational spaces that had failed them or others like them. This points to a broader conception of aspirational capital, one that aligns with DeNicolo et al. (2015), who define it as “the strength of spirit combined with a critical awareness regarding how society functions” (p. 234). Put differently, aspirational capital is not sustained by naïve optimism, but by a critically informed hope, a kind of hope that persists in the face of systemic inequities, grounded in lived realities and a desire for change (DeNicolo et al., 2015; Yosso & García, 2007).

Participants articulated this critical hope in various ways. Many shared frustrations with how their teacher education programs often failed to reflect or respond to the realities of the diverse students they hoped to serve. Ardeen voiced a need for “more classes on teaching racialized students,” while Jamie observed that issues of diversity were mentioned only superficially, rarely integrated into the core of the curriculum. Maddox echoed this critique, pointing out the inconsistency between what was taught and how it was modeled: “They teach us how to engage students with hands-on activities and differentiation... but the way that we’re being taught is often not that way.”

These experiences point to a broader pattern identified in the literature, that is, teacher education programs often fall short in preparing candidates, particularly racialized candidates, to engage in culturally responsive, socially just teaching (Brown, 2014; Brown, 2019; Burke, 2023). Kohli (2009) notes that many racialized teacher candidates already possess a deep awareness of how racism and exclusion operate in schools, because they have lived it. However, this experiential knowledge is often undervalued or ignored in teacher preparation, which continues to centre dominant norms and frameworks. Scholars such as Gay (2002, 2018) and Villegas and Davis (2007) have long argued that teacher education must equip all candidates, and especially racialized teacher candidates, with the tools to be critically reflective, culturally responsive, and equity-focused in their practice.

Participants in this study spoke to this need with urgency. Drawing on her experience as a South Asian woman, Ardeen described how her cultural background helped her understand the pressures students from similar backgrounds face. When her students were distressed about grades, she recognized the deeper cultural and familial contexts that made these marks more than numbers. “They’re coming from a culture where, like you have to try hard,” she explained, emphasizing the importance of teachers who can connect culturally and emotionally with students. For Ardeen, her motivation to teach stemmed from a desire to ensure that no student would experience the same sense of isolation, neglect, and dismissal that she endured in her own schooling.

This sense of purpose that is rooted in lived experience and oriented toward justice was echoed across other narratives. Sage, for instance, described how her own racialized identity shaped her attentiveness to students who might otherwise be overlooked. “I pay more attention to them... I wanna make sure their classmates are treating them right... to ensure they’re comfortable.” Her statement reflects not only empathy, but a proactive commitment to ensuring that all students feel seen, safe, and valued. Moreover, Emery’s reflections illustrate how a sense of community can be foundational to inclusive teaching practice. His account of working in a school that was deeply embedded in local life shows how relationships beyond the classroom shape student experiences. For Emery, education was not something that happened in isolation; it was inextricably linked to everyday life, family, and place. He made it clear that in his future teaching, community would not be an outreach strategy, it would be the starting point. His view

reflects a relational, place-based understanding of teaching, where school is not isolated from lived experience but deeply responsive to it.

What emerges across these narratives is a redefinition of what it means to aspire to teach. For these participants, teaching is not a neutral act or a linear career trajectory, but is a form of resistance, a way to disrupt the cycles of exclusion they themselves have experienced. Their aspirations are not solely based on personal ambition but are deeply rooted in a desire to humanize education. These candidates, therefore, enter the profession not simply as educators but as agents of transformation.

7.10 Linguistic Capital and the Power to Transform Teaching

This study adds to the growing body of literature that frames racialized teacher candidates not simply as future educators, but as agents of transformation (Brown, 2014; Sleeter, 2017). While much has been written about their role as cultural role models, a key contribution of this research lies in demonstrating how these candidates strategically mobilize their linguistic capital to actively challenge exclusionary norms and foster more inclusive educational environments.

A compelling example of this comes from Ardeen, who spoke of using her multilingualism to support students who share her linguistic background. In her words:

“Being multilingual myself gives me a different avenue to connect with them [students], and to help them better understand the content if they don't understand it in English... for example, if something is similar in English, like maybe the sentence structure is similar in English, and in Hindi I can connect that for them and say, ‘You know what like. It's just like it's the same as when we speak Hindi like you can use that same sentence structure. But you just need different vocabulary...”

Ardeen’s approach reflects more than just good teaching practice. it reveals a pedagogical resistance to monolingual norms that dominate most North American classrooms. She repositions her multilingualism not as a trait to be hidden or overcome, but as a pedagogical asset. By recognizing the cognitive and cultural value of her students’ home languages, she challenges the deficit narratives that often surround English language learners and reframes multilingualism as a source of intellectual and relational strength. This echoes Ruiz's (1997) concept of viewing language as a resource rather than a problem. When language is approached through an asset-based lens, the cultural and linguistic knowledge that students and teachers bring into the classroom becomes a foundation for learning, rather than an obstacle to be

managed. Racialized teacher candidates, through their lived experiences and linguistic fluency, are uniquely positioned to model this shift not just by affirming students' identities, but by transforming dominant pedagogical norms.

Similar findings were drawn by Tolbert and Eichelberger (2016) in their study where one of their participants drew on linguistic capital to enact social justice pedagogies in her student teaching placement. For example, one of her cooperating teachers did not speak Spanish and did not allow his students to speak Spanish in the classroom until the participant became his student teacher. The participant's ability to create space for her students to speak Spanish exemplified a form of community cultural wealth that sustained her across the year.

