

WHAT IS IT LIKE TO BE AN IMMIGRANT TEACHER IN THE U.S. SCHOOLS?
THE CHALLENGES THEY FACE AND THEIR STRENGTHS

By

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(Under the Direction of KyungHwa Lee)

ABSTRACT

In spite of the increasing need for more teachers from similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds with English Language Learners in the U.S. schools, there has been little research on the experiences of immigrant teachers. Moreover, the majority of existing research studies of immigrant teachers were conducted outside the United States such as Australia, Canada, Great Britain, and Israel. Compared to these other countries, however, the United States has not been active in producing research on immigrant teachers and exploring the implications of this line of research for the field of teacher education. The purpose of this study is to examine the lived experiences of three multilingual and multicultural immigrant teachers as they work as certified teachers in the U.S. public schools. A phenomenological research methodology was used as a philosophical approach for this dissertation study. Phenomenology studies these experiences as experienced from the first person point of view. Phenomenological interviews, initial bridling statement and bridling journal entries were used for data collection of the study. For data analysis, the *whole-part-whole analysis* was used. This study found that the immigrant teachers experienced sociocultural challenges due to the cultural differences, prejudices, and their lack of cultural capital of the host society. The immigrant teachers coped with their challenges using

educational resources (e.g., professional learning), religion, social networks, and personal dispositions (e.g., dealing with angry parents, conflicts with colleagues, and the lack of instructional support). The immigrant teachers demonstrated strengths such as multilingual ability, international teaching experiences, professionalism, continuing self-improvement, keeping good relationships with school administrators, leadership, passion for teaching, and tenacity. The immigrant teachers had positive experiences when they were appreciated and recognized as a competent teacher by their colleagues, school administrators, students' parents, and their students. This study highlighted the immigrant teachers' qualities using the Yosso's six forms of capital and also suggested "leadership capital" to be added onto Yosso's six forms of capital. The study concludes with implications for school administrators, professional development, teacher education programs at university, parents/students/teachers, and immigrant teachers.

INDEX WORDS: Immigrant teachers, International teachers, Bilingual teachers, Minority teachers, Teachers of color, Foreign teachers, Minority group teachers, Teacher education, Role models, Teacher shortage, Teacher diversity, Diversifying the teaching force, Teacher recruitment, Multicultural education

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my mother, Hi-Ja Kim, who has inspired me to be an educator, my father, Chang-Hoon Lee, and my brother, Seung-Yoon Ri. Thank you for the emotional support and prayers you have given to me.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | Page |
|--|------|
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENT | v |
| LIST OF TABLES | ix |
| LIST OF FIGURES..... | x |
| CHAPTER | |
| ONE INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| Background for the Study | 1 |
| Statement of the Problem..... | 3 |
| Purpose of the Study | 4 |
| Research Questions..... | 5 |
| Significance of the Study | 5 |
| Scope of the Study | 7 |
| Definition of Terms..... | 8 |
| TWO LITERATURE REVIEW ON IMMIGRANT TEACHERS AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS..... | 10 |
| Literature Review on Immigrant Teachers | 10 |
| Theoretical Frameworks | 33 |

| | | |
|-------|--|-----|
| THREE | RESEARCH METHODS..... | 44 |
| | Why Phenomenology? | 44 |
| | Statement of Phenomenon through an Intentionality Statement..... | 45 |
| | Research Contexts and Participants | 46 |
| | Confidentiality | 47 |
| | School Contexts | 48 |
| | Data Collection | 55 |
| | Data Analysis | 64 |
| FOUR | PORTRAITURE OF PARTICIPANTS | 67 |
| | Annabel | 70 |
| | Niang | 78 |
| | Mares | 87 |
| FIVE | FINDINGS | 103 |
| | Sociocultural Challenges | 104 |
| | Coping Strategies | 132 |
| | Strengths | 151 |
| | Positive Experiences | 168 |
| SIX | DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS | 176 |
| | Discussions..... | 177 |
| | Implications..... | 182 |

| | |
|------------------|-----|
| REFERENCES | 197 |
| APPENDICES | 208 |
| Appendix A | 208 |
| Appendix B | 211 |
| Appendix C | 215 |

LIST OF TABLES

| | Page |
|--|------|
| Table 1: Pseudonyms for Participants' Schools and School Districts | 47 |
| Table 2: Race and Ethnicity of Students (2009-2010)..... | 48 |
| Table 3: Economically Disadvantaged Students (2009-2010)..... | 48 |
| Table 4: Race and Ethnicity of Teachers (2008-2009) | 49 |
| Table 5: Economically Disadvantaged Students (2009-2010)..... | 50 |
| Table 6: Race and Ethnicity of Students (2009-2010)..... | 50 |
| Table 7: Race and Ethnicity of Teachers (2008-2009) | 51 |
| Table 8: Economically Disadvantaged Students (2009-2010)..... | 51 |
| Table 9: Race and Ethnicity of Teachers (2007-2008) | 52 |
| Table 10: A Brief Summary of Study Participants | 53 |
| Table 11: Bridling Conducted..... | 63 |
| Table 12: Whole-Part-Whole Analysis Conducted..... | 66 |
| Table 13: Summary of Findings | 68 |

LIST OF FIGURES

Page

| | |
|--|---|
| Figure 1: Comparisons between Teacher Workforce and Student Enrollment in Georgia..... | 2 |
|--|---|

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background for the Study

The population of immigrant students who are English Language Learners (ELL) has been rapidly growing in the U.S. public schools. According to National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (2005), since mid 1980s the ELL population in the U.S. schools has increased to approximately 5.5 million, which is almost seven times the rate of total student enrollment. The body of these ELLs makes up almost 40 percent of the total students enrolled in elementary and secondary public schools (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003). ELL population will constitute an estimated 44 percent of the K-12 age population by 2020 and 54 percent by 2050 (Redmond, Clinedinst & O'Brien, 2000). Georgia, which is selected as a setting of this study, also has had an increase in the population of ELLs. Georgia has shown a 291.6% increase in its K-12 ELL population from 1994 to 2004 (NCELA, 2005). Across the United States, about 41% of teachers have ELLs in their classrooms (Carrison, 2007) and 460 different languages are spoken by ELLs in the U.S. public schools (Kindler, 2002).

In spite of the dramatic increase in the percentage of ELLs in the U.S. schools (Carrison, 2007; Kindler, 2002; NCELA, 2002, 2005; NCES, 2001, 2003, 2007; Redmond, Clinedinst, & O'Brien, 2000), the growth in the population of teachers from similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds with ELLs in the U.S. schools has not paralleled the growth of the ELLs (Apostol, 2008). For example, while the percentage of culturally and linguistically diverse students in Georgia is 16.6 percent, the percentage of immigrant teachers is only 2.5 percent (Afolabi &

Eads, 2009). The following table shows the comparison of racial composition between Georgia's teaching workforce and student enrollment in 2009.

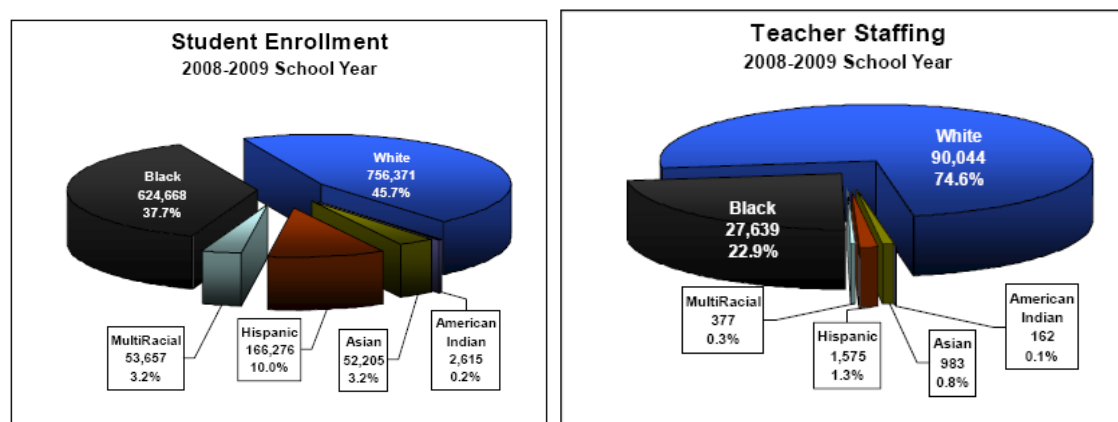


Figure 1. Comparisons between Teacher Workforce and Student Enrollment in Georgia^a

Although the K-12 population has become progressively more diverse, the teaching force in Georgia's public schools is disproportionately made up of White (74.6%) teachers. Redmond, Clinedinst and O'Brien (2000) also pointed out that in spite of the dramatic shift in student population, "classroom teachers are not broadly representative of the students they teach: 9 out of 10 teachers are White" (p. 9).

This increasing gap between the population of culturally and linguistically diverse students and teachers from similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds with ELLs has enlarged the differences between students and their teachers in terms of cultural and linguistic

^a From "An overview of Georgia's educator workforce" by C. Afolabi and G. M. Eads, 2009, Georgia Professional Standards Commission. Retrieved from www.gapsc.com Research 2008 Report An Overview Of Georgia Education Workforce pdf. Copyright 2009 by the Georgia Standards Commission. Adapted with permission of the author.

backgrounds. This growing mismatch between the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of K-12 students and their teachers has animated many researchers to demand a teaching force that reflects the growing diversity of the student population (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 1999; Scheetz, 1995; Shure, 2001; Stephens, 1999). They have suggested increasing the number of teachers from similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds with ELLs in schools for the following reasons: serving as role models, mentors, and advocates (Clewell & Villegas, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Milner, 2003); providing more culturally relevant instruction (Ladson-Billings, 1995); helping to bridge differences between culturally and linguistically diverse students' home cultures and schools (Clewell & Villegas, 2001; Genzuk & Baca, 1998) as their "cultural translators" (Irvine, 1990, p. 51); and enriching the school environment and the curriculum (Nieto, 1999).

Statement of the Problem

In spite of the increasing need for more teachers from similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds with ELLs in the U.S. schools, there has been little research on immigrant teachers (Gordon, 2000; Hwang, Baek, & Vrongistinos, 2005; Omi & Winant, 1994; Subedi, 2008). Moreover, the majority of existing research studies of immigrant teachers were conducted outside the United States such as Australia (see Cruickshank, 2004; Peeler & Jane, 2005), Canada (see Bascia, 1996; Beynon, Illieva, & Dichupa, 2004), Great Britain (see Miller, 2006; Miller, Ochs, & Mulvaney, 2008) and Israel (see Elbaz-Luwisch, 2004; Weintroub, 1996). These countries have already started in-depth studies about the experiences of immigrant teachers such as the challenges they face, their coping strategies, and the contributions they make to the school of the host society. They also have developed pre-service teacher education programs and mentoring programs for immigrant teachers.

Compared to these other countries, however, the United States has not been active in producing research on immigrant teachers and exploring the implications of this line of research for the field of teacher education. My teaching experiences as an immigrant teacher in the U.S. schools and informal conversations with other immigrant teachers have confirmed that teachers, school administrators, parents, and students from the U.S. mainstream culture do not really know where immigrant teachers come from, how they become teachers in the United States, what challenges they face, how they meet their challenges, what strengths they have, and what contributions they make to the U.S. schools. This lack of understanding about immigrant teachers often contributes to the prejudice and discrimination against these teachers in the U.S. schools (Ozbarlas, 2008; Yee, 2008).

To fill this gap in research literature, I conducted a research study of immigrant teachers in order to understand the challenges they face and their strengths as well as factors that help them to be competent teachers in the U.S. schools.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the lived experiences of three multilingual and multicultural immigrant teachers as they work as certified teachers in the U.S. public schools. The main focus of the study is first, to gain understanding of the challenges these immigrant teachers face in the U.S. public schools; second, to examine how these teachers meet the challenges they face at work; third, to identify factors that help these teachers meet those challenges; fourth, to study the qualities and strengths they bring with them to the U.S. schools; last but not least, to illuminate their positive teaching experiences and their contributing factors.

With this purpose in mind, the aforementioned five aspects of the experiences of three immigrant teachers were examined through phenomenological interviews. The merits of using

the phenomenological interviews as mentioned in the study of Carrison (2007), *Learning from the Lived Experiences: Strengths and Insights of Bilingual Immigrant Teachers*, are first, they enable me to gain insider perspectives of their teaching experiences because the phenomenological interviews provide a “first-person insight” (p. 5) into these immigrant teachers’ personal and professional lived-experiences as teachers; second, they draw attention to these teachers “as a valuable and critical resource to increase the pool of potential teachers” (*ibid.*) from multilingual and multicultural groups; third, they center “the voices of those traditionally marginalized” in order “to build knowledge and inform educational practices” (*ibid.*).

Research Questions

The main research question in this study is “What is it like for immigrant teachers to meet the challenges they face in the U.S. schools?” I pursued this large question by posing the following sub-questions:

- What challenges do immigrant teachers face?
- What are the factors that help them meet their challenges?
- What are qualities and strengths they bring with them?
- What are their positive experiences as they work in the U.S. schools?

Significance of the Study

This study provides useful implications for (a) immigrant teachers; (b) school administrators; (c) teachers, students, and parents who work with immigrant teachers; and (d) teacher education.

For immigrant teachers, this study provides social-emotional support for these teachers by helping them realize that other immigrant teachers face similar challenges, and that they are not alone. This study offers a resource for immigrant teachers to use in order to meet the challenges they face through examining the experiences of other immigrant teachers. As Solórzano and Yasso (2002) used the “storytelling” (p. 32) of marginalized people in the U.S. mainstream culture as a tool to “challenge racism” (*ibid.*) and strengthen their “social, political, and cultural survival and resistance” (*ibid.*), this study centers the voices of immigrant teachers which are often marginalized, and uses their stories to value and empower their presence in the U.S. schools.

For school administrators, this study assists their understanding of who immigrant teachers are and what strengths and qualities they bring with them to the school. This understanding encourages administrators to actively recruit more immigrant teachers, as several researchers (Farrell, 1990; Lara-Alecio, 2002; Lomotey, 1989) found that the more minority teachers are employed, the less minority students are over represented in traditional patterns of remedial and disciplinary programs at school. I believe that this study also helps administrators understand the importance of providing a just and respectful working environment where immigrant teachers’ potentials and leadership can be fully developed and recognized in their schools.

For teachers, students and parents who work with immigrant teachers, this study increases their understanding of the lives of immigrant teachers. Through this understanding, they may see that although immigrant teachers look and sound different from them, these teachers are competent professionals who deserve respect and appreciation.

Finally, I believe that the result of this study also provides useful implications for teacher education in general, and in-service teacher education and professional development in particular^b. This study encourages teacher educators to reflect upon what challenges immigrant teachers have at schools and what roles they can play to help these teachers meet their challenges. The current research studies of immigrant teachers (see Milner, 2003; Redmond, Clinedinst, & O'Brian, 2000; Ross, 2003) have paid most of their attention to pre-service teacher education and the development of teacher preparation programs to recruit more prospective immigrant teachers. Thus, there is a need for research exploring the role of in-service teacher education regarding immigrant teachers. I also hope that the findings of this study can motivate teacher educators to design courses, seminars, workshops, or mentoring programs that meet the special needs of in-service immigrant teachers.

Scope of the Study

This study seeks to examine the lived experiences of immigrant teachers who a) were born outside the United States, b) speak English as a second or foreign language, c) received K-12 education in their home countries, d) immigrated to the United States as an adult, e) experienced the credentialing process to become a teacher in the United States, and f) are currently teaching full-time in the U.S. public schools.

The study limits its focus on the in-service teachers who are already in teaching practice *after* they became certified teachers in the U.S. schools rather than pre-service immigrant teachers because first, there is a lack of research study about in-service teacher programs that can be helpful for immigrant teachers as they practice teaching; second, several researchers (Milner,

^b Both in-service teacher education and professional development come under the umbrella of teacher education. And the professional development is part of in-service teacher education.

2003; Redmond, Clinedinst, & O'Brian, 2000; Ross, 2003) have already paid their attention to pre-service teacher education for immigrants.

Further, this study does not attempt to generalize the views and attitudes expressed by participants in this study to other immigrant teachers because they have their own unique cultural contexts that would be varied depending on their country of origin, the level of English proficiency, length of teaching experience in the U.S. schools, characteristics and population of students they serve, etc. The focus of this study is to gain an in-depth understanding of these three immigrant teachers' lived experiences as teachers in the U.S. public schools.

Lastly, the current study focuses on the experiences of immigrant teachers in public elementary schools, especially between pre-K through Grade 3 because 67 percent of the total ELL enrollment is clustered at the elementary school level with over 44 percent in the primary grades which are Pre-K through Grade 3 (Kindler, 2002). This selection enabled me as a researcher (a) to have meaningful findings of the experiences of immigrant teachers who work with grade levels that have the most concentrated ELL population, and (b) to discover the significant part of contributions that immigrant teachers make to the U.S. schools.

Definition of Terms

The following key terms used in this study are defined for clarity as follows:

English Language Learners (ELLs): Non-native English-speaking students learning English as a second or foreign language.

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL): A term used to indicate a program for ELLs. When indicating a person learning English as an additional language, ELL is used. However, when indicating a program for ELL, ESOL is used in general.

Immigrant Teacher: A currently practicing teacher in the U.S. schools, who was born and received K-12 education outside the United States; a teacher who experiences VISA process, (re)credentialing process, language barriers, cultural adjustment, etc.

Immigrant Teacher Candidates: Immigrants who are preparing to become certified teachers in the U.S. schools.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Literature Review on Immigrant Teachers

Parameters Used for the Literature Review

For the literature review for this study, I used key words such as “immigrant teachers”, “international teachers”, “bilingual teachers”, “minority teachers”, “a teacher of color”, “foreign teachers”, “minority group teachers”, “teacher education”, “role models”, “teacher shortage”, “mentors”, “teacher diversity”, “diversifying the teaching force”, “teacher recruitment”, “multicultural education”, etc. The key words such as “immigrant teachers”, “bilingual teachers”, “international teachers”, and “foreign teachers” were greatly helpful to find the most relevant research studies to my area of interest because they excluded African-American teachers and black and white racial issues in existing studies.

Types of materials reviewed are doctoral dissertations; master’s degree theses; data from National Center for Education Statistics; journals from the areas of teacher education, multicultural education, educational research, curriculum and teaching, educational practice and theory, and international migration; American Educational Research Association journals, etc.

The range of publication years of the empirical studies I have found started from the 1970s. This is probably due to the huge influx of immigrants from South America and Asia since 1965 when the U.S. government passed the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act which eliminated the restrictive national origins system initially passed in 1924 in order to limit immigration from Asia (Le, 2010). After an extensive review of literature pertinent to immigrant

teachers from 1970s to 2009, I have found the trends in each decade summarized in the following section.

Overview of Trends in the Literature Review from 1970s to 2010

From 1970s to 1980s (see Bolaria & Li, 1988; Britzman, 1986; Bullough, 1989; Department for Education and Science, 1985; Graham, 1989; Hawley, 1989; Lortie, 1975; Ortiz, 1982; Rundall & Hernandez, 1986), observation of increasing students from multicultural and multilingual backgrounds in public schools was discussed. From 1990s to 2000 (see Cook, 1999; Fleras & Elliot, 1999; Henry, Mattis, Rees, & Tator, 1995; Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998; Levinson, Foley, & Holland, 1996; Kamler, Reid, & Santoro, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; McCarthy, 1993; Munro & Derwing, 1995; Stover, 1993), the need for diversifying the teacher workforce in order to meet the needs of minority and immigrant students was explored along with factors that kept qualified immigrants from entering the teaching force.

Since 2000, there has been increasing research on immigrant teachers (see Arun, 2008; Basit & McNamara, 2004; Carrison, 2007; Flores, 2001; Milner, 2003; Ng, 2006; Salinas, 2002; Yee, 2008; Zhang, 2005). In these studies, attention has been paid to challenges they face, contributions they make to both immigrant and mainstream students, and the role of teacher education programs for integrating teachers from diverse cultural groups into the teaching workforce. Because this dissertation study focuses on how immigrant teachers met their challenges *after* they became teachers in the U.S. schools, I focused on reviewing the literature published since 2000 because the majority of studies on foreign-born immigrant practicing teachers' experiences in the U.S. schools were conducted during this period of time.

Focusing on the literature published between 2000 and 2010, I have identified some studies that significantly drew other researchers' attention in this field. The studies of Arun (2008), Bascia (1996), Beynon, Ilieva, and Dichupa (2004), and Phillion (2003) have addressed the challenges immigrant teachers faced such as language barriers, social isolation, cultural differences, and racial conflicts. While these studies focused on the challenges and barriers immigrant teachers faced, the positive and successful teaching experiences of immigrant teachers did not receive much attention. Indeed, positive and successful teaching experiences as well as their challenges are a significant part of immigrant teachers' lived experiences. In this dissertation study, I illuminate positive and successful teaching experiences of immigrant teachers. This illumination adds the positive teaching experiences to the research literature on immigrant teachers.

My review of literature also revealed that many researchers (Arun, 2008; Elbaz-Luwisch, 2004; Hwang & Baek, 2005; Flores, 2003; Francis, 2005) focused on particular ethnic minorities such as South Asian immigrant teachers, Jewish immigrant teachers, Jamaican immigrant teachers, Filipino immigrant teachers, and Latino immigrant teachers. Although these research studies helped me understand immigrant teachers from a particular ethnic group in-depth, unfortunately, the implications of their findings seemed often limited to that group. In an effort to address this limitation, I recruited participants from diverse backgrounds in order to understand immigrant teachers from different racial groups and geographic regions.

So far I have briefly explained the parameters used for the literature review, materials and the range of publication years of the materials reviewed, and the overview of trends in literature from 1970s to 2010. In what follows I will discuss several themes identified from the literature review related to this dissertation study in detail.

The need for immigrant teachers. As the number of ELL population in the U.S. schools has rapidly increased to approximately 5.5 million, which is almost seven times the rate of total student enrollment since mid 1980s (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 2005), researchers (Aronson & George, 2003) have been concerned that few White teachers were adequately prepared to teach culturally and linguistically diverse students. Many researchers (Apostol, 2008; Aronson & George, 2003; Banks, 1993; Carrison, 2007; Clewell & Villegas, 2001; Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 1999; Genzuk & Baca, 1998; Irvine, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Milner, 2003; Nieto, 1999; Scheetz, 1995; Shure, 2001; Stephens, 1999; Yee, 2008) emphasized the need for the supply of teachers representing culturally and linguistically diverse children's backgrounds.

Especially, Apostol (2008) studied that culturally and linguistically diverse students benefit from teachers who shared the same ethnic and racial backgrounds. The reason that these teachers could provide an effective instruction to culturally and linguistically diverse students was because they were "well-prepared to understand the process of language acquisition and the challenges and possibilities of cultural and linguistic diversity related to teaching and learning" (Carrison, 2007, p. 1). This importance of cultural and linguistic connection between teachers and students was closely examined in Yee's (2008) study of a Cambodian student who spoke of his experience with the lack of Cambodian teachers when he was growing up: "It would have helped tremendously to have someone able to understand you, to see through you and understand your history and why you are here. That would have quadrupled my learning process" (p. 3). According to Education and the Southeast Asian American Community (2005), many Southeast Asian American students felt as if they did not belong in their schools because the schools did not have Southeast Asian American teachers. The lack of role models for students from

culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds inspired a researcher like Carrison (2007) who asserted the importance of drawing more immigrant teachers into the U.S. public school system in order to meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students. Similarly, educators (see Banks, 1993; Grant, 1994; Haberman, 1996; Ladson-Billings, 1995) also have suggested increasing the number of culturally and linguistically diverse teachers in schools for the following reasons: serving as role models for students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Clewell & Villegas, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1995), providing more culturally relevant instruction (Ladson-Billings, 1995), helping to bridge differences between these students' home cultures and schools (Clewell & Villegas, 2001; Genzuk & Baca, 1998) as their "cultural translators" (Irvine, 1990, p. 51), and "enriching the school environment and the curriculum" (Nieto, 1999, p. 330) by providing alternate perspectives on appropriate and effective practices for all students (Banks, 1993).

Importance of studying immigrant teachers. Several researchers (Beynon, Ilieva, & Dichupa, 2004; Ozbarlas, 2008; Yee, 2008) explored the importance of studying immigrant teachers. In their study about immigrant teachers in Canada, Beynon, Ilieva and Dichupa examined the importance of investigating how individuals from "diverse professional and personal backgrounds and with initial teaching credentials from outside Canada perceived and responded to the institutional/structural constraints" (p. 439).

Ozbarlas (2008) suggested a need for a more thorough understanding of immigrant teachers' viewpoints as they served as role models, mentors, and activists as the U.S. schools faced challenges such as interracial tensions and conflicts, increasing percentage of second language learners, and continuous gaps in achievement among students from diverse backgrounds.

Yee (2008), in his study of Cambodian American teachers, also pointed out the importance of studying immigrant teachers in terms of their barriers such as language and culture that made it more challenging for them to attain their teaching position in a new country. He asserted that “If our goal is to increase the number of Cambodian American teachers, we must study the effect that culture has on Cambodian Americans who aspire to become teachers” (p. 10).

Lived experiences of immigrant teachers. Several scholars (Arun, 2008; Carrison, 2007; Ng, 2006) explored the lived experiences of immigrant teachers as they practiced teaching in public schools. Arun examined the life histories of four first generation South Asian immigrant teachers and explored evolution, continuities and changes in these teachers’ pedagogies, worldviews, relationships, and identities in response to their geographic, cultural and professional relocations. In her study, the participants emerged as knowledgeable, compassionate and capable educators. Adapting to the new context, they exhibited varied and flexible pedagogy, bringing a holistic perspective to their multicultural classrooms. Once settled, they engaged in the available professional development activities and took on leadership roles in their schools.

Similarly, Carrison (2007) focused on the qualities and strengths of immigrant teachers. She examined the lived experiences of a group of seven bilingual and bicultural ELL para-professionals as they transitioned from support positions in schools and classrooms to certified teaching positions. Her study’s findings illuminated the qualities and strengths those teachers brought with them to their work such as culturally responsive pedagogy, advocacy for students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and translators connecting the students and their families with the school. Carrison also provided an intimate and first-person account of the teachers’ experiences as they related their personal and professional journeys into teaching.

Unlike other researchers aforementioned, Ng (2006), in her study of five immigrant teachers' lived experiences, included herself as one of the five participants of her study and explored the immigrant teachers' identity development and the implication of identity shifts in re-shaping their personal and professional lives before and after immigrating to Canada. Upon reflections, Ng (2006) concluded (a) that the immigrant teachers brought to "teaching their past experiences which were used in the form of narratives for didactic and instrumental curricular intent in the classroom" (p. 257); (b) that their personal and professional identities changed while maintaining "a harmony of both Canadian culture and individual ethnicity" (p. 258); and that (c) although their cultural and linguistic differences helped them understand the needs of the students from minority backgrounds, they "experienced non-supportive attitudes and responses from other minority teachers, administrators, parents and students from their own ethnic background" (p. 259).

Hiring immigrant teachers. Vaughan (2008) explored hiring practices in Texas public school districts with over 500 students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Vaughan examined differences between the practices of districts with ethnic minority teachers as the majority of the teaching populations and the practices of districts with ethnic minority teachers as the minority of the teaching population. The study particularly focused on the role and title of human resource administrators, the method of attracting a candidate pool, and if a formal statement of intent to hire a diverse staff existed. The author found that the attitude and willingness of school administrators to hire teachers from diverse backgrounds played a significant role in diversifying staff. This study has potential to have significant influence on increasing the pool of immigrant teachers if school administrators apply the study findings to their hiring practices at school.

However, the Arizona Department of Education recently notified school districts that “teachers whose spoken English seems to be heavily accented or ungrammatical must be removed from classes for students still learning English” (Jordan, 2010). This policy and political context might influence other states and discourage school districts to hire immigrant teachers.

Strengths and contributions of immigrant teachers. Several researchers (Arun, 2008; Carrison, 2007; Dee, 2003; Myles, Cheng, & Wang, 2006) highlighted the qualities and strengths immigrant teachers brought with them to their work. In Arun’s study of South Asian immigrant teachers, the author discovered that the immigrant teachers in the study appeared to be

knowledgeable, compassionate and capable educators. Adapting to the new context, they exhibited varied and flexible pedagogy, bringing a holistic perspective to their multicultural classrooms. Once settled, they engaged in the available professional development activities and took on leadership roles in their schools. (p. ii)

Carrison (2007) also found the immigrant teachers’ strengths which include (a) “approach[ing] the profession from a culturally responsive perspective that not only influences their instructional practices but also their advocacy for students” (p.v); (b) demonstrating “the potential to become leaders who can guide others—including pre-service and in-service educators -- in issues relating to the education and welfare of culturally and linguistically diverse students and their families” (*ibid.*). Carrison’s finding has a significant meaning for many immigrant teachers and other people around these teachers. In that it recognizes immigrant teachers’ potential as leaders. Similarly, Dee (2003) reported that immigrant teachers brought with them an inherent understanding of the backgrounds, attitudes, and experiences of students from certain minority groups and, therefore, could help inform majority teachers about effective ways to interact with students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

What school administrators and teachers can learn from the aforementioned studies is that they can view immigrant teachers as leaders in the school building and utilize their cultural and linguistic knowledge and experiences to create a culturally responsive school environment for all students. Myles, Cheng, and Wang (2006) would corroborate this idea as they asserted that “school should become more inclusive and accepting of the experiences and identities” (P. 244) of immigrant teachers and should view these teachers as someone who “would significantly enrich not only lives of the children they teach, but also the broader educational communities into which they become immersed” (p. 243).

The contribution of immigrant teachers to all students, not just to students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, was also highlighted by several researchers (Quirocho & Rios 2000; Redmond, Clinedinst, & O’Brien, 2000; Tomlinson, 1990). For students from the mainstream culture, having a teacher from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds “presents an opportunity to learn from an individual who reflects the broad cultural and social diversity that is the bedrock of our national unity” (Redmond, Clinedinst & O’Brien, p. 9). In the 21st century, all students are affected by diversity in languages and cultures (Lustig & Koester, 1996). Consequently, it is important that students from the mainstream culture interact with culturally and linguistically diverse professionals in order to help eradicate racism (Tomlinson, 1990) and racial and ethnic separation (Hawley, 1989). According to Quirocho and Rios, parents in the United States who are interested in multicultural education understand the significance of having their children exposed to teachers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. It is important to acknowledge what immigrant teachers bring to the host society, which includes “positive images of people of color, a realistic understanding of our growing multicultural

society and sheer understanding of learning from people of different backgrounds” (Shaw, 1996, p. 488).

Challenges for immigrant teachers. A wide collection of literature (Bascia, 1996a, 1996b; Beynon, Ilieva, & Dichupa, 2004; Flores, 2001; Mawhinney & Xu, 1997; Myles, Cheng, & Wang, 2006; Pailliotet, 1997; Phillion, 2003; Wang, 2002; Zhang, 2005) has addressed the challenges immigrant teachers faced at school such as challenges in credentialing process and employment process, language barriers, social isolation, cultural conflicts, racial discriminations, and challenges in classroom discipline.

Challenges in credentialing process. Teachers immigrating to the United States and Canada with credentials from non-American and non-Canadian jurisdictions are required to redo some or all of their professional training. Beynon, Ilieva, and Dichupa (2004) explored the re-credentialing experiences of immigrant teachers and documented that immigrant teachers experienced a negation of their professional identity as well as challenges to financial resources through the recertification process with the credential institutes in Canada. Ross (2003) also documented that one of the most clear cut and well-documented challenges for minority teaching candidates was to pass standardized tests for a teaching certificate. The struggle for minority teacher candidates to pass standardized tests was well documented in other studies as well (Haney, Madaus, & Kreitzer, 1987; Heger & Engelhart, 1991; Hood & Parker, 1989). Quiocho and Rios (2000) argued: “A logical line of inquiry around this concern is the degree to which minority group people are involved in the construction and review of standardized teaching examinations” (p. 521). Solano-Flores and Trumbull (2003) have called for a paradigm shift in the way that standardized tests were developed, reviewed, and accounted for the language as a source of measurement error to respond to ELL test takers. As a need for immigrant teachers is

increasing, it seems logical that these minority groups should be involved in designing and reviewing teaching certificate exams in order to improve the standardized test to be fair and culturally responsive for all test-takers.

Challenges in employment process. Even though immigrant teachers successfully complete the challenging credentialing process, they have to face different kind of challenge during the employment process. There are two different issues to consider. First, there is a relatively smaller number of immigrant teacher candidates entering into the teaching force. It is important to discuss the contributors to the under-representation of immigrant teachers in the U.S. schools. Second, when immigrant teacher candidates apply for a teaching position, they face discrimination in the process of employment. This employment issue is discussed in relation to the role of school administrators during the employment process.

Several researchers (Apostol, 2008; Basit & McNamara, 2004; Carrison, 2007; Redmond, Clinedinst, & O'Brien, 2000) found possible contributors to the reasons for the under-representation of minority teachers in the U.S. schools.

- Declining minority students' enrollments in teacher education program (Apostol, 2008) due to the fact that minority students entering college are more attracted to degrees that will lead to higher paying professions (Carrison, 2007)
- Poor working conditions of teachers such as limited influence over pedagogical and curricular decisions, low pay, overcrowded classrooms, and discipline problems discourage candidates to enter the profession (Basit & McNamara, 2004; Carrison, 2007; Redmond, Clinedinst & O'Brien, 2000)
- A lack of cultural and social support in teacher preparation programs as well as in the communities in which new teachers will be teaching (Apostol, 2008; Carrison, 2007)

- Fear of racism (Basit & McNamara, 2004)

There is also racial discrimination during the employment process, which contributes to the under-representation of immigrant teachers in the teaching force. Ahmad, Modood and Lissenburgh (2003) found that discrimination took place at the point of recruitment when immigrant teacher candidates were applying for the same job at the same places that their peers applied. In spite of the same qualifications and the same teaching experiences, their peers who were from the mainstream culture got an interview because they had an English name (Basit & McNamara, 2004).

The role of school administrators is important in the process of employment because they are the ones who do most of the hiring. Vaughan (2008), in his study of methods that school administrators used during hiring process, found that the attitude and willingness of school administrators to hire teachers from diverse backgrounds played a significant role to diversify staff. It is important that school administrators open up their minds and understand the value of hiring culturally and linguistically diverse teachers. At the same time, all disciplinary areas such as teacher education, professional development, and educational leadership also need to work collaboratively in order to recruit and maintain more immigrant teachers in the teaching force. It is not simply teacher education's responsibility to achieve this goal. School administrators, teacher educators, and school district level administrators involved in educating and hiring immigrant teacher candidates should realize that they are interdependent and should work together as a team to diversify the U.S. public school teaching force. If issues regarding immigrant teacher recruitment are unattended, "they will not only deter the immigrant teacher candidates from continuing in teaching, but will also convey the message to other potential

teachers, from ethnic minority groups, that teaching is not a profession for them” (Basit & McNamara, 2004, p. 113).

Language barriers. Among the difficulties confronted by immigrant teachers, language challenges have always been viewed as a main barrier (Bascia, 1996b; Flores, 2001; Mawhinney & Xu, 1997; Myles, Cheng, & Wang, 2006; Phillion, 2003; Wang, 2002). Several researchers (Myles, Cheng, & Wang, 2006; Phillion, 2003) have acknowledged that high English language proficiency was important for immigrant teachers’ securing employment and maintaining it. In Phillion (2003)’s study of the experiences of five foreign-accredited teachers, the Somali participants considered that a major difficulty in obtaining employment was their lack of oral fluency in English. Two participants from India and Jamaica found that their accents were problems in interview situations. As another example of how English proficiency and foreign accented English impacted immigrant teachers’ employment, in Myles, Cheng, and Wang’s (2006) study of foreign-trained teacher candidates in Canada, new immigrant teachers who needed to find jobs in Ontario elementary schools found that their non-native English accent was one of their primary concerns. They also claimed that their English proficiency posed a challenge in their instruction and communication with fellow teachers. Mawhinney and Xu’s (1997) research supports this finding. They reported the challenges to constructing a professional identity faced by foreign-trained teachers enrolled in the Upgrading Pilot Program for Foreign-Trained teachers developed by the faculty at the University of Ottawa. Many frustrations these teachers experienced during the program stemmed from being constantly questioned about their accents when speaking English. In Bascia’s (1996b) research on immigrant teachers in Canadian schools, a third grade teacher emigrating from Taiwan described her own experience of learning English: “[It is like] flying a kite on a windy day, it’s so high up and you are so small, you can’t

catch it, and yet you have to hold on to the string, otherwise you'll lose it. That's a new language" (p. 156).

In spite of the prevalent result describing language as a major barrier for immigrant teachers, Kauchak and Burbank (2003) presented a different finding which can have a significant implication for all immigrant teacher candidates. Bo, a participant in Kauchak and Burbank's study, said,

My professor said my way of solving problem was better than his. I don't know if that was the truth but it was then when I recognized I could study to become a math teacher in this country...Teaching is a matter of „how you teach“...Knowledge allows students to empower themselves, to understand the world around them, and to become better, useful people. (p. 68)

As Bo mentioned, teaching is a matter of *how you teach*, rather than a matter of only how you speak a language.

Social isolation. Another challenge that immigrant teachers face is social isolation. In Henry's (1998) study of six Black Canadian teachers, immigrant teachers were often isolated and thought that their experiences as minority educators were either not recognized or taken advantage of by their colleagues and supervisors. It may be helpful to provide educators from the dominant culture with professional development that can guide them to be compassionate, respectful, and collaborative as they learn to work with their colleagues from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Cultural conflicts. In Yee's (2008) study of Cambodian immigrant teachers, the participants reported that barriers associated with culture were the most difficult to overcome when they pursued their teaching position. Oriaro's (2007) study of Kenyan immigrant teachers revealed that these teachers faced challenges that were based on the differences between the Kenyan and U.S. cultures. In Kenyan culture, students are expected to be quiet, less assertive,

and respectful to their teachers. On the contrary, the mainstream U.S. culture encourages freedom of speech, discussion, and equality. Consequently, Kenyan immigrant teachers viewed some of the U.S. students as talkative, assertive, and disrespectful to their teachers.

Interestingly, even the minority students and immigrant teachers of the same racial background may have conflicts. In Francis's (2005) study of Jamaican immigrant teachers revealed that, although most of these teachers stated that they felt culturally connected to their students of Caribbean descent in New York City, their statements revealed significant gaps in their feelings of cultural connection with them. This was largely due to vast differences in the cultural background in which these teachers grew up and that of their present students who grew up in the United States and had learning experiences in the U.S. public school system. Jamaican immigrant teachers' lack of learning experience in the U.S. school system may cause the cultural conflict even with the students of the same ethnic background. Zhang's (2005) study supported this finding. Zhang found that the immigrant student teachers' lack of teaching and learning experiences in the U.S. public school due to their K-12 education received in their home country contributed to the cultural conflicts they experienced during their student teaching period in the U.S. public schools. From the findings of these studies, it seems that the immigrant teachers' different schooling experiences in their home countries can lead these immigrant teachers to experience cultural conflicts as they practice teaching in the U.S. public schools.

Racial discrimination. Racial discrimination is also highlighted by several researchers (Manwhinney & Xu, 1997; Zhang, 2005). According to Zhang, "Unlike language and cultural differences, racial and ethnic difference cannot be negotiated through learning and conformity" (p. 13). Manwhinney and Xu's study of foreign-trained teachers enrolled in the Upgrading Pilot Program developed by the University of Ottawa supported Zhang's claim. The authors found that

immigrant teachers felt that they were subject to discrimination because of their ethnicity: “Talk about difference? The only difference is that I am not White. They do not want us to stay in school. No matter how well we do, they just don’t like us” (p. 637).

In 1985, the Swann Report, formally called Education for All, was issued as one of the major government reports promoting a multicultural education system for all schools, regardless of ethnicity for staff/pupils in Great Britain (Griffiths & Hope, 2000). The report provided data on ethnicity and educational attainment, and discovered that practicing and pre-service teachers from minority ethnic groups faced racial prejudice and discrimination (Department of Education and Science, 1985). Even today, racism is seen as a significant factor, which deters ethnic minorities from going into teaching (Osler, 1997). Immigrant candidates who do choose to train for the profession can sometimes face racial discrimination in schools during teaching practice (Sirai-Blachford, 1993), feel less favorably treated than their peers from the majority group, and notice stereotypical views amongst teachers regarding their culture and language (Maguire, 1997). Basit and McNamara (2004) suggested that increasing “the recruitment and retention of ethnic minority teachers is a need for society to learn to value diversity and to work towards eliminating negative racist attitudes that predominate in certain areas of England” (p. 110).

Challenges in classroom discipline. Several researchers remarked (Oriaro, 2007; Peterson, 2003) that classroom discipline is one of the most daunting challenges for immigrant teachers. Oriaro, Ross (2003), and Su (1997) found that many pre-service teachers and first-year teachers, especially from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, struggled with classroom management. According to Su, if immigrant teachers continue to experience these conflicts without receiving any support, they may alienate themselves from the classroom and distance themselves from students. It is important for teacher education programs to include

curriculum for student discipline and classroom management for immigrant pre-service teachers. Because many immigrant pre-service teachers rely on their previous experience to fashion classroom management strategies (Oriaro, 2007), it is important for teacher educators to understand the immigrant pre-service teachers' previous student discipline practices and beliefs, and to find discrepancy between their native country's educational practice and that of their host country in order to provide them with an appropriate guidance.

Implications for Teacher Education Programs for Immigrant Teachers

The review of literature revealed ways that teacher education programs can be helpful for immigrant teachers. In this section, I discuss factors related to successful teacher education programs for immigrant pre-service teachers, alternative teacher preparation programs for the recruitment of immigrant teachers, mentoring, cohort structure, and developing reflective teachers.

Successful teacher education programs for immigrant pre-service teachers. In designing programs to support minority candidates to enter the teaching profession, several researchers (Bennett, Cole & Thompson, 2000; Quiocho & Rios, 2000; Yopp, Yopp, & Taylor, 1992) have identified the factors related to successful teacher education programs to meet the needs of immigrant teachers such as peer group support (i.e., creating community among pre-service immigrant teachers), financial aid, working for social justice through multicultural education, promoting sustained school-based experiences through school/university partnership connecting theory and practice, and portraying a different view of teaching. Designing teacher education programs having these factors in mind can provide immigrant teacher candidates with "the skills necessary for translating their cultural resources into active pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching" (Kauchak & Burbank, 2003, p. 73).

Alternative teacher preparation programs for the recruitment of immigrant teachers. Apart from the traditionally structured programs such as 4-year undergraduate or combined advanced degree and certificate programs, there are several non-traditional or alternative routes for teacher preparation which have been developed in order to increase the cultural diversity of participants in the teacher education programs. They include Troops to Teachers, a U.S. Department of Education and Department of Defense program, that supports qualified military personnel to start a new profession as teachers in U.S. public schools (“Troops to Teachers”, 2002), and the Bilingual/ESL Teacher Advancement Program (BETAP) that Washington State University has started for currently employed para-educators to become certified teachers (Carrison, 2007). In order to increase the pool of immigrant teachers in the U.S. public school systems, it is necessary to recruit teachers through alternative routes such as the BETAP, which enables a larger number of immigrants to enter the teacher preparation program. Immigrant teacher candidates, who have no prior teaching experiences in the U.S. schools, can benefit from starting their teaching as bilingual paraprofessionals because such experiences expose them to the U.S. public school systems before they move onto the certified teaching position. This working and learning experiences with certified classroom teachers as their role models can not only minimize the cultural conflicts the immigrant teachers may face in the U.S. public schools but also increase the immigrant teacher retention. These alternative routes for teacher preparation programs proved their effectiveness not only in minority teacher recruitment but also in their retention. According to the National Center for Education Information (2005), nearly half (48 percent) of the intern teachers of the alternative teacher preparation programs were members of ethnic groups underrepresented in the state’s teaching workforce; and the retention rate for the first five years was 86 percent.

Mentoring. Mentoring can also play a significant role in the recruitment and retention of immigrant teachers and teacher candidates (Holloway, 2002; Meyers & Smith, 1999; Williams, 1997). Meyers and Smith examined a cooperative effort between the Middletown (Vermont) School District and the University of Vermont to recruit and nurture immigrant teachers. The project brought together mentors, university faculty members, and classroom teachers to help candidates from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds succeed as teachers in public schools. Mentors advised protégés on using university resources and dealing with the personal issues that college students typically face. They also monitored their protégés' progress through formal and informal meetings, seminars, and e-mail conversations to address their changing needs. Such support from mentors can make immigrant teachers and teacher candidates feel welcome and comfortable when they start teaching. It can also help make their first year teaching experience less challenging (Basit & McNamara, 2004). As Oriaro (2007) mentioned, the initial years for these immigrant teachers should not be seen merely as a time of survival but of professional growth and development.

The limitation of the aforementioned studies about mentors, however, is that they focus on assimilation of immigrant teachers into the mainstream practice and value. It seems that mentoring is considered as teaching the new immigrant teachers to concord with the culture of the U.S. public school systems, especially, with regard to the way to speak and the way to teach. For example, Ross (2003) examined the challenges mentors face in helping immigrant teacher candidates. In interviews and e-mail surveys with three of the mentor teachers, Ross identified that mentors had challenges in helping their protégé in terms of language. Mentor teachers reported that it was more work for them to have immigrant teacher candidates because their first language was not English. Some of the mentors reported difficulty understanding the immigrant

interns. This study implies that the interns from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds sound differently from the teachers educated in the U.S. and that the mentors consider it problematic and more work for them to have such interns. What these mentors did not see was that the interns from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds were linguistically more competent than the mentors because the interns were multi-lingual. These mentors in Ross's study failed to acknowledge the qualities those interns brought with them to the U.S. public schools, which also implied their lack of respect for the cultural heritage and linguistic competence of interns from diverse cultural backgrounds.

This leads to another issue regarding mentorship, which is identifying high quality, veteran teachers to serve as mentors (Ross, 2003), especially, the ones who respect and provide a safe and welcoming environment for immigrant teachers to share their cultural heritage and qualities they bring with them to the U.S. public schools. Ross cautioned that "the relationship between [immigrant] teacher candidates and their mentors can be sensitive especially when it comes to the cross-cultural communication and expectations that are inherent in our diverse society" (p. 13). Finding veteran teachers who have the similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds to the immigrant teacher candidates or who genuinely respect the immigrant teachers' diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds can help to put the sensitive relationship between mentors and protégé at ease. There should be more study of the qualities of mentors that respect the immigrant teacher's cultural heritage and qualities.

Cohort structure. The study on design of teacher education programs for minority teachers supported the use of cohort structure (Quirocho & Rios, 2000; Yopp, Yopp, & Taylor, 1992). The cohort structure was significant for all pre-service teachers (Fallona, Shank, Canniff, & Hanley, 2002; Pritchard Ross, 2000) but has been reported to be distinctly important for

immigrant teacher candidates. Cabello and Eckmier (1995) found that development of a peer-based social network through a cohort program helped immigrant student teachers in their study “persist, reduce burnout, overcome feelings of isolation, and minimize feelings of being overwhelmed” (as cited in Quirocho & Rios, p. 503).

The cohort structure provided these student teachers with a space where the “dialogic conversation” (Rodriguez, 2002, p.1020) was encouraged. Dialogic conversation is a special kind of interaction whereby a group of individuals can come to a common understanding necessary for carrying out a shared enterprise such as a shared educational mission (Moder & Kaczkowski, n.d.). Dialogic conversation engages both dialogue (e.g., sharing of experiences, perspective, understandings, judgments, and so on) and dialectics (e.g., a systematic working to move beyond opposing points of view), in which the members of a cohort program help each other decide where experiences, insights, and judgments about things come to be held in common (*ibid.*). In this dialogic conversation, student teachers get to know each other as individuals, build trust, have conversations reflecting on their school experiences, and be able to speak and listen as individuals situated in similar teaching and learning contexts.

Developing reflective teachers. One of the most meaningful lessons immigrant teachers can achieve in teacher education may be learning to be reflective teachers. Zeichner and Liston (1996) emphasized the following five key features of a reflective teacher:

[A reflective teacher] examines, frames, and attempts to solve the dilemmas of classroom practice; is aware of and questions the assumptions and values he or she brings to teaching; is attentive to the institutional and cultural contexts in which he or she teaches; takes part in curriculum development and is involved in school change efforts; and takes responsibility for his or her own professional development. (p. 6)

As the classrooms in the U.S. schools become culturally and linguistically diverse, the importance of being aware of and questioning the assumptions and values the teachers bring to teaching with regard to diversity is increasing.

However, Milner (2003) remarked that reflection on diversity was seldom taught or practiced in teacher education. He also argued that teachers' reflective thinking on the issues of diversity and race could be essential in leading them into deeper understanding, which might otherwise be ignored, misunderstood, misrepresented, misinterpreted, or unsettled. Milner suggested that both White teachers and teachers of color be reflective on the issues regarding diversity and race. The author argued that many White teachers have adopted color-blind ideologies in a teaching context and that this thinking could be a disadvantage for learning among students of color. Milner added that teachers of color also need to reflect on issues of diversity and race as they often revealed oppressive misconceptions about racism.

The issues of race constantly emerge at school and yet teachers are afraid to discuss them because oftentimes they are unclear as to how to think in regard to race issues. Many of them wonder if they should think or talk about these issues at all. They also question if it makes them a racist if they think or talk about race in their classrooms. Teacher educators should encourage teacher education students to ask themselves, "How do I address the issues of race and diversity?" and "How should I treat my students in order to be fair to all students while maintaining a culturally responsive learning environment?"

Teacher educators should also model how to use teacher reflection in order to attend these issues at school. Milner (2003) introduced Schön's (1983) "reflection-on-action" (p.26) and "reflection-in-action" (p.62). Schön's idea of reflection-on-action highlighted reflection before and after teaching. Reflection-in-action was presented when teachers redirected their

plans based on the situation because teachers often reflected while they were actually carrying out lessons with their students.

Having the concept of reflection-on-action (p. 26) and reflection-in-action in mind, Milner (2003) suggested race reflective journaling (p.177) and critically engaged racial dialogue (p.179) as a means for teachers to develop reflective thinking and practices. Race reflective journaling is a method for immigrant teacher candidates, in-service teachers, and teacher educators to think through their experiences around race. By journaling, teachers might uncover aspects of who they are as racial beings, how their race influences their work as a teacher, and how they can negotiate the power structures around race in their classes to allow students to feel a sense of worth. Milner suggested that teacher educators introduce this notion of race reflective journaling in teacher education programs because a journaling approach provides a safe space for teacher education students to think through often uncomfortable, complex, and challenging issues they may not be ready to discuss or expose to a group. Milner (2003) also introduced the critically engaged racial dialogue for teacher candidates, in-service teachers, and teacher educators to engage themselves in discussion of racial and diversity issues. Milner also suggested that critically engaged racial dialogue be started in small groups initially because there may be levels of discomfort around these conversations otherwise and that this type of dialogue be couched in teachers' life experiences where race was concerned. Developing a way in which discussion of such sensitive matters can be managed constructively in a safe and encouraging environment is vital because dialogue builds bridges between dominant and minority groups and minimizes prejudice and racism caused by "ignorance" about race.

Theoretical Frameworks

Philosophical Claim

Because I chose phenomenology as a guide for my methodology, it is necessary to mention one of the important concepts in phenomenology, which is “pre-understanding” (Dahlberg, Dahlberg, & Nystrom, 2008, p. 134). Dahlberg, Dahlberg, and Nystrom (2008) described pre-understanding as “a preconceived meaning or common prejudices related to the studied phenomenon” (p. 134). These phenomenological researchers try to harness their pre-understandings so they do not govern the understanding of the phenomenon. Briefly, the “phenomenon” is a meaningful lived experience of human beings. The phenomenon of this dissertation study is how immigrant teachers meet the challenges they face in the U.S. schools. Going back to the philosophy of phenomenological research regarding pre-understanding, the phenomenological researchers suggest that researchers be aware of and bridle “their own beliefs in order to hear what interviewees are telling them and to see the otherness of life experiences that do not match their own” (p.145). To bridle in phenomenology means “to scrutinize the involvement with...the investigated phenomenon and its meaning(s)” (p. 132). Pre-understanding includes researchers’ “favorite theories or thought models which become part of, or worse yet, the starting point for the research” (p.134).

For the aforementioned reason, I chose not to bring in a pre-determined theoretical framework before the data collection. Instead, I gathered and analyzed the data first and then determined the theoretical framework that most enriched my understanding of the meaning of the phenomenon for this study. There are three main theoretical perspectives, including identity theory, discourses of (post)colonialism, and critical race theory that provided a framework for the analysis of this study. In what follows I discuss each of these theoretical perspectives.

Identity Theory

The first theory pertains to the *(re)creation of identity as a socio-historical and cultural construct*. Bakhtin (1981) and Vygotsky (1978/1986) perceived identity as an active social process that is located in a particular time and place. In an active social process, language plays an important social tool. Both Bakhtin and Vygotsky focused on language that was instrumental in the (re)creation of identity. They stressed that language was used to communicate with others, was dynamic and changing, and was dialogical.

Likewise, language plays a key role for immigrant teachers in their daily practices of teaching at school. They constantly use language as a tool to teach, to discipline students, and to communicate with other teachers and parents. Through this on-going communication, immigrant teachers situate themselves in relation to others at school and (re)create a new identity.

Bakhtin (1981) argued that words approached us “already populated with the social intentions of others” (p. 300) and those intentions influenced the listener. He observed that language had dialogic nature and demanded response, and in the response, language was then altered, and so the words became “half-ours, half-someone else’s” (p. 345) because the words have come to us with the meaning and intentions of others. Being influenced by Bakhtin (1981), Holland et al. (1998) asserted that the “I” was in dynamic relationship with the “other”, and that the “I” has a responsibility to answer the “other”.

Applying this notion to the association between immigrant teachers and the people they interact with at school, the immigrant teachers are in dynamic relationships with *others* at school and they have a responsibility to respond to *others*. During this interactive and dynamic sharing of words with others, immigrant teachers are influenced by other’s intentions and vice versa

because the words come to them with the meaning and intentions of others at school. In this “shared event” (Holquist, 2002, p. 28), a new meaning or a new sense of self can be created.

Similar to Bakhtin, Vygotsky (1986/1978) argued that language was closely associated with one’s development. In his book, “Thought and Language”, Vygotsky described how language was essential in the development of thought: “the child’s intellectual growth is contingent on his mastering the social means of thought, that is, language” (p. 94). For Vygotsky, language was used as social means for the development of thought. This development of thought attained through language was an active socio-historical and cultural process because we exercised language not only as a means of sharing information with others in society, but also as a way of making things happen by influencing the actions of others in a given context. Our use of language as a cultural tool enables us to gain access to the culture of society. And this access to the culture of society influences not only our ways of thinking but also (re)creation of our identity as members of social groups because our dialogical interactions with others can reshape the culture of our society by our own involvement in it. And this reshaping the culture of our society can also recreate our identity. Thus, expanding Vygotsky’s idea about the development of thought attained through language, I would like to add that identity development is also achieved through language and is part of an active socio-historical and cultural process. According to this view, immigrant teachers develop their identities and (re)create a new sense of self through language during the social interaction with others at school.

Murrell (2007) shared a similar perspective with Bakhtin and Vygotsky. Murrell’s situated-mediated identity theory argued that

the identity of an individual is best understood as located in human activity, and mediated through the human dynamics of the social setting as well as by the social, cultural, and historical context of their social activity in and out of school. (p. 28)

Immigrant teachers (re)create their identities by responding to the surrounding discourses.

Immigrant teachers' identities are continuously (re)created by what the surrounding discourses expect of them. But at the same time, immigrant teachers develop their sense of self through their teaching practice and how they invest in their teaching. In short, identity formation is a continuous negotiation between individual representations of self and the descriptions or evaluation made of the individual by wider society, which Murrell defined as positionality. Positionality means a "social identification concerning the tension between individual representations of self and the ascriptions made of the individual by wider society" (p. 37).

Identities are created in relationship with others while continually being negotiated by both oneself and others in a wider social setting, and this is a constant social, historical, and cultural process. It is how we secure our social identity in a given situation. Immigrant teachers continuously create and recreate their identities through the communication and interaction with others in a school setting. Those communications and interactions come to the immigrant teachers with the meaning and intentions of other teachers, students, parents, and school administrators. So, their identities are influenced not only by their own representations of self but also by what they communicate with others and how they interact with others. The unique positionality of immigrant teachers with respect to their teaching competency is generally misread and misinterpreted by the dominant discourse that marginalizes immigrant teachers for their different cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Discourses of (Post)Colonialism

Although the identity theories help me understand immigrant teachers as always forming their sense of self through the communication and interaction with others in a school setting, it does not explain the role of authoritative or dominant discourses existing in a school setting.

Because such authoritative discourses at school significantly influence the identity formation of immigrant teachers, it is necessary to bring a theory that explains how the dominant or authoritative discourses at school influence immigrant teachers. With this in mind, I chose *discourses of (post)colonialism*, which concern dominant discourses (the oppressor) existing in an educational setting and their impact on immigrant teachers (the oppressed). This discussion of (post)colonialism focuses on two strands: immigrant teachers' identity negation under dominant discourses at school and language issues.

Bakhtin (1998) suggested the concept of "authoritative discourses" which were dominant discourses that were present in a social setting. Authoritative discourses have the power to change the individual and to place the individual in a subordinate position (Hodge, 2005). According to the authoritative discourses at school, for example, there is only one credentialing process and teaching experiences they value, which is the credentials and the teaching experiences from the dominant culture. Many immigrant teachers risked their hopes and aspirations in order to continue their teaching careers in a new country as differences in the culture of schooling impacted on their professional identity (Peeler & Jane, 2005). They first went through a re-credentialing process in which they experienced feelings of "identity negation" (Beynon, Ilieva, & Dichupa, 2004). Beynon, Ilieva, and Dichupa's study indicated that immigrant teachers' education and their teaching experiences in their native countries were not valued or recognized by authoritative discourses because they were required to start from the beginning in order to enter the teaching workforce in a new country.

Some of the immigrant teachers felt that engaging with the authoritative discourses of a re-credentialing process was humiliating and negated their professional identities due to the lack of flexibility in the re-credentialing and evaluation process and the complete disregard for

teaching experiences from their native countries. Some were resistant and challenged the authoritative discourses and gained a provisional teaching certificate without enrolling in a teacher education program. However, many of them accepted the authoritative discourses and fulfilled the requirements to teach in a school but at considerable emotional and financial cost. It is obvious that immigrant teachers' agencies constantly negotiate with mainstream institutional requirements. By doing so, they "come to terms with the positions into which they are cast and remake the conditions of their lives" (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998, p. 44).

When immigrant teachers finally join the teaching workforce after the re-credentialing process, they face another challenge: forced compliance to the norms of the dominant culture. Immigrant teachers' ability to understand and to be compliant to the established norms of the dominant culture plays as a vital key to gain acceptance to community and identification as a professional within it. Interestingly, many immigrant teachers found that the norms of the authoritative discourses often conflicted with the norms of their native culture and that they experienced discomfort, confusion, and low self-perception in the beginning as they were expected to acculturate to the new school culture (Peeler & Jane, 2005).

In order to acclimatize themselves to a new culture, they had to develop strategies to cope with dilemmas that confronted them throughout their learning process (Madsen & Mabokela, 2000). Immigrant teachers developed a new teacher identity by interpreting self in new ways as they redefined the role of teacher (Goodson & Cole, 1993). Many immigrant teachers negotiated different perspectives of the teacher's role, status, and teaching methodologies in order to fit in (Kamler, Reid, & Santoro, 1999). In the process of this negotiation, immigrant teachers internalize or are internally persuaded by the dominant discourse. Bakhtin (1981) stated that through a dialogic process, authoritative discourse could become "internally persuasive

discourse” (p. 345). Authoritative discourse was assimilated and acknowledged by the individual into the “everyday rounds of our consciousness” (*ibid.*). So it became internalized as self-dialogue and could become part of one’s on-going identity creation (Hodge, 2005).

According to the authoritative discourses in the U.S. schools, in terms of language, there is one acceptable language which is English, especially American English. Hodge (2005) called it “the language of colonizers, the language of the oppressor, of a powerful nation, or economic force” (p. 80). The ability to talk like and sound like native English speakers is expected in the U.S. schools. If immigrant teachers do not meet such an expectation, they are likely to be perceived as incompetent. Similarly, Hodge (2005) said, “a colonial discourse informs immigrant teachers that they are not the holders of the right English” (p. 28). In other words, immigrant teachers’ English is not perceived as good enough when compared to a speaker from the dominant culture. Some immigrant teachers believe that their second language skills are not good enough within the first language setting and doubt their teaching and linguistic competence. According to Hodge, when immigrant teachers are exposed repeatedly to the colonial discourses informing them that their English is inferior to that of native English speakers, they are likely to internalize the dominant discourse.

Although colonial discourses marginalized immigrant teachers and privileged teachers from the mainstream culture by favorably holding their English as the model against immigrant teachers’ foreign-accented English, Cook (1999) challenged such presupposition of colonial discourses. She argued that “the second language learner is not a failed or deficient native speaker, but is a *multicompetent* speaker who potentially possesses more linguistic and cognitive abilities than a mere native speaker” (p. 190). Speaking more than one language means owning the knowledge of more than one social and cultural belief. With this in mind, immigrant teachers

should be viewed as proficient and multicompetent, not as deficient. Furthermore, Cook argued that multicompetent speakers could never be native speakers, and they should not be expected to be. In this regard, immigrant teachers should not be expected to speak English as native English speakers do. Rather, they should be appreciated for their bilingual and bicultural qualities.

Critical Race Theory

As language plays a significant role in identity formation of immigrant teachers in the U.S. schools, so do culture and race. It is necessary to have a theory that helps me answer what roles cultural competency and race play for immigrant teachers as they work in the U.S. schools. In an effort to answer this question, critical race theory was selected. Critical Race Theory is defined as “a framework that can be used to theorize, examine, and challenge the ways race and racism implicitly and explicitly impact on social structures, practices and discourses” (Yosso, 2005, p. 70).

The colonial discourses negate any attempts to theorize the experiences that are influenced by histories of migration, cross-fertilization of knowledge and cross-cultural interactions (Subedi, 2008). In other words, teaching students in the dominant culture means educating students about “Eurocentric curriculum knowledge, race-neutral philosophy, mainstream Christian traditions, and meritocracy values” (p. 57). In this regard, immigrant teachers are not considered qualified because they are lacking the cultural knowledge of the dominant society. When immigrant teachers try to negotiate non-mainstream identities, schools negatively react to their attempts.

Considering that school teachers are positioned as key players who transmit cultural capital and educate students to dominant social norms, colonial discourses privilege mainstream teachers because of their cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) and marginalize immigrant teachers

because of their minority status and race. According to Bourdieu, cultural capital means an accretion of cultural knowledge, skills, and abilities possessed and inherited by privileged groups in society such as education and language. He argued that if one was not born into a family whose knowledge was already deemed valuable, one could then access the knowledge of the middle and upper class and the potential for social mobility through formal schooling. Immigrant teachers were born outside the United States. This means that they cannot inherit the cultural capital. In addition, because the immigrant teachers received most of their formal schooling in their home countries, they cannot obtain the cultural capital through education, either.

Although immigrant teachers are marginalized for their lack of cultural capital, Yosso (2005) challenged such colonial discourses that silence and marginalize people of color. Instead, she used critical race theory to center the marginalized. She argued that “when the ideology of racism is examined and racist injuries are named, victims of racism can often find their voices” (p. 74). According to Yosso, those immigrant teachers whose voices were silenced by the ideology of racism at school can become empowered through listening to their own stories and the stories of others and learning to make arguments to defend themselves.

Yosso (2005) introduced an alternative concept called *community cultural wealth* which examined some of the under-utilized assets people of color bring with them from their homes into the school. This concept challenged the dominant discourse’s deficit thinking which believed that people of color entered the dominant society without the normative cultural knowledge and skills. Yosso defined the community cultural wealth as “an array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed and utilized by communities of color to survive, and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression” (p. 77). She suggested six forms of capital that comprised community cultural wealth, including aspirational capital, familial capital, linguistic capital,

navigational capital, resistant capital and social capital. The definitions of those six forms of capital are as follows:

- Aspirational capital: The ability to keep hopes and dreams for future in spite of challenges
- Familial capital: The cultural knowledge nurtured among families that carry a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition. This form of cultural wealth engages a commitment to community well being and can be fostered within and between families, as well as through sports, school, religious gatherings and other social community settings.
- Linguistic capital: The intellectual and social skills achieved through communication experiences in more than one language
- Navigational capital: Skills of maneuvering through social institutions. Historically, this infers the ability to maneuver through institutions not created with communities of color in mind.
- Resistant capital: Knowledge and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequalities
- Social capital: Networks of people and community resources. These peer and other social contacts can provide both instrumental and emotional support to navigate through society's institutions. (pp. 77-80)

When applying Yosso's six forms of capital to immigrant teachers, their *aspirational capital* can be described as their capability of being a teacher in spite of the linguistic and cultural barriers; their *familial capital* as their commitment to carrying a strong sense of their cultural values and ethnicity; their *linguistic capital* as being bilingual; their *navigational capital* as their skills of maneuvering through U.S. public school systems of which the teacher workforce is White dominant; their *resistant capital* as their capability to resist the dominant discourses that marginalize them at school; and their *social capital* as networks of immigrant teachers who provide informational and emotional support to help each other regarding visa process, credentialing process, etc.

Yosso (2005) informed that these six forms of capital were "not mutually exclusive or static, but rather are dynamic processes that build on one another as part of community cultural wealth" (p. 77). For example, aspirations are nurtured "within social and familial contexts, often

through linguistic storytelling and advice that offer specific navigational goals to challenge (resist) oppressive conditions” (*ibid.*). Therefore, aspirational capital lies over “each of the other forms of capital [such as] familial, linguistic, navigational, resistant and social capital” (*ibid.*).

This notion of community cultural wealth that immigrant teachers possess challenges the deficit thinking that immigrant teachers enter the U.S. school systems without cultural capital. Instead of aiming attention at such deficit thinking, the focus should be on the community cultural wealth the immigrant teachers bring with them to work as teachers in the U.S. schools.

Although critical race theory explains how cultural competence and race influence immigrant teachers as they teach in the U.S. schools, there is one limitation in this theory as it tends to focus on *Black* and *White* issues. Omi and Winant (1994) argued that the voices of immigrant teachers and their racial issues were silenced and dominated by this dichotomous notion on race. With this in mind, I believe that this dissertation study of immigrant teachers can reach beyond the scope of Black and White issues on race by paying more attention to people from various ethnic/racial groups.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODS

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of three multilingual and multicultural immigrant teachers working in the U.S. public schools. A phenomenological research methodology was used as a philosophical approach for this dissertation study. Phenomenology can be defined as the study of structures of human experience or consciousness. Literally, phenomenology is the study of *phenomena*: things as they appear in our experience, or the ways we experience things. In other words, phenomenology studies human experience ranging from perception, thought, memory, imagination, emotion, desire, and social activity, including linguistic activity (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2003). In addition, phenomenology studies these conscious experiences as experienced from the first person point of view. Phenomenological interviews, initial bridling statement, and bridling journal entries were used for data collection of the study. These data provided insights into the challenges immigrant teachers faced, how they met those challenges, factors that helped them meet those challenges, and the qualities/strengths they brought with them to the U.S. schools.

Why Phenomenology?

Phenomenology seems most appropriate to meet the purpose of this dissertation study for the following reasons:

First, the purpose of the research was to understand how immigrant teachers meet their challenges from these teachers' perspectives through their own words. In other words, centering the voice of immigrant teachers whose voice is often silenced is what I would like to achieve in this study. The understanding gleaned from the phenomenological components provided a first-

person perspective of the experiences (Carrison, 2007). This first-person perception of phenomenology assisted me in gaining insider perspectives of the teaching experiences of immigrant teachers.

Another reason why phenomenology was selected is because phenomenology aims to construct an animating and evocative description of unique human experiences but not to make a generalization out of them (Van Manen, 1990). One of the limitations I found in the literature review on immigrant teachers was that some of the studies tried to generalize their findings to all immigrant teachers. The problem is that the experiences of immigrant teachers are so diverse and unique with regard to where they teach, who they work with, where they are from, how long they have been in the United States, etc. The generalization of findings of a study about immigrant teachers is extremely limited in this regard. It would be more meaningful to focus on describing the experiences of immigrant teachers rather than to generalize such unique and diverse experiences. In this sense, phenomenological research methodology was chosen in order to describe and to capture the meaning of the unique experiences of immigrant teachers who participated in this study.