A critical reading of these findings suggest when racialized teachers, and by extension, racialized teacher candidates engage with students' home languages as pedagogical tools, they challenge what Valenzuela (1999) describes as subtractive schooling, wherein schools strip away students' cultural and linguistic identities to impose conformity with dominant norms. Such deficit orientations not only marginalize racialized learners but also devalue the rich cultural and linguistic repertoires that shape their intellectual lives. By leveraging their ability to move fluidly between languages, participants made learning more accessible while simultaneously legitimizing the diverse linguistic and cultural resources their students bring into the classroom.

Sage, for instance, emphasized the importance of linguistic diversity in fostering equity and cultivating awareness among her students. She wanted students to recognize that "there's so many different languages in the world that you might not even know of," expressing a commitment to carrying that awareness into her future classroom. For Sage, valuing linguistic diversity was inseparable from creating an inclusive and affirming learning environment. Her advocacy extended beyond the classroom to teacher education itself, where she called for racially and linguistically diverse faculty voices, noting that they offer "a different lens" necessary for preparing teachers to serve diverse student populations.

7.11 Chapter Summary

The discussion presented in this chapter challenges us to reconsider how racialized teacher candidates persist, resist, and reimagine their place within teacher education. As argued, their very presence constitutes a form of resistance, an act of defiance against systemic exclusion, tokenism, and deficit narratives that too often shape their lived experiences. Through academic excellence, silence, self-preservation, and strategic adaptation, participants navigated hostile environments that undermine their sense of belonging. These acts of endurance, however, reveal more than survival; they uncover a profound story of strength, resourcefulness, and community cultural wealth.

Their narratives overturn deficit thinking. Participants drew, albeit unconsciously, on deep reservoirs of social, familial, navigational, resistant, aspirational, and linguistic capital to carve out spaces of possibility within institutions not designed for them. Their networks of support, belief in the transformative power of education, and commitment to inclusive pedagogy demonstrate that CCW is not merely theoretical, but it is a lived, embodied practice of survival, hope, and transformation.

By centering the voices of these participants, this chapter challenges the narrow frameworks that continue to position racialized teacher candidates as mere “diversity additions” rather than as knowledge holders and agents of change. Their stories compel teacher education to move beyond token inclusion, toward the creation of environments that recognize, honour, and nurture the wealth these candidates already possess. In doing so, teacher education can begin to transform not only who becomes a teacher, but what teaching itself can mean: a practice that is rooted in equity, belonging, and the collective strength of communities. In the following chapter, I explore the implications of the findings for theory and research, consider their relevance for teacher education policy and practice, address the limitations of the study, and, finally, outline directions for future research.

Chapter Eight

CONCLUSION

8.1 So, What and Who Cares?

In narrative inquiry, it is not enough to collect or retell stories; narrative inquirers must also address the questions of “So what?” and “Who cares?” (Clandinin, 2023) in their study. These questions remind researchers to consider the meaning and significance of their work, both for themselves and for the communities they engage with. Drawing from decades of narrative inquiry practice, Clandinin (2019, 2023) and Connelly and Clandinin (1990) emphasize that such reflection involves three forms of justification: personal, practical, and social. Through these justifications, researchers illuminate the importance of the inquiry and the impact it seeks to make.

In this concluding chapter, I respond to these guiding questions by reflecting on the three justifications of my research. I begin with the personal justification, where I consider how engaging in this narrative work has transformed my understanding of doing research and reshaped my sense of self, both as an individual and a researcher. I then turn to the practical justification, examining how this study may inform professional practice, particularly within teacher education, and contribute to more equitable and inclusive learning spaces. I also offer the social justifications, discussing the broader methodological and theoretical, including policy implications of this work. Finally, I outline the limitations of the study and identify potential opportunities for future research before offering my final reflections.

Through these reflections, I aim to return to the central purpose of this study and respond to its final research question: **What lessons can teacher education learn from the narratives of racialized teacher candidates to promote equity, diversity, and inclusion within the program?** In doing so, I bring this research journey to a close as I look ahead to the ongoing work of imagining and enacting more just and inclusive possibilities in teacher education.

8.2 Personal Justifications: Finding Purpose and Meaning through Research

At the outset of this doctoral journey, I entered the research field from a place of profound personal vulnerability. As introduced in Chapter 1, I positioned myself as a racialized

researcher and educator working within a predominantly white Ontario school board. At that time, I was navigating the intersecting experiences of grief, existential uncertainty, and a deep search for meaning in my life. Pursuing a Ph.D. was, at its core, an attempt to find that meaning: to hold on to something that might help me make sense of life and of myself. Yet, as I soon came to realize, my research journey became far more than an academic pursuit; it became a process of my personal transformation.

Meeting Sage, Ardeen, Neve, Maddox, Emery, Lark, and Jamie was the beginning of that transformation. Entering into the relational spaces I shared with each of them, I was invited to engage in what Josselson et al. (2007) describe as “a deeply human, genuine, empathic, and respectful relationship to the participant about significant and meaningful aspects of the participant’s life” (p. 539). Placing such relational ethics at the heart of the inquiry meant that the process of data generation extended far beyond the act of collecting stories; it became about cultivating trust, mutual respect, and care. In these shared relational spaces, I learned to listen differently, with humility, attentiveness, and emotional presence.

This was most powerfully evident in my engagement with Emery. It was through our conversations that I realized how sometimes the simplest questions can elicit the most profound and affective responses. Among all the participants, it was Emery’s story that I found myself struggling with the most. He spoke of grief, loss, and the search for meaning and purpose in the aftermath of profound trauma— experiences that resonated deeply with my own. In listening to him, I encountered the language for emotions I had not yet been able to articulate in my personal life. As Emery shared his story, I listened intently, moved to tears by his vulnerability. I remember feeling an almost overwhelming urge to hug him and offer comfort, to acknowledge the pain he laid bare. Yet in that moment, I was acutely aware of my role as a researcher and the ethical boundaries that defined our encounter.

The struggle did not end when our three-part conversations concluded. It extended into the analytic process, where I continued to grapple with how to hold Emery’s story with care. Working with his transcript felt like navigating deep, uncharted waters. As I wrote in my research journal, “He was down in the deep blue sea, but I could not dive deep enough to reach him. I felt unequipped and lacking the necessary tools to withstand the pressure of those depths, to fully comprehend the magnitude of his pain” (Field Notes, October 5, 2024). There was a constant tension between wanting to understand and recognizing the limits of my understanding.

In reflecting on this, I found myself returning once again to Lugones' (1987) concept of “world-traveling.” It reminded me of the act of moving lovingly into another’s world to understand them from within their own terms. My engagement with Emery’s story, and those of the other participants, demanded this kind of ethical and imaginative travel. I could not fully or truthfully capture the entirety of their experience, but I could strive to approach it with love, humility, and openness. This practice of world-traveling required me to dwell in the discomfort of partial knowing, to accept that understanding in narrative inquiry is always incomplete, always situated within relational and ethical boundaries.

This experience with Emery and the six other participants deepened my appreciation for the relational ethics that underpin narrative inquiry. It reminded me that research is not about mastery or full comprehension, but about presence, respect, and care. To engage ethically with another’s story is to acknowledge both its depth and its mystery, while listening with empathy and recognizing the impossibility of total knowing. It is in this tension between closeness and distance, between empathy and ethics, that the transformative potential of narrative inquiry truly resides.

Engaging in this kind of relational work has not only transformed how I approach research but has also reshaped how I understand the value and responsibility of my scholarly practice. At the conclusion of each participant’s final interview, I assured them that I would honour their stories. Initially, I understood this commitment to honouring their stories through the lens of relational ethics, that is, by being attentive to how I represented their voices in the narrative accounts, within the findings, and throughout the final dissertation manuscript. However, as the research continued to shape and challenge me, I came to realize that truly honouring their stories and the relational spaces we had shared could not—and should not—end with the completion of the dissertation. To honour them fully, I must continue to carry their stories forward: to speak about their experiences in wider educational contexts, to publish in academic journals, to present at conferences where their voices might resonate with others, and most importantly, to let what I have learned from them live on in my pedagogy as a teacher.

Through this journey, I have learned to value narrative inquiry not simply as a method of research but as a way of being in the world, a practice that calls us to live ethically, relationally, and reflectively. This work has taught me that research is not about mastery, but about humility; not about closure, but about continual becoming. Long after leaving the research field, I still find

myself thinking about my participants' stories. They have become part of my inner landscape—voices that accompany me, guide me, and remind me of the kind of educator and human being I aspire to be.

I find truth in Caine et al.'s (2020) insight that as researchers, when we carry our participants' stories, "they change us, making us want to live right" (p. 473). This, for me, captures the essence of the personal justification of this dissertation: engaging in this narrative work has awakened in me a desire to live more consciously, ethically, and compassionately. As Okri (1997) so beautifully writes, "storytelling is a double-headed axe... you think it cuts only in one direction, but it also cuts you" (p. 43). These stories have cut into me in ways I could never have anticipated. Indeed, stories possess a living force; their real life begins when they take root within us. The stories of Sage, Ardeen, Neve, Maddox, Emery, Lark, and Jamie now live within me. Through them, I have not only found my scholarly path but also my sense of meaning and an understanding that research, at its most human level, is a way of learning how to live right. In coming to know their stories, I have come to know myself, and in that recognition lies the enduring purpose of this work, that is, to live my life right.

8.3 Practical Justifications: Reimagining Curriculum and Practice

As I come to know the stories of my participants, and as their narratives begin to live within me, I feel a growing responsibility to consider the practical justifications of their experiences. This compels me to reflect and recognize that the knowledge shared by participants holds the potential to transform how teacher education understands and supports racialized candidates. A central finding in this study is that these candidates enter their programs already carrying stories of resilience, persistence, and hope despite navigating systemic barriers in their own schooling. Drawing on multiple forms of CCW, they persist and succeed. Although schools have not always been welcoming spaces, these candidates chose to return to them with the purpose of serving their communities through teaching.

Yet, teacher education programs remain, in many cases, unwelcoming and unsafe. This study therefore calls for the intentional creation of spaces where racialized candidates feel seen, heard, and validated. The literature refers to these as "racial affinity spaces" (Kohli, 2025), intentional spaces that allow racialized teacher candidates to reflect, connect, and heal while building critical and racial literacy.

One of the key insights that emerged from my conversations with participants was the transformative nature of our relational space. Several participants described our meetings as a kind of “safe space,” with Sage and Maddox referring to them as “therapy sessions.” Within these conversations, participants felt listened to. Maddox shared that our dialogues prompted him to reflect deeply on “what it means to be a racialized teacher,” a question he had never fully considered before. For him, these discussions opened a space to think critically about how race shaped his identity as an educator and how it might affect his students.

However, these spaces must not be understood as ancillary or optional initiatives under the banner of promoting diversity. As Ardeen insightfully noted, while the program encouraged them to bring diversity into their teaching, there was no guidance on how to navigate that work as racialized individuals. There was no structured space to unpack what it means to carry race within the teaching profession. This distinction underscores the need for affinity spaces to be embedded within the formal curriculum and course structure, not relegated to optional programming or extracurricular efforts.