Statement of Phenomenon through an Intentionality Statement

Since phenomenology means the study of phenomenon (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2003), it is necessary to understand what the phenomenon of my study is. In phenomenology, this understanding of phenomenon is expressed through the intentionality statement because “an intentionality statement is a clear and direct statement of the phenomenon under investigation” (Vagle, 2009, p. 2). Intentionality is the meaningful relationship between subject and object, in other words, how subjects find themselves in relation to objects. In this sense, the intentionality of my research study is the meaningful relationship between immigrant

teachers (subject) and how they meet challenges they face at school (object). Applying my understanding of intentionality, the phenomenon of my research study is *“how immigrant teachers find themselves in the situation where they face challenges and meet their challenges in the U.S. schools.”*

Research Contexts and Participants

The procedures and methods that were employed in my dissertation study are described in this part of chapter. For research procedures and methods I followed the suggestions made by well-known phenomenological researchers, such as van Manen (1990) and Dahlberg, Dahlberg, and Nystrom (2008).

Three immigrant teachers were selected out of ten initially identified immigrant teachers. These three immigrant teachers met the following criteria that I set for the participant selection:

- They were born outside the United States.
- They speak English as a second or foreign language.
- They received formal education from K-12 in their mother countries.
- They came to the United States as an adult.
- They went through a credentialing process and are certified teachers in the United States.
- They are currently working as full-time teachers in the U.S. public schools.

There was a diligent endeavor to select participants from different school districts in one of the southeastern states to see how their experiences are similar and different. I originally had participants from three different counties. However, one of the participants of this study from South America canceled her participation at the last minute. Because of this change, a Spanish speaking immigrant teacher was recruited from the same county in which one of the other

participants was working. Therefore, two of the participants of this study are from the same county and the other participant is from a neighboring county. Both counties are in the same city.

I also made an effort to select participants from different countries to help larger number of immigrant teachers and people working with those teachers relate themselves to the findings of this study. One of the participants is from Singapore, another is from a European country, and the other is from the Republic of Colombia. They are all female and satisfy the aforementioned criteria.

Confidentiality

To protect the confidentiality of the participants, pseudonyms were used for their names. In terms of their home countries, one of the participants from a European country expressed that she did not want to be identified by her country of origin in the study. After a long discussion with the participant, we agreed to use “European” as her country of origin. Two other participants felt comfortable to be identified by their countries of origin in my study.

Each participant picked her own pseudonym with which she felt most comfortable. The European participant chose “Annabel,” the Colombian participant chose “Mares,” and the Singaporean participant chose “Niang” as their names for this study.

Pseudonyms were also used for their schools and school districts as listed in Table 1.

Table 1

Pseudonyms for Participants’ Schools and School Districts

| Participant | Annabel (European) | Mares (Colombian) | Niang (Singaporean) |
|-----------------|--------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| School | Angel Elementary | Lily Elementary | Nelson Elementary |
| School District | Anderson County | Anderson County | Newman County |

School Contexts

Annabel (European) is working at Angel Elementary School in Anderson County as an ESOL teacher (K-3). The following tables briefly describe her school.

Table 2

Race and Ethnicity of Students (2009-2010)

| Angel Elementary School | Asian/Pacific Islander | Black | Hispanic | American Indian/Alaskan Native | Multi- Racial | White |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|-------|----------|--------------------------------------|------------------|-------|
| Total | 3% | 41% | 14% | 1% | 4% | 37% |

Note: Data developed from the Anderson County School District File System--2009.

Table 3

Economically Disadvantaged Students (2009-2010) ^a

| No | Yes |
|-----|-----|
| 50% | 50% |

Note: Data developed from the Anderson County School District File System--2009.

^a Children who received free or reduced price meals at school

Table 4

Race and Ethnicity of Teachers (2008-2009)^b

| | Administrators | Support Personnel | PK-12 Teachers |
|---------------------|----------------|-------------------|----------------|
| Black (%) | 2% | 0 | 16% |
| White (%) | 2% | 4% | 76% |
| Hispanic (%) | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Asian (%) | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Native American (%) | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Multiracial (%) | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Note: Data developed from the Governor's Office of Student Achievement--2009.

^b 2009-2010 data for teacher race and ethnicity are not available yet.

As shown in Table 2, the majority in the students of Annabel's school is Black (41 percent), and the second largest ethnic group is White (37 percent). Table 3 indicates that the half of Annabel's school students are from economically disadvantaged families, which means that they receive free or reduced price meals at school. Table 4 shows that White teachers (76 percent) are dominant in Annabel's school, and Annabel is counted as White because she is European.

Mares (Colombian) is working at Lily Elementary School in Anderson County. She is a lead classroom teacher in Pre-Kindergarten and works with two paraprofessionals. I could not obtain data about race and ethnicity of students in Mares's school due to the non-response from the Anderson County School District to my request of the specific information about the students' demographics of Lily Elementary School. The following tables describe Mares's school.

Table 5

Economically Disadvantaged Students (2009-2010)

| No | Yes |
|----|-----|
| 4% | 96% |

Note: Data developed from the Anderson County School District File System--2009.

Table 6

Race and Ethnicity of Teachers (2009-2010)

| | Pre-K – K Teachers ^d | Support Personnel |
|--------------|---------------------------------|-------------------|
| Black (%) | 20% | 80% |
| White (%) | 60% | 20% |
| Hispanic (%) | 20% | 0 |

Note: Data developed from the Anderson County School District File System--2009.

Anderson County School District Pre-Kindergarten program serves 641 four-year-old children. There are two or three Pre-Kindergarten classrooms housed at each of the fourteen elementary schools in Anderson County. The Lily Elementary School has 3 Pre-Kindergarten classrooms and 2 Head Start/Pre-Kindergarten collaborative classrooms and serves 12 Pre-School Special Education students in 2 inclusion classes. Mares teaches one of the 3 Pre-Kindergarten classrooms and serves two special education students. As Table 5 shows, most of Lily Elementary School's students receive free or reduced price meals (96 percent) at school. Especially, according to the Anderson County School, 100 percent of Mares's classroom students receive free or reduced price meals. Table 6 shows that the majority of pre-Kindergarten

^d Lily Elementary School is consisted of only pre-K and K classrooms.

and Kindergarten teachers in Lily Elementary Schools are White (60 percent). Mares is the only teacher from a Spanish speaking country in her school. Interestingly, while the majority of classroom teachers are White (60 percent), most of the paraprofessionals in Mares' school are Black (80 percent).

Niang (Singaporean) is working at Nelson Elementary School (K-2) in Newman County as a first grade classroom teacher. She was elected as a teacher of the year for 2009-2010.

Table 7

Race and Ethnicity of Students (2008-2009)

| Nelson Elementary School | Asian/Pacific Islander | Black | Hispanic | American Indian/Alaskan Native | Multi- Racial | White |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------|-------|----------|--------------------------------------|------------------|-------|
| Total | 3% | 4% | 3% | NA | 3% | 87% |

Note: Data developed from the Governor's Office of Student Achievement--2009.

Table 8

Economically Disadvantaged Students (2009-2010)

| No | Yes |
|-----|-----|
| 80% | 20% |

Note: Data developed from the Newman County School District File System--2009.

Table 9

Race and Ethnicity of Teachers (2007-2008)

| | Administrators | Support Personnel | PK-12 Teachers |
|---------------------|----------------|-------------------|----------------|
| Black (%) | 0 | 0 | 2% |
| White (%) | 4% | 9% | 83% |
| Hispanic (%) | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Asian (%) | 0 | 0 | 2% |
| Native American (%) | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Multiracial (%) | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Note: Data developed from the Governor's Office of Student Achievement--2009.

As Table 7 shows, White students (87 percent) are dominant in Niang's school and less than 13% of the students in her school are members of ethnic minorities. Table 8 explains that 20% of the students received free or reduced-priced meals. According to the Newman County School District File System (2009), more than 20% of the students are classified as gifted and that the average SAT scores of Newman County School District exceed state and national averages. As shown in Table 9, White teachers (83 percent) are dominant in Niang's school. Niang is the only Asian teacher in her school.

Table 10 shows a brief summary of participants of this study.

Table 10

A Summary of Study Participants

| | Participant 1 | Participant 2 | Participant 3 |
|---|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|---|
| Teacher Name | Annabel | Mares | Niang |
| School District | Anderson County | Anderson County | Newman County |
| School | Angel Elementary | Lily Elementary | Nelson Elementary |
| Country of Origin | Europe | The Republic of Colombia | Singapore |
| Mother Language | Slavic Language | Spanish | Malay |
| Gender | Female | Female | Female |
| Current Teaching Position | ESOL Teacher (K-3) | Pre-K | 1 st Grade |
| Number of Years in Teaching in the United States and the home country | 4 years | 7 years | 19 years |
| Age | 32 | 43 | 42 |
| Marital Status | Married | Married | Married |
| Number of Children | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| Number of years in the U.S. | 8 | 20 | 20 |
| Educational Background | M.A. (obtained in the U.S.) | B.A. (obtained in Colombia) | Pursuing Ph.D. (obtaining in the U.S.) |

As show in Table 10, Annabel has been living in the United States for 8 years and married a European American. She is 32 years old and has no children yet. Annabel has been teaching for 4 years and obtained her master’s degree in Spanish and Slavic language from her country. She is currently teaching ESOL students in Grades K-3.

Mares has been living in the United States for 20 years and married a man from her home country, the Republic of Colombia. She is 43 years old and does not have any children. She has been teaching for 7 years in the United States and obtained her bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education from her home country. She is currently teaching pre-kindergarten students as a lead classroom teacher.

Niang has been in the United States for 20 years and married a European-American. She is 42 years old and has four children. She has been teaching for 19 years and obtained her specialist degree in Early Childhood Education in the United States. She is currently pursuing her Ph.D. in Early Childhood Education while teaching full-time as a first grade teacher.

In addition to the recruitment of three participants, I had an opportunity to interview Niang's principal, Helen (pseudonym), upon Niang's invitation, about Helen's perception of an immigrant teacher. Although Helen is not a formal participant of this study, the data obtained from the interview with her principal served to not only to verify the information shared in interviews with Niang but also to obtain the U.S. public school principal's perception of immigrant teachers. Although I tried to interview Mares's and Annabel's principals for the same purpose, I could not interview them because both Mares and Annabel felt uncomfortable about the idea that I contact their school principals and ask them questions about their perception of hiring and working with immigrant teachers. Some of the questions posed to Niang's principal are as follows:

1. How did you meet Niang?
2. Why did you hire Niang?
3. What do you think about Niang as a teacher?
4. What is your view on immigrant teachers like Niang?

5. What will help other school administrators understand about immigrant teachers and give them a chance to work for their schools?
6. When you hired Niang, what were other teachers' and parents' response to working with Niang?
7. What contributions and strengths do you think Niang has?

Data Collection

Data for this study were collected from phenomenological interviews and bridling journal entries. These data contributed to gaining insider perspectives of the lived experiences of immigrant teachers including the challenges they face, how they met those challenges, factors that helped them meet those challenges, and their qualities and strengths.

Phenomenological Interviews

In an effort to gather the first-person and insider perspectives, I chose "interviewing" as suggested by a phenomenological researcher, Van Manen (1990). The interview in phenomenological research has "very specific purposes" that are different from the interview method used in ethnography which is "to study ways of doing and seeing things peculiar to certain cultures or cultural groups"; the interview in the "psychological perception" which studies "the way individuals see themselves and others in certain situations"; or the interview used in the "social opinion" which studies "the way people feel about certain issues" (p. 66). The purposes of the interview in phenomenological research are (a) to serve "as a means for exploring and gathering experiential narrative material" in order to develop "a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon", and (b) to serve as a vehicle to develop a conversational relation with a partner (interviewee) about the meaning of an experience (*ibid.*).

Van Manen asserts that different functions of the interview method in qualitative research are not to be confused with the function of conversational interviewing in phenomenological research.

The potential limitation of this conversational interviewing is that a beginning researcher may enthusiastically conduct the interview with the participants by using the so-called *unstructured or open-ended interview method*. The researcher may get easily carried away with interviews that go everywhere and nowhere. In order to overcome this limitation, I developed interview questions that helped me remain oriented to the research questions and purposes. However, the interviews were semi-structured, and the interview questions were used as guidelines and did not exclude the participants' interest. All interviews were audio-taped and carefully analyzed. The list of questions that guided me during the conversational interviews is as follows (for complete interview questions, see Appendix A):

- 1) Tell me about your life in your native country before you came to the United States.
 - a) What was your formal schooling from K-12 and college education (if applicable) like in your native country?
 - b) How are the schools in your native country and the schools in the United States alike and different?
 - c) Tell me about your family (parents, siblings, relatives, etc.)
- 2) Tell me why and how you became an immigrant teacher in the U.S. public school system.
 - a) Why did you come to the United States?
 - b) What kind of visa process did you go through to come to and to stay in the United States?
 - c) Why did you want to become a teacher in the U.S. public school system?
 - d) What did you do in order to become a certified teacher in the state? (e.g., credentialing

process, state certificate exams, teacher preparation programs, etc.)

3) Discuss the teaching experiences in the U.S. schools.

- a) Tell me about your first year teaching experiences in the U.S. school.
- b) What was your relationship like with other teachers/ with your students/ with your school administrators /with parents in your first school?
- c) What was most challenging in your first year teaching?
- d) When you experienced those challenges, what did you wish to have in order to help you to meet those challenges?
- e) What did you do to meet those challenges?
- f) What or who helped you meet your challenges?
- g) Were there any programs such as in-service teacher education at graduate school or professional development that were helpful to you? If so, how were they helpful to you?

3) Tell me about your teaching experiences after the first year.

- a) What was your teaching experience like after the first year?
- b) What challenges have you had as you teach your students or work with other teachers/ your school administrators/ your parents?
- c) What did you do to meet those challenges?
- d) If you are a teacher educator, what kind of in-service teacher education program or professional development would you create to help immigrant teachers like you?

4) Tell me about your strengths and contributions to the U.S. schools.

- a) Tell me about your positive teaching experiences.
- b) Tell me about the moments when you felt competent at school.

c) Tell me about the moments when you felt valued and appreciated at school.

d) Tell me about your strengths as you find yourself in meeting those challenges.

Although the same guiding questions were asked to the participants during the interviews, each participant spent varying time and focused on different questions. I also used the Wall Street Journal news article about Arizona state evaluating immigrant teachers on their English accent and fluency in order to stimulate the conversational interviews with the participants.

Interview Time and Length

The interview began in March, 2010. I met with each of the participants once a month, a total of five times between March and June, 2010. Approximately two to three hours were spent for each of these interviews. After the initial data analysis, between July and October, 2010, the follow-up interviews were conducted via e-mails and phone calls because some of the participants went back to their home countries to visit their families during the summer, and I also moved out of state after the interviews were completed. The number of follow-up interviews varied depending on the participants. With Annabel, five follow up interviews were conducted via e-mails. With Niang, six follow up interviews were conducted via e-mails and phone calls. With Mares four follow up interview were conducted via e-mails.

Interview Place

The interview place was discussed with the study participants. The criterion of this interview place was a quiet place where I could record their stories uninterrupted. Annabel wanted to come to my place because she had two dogs and three cats at her house, which made it difficult to have a quiet interview environment at her place. Mares originally wanted the interviews to take place in her place or in her classroom after school. However, I wanted to offer Mares some refreshment before the interview, considering that she would be tired after her work.

So I invited Mares to my place, and she could relax and reenergize herself before the interview started. Because the first interview was very pleasant, Mares decided to have all the following interviews in my place. Niang wanted me to be flexible about the interview place, considering her very busy schedule as a graduate student and mother of four children. Thus, various interview places were used, including an empty classroom at the local university where she took an evening class in spring, 2010, Niang's classroom after school, and my place. My place was commonly used for interviews with each participant. The reason is because first, it provided a safe space for participants where they could freely share their stories without worrying about being overheard by someone at the school building. Second, it was a place where interviewees relaxed and reenergized themselves with refreshments before the interview started. After at least eight hours of teaching since 7:20 AM, the participants could be easily tired. So it was a wonderful opportunity for interviewees to relax for a moment while sipping a cup of tea with snacks and getting their mind and body ready for the interview. Third, it provided a space where the interviews could be conducted in a quiet and uninterrupted environment. For example, when the interview took place in a school building, the interview was often interrupted by a custodian entering the classroom to vacuum the floor or by a next door teacher who needed to borrow some materials, etc. These lurking interruptions could interfere with the flow of the conversational interview. Fortunately, my place eliminated all those possible interferences and provided an uninterrupted space for the interview.

Bridling Journal Entries

Phenomenological researchers such as Dahlberg, Dahlberg, and Nystrom (2008) suggested *bridling* as a necessary part of phenomenological study, which was defined as a process in which the researchers took an open stance, scrutinized his or her involvement with the

phenomenon, and continually reflected upon how meanings “come to be” (p. 16) in the research. Unlike the traditional notion of bracketing, which was to set aside a researcher’s pre-understandings in phenomenological research, bridling asked the researcher to constantly analyze how those pre-understandings might influence the phenomenon under investigation (Vagle, 2009; Vagle, Hughes, & Durbin, 2009). Bridling helped me remain open to the phenomenon of investigation by actively practicing openness and humility throughout the data collection and data analysis. In an effort to constantly interrogate pre-understandings I might bring into this research and also to develop an understanding of the phenomenon of the study, I used bridling journal entries during the data collection and data analysis. These bridling journal entries served as a space to wonder, question, think, contradict or agree with theoretical frameworks and data of this study.

During the initial phase of the bridling journal entry, I wrote an initial bridling statement in mid-January, 2010, before the data collection began in March, 2010. In this statement, I wrote as much as I could about my pre-understandings of the challenges that immigrant teachers might have and how they might meet their challenges. There were several challenges that I thought of when it came to immigrant teachers working in the U.S. public schools: cultural shock, lack of cultural capital, language barrier, prejudice, etc. These challenges were identified based on two grounds: my own teaching experiences as an immigrant teacher in the U.S. public schools and research studies regarding immigrant teachers.

More specifically, I wrote what I thought I would learn from the participants to get the assumptions out on paper. From Annabel, I assumed that she would have challenges such as discrimination, the lack of support from the school administrators, cultural differences, etc. Because Annabel’s husband was European American, I assumed that her husband would

probably give her a sense of belonging to the mainstream culture because her husband as a cultural insider might have helped her have easy access to the mainstream culture. I wondered how this acquired sense of membership to the U.S. mainstream culture worked for Annabel as she taught in the U.S. school. I also supposed that Annabel had moments when she found herself to be satisfied, fulfilled, thrilled, or happy in her school. If I could measure the ratio of Annabel's positive and negative experiences as an immigrant teacher, I wondered what the ratio would look like.

From Niang, I assumed that she had a lot of positive experiences as an immigrant teacher because she was a teacher of the year in 2009-2010. I also supposed that Niang had a strong work ethic because she is a mother of four children, a full time school teacher, a wife, and a doctoral student in a graduate school. I wondered why Niang took such a huge responsibility on her shoulders and what drove her to be so multi-tasked.

From Mares, I assumed that she might have experienced some negative experiences such as discrimination, language barrier, lack of support from school administrator, or prejudice. I also wondered how her marriage to a Colombian from her home country impacted her life in the United States compared to Annabel and Niang who were married to the European Americans. Mares has lived in the United States for 20 years like Niang has. However, Mares taught for 7 years whereas Niang taught for 20 years. I wondered how the difference in the number of years of teaching in the U.S. would impact their experiences as a teacher.

Examining my own assumptions helped me remain open to the phenomenon of the study. I revisited this initial bridling statement throughout data collection and analysis and used it in order to write new statements in the bridling journal entries. For a complete initial bridling statement, see Appendix B.

As data were collected and analyzed from March to October, 2010, I created a system to bridge. For example, a bridling journal entry was written and dated after each data collection event. After each interview, I transcribed it and wrote my learning from the transcript. Then these new understandings were compared to and contrasted with the initial bridling statement that was written in January, 2010. By doing so, I was able to see the differences and similarities between these two documents and interrogate or question my assumptions and pre-understandings about the investigated phenomenon. I added three samples of my bridling journal entries in Appendix C. The first bridling journal entry from each participant was selected. The first bridling journal entries for Annabel, Mares, and Niang were written in quite different styles. The first bridling journal entry for Annabel was written in a form of an essay weaving both of my learning and interpretations of the first interview with Annabel. I wrote the first bridling journal entry for Mares using many subheadings. I wove the learning and interpretations altogether and jotted down some notes in the margins. This tremendously helped me later when I developed patterns of meanings. The first journal entry for Niang was very similar to Mares's. The only difference was that I color-coded the learning and interpretations; I typed in black when I mentioned what I learned about Niang and in pink when I interpreted what I learned about Niang. So I separated the learning from the interpretation. The reason I wrote these first bridling journal entries in different styles during the initial phase was in order to find the most helpful way to write the bridling journal entries in a more concise manner. I found that the first bridling journal entry of Niang, which was written under many subheadings and separated the learning from the interpretation, was most helpful. So the rest of the journal entries were written in such a manner.

The journal entries after each interview helped me remain open to the findings and understandings that were different from my assumptions and pre-understandings. For example, in my initial bridling statement, I wrote, “I believe that [Niang] has a lot of positive experiences as an immigrant teacher...Niang must be very popular among teachers in her school.” [Initial Bridling Statement, January, 2010]. This statement showed my assumption that Niang’s relationship with other teachers at school was very positive. However, during the data collection period, I learned that Niang had some negative experiences with teachers at her school. In my bridling journal, I wrote,

“In Newman County, when [Niang] was hired by her principal, [Niang said that] teachers in her school didn’t understand why the principal hired [Niang] because she was the only Asian in that school. [Niang mentioned that] teachers were jealous of Niang because she became a national board certified teacher, was pursuing her Ph.D., and received a blank check from her principal to set up her Kindergarten classroom.” [Bridling Journal Entry for the Second Interview, 5/4/2010]

When my findings were different from my assumptions about the phenomenon of the study, I found myself posing the following questions, “What does this difference tell me? What can I learn from this finding? What other differences can I find from the data?” These questions helped me remain open to the phenomenon of the study.

The bridling journal entries also helped me realize my tendency or my bias towards the immigrant teachers: I had a tendency to focus on the positive aspects of the immigrant teachers. I attribute this tendency or bias to my own experiences as a former immigrant teacher. From my previous experiences as an immigrant teacher, I noticed that there were deficit perspectives on immigrant teachers. In order to challenge these deficit perspectives against the immigrant teachers, I was inclined to illuminate the positive aspects. These bridling plans assisted me to remain focused on and open to the phenomenon. For complete bridling journal entries of the

aforementioned samples, see Appendix C. The following table shows a brief summary of the bridling conducted.

Table 11

Bridling Conducted

| | | |
|------------------------|----------------------------|--|
| January, 2010 | Initial bridling statement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Got my pre-understandings and assumptions out on paper. |
| March to October, 2010 | 1 entry per interview | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compared it to the initial bridling statement • Questioned and interrogated my assumptions and pre-understandings • Developed new understandings |

Data Analysis

Whole-Part-Whole Analysis

For data analysis, I used the *whole-part-whole analysis* advocated by Dahlberg, Dahlberg, and Nystrom (2008), Vagle (2010) and Van Manen (1990). In the first phase, I read the whole data collected such as interview transcripts, the initial bridling statement, and bridling journal entries without any interpretive work.

First read of data. After the initial reading of the whole data, the data were re-read several times until I found statements or phrases particularly essential or revealing about the phenomenon under investigation (Van Manen, 1990). Then I highlighted those statements or phrases and put brief descriptions of them. Comments or questions were also put on the margin. Van Manen (1990) called this approach as “*selective or highlighting approach*” (p. 93). During this reading process, I turned to those bridling journal entries in order to clarify some of my thoughts and to interrogate how my presuppositions might influence the analysis.

Follow-up questions and interviews. After I read the entire data and completed the first highlighting approach, the margin notes were reviewed in order to generate questions for the follow-up interviews with the participant. The follow-up questions varied depending on the participants. For Annabel, I asked her follow-up questions about the universities in her home country and her parents’ professions. For Mares I rechecked some of the facts about her teaching experiences in the U.S. public schools mentioned during the interviews. For Niang, I asked more questions about the culture of Singapore. I also asked Niang questions about teacher education programs at university in Singapore. Although the follow-up questions varied, they helped me clarify meanings that were important in describing the phenomenon.

Second read of data. After the follow-up interview, I wrote bridling journal entries and repeated the highlighting approach. Then I moved (by copying and pasting electronically) each highlighted statement (or segment) to a new document created separately for each participant. As these new documents were read, I made sure that they contained all of the essential parts that I thought might contribute to answering the research questions. As I reread these new documents, I articulated my analytic thoughts about each segment.

Third read of data. As I reread these new documents the third time, I looked for patterns. Once I began to see patterns, I gave each segment preliminary titles and categorized each segment by the same title. These themes were, once again, reorganized so that they belonged to larger patterns. Throughout this process, I not only added and deleted analytic thoughts, but also saw each segment in relation to the whole.

Table 12 shows a brief summary of this whole-part-whole analysis conducted.

Table 12

Whole-Part-Whole Analysis Conducted

| Phase | Guidelines | Specific notes |
|------------------------------------|---|---|
| I. Holistic Reading of Entire Text | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read the entire data collection. • Did not make any interpretive notes. • Got reacquainted with the data. | |
| II. First Read of Data | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used Highlighting Approach. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highlighted meaningful statements and phrases. • Briefly described them on the margin. • Wrote comments/questions on the margin. |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used the bridling journal to explicate my thoughts. | |
| III. Follow-Up Questions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewed margin notes in order to generate follow-up questions. • Conducted follow up interviews to clarify meanings important in describing the phenomenon. | |
| IV. Second Read of Data | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used Highlighting approach. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articulated the meanings based on my highlighted markings and margin notes. • Follow-up with research participants |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Created a separate document for each participant. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moved (copy and paste electronically) each highlighted statement to a new document. • Made sure to contain all of the potential parts that might contribute to answer my research questions. |
| V. Third Read of Data | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highlighting approach. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articulated my analytic thoughts about each highlighted markings. • Continued this process with each participant's interviews and bridling journal. |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read across each participant's data. | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Looked for patterns. | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gave preliminary titles to patterns. | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Added to and deleted analytic thoughts. | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Saw each pattern of meaning in relation to the whole. | |

CHAPTER FOUR

PORTRAITURE OF PARTICIPANTS

The unit of analysis of this study is the phenomenon, which I briefly defined in Chapter Three as “how immigrant teachers find themselves in the situation where they face challenges and meet their challenges in the U.S. schools.” When the immigrant teachers face challenges in the U.S. public schools, they tend to demonstrate their resistance towards the dominant discourses that try to negate their professional identity. They showed their resistance by asserting themselves as professional and worthy of respect. The immigrant teachers also tend to exhibit resilience and pursue their dreams and goals of their lives no matter how difficult the challenges are. They act as leaders who reach out and help other teachers in the U.S. public schools. In this sense, the life story of immigrant teachers seems to be a success story that turned the challenging circumstances to positive situations in which they grew to be strong and successful.

In this chapter I portray the life stories of the three immigrant teachers in detail before presenting findings, which demonstrate my comprehensive understanding of the experiences of the immigrant teachers of this study, in Chapter Five. Table 13 lists the patterns of meanings described in Chapter Four and Chapter Five.

Table 13

Patterns of Meanings

| Patterns of Meanings | Sociocultural Challenges | Coping Strategies | Strengths | Positive Experiences |
|-----------------------------|--|---|---|--|
| | Systemic & Cultural Differences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VISA process • Differences in the educational practices between the United States and the home country • Acculturation • Language and Accent | Educational Resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional learning | Multicultural Experiences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bilingual ability • International teaching Experiences • Perceptions of children and families from diverse cultural groups • Bringing diversity to school | Colleagues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition from colleagues as a competent teacher |
| | Prejudice and Immigrant Teachers' Lack of Cultural Capital <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prejudices • Immigrant teachers' lack of cultural capital | Religion | Professional Traits <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professionalism • Continuing improvement • Keeping good relationships with school administrators • Leadership | Parents <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having parents' appreciation and trust |
| | | Social Network <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receiving emotional support • Receiving professional support | | Students <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeing children's growth and progress |
| | | Personal Dispositions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dealing with angry parents • Dealing with conflicts with a colleagues • Dealing with the lack of instructional support | Personal Attributes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passion for teaching • Tenacity | Administrators <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gaining school administrator's appreciation |

Although the brief information about the participants was provided in the previous chapter, I believe that more elaborate descriptions of the participants are necessary before I proceed to comparisons among these participants that I share in the next chapter. In *The Art and Science of Portraiture*, Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman Davis (1997) explained the written portraits as narratives that are “complex, provocative, and living, that attempt to be holistic, revealing the dynamic interaction of values, personality, structures, and history” (p. 11). The portraiture of participants provides verbal pictures of who the participants are not only as immigrant teachers but also as human beings who have meaningful lived experiences such as adventures, challenges, frustration, endeavors, accomplishments, and happiness. Such portraiture serves as a means of introducing readers to these participants: their upbringing, values, philosophies, passion, life history, perspectives of life, and personality.

Carrison (2007), in her study on bilingual immigrant teachers, also used a written portrait of her participants in order to “capture the essence of the individual” (p. 71). She also described the portraiture as “a method of inquiry” that “steers away from one dimensional and stereotypical description of the experiences of people and seek to give *voice* to those who were not often invited to express themselves in the public arena” (*ibid.*). The purpose of this portraiture is, first, to provide the reader with better understanding of the participants in this study; second, to capture the essence of each participant; third, to move the reader away from any stereotypical description of immigrant teachers; fourth, to give *voice* to immigrant teachers whose words are often ignored or marginalized by dominant discourses at school; last but not least, to encourage the reader to reflect more deeply regarding issues that concern the participants of this study.

The portraiture was a collaborative work between the participants and I. Although I am the primary illustrator of the portraiture, the participants provided their life stories during

interviews and edited the portraiture for accuracy. As Carrison (2007) pointed out in her study of bilingual immigrant teachers, in spite of the researcher's endeavor to center the voice of the participant, "the reader will undoubtedly be aware of the researcher's voice as well" (p. 72). However, Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) reminded the meaning and discipline of the researcher's voice in the portraiture: "Voice is the research instrument...of the portraitist-her eyes, her ears, her insights, her style, her aesthetic. Voice is omnipresent...But her voice is also premeditated one, restrained, disciplined, and carefully controlled" (p. 85). The researcher's job as a portraitist is "to take position on the peripheral" (Carrison, p. 72) and "systematically gather details" (Lawrence-Lightfoot, p. 87). In an effort to collect details systematically, I wove materials such as interviews and bridling journals to illustrate these written portraits of participants.

In the following section, I will illustrate written portraits of each participant including but not limited to where she is from, how she came to the United States, how and why she became a teacher in a foreign country, and where she is going from here.

Annabel

Annabel was born in 1976 in one of the countries in Europe. She speaks one of the Slavic languages. Her country was under a communist regime until she was thirteen. People in her country were not allowed to travel to western countries. The only foreign language they were allowed to learn at school was the Russian language. Annabel had to learn the Russian language from 4th grade to 8th grade. However, after the 1989 revolution, there was more freedom of choices in her country. Annabel was allowed to learn both German and English at school. Her parents, who have always been her supporters and cheerers, hired private tutors for those languages so that she could get a better quality of foreign language acquisition. They also signed her up for different after school activities such as gymnastics and ballet. She has a brother who

works as a chef in her country. Her mother works as a supervisor for medical supplies in a hospital, and her father is a welder specializing in the bridge construction business. They were very proud of Annabel when she chose to be a teacher in her country because they always have shown great respect for Annabel's teachers, when she was a student. Her parents are hard workers, and their strong work ethic influenced Annabel to be a dedicated and devoted teacher. Annabel laughed when she told me what her husband called her, "workaholic".

In Annabel's home country, the minimum required education was from Grades 1-8. Now it has changed to Grades 1-9. After the 9 years in elementary level, students in her country can go to either college preparatory school for four years or vocational school for three years. Being an ambitious person, Annabel proceeded to the college preparatory school. Annabel came from a country that is educationally rigorous and very competitive. The reason is because first, the government pays for all school tuition and health insurance as long as one stays as a student at school until he/she is 26 years old. So most of the students want to go to the university, and this makes the environment very competitive. Second, in spite of large number of students who wish to go to the university, there are only small numbers of universities (total 20) in the entire country. So it makes it even harder to get into the university. The fact that Annabel entered the university in her country illustrates her strong motivation and passion in education.

In college, she majored in Spanish and one of the Slavic languages. She wanted to teach these two languages at school as a teacher. She obtained her master's degree in those languages and got certified to teach in a secondary school such as college preparatory schools and vocational schools. In her country, teacher candidates must have a master's degree in order to teach. For example, if the teacher candidates want to become a Spanish teacher, they have to have a master's degree in Spanish language. Most parents in her country have tremendous

respect for teachers because of their high level of education through such a competitive school environment.

After graduating from her college, Annabel visited her friend in a city in one of the southeastern states of the United States where she currently lives. During her visit, she met a European-American man who fell in love with Annabel. Because Annabel planned to go to Australia to improve her English language skills, she came back to her country. In addition, her tourist visa did not allow her to stay any longer in the United States. Surprisingly, this gentleman whom she met during her short visit in the United States came to her country to see her and later proposed to her. Annabel, therefore, changed her plan and became a June bride in 2002. Although her parents never thought that their daughter would leave their country to marry a man from the United States, they fell in love with her husband and were happy for her marriage.

Annabel mentioned that the visa process to immigrate to the United States was not easy. She said that it was time consuming and stressful. When Annabel immigrated to the United States in September, 2002, her husband was studying Early Childhood Education in a college. Annabel babysat for her friend for a while. She became frustrated after a while because of her inability to use the master's degree previously obtained in her country. She knew that her heart was in teaching children. With her husband's guidance, she obtained a substitute teaching position in a local elementary school. The first class she entered was a third grade class. She had never experienced the U.S. public school and did not know what to expect from children. In her reflection on that third grade class, her shock and heartbreak were vividly shown:

When I entered the classroom, I was in shock how children were rude, disrespectful, wild, not listening, not following the classroom rules. I cried after I left [the classroom] and said [to myself that] I would never teach again. I think that was the hardest job that I ever had in my life. Most challenging. [Interview, 5/23/2010]

Annabel did not give up. She worked hard and did her best to learn as much as possible from the experience as a substitute teacher. One of the Pre-K classroom teachers in the school building noticed Annabel's work and referred her name to the school principal. The principal immediately offered her a paraprofessional position in her school. When Annabel informed the director of substitute teaching of her new job, the director told her, "Oh, the best always leaves so quickly" [Interview, 4/26/2010].