I witnessed this need firsthand when I served as a teaching assistant for a course titled *Schooling and Society*, taught by a racialized professor who courageously centered antiracist pedagogy in her teaching. The course invited discomfort, especially among white teacher candidates, who made up the majority of the class. At the beginning of the semester, many racialized teacher candidates spoke openly about their experiences. However, as the weeks went on, their participation dwindled. This pattern echoes Amos' (2010) observations that racialized teacher candidates often begin with much to say but become silenced over time, dominated by white peers, discouraged by their naïveté, or fearful of retaliation and ostracism.

These observations and findings highlight the urgent need for structured and protected affinity spaces within teacher education. Such spaces would allow racialized teacher candidates to critically reflect on their identities and emerging teaching practices in community with peers who share similar lived experiences. To be effective, these spaces should be well-resourced and student-led, supported by the institution by providing dedicated physical space, modest funding, and administrative assistance. Such spaces can serve as sites of affirmation and empowerment, where racialized teacher candidates build community, strengthen racial and critical literacies, and develop collective strategies for navigating and transforming educational inequities (Bristol & Gist, 2022; Mosely, 2018).

Furthermore, this study underscores the urgent need to increase the representation of racialized faculty within teacher education programs. The findings reveal that the limited presence of racialized faculty often heightened participants' feelings of isolation and cultural disconnection. Conversely, even the presence of one or two racialized professors created meaningful differences in participants' experiences, fostering trust, relatability, and a deeper sense of belonging. As Sage shared, racialized professors "provide a different lens," while Ardeen described feeling "more comfortable" reaching out for help when the instructor shared her racial background.

The literature strongly supports this finding. Studies have consistently shown that racialized educators are more likely to engage in culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Gay, 2018), and to mentor racialized teacher candidates in ways that affirm their identities and lived experiences (Bobongie-Harris & Youse, 2023; Kohli, 2019). Racialized faculty often bring with them a critical understanding of how racism manifests in educational systems and a commitment to dismantling those inequities through their teaching, mentoring, and leadership. Their presence not only benefits racialized candidates but also enriches the entire teacher education community by broadening epistemological perspectives and cultivating spaces for dialogue across differences (Abawi, 2021).

Given these impacts, it is imperative that teacher education programs actively recruit and retain racialized faculty with strong cultural competencies. However, increasing representation is only part of the solution. Institutions must also recognize and support the often-unacknowledged labour that racialized faculty already perform, particularly in mentoring racialized teacher candidates and engaging in equity and inclusion work. This labour must be formally acknowledged and tangibly rewarded. Programs should count mentoring toward faculty workload, offer stipends for equity-focused initiatives, and revise tenure and promotion criteria to value equity, diversity, and inclusion contributions, mentoring, and community engagement as legitimate forms of academic service.

While shared racial or cultural identity can be a meaningful foundation for connection and support between racialized teacher candidates and faculty, findings from this study also suggest it is not the only path to fostering belonging. Emery's experience with a white professor exemplifies how relational quality and pedagogical intentionality can transcend identity markers. Therefore, teacher education programs must recognize the importance of cultivating humanizing

practices across all faculty. Every instructor should be equipped to engage students in ways that are empathetic, reflective, and affirming. To support this, teacher education programs should offer workshops and training on relational and culturally responsive teaching. Introducing Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth framework can serve as a valuable addition to strategies for developing culturally responsive and sustaining teacher education faculty (Brown, 2019).

Another key finding is that participants' aspirations to teach are often rooted in a commitment to social justice rather than individual career advancement. Teacher education programs must harness this commitment by embedding social justice and critical pedagogy into the curriculum. This includes fostering critical reflection on systemic inequities, and equipping candidates with tools for culturally responsive and anti-oppressive teaching (Paris & Alim, 2017). Additionally, integrating asset-based frameworks, such as the CCW framework, into coursework and field experiences is essential. Teacher candidates should be trained to structure their teaching and observations in ways that recognize and build on students' strengths (Zoch & He, 2020).

Further, this study highlights that participants' persistence in teacher education is closely tied to family values that prioritize education. Families provide both motivation and guidance, shaping how candidates approach goals, make decisions, and solve problems (Swanson, 2019; Yosso, 2005). Teacher education programs, therefore, should intentionally engage with students' familial influences through advising and mentorship that connects personal and professional development.

On a different note, findings of the study demonstrate how racialized teacher candidates strategically leverage their linguistic capital to challenge exclusionary norms and foster inclusive learning environments. Teacher education must move beyond deficit views of language diversity, recognizing that students' home languages are powerful cognitive, cultural, and social resources (Cummins, 2000; Garcia & Kleifgen, 2018). Preparing teacher candidates to honour linguistic identities promotes belonging, engagement, and academic success. In practice, this involves integrating reflective exercises, case studies, and collaborative projects that highlight multilingual learners' strengths. A key approach in this work is translanguaging, which refers to the use of more than one language or language variety by multilingual individuals during communication (García & Lin, 2017; Polat & Lange, 2025). On the one hand, code-switching is

generally defined as the practice of alternating between two or more linguistic codes, including languages or dialects, within classroom interactions (Lin, 2008). On the other hand, translanguaging goes beyond code-switching, enabling students to draw on their full linguistic repertoire to make meaning, express ideas, and engage more fully in learning (Omidire & Ayob, 2022). Research and classroom practice emphasize that students' first languages should be actively welcomed rather than discouraged, as doing so validates their identities and fosters academic participation (García & Wei, 2015). Training teacher candidates in translanguaging strategies and linguistically responsive pedagogy, along with assignments that critically examine how language practices impact equity and student agency, equips future teachers to create inclusive and linguistically affirming classrooms where multilingual learners feel seen, valued, and supported (Hornberger, 2003).

In summary, this section outlines the practical justifications of the study, emphasizing that reimagining teacher education requires a sustained commitment to transforming both curriculum and practice. The next section turns to the social justifications, exploring the study's broader methodological, theoretical, and policy implications, and its potential contributions to ongoing conversations about equity, diversity, and inclusion in education.

8.4 Social Justifications

One of the most resonant findings in the study, aligning closely with existing scholarship, is that racialized teacher candidates enter their programs already embodying multiple forms of community cultural wealth (Brown, 2019; Burciaga & Kohli, 2018; Grace & Aming-Attai, 2023; Yosso, 2005). In fact, the very foundation of the CCW framework is to "transform education and empower People of Colour to utilize assets already abundant in their communities" (Yosso, 2005, p. 82). This study affirms that vision, while also extending it. It shows how racialized teacher candidates not only carry these assets but strategically mobilize them to navigate, survive, and challenge predominantly white teacher education programs. The social justification of this work lies in the urgency of listening to and learning from these candidates not as an act of inclusion, but as a necessary intervention in a system that has long marginalized their voices.

Theoretically, this study extends Yosso's (2005) original conceptualization of CCW into teacher education, particularly in the context of Canada. While the CCW framework has been widely used in studies based in the United States, particularly those centered on Latinx

communities (DeNicolo et al., 2015; Martin-Beltrán et al., 2018; Nevárez, 2022; Rincón & Rodriguez, 2021), its use in Canadian teacher education research remains limited. Bringing CCW into this context not only fills a significant gap but also creates an opportunity to reimagine teacher education in Canada, an institutional space that has long upheld whiteness as the standard for what counts as “good teaching” (Ladson-Billings, 1995a; Milner, 2008). Additionally, by centering the lived experiences and cultural knowledge of racialized teacher candidates, this study reframes teacher education as a space of mutual learning. Institutions must move beyond merely preparing racialized teacher candidates to teach and instead learn from the cultural wisdom, lived experiences, and pedagogical insight they bring.

Drawing on the practical and theoretical insights of this study, the following policy-oriented recommendations call for a shift beyond symbolic commitments to diversity toward sustained structural change in teacher education. Educational policies must be intentionally designed to recognize, sustain, and expand the diverse forms of CCW that racialized teacher candidates bring with them. This requires embedding CCW principles into the core structures of teacher education programs, including curriculum, assessment, mentorship, admissions, and faculty policy.

First, racial affinity spaces should be formally embedded within teacher education programs rather than positioned as optional or peripheral initiatives. When intentionally designed and adequately resourced, these spaces affirm racialized teacher candidates’ lived experiences and legitimize their experiential knowledge as a valuable form of professional learning. Second, curriculum and assessment practices should explicitly adopt asset-based frameworks, such as CCW, by engaging candidates in identifying, reflecting on, and mobilizing their own cultural, linguistic, and familial assets, as well as those of their future students. Such practices not only affirm candidates’ cultural knowledge but also prepare them to teach through equity-oriented and humanizing pedagogies.

Third, admissions and evaluation policies must move beyond narrow, standardized indicators of merit rooted in white, middle-class norms to recognize experiential, cultural, and community-based forms of knowledge as valid indicators of teaching potential (Abawi, 2021). Finally, faculty policies must more fully reflect equity commitments. Teacher education programs should actively recruit, retain, and support racialized faculty, while formally recognizing and rewarding the often-invisible mentoring and equity-focused labour they perform

through workload allocation, compensation, and tenure and promotion criteria (Kohli, 2019). In addition, all faculty, regardless of racial identity, should engage in sustained professional learning focused on relational, culturally responsive, and humanizing pedagogies.

8.5 Significance, Limitations, and Opportunities for Future Studies

Before turning to the study's limitations and directions for future research, it is important to reiterate its significance and contributions. This study offers rich narrative accounts of racialized teacher candidates' lived experiences within a Canadian teacher education context, a group whose perspectives remain underrepresented in the literature. The findings illuminate how racialized teacher candidates actively mobilize multiple forms of Community Cultural Wealth to navigate, persist within, and resist predominantly white institutional spaces. Theoretically, the study extends Yosso's (2005) CCW framework into Canadian teacher education, demonstrating its relevance beyond its more common application in U.S.-based and postsecondary settings. Methodologically, this study contributes to narrative inquiry by showing how critical frameworks such as CRT and CCW can be used in ways that center participants' lived experiences and stories. While the study makes significant empirical, theoretical, and methodological contributions, its scope and context also signal where future research could extend this work.

As with all qualitative research, this study has limitations that also open pathways for further inquiry. First, the study's participant pool, although rich in narrative depth, was relatively small and limited to candidates within a single teacher education program. As a result, the findings cannot be generalized across all Canadian contexts. Teacher education programs differ widely in structure, curriculum, and demographic makeup. Future research should therefore expand the scope to include multiple institutions and geographic regions across Canada, particularly in rural and Francophone contexts, to capture a more diverse range of experiences.

Second, while the study included participants from varied racialized backgrounds, it did not explore deeply into the intra-racial differences that shape how CCW is experienced and expressed. For example, Black, Indigenous, South Asian, Southeast Asian, and East Asian teacher candidates may draw on different forms of CCW and navigate teacher education spaces in distinct ways. Future studies could benefit from intersectional analyses that account for

ethnicity, Indigeneity, migration history, gender identity, and language background to explore these nuances more fully.

Third, the study primarily focused on teacher candidates and their experiences during their teacher preparation training. However, CCW continues to evolve and manifest in complex ways once candidates enter the profession. Longitudinal research, if not ethnography, that follows racialized educators through the early years of their teaching careers would offer deeper insights into how they continue to draw upon, adapt, or reconfigure their CCW in response to the institutional challenges of teaching in K–12 systems.