Annabel became a paraprofessional in January, 2003 and worked in a Pre-K classroom for three years. Through observing and helping her classroom teacher, Annabel learned how the U.S. public school system worked and how to interact with students and parents in the school. She also utilized this opportunity to familiarize herself with the U.S. public school mission, standards, educational laws and legal system that were different from her home country.

During the first year as a paraprofessional, Annabel was nominated as paraprofessional of the year. The fact that she was recognized as a paraprofessional of the year by fellow teachers after working for a year is an extraordinary compliment for any teacher. In spite of such an honor, she declined the award and let another paraprofessional be the recipient of the honor. Annabel firmly believed that this colleague deserved to be the paraprofessional of the year for her longer years of service. What Annabel did was a reflection of her modesty and her caring heart for other people whose hard work was often unrecognized by others. It is not surprising that she was nominated again as paraprofessional of the year the next school year. Her principal teased her that this time she had to accept it. And she did.

While Annabel was working as a paraprofessional, she was admitted to the Teachers of English Language Learners (TELL) program in a nearby university. The TELL Program is a scholarship program designed to help highly qualified bilingual adults become teachers in the

state's public schools. TELL began in Spring 2003 as a five-year Transition To Teaching Grant from the Office of Innovation and Improvement of the U.S. Department of Education. The goal was to assist 49 talented bilinguals in becoming certified teachers. As of 2010, 52 non-certified bilingual teachers and paraprofessionals have been awarded scholarships and other support services to earn professional certification. In return, they commit to teaching three years in a high-need school in the state. As part of the requirement in the TELL program, Annabel took the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and passed it. She also submitted all her coursework from her university in her home country to the U.S. educational credential evaluation services agency. Fortunately her master's degree in Spanish was recognized by the agency. After that, she took three ESOL endorsement courses and one Exceptional Children course in a nearby college. Her tuition for the college was paid for by the TELL program. She took a series of the state's teaching certificate exams to become certified to teach English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) students.

The proverb, "Opportunity comes to a prepared person", is truly appropriate when describing how Annabel got the ESOL teaching position. This had been her desire since coming to the United States. During her teaching as a paraprofessional, she also worked in the after school program for a couple of months, where she taught English literacy skills to Spanish speaking students. The director of the ESOL department, who supervised the program for the Spanish speaking students, met Annabel and appreciated her strong work ethic and her multilingual and multicultural qualities. At that time, the director was looking for an ESOL teacher who could teach multi-grade levels in two different elementary schools starting from February, 2007, even though it was almost the end of school year. She offered Annabel the ESOL teaching position. Annabel accepted the job and has been working as an ESOL teacher

since then. Although she started teaching in the end of the school year for two schools where she had to teach classes with multi-grade level students, she coped with the challenge by seeking support from the district ESOL specialist and ESOL teachers in other schools. She also read research studies to get ideas for differentiated instruction and used research based strategies such as guided reading in order to help her students with varied English proficiency levels.

Utilizing her Spanish language skills, Annabel not only interpreted for Spanish speaking families during teacher-parent conference weeks but also helped those families with social and academic issues. She is always open and willing to help parents at school because she firmly believes in a strong partnership between teachers and parents to help children, as shared in the following transcript:

Speaking Spanish...I served as a volunteer for parent-teacher conferences as an interpreter. This way I was able to connect with my parents most closely. If the student had any problem or any difficulties at school, parents contacted me immediately and address[ed] the issue that the students faced. My immigrant background definitely help[ed] me to relate to their feelings, to their challenges, to their strengths, and to their weaknesses as immigrants, as foreigners coming from different linguistic, cultural background[s] to American main[stream] culture. [Interview, 4/12/2010]

When Annabel started working as an ESOL teacher in two schools where she was assigned to, the school principals and collaborating classroom teachers appreciated Annabel's flexibility and her support that she had given to the students and their families in spite of her challenging work conditions. For example, Annabel did collaborative teaching with one of the second grade teachers at one of the schools in which she worked. There was a small group of ten students assigned to work with Annabel. Only four of them were ESOL students, and the rest of the six students were regular education students. This was a challenge for Annabel because she had students with so many different reading levels. This called for a lot of differentiation in her reading instruction. She felt a huge responsibility because she wanted to help all her students

succeed in reading. Thanks to her concern about these students, all the students in her group not only passed the reading part of the Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT), but they also exceeded the standards. The classroom teacher with whom Annabel worked was very pleased with the students' performance. As a result, the classroom teacher asked the school principal to place all ESOL students in the second grade in her classroom next year so that she could work with Annabel again. Annabel shared this story with great pride and joy: "I was very pleased because I collaborate with [a] second grade classroom. And the teacher actually requested [that] all ESOL children to be placed in her classroom next year for her to collaborate with me" [Interview, 5/21/2010].

When Annabel started teaching in a new school, the teachers in her school did not know that she was an immigrant teacher because she came from Europe and had white skin, blond hair, and a pointed nose like the White American. So they could not tell if she was from another country until Annabel started speaking with a foreign accent. She talked about this with a cheerful laugh during the interview:

People [were] very surprised when I started conversations because they realized that I do have an accent. That [led] to questions about my origin, native language, etc. But if I am in the movie theater, I'm watching the movie, you [can] never tell that I am [a] legal resident or [an] alien (Laughed). [Interview, 5/21/2010]

Annabel's future plan is to teach English for adult English language learners in universities or technical colleges so that she can help them pursue degrees in higher education and find good quality jobs. She was concerned that adult ELLs do not have many opportunities to improve their English while ESOL students in U.S. public elementary schools get linguistic support from their ESOL teachers, classroom teachers, and literacy coaches. She remembers how anxious she was to get a teaching position and how frustrated she was because her English was not good enough to get the job she wanted:

I was studying at home, I was reading, watching TV, everything that [I] could [do to] improve my literacy skills; reading and writing, oral skills; listening and speaking. And I [realized] that if I stay [in the United States], I will have to get better. I need to get better. I need to improve myself. Other than that, it would be difficult for me to find [a] job...that I could compete for. [Interview, 4/26/2010]

Annabel's experience as an immigrant in the United States motivated her to help other immigrants who have similar challenges. As caring and passionate as she is, there is no doubt that one day I will see her in a local college teaching adult ELLs and helping them pursue their American dreams.

Annabel firmly believed in the contribution of immigrant teachers to U.S. education for their unique cultural backgrounds. She is grateful for being different because being different means that she can always bring something unique to the classroom. Her conviction was beautifully expressed in the written message that she wrote, hoping to be shared with other immigrant teachers out there. She read this note during the interview:

I think that the uniqueness of the immigrant teachers' culture enriches the students' lives in an unforgettable way. Students who are fortunate to be taught by immigrant teachers gain multicultural experiences that will help them become more knowledgeable citizens with the cosmopolitan views of the world. In other words, these students will become global citizens respecting other people's cultural differences. This acknowledgement of the individual's cultural exceptionality will lead to the creation of more peaceful world. We will accept everybody who is different regardless of their religion, regardless of cultural differences. We accept them as individuals, period. I think that we will have a more peaceful world. [A written note from Annabel, 5/23/2010]

Niang

Niang was born in Singapore in January, 1966. Her mother passed away when she was five. She was brought up by her father who worked two jobs to raise his children. She has 13 brothers and sisters and is the youngest. Although her family was poor, Niang said that she never felt poor as a child. She now has eight brothers and sisters after losing some of her siblings to illness. One of her sisters lives in Australia, and the rest are living in Singapore. A few weeks before the first interview, Niang lost one of her brothers. It was a difficult time for Niang, especially after losing her father only two years ago. She shared with me how sad she was when she could not go back to Singapore to attend the funeral of her father and brother. She considered this one of the disadvantages of living in a country far away from her home country.

The education system in Singapore is similar to that of the United States. There are Kindergarten 1 (equivalent to Pre-Kindergarten in the U.S. education system) and Kindergarten 2 (equivalent to Kindergarten in the U.S. education system), Grades 1-6 (elementary school), Grades 7-10 (middle school), and Grades 11-12 (high school). Although Kindergarten 1 and Kindergarten 2 are not a required education, the elementary school is. Niang skipped Kindergarten 1 and Kindergarten 2 and started from Grade 1 because Niang's father did not have the money to send all of his 13 children to Kindergarten 1 and 2.

The Singapore government recognizes four official languages: English, Malay, Chinese (Mandarin), and Tamil, with English being the medium of instruction. Singapore became a British colony in 1824 and declared independence from Britain in August 1963. Even after the independence, the Singaporean education system has still followed the British Cambridge system. Students in Singapore are required to learn both English and one of the three other official languages as a mother tongue. Niang speaks both English and Malay. She spoke Malay at home

until she started school at seven. Niang recalled that in order to be promoted to the next grade level, she had to pass a test for her mother tongue which was Malay. Interestingly, when some Singaporean students do not pass the test for their mother tongue, they cannot attend the university.

Since starting school at seven, Niang has always wanted to be a teacher. Being the youngest of 13 brothers and sisters, she became an aunt when she was very young and loved taking care of her nephews and nieces. Her love of children was well described in her reflection:

I became an auntie when I was seven years old. So I've always been around kids. I love [children], I would baby[sit] for free. All my nephews and nieces still remember that I was always there because I would give up my vacation and ...just stay with them and take care of my nephews and nieces because I just love being with them. And I've always been that way. [Interview, 4/13/2010]

One day Niang met an American couple at her church in Singapore who stayed in Singapore for five years. They came to Singapore because the husband was working for an American company and also teaching in one of the universities in Singapore. The American couple invited their son, George, to stay with them for three weeks. Niang met George when he came to the church with his parents. They fell in love. By the third week of his visit, they wanted to keep seeing each other which led them to a long distance relationship of two and a half years before they got married in the United States.

Niang's original plan was to enter the Teacher's College after graduating from her high school. There is only one Teacher's College in Singapore, which is run by the Ministry of Education. Those students who attend this Teacher's College are required to spend two years for training and three years for teaching in Singaporean schools after graduation. In other words, once Niang is admitted to the Teacher College, she was required to stay in Singapore for a total five years. For Niang and George, who did not want to be separated for another five years, this

was a problem. As a solution, Niang decided to come to the United States to study Early Childhood Education so that they could be together. Fortunately, she was admitted to a university in a southeastern state of the United States where George lived.

Niang came to the United States in 1987 with a student visa. A year later she changed it to a fiancé visa. After her marriage, her visa status changed to a permanent resident. Although she could get the U.S. citizenship two years after her marriage, she waited for 18 years because she did not want to give up her Singaporean citizenship (Singapore does not allow dual citizenships).

During her four years of study in a university, Niang had two sets of field-based experiences: one semester for practicum and another semester for student teaching. Although she was pregnant during her practicum, her practicum was enjoyable and positive thanks to the mentor teacher who was supportive and understanding of her condition. However, her student teaching experience was not so pleasant due to the conflict Niang had with her mentor teacher. For example, when Niang brought her lesson plan to her mentor teacher, she asked Niang to correct almost everything and said, “You can’t do this. I guess you are not ready for this”. Niang thought that her mentor teacher was discouraging and unhelpful. In spite of the conflict she had with her mentor teacher, Niang graduated with a Bachelor’s Degree in Early Childhood Education and obtained a teaching certificate for Grades Pre-Kindergarten through 5.

After her graduation, Niang got her first teaching position as a Kindergarten teacher in a predominantly African American school in Aaron County for which she worked five years. Aaron County has population of 747,274 as of 2009 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The racial makeup of the Aaron County as of 2009 is 54% African-American, 30% White, 10% Hispanic or Latino, 4.2% Asian, 1.4% from two or more races, 0.4% Native American, 0.1% from other

races (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). Niang observed that most of the parents were working class and could not come to her class to volunteer because of their work commitments. Niang was the only Asian teacher in her school. She recalled that her students who never had an Asian teacher wanted to touch her hair and asked her if she spoke Spanish because that was the only foreign language they knew. Niang said that the assistant principal, who hired Niang, had military experiences which had exposed him to different cultures. He was open-minded and positive towards Niang's cultural heritage. Two years later, there was an administrative change in her school. Unfortunately, however, Niang felt that the new principal did not appreciate her as much as her previous administrator did. For example, sometimes he called Niang to his office and questioned her for some of the instructional decisions she had made for her class. Niang said that after five years of teaching in Aaron County, she had learned to be strong and perceptive.

Niang left Aaron County to teach in Baron County because it was closer to her home. Baron County has population of 84,569 as of 2009 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The racial makeup of the Baron County as of 2009 is 45% White, 41% African-American, 10% Hispanic or Latino, 2.2% Asian, 1.4% from two or more races, 0.3% Native American, 0.1% from other races (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). She taught in Baron County for three years as a Kindergarten classroom teacher. Baron County had a higher socio-economic level and had more White students than Aaron County. The principal had overseas experiences and was very receptive towards Niang. Although she was eight months pregnant with her second child when she applied for a job, the principal hired Niang and was very confident of her teaching abilities.

Unfortunately, Niang had to move to another school in a month because there were not enough students to justify her position. Because she was the last person hired, she had to transfer to

another school in the same county. Luckily, Niang liked the new school and worked as a Kindergarten classroom teacher for three years.

After Niang left Baron County, Niang and her family moved to Singapore. The reason why she went back to Singapore was because her husband made a promise when he married her that he would move back to Singapore when the opportunity presented itself. To keep his words, George got a job in Singapore and lived there for four years with Niang and their children. After spending a year to look for a teaching position in Singapore, Niang taught in an international school in Singapore for three years. The school offered the International Baccalaureate (IB) program which was widely recognized throughout the world. IB schools offer a curriculum that represents the best from many different countries rather than the exported national system of any one. These schools encourage international-mindedness in students. The students in IB schools learn a second language and the skills to live and work with others internationally. There are more than 876,000 IB students at 3,067 schools in 139 countries as of 2010 (“About the International Baccalaureate®”, 2005). The IB school where Niang worked in Singapore had students representing over forty nationalities. She had students from eleven different countries in her classroom. The school had an annual international festival and taught students about different countries. Niang taught in Kindergarten 1 and then looped with her students the next year to Kindergarten 2. Niang’s own children attended both international and local schools. In a local school, they took Chinese language class and had many multicultural experiences.

After the four years in Singapore, Niang and her family moved back to the southeastern state of the United States. Niang worked in Camry County for three years as a Kindergarten classroom teacher. Camry County has population of 46,337 as of 2009 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). The racial makeup of the Aaron County as of 2009 is 53% White, 43% African-American,

1.5 % Hispanic or Latino of any race, 1.3% Asian, 0.8% from two or more races, and, 0.3% Native American (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The reason why Niang came to Camry County was because her parents-in-law lived in the county and missed their grandchildren very much. Camry County recognized her three years of teaching experience in Singapore. She was surprised by this because most school districts do not count the foreign teaching experiences toward the teacher's retirement system. The school she worked for was an African-American dominant school and had families with varied socio-economic status. She enjoyed her teaching there because she had a good principal who treated her like a professional. To her disappointment, however, she saw that Camry County was neither a safe nor a challenging learning environment for her son. For example, her son was suspended a lot over several incidents (e.g., climbing up the roof of the school building, inserting a pen into an electrical socket) that Niang considered partially the school's fault. She experienced a lot of conflicts and confrontations with her son's school administrators and teachers when dealing with her son's suspension. So she moved out of Camry County three years later. During the three years of painful experiences as a mother in Camry County, Niang said that she learned to be understanding for those students in her classroom, who are smart but rambunctious like her son, and compassionate for those parents who have had similar experiences. She often said that being a mother helped her to be a good teacher.

After Niang left Camry County, she and her family moved to Newman County located in the Northeastern part of the state and has estimated population of 112,787. The racial makeup of the Newman County as of 2000 (Newman County School District website) was 90% White, 6% African-American, 3.18% Hispanic or Latino of any race, 1.43% Asian, 0.18% Native American, 0.05% Pacific Islander, 1.48% from other races, and 0.87% from two or more races. She is

currently working as a first grade classroom teacher in Newman County. Her son is very happy in Newman County and has never been in trouble in his new school. He successfully graduated from the high school with an excellent SAT score and is currently a junior in a university.

Niang has been teaching in Newman County for four years now. According to Niang's principal, Helen, parents in her school have tremendous respect for Niang because she has proved herself to be professional and competent through her strong work ethics and extraordinary teaching. Helen mentioned that one of Niang's strengths was that she was talented in building a community of families in her classroom. For example, Niang invited parents to her classroom as a volunteer. For those parents who did not have time to come to Niang's classroom to help, she sent home some classroom chores such as cutting the laminated materials. By doing so, Niang said that she wanted her students' parents to feel a sense of ownership and contribution to their children's learning at school. Niang considered having parents in her classroom one of the best ways to show them what a competent teacher she was. She believed that they trusted her and counted on her after their visit to Niang's classroom. Niang mentioned that another way to gain parents' trust is to keep an open and consistent communication channel with them. When parents e-mailed her and requested something, she always responded to them within 24 hours. She also created her own surveys for parents and received their feedback to improve her lesson.

Being an immigrant teacher from Singapore, Niang has an Asian accent and speaks quite fast. Oftentimes, her students corrected her English when they heard her accent. However, Niang did not take offense. She believed that she could also learn from her students as they learned from her.

Niang loves working in the current school because she has a supportive principal, trusting parents, and great students. Newman County parents have high socio-economic and educational

backgrounds. When it comes to children's education, she believed that it was not Black and White issue. It was about how parents encouraged and supported their children to reach their potential. She observed that in the United States the more educated the parents were, the better educated their children were because they had access to more educational resources.

Niang also observed that the more principals were exposed to different cultures, the more positive attitude they had towards immigrant teachers. Her current principal, Helen, hired her because she has such high regards for Asians for their work ethic and studiousness. Helen hired Niang on the spot during the job fair because of her preconception about Asians and was glad that Niang has proved her right with her excellent teaching. As Helen retired in spring 2010, she encouraged Niang to think about being a school administrator one day because Helen believed that Niang knew what good teaching is and what good teachers do.

Helen had high regards of Niang. When Niang became a National Board Certified Teacher, which demanded rigorous and time consuming work to be approved, Helen was so proud of Niang and gave her a beautiful bouquet of flowers. When Helen asked Niang to loop with her Kindergarten class to the first grade, Niang took the challenge and successfully carried it out. Helen said that looping with students to the next grade level was a lot of additional work and a real burden for the teacher because the curriculum, standards, instructional materials, textbooks, and everything changed. It also required a room change which called for a classroom set up with different materials. Helen recalled that while all other teachers were reluctant to do so, Niang showed them how beneficial it could be for both students and teachers because when the new school year started, Niang's students already knew the classroom rules and routines as well as Niang's expectations of them. So they could start working on the curriculum from day one while other classes were still working on their classroom rules and routines for two weeks.

Because the looping was so successful, Niang volunteered to loop with her new Kindergarteners the next year. So Niang has done the looping twice with great success.

Helen supported Niang when some of the parents were unreceptive to Niang because of her race. One parent, who lost her job because a Japanese person took over her position, thought that Niang was Japanese and showed her aggressive attitude toward Niang. Niang was surprised that the parent thought she was Japanese just because she was Asian. Niang pointed out that some Americans thought that Koreans, Japanese, Chinese, and Singaporeans were all the same and lumped them all together. Helen supported Niang and asked her not to be discouraged by such parents. Another example is that when a mother who did not want her son to be in Niang's class because she was Asian, Helen assured the parent that Niang was an excellent teacher and persuaded the parent to give Niang a chance.

Helen said that Niang has done so many great things in her school. For example, when there was an earth quake in Haiti, she invited a guest speaker who presented a touching photo story of victims of Haiti earth quake. Helen recalled that there were no dry eyes after the presentation. Being inspired by the guest speaker, Niang's students passionately and urgently suggested to Niang that they take an immediate action to help the Haiti victims. So Niang and her students did a fundraising through a bake sale which was a huge success and made \$406.85. Niang taught her students not only to reach out the community outside the United States but also to realize that they are capable of helping other people as long as they keep their mind open to respect people from different countries.

Although Niang experienced doubts and questions about her capability as a teacher from some of her peers over the years, Niang's hard work and extraordinary teaching were recognized by the majority of her colleagues. Niang became the teacher of the year in 2009-2010 which

means that many of her fellow teachers who respected Niang and recognized her as a competent teacher.

As of 2010, Niang has a total 18 years of teaching experience: 16 years in Kindergarten and 2 years in first grade. Currently, she is working on her Ph.D. in Early Childhood Education in a university in which her son is a junior. She hopes to be a professor in Early Childhood Education and work for teacher education one day.

Mares

Mares was born in Colombia as an oldest child among four daughters in a family of six: Mares, her three younger sisters, mother and father. Thanks to her father who owned an engineering company, Mares's family had a financially comfortable life. Mares is grateful that she has a mother who has always been there for her children as a house wife. Mares was able to enjoy things that many other children in Colombia could not have, such as a family vacation in the United States almost every summer and a bilingual education in a private school where only privileged parents could afford to send their children. Whenever Mares's family went on vacation, Mares's mother invited her nieces and nephews as well as her daughters' friends and did a cook out for them. Mares remembered that her house was always full of friends and families thanks to her mother's hospitality.

Mares's mother was very strict with all of her children while Mares's father was generous and did everything to "spoil" his children. Mares's father always supported his wife's decision. Mares's mother set the rules for her children which were strictly observed. For instance, as soon as Mares came home from school, her mother made sure that Mares finished her homework first. Having been diagnosed as dyslexic, Mares sometimes brought an unsatisfactory report card. Her mother made her own quizzes for Mares and gave her the tests until Mares had a passing score.

Reflecting upon her mother's parenting, Mares appreciated her mother for the support that she has given to Mares.

While most Colombian girls went to the girls' school, Mares went to a co-educational private bilingual school since Kindergarten, where she could learn how to interact with everybody regardless of the gender. Another reason why Mares's parents sent her to a bilingual school was because they wanted Mares to receive a high quality English language education, due to that Colombian society highly values English language skills. To Mares's dismay, however, she was diagnosed with dyslexia when she was in the third grade and had to leave the bilingual school because the school believed that a dyslexic student could not learn English. Although Mares's parents moved her to a private monolingual school, they continued to provide Mares with English language education through private tutors, a psychologist for her dyslexia, and weekend English language classes. They also took Mares and her sisters to the United States for English lessons during summer. Knowing her daughter being timid and shy in her English speaking skill, Mares's mother pushed her daughter to speak as much as she could:

[My mother] will make the way for us to use [English]...no matter what. We will go to church and she will make us to talk to the priest [in English] or talk to the person sitting next to us [by using] just [English] words. If...my father...rent[ed] a car so we [could] go different places and he got lost, we were the ones who had to go to the gas station and ask, "Sir, we are going to this place, we got lost. Where are we?"...all those kinds of things. [Interview, 4/7/2010]

When it was time for Mares to decide what she wanted to do for her life, she shared her hope to be a school teacher with her family. Considering the reality that school teachers in Colombia do not make much money, Mares's mother suggested that Mares work in her father's engineering company. Being more concerned about her daughter's happiness than her financial prosperity, however, Mares's father encouraged Mares to pursue her dream:

[My father said] whatever [you] chooses it is going to be okay with me. When you choose what you are going to be, it has to be something that you will love. Because when you start your life, when you start working, you have to love what you do. Because if you don't love what you do, you will be the most miserable person in life no matter how much you have. Money does not bring you happiness. Money is important to be happy, but more important than money is what you love. If you don't love what you do, you are going to be miserable no matter how much money they pay you. [Interview, 4/7/2010]

Thanks to her father's support, Mares went to a college to study Early Childhood Education in her home country.

Although Mares was happy to study Early Childhood Education in college, she did not enjoy her study due to dyslexia. When Mares was a junior in her college, she met her husband in 1989 at a Mother's Day party at her mother's house when Mares's sister invited him as one of her friends. Mares had a nice conversation with him all day during the party. Since then, they went to the church together on Sundays and talked to each other almost every day. They started dating for about 9 months before they got married. After the honeymoon, Mares decided to give up her bachelor's degree. However, with her mother's persuasion, Mares resumed her study and graduated from the college with a bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education. Mares mentioned that she was grateful for her mother's push for her education because otherwise she would not have been able to be a school teacher, neither in Colombia nor in the United States.

Due to the highly valued English language skills within the culture, Colombia had brought native English speakers from the United States and provided them with benefits such as housing, salary, and airplane tickets for teaching English in private bilingual schools. As the economy started declining in Colombia, however, those schools started hiring Colombian teachers who were bilingual. Mares would have not been able to teach English in bilingual schools, had she not been fluent in English. Although school teachers in Colombia do not get paid much in general, they can receive a higher salary in their school if their English is fluent enough to teach Colombian students.

Mares started her teaching in a bilingual school as a paraprofessional and an Art Teacher in a Kindergarten classroom for a year. Being a first year teacher and having never been professionally trained in teaching Art, Mares felt incompetent in the beginning. On her first day of work, assuming her job as running simple errands for her classroom teacher, Mares was surprised when she was asked to read a story book to the class. Mares had never done this before. Although it was a nerve racking experience for Mares, thanks to her classroom teacher's support and all the confidence she has given to Mares, Mares successfully finished her Read Aloud for students. From that moment, Mares started learning to be a confident and competent teacher. Mares considered the lead teacher her mentor and appreciated her for all the strengths and confidence she had given to Mares.

The next year Mares became a Total Physical Response (TPR) teacher in the same bilingual school to teach English to students from Pre-Kindergarten to Grade 1. Total physical response (TPR) is a method developed by James J. Asher, to assist learning second languages ("Total Physical Response", 2010). In TPR, students act in response to English commands that require physical movement (Asher, 1969).

After teaching as a TPR teacher for three years, Mares moved to a different bilingual school where she taught in Kindergarten for four years. Unlike U.S. schools where there were teachers for specials such as music, art, and physical education, Mares taught all specials as well as reading, writing, English language arts, math, social studies and science, which was a general practice in Colombian schools.

The next school Mares worked for was also a bilingual school where she started with Pre-Kindergarten classroom and looped with the same class for three years until transition class. The transition class comes between Kindergarten and Grade 1 in the Colombian school system and is

equivalent to Grade 1 in the U.S. school system. Her looping experience with the same children for three years was positive because of the benefits that the looping brought to both teachers and students: consistency in expectations and classroom procedures, efficiency in teaching and learning as a result, strong relationships not only between Mares and her students but also between Mares and the parents of her students, which were solidified over a long period of time.

Despite the request from her students' parents for Mares to loop with their children the fourth year, she left the school to work as an ESOL teacher for Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 3 in a monolingual Catholic school, which was her last job before she came to the United States. The school was for girls only and had an impeccable reputation for its well-disciplined students: students wore school uniforms; they were not allowed to wear make-ups, nail polish or jewelry. She mentioned that her teaching experience in this school was filled with positive memories because her students were very respectful to their teachers.

As the economy started declining, Colombia was no longer a safe place to live for Mares's family because of the violence (e.g., kidnapping and bombing) and high unemployment rates. In search for a safe place to live and a professional job to make a living, Mares's three sisters came to the United States with a tourist visa, which they later changed to a student visa and then to a work visa. Mares's situation in Colombia was not optimistic, either. Due to her husband's waning business, they were on the verge of being broke. In an effort to find a sponsor in the United States for his work visa, Mares's husband left Mares alone in Colombia for six months, which was a painful time for her. Mares cried every time she talked with her husband on the phone. Although she was reluctant to leave her parents alone in Colombia, she eventually followed her husband to the United States in June, 2001 after her husband found a sponsor for his work visa. It was a difficult phase for Mares to settle in the United States. While her husband

was out working as a waiter and a part time manager of an Italian restaurant, Mares stayed at home, not knowing what to do, feeling lonely, having terrible homesickness, and missing her parents in Colombia.

However, Mare's husband was determined not to go back to Colombia because from his perspective there was no hope for a better life there. In an effort to help her husband and to overcome her homesickness, Mares looked for something to do and started working as a full-time babysitter for a wealthy American family. Meanwhile, she was looking for a chance to change her tourist visa to a student visa as her sisters had done. The American Language Program (ALP) at a local university helped her change her visa status to a student visa. Although she did not need to take an English language class due to her fluent English, Mares enrolled in the ALP because it was the only way for her to change her visa status.

Since Mares came to the United States, she was determined to become a school teacher which had been her profession for 15 years in Colombia. Mares said that she was determined to do everything she could no matter how long it took for her to turn her dream into a reality. After obtaining her student visa, she looked for a sponsor who could change her student visa to a work visa. While working on the ALP at the university, she shared her hope to be a teacher with a professor who suggested meeting with the superintendent at Anderson County School District nearby the university. Mares not only met with the superintendent but also applied for a Family Engagement Specialist position in Lily Elementary School in Anderson County. To her disappointment, however, Anderson County neither sponsored a work visa for Mares nor offered the position she applied for. However, during the interview, one of the interviewers was from Twinkle Star Academy, a private day care center that has had a partnership with Lily Elementary School, and told Mares that her academy had sponsored an immigrant teacher from India in the

past. So, Mares got an interview opportunity with Twinkle Star Academy and was offered a teaching position. Thanks to Twinkle Star Academy that sponsored Mares for her work visa, she was given a three-year work visa. She started with the baby room during the first year, then moved to a toddlers' classroom during the second year, and then taught a Pre-Kindergarten classroom in the third year where she taught for four years. While she was teaching in a Pre-Kindergarten classroom, Twinkle Star Academy sponsored her for a permanent residency. Mares worked for the academy for a total of six years and became a permanent resident in May, 2009.

Since Mares had an interview with Lily Elementary School for a family engagement specialist in 2004, she has set her mind to be a teacher in that school. One day her hard work in Twinkle Star Academy paid off. Due to the partnership between Lily Elementary School and Twinkle Star Academy, the principal of Lily Elementary School visited Twinkle Star Academy on a regular basis and observed Mares's classroom. The principal was impressed by Mares's teaching and strong work ethic, and offered her a teaching position for a Head Start Pre-Kindergarten classroom at Lily Elementary School in 2008. Although her bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education from Colombia was fully recognized by the World Education Services (WES), neither her fifteen years of teaching experiences in Colombia nor the six years of teaching in Twinkle Star Academy were counted towards her Teacher Retirement System. This meant that Mares had to start with a salary for a first year teacher with a bachelor's degree. However, her positive spirit and determination to be a teacher in the U.S. school never wavered in her reflection:

In life, not every single thing is fair. I had something that I was willing to have, which was working in Anderson County that was ...my biggest goal. And I did it. So it's okay. Nobody is going to take away my knowledge. Nobody is going to take away my experience. Nobody is going to take away what I know. No matter they put it or not put it in [Teacher Retirement System], I have it. And I feel proud of it. And that's enough for me. [Interview, 4/7/2010]

Mares is currently working on a provisional certificate and needs to take the state teaching certificate exam in order to receive a clear renewable teaching certificate. However, Mares is worried that she might not be able to pass the exam because first, it has been a long time since she graduated from college; and second, she is not familiar with the U.S. teaching certificate test.

Mares had a number of challenges, being new to the younger age group of students and the way U.S. parents treated her differently than parents in Colombian schools did. During her first year teaching in Twinkle Star Academy, Mares with a paraprofessional taught in the Baby's Room where there were four babies whose ages ranged from six months to a year and a half. It was a new and challenging experience for Mares to work with babies of such a young age. She had to learn how to hold them, how to change their diapers, how to put on and discard rubber gloves, and how to make a baby bottle, with which she was not familiar. In addition, having never worked with a paraprofessional in Colombia, it was a learning process for Mares to work with a partner who had a different work style. For example, while Mares was quick in decision making, her paraprofessional was rather indecisive. However, she learned to be patient and perceptive of a different personality and a work style.

Another challenge Mares faced was learning American students' names. Mares said that it was not easy for her to pronounce or write names of her students. She was also mistaken in telling the gender of her students who had long and braided hair. One of her parents corrected Mares when Mares called her son a girl:

Because he had a braided hair and it was up to his shoulders...I said, "Oh, she is so beautiful!" And the mother look[ed] at me and said, "It's not she, it's he (Sigh)." I didn't even know what to say. I almost died. So I learned, never say boy or girl ...until I was sure. [Interview, 4/13/2010]

Although interacting with parents was not new to Mares, she remembered how difficult it was to learn how to communicate or interact with parents of her students in the U.S. school. Coming from the Colombian culture where parents and teachers openly discussed all issues regarding the students, including a student's personal hygiene and a divorce in the student's family, Mares often inadvertently made American parents upset when she attempted to discuss the issues with them directly as she had been used to do so with parents in Colombia.