Additionally, this study primarily centered the voices of racialized teacher candidates. Future studies could extend this work by exploring how faculty, administrators, and policymakers perceive and respond to the various forms of CCW that racialized candidates bring. Such research could illuminate institutional barriers and possibilities for transforming teacher education from within, particularly in relation to curriculum design, assessment, and faculty mentoring practices.

Finally, this study highlights the promise of applying CCW within Canadian teacher education, where research using this framework remains limited. Future studies could explore how integrating CCW into policy, pedagogy, and accreditation standards might reshape institutional culture and accountability in teacher education. Such inquiries would not only build on Yosso's (2005) original framework but also contribute to developing a uniquely Canadian understanding of how community cultural wealth can inform equity-driven educational reform.

In summary, while the study's scope and context necessarily limit its generalizability, these same boundaries create rich opportunities for continued exploration. Expanding this line of inquiry across contexts, stakeholders, and methodological approaches can further advance both the theoretical development of CCW and its transformative potential in making teacher education, and the broader field of education, more equitable, inclusive, and socially just.

8.6 Final Reflections

This study has been both an academic journey and a profoundly personal one. As I came to know the stories of my participants, their courage, persistence, and hope began to resonate deeply within me. Their narratives have reshaped the way I understand education, not as a neutral or objective space, but as one deeply shaped by power, culture, and resistance.

Engaging in this research as a racialized individual repeatedly challenged me to confront my own assumptions about myself and the world. As I analyzed my participants' stories, I realized I was also tracing the ways dominant narratives had shaped my understanding of what counts as my own assets. There were moments when I stumbled, questioning whether my experiences, or those of my participants, truly constituted strengths. At times, I caught myself downplaying my own experiences and, by extension, the experiences of my participants. Guided by the scholarship of racialized researchers, including Tara Yosso and Rita Kohli, among others, I was able to hold my ground. I persisted in documenting the multiple forms of CCW that are emerging from participants' experiences while remaining deeply reflexive about my own.

Furthermore, this work has reaffirmed my belief that research is not merely about generating knowledge; it is also about engaging ethically and relationally with the people whose stories we study. It calls on both myself and the broader field of teacher education to move beyond simply documenting inequities toward actively transforming the structures and conditions that sustain them.

Finally, through this research, I have gained both clarity and a strengthened sense of purpose. It has reinforced my commitment to live and work in ways that honour the stories entrusted to me and to continue imagining education as a space grounded in justice, belonging, and collective transformation. Importantly, it has reminded me that our stories— mine, my participants', and those yet to be heard— are not only worth telling but are central to rethinking and transforming the future of education. Indeed, my work does not end here; it has only just begun.

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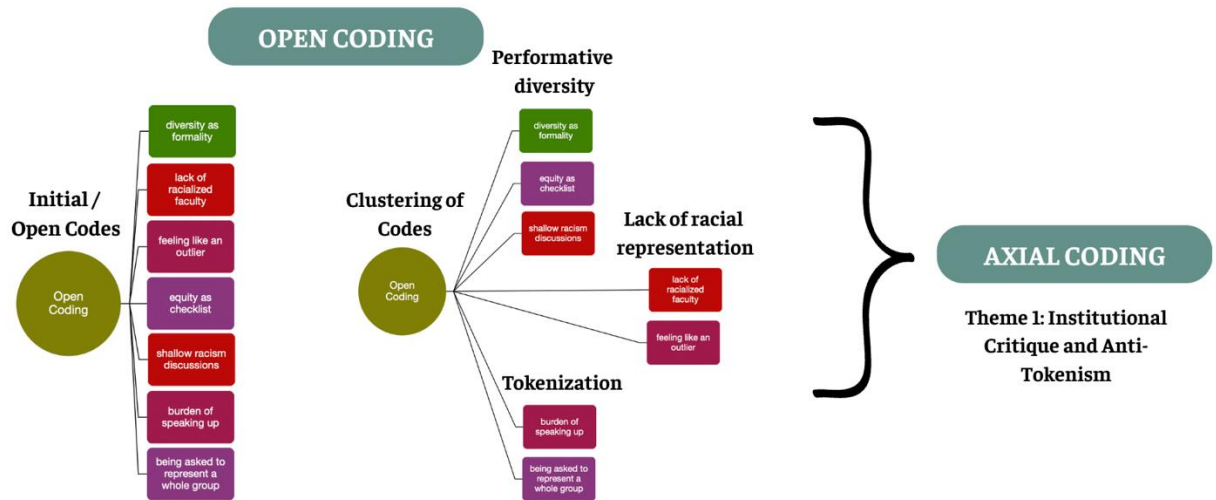
Appendix A

SUMMARY TABLE OF PARTICIPANTS' CHARACTERISTICS

Pseudonym	Interview Dates (2024)	Age Range	Sex Assigned at Birth	Stream	Language Background	Social Identity	Interview Mode
Sage	Sep-Oct	24-28	Female	P/J	English + Karen (Ethnic Language)	Southeast Asian, Single	Online
Lark	Sep-Oct	20-24	Female	P/J	English + Arabic + Hindi	South Asian, Single	Online
Ardeen	October	24-28	Female	P/J	English + Hindi	South Asian, Single	Online
Neve	Oct-Nov	34-40	Female	P/J	English + (not disclosed)	South Asian, Married w/ children	In-person
Emery	Oct-Nov	26-30	Male	I/S	English only	East African, Single	In-person
Maddox	Oct-Nov	30-34	Male	I/S	English only	East Asian, Single	In-person
Jamie	Nov-Dec	24-28	Female	P/J	English only	South + Southeast Asian, Single	Online