When I came here, something that was difficult for me was to learn how to communicate with parents because you had to be so careful to what you say and how you say it because anything that you say can be against you... You cannot ask questions... inappropriate questions because then you are going to be sued or in trouble or fired or parents are going to say, "I don't want that teacher any more and I will just take my child out of that classroom." [Interview, 4/13/2010]

Through trials and errors, Mares learned to understand the uniqueness of each culture and the importance of respecting and following U.S. cultural norms:

I need to act like people in this country, no matter what my background is. I will never forget [who] I am, where I c[a]me from, [and] what things are important in life for me. I just have to understand the other point of view. That means that I respect this culture. And because I respect this culture, I have to do what is okay for this culture. It might not be okay for my culture..., but if I decide to work in this country, I have to go [with the] flow [and follow] the rules. [Interview, 4/13/2010]

As she continued to become skilled at how to communicate with parents in a way that is acceptable in U.S. culture, Mares also learned to help parents understand her and recognize her good intentions for them and their children:

When you are ...raised with certain philosophy [in a different county] (sigh), and you see things against your philosophy...it's hard. But it does not mean that I cannot do it. I just [have to] learn how to ...explain [to] parents. In my open house when I start school, I told my parents [that] I am a loud person because I want them to know and understand that it's not that I am screaming to their kids. It's that I just cannot whisper...[So I told them], "Sometimes when I speak, [if] it sounds rude, please come to me before you go to my principal and talk to me and say, „Mares, did you mean this?“ And maybe...we can get to an agreement." And that has worked very good. [Interview, 4/13/2010]

In Colombia, most Pre-Kindergarten students Mares knew came to school already knowing letters, letter sounds, color words, and numbers. Being used to working with Colombian Pre-Kindergarten students for a number of years, Mares expected her U.S. Pre-Kindergarten students to be the same way. Not having had a Pre-Kindergarten teacher training until February, 2008 provided by the State Department of Early Care and Learning, Mares was not aware of the state Pre-Kindergarten standards and kept imposing her high expectations on her students. A consultant from the State Department of Early Care and Learning, who visited Mares's Pre-Kindergarten classroom in Twinkle Star Academy, raised concerns about her lesson for not being developmentally appropriate for the students. In addition, being the first and the only Pre-Kindergarten teacher Twinkle Star Academy ever had, she had no one to ask for help. However, the Pre-Kindergarten teacher training in spring, 2008 changed the situation:

When ...I did the training, I got it and said, "Oh, okay. So this is what I have to teach. This is what I have to say. Oh, this is what I have to learn, not this that I'm teaching because ...it was very high for them". So when my consultant came back in March 2008, he almost flip[ped] over because he said, "This is what I wanted to see! Now you are doing [well]!" Every single thing was "meet or exceeded." And he said that he could not believe how I was able to change my whole process of my lesson plans and my activities and my lessons to my students! [Interview, 4/13/2010]

When I asked Mares who helped her meet the challenges she had, her answer was "nobody." Although Mares had 15 years of teaching experience in Colombia, teaching in U.S. schools was very different and new to Mares. According to Mares, what made her first year teaching in a U.S. school most difficult was first, people's assumption that Mares would know how the American school system works and the tasks (e.g., following the school district's specific lesson plan template and using the school district's curriculum guide) that were expected of her; second, people's indifference about Mares's struggle:

I had no mentors. They assume[d] that I know [how to teach]. They are telling me, "This is toddlers. Do a lesson plan. And this is the curriculum you are using" (sigh). I

don't...feel that teachers here are willing to work with me. Nobody cares if you know or [do] not know. Nobody cares if you understand or do not understand. They don't even come to you and ask you, "Do you need any help?" I feel they assume because you are a teacher, you are in that position, you should know what to do. So that was hard for me because I had to ...learn how to do it and learn how to deal with it [by myself]. [Interview, 5/20/2010]

Having no mentors to guide her, Mares sought the help she needed through reading educational text books, attending a training provided by the State Department of Early Care and Learning, utilizing her teaching experiences in Colombia, and going to observe a Pre-Kindergarten class in other schools a couple of times a year.

Hoping to help the first year teachers, Mares suggested that the first year immigrant teachers would be benefited from not only a classroom observation in other schools where they can learn from experienced and highly competent teachers but also one-on-one or a small group support for lesson plans, curriculum, and standards. She also proposed that immigrant teachers must have a mentor who takes a genuine interest in them, understands the challenges they have, and gives them feedback about their strengths and areas of improvement.

Despite her six years of teaching experience in Twinkle Star Academy, Mares's first year in a Head Start Pre-Kindergarten classroom in Lily Elementary School was extremely challenging due to the numerous regulations and requirements she had to observe, such as following health and personal hygiene norms, avoiding certain detergents that could cause an allergic reaction in a child, having two teachers in the classroom in all circumstances, eating with children, requesting for a cover-up when going to the bathroom, keeping a portfolio for each student, writing anecdotal notes, and documenting students' pictures and work samples. Furthermore, Mares had to deal with frequent trainings regarding new curriculum and instructional methods provided by the Anderson County School District, the new working environment, teaching students with special needs in her classroom for the first time, and working extra hours

every day. The distress she had during the first year was vividly portrayed in a phone conversation that she had with her mother in Colombia:

I cried everyday. [During] my first year [in Anderson County], I would go home and cry. I just [felt] so tired. And...I call[ed] my mom [in] Colombia. "Mommy, I can't stand this anymore" (crying). My mom was like, "You need to calm down, please. I don't want to see you crying". And then...by January, this was getting worse. And she said, "Quit! Quit the job! I have never told you to quit anything in your life. But I have heard you crying since August. This is just too much!" (sigh) And I said, "No, I cannot quit. Maybe next year is going to be a great year." [Interview, 4/27/2010]

Her paraprofessional was not much help due to her frequent absences which were almost every other day for about three months. Mares had to do everything by herself and dealt with a new substitute paraprofessional. To solve this problem, she brought this issue to her principal's attention. Fortunately, Mares's paraprofessional was assigned to a different position and, by chance, Mares got a new paraprofessional who had been her paraprofessional for four years in Twinkle Star Academy. Being efficient and accountable as she was, Mares could count on her paraprofessional for everything. Thanks to their partnership, Mares believed that her students had a great respect for both Mares and her paraprofessional.

Having no prior teaching experience with students with special needs, working with two special education children was extremely challenging for Mares. One of the special education students had an anger issue (i.e., cursing other classmates and hitting other students when being upset). Although Mares tried to talk to the child's mother about his behavior and asked her for her support, the child's mother not only denied her son's anger issue but also refused to help Mares. However, Mares did not give up her endeavor to acquire the mother's cooperation as well as her attempt to reach the parent heart-to-heart:

I said [to the mother], "I have to support you[r] [son] here in school and you have to do the same at home because if he knows that we are on the same page, things are going to get better for both of us." And she looked at me and said, "whatever". And she left. Then

she came back for my second parent-teacher conference. I said, "He is a very smart boy. He can read. He can say the sounds of letters [and] the numbers. But the problem that we are encountering right now is his relationship with his friends and with his teachers. He doesn't respect any body. He needs to learn how to solve his problem, using words not hitting or screaming or kicking or cursing." She looked at me. And her eyes were full of tears. [She] said, "Help me." JeeHae, I almost died. It took her two teacher-parent conferences to be able to open up. So she started telling all what he did at home. So we set some norms...that she was going to work with him at home. She also went to do some psychological therapy. And he...was better. [Interview, 4/27/2010]

Mares had couple of other special education students in her classroom. Collaborating with the parents of those students, Mares helped them improve their social and academic skills.

Having successfully completed the first year in Anderson County, Mares was nominated to take a collaborative classroom the next year in which she was given five additional students with special needs. But in return, two additional teachers were assigned to Mares's classroom: a special education teacher, Kristy, and Kristy's paraprofessional. However, Mares's new collaborative relationship with Kristy and her paraprofessional was not compatible due to the different teaching philosophies and practices. While Mares focused on teaching her students, including her special education students, to be independent and autonomous learners, the special education teacher did not support Mares's goal:

I'm going to challenge those behaviors or those brains to get them ...to go to Kindergarten. That's my goal: prepare them in life to be successful. So the first week...I showed them [how to open a carton of milk] and then said, "Never again I will open anything for you guys. Why? Because I already taught you how to do it. If...you have tried [and can't open it], then yes, I will help you." [But Kristy] wanted to do every single thing for my special ed[ucation] kids. So they knew [Kristy] will do it. And they would run to her, and she would open [the milk for them]. I was so upset about it. [Interview, 4/27/2010]

However challenging it has been for Mares in the U.S. school, Mares had grown to be a competent teacher. Her principal in Lily Elementary School gave Mares a positive end-of-year evaluation:

In my last evaluation...[my principal] wrote [that] she thought I was a great person and a great teacher. And I was always on task. And every time she came into my classroom, she had learned so much from me and she was happy to see the kids, how they were involved, and how much learning [she] could see in my classroom. [Interview, 5/20/2010]

After receiving an exceptionally positive end-of-year evaluation from her principal, Mares shared with her principal how rewarding and meaningful it was for her to read her principal's positive thoughts about her:

There [are] many ways to give people rewards. You can give a bonus. You can give a tip to a waiter. But I think words are so important. For me, they are [so important]. I think that when somebody tells you [in] writing how much they appreciate you, how much they think you are good..., how much they are pleased with what you are doing in the classroom, that is a motivation for me to be a better teacher, a better person day by day. [Interview, 5/20/2010]

In spite of the conflicts Mares had with some of her students' parents in the beginning, after seeing the significant progress of their children at school, parents of her students expressed their appreciation for Mares in the end of school year. This was another greatly rewarding experience for her:

After they [saw] the progress of their kids, it was very rewarding for me to see how these parents, on the last day of school, have come and give[n] me a note saying, "Thank you for what you've taught my son or my daughter", [and] given me a hug that I really feel the appreciation for what we have done. So that was very comforting for me. [Interview, 5/18/2010]

Seeing the progress of her students, especially those who struggled in the beginning of the school year, was one of the most rewarding experiences for Mares. When one of her students with special needs, who had difficulty with fine motor skills, could finally write his own name during the last week of school, the joy Mares felt was beyond words:

The whole year I was saying, "Sam, go get your name sample and write your name on a piece of paper." "I cannot do.", [said Sam]. I [said], "It doesn't matter. Just try because practice makes perfect". Sam [got] his name and [made] a ...straight line through the whole year. The last week of school, he was able to write his name completely by himself. He [came] and [told] me, "Ms. Mares, I did it!" Oh, my gosh, JeeHae! I cried that day so

much because, first of all, he was a special ed[ucation] kid; second, because his fine motor skills were so weak and at the end of the year, he was able to write his name. And he was able to tell me that was his name. And he was able to tell me every single letter in his name. So that, for me, was incredible! [Interview, 5/18/2010]

Mares's love of children and teaching was clearly expressed in the following interview transcript:

I adore my students. I adore being a teacher. That's the only thing I know how to do. That's the only thing I have done [in] my whole life. And I am passionate with it. I think that if I had to choose another career, I would [have] be[en] the most miserable person in life. I think what I choose was what I had to be. I don't see me in any other office, company or anything. I love what I [do]. I just think that that's what I was meant to be; a teacher. [Interview, 4/7/2010]

Mares never seemed to cease her endeavor to improve her teaching in order to be the best teacher she expects herself to be. Perhaps, such an effort may give Mares a sound confidence in her teaching. Whenever and whoever comes to observe her classroom, Mares said that she always enjoyed showing people what an excellent teacher she was:

When they come in my classroom [for an] observation, I [make] sure that that day, I'm the star. And I make that happen...I show off just like the kids show off...when they have so many teachers in the classroom. I let people know that I have a good direction in [my] classroom, good management, good plan for [my] kids. I don't feel scared to show that. When I know they are coming, I make sure that I ...give [them] the best of me. [Interview, 5/18/2010]

Having experienced frustration for the lack of support and guidance when she first started teaching in a U.S. school, Mares reached out first and gave support to help a new teacher in her school. Mares's support for the new teacher gained her a lot of confidence. Moving to a new Pre-Kindergarten classroom next year where the new teacher's classroom was going to be right next door to Mares's, they both were excited and expected to do a lot of collaboration with each other:

[My new colleague] is so happy and I'm too because we made our friendship out of something that we never thought it was going to get us so close. I helped her how to plan. I helped her a lot through the whole year. I feel happy for her. And I feel happy for me that I was able to help her move on. [Interview, 5/20/2010]

Mares likes to proactively reach out to help teachers in her school. Mares had applied for an Education Specialist position for the Head Start program, which was helping other Pre-K classroom teachers as their literacy coach. Utilizing her 23 years of teaching experiences in both Colombia and the United States, Mares hoped to help other teachers not only improve their teaching but also enjoy the learning process of it. Although she did not get the coach position she wanted this year, I know she will never give up her dream and will turn it to reality one day.

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS

As I discussed in Chapter Four, the essence of the phenomenon is that the immigrant teachers turn the challenging circumstances into successful situations in which they grow to be strong and worthy of respect. In Chapter Five, I would like to discuss the supporting details of the essence of the phenomenon. This chapter presents findings from the data analysis of the interview transcripts of three immigrant teachers and a principal of one of the participants, bridling journals, initial bridling statement, and three portraitures. Through the analysis of data, I obtained a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of my research participants. Van Manen (1990) mentioned:

The point of phenomenological research is to “borrow” other people’s experiences and their reflections on their experiences in order to better be able to come to an understanding of the deeper meaning or significance of an aspect of human experience, in the context of the whole of human experience. (p. 62)

He posed a thoughtful question and answered his own inquiry: “Why do we need to collect the „data“ of *other* people’s experiences? We gather other people’s experiences because they allow us to become more experienced ourselves” (*ibid.*).

The analysis of data revealed unique and shared experiences among these immigrant teachers. In this chapter I organize these immigrant teachers’ experiences in four patterns of meanings: sociocultural challenges, coping strategies, strengths, and positive experiences. I examine each pattern of meaning in relation to particular strands that contributed to the formation of the pattern. Although these four patterns are discussed separately, I would like to note that

they are not mutually exclusive. Like a fine yarn, these patterns are not only interwoven together but also consisted of three or more strands intertwined that help us understand how immigrant teachers meet the challenges they face and how they transform such challenging experiences to success stories. Briefly, in order to meet the sociocultural challenges they faced in the U.S. schools, immigrant teachers came up with coping strategies, which served to strengthen the qualities they have. Their strengths have brought them rewarding accomplishments which directly contributed to their positive experiences.

The first pattern, sociocultural challenges resulted from systemic and cultural differences, prejudices against immigrant teachers, and these teachers' lack of cultural capital. The second pattern, coping strategies, is composed of four primary resources: educational resources, religion, social network, and personal strategies. The third pattern, strengths, consists of three underlying elements: multicultural experiences, professional traits, and personal attributes. The last pattern of meaning is positive experiences which include support and recognitions from colleagues, parents, students, and school administrators. In what follows I discuss each of these four patterns in detail.

Sociocultural Challenges

The challenges with regard to immigrant teachers' lived experiences were one of the primary focuses of the study. These challenges resulted from two contributing strands, including systemic and cultural differences as well as prejudice and lack of cultural capital.

Systemic and Cultural Differences

The three immigrant teachers in this study experienced challenges because of systemic and cultural differences. The systemic differences in this section are defined as differences in social, legal, educational, and linguistic systems between the United States and the immigrant

teachers' home countries. The cultural differences are defined as differences in beliefs and practices between the United States and the immigrant teachers' home countries, and discussed through the acculturation of the immigrant teachers.

Visa process. The visa process reflects differences in the social and legal systems between the United States and the immigrant teachers' home countries. As immigrants, all three teachers in this study had to go through the visa process when they came to the United States in order to be considered for a teaching position. To these teachers, the visa process was painful, time consuming, and expensive. The regulations, procedures, time, and expense for the visa process were set by the U.S. government, and the immigrant teachers had no control.

Annabel described her visa process as follows:

We decided to get married. And the entire process going through INS...(sigh) was really tough. Because ...I still came [to the United States] in tourist visa. But to get married, I would have to apply for fiancé visa which I had to apply in [my home country]. After receiving the [fiancé] visa, I would have to fly [back] ...to the United States within three months to get married. It was... [the] requirement needed for me to officially immigrate to the United States. [Interview, 3/29/2010]

Niang also explained her visa process in a similar manner:

Each step was tedious. [There were] lots to answer and documents to gather. And price went up for each thing I applied. The citizenship was like \$345, and I heard it's even more now. [It was] stressful...when I had to wait for the answer during my application for fiancé visa [because] they delayed it as they forgot to file for the FBI check! [Interview, 9/30/2010]

Mares married a Colombian before she came to the United States and went through four different visa statuses: a tourist visa ("B-2"), a student visa (F-1), a work visa (H-1B), and a permanent residency ("Immigralaw.com", n.d.):

I had a tourist visa. My [Colombian] husband was already in the process of getting his papers [for an H-1B work visa] organized. I went to [a local university], and they had this program called ALP, American Language Program. And they were able to change my status to [a] student visa. I had an interview with the owner of Twinkle Star Academy ...[who] was Jennifer Labelle. Jennifer Labelle [was] willing to sponsor [me]. So I called

my [immigration law] attorney. He said, “We can do [it]. But that will cost you more and more and more.” Every single thing that [I] asked that attorney [was] one thousand more, two thousand more, three thousand more. So we did that. And after a month, I’ve heard [that] I was a teacher of the baby room...in Twinkle Star Academy. I got a work visa for three years. [In] the third year [Jennifer Labelle] ... said, “If you consider going to the pre-K classroom, I will [sign] you[r] residency paper.” Of course, I accepted it. And I had to...renew my work visa for the other three years and then I did the process of the residency. I worked there for [six] years. [Interview, 4/7/2010]

Annabel and Niang had shorter and less complicated visa processes than Mares did due to their marriage to American citizens. Because of their spouses, these teachers were able to obtain their permanent residency in two years. On the contrary, it took six years for Mares to obtain her permanent residency. Because Mares’s husband was Colombian, there was no other way for Mares to obtain her permanent residency than to keep changing her visa status until she was able to upgrade her status to a permanent residency.

Another difference between Mares and the other two teachers is that while Annabel and Niang’s first year teaching started in public school systems, Mares had to take six years of detour until she came to teach in a public school system. This is because both Annabel and Niang already had their permanent residency when they applied for a teaching position in the public school system, but Mares did not. Mares said that the Anderson County School District where she originally applied did not sponsor a work visa (H-1B). When Mares went to see the superintendent of Anderson County and applied for a Family Engagement Specialist position in one of the schools in that county, Mares’s hope for getting a sponsor for a work visa (H-1B) and working in a public school was denied: “I did a great interview. But they told me, „This is through the [public] school system. The superintendent will not sponsor you [for your work visa]”” [Interview, 4/7/2010].

After a long discussion with each immigrant teacher about the reason why the U.S. public schools she had applied for did not sponsor a work visa (H-1B) for immigrant teacher applicants,

we came up with a hypothesis that most U.S. public schools did not sponsor a work visa due to responsibilities and risks they take on when hiring foreign teacher candidates. This discussion led me to gather some information regarding the responsibilities and risks for hiring foreign teacher candidates by U.S. schools. Using internet resources such as *H1 Base: Everything You Need to Obtain a USA Work Visa* (n.d.) and a phone conversation with an immigration law attorney (VisaPro Global, personal communication, May 23, 2010) in Washington, D.C., I found that there were a number of good reasons why some of the U.S. public schools did not sponsor the work visa (H-1B).

First, it demands filing a lot of legal documents for a public inspection and collaboration with the Department of Labor (DOL). As part of the H-1B Visa petition, the U.S. school districts have to make a number of attestations by submitting a Labor Condition Application (LCA) to the DOL (Form ETA 9035) and familiarize themselves with the statements they are agreeing to in order to avoid any inadvertent noncompliance and possible penalties (“H1 Base Everything You Need to Obtain a USA Work VISA”, n.d.). The attestations they must make are as follows:

- *The actual vs. the prevailing wages:* The actual wage is the wage that the school district payroll department has set for the position for all employees with similar experience and skill. The prevailing wage is a figure provided by the state’s employment agency which it thinks is an accurate reflection of what other employers are paying for that position. The school districts must agree to pay the higher of the two wages.
- *Working conditions:* The school districts must state that employing foreign immigrant teachers will not adversely affect the working conditions of other similarly employed workers with U.S. citizenship.

- *Strikes, lockouts and work stoppages:* If any of these occur after submitting the LCA to the DOL, the petitioning school districts must inform the DOL.
- *Public access file:* School districts are required to maintain a public access file containing documentation showing the compliance of the petitioning school districts with aforementioned requirements, which is to be made available for public inspection.
- *Additional requirements for H-1B dependent employers:* School districts are considered to be H-1B dependent if they have less than 25 workers and more than seven H-1B immigrant teachers; between 26 to 50 workers and more than twelve H-1B employees; or more than 50 workers with 15% or more of them being H-1B workers. In this case, the H-1B dependent school districts must fulfill two additional requirements state below:
 - Displacement of workers with U.S. citizenship: the school districts must attest that by hiring an H-1B immigrant teacher candidate, it is not displacing any worker with U.S. citizenship for a similar position within 90 days before or after filing an H-1B petition.
 - Recruitment effort: The school districts must also attest to making good faith attempts to recruit workers with U.S. citizenship and offering prevailing wages for this position (“H1 Base Everything You Need to Obtain a USA Work VISA”, n.d.).

As described above, when sponsoring a work visa (H-1B) for immigrant teachers, school districts are required to do a lot of paperwork in order to demonstrate their compliance to the law.

Second, sponsoring the work visa is time consuming and is not time sensitive to the school schedule. After the school districts submit the LCA to DOL, they have to submit a copy of the approved LCA to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) with a completed petition requesting H-1B classification (“*H1 Base Everything You Need to Obtain a*

USA Work VISA”, *n.d.*). Importantly, the school districts cannot allow immigrant teachers to begin work until USCIS grants the teachers authorization to work in the school districts (*ibid.*). This can be a problem, if the paperwork did not go through until the school starts, which will call for a temporary substitute teacher to fill in the absence. There is a chance that this will lead to the job loss of the immigrant teacher, if the school later decides to hire a teacher with U.S. citizenship available for that teaching position. No school districts would want to deal with such risks and responsibilities.

Lastly, there are some hidden costs and risks when school districts sponsor the work visa. The costs for school districts to apply for a work visa (H-1B) can be significant, and it varies between \$1,440 and \$3,000 per case depending on the attorney's fees if used. In addition, there is no guarantee that the prospective immigrant teacher will be granted the visa due to high demand, and the expenses are sometimes non-refundable. More over, if the school districts should dismiss the immigrant teacher, they are liable for any reasonable costs that the immigrant teacher incurs in moving him/herself back to his/her home country (“H1B VISA”, 2010).

As the above information shows, school districts have to deal with not only additional paperwork on top of the flood of paperwork they already have to complete on a daily basis but also extra costs up to \$3000 per case. There is also a risk that the school districts may have to hire a temporary substitute teacher, if the immigrant teacher’s work permit is not granted by the USCIS before the school starts. For these reasons, the U.S. public school districts hardly sponsor a work visa (H-1B) for foreign teacher applicants. As a result, the responsibility to get a work visa (H-1B) is left entirely on the shoulders of immigrant teachers. Thus, the visa process plays a significant role as a systemic gate-keeper against the immigrant teacher candidates when they try to enter the U.S. public school system. This hurdle can position immigrant teachers as disentitled

(see Fleras & Elliot, 1999; Henry, Tator, Mattis, & Rees, 1995) to be a teacher in the United States for their lack of proper visa status.

As mentioned in Chapter Two, the authoritative discourses (Bakhtin, 1998) were dominant discourses that were present in a social setting and had the power to place the individual in a subordinate position (Hodge, 2005). The authoritative discourses at the U.S. public school systems value only certain kinds of visas, which are the work visa (H-1B), a permanent residency, or the U.S. citizenship approved and issued by the U.S. government. The immigrant teachers were placed in a subordinate position and changed their visa status to comply with the authoritative discourses dominantly present at the U.S. public school systems.

Annabel mentioned that if the school districts sponsored a work visa for immigrant teachers, they might have to be responsible for immigrant teachers' illegal actions such as criminal acts and even their failure to pay house mortgages. My examination of the work visa (H-1B) laws, however, did not confirm Annabel's claim. For a confirmation, I contacted a law firm in Washington, DC and talked to an immigration law attorney specializing in the work visa (H-1B) about the employer's responsibility over the wrongdoings of the work visa (H-1B) sponsored immigrant teachers during their employment. The attorney explained that if the wrongdoings of the immigrant employees were not relevant to the business of the school districts, the school districts were not responsible for them (VisaPro Global, personal communication, May 23, 2010). For example, if the immigrant employee failed to make a house mortgage payment, the school district that sponsored the work visa (H-1B) for the person is not responsible for it. The school districts sponsoring work visas (H-1B) are responsible for only paying the immigrant employees' salary in such case. Although Annabel's assumption proved to be wrong,

her comments revealed her concern over the work visa (H-1B) that immigrant teachers have to obtain.

Differences in beliefs and practices. The three immigrant teachers experienced challenges because of the differences in educational beliefs and practices between the U.S. schools and their home countries. In Bascia's (1996a) study of immigrant teachers' experiences in their teaching careers in Canada, the author described that each participant in the study expressed "a sense of cultural dissonance and a struggle to come to terms with the cultural worlds they knew" (p. 7). The immigrant teachers in my dissertation study faced similar challenges.

For example, all three participants mentioned that they grew up in a teaching and learning environment where the teacher's authority was greatly respected by her students. Annabel described how students in her home country showed their respect to their teachers in the following transcript:

When teachers enter[ed] the classroom, every child had to stand up. That's how class was introduced. And then ...the teacher allowed us to sit down and started the lesson. The entire time we had our hands crossed behind [us]. There was no talking. [Although]... the number of students was ...probably, [from] 1st to 12th grade, about ...30 to 33 students in one classroom with one teacher, we d[id] not have [any behavior problem] at all. [Interview, 3/29/2010]

Similarly, Mares explained how well-behaved her students were when she was a teacher in Colombia:

When [I] c[a]me in the classroom in my country, they st[oo]d up and they sa[id], "Good morning" or "Good afternoon." And then they s[a]t down. And then [I] start[ed] the classroom. Everybody listen[ed]. Actually there [wa]s no behavior problem. [Interview, 4/27/2010]

Niang also shared a similar experience in Singapore: "I was brought up in a way that [I] just respect the authority [at school]" [Interview, 5/13/2010].

When these immigrant teachers started teaching in the U.S. public schools, however, they noticed students' disrespectful behaviors towards their teachers. Several researchers (Oriaro, 2007; Ross, 2003; Su, 1997) found that many pre-service or first-year immigrant teachers struggled with classroom management. As mentioned in Annabel's portraiture in Chapter Four, she said that when she entered the third grade classroom as a substitute teacher, she was shocked because the students were rude, wild and disrespectful (see p. 68). Mares described an incident when one of her Pre-Kindergarten students in Anderson County School District hit and kicked his Speech Therapist:

He kicked on [the speech therapist's] breast. And then he got a stick, a metal stick that was on the floor, and hit her. When she came out, she was shaking. She was crying. She said, "This child has no respect for me, for anybody...I cannot work with him". And she left the classroom. [Interview, 4/27/2010]

Niang also mentioned that her students made fun of her accent by mimicking what she said when she first started teaching in the U.S. public school.

These immigrant teachers have noticed "disrespectful" behaviors from their students since they started teaching at the U.S. public schools. While I was listening to these teachers' stories about students' behaviors from both their home countries and the United States, I noticed that the immigrant teachers' perception of respectful or disrespectful behaviors of their students was influenced by their childhood experiences as a student. In other words, the way they had been taught to respect teachers in their home countries has shaped their beliefs about how to teach students to behave or show their respect to teachers. This finding echoed what Ross (2003) found about the influence of the teacher's own schooling experience on his/her teaching.

Although several studies (Britzman, 1986; Bullough, 1989) suggested that teacher education courses or professional learning had little effect on the teacher's prior beliefs, the findings of this study suggested otherwise, especially when it came to the instructional method.

For example, Annabel, who grew up in a country where there was no differentiated instruction provided at school, mentioned that she firmly believed in the importance of differentiated and individualized instructions for her students after she learned about differentiation in instructions through her professional learning in the United States. Niang, who had been taught not to question the authority of teachers in Singapore, said that she did not expect her students in the U.S. schools to show her their respect in such a manner. Rather, Niang encouraged her students to ask questions: “I’ve made a really concerted effort with every group of children that I have because I tell them....,Don’t be afraid to ask.”...Then they ask me questions” [Interview, 5/18/2010].

Having received teacher education from the U.S. undergraduate program to the graduate school, Niang mentioned that those courses she had taken have helped her to be a more competent teacher. Similarly, as described in the previous chapter, Mares came from a country where children already knew letters, letter sound, numbers, and colors before they entered Pre-Kindergarten. She kept the same expectation for her pre-Kindergarten students in the U.S. schools. However, after the professional learning session on the state standards and curriculum of Pre-Kindergarten, Mares immediately adjusted the level of her expectations and tried to deliver instructions appropriate for her students in the U.S. school. As shared in these examples, teacher education courses and professional learning seem to have a significant effect on these immigrant teachers’ reconsideration for their prior beliefs and their practices in U.S. schools.

Acculturation. Different cultural beliefs and practices led all participants to acculturation which was a process in which these teachers adopted the norms and practices of the U.S. public school culture. Although the degrees varied, these teachers felt frustrated because everything was

a new learning process for them in the beginning. Especially, the first year teaching was one of the most challenging parts of acculturation for Mares as described in Chapter Four (see p. 94).

Interestingly, however, the first year teaching for Annabel and Niang was not as overwhelming as that for Mares. The fact that Niang studied Early Childhood Education for four years in a U.S. university and had two sets of student teaching experiences in the U.S. schools as part of her training in the teacher education program seemed to help her first year teaching in a U.S. school. Although Annabel obtained her bachelor's degree in her home country like Mares, Annabel has built the insider knowledge of the U.S. school system through her experiences as a substitute teacher (for two to three months) and as a paraprofessional (for two years) before she became an ESOL teacher. These experiences gave Annabel enough time to comprehend the U.S. educational system and practices and made her first year teaching more enjoyable as stated below:

I realized that...substituting teaching [experiences], which I am extremely grateful [for], gave me the opportunity to really deeply learn how the [U.S. public school] system works here. I [can handle students' misbehaviors and deal with parents] because I went through this when I was a substitute teacher and a para pro[fessional]. I already knew how to approach this situation. I already had the knowledge. [Interview, 5/21/2010]

While Annabel mentioned in the above transcript that her prior teaching experiences as a substitute teacher and a paraprofessional helped her handle students' misbehaviors and deal with students' parents, Mares and Niang, who did not have such experiences, said that there were times that they did not know how to deal with conflicts with students' parents or other colleagues during their first year teaching in the U.S. schools. As described in Mares's portraiture in Chapter Four, she mentioned that communicating and dealing with her students' parents in Twinkle Star Academy was one of the most difficult parts of her first year teaching (see p. 91). Unlike Mares, Niang did not mention any difficulties in dealing with student behaviors or

students' parents. However, dealing with conflicts with colleagues at school was something for which she was not prepared. When Niang was a first year teacher in Aaron County, she had a conflict with her paraprofessional and did not know how to handle it:

[My paraprofessional] fell asleep during a small group [instruction] or chewed gum in front of the children. I just [felt] like [she] need[ed] to respect the children and ...[shouldn't] do things like that. But because I was a first year teacher, I didn't know how to handle it. [Interview, 5/4/2010]

These examples reveal that pre-first year teaching experiences such as student teaching, substitute teaching, and paraprofessional teaching in U.S. schools might help immigrant teachers' first year teaching and help them avoid unnecessary emotional drain. More exposure to the U.S. school system prior to their first year teaching can make their transition into the classroom smoother and keep immigrant teachers from giving up early in their teaching career.

During the process of acculturation, these immigrant teachers not only developed a new teacher identity by redefining their teacher role in a new cultural context (Goodson & Cole, 1993), but also negotiated different perspectives of the teacher's role, status, and instructional methods (Kamler, Reid, & Santoro, 1999) in order to fit into the U.S. school system. When Annabel started teaching students with many different reading levels in the U.S. public school system, she felt lost because she did not know how to differentiate her lesson. As discussed earlier, differentiating instruction was a new concept for her. However, Annabel quickly negotiated with different teaching methods and familiarized herself with the guided reading that she used as an instructional tool for differentiation:

All children read the same book or the same text regardless of their reading levels [in my home country]. We do not have a guided reading in my country. When I was hired [by the U.S. public school], I was totally lost. So I [began to read some] research studies. "What will be the most effective strategies [for differentiation]?" I believe that guided reading was that particular research-based strategy that...really helped [me] with differentiation because I was matching text to student's reading level[s]. I definitely used guided reading as one [of the differentiating] strategies. I provided books for children that

reflected the[ir] reading levels. I worked individually with each child. [Now I believe that] children are different. Children are not performing on the same level. Children should be differentiated. [Interview, 4/12/2010]

Adopting the U.S. educational beliefs and practices, Annabel observed: “My Eastern European mentality is [re]shaped by American mentality.” Her comments demonstrate how Annabel created a new identity by construing herself in a new way as she redefined her role as a teacher in the U.S. school.

Similarly, Mares also showed how she negotiated different perspectives of the teacher’s role and teaching methods by adjusting her expectations and instructions to the level appropriate for her U.S. Pre-Kindergarten students. As described in Mares’s portraiture in Chapter Four, after receiving negative comments on her expectation for her students and on her teaching from an evaluator, she studied the standards for Pre-Kindergarten students in the U.S. schools and understood the different expectations for Pre-Kindergarten students in the United States and in Colombia (see p. 92). This understanding helped Mares negotiate and change her perception of the teacher’s role and her instructional strategy.

Likewise, growing up in an educationally competitive learning environment in Singapore, Niang was familiar with Singaporean parents’ zeal for their children’s scholastic success which oftentimes imposed pressures on the children at a very early age. However, after teaching for 18 years in the U.S. schools where, she felt, many parents depended on the teacher to teach their children all the basics, Niang pointed out that it was not right either. She recognized the advantages and disadvantages of those educational phenomena in both countries and claimed that a balance between Singaporean parents’ high expectation for their children and American parents’ dependence on the teacher for their children’s learning would be needed:

The competition [in education] is so high [in Singapore]. So parents literally start teaching their kids when they're babies! I can't say [that] I totally agree with that mentality as it puts pressure on the children at a very young age. On the other hand, some parents here [in the United States] wholly depend on the teacher to teach their child all the basics. And that is not right, either. A balance would be nice. [Interview, 7/21/2010]

Niang's thought seems to also reveal her negotiation with different perspectives of parents' and teachers' roles in children's learning.

Language and accent. Many researchers (Bascia, 1996b; Flores, 2001; Mawhinney & Xu, 1997; Myles, Cheng & Wang, 2006; Phillion, 2003; Wang, 2002) pointed out that language has always been viewed as a main barrier among the challenges confronted by immigrant teachers. As discussed in theoretical frameworks in Chapter Two, it is because of the dominant discourses that recognize only one acceptable language in the U.S. schools, which is American English. Working in an environment where the ability to talk like and sound like native English speakers is expected, all three immigrant teachers, albeit their varied English proficiency levels, experienced challenges due to their foreign accented English.

Annabel, who learned English for only five years from 9th grade through her college preparatory school in her home country, struggled most among the three immigrant teachers with her English and sometimes received remarks from some of her students that she talked funny. Similarly, Mares mispronounced some English words (e.g., Mares pronounced New York as New Jyork because the Spanish "y" sounds like the English "y" and "j" put together.), which, according to her observation, were often accurately interpreted by one of her students who always helped other students understand Mares every time she mispronounced a word:

Vowels are very difficult for me to pronounce because ...[there are] short vowels and long vowels. And depending on what consonant goes before or after, it sounds one way or another way. Some of my students do not understand [me]...because I didn't use the correct pronunciation for that word with that vowel. But ...one of my students [is] on top of it. And he's helping ...the rest of the kids [to understand me]. And once [he] [did] that, they got it. [My pronunciation] is not going to be a problem at all. [Interview, 5/18/2010]

However, thanks to her schooling in a bilingual school and her mother's support for her English education in Colombia, Mares has very high English language proficiency.