Appendix B

ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLE OF THE CODING PROCESS



Appendix C

ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER

03/09/2024

Université d'Ottawa

Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

University of Ottawa

Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

CERTIFICAT D'APPROBATION ÉTHIQUE | CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS APPROVAL

Numéro du dossier / Ethics File Number

S-08-24-10664

Titre du projet / Project Title

A Narrative Inquiry into the Lived
Experiences of Racialized
Teacher Candidates in an
Ontario Teacher Education
Program

Type de projet / Project Type

Thèse de doctorat / Doctoral
thesis

Statut du projet / Project Status

Approuvé / Approved

Date d'approbation (jj/mm/aaaa) / Approval Date (dd/mm/yyyy)

03/09/2024

Date d'expiration (jj/mm/aaaa) / Expiry Date (dd/mm/yyyy)

02/09/2025

Équipe de recherche / Research Team

Chercheur / Researcher

Affiliation

Role

Wenefe CAPILI-BALBALIN

Faculté d'éducation / Faculty of Education

Chercheur Principal / Principal Investigator

Sachin MAHARAJ

Faculté d'éducation / Faculty of Education

Superviseur / Supervisor

Conditions spéciales ou commentaires / Special conditions or comments

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Université d'Ottawa

Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

University of Ottawa

Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

Le Comité d'éthique de la recherche (CÉR) de l'Université d'Ottawa, opérant conformément à l'*Énoncé de politique des Trois conseils* (2014) et toutes autres lois et tous règlements applicables, a examiné et approuvé la demande d'éthique du projet de recherche ci-nommé.

L'approbation est valide pour la durée indiquée plus haut et est sujette aux conditions énumérées dans la section intitulée "Conditions Spéciales ou Commentaires". Le formulaire « Renouvellement ou Fermeture de Projet » doit être complété quatre semaines avant la date d'échéance indiquée ci-haut afin de demander un renouvellement de cette approbation éthique ou afin de fermer le dossier.

Toutes modifications apportées au projet doivent être approuvées par le CÉR avant leur mise en place, sauf si le participant doit être retiré en raison d'un danger immédiat ou s'il s'agit d'un changement ayant trait à des éléments administratifs ou logistiques du projet. Les chercheurs doivent aviser le CÉR dans les plus brefs délais de tout changement pouvant augmenter le niveau de risque aux participants ou pouvant affecter considérablement le déroulement du projet, rapporter tout événement imprévu ou indésirable et soumettre toute nouvelle information pouvant nuire à la conduite du projet ou à la sécurité des participants.

The University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board, which operates in accordance with the *Tri-Council Policy Statement* (2014) and other applicable laws and regulations, has examined and approved the ethics application for the above-named research project.

Ethics approval is valid for the period indicated above and is subject to the conditions listed in the section entitled "Special Conditions or Comments". The "Renewal/Project Closure" form must be completed four weeks before the above-referenced expiry date to request a renewal of this ethics approval or closure of the file.

Any changes made to the project must be approved by the REB before being implemented, except when necessary to remove participants from immediate endangerment or when the modification(s) only pertain to administrative or logistical components of the project. Investigators must also promptly alert the REB of any changes that increase the risk to participant(s), any changes that considerably affect the conduct of the project, all unanticipated and harmful events that occur, and new information that may negatively affect the conduct of the project or the safety of the participant(s).

Riana MARCOTTE

Responsable d'éthique en recherche / Protocol Officer

Pour/For **Barbara GRAVES** Président(e) du / Chair of the **Comité d'éthique de la recherche en sciences sociales et humanités / Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board**

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Appendix D

CONSENT FORM

Université d'Ottawa | University of Ottawa

CONSENT FORM

Title of the study: A Narrative Inquiry into the Lived Experiences of Racialized Teacher Candidates in an Ontario Teacher Education Program

Wenefe Capili-Balbalin

Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa

Dr. Sachin Maharaj

Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa

Invitation to Participate: I am invited to participate in the above-mentioned doctoral research conducted by Wenefe Capili-Balbalin, under the supervision of Dr. Sachin Maharaj, from the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa.

Purpose of the Study: I understand that the purpose of the study is to examine my lived experiences as a racialized teacher candidate during my teacher education and to gain a deeper understanding of the ways I navigate the challenges and opportunities I experience within teacher education.

Participation: I acknowledge that my participation involves three audio-recorded interviews, each lasting up to 60 minutes. These interviews will be scheduled at a time and place convenient for me, either in-person or online. If I am unable to attend the second interview, the researcher and I can combine the first and second interviews into one session for a total of 120 minutes. I can also bring artefacts, such as course assignments, if I wish to discuss them in my interviews. Additionally, I am aware that the third interview will be spaced three days to a week apart from the others to allow time for reflection on what I have shared with the researcher.

The first interview will focus on my life history, the second will discuss my practical experiences in teacher education, and in the final interview, I will reflect on my past and present experiences as a racialized individual pursuing a teaching career. I agree that the researcher may contact me via email for any follow-up questions or to review and verify the content of my interview transcript. I expect to receive a secured copy of my transcript within four weeks after each interview session. If I have any revisions or recommendations, I will return them to the researcher within four weeks of receiving the transcript, using the same method by which I received it.

Risks: I understand that participating in this study involves exploring my lived experiences and how I navigate challenges and opportunities within teacher education. I am aware that recalling my personal experiences might cause emotional or psychological discomfort. However, I am aware that I have the option to refrain from answering any questions or to withdraw from the study at any time. In such case, I am guaranteed that the data relating to my participation will be destroyed or deleted immediately. I am also assured confidentiality throughout the research process. If I experience any concerns or discomfort during my participation, I may reach out to the researcher or her supervisor using the contact information provided above. For additional psychological or emotional support, I can contact the University Counselling Services at 613-562-5411.