Niang, who learned English as Singapore's one of the four official languages, spoke English most fluently among the three teachers. However, Niang spoke English so fast and had to keep reminding herself to slow down so that she could be understood. Although Niang spoke English with a Singaporean accent mixed with a British accent, she did not want to lose her accent and considered it her way of expressing her cultural heritage in which she took a great pride. Niang's attitude toward her accent challenges the prevalent findings about the influence of dominant discourses on immigrant teachers' perception of self. In the study of Brutt-Griffler and Samimy (1999), which examined the influences of the colonial discourses on immigrant teachers, the participants considered themselves less than ideal language models and continued to believe that the language of the native speakers was superior. These participants were helplessly unwilling to refute this kind of dominant discourse. On the contrary, Niang not only refused to internalize such dominant discourses but also acknowledged her accent as an integral part of her identity of which she was so proud. Niang confirmed that she would be very sad if she lost her accent and never wished to let it go away.

There is another finding from this study that contradicts the currently believed idea about the correlation between the length of exposure to the dominant discourses and immigrant teachers' internalization of the dominant discourses. Hodge (2005) claimed that when immigrant teachers are repeatedly exposed to the dominant discourses that they are not the holders of the right English for a certain period of time, immigrant teachers internalize such discourses and start doubting their teaching and linguistic competence. However, none of my participants demonstrated such negation of a professional identity. Niang who had taught for eighteen years

in the U.S. schools surely has been exposed to such dominant discourses. However, she has never internalized such dominant discourses and firmly believed in conserving her accent as one of the essences of her identity. Niang was aware of the concern from her students' parents that their children might come away with her accent, and their doubts of her competence as a teacher for that reason. However, Niang confidently resisted internalizing such discourses and has successfully convinced her students' parents to see what a competent teacher she was and what an extraordinary learning their children experienced in her classroom. She has changed parents' prejudices by actively inviting them into her classroom and openly showing them how much their children are learning with their teacher, in spite of her accent:

One of the things I work really hard is [that] I get [my students' parents] to volunteer so [that] they [can] see me in the classroom. They...realize that my accent may be different...but they know that I'm teaching [their children and that] I'm a good teacher. Once [my students' parents] see that [I am] a good teacher, they really trust [me].
[Interview, 4/13/2010]

Similar to Niang, both Annabel and Mares observed their students' tremendous progress in their classrooms in spite of their foreign accented English. Although Annabel said that everyday was a challenge for her because of her limited English proficiency, it neither kept Annabel from being a competent teacher nor kept her students from succeeding in learning. As described in the previous chapter, all of Annabel's students not only passed the Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) administered by the State Department of Education but also exceeded the standards. This is more remarkable than a native English-speaking teacher helping native English-speaking students pass the CRCT test because all Annabel's students were non-native English speakers and learning English as their second language. Mares also observed a remarkable development among her Pre-Kindergarten students in the end of school year in spite of her Spanish accent.

All of the above cases challenge the prevalent idea that immigrant teachers internalize the dominant discourses when they are repeatedly exposed to the message that their English is not good enough compared to the native English speakers and thus so is their teaching. All participants not only resisted internalizing dominant discourses but also demonstrated that their professional identity had not been negated after a number of years of teaching in the U.S. school system. Although all three immigrant teachers recognized the prejudice against them due to their foreign-accented English, these teachers seemed to consider their students' academic progress and performance as a better indicator for their competence in teaching instead of internalizing dominant discourses focusing on the language itself.

During this study, there was interesting news in the state of Arizona with regard to the immigrant teachers and their foreign accented English. This became one of the major discussion topics during the fourth interview. The reasons that I included actions against immigrant teachers for their English skills in Arizona were because first, the news article was relevant to the experiences of participants; second, the discussion about the news article revealed so much more about each participant's perception of language and its impact on immigrant teachers' competence, which might not have been shared if I did not bring this news article to our conversation.

Briefly, the news article, *Arizona Grades Teachers on Fluency*, from the Wall Street Journal published on April 30, 2010, was about how the state of Arizona pushed school districts to reassign immigrant teachers with heavy accents or other shortcomings (e.g., grammatical errors) in their English to different classrooms where there were no ESOL students. In the 1990s Arizona recruited Spanish speaking immigrant teachers from South America for its bilingual education program. In 2000, however, the state forced those bilingual teachers to teach students

only in English after voters passed a ballot stipulating that the instruction be offered only in English. As of 2010, the Arizona Department of Education started telling school districts that teachers whose spoken English was deemed heavily accented or ungrammatical must be removed from classes for students still learning English (Jordan, 2010). According to the State education officials, the intention of the move is to ensure that students with limited English have teachers who speak the language flawlessly. This is the very idea of dominant discourses about who the holders of right English are or who has the right to teach English to students in U.S. schools. Arizona's move is clearly sending the message that foreign accented English speaking immigrant teachers are not the holders of right English and thus should not be teaching English Language Learners (ELLs) for that reason. The Arizona education department has sent out evaluators to audit immigrant teachers across the state on things such as comprehensible pronunciation, correct grammar, and good writing. If immigrant teachers do not pass this evaluation, they have to take accent reduction and American English pronunciation classes or other steps to improve their English. If fluency continues to be a problem, according to the director of the Arizona education department office, it is up to school districts to decide whether to fire teachers or reassign them to mainstream classes not designated for students still learning to speak English. Those teachers are not allowed to continue to work in classes for non-native English speakers. Arizona's enforcement of fluency standards is based on an interpretation of the federal *No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act* which states that, for a school to receive federal funds, ELLs must be instructed by teachers fluent in English. How is the fluency defined? According to a spokesman for the U.S. Department of Education, it is left to each state.

As several researchers (Myles, Cheng, & Wang, 2006; Phillion, 2003) have acknowledged, the high English language proficiency is important for immigrant teachers"

securing employment and maintaining it. The enforcement of fluency standards in Arizona is a good example of it. Although my participants agreed that teachers should speak grammatically correct English, they objected to punishment for their foreign accent because that is something beyond their control. Annabel mentioned that learning English as an adult or after a certain age one would always have a foreign accent. Niang also believed that it was very difficult for an adult English language learner to speak without a foreign accent. Understanding how challenging it is to remove the accent, all my participants were very curious about the effectiveness of the accent reduction course suggested in Arizona. There is really such a course called *American English Pronunciation & Accent Reduction Course* designed by the Arizona Language Institute. The institute teaches:

how to produce sounds (vowels, consonants and consonant clusters) using correct tongue, jaw and lip positions and tongue tension; connected speech (links between words, weak and strong forms of grammar words; leaving out sounds); syllables, word stress and stress in phrases; and intonation. [“Arizona Language Institute”, 2010]

It offers a six-week session with three-hour lesson per week costing \$360. However, all my participants were skeptical about the effect of those accent reduction courses because they have learned English for all their lives and still have an accent when speaking English. Cook (1999) used an expression of multicompetent speakers for bilingual speakers like immigrant teachers and argued that multicompetent speakers can never be native speakers, and that they should not be expected to be.

Refuting Arizona’s enforcement on fluency, the three participants of the study shared their observation that teaching English to ELLs and teaching students in English is not about free of accents or a correct pronunciation, but how much students learn in the teachers’ classrooms. As these immigrant teachers mentioned their students’ remarkable end-of-year academic performance, in spite of their foreign accent, their students’ learning has not been impacted by

their accent. Munro and Derwing (1995), in their examination of the association among accent, apprehended comprehensibility, and intelligibility in the speech of non-native speakers, have founded that accent should not be associated with the comprehensibility, which supports the aforementioned experiences of my participants whose accent did not interfere with their students' learning. Annabel suggested that we need not only more research study to examine the relationship between immigrant teachers' accent and their students' comprehension by using their academic performance as a measurement but also a comparative study of academic performances of students taught by immigrant teachers with foreign accent and by native English-speaking teachers perceived to speak the standard English.

Regarding the new regulation in Arizona, Annabel said, "The [immigrant teacher] has the same right as an American citizen except voting. This calls for a high discrimination case one day" [Interview, 5/21/2010]. The same opinion was also expressed by other participants during the interview. Annabel pointed out that Arizona's enforcement on fluency was specifically targeting the immigrant teachers from South America from which the state recruited these teachers for its bilingual education in 1990. Both Mares and Niang perceived Arizona's move as an anti-immigrant attitude which was going backward on globalization. Arizona Governor, Jan Brewer, signed the nation's toughest law to crack down on illegal immigrants in the same month that this news article was reported. Many critics accused Arizona evaluating immigrant teachers on their fluency for its politically driven act targeting immigrant teachers at a time when a budget crisis has forced layoffs. The participants of the study agreed that it was a discrimination against immigrant teachers, especially the ones from South America, and believed that those immigrant teachers in Arizona should be aware of their rights that were as equal as those of U.S. teachers. Skutnabb-Kangas (1988) introduced the term, linguicism, in *Minority education: From shame to*

struggle. Linguicism is defined as “ideologies and structures which are used to legitimate, effectuate, and reproduce unequal division of power and resources between groups which are defined on the basis of language” (Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson, 1989, p. 455). Cho (2010) mentioned that “the questioning of accents is evidence of ...linguicism” (p. 8). Linguicism is a form of discrimination based on accent that is often unacknowledged (Sethi, 1998).

However, Niang pointed out the inescapable reality that immigrant teachers in Arizona are facing at the moment:

When I first came here, when I wanted to go to college here [in the United States], I was asked to take the TOEFL exam. And I told them, “Why do I have to take it? I got an A1^e for general paper from Cambridge, UK. You can’t get a higher grade than that [in English language]”... But I had to take it. [If] you want to come here, you do it anyway. You do whether you agree or not. I think that’s what immigrant teachers [in Arizona] will have to do. If you want to stay here, you want to keep the job or you want to have a job, you do what [the state educational officials] ask you to do. See, your hands are really tight. [Interview, 5/18/2010]

Niang’s observation, that immigrant teachers have to comply with the U.S. educational system in order to get and keep a teaching position, in fact, reflected the experiences of all three participants. For instance, when Twinkle Star Academy asked Mares to pay for all the cost incurred during the work visa (H-1B) process, she complied without a choice in order to get a teaching position in that school. When Anderson County told Mares that her 15 years of teaching experiences in Colombia would not be counted towards her salary, she had to accept such condition in order to work in the school system as a teacher. Niang shared her perspectives as an immigrant who does not defy against the system of the powerful nation:

^e Niang is referring to the Singapore-Cambridge General Certificate of Education (Ordinary Level) Examination, which is an annual examination conducted in Singapore. The examination is taken by students at the end of their fourth (for Express Stream) or fifth (for Normal Academic Stream) year in secondary school, mostly at age 16. The level of achievement in each subject is indicated by the grade obtained, with A1 being the highest achievable grade and F9 the lowest (“Education in Singapore”, n.d.).

Whereas American born teacher would fight it and say, “This is discrimination. I’m going to sue you”, [Immigrant teachers] are not like that. I wouldn’t react that way. So ...I tend to internalize, “Okay, what can I do [to comply with them]?” We don’t say, “Well, no, you can’t do this. I’m going to sue you.” That’s ...just a mentality. [Interview, 5/18/2010]

It is interesting that although these three immigrant teachers refused to internalize the dominant discourses that try to devalue their teaching competence due to their foreign accented English, they seem to still internalize the dominant discourse by complying with the unfair system and regulations of the host society instead of directly confronting them. These teachers seemed to think that defying the dominant discourses on language and accent was something they could do on their own by refusing to accept those discourses in order to keep their professional identity intact. However, from their perspectives, they did not have the power to defy or change the system and regulations of the host society. By complying with the system and regulations of the host society, these immigrant teachers were able to enter the U.S. school systems in which they could challenge the prejudice and misunderstanding that students, parents and other colleagues in U.S. schools have against them through their work. These immigrant teachers firmly believed that those students whose learning experiences were enriched by working with teachers from foreign countries are more receptive to different cultures and try to learn and reach beyond their communities by traveling abroad and adjusting their ears to understand non-native English speakers with various foreign accents. Through these changes, these teachers hoped, they could contribute to the eventual change in the systemic barrier of the host society.

A story written by an unknown monk circa 1100A.D. sums up what these immigrant teachers are trying to accomplish by changing themselves:

When I was a young man, I wanted to change the world. I found it was difficult to change the world, so I tried to change my nation. When I found I couldn't change the nation, I began to focus on my town. I couldn't change the town and I tried to change my family. Now, as an old man, I realize the only thing I can change is myself, and suddenly I realize that if long ago I had changed myself, I could have made an impact on my family. My family and I could have made an impact on our town. Their impact could have changed the nation and I could indeed have changed the world. ["Exceptional Living", 2006]

Prejudices and the Lack of Cultural Capital

The three immigrant teachers in this study experienced challenges because of prejudices against them for their race and their lack of cultural capital. The prejudices in this section are defined as a preconceived judgment toward a person because of his/her race and nationality. The cultural capital in this section means cultural knowledge and social skills possessed by people in the U.S. mainstream culture.

Prejudices. Zhang (2005) said that "unlike language and cultural differences, racial and ethnic differences cannot be negotiated through learning and conformity" (p.13). The immigrant teachers may be able to change the way they talk and act to sound like and behave like middle class European-Americans in the U.S. mainstream culture. However, they cannot change their appearance.

Unlike Annabel and Mares who looked like European-Americans, Niang experienced prejudices most because of her visible Asian appearance. One of her experiences shows that sometimes simply looking like a foreigner can invite prejudices from parents and other teachers. During her student teaching, Niang had a mentor teacher who made her student teaching experience quite difficult. Niang had never been late or absent during her internship, had always stayed until six o'clock to help her mentor teacher, and had done everything her mentor teacher asked Niang to do. However, Niang's mentor teacher gave Niang only simple chores (e.g.,

cutting paper and copying worksheets) to do and did not want to guide her. When Niang brought her mentor teacher a lesson plan, as described in Chapter Four, her mentor corrected almost everything in Niang's lesson and told her, "You can't do this...I guess you are not ready for this." Niang believed that it was because she was an Asian. She could not think of any other reason for her mentor teacher's unjust treatment and her discouragement that Niang should not be a teacher. In spite of such a discriminating treatment from her mentor teacher, Niang did not report it to her supervising professor until her student teaching was over with a passing score. When her professor asked Niang why she did not tell her earlier about the mentor teacher's mistreatment, Niang said that she did not want to fail her student teaching for insubordination because the mentor teacher was the one who graded Niang's work in her classroom. So Niang did her best to comply with her mentor teacher in order to pass the student teaching and graduate.

For another instance, a mother of one of Niang's students doubted Niang's teaching competency because of her appearance. On the first day of school, as soon as the mother of Niang's student entered Niang's classroom and saw Niang, the mother went to the office and protested that the school should change the classroom teacher for her son:

[The mother said], "You can't do this to me. My child had a terrible preschool teacher who he couldn't understand her English. She wasn't American. Now you are giving me somebody who's not from America. You can't do this to me." [Interview, 5/4/2010]

Niang noticed that parents and teachers have more problems with her race than her students do:

Children accept me for who I am. They don't see color. As long as they know [I] love them and [I] care for them, they are totally fine. It's the adults that have the problems, the parents and the teachers. [Interview, 5/4/2010]

Interestingly, however, Annabel and Mares did not experience this kind of prejudice. Because Annabel is from Europe, she looks like European-American. As mentioned in Annabel's Portraiture in Chapter Four, Annabel had white skin, blond hair, and a pointed nose

like a European-American. Annabel mentioned that teachers and parents in her school could not tell if she was from a different country until she started talking with a foreign accent. Although Mares had brown hair, she looked more like a European-American. When I asked Mares and Annabel if they had felt any prejudice against them because of their appearance, they both said that they did not experience it.

Lack of cultural capital. Bourdieu (1986) introduced “cultural capital” which means an accretion of cultural knowledge, skills, and abilities possessed and inherited by privileged groups in society. Considering that school teachers are positioned as key players who transmit cultural capital and educate students to dominant social norms, dominant discourses privilege people from the mainstream culture for their possession of cultural capital and marginalize immigrant teachers because of their minority status in the host society. My participants experienced challenges because of their lack of cultural capital. For example, coming from Colombia where teachers could openly discuss and express their thoughts about almost all issues regarding their children, Mares unintentionally made American parents upset when she attempted to frankly share her thoughts with the parents as she had been used to do so with parents in Colombia. She had a conflict with one of her students’ parents after she called the parent’s son “a liar” when the boy accused Mares of something that she did not do in the classroom. Her principal reprimanded Mares that she should not call a student a liar in front of the student’s parent and asked Mares to apologize the parent for it. This is an example of how Mares’s lack of cultural capital, which was, in this case, her lack of cultural knowledge about what was acceptable or unacceptable to say to a parent about her child, could cause a conflict and became a challenge for Mares.

Interestingly, however, Annabel and Niang did not experience this kind of conflict with parents. Gleaning from their portraits in Chapter Four and interview transcripts, I believe that

it is because they both had been exposed to and learned how to interact and communicate with students' parents in the U.S. public schools through student teaching, substitute teaching, and paraprofessional teaching experiences. Annabel mentioned that she learned how to interact with students' parents by watching how the classroom teacher talked to parents when she was a paraprofessional:

I had a chance to observe...the relationship between teachers and parents. [I] gain[ed] something from the teacher that [made me] stronger. And it also [gave me an] idea how to solve certain problems. [I] gain[ed] the problem solving skills. [Interview, 5/23/2010]

Annabel also learned how to deal with upset parents by watching her husband, who had taught at a nearby elementary school in the same school district:

My husband received a call last Friday from a parent because...one of his students got wet during a field day when [the child was playing at] a water station. And the parent was extremely upset ...and very rude. [And she made] a very unpleasant phone call. (Mimicking the parent's angry voice) "Why did you let my child get wet?" But...you have to be very polite. You cannot say what you really think. You have to go literally around the bush. [Interview, 5/21/2010]

Niang said that being a mother of four children who are students in the U.S. public schools has helped her communicate better with her students' parents because she understood what they were going through: "Because I have child[ren], I can relate to their feelings as parents" [Interview, 5/13/2010].

Although the immigrant teachers experienced prejudices because they were lacking the cultural knowledge of the host society, the participants also experienced prejudice against them when parents and teachers in their schools did not possess the cultural knowledge of the world outside the United States, especially of the countries from which these immigrant teachers came. When Annabel worked as a paraprofessional before she became an ESOL teacher, for example, her classroom teacher did not treat her as someone with skills and a master's degree because Annabel's diploma was obtained from outside the United States. The lead teacher considered

herself the only rightful professional with skills and a valid degree from the United States. This kind of mistreatment and prejudice against Annabel resulted from the lead teacher's lack of knowledge about the competitive learning environment of the country where Annabel grew up. As described in the previous chapter, all teachers in her home country are required to obtain a master's degree in order to be able to teach at school. Besides, Annabel can fluently speak three languages, including the Slavic language as her mother language, Spanish and English. If her classroom teacher was aware of Annabel's cultural background, she would have known that Annabel was overqualified for a paraprofessional position, and she might have treated Annabel with more respect.

Similarly, Mares also experienced prejudice from some of her parents who were lacking the cultural knowledge of Colombian people who, as Mares described, tend to talk loudly. Mares said that some parents took her in a wrong way because of her loud voice:

I'm very loud. I have a loud voice. And sometimes [my students' parents] think [that] I say things in a mean way. [After they complain,] I have to go to talk to my school principal...and tell [her that] I didn't mean that. [Interview, 4/13/2010]

If parents of Mares's students knew Colombian culture, they would have understood that Mares did not mean to be rude to their children but only tried to communicate with them.

Niang also experienced similar prejudice from a parent of one of her students. As mentioned in Niang's portraiture in Chapter Four, a parent of Niang's students, who lost her job because a Japanese person took over her position, thought that Niang was Japanese and showed her aggressive attitude toward Niang (see p. 79). If that parent was aware of the fact that Niang was from Singapore, not Japan, and of the difference between these two countries, she would not have shown her aggressive attitude toward Niang.

The immigrant teachers of this study also experienced challenges when they were isolated from colleagues in the school and felt their indifference. There are several researchers (Henry, 1998; Thiessen, Bascia, & Goodson, 1996) who studied about immigrant teachers' social isolation and separation in the school building. Considering the fact that immigrant teachers make up only 2.5 percent (Afolabi & Eads, 2009) of the teacher workforce in the state where all three teachers work, it is not surprising that each participant of the study found herself being the only immigrant teacher in the school building or sometimes even in the entire school district. In a study of 125 pre-service teachers in the United States, Hadaway, Florez, Larke, and Wiseman (1993) found that most of these pre-service teachers reported few personal experiences in culturally diverse settings. Many of them expressed their fears about teaching students from a culture different from their own (Association of Teacher Educators, 1991; Hadaway, Florez, Larke, & Wiseman, 1992). If these teachers feel uncomfortable about teaching students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, they can also feel the same about immigrant teachers in the school building.

When immigrant teachers experienced prejudice, sometimes they did not know how to deal with them because they had never experienced it in their home country. Kostogriz and Peeler (2004) mentioned that immigrant teachers made "huge cultural leaps" (p. 9) between teaching practices in their home countries and those in a colonial world. The immigrant teachers gained knowledge of how to make sense of the new professional space through the challenges they experienced in the U.S. public school system. Matusov (1999) described this process as funneling or (re)shaping newcomers to comply with what is acceptable. The immigrant teachers of this study experienced challenges because of their lack of cultural capital, and they underwent

this funneling process in order to enter the world of the teaching workforce and then to perform as a competent teacher defined by the U.S. mainstream culture.

Coping Strategies

Through the sociocultural challenges the immigrant teachers experienced over the course of years, they have developed coping strategies. These teachers could meet the challenges they faced because there were people and various kinds of resources that supported them. The immigrant teachers' coping strategies are categorized into four different resources: educational resources, religion, social network, and personal dispositions.

Educational Resources

The three immigrant teachers improve their teaching practices at school through professional development experiences. Both Mares and Annabel found professional learning experiences resourceful to improve their teaching practices. As described in Mares's portraiture in Chapter Four, after an evaluator from the State Department of Early Care and Learning determined that Mares's lesson was not developmentally appropriate for her Pre-Kindergarten students, Mares received the professional learning called Bright from the Start Pre-Kindergarten teacher training and found it very helpful (see p. 73). Through this training, Mares learned the standards for Pre-Kindergarten students and how to use those standards to provide instruction appropriate for Pre-Kindergarten children. When the consultant came back to Mares's classroom one month after she had the professional learning, he was very pleased with the improvement and changes made in Mares's lesson and gave her a positive evaluation.

Similarly, Annabel also experienced that the professional learning she received from the Anderson County School District improved her instruction. Coming from a country where teachers were given a nationally unified curriculum and standards with specific guidelines,

Annabel was at a loss as to where to begin with her lesson and what to teach first when she started teaching in the U.S. school. Thankfully, the professional learning provided by the Anderson County School District for the state standards in the beginning of the school year helped Mares to be more organized when she designed her lesson plans. The state standards provided Annabel with specific guidelines about what concept she should teach each quarter and month.

Both Mares and Annabel found the professional training on the standards and curriculum guides tremendously helpful. However, it is important to mention the concerns from several scholars (Anderson, 1987; Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009) regarding the state's enforcement of standards and its effect on decreased teacher autonomy. Anderson stated that teacher autonomy in the United States has been declining because of the uniform staff development programs based on research on effective teaching, and the use of classroom observations as an integral part of imposed teacher evaluations. Gleaning from the interviews with the participants in this study, the state where these immigrant teachers currently work has also enforced teachers to follow the state standards through the professional development and evaluated their use of standards through classroom observations. Darling-Hammond said in an interview:

Unfortunately kids don't learn at the same rate. They don't learn in the same way. So whenever teachers are given a single way to teach, they're actually made less effective in meeting the needs of the students. And I think a lot of the folks outside of the profession don't realize that some efforts to improve teaching can actually harm it." ("Interview with Linda Darling-Hammond", n.d.)

Darling-Hammond (2010) challenged "standardization of curriculum enforced by frequent external tests, reduced use of innovative teaching strategies, adoption of educational

ideas from external sources, rather than development of local internal capacity for innovation and problem solving” (p. 19).

In spite of these concerns over the state’s enforcement of standards and its negative effects on curriculum, children, and teachers, it seems important for immigrant teachers to learn what the state standards are and what children in public schools are expected to learn because these teachers came from different countries where standards and curricula are very different from those of the United States. The professional learning about state standards provides immigrant teachers like Annabel and Mares with a frame of reference when beginning to work in U.S. public schools.

Whereas both Mares and Annabel found their professional learning helpful, Niang did not see the benefit of her professional learning and called it “a waste of time.” Having taught in four different counties in the U.S. schools for the last 18 years, Niang’s experiences with professional learning in each county varied. She mentioned that Aaron County’s professional learning was not helpful because she did not have any choice in selecting her own professional learning classes. The professional learning class that she was required to attend in Aaron County was a traditional lecture style for which hundreds of teachers were asked to gather in one room to listen to a speaker. Niang also observed that the professional learning in Aaron County was offered at the end of a school day when everybody was tired and nobody was receptive. On the contrary, she had a fairly positive professional learning experience in Baron County: “[Baron County] had some good ones. They...had more make-and-take workshops than any of the other systems that I worked for” [Interview, 10/4/2010]. Niang did not remember any thing particular about her professional learning experiences in Camry County: “Camry? [There was] nothing of significance that I remember” [Interview, 10/4/2010]. She had a positive professional learning

experience in Newman County because she could select her own professional learning classes. Summing up Niang's professional learning experiences in four different counties, she enjoyed Baron and Newman Counties' professional learning because she had a choice of selecting her own professional learning sessions and there were more hands-on activities. Niang's least favorite style of professional learning was a traditional lecture style given to her regardless of her interest. In spite of Niang's positive experiences with professional learning in two of the four counties where she had worked, she said that she did not like professional learning provided by the school districts in general.

The nature of Niang's unfavorable regard to the professional learning provided by the school districts seems related to her high level of education in U.S. universities. Niang has obtained her bachelor's degree, master's degree, and a specialist degree in the United States. She has been working on her Ph.D. at a U.S. institution as well. Niang learned the state standards and curriculum through her student teaching and coursework at universities. She as a doctoral student also has been learning the cutting edge educational philosophies, theories, and practices. At a graduate school she had quality discussions with other fellow students, many of whom were also teachers, and critically reflected on each other's teaching practices. Compared to the qualities of her learning experience in a graduate school, the professional learning provided by the school districts might have been less inspiring to Niang.

Understanding the value of her learning experiences in the graduate school, she made the following suggestion:

I think ...once you are a teacher, [the school districts] need to make you go back to graduate school. I feel that they need to make it a requirement that if you want to be teaching and keep teaching after so many years, you must go back and get your masters on your own. When we have to pay it ourselves, you tend to do the work, you tend to ...pay attention. I know it costs money but if you love what you do, you are going to do it. [Interview, 4/13/2010]

Although paying for their own school tuition for advanced degrees may not be a favorable option for some teachers who cannot afford to pay for their own education, Niang thought that it is important to appreciate and understand the invaluable learning experiences the graduate school can provide to school teachers, especially to immigrant teachers whose learning from such opportunities would be tenfold.

Religion

Religion was an important resource particularly for two of my participants. Growing up in a Catholic family, both Mares and Niang tried to find strengths in the faith of God. For instance, it was important for Niang to do the right thing and have a clear conscience when she was teaching or dealing with difficult parents because she believed that God sees everything and ultimately He is the one whom she has to answer to in the end:

As long as I know I'm doing the right thing, I feel like I have nothing to fear because God's behind me...I'm doing the best I can. So that's how it gets me through. As long as everyday I made sure that I do the right thing...there's nothing for me to hide.
[Interview, 5/4/2010]

Niang found her strength in her prayer. For instance, after three trying years in Camry County as a parent because of the conflict she and her son had with the school district, Niang was desperate to move to a different county where her son could have a better quality of education in a supportive and safe learning environment. When there was a job fair in Newman County where Niang desperately wanted to move to, she was overwhelmed during the job fair and prayed, "If this is where you want me to be,...help me." Her principal who hired Niang during that job fair told her, "The minute you walked in [to the job fair], I knew I wanted you to work for me" [Interview, 5/13/2010]. Niang recalled, "Nobody can do that...God had to have a

hand in that because I didn't know [the principal]. And she didn't know me. But she felt that, and I felt it. It was like, just amazing" [Interview, 5/13/2010].

Similarly, having been a devoted Catholic, Mares also found her strengths in her religious faith: "I'm Catholic. So I think about God as a first thing. My mom says, „Having God, you have every single thing. Without God, you have nothing." I agree with that" [Interview, 4/27/2010].

Although Mares and Niang did not talk about their religious life and their spirituality at school, they openly shared during the interviews how their religious faith has given them the spiritual support and what a significant factor it has been for them as a means to cope with the challenges they faced in their daily teaching practices. This thought was well expressed in Niang's reflection:

Because I'm from another country, it's difficult for [me]. [I] come in and [I am] minority. [I am] like the only one in that school and [I] have to prove [my]self. It takes a lot of confidence and ...[I am] really vulnerable to them. And it takes a lot of confidence and a lot of prayer. I could not do it without my faith. [Interview, 5/13/2010]

Social Network

Social network is defined as a person's family, neighbors, and friends with whom these teachers are socially involved ("Social network", n.d.). All three participants have sought support from a social network in order to meet the challenges they faced. This social network included family members from both home countries and the United States, school administrators, and other support personnel at school. When it came to their work-related challenges, the teachers looked for support and help from school administrators, their students' parents, and other support personnel such as a paraprofessional and instructional coaches. However, for an emotional support, they confided only in their families.

Receiving emotional support. In times of trouble, Mares found her strength by confiding her emotional struggle in her mother who was not only more experienced in life but

also perceptive to Mares's strengths and needs better than any one. When Mares felt overwhelmed by her work as a Pre-Kindergarten classroom teacher in Anderson County, Mares's mother gave her a valuable advice:

You need to be smart... You have three more people in your classroom. Don't solve the problem [all by yourself] .You [already] have too many things that you have to solve in school every day. [Interview, 4/27/2010]

Her caring heart and words of wisdom for her daughter have inspired Mares to be a strong and thoughtful teacher. Knowing her daughter's work ethic, Mares's mother tried to help her daughter understand the importance of working with the supportive personnel assigned to her classroom and sharing her burden with them. Through the emotional support that Mares's mother has given to her daughter, Mares learned how to cope with the challenges she faced at school.

During the interview, Annabel pointed out that the only emotional support she got was from her husband. As mentioned in Annabel's and Niang's portraits in Chapter Four, Annabel and Niang married European-American men. Their husbands played a significant role as an emotional supporter, a cultural ambassador, and even an English language tutor in these immigrant teachers' lives. Interestingly, however, Mares who married a Colombian man did not mention her husband's support during the interview.

Whenever Annabel shared her frustration after a trying day at school, her husband always listened to the challenges Annabel had and showed his empathy. Being an elementary school teacher and working in the same school district, Annabel's husband also provided her with information and suggestions regarding effective teaching strategies for reading and writing when Annabel was frustrated with her teaching. Similar to Annabel, Niang's husband always lent her a sympathetic ear whenever Niang told him what happened at school, which has helped Niang gain not only a great emotional support but also confidence.

Annabel's and Niang's husbands also gave their support in the acculturation process as cultural ambassadors by helping their wives pursue their dreams in a new country and by showing their respect to their wives' heritage cultures. Using their cultural knowledge, social skills and network, Annabel's and Niang's husbands provided Annabel and Niang with the cultural insider's perspectives. When Annabel was not sure if she could be a teacher in the United States with her foreign obtained master's degree, Annabel's husband not only explained to her how the American school system works but also showed her how to apply for a substitute teaching position which was a great beginning of her teaching career in the United States. Thanks to his guidance to the U.S. school system, Annabel turned her dream to be a school teacher into reality. Similarly, Niang's husband has supported his wife's pursuits of a Ph.D. degree. Fully understanding Niang's workload as a full-time school teacher and a mother of four children, Niang's husband adjusted his schedule so that he could take care of the children while Niang was taking graduate courses in the evening. In addition, Niang's husband showed his respect to Niang's Singaporean culture. He loved to eat the Singaporean food she cooks, visited Singapore with her, and even lived there for four years. Niang felt that her husband loved her and accepted her as who she is.

Gleaming from the interview data, it seems that having a European-American spouse had a couple of advantages for Annabel and Niang, which Mares did not have. First, both Niang and Annabel received help from their husbands for their English language. Coming from Singapore where people spoke fast, Niang's husband asked her to speak slowly so that people could understand her. He also corrected Niang's English expression that was different from Singapore. For example, in Singapore Niang used to say, "Keep the toys," when she wanted her students to put the toys away. Niang said that, in Singapore "keep the toys" meant "put the toys away."

Niang's husband explained to her why her students were confused when she told them to keep the toys and wanted her students to clean up. When Niang was concerned about her pronunciation in public speaking, her husband read the word in question and then Niang mimicked her husband to perfect her pronunciation. Annabel also benefited from her husband's English language support. Having learned English for only five years in her home country, communicating with her husband in English every day helped her with fluency. In addition, Annabel's husband explained meanings of English words to Annabel using a bilingual dictionary so that Annabel could understand them in her native language. When Annabel was asked how it would have been different had she married a man from her home country, Annabel said that she would have used only her Slavic language at home and probably forgotten her English, which could have made her teaching experience in the U.S. school more challenging.

Another benefit of having a European-American spouse was that Annabel and Niang gained European-American parents-in-laws who tried to take good care of their foreign daughters-in-law. Although the first three years in the United States were a very difficult time for Annabel, her parents-in-law helped her adjust to U.S. culture by visiting often. Similarly, Niang's parents-in-law who lived in Singapore for a couple of years understood what Niang was going through and were appreciative of what Niang had accomplished since she came to the United States. When Niang was asked how it would have been if she married a man from Singapore, she answered that it would have been more difficult to be accepted by the community at large because both of them would have to adjust to a new country. Niang's cultural transition to U. S. culture was much easier thanks to her husband, and she gained an immediate access to the mainstream culture through the social network of her European-American husband and his families.