Moreover, I am aware of the potential economic inconveniences of participating in the three interviews. The researcher reassured me that the interviews will be a maximum of 60 minutes each, unless we mutually decide to combine the first and second sessions for a total of 120 minutes. The interviews will be conducted at times and locations that do not conflict with my work, study schedule, or other personal obligations.

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Benefits: While there are no direct benefits for my participation in the study, I acknowledge that it may offer me valuable insights into the strengths and uniqueness of my experiences as a racialized individual, potentially leading to a deeper understanding and appreciation of my own cultural background. Furthermore, my involvement will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the experiences of pre-service racialized teachers, which is essential for creating targeted strategies to address the underrepresentation of racialized teachers in education. By highlighting how racialized teacher candidates, including myself, navigate challenges within teacher education, the findings of the above research could help inform policymakers and stakeholders within teacher education in developing educational policies and strategies that address the specific needs of racialized teacher candidates.

Confidentiality and Privacy: The researcher has assured me that the information I provide will be kept strictly confidential. I am confident that no details such as my name, email address, phone number, and age be used in a way that could identify me. **If I choose to disclose my racial background, ethnicity, gender identity, and teaching division, I will inform the researcher via email or in person before the interviews begin.** I am aware that the researcher will substitute my name with pseudonyms to portray my stories in the study. **At the end of the three interviews, the researcher will notify me via email or in-person about how my information will be represented in the study and I will have the opportunity to provide feedback if needed.** Additionally, **I understand that** the anonymized data from my interviews will be utilized only for the above research project, subsequent studies, publications, and presentations.

Conservation of Data: I am assured that the interview audio recordings, transcripts, and researchers' notes, in both hard copy and electronic formats, will be securely stored. Hard copies will be kept in a locked filing cabinet at the researcher's home office, while electronic copies will be protected with strong, unique passwords. **I am aware that my data will be kept within five years from the conclusion of data collection period to allow the researcher sufficient time for disseminating her findings.** Additionally, the researcher will regularly back up my data to prevent loss, ensuring that it is encrypted and stored in a separate secure location at her home.

Voluntary Participation: I am under no obligation to participate in the study and if I choose to participate, I can withdraw at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any penalty or negative consequences. Should I choose to withdraw, all data collected until the time of my withdrawal will be removed from the dataset, not used in the study, and promptly destroyed.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher or her supervisor. If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Office of Research Ethics and Integrity via email (ethics@uottawa.ca) or telephone (613-562-5387).

I am advised that I retain a copy of this consent form for my records.

Acceptance: By signing my name below, I confirm that I understand the contents of this form and that I agree to participate in the research study entitled, *A Narrative Inquiry into the Lived Experiences of Racialized Teacher Candidates in an Ontario Teacher Education Program*.

Participant's name: _____ Date: _____

Participant's signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's signature: _____ Date: _____

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Appendix E

INTERVIEW GUIDE

1st Phase: The goal of this phase is to contextualize the participants' experiences within their life histories by encouraging them to share as much as possible about themselves in relation to the topic (Seidman, 2019).

Can you take me through your life journey up until the point you became a teacher candidate? Feel free to start from as far back as you remember and share the key experiences, challenges, and milestones that have shaped you along the way.

Prompts / follow-up questions:

- How was schooling for you growing up?
- How did you become interested in teacher education? / What motivated you to take the teaching path? (Aspirational Capital)
- Can you describe a time when you had to resist or challenge stereotypes and barriers in your academic journey? What role did your cultural heritage play in this resistance? (Resistant Capital)
- Can you share some experiences where you had to navigate educational or professional institutions that were unfamiliar or challenging? How did your community or personal background help you? (Navigational Capital)
- What values and traditions from your family have significantly impacted your journey to becoming a teacher? (Familial Capital)
- How have community connections and support systems played a role in your educational and professional journey? (Social Capital)

2nd Phase: The goal of the second phase is to focus on the concrete details of the participants' current lived experiences related to the topic (Seidman, 2019).

Can you take me through a typical day in your life as a racialized teacher candidate, from the moment you wake up to when you leave the school, focusing on your thoughts, feelings, and actions throughout the day? Please include specific details and examples of your interactions, routines, and significant moments.

Prompts / follow-up questions:

- What languages or dialects do you speak, and how have they enriched your daily interactions with fellow teacher candidates, professors, and colleagues? (Linguistic Capital)
- How are you managing your time and resources to effectively progress in your program?
- Can you describe some of the biggest challenges you have faced in the teacher education program?
- What opportunities have you found most valuable in your teacher education program?
- Can you share a story about a time when you seized an opportunity that significantly impacted your growth as a teacher candidate?

3rd Phase: The purpose of the third interview is to ask clarifications and to reflect on the meaning of the experiences explored in interviews one and two (Seidman, 2019).

Reflecting on what you shared with me about your life history in interview one and your experience as a racialized teacher candidate in interview two, what does it mean to you to be a racialized teacher candidate?

Prompts / follow-up questions:

- What lessons have you learned from navigating these experiences that you will carry forward into your teaching practice?
- Could you elaborate on any specific moments or interactions that have influenced your perception of being a racialized teacher candidate?
- How have your experiences as a racialized individual shaped your approach to teaching and interacting with students in your placement?
- Looking ahead, what strategies or changes would you like to see within the teacher education program to better support racialized teacher candidates like yourself?