Unlike Annabel and Niang, Mares who married a Colombian man did not talk about her husband's support in the same manner as Niang and Annabel did during the interview. Mares's social network was composed of her families from Colombia and friends from Spanish speaking countries:

I go to a catholic church...where I really do not know any one. I usually go [to church] with my husband and sometimes with my sister, her husband, and [their] children. We have a very small group of friends [whom] we meet every other weekend. There are eight couples. [They are]...from Honduras, Mexico, Venezuela, and Colombia. [Interview, 10/2/2010]

Because both Mares and her husband were minorities in the United States, they seemed to form a social network with people from their own ethnic backgrounds. On the contrary, Niang and Annabel had different social networks from what Mares had. Niang's social circle was influenced by her European-American husband when she first immigrated to the United States: "[My husband] has certainly helped me to be accepted into mainstream American culture. I feel [more confident] about mingling with [European-American] people" [Interview, 9/30/2010]. However, eventually, Niang seemed to outgrow her husband's social circle and formed her own social network with people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds because of her children and her job:

I hang out with people I meet, and George joins us whenever he can. Guys don't seem to have as wide a social circle as women do. People I'm close to are our children's godparents from India. We have known them since I first came to America in 1987 and we still see them. [My] closest friends are from Singapore, Venezuela, [and] South Korea. I also tend to be friends with foreign wives of American husbands. I also have Caucasian friends [whom] I have been friends with for many years, and most of my friends are teachers. [Interview, 9/30/2010]

Although Annabel married a European-American like Niang did, Annabel's case was different from Niang. When Annabel came to the United States, she already had friends from her home country living in the United States, who introduced Annabel to her husband in the first

place. In addition, Annabel mentioned that her husband did not have many friends in Anderson County because he grew up in a different city. So when Annabel was working as a paraprofessional in a local elementary school, she introduced her husband to her colleagues:

My husband moved from his town to [where we live now]. [So] he did not have a lot of friends. I started working at [Amber] Elementary. And I introduced him to my colleagues. We expanded the social circle based on my friends. [Interview, 10/6/2010]

Annabel already had her own social network when she first came to the United States and contributed to expanding her husband's social network through her colleagues at work and her friends.

Reflecting on these findings, I think immigrant teachers' spouses have an influence on these teachers' lives and work in the host society. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Annabel's husband is a school teacher and has helped Annabel with her teaching such as getting information about applying for the substitute teacher position and giving Annabel advice on teaching strategies. Niang's husband is a software program analyst working in the Enterprise Information Technology Services (EITS) department at a local university. Although Niang mentioned that she did not think her husband's job influenced her social network, her story informed me otherwise:

I am not a fan of football [game] but I do go to at least one [football] game with [my husband] each year and [also] go to his department Christmas lunch on campus. We did not get to go to their summer picnic [this year] because we [were] going to Florida that same day. [Interview, 10/4/2010]

As shown in the above excerpt, through her husband Niang attended football games, participated in the Christmas luncheon organized by a department in a university, and was invited to the department summer picnic. Although Niang may not realize it, her social network has been influenced by her husband's job.

Gleaning from the immigrant teachers' experiences with regard to the association between the nationality and race of their spouses and gaining knowledge of and the entry to the mainstream U.S. culture, having a spouse from the dominant U.S. culture seemed to provide Annabel and Niang with more leverage in terms of English language, cultural adjustment, and social network. However, there are also disadvantages. Niang said, "I also had some challenges because [my husband] couldn't really understand what I was going through...being in a foreign country [and] having to stay here" [Interview, 4/13/2010]. Annabel said that when she was going through homesickness during the first three years in the United States, she gave her husband a hard time: "When I was separated from my family [in my home country]...I gave my husband really hard time. He always said that I was punishing him" [Interview, 4/26/2010]. On the contrary, Mares said that her husband understood what she was going through because he was going through the same process at that time: "We both supported each other during our adjustment in USA. I think [it] is wonderful to be from the same country because we have the same...language and know what to expect from [each] other" [Interview, 10/4/2010].

The previous studies on immigrant teachers did not pay attention to the influence of the immigrant teachers' spouses. From the data collected for this study, I have found that the immigrant teachers' spouses played a significant role as their emotional supporter, advisor, and confidant. When the immigrant teacher's spouse was European-American, he played a role as a cultural bridge between the mainstream U.S. culture and that of the immigrant teacher's home country and provided her with knowledge of a cultural insider. When the spouse was from the same country of the immigrant teacher, although he could not provide the knowledge of a cultural insider, he had a better understanding of the emotional struggle of the immigrant teacher when she was experiencing cultural shock and homesickness.

Receiving professional and instructional support. When it comes to work-related challenges, the immigrant teachers turned their heads to students' parents, school administrators, and other support personnel at school for the professional and instructional support. When dealing with students with special needs or students' behavior problems, the immigrant teachers asked the parents of those students for their help. For instance, Mares had a challenging student who constantly cried and screamed at school. After discussing how the parent had responded to her daughter when she screamed and cried at home during her home visit, Mares suggested a couple of behavior management plans that the mother could practice with her daughter. Although she needed to adjust the plan due to the mother's busy schedule and four other children she had at home, they came to an agreement and the support the mother gave Mares has made a significant difference in the student's behavior.

I said [to the mother], "I have to support you here in school and you have to do the same at home because if [your child] knows that we are on the same page, things are going to get better for both of us." So we set ...some norms...that she was going to work with him at home. She also went [to a nearby city] to do some psychological therapy. By the end of the year, that [child] was better. [Interview, 4/27/2010]

When the immigrant teachers had conflicts with parents, they took the issue to their school administrators' attention and sought their support. For example, as described in Chapter Four, when one of Niang's parents was upset that the school assigned her son in an immigrant teacher's classroom and requested to change the classroom teacher for her son, Niang's school principal assured the parent that Niang was a fantastic teacher and that she should give Niang a chance. It means a lot to immigrant teachers when their principal advocates them against parents who do not want to work with immigrant teachers. Fortunately, Niang's principal, Helen, whom I had an opportunity to interview, was a person appreciating the benefit of working with an individual with multi-cultural and multi-linguistic background. Helen had been Niang's advocate

and publicly shown her support for Niang at school. During the interview, Helen mentioned that when parents wonder if their children would come away with different pronunciation, principals should trust that the language will not be a barrier and show their support publicly as she has done so for Niang:

If you sell the teacher and talk to the parents and you show your support publicly, I believe that that bridges two cultures very well... You are giving something to the children that is ...very different than what they are growing up with. [Interview, 6/12/2010]

As shown in Helen's support for Niang, the school administrators can give tremendous help when the immigrant teachers have conflicts with parents.

The immigrant teachers also sought their school administrator's help when they had a conflict with colleagues at school. As described in the previous chapter, when Mares's paraprofessional had frequent absences, she went to her school administrator's office and shared her concern about the paraprofessional. Understanding the heavy workload and inconvenience Mares had for the frequent absences of her paraprofessional, her principal reassigned Mares's paraprofessional to a different place and hired a new paraprofessional who coincidentally had worked with Mares as her paraprofessional before Mares moved to the school where she is currently working. Whether they had conflicts with parents or other teachers at school, the immigrant teachers coped with the challenges by seeking their school administrator's support.

When the immigrant teachers had a challenge regarding their teaching strategies or preparing for lesson plans, they sought an instructional support from support personnel at school such as instructional coaches and instructional specialists. When Annabel started working as an ESOL teacher, she needed help with her lessons and instructions. Having no mentors at that time, Annabel contacted other ESOL teachers in different schools, the ESOL specialist at board of education office, and the literacy coaches at her school for instructional support. Her effort to

seek help came back to her tenfold because they provided Annabel with not only instructional materials, useful information, and curriculum guides but also modeling by letting her shadow how to do testing accommodations and how to do collaborative planning with classroom teachers, for instance. Annabel could meet her challenges successfully thanks to the help she received from colleagues around her.

Interestingly, whereas the immigrant teachers in this study sought professional and instructional support from their school administrators and colleagues, these teachers never asked for emotional support from them. Both Annabel and Niang mentioned the importance of separating emotions from professional work. Annabel believed that the principal is her boss who is there to lead her and to solve the problem. So when Annabel seeks her school principal's support, it was for her professional and instructional purposes, not for her personal or emotional conflict. She believed that having an emotion involved in teaching was unprofessional. Anything that is emotional should be discussed in the privacy of home, not in a professional work place. For Annabel, her job was not there to complain but to be part of solving problems and discussing strategies for issues related to work. Niang also pointed out that her school principal was her boss, not her friend. Niang stressed that it was important to keep the professional and personal life separate at school. She added that the teacher's personal life included her personal feelings. So even when she had a conflict with the parents, instead at the sign of first trouble showing her emotional distress, she gathered her thoughts and calmly told them, "This is what happened. These are the strategies I used, which did not work. So I need your advice" [Interview, 5/25/2010]. Keeping their emotions separate from their professional work was helpful for these immigrant teachers not only to cope with the challenges they had at school but also to gain a trust from their school administrators for their professional conduct.

Personal Strategies

Along with the support from other people and educational resources, the participants came up with coping strategies using their own personal resources when they were dealing with angry parents, having conflicts with other teacher at school, or receiving no support from their mentors and colleagues. When faced with angry parents, Niang applied several strategies that she developed from her eighteen years of teaching experiences in the U.S. schools. For a conflict with colleagues, Mares dealt with the challenging situation by standing up for herself when it concerned her professional work. If the conflict with the colleagues was for a non-instructional matter such as jealousy, the participants took the high road and avoided confrontation. When the immigrant teachers received no instructional support from mentors and colleagues, they demonstrated determination and ingenuity to cope with the challenging situation.

Dealing with angry parents. When dealing with angry parents, Niang pointed out that it is best to listen to them and say, “Thank you for your opinion” because no matter what she says to defend herself, the parents would not hear it because they are upset at that moment. Another reason why it is important to keep quiet and listen to them is to understand what they are trying to say. So Niang has learned not to argue with them but listen to them carefully when they were upset. Sometimes she had to reschedule the meeting, not only to give them time to calm down but also to keep herself from saying something to them that she may regret later. Another strategy Niang uses was that she always documented everything. Niang kept journals and all the correspondence with parents including notes, letters, and e-mails so that she could refer to her documents when a parent accused her of something that she did not do. For instance, when Niang was in a meeting with a parent, her assistant principal, and her student teacher, the parent was upset with Niang because she kept sending the mother notes every time the parent forgot to

sign an important school document such as a permission slip for a field trip. The mother accused Niang of writing her offensive notes and told Niang not to send her any more reminder notes for that reason. Niang asked the parent exactly which note from her was offensive. Because Niang kept all the notes that she had sent out to the mother, this parent could not answer Niang's question and Niang could protect herself from the false accusation.

Unlike Niang, when Mares had to deal with angry parents, she tried to conciliate them by showing her respect to American culture with regard to the teacher-parent communication that was very different from that of Colombia. Unlike Niang and Mares, Annabel did not experience this kind of conflict with her parents because she was an ESOL teacher and any direct interaction with the parents was the classroom teacher's responsibility except when Annabel was helping Spanish speaking parents for translation.

Although the approach varied, both Niang and Mares have found the coping strategies through the years of their teaching experiences in the U.S. schools.

Dealing with a conflict with a colleague. When Mares had a conflict with a colleague at school, she faced the challenging situation by standing up for herself, especially if it concerned her professional work. In Mares's classroom, there was a special education teacher who was known for habitual tattling. Whenever the teacher had a disagreement with Mares, instead of having an open discussion about it, she reported it to her supervisor. One day when the special education teacher found out that Mares did not wish to work with her the next school year, the special education teacher cried in front of Mares and expressed her hurt feeling without trying to understand Mares's intention or to solve a situation together. Being afraid of losing her position in Mares's classroom, the special education teacher reported it not only to her supervisor but also to Mares's supervisor, which made the situation unnecessarily worse. When Mares was called to

the office for it, however, Mares stood up for herself and expressed her concern to work with the special education teacher:

“We talked about it [yesterday]. [I thought] it [was] over. I didn’t know you involved [my principal], Ed, and now we are here in this meeting. For what?” So she said, “Well, I don’t know what else to do to make you ...to have me with you at work”. [I said], “Let me tell you something. To start [with], I don’t trust you. I need to trust you before I can tell you anything else. And the way you are acting, telling on me little things like this, would not allow me to trust you”. She said, “I’m a great teacher. I have been a teacher for 18 years”. [I said], “You know what? You know how many doctors ...have been doctors forever and not good doctors? So don’t come and tell me that because you have been teaching for 18 years and you are a good teacher. That means nothing to me. Ha! Is this conversation over? Because I don’t have anything else to say. Bye”. And I left. [Interview, 4/27/2010]

Niang mentioned in her interview that it was not easy for her to stand up for herself because she did not want to cause any trouble at school. However, Mares not only honestly expressed her distrust to the special education teacher for her habitual tattling but also refused to work with her the next school year when her supervisor asked Mares if she could work with the same special education teacher again. Because Mares stood up for herself, she got her wish and did not need to have that special education teacher in her classroom.

Annabel and Niang did not have this kind of conflict with their colleagues because they both said that they did not like to have confrontation with people at work. Especially when the conflict was for a non-instructional matter such as jealousy and being nosy, which did not interfere with their teaching competence, Annabel and Niang took a high road and avoided direct confrontation. When Niang started working in a new school, there was a teacher whom Niang called “a copy machine police” because every time Niang used the copy machine, the teacher watched Niang like a hawk as if Niang would break the machine or use too much paper, and gave Niang an unpleasant remark such as, “You are making too many copies.” Niang thought that the teacher picked on her because she was not a European-American teacher. However,

Niang chose not to dignify her discrimination with confrontation. Instead, she simply said, “Okay” and let it go. Niang said that she never showed her emotional distress or shared what the teacher did to Niang with anyone at school. Although it might not have stopped the teacher’s disrespectful attitude toward Niang immediately, Niang understood that a direct confrontation was not always the best policy, which sometimes may give the other person not only a clue about what aggravates Niang but also a chance to use it against her. Similarly, when Annabel was working as a paraprofessional before she became an ESOL teacher, she experienced that her classroom teacher sometimes tried to put her down because she was jealous of Annabel and felt threatened by her, fearing that one day Annabel might take her teaching position as a classroom teacher. Despite her classroom teacher’s jealousy and disrespectful attitude, Annabel did not respond back with the same attitude but showed her respect by being grateful for things that Annabel learned from her. Understanding the importance of partnership between the classroom teacher and the paraprofessional, Annabel tried not to create a competitive environment and shared her goal to be an ESOL teacher, not a classroom teacher. Annabel said that there was always something that she could learn from people including her classroom teacher. Annabel’s positive attitude and open-mindedness enabled her to have a good relationship with her classroom teacher in the end.

Dealing with the lack of instructional support. When the immigrant teachers had challenges because they received no instructional support from mentors and colleagues, they demonstrated determination and ingenuity to cope with the challenging situations. Oriaro (2007) found that most of the immigrant teachers did not receive adequate formal assistance from schools and school districts. They relied on books and peers to understand school policies and procedure. A similar phenomenon was observed among the participants in my study. However,

what was not clear from the existing research was whether the immigrant teachers possessed a sense of agency and demonstrated more proactive and creative attributes toward solving problems independently in such a challenging situation.

The participants in this study demonstrated their sense of agency and their ability to make a proactive, creative, and independent choice in the process of facing their challenges. For instance, having no mentors to guide her or no other Pre-Kindergarten teacher in her school building when she was in Twinkle Star Academy, Mares sought help she needed by reading educational text books, attending a training developed by the state's Department of Early Care and Learning, using her fifteen years of teaching experiences in Colombia, and observing a Pre-Kindergarten classroom in other schools. Similar to Mares, Annabel also found the instructional support she needed from reading textbooks and articles about research-based teaching strategies, and came up with her own differentiated teaching strategies for her English language learners with various reading levels. When Annabel and Mares had no one to give them an instructional support, they searched for information and designed their own instructional strategy. However, Niang did not experience the lack of instructional support because she was receiving a lot of instructional support through her master's degree, specialist degree, and her Ph.D. study in a graduate school since she became a teacher in the U.S. schools.

Strengths

Through coping with sociocultural challenges, the immigrant teachers in this study have demonstrated strengths which consisted of the following elements: multicultural experiences (e.g., bilingual ability, international teaching experiences, etc.), professional attitudes (e.g., professionalism, engaging parents in children's learning, etc.) and personal attributes (e.g., passion for teaching and tenacity).

Multicultural Experiences

The participants of the study possessed strengths gained from their multicultural and multi-linguistic backgrounds. Their bilingual ability and international teaching experiences contributed to enriching the lives of students and their families in the community where these immigrant teachers brought different perspective to.

Bilingual ability. Annabel and Mares helped Spanish speaking immigrant students and their families, using their Spanish language ability. Although all three immigrant teachers spoke two or more languages, only Annabel and Mares used their multilingual ability for their students and their families. Because Niang's first language is Malay and none of her students spoke Malay, she did not have an opportunity to utilize her bilingual ability. Annabel, who speaks three languages including a Slavic language, Spanish and English, has facilitated the communication between Spanish speaking parents and their children's classroom teachers during the teacher-parent conferences. Although Annabel is from one of the Eastern European countries, she spoke Spanish fluently because her bachelor's and master's degrees were obtained in the Spanish language as well as in a Slavic language. Since Annabel started working in the U.S. schools, she has volunteered as a translator and a cultural ambassador bridging the linguistic and cultural gaps between Spanish speaking parents and their children's classroom teachers and assisted them for the issues related to not only an academic growth at school but also social and emotional development. Annabel reached her hand out to smooth the progress of those families' cultural and linguistic transitions in a new country. Thanks to her proactive support, parents always contacted Annabel immediately every time they had issues concerning their children, and Annabel was glad to help them in any way she could.

Whereas Annabel helped her Spanish speaking students and their families by giving them a bilingual support, Mares helped her Spanish speaking students and families by giving them a mental support. For instance, after Mares observed that some of the Spanish speaking parents stopped teaching and using Spanish language with their children at home, Mares encouraged her Spanish speaking students and their parents not to lose their first language. Carrison (2007) suggested that teachers who work with students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds “must work to instill pride in students whose cultures deviate from the mainstream dominant cultural group, which is Anglo, native English-speakers” (p. 46). Understanding the value of bilingual ability and bicultural knowledge, Mares said that she taught her students to never be embarrassed for their different cultural heritage. Mares also told her Spanish speaking students that more opportunities would open up for them because of their multicultural and multi linguistic backgrounds.

International teaching experiences. Although sometimes the immigrant teacher’s teaching experiences outside the United States are not recognized (Henry, 1998), having an international teaching experience in a foreign country is an asset and helps the teacher gain remarkable knowledge about diverse cultures outside the United States. Mares had fifteen years of teaching experiences in Colombia. She has not only worked in a monolingual school but also taught students in English in several different bilingual schools as a paraprofessional, an Art teacher, an ESOL teacher, and a classroom teacher. She also looped with the same class for three years in a row during the fifteen years of teaching in Colombia which enriched her experiences as a teacher in depth and width. Niang also had an international teaching experience in Singapore. As described in the previous chapter, she taught in an international school that offered the International Baccalaureate (IB) program which was widely recognized throughout the world,

and the school's population consisted of students representing over forty nationalities. She had students from eleven different countries in her classroom. Niang also looped with the same class for two years. Some U.S. school principals appreciate teachers with international teaching experiences. When I interviewed Niang's principal, Helen, and asked her why she hired Niang, Helen answered that when she saw in Niang's resume that she taught in an international school in Singapore, she sensed that Niang had something very special to offer her school:

The fact that she had taught in a very prestigious...international school really said to me that she was looked by a lot of other people, and I didn't want to lose this opportunity to have her on board. [Interview, 6/12/2010]

Unlike Mares and Niang, Annabel did not have any international teaching experiences because she never taught in her home country. Nonetheless, her experiences with education and life in two countries have had a great influence on her teaching. Together, these international experiences have affected the immigrant teachers' perceptions of children and their families from diverse cultural groups in the United States as detailed in the following section.

Perceptions of children and families from diverse cultural groups. Having lived in two different countries, Annabel has gained not only knowledge of the lives and experiences of diverse cultural groups but also comprehension of how different cultural experiences shaped attitudes and perspectives of varied groups, including her own. Through her multicultural experiences, Annabel showed her understanding and sensitivity for students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. For example, Annabel supplemented instruction with resources rich in diversity and sensitive in portrayal of individuals from culturally and linguistically different backgrounds. Using the Digital Story Telling computer software program, Annabel conducted a lesson called, "All About Me," a project with her ESOL students during writing time, in which students were asked to write about not only personal qualities such as who

they were and what they were interested but also their cultural attributes such as their country of origin, their diverse cultural and family backgrounds, and where their parents originally came from. Then her ESOL students read their stories recording on a microphone, which later Annabel put all together to make a movie and display on the SmartBoard. Sharing each other's personal and culturally diverse qualities, those students were not only proud of themselves but also appreciative of cultural diversities that other students brought to the class. By promoting self images and brief autobiographies of culturally and linguistically diverse students, Annabel capitalized on the strengths her ESOL students brought to school. Richards, Brown, and Forde (2006) pointed out that culturally responsive teachers use textbooks, design bulletin boards, and implement classroom activities that are culturally supportive of their students. Annabel showed this trait of a culturally responsive teacher by validating students' cultural identity in classroom practices and instructional materials.

Unlike Annabel, who worked primarily with ESOL students, Mares and Niang worked with regular classroom students for the most part. While the majority of Mares's students were from low-income families, Niang's class consisted of a mixture of both high and low income. Interestingly, Mares's and Niang's perceptions of students and their families at times seemed to reflect the dominant discourses. For instance, Mares, who had never worked in public schools but only in private schools in Colombia, found it very different when she started working in the U.S. public school located in an African-American dominant area where there were a lot of low-income families. Coming from a country where there was not enough governmental support for families in poverty, Mares said that she was surprised to see a lot of supports provided for low-income families in the United States, including free bus passes, diapers, and free or reduced price meals at school. Although Mares saw many families utilizing the benefit of such aids in order to

break the cycle of poverty, she also felt that some families took it for granted and stayed in their current situation:

[In the United States] they just have [to] ask to get [the aids]. It's so easy. And that's why sometimes [some families] don't appreciate what they really have. I think this country... ha[s] wonderful opportunities for people [who] do not have...a lot of education. And...[the U.S. government] think if they...give [low-income families] all those support, that's going to move [those families] to the next level. [But] sometimes you don't see that. Instead of...getting a better quality of life, they just stay there because it's more comfortable to receive and receive and receive and not to do anything for themselves or for the families. [Interview, 4/13/2010]

Mares also added that those families should not take the supports they receive for granted:

I appreciate [for] all what this country can give [to] other people...I feel that this country has so [many] opportunit[ies] [and] so [many] good things. And a lot of people do not appreciate what they have. I wish I had these poor parents [who] I am working with [come to see] my country so that they can see what poverty is for real. [Some American parents] are living [in] poverty but they have all these resources, free help [such as] bus passes, diapers, meal...so many things than poor [people in Colombia who do] not have anyone to give them a help. In [my] country, if you don't have money, you will die for things like...coughing. If I can, [I wish I could take] half of this piece to my country to the poor people [who] are there. [Interview, 4/13/2010]

When Mares said that some of the low-income families failed to get a better life because she thought that it was more comfortable for them to receive the governmental support, it seemed that Mares has revealed her beliefs about people in poverty. Countryman and Elish-Piper (1998) mentioned that attitudes toward people in poverty were one of the major factors in the development of deficit perspectives of low-income families. They also asserted that the deficit perspectives toward low-income families could prevent early intervention programs from fully serving the needs of those families. Dudley-Marling and Paugh (2010) stated that the dominant discourse situates learning and learning failures in students' families, and that this deficit view reflects the ideology of individualism dominant in contemporary U. S. culture. By situating the

failure to break the cycle of poverty in low-income families themselves, Mares seemed to adopt the deficit perspective prevalent in the dominant discourse.

Similarly, Niang's perception of low-income families also seemed to reflect this kind of dominant discourse:

I remember [a student who] was very poor. There's nothing wrong with that. But...the problem...was [that] she kept pooping in her pants in the classroom. [When I talked to her mother about it], the mom [said], "She doesn't do this at home." I was like, "I don't think so. Nobody sits in there and poop." It's just not normal. I found that [people donated] clothes for her. And the mom will not wash [the clothes]. She just throws the clothes away because she just expects more and more [clothes] to come in. She wasn't doing her part: [the] girl...c[a]me in with dirty socks or no socks; in the winter, [she had] no jacket. It was just...pure neglect. You have no idea how many days [her hair] hasn't been washed. And she smelled. Social workers got involved. It was my first eye opener because, in Singapore, it's...shameful for family to have the social workers to come to [your] house. Family [is supposed to] take care of their own people. [Interview, 5/4/2010]

Niang situated the student's problem (e.g., her bowel control problem and body odor) in her family (e.g., "pure neglect", "[the child's mother] wasn't doing her part", "shameful to have the social workers to come to [your] house"). Gleaning from the excerpt above, Niang seemed to adopt the deficit view that blames the family in poverty.

According to Dudley-Marling and Paugh (2010), a teacher with a deficit perspective responds to students' failures with such questions as, "What's wrong with this student?" or "What's wrong with his/her family?" The deficit perspective neglects the importance of knowing "an adequate account of the contexts in which the [students'] actions take place" (McDermott, 1976, p. 106). From a social constructivist perspective, Dudley-Marling and Paugh argued that neither the student nor the family is the problem. It is important for teachers to recognize that each person "has a relationship with the problem" rather than being the problem (Freedman &

Combs, 1996, p. 66). Dudley-Marling and Paugh suggested that teachers rather ask, “What's going on here? What makes this student or his/her family incompetent?”

Although the aforementioned excerpt from an interview with Niang showed the influence of the dominant discourse on students and families in poverty, Niang also demonstrated a strong potential to develop a social constructivist lens in her teaching. For instance, Niang shared a social justice unit that she had done with her first grade students about poverty, encouraging her students to ask themselves, “What does poverty look like?” They wrote and drew a picture of what they thought the poor looked like. After that, Niang invited a guest speaker who experienced poverty. Expecting a person who would look very different from them, Niang’s students were very surprised when they saw Niang’s paraprofessional walked into the classroom as a guest speaker. The paraprofessional shared her story about how she became poor, what it was like living in a homeless shelter, and how she got out of poverty. Many students shared what they learned in Niang’s classroom that day with their parents. These parents later came to Niang and said that it was an eye opening moment for their children because they learned not only that a person who worked with them every day could be poor but also that White people could live in poverty. Considering the fact that Niang’s students lived in an affluent European-American dominant community in the suburbs, what Niang taught them about the poverty and social justice that day challenged her students’ stereotypes about poverty. Niang structured her “classroom environment conducive to inquiry-based learning” and “allow[ed] students to pose questions to themselves, to each other, and to the teacher” regarding their assumptions about poverty (Richards, Brown & Forde, 2006, p. 10). From this example, Niang showed that she had a potential to move beyond the dominant deficit perspective. Unlike Niang, I was not able to find this potential from the interviews with Mares.

Bringing diversity to school. Understanding the chance of cultural clash and prejudice when students were uninformed about the differences of other groups, the immigrant teachers provided their students with multicultural learning opportunities so that they not only become more culturally knowledgeable but also could relate themselves to people from different cultures positively, regardless of cultural and linguistic differences. For instance, using her culturally diverse social network as described in Niang's portraiture in Chapter Four, Niang took her students to the International School Students Association at the local university and had her students exposed to different food, dances, languages, and national flags. Niang shared her vision for her students:

I wanted to instill in them curiosity and inquiry, "what's out there?" So...maybe years from now, I'll hear that they love to travel because they were exposed in young age that there are more things out there that you don't know about, that you should go and find out. [Interview, 5/18/2010]

Utilizing her culturally diverse social network, Niang invited people from different countries to teach her students about various cultures. She also invited international students from local universities as guest speakers. Parents appreciated Niang for her ability to open their children's eyes and globalize their minds. Niang's principal, Helen, was appreciative of the multicultural education that Niang brought to her school:

What she has given to staff is that just a real holistic understanding and...appreciating and knowing other cultures. She has speakers in. She has different international days where students come from university. They dress in the traditional clothing of their country. They talked to the children about writing, the symbols in the language. And how rich can that be! You cannot learn something like that by just watching a video. [Interview, 6/12/2010]

Through the field trips to the international event and meetings with guest speakers from diverse cultural backgrounds, Niang's students not only learned about the world outside the United States but also shared their newly obtained cultural knowledge with their parents.

Similarly, Mares brought diversity to school by teaching her students and their families about Colombian culture:

Learning about the new culture [is] learning to respect this culture. [It also means] to allow people to learn about my country, [especially] the good things about my country, not only the bad things...because...every country has good things and bad things. So [I'm] trying to show my [students and their families]... what a wonderful country [Colombia] is [by] being that good teacher to show that...we have good people, we have honest people, we have people that are...willing to work and do good things for others. [Interview, 4/7/2010]

By educating her students and their parents about her Colombian culture that was different from theirs, Mares tried to show them how a person from a different country could make contributions to the U.S. society by being their teacher. Students and parents in the United States can develop an appreciation for other groups when they learn the contributions of different people (Richards, Brown & Forde, 2006). More importantly, when Mares taught her students about the culture of her home country, there was a less danger of inadvertently giving them cultural stereotypes because Mares had in-depth cultural experiences and knowledge as a cultural insider of Colombia. For students from the dominant culture, having a teacher from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds “presents an opportunity to learn from an individual who reflects the broad cultural and social diversity that is the bedrock of our national unity” (Redmond, Clinedinst, & O’Brien, 2000, p. 9).

Unlike Niang and Mares, Annabel did not mention how she directly brought diversity to her school. I believe that this can be attributed to Annabel’s position as an ESOL teacher who had to collaborate with other classroom teachers in their classrooms. So Annabel did not have as many chances to teach her European culture or to invite guest speakers from different countries as Niang and Mares did.

As all students are affected by diversity in languages and cultures in society (Lustig & Koester, 1996), several researchers (Hawley, 1989; Tomlinson, 1990) argued that it is important for students from the dominant culture to interact with ethnic minority professionals in order to help eradicate racial and ethnic separation and isolation. Diversity at school is also beneficial for parents. Quiocho and Rios (2000) asserted that parents who are open to global education see the value of having their children exposed to teachers from other lands. Shaw (1996) asserted that it is important to acknowledge what teachers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds bring to European-American students, including “positive images of people of color, a realistic understanding of our growing multicultural society and sheer understanding of learning from people of different backgrounds” (p. 488). Niang’s school principal expressed that she loved to hire teachers from different countries because she appreciated the diversity they can bring to the school:

[Niang] has enriched our lives. So I’m always interested in interviewing [immigrant teachers]. Even if the person hasn’t been born in a foreign country, when I see on a resume that they’ve done their student teaching abroad, or that they have been on trips where it’s been linked to arts or sometimes even sports, then I think that they are bringing something to the table that just as a real asset to the faculty. [Interview, 6/12/2010]

Professional Attitudes

The participants of this study demonstrated strengths through their professional demeanor and attitude at school including professionalism, continuing self-improvement, keeping a good relationship with school administrators, and leadership.

Professionalism. The three immigrant teachers exhibited professionalism through honesty, a sense of responsibility, and strong work ethic.

There is saying, “Honesty is the best policy.” The immigrant teachers gained trust from their school administrators by being honest, even at the moment when a lie seemed useful. When

Mares made a mistake at work, she always told her principal nothing but the truth and never tried to cover up her fault by giving excuses. Mares's principal appreciated Mares for her honesty:

[My principal said], "I want you to know that I feel very happy for your honesty. Every time you have been called for something wrong that you have done, you have never lied to us. You know how much I appreciate that." [Interview, 4/27/2010]

Although Mares sometimes made some of her students' parents and other teachers at school upset for being straightforward, it seems important to recognize the other side of straightforwardness which is truthfulness. It is also worth noting that the principal's recognition and appreciation for an immigrant teacher's honesty not only means a lot to an individual telling the truth but also promotes traits of honesty in the school environment for other teachers and students.

The immigrant teacher's traits of honesty also related to her sense of responsibility because honestly admitting the mistakes means that she takes the responsibility. Being a classroom teacher, Niang worked with a paraprofessional and often times with student teachers. Every time Niang's paraprofessional and her student teachers made mistakes, Niang said that she always took the responsibilities because she believed that the classroom was under her name, and that she was ultimately responsible for everything taking place in her classroom. Although Annabel showed many strengths which are discussed throughout this chapter, her thought related to honesty was not revealed in my interviews with her.

In addition, all participants demonstrated a strong work ethic in their teaching. Mares said that she always worked extra hours to be the best teacher she wanted to be: "When I do something, I have to do it in the best way, not just good, the best" [Interview, 4/13/2010]. Mares said that she gave the best of herself to the people around her including her students, their families, school administrators, and colleagues. She also mentioned that, working more than

anyone in her school, she got very tired when she came home, which oftentimes made her sister complain, “Why do you have to work so much? Are you the only teacher that works so [hard] like that?” [Interview, 4/13/2010]. Similar to Mares, Annabel shared that she worked too much, and that her husband called her a workaholic: “I’m [a]...hard worker. My husband calls me...workaholic (laughs)” [Interview, 4/26/2010]

Strong work ethic brought Niang her school administrator’s trust. Niang’s principal, Helen, approved and supported Niang’s ideas about projects for her students because she worked very hard for them:

Every time that Niang has wanted to test something... [such as] over night staying...[for] students and parents at school on Friday evening, she would come to me and have a very good plan. She had everything thought through; good parent letters explaining about safety, talking about what the protocols would be, what the evening will hold for them. And I just felt like she was very prepared. Her ideas were sound. They made sense. And ...there were things that maybe regular teachers wouldn’t necessarily want to do because it was time consuming. I felt like she just has so much energy that she puts into her job but it’s not a job. It’s what she believes in. And that passion just comes through loud and clear. [Interview, 6/12/2010]

As shown in the above transcript, Helen appreciated Niang for her extra hours of work and an extraordinary learning opportunity that she has given to her students and their families.

Through honesty, a strong sense of responsibility, and work ethic, the immigrant teachers in this study revealed their high expectations for their work and focused their energy and time to be a competent teacher.

Continuing improvement. The participants of the study continuously strived to improve themselves as a competent teacher through being open-minded to learning something new and pursuing advanced degrees or a higher level teaching certificate.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Annabel believed that everyone had something to teach her. Her open-mindedness and willingness to work with anyone and to learn something

from them helped her to be a more knowledgeable and an effective teacher. Meanwhile, Niang continuously improved her teaching through pursuing advanced degrees and a higher level of certification. As mentioned in Niang's portraiture in Chapter Four, her principal, Helen, was very proud of Niang for achieving a National Board certification because it was not only difficult to get one but also a very rigorous and demanding process. During the preparation process for the National Board Certification, Niang learned to be reflective in her teaching and constructively criticize her own teaching in an effort to improve her teaching.

Keeping good relationships with school administrators. The immigrant teachers maintained a good relationship with school administrators based on trust and respect. They approached their school administrators with genuine respect and appreciation for what they did for their school. For instance, Annabel expressed her appreciation for her school administrators for the support they had given to her, particularly in relation to testing accommodations for her ESOL students:

[My school administrators] were very supportive. I cannot complain [about them]. [They] really helped me, especially in the area of testing and testing accommodations because assistant principals...were the testing coordinators. They gave me insight into all the testing procedure and accommodations. [Interview, 4/12/2010]

Niang also showed her respect for her school administrators: "I'm going to respect my principal. She's...support[ed] me as best as she [could]" [5/13/2010]. Niang's positive attitude toward her school administrators transcended even when she found herself disagreeing with them: "I respect my [school] administrators. Even if I don't agree with them, I don't say much [because my school principal] has been a great principal for six years" [5/25/2010]. Likewise, Mares expressed her positive attitude toward her principal: "My boss has always been a very sweet person. She has been a very [understanding] person. She is the most wonderful person I have ever met" [5/20/2010].

Leadership. The participating immigrant teachers demonstrated leadership by reaching out to help other teachers in the school building. As mentioned in Mares's portraiture in Chapter Four, Mares reached out first and gave support to help a new teacher in her school. On the second week of a new teacher starting work, Mares went to see this colleague's classroom and asked, "How are you feeling? Is everything okay? Is there something I can do to help you?" [Interview, 5/20/2010] To her surprise, the new teacher started crying and said that she felt so overwhelmed, and that it was too much work for her. Mares assured this colleague that she was going to help her and kept her word by helping her and giving the support she needed throughout the year. This collaborative process helped Mares feel a sense of gratification:

How did I feel helping this girl this year? I feel great! I think she felt calmer because every time she was so stressed, I [told] her, "No, don't worry. This is the way they want you to do it but there is another way that you can do it also. And it's okay." So that g[a]ve her so much comfort. It let her breathe and say, "Yes, I can do it. I know how to do it [now]". [Interview, 5/20/2010]

Similar to Mares, Niang enjoyed helping and guiding her student teachers by being their role model and showing them what good teaching looked like: "[My] job as a supervising teacher is to scaffold [the student teachers'] learning. If they are not doing something right, [I] need to show them" [Interview, 5/13/2010]. Annabel also showed her leadership when she helped a classroom teacher improve her classroom management skill:

[There was a third grade] teacher. It was her second year. She had a [real] difficulty with discipline, and I definitely supported her. We both created behavior plan for children to follow. I think it worked very well. The third grade teacher was very grateful. [Interview, 5/23/2010]

As mentioned in Chapter Two, Arun's (2008) study found that the immigrant teachers in the study emerged as "knowledgeable, compassionate and capable educators...Once settled, they engaged in the available professional development activities and took on leadership roles in their schools" (p. ii). Gleaning from the aforementioned excerpts, the three immigrant teachers in this

study showed leadership by reaching out and offering professional support to other teachers who needed direction and assistance in their planning and teaching.

Personal Attributes

The immigrant teachers demonstrated their strengths through their personal attributes including their passion for teaching and tenacity.

Passion for teaching. Passion for teaching may be what many people in the teaching profession possess, whether they are immigrant teachers or not. The reason why I added love of teaching as one of the immigrant teachers' strengths is because these participants showed their passion for teaching in an extraordinary way that other teachers from the U.S. mainstream culture may not experience. The immigrant teachers could have chosen a different career when they came to the United States. However, they chose teaching, which Niang put as "a gift from God." Although pursuing their dream in a new country was not an easy task, as described in Chapter Four, these immigrant teachers endured all the obstacles they have faced (e.g., visa process, credentialing process, starting from the bottom of the system to gain an entry, prejudices, cultural differences, etc.) and became a teacher in the U.S. public schools.

Niang believed that it was her calling to become a teacher. Even after she finished her work at school, she said that she could not stop thinking of her teaching and students. Annabel also thought: "Teaching is about touching the heart of children, parents, and other teachers" [Interview, 5/23/2010]. She added that this was why she wanted to be a teacher. Similarly, Mares shared her love of teaching children:

I adore my students. I adore being a teacher. That's the only thing I know how to do. That's the only thing I have done [in] my whole life. And I am passionate with it. I think that if I had to choose another career, I would be the most miserable person in life. I think what I choose was what I had to be. I don't see me in any other office, company or anything. I love what I [do]. I just think that that's what I was meant to be, a teacher. [Interview, 4/7/2010]

To these immigrant teachers, teaching was not just a job, but something that gives purpose and meaning to their life and their sense of self.

Tenacity. The immigrant teachers exhibited their strengths through tenacity. Tenacity in this study is defined as the quality of being persistently determined and hard to change from a perspective of dominant discourses. Namely, tenacity means their personal disposition of not giving up easily in spite of the dominant discourses that constantly try to negate the immigrant teachers' professional identity. For instance, although all Mares's credentials from Colombia were recognized during her credentialing process in the United States, her fifteen years of teaching experiences were not. She had to start from the bottom level with the salary of a brand new teacher. This was the very example of dominant discourses that tried to negate Mares's professional identity by invalidating her teaching experiences obtained in her home country. However, such practices not only failed to change Mares's determination to be a teacher but also failed to keep her from developing a positive professional identity as a competent teacher as described in Mares's portraiture in Chapter Four.

Niang, during her student teaching period, worked with a mentor teacher who tried to discourage Niang's dream to be a school teacher. However, Niang's tenacity was her best weapon to cope with her challenge. The mentor teacher who made Niang's student teaching experience so miserable and discouraging did not succeed in breaking her determination to be a competent teacher. Niang's tenacity was well described in her reflection:

If I saw [the mentor teacher] today, I would tell her, "Look, you tried to beat me down. But look at what I have accomplished. I am not what you think, what you wanted to make me." [Interview, 4/13/2010]

In Yosso's (2005) description of six forms of community cultural wealth, she explained one of the community cultural wealth called "resistant capital" which indicated the culturally

marginalized group's capability to resist the dominant discourses that tried to discourage them to succeed in the dominant society. The immigrant teachers' tenacity aligned with Yosso's resistant capital in that the three immigrant teachers not only survived but also thrived as competent teachers in spite of a low expectation from people in the dominant culture. Through their tenacity, the immigrant teachers could overcome the obstacles they faced and turned their dreams of being a teacher in the U.S. schools into reality.

Positive Experiences

In spite of the challenges the immigrant teachers faced, they also had positive experiences in which they felt a sense of accomplishment after all the hardships they had been through. Their positive experiences are discussed with regard to the support and recognition received from colleagues, parents, students and school administrators.

Colleagues

The immigrant teachers shared that most of their positive experiences with colleagues at school were associated with the moment when they were recognized by other teachers at school as a competent teacher. As described in Chapter Four, both Annabel and Niang were nominated as the paraprofessional of the year in 2005 (in Annabel's case) and teacher of the year in 2010 (in Niang's case). These nominations were an honor because they were recognized by other teachers as a competent teacher. Mares also received recognition from teachers and supervisors in her school. As described in Mares's portraiture in Chapter Four, she has received excellent evaluations and many compliments from consultants who came to observe Mares's teaching. These positive evaluations and comments gave Mares a sense of pride and accomplishment.

Receiving recognitions from colleagues at school can be a positive experience to any teacher. The reason why this is particularly meaningful for immigrant teachers is that this

recognition gave these teachers, who were considered the outsider or the marginalized of the U.S. mainstream culture, a validation for who they are and what they do as well as a sense of belonging in the professional community. As mentioned in Chapter Two, one of the challenges that immigrant teachers faced was social isolation. Henry's (1998) study showed that immigrant teachers were often isolated and thought that their experiences as minority educators were not recognized by their colleagues. In spite of this challenge, the immigrant teachers of this study gave their best at work and were recognized as competent teachers by their colleagues. Through this rewarding experience, the immigrant teachers expressed that they felt a sense of pride and confidence.

Parents

Despite the conflict they had with parents in the beginning of their teaching careers, all of the participating immigrant teachers gained most of their parents' appreciation and trust in the end, which contributed to making their teaching experiences positive. Once again, receiving appreciation and trust from parents is a rewarding experience for any teacher. The reason why parents' appreciation is especially meaningful for these immigrant teachers is because they *earned* the appreciation from their students' parents in spite of the prejudices that many parents initially had against these teachers. When all parents of Mares's Pre-Kindergarten students participated in the Move-On Ceremony in the end of the school year, Mares was very happy because the parents' full participation showed the fruits of her year-long endeavor to engage them into her classroom activities. It was a rewarding experience for Mares when some of her students' parents sent her thank-you notes and verbally expressed their gratitude for Mares's dedicated work.

Niang also received appreciation and trust from her students' parents because of her hard work. Niang said that it was such a rewarding experience when her students' parents expressed their thanks to her in the end of the school year. Similarly, when Annabel was approached by her ESOL students' parents who were asking for Annabel's advice for their children, she took it as a compliment:

Happy moments [were]...[when one of the] parents...actually came [to me], had trust in me, opened [up to] me, [and asked] if I could recommend a psychologist for their children because the [parents] had difficulties to even handle their [children] at home. I think [that] this is a huge compliment [for me] to even openly say that their children have problems and [that] they tried to include me to solve the problem. [Interview, 5/23/2010]

Gleaning from the immigrant teachers' positive experiences with regard to their relationship with parents, gaining the appreciation and trust from their students' parents through their hard work had a significant meaning to these immigrant teachers in that it was a recognition of their identity as knowledgeable and competent professionals.

Students

The immigrant teachers considered seeing their students' academic progress and social/emotional growth a great achievement. Again, this can be true for all teachers. However, the reason why students' academic progress and social/emotional growth are especially meaningful to these immigrant teachers is because they considered their students' growth to be the evidence of their teaching competency.

As explained in Chapter Two, several researchers (Oriaro, 2007; Ross, 2003; Su, 1997) found that many first-year teachers, especially from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, struggled with classroom management. They asserted that if immigrant teachers continue to experience these conflicts without receiving any support, they may tend to distance themselves from students. In spite of this challenge, the immigrant teachers of this dissertation

study developed successful classroom management skills and tried to help their students reach their full potential as described earlier in this chapter and Chapter Four. When all Annabel's ESOL students, who struggled with reading in the beginning of the school year, passed the Criterion Referenced Competency Test and exceeded the state standards, she saw the fruits of her hard work through the extraordinary progress her students made. Annabel said that when children were happy, motivated to learn, and showed their academic and social/emotional growth, it made her the happiest teacher.

Mares also had a rewarding experience when one of her special education students, who could not write his name because of his poor fine motor skills, finally wrote his name independently after Mares tried everything to help him:

Oh, my gosh! I cried that day so much [for joy] because, first of all, he was a special ed[ucation] kid; second, because his fine motor skills were so weak and at the end of the year, he was able to write his name, and he was able to tell me that was his name and he was able to tell me every single letter in his name. So that for me was incredible.
[Interview, 5/18/2010]

Gleaning from the above stories, the immigrant teachers took a great pride and joy when they saw their students' academic progress and social/emotional growth, which they considered the proof of their competence as teachers.

School Administrators

The school administrators of the immigrant teachers played a significant role in these teachers' positive teaching experiences in the U.S. schools. The participants shared that when their school principals appreciated them for their qualities as competent teachers and gave their support and trust, it was not only rewarding but also inspiring and motivating for them to give more to their students. This can be true for all teachers. However, the reason why the school administrator's appreciation is especially meaningful to these immigrant teachers is because it

meant the world to these immigrant teachers that their school administrators recognized them as an asset to the school in spite of the doubts and reservations many school administrators have when hiring the immigrant teachers.

As explained in Chapter Two, several researchers (Ahmad, Modood & Lissenburgh, 2003; McNamara, 2004) found that discrimination takes place at the point of recruitment when immigrant teacher candidates apply for the same job at the same places where their peers from the mainstream U.S. culture apply. In Myles, Cheng, and Wang's (2006) study, immigrant teachers were also concerned about getting a teaching position in a school because of their foreign accented English.

In spite of these challenges, the immigrant teachers of this study gained their school administrators' appreciation. As described in Chapter Four, Mares's principal gave her an exceptionally positive end-of-year evaluation in which she pointed out Mares's teaching competence and her dedication and passion for her children's learning. When Annabel had to teach in a challenging situation, her school administrators recognized the challenges she faced and were very appreciative:

[My school administrators] were very appreciative because they realized that it is very challenging to have multi-grades in one segment. But...they saw the gain that children made, even though [I] had children of different ages, different levels, [and] different grades in one group. [Interview, 4/12/2010]

Niang's principal, Helen, also admired Niang for meeting the challenges she had at school beyond her expectations when she asked Niang to loop with the Kindergarten class to the first Grade. Helen was very impressed when almost all parents volunteered to loop with Niang:

[The parents] all volunteered [to loop with Niang]. And the reward came back tenfold because [when] they came back in August in first grade with her, [Niang] didn't need to explain anything. The [children] already knew daily routine. She just took them a quantum of leap further. So I have always said that at every holiday...that class...that looped [with Niang] [was] miles ahead of the other classes. The parents absolutely loved

it...Niang stepped up to the plate. It is not easy for the teacher [to loop with students] because many times you have to move to the different room; you are changing materials out; you are...learning a different curriculum. So for her to come and offer that, I knew beyond anything, her heart was in it. It was what's best for the children, and I had admired that. So she's a very big star in my eyes. [Interview, 6/12/2010]

Niang also said that it was a rewarding experience when her principal appreciated her cultural heritage and encouraged her to share it with other teachers and students at school. When Niang's principal took Niang to the Teacher of the Year banquet after she was nominated as the teacher of the year in her school, Niang wore a Chinese outfit, which Helen deeply appreciated her for sharing her cultural heritage with the school. Helen also thanked Niang when she brought her families from Singapore to school and introduced the school faculty and staff to her family members:

She does an excellent ambassador for us...She would bring so many things from her home...Some of her families have visited over the years. She would bring them to school, introduce them to the staff, to the children, to spend some time at school. And so that, they really got to know a personal side rather than just the teacher...She really opened her life to them. And so, I think it paved the way for more hiring. [Interview, 6/12/2010]

Because of Niang's exemplary work, her school principal had a positive perception of immigrant teachers. This was very rewarding for Niang. It is also important to note that having a principal who was receptive to teachers from diverse cultural background played a significant role with regard to Niang's positive teaching experiences.

In summary, this chapter compared and contrasted unique and shared experiences among the three immigrant teachers in the light of four patterns of meaning: sociocultural challenges, coping strategies, strengths, and positive experiences. In the discussion of the first pattern, sociocultural challenges, the findings revealed that the immigrant teachers experienced challenges because of systemic differences (e.g., complicated and costly visa process) and cultural differences (e.g., different educational beliefs and practices between the United States

and their home countries). They also experienced challenges through the process of acculturation, their language and accent, prejudices against them, and their lack of cultural capital in the host society.

The second pattern, coping strategies, was examined through the four primary resources the immigrant teachers used in order to cope with the challenges they faced. First, the immigrant teachers used professional learning as one of the educational resources. Their views on the professional learning varied dependent upon their teaching experiences and educational backgrounds. Second, the immigrant teachers used their social network to cope with the challenges they faced. Although varied dependent upon the individual teacher, the immigrant teachers' spouses played a significant role in influencing the level and scope of these teachers' access to the network and capital in the host society, which made up the third strand of coping strategies, social network. Fourth, immigrant teachers demonstrated personal strategies (e.g., avoiding confrontation, documenting everything, demonstrating a sense of agency, etc.) to deal with angry parents, conflicts with colleagues, and the lack of instructional support at school.

In the discussion of the third pattern of meaning which was strengths, three underlying elements were examined. They included multicultural experiences such as their bilingual ability and international teaching experiences. The immigrant teachers' perceptions of children and families from diverse cultural groups were also discussed in this section. The findings revealed that although the immigrant teachers tried to be culturally responsive to students from culturally and linguistically different backgrounds, these teachers were susceptible to the dominant deficit perspective when it came to the low-income families in their schools. However, the findings also revealed a potential that these teachers might be able to develop to challenge the deficit view of children and families in poverty. The immigrant teachers also demonstrated strengths such as

bringing diversity to school, demonstrating professionalism, continuing improvement, keeping good relationships with school administrators, and developing leadership. Their personal attributes, such as their passion for teaching and tenacity, were also discussed.

The final pattern, positive experiences, focused on the immigrant teachers' most rewarding experiences in relation to support and recognitions from colleagues, parents, students, and school administrators. I discussed the reasons why receiving recognitions from these people were especially meaningful to these immigrant teachers.

These four patterns of meaning were intricately interwoven together to explain what it was like for the immigrant teachers to meet the challenges they faced in the U.S. schools. Although they had sociocultural challenges, they transformed such challenging experiences into success stories by developing their own coping strategies which demonstrated their strengths as competent teachers with ingenuity and tenacity. Their strengths brought them a sense of accomplishments and contributed to their positive teaching experiences in U.S. public schools.

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of three multilingual and multicultural immigrant teachers as they worked as certified teachers in the U.S. public schools. The focal points of the study were first, to gain understanding of the challenges these immigrant teachers faced in the U.S. public schools; second, to examine how these teachers met those challenges by identifying their coping skills, including various resources they used; third, to identify the qualities and strengths the immigrant teachers brought with them to the U.S. schools; and lastly, to illuminate their positive teaching experiences and contributing factors to these experiences. Through the examination of insights gleaned from the lived experiences of the three multilingual and multicultural immigrant teachers, this study sought to not only inform the readers of what it is like to be an immigrant teacher in the U.S. public school systems but also inspire the readers to consider immigrant teachers competent professionals who have a lot to contribute to the U.S. education. The phenomenological apparatus of this study not only provided a first-person insight which enabled me to gain an insider perspective of the immigrant teachers' personal and professional lived-experiences but also served to center the voice of these teachers who were often marginalized and silenced by the dominant discourses in the U.S. school system.

In Chapter Five, I have discussed the findings of this study by linking the theoretical frameworks explained in Chapter Two as much as possible. In this chapter I discuss the major findings of the study in light of the six forms of cultural capital which Yosso (2005) introduced

in her explanation of “community cultural wealth” (p. 77) discussed in Chapter Two. Following the discussion, I conclude with the implications of this study for school administrators, professional development, teacher education programs at university, immigrant teachers, parents/students/ teachers, and future research.

Discussions

As discussed earlier in Chapter Two, critical race theory was one of the theoretical lenses I used in an effort to deepen my understanding of the lived experiences of the immigrant teachers in this study. As a counter-theory against Bourdieu’s (1986) cultural capital which did not recognize resources and capital that cultural minorities such as immigrant teachers possess, Yosso (2005) introduced an alternative concept called “community cultural wealth” (p. 77) and examined some of the under-utilized assets that people of color bring with them from their homes into the school. Yosso suggested six forms of capital that comprised community cultural wealth, including aspirational capital, familial capital, linguistic capital, navigational capital, resistant capital, and social capital. After examining the four patterns of meaning discussed in Chapter Five, I realized that Yosso’s six forms of capital could well represent the key points of the findings from those four patterns of meaning. Thus, I apply in this chapter the concept of Yosso’s community cultural wealth to the major findings of this study.

Aspirational Capital

Aspirational capital in this study refers to the immigrant teachers’ capability to sustain high expectations and goals for the future in spite of the challenges they face. The participants of this study demonstrated aspirational capital and allowed themselves to “dream of possibilities beyond their present circumstances, often without the objective means to attain those goals” (Yosso, 2005, p. 78). Although the three immigrant teachers of this study faced barriers such as

visa process, recredentialing process, language, cultural shock, and their lack of knowledge about the U.S. school culture and system, they preserved consistently high aspirations for their dream that was to be a teacher in the U.S. public school systems. These stories of immigrant teachers' resiliency "nurture a culture of possibility as they represent the creation of a history that would break the links between" (Gándara, 1995, p. 55) their status as immigrants and their future occupational acquirement.

Familial Capital

Familial capital in the current study is defined as the cultural knowledge promoted by families of immigrant teachers that carries a sense of community history, memory, and cultural insight. According to Yosso (2005), this form of cultural wealth broadens the concept of family to include immediate family, in-laws, relatives, grandparents, and friends. Adding a global concept to Yosso's description of family, the immigrant teachers of this study possessed familial capital from two different countries including their home countries and the United States. Their families provided these teachers with emotional support for their education and career (Auerbach, 2001, 2004; Reese, 1992). From extended kinship ties that the immigrant teachers owned, they maintained "a healthy connection to their community" (Yosso, p. 79). For instance, when Mares was faced with challenges in the U.S. school as an immigrant teacher, her mother in Colombia provided her with emotional support and helped Mares cope with her challenges. In addition, both Niang's and Annabel's husbands are European-Americans who gave their spouses emotional support, educational and cultural insights, and occupational support by sharing the knowledge of the U.S. mainstream culture. Through familial capital, the immigrant teachers' isolation was reduced as their families "became connected with others around common issues"

and helped them recognize that they were “not alone in dealing with their problems” (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001, p. 54).

Linguistic Capital

Linguistic capital in this study refers to the immigrant teachers’ “intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language” (Yosso, 2005, p. 78). The three immigrant teachers demonstrated linguistic capital in their teaching and brought multiple language and communication skills with them to the U.S. public schools. They utilized their multilingual ability to help their linguistically diverse students and their families by translating for them and providing them with academic, social, and emotional support. The multicultural knowledge that is attained through the immigrant teachers’ multilingual experiences enriched the lives of the students and their families with their culturally responsive pedagogy which served to foster the academic success for all students in their classrooms.

Navigational Capital

The immigrant teachers of this study exhibited navigational capital which refers to their ability to maneuver through social institutions and systems that are not created with immigrant teachers in mind. They utilized the plexus of associates and other social networks as well as resources including educational resources, religion, and personal dispositions, which provided them with instrumental and emotional support to navigate through the host society’s institution and system. For instance, Mares employed her educational resources, religion, personal strategies, and social networks in order to change her visa status from a tourist visa (B-2) to a work visa (H-1B) so that she could get a teaching position in the U.S. public school system, which was not designed with immigrant teachers in mind. Although the immigrant teachers’ visa process and the (re)credentialing process were both stressful, their resilience and sense of agency

not only transcended institutional constraints but also made them activate their navigational capital to be successful in their employment.

Resistant Capital

Resistant capital in this study is defined as the immigrant teachers' tenacity or their "knowledge and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequalities" (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). The participants exhibited their resistance to subordination against the dominant discourses that attempted to negate their professional identity. For instance, as mentioned in Chapter Five, when Mares had to start from the bottom level in the U.S. public school system with the salary of a brand new teacher in spite of her 15 years of teaching in Colombia, her professional identity was not negated. She resisted that such dominant discourses could not take away her experience as a teacher and her passion for teaching. Similarly, when Niang worked with a mentor teacher, who tried to discourage Niang's dream to be a school teacher, during her student teaching, Niang resisted such discouragement and used her tenacity to cope with her challenge. Annabel also showed her resistance to dominant discourses when she was working as a paraprofessional in Amber Elementary School. As described in Chapter Five, although her classroom teacher considered herself to be the only professional in the classroom because of her degree in a U.S. institution, Annabel did not let such a narrow perspective negate her professional identity. Together, these immigrant teachers asserted themselves as "strong and worthy of respect to resist the barrage of societal messages devaluing" their professional identity (Yosso, 2005, p. 81).

Social Capital

The participating immigrant teachers utilized social capital to attain education, legal assistance for visa process, employment, and instructional support. The social capital refers to

“networks of people and community resources” (Yosso, 2005, p. 79) which provided the immigrant teachers with professional and emotional support to navigate through the U.S. social and educational systems. For example, when Mares was looking for an interview opportunity for a teaching position in Twinkle Star Academy, she talked with one of the academy’s employees who spoke Spanish, utilized her social networks, and finally got an interview appointment with the principal, who not only hired her as a teacher but also sponsored her work visa (H-1B) and eventually her permanent residency. Annabel also utilized her social network when she was working in a challenging teaching environment (e.g., teaching multiple reading levels of students from different grade levels in one classroom) and when she first became an ESOL teacher in the U.S. school. Annabel brought resources from her friends who were ESOL teachers in other schools and an ESOL specialist from Anderson County School District office. When Niang taught her students, she too utilized her social network to teach her students multicultural education. She invited guest speakers from different countries who she had known through her children or her study in a graduate school.

These immigrant teachers, who have utilized their social capital for their attainment of education and employment, also wanted to share information and resources they had learned from their lived experiences with people in their social networks.

As illustrated above, these six forms of capital are dynamically interwoven together and build on one another (Yosso, 2005). For instance, the immigrant teachers’ aspirations to be a school teacher in the U.S. school system were nurtured through their familial capital, which contributed to activating navigational and social capitals. After achieving their aspirations, the teachers resisted accepting discriminating dominant discourses and shared their social and navigational capitals with other immigrant students and their families by utilizing their linguistic

capital. Thus, these six forms of capital overlap with each other to create a dynamic community cultural wealth.

Although Yosso's six forms of capital helped me explain the qualities of the three immigrant teachers, this framework constrained my attempt to capture these teachers' leadership. As explained in Chapter Five, the three immigrant teachers demonstrated leadership by reaching out and offering their knowledge to other teachers from diverse backgrounds, including the mainstream U.S. culture. However, I found that there was no room in Yosso's six forms of capital to highlight these teachers' capability and desire for leadership. I believe that leadership is one of the neglected forms of capital that is possessed by the marginalized. Because the dominant discourses highlight immigrant teachers' lack of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), these teachers are not considered to be qualified leaders. Instead, they are often perceived as followers or learners who should be acculturated into and compliant to the established norms of the dominant culture. So I would like to suggest adding "leadership capital" to Yosso's framework to expand the community cultural wealth that cultural, racial, and linguistic minority groups possess.

Implications

There are a number of implications that can be drawn from the findings of this study. In this section, I discuss implications of this study for school administrators, professional development and teacher education, teachers/parents/students, immigrant teachers, and future research.

For School Administrators

It is imperative that school principals take a risk, recognize the qualities immigrant teachers have, and give them a chance to show what they can offer to the school. As discussed in

the findings of the study, having immigrant teachers at school enriches the lives of students with knowledge that these teachers have obtained from their culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Niang's principal, Helen, said, "If we believe in children taking a risk in learning, even if you did a trial bases for a year and offer [immigrant teachers] a contract, I just think that there are very creative ways to make it happen" [Interview, 6/12/2010]. Helen believed that if principals do a good interview and let immigrant teacher candidates talk about their lives and teaching experiences, they can surely tell what kind of teaching they are going to provide in the classroom, what kind of person they are going to be, and how they are going to be interacting with children, parents, and staff members. It is important that principals are not afraid of interviewing immigrant teachers and try to recognize the qualities these teachers have with an open mind during the interview.

Gleaning from Niang's experiences with different principals and her interviews with various school districts, the more multicultural experiences principals have, the more receptive they become towards diversity. Having had enriching life experiences from her study tour to a variety of schools in different countries, Helen hoped that other principals could have opportunities to visit schools outside the United States and exchange their ideas about education with teachers and principals from different countries. She thought that such learning experiences would make a huge difference in the mind set of U.S school principals, especially those who are reluctant to take a chance on hiring immigrant teachers. I suggest that educational institutions such as universities utilize grants to create an international field trip for school administrators and teachers so that they can visit schools in other countries and broaden their multicultural experiences which will help them to be more receptive to teachers from diverse backgrounds.

As discussed in immigrant teachers' challenges in Chapter Five, school administrators should provide first year immigrant teachers with support through mentors. All three participants mentioned that it should be a mandatory for beginning immigrant teachers to have mentors who are experienced, skilled, and compassionate. In addition to these qualities, I would like to point out the importance of bi-directional relationship between the mentor and the mentee. Niang, for example, shared:

[The mentors should be] open to teach [the immigrant teacher] and not like an expert, "I'm going to tell you what to do." I don't like that kind of attitude. [The mentors should be] somebody who is open to new stuff. They are not closed minded, "Oh, this is the way we have done it twenty years ago. So you are going to do it this way." That's not the way because things change and they need to be adaptable and flexible. And [the mentors also should be] somebody who appreciates someone from another culture. It would be great if they traveled abroad and they are really interested in knowing people. If the mentor teacher thinks that they are the expert and this [immigrant] teacher is like a kid, then it won't work. [Interview, 5/25/2010]

Niang is clearly opposed to the uni-directional (from mentor to mentee) or top (mentor)-to-bottom (mentee) relationship. As discussed in Chapter Two, the limitation of the previous studies about mentors is that these studies focused on the assimilation of immigrant teachers into the mainstream practice and norm of U.S. schools. In other words, they focused on one directional or top-to-bottom approach in the mentor-mentee relationship. Mentees such as immigrant teachers bring multicultural and multi-linguistic qualities to the school. Their mentors should be able to appreciate these qualities and give immigrant teachers a chance to share and utilize multicultural and multi-linguistic backgrounds in their teaching.

After discussing with immigrant teachers about the traits of a good mentor, I came up with the following qualities of an ideal mentor: An ideal teacher as a mentor for a newly hired immigrant teacher is an experienced immigrant teacher who has taught in the U.S. school system for about three to five years. I believe such a mentor can empathize with the new immigrant

teacher and understand what the new teacher needs to know by utilizing the mentor's own teaching experiences in the U.S. schools. However, if school administrators cannot find a veteran immigrant teacher at school, they might consider a teacher with the following qualities to be a mentor:

- Willingness to guide a newly hired immigrant teacher with compassion
- About five years of teaching experience
- Openness to learning something new and being adaptable and flexible
- Capable of bringing out the cultural asset (e.g., multicultural experiences and knowledge) and exploring this asset to address some of the issues in U.S. schools
- Appreciation for someone from another culture
- Someone who has traveled abroad
- Genuine interest in understanding and working with other people

The mentor can provide the newly hired immigrant teacher with one-on-one support for lesson plans, curriculum guides, and standards. Having a classroom observation in other schools can also help the new immigrant teacher. It is important that she has an opportunity to observe an experienced and highly competent teacher's classroom. When guiding a first year immigrant teacher, the mentor should give the mentee feedback about what she does well and what she can do to improve her teaching.

Gleaning from the findings of Mares and her principal in Chapter Five, it is undoubtedly important to have a school administrator who recognizes an immigrant teacher's excellent work and does not hesitate to express her or his appreciation because words of encouragement and appreciation from the school principal to a teacher mean a lot to a teacher, especially to an immigrant teacher. It takes time, a genuine interest, and an effort for the principal to learn her or

his teachers' strengths and contributions to the school. As Mares confirmed in her reflection, the school administrator who takes such extra steps certainly can motivate and inspire immigrant teachers to give ceaseless endeavor to improve themselves every day.

For Professional Development

Gleaning from the challenges the immigrant teachers experienced with parents in the beginning of their teaching career, a professional development that provides guidance in communicating with students' parents at the U.S. public schools would help newly hired immigrant teachers build positive and pleasant relationships with their students' parents. Coming from different countries where the way teachers interact with parents is different from that in the United States, these teachers would appreciate guidance in how to communicate effectively with parents and how to resolve a disagreement or conflict with them. Mares shared that it would have helped her avoid some of those conflicts with parents in the beginning of her career in U.S. schools, if there had been professional development that guided her. Although the immigrant teachers have established collaborative and extraordinarily positive relationships with parents over the course of time, they achieved the knowledge at the expense of their emotional distress through trial and error. It is important to provide them with professional development that can minimize their conflict with parents and assist them to have positive and constructive relationships with parents.

As discussed in Chapter Five, I also note that immigrant teachers are susceptible to the deficit perspective of children and families in poverty. The immigrant teachers in this study started their career in schools where students were predominantly African-American and from low-income families. Their experiences in these schools with challenging conditions seem to expose them to the dominant discourses on minority students and their families in poverty. Given

the common entry experiences in U.S. schools, I think it is essential for immigrant teachers to have professional development to challenge the dominant discourse's deficit perspective of children and families in poverty.

Immigrant teachers can also educate other teachers by offering professional development to share their knowledge of cultural diversity. Mares suggested having immigrant teachers share their experiences of becoming a teacher in the United States. She believed that learning educational beliefs and practices of other countries would benefit all teachers because this may help them understand people from different cultures and appreciate immigrant teachers' multicultural and multi-linguistic knowledge and insights. Providing teachers from diverse backgrounds with an opportunity to share their funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992) through professional development will contribute to respecting each other as competent and resourceful professionals.

The findings of this study also suggest that immigrant teachers, especially the ones who are hired under a provisional teaching certificate, will benefit from a professional development that prepares them for the teaching certificate exam. Working under a provisional teaching certificate, Mares was concerned about taking the state teaching certificate exam for fear of failing. Although her bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education in Colombia was recognized by the World Education Services (WES) in the United States, she was worried that she might not pass the teaching certificate exam because first, it had been a long time since she graduated from college; second, she was not familiar with the teaching certificate exam in the United States. I believe that there may be a significant number of immigrant teachers who find themselves in a similar situation like Mares. If there is professional development offered to these immigrant teachers working under a provisional teaching certificate to help them prepare for the

teaching certificate exam, more immigrant teachers will be able to obtain a renewable teaching certificate. Therefore, I think providing the teaching certificate exam preparation classes in school districts or the local universities will be helpful for many immigrant teachers.

For Teacher Education Programs at University

As I searched information regarding a work visa (H-1B) for immigrant teacher candidates, I began to learn that the teacher education programs admission process and the public school hiring process conflict with each other regarding the work visa. As described in Mares's portraiture in Chapter Four, it was an obstacle for immigrant teacher candidates, who do not possess a work visa, to be considered for a teaching position in the U.S. public school systems because many school districts did not sponsor a work visa. From my personal experience as an immigrant student having been admitted to the teacher education program in the U.S. institution, I observed another obstacle for immigrant teachers: the teacher education programs at universities are reluctant to give admission to immigrant applicants who do not have a work visa because the absence of their work visa would make their future employment at U.S. public school systems uncertain.

According to the requirements for a work visa, if an immigrant teacher candidate requires a teaching certificate to teach at a school, the teacher will need to show possession of a teaching certificate or present documentation from the teaching credentialing board that the teacher has met all of the requirements for the teaching certificate. The only element continuing to prevent the issuance of the teaching certificate is possession of a legally valid visa ("The ABC'S of Immigration: Visa Options for Teachers", 2004). This is the part where I noticed the conflict between the teacher education program's admission process and the U.S. school districts' hiring process. In order to be a certified teacher in the U.S. public school system, the immigrant teacher

candidates must meet all requirements (e.g., completing required coursework and student teaching, passing the teacher certification exams). The problem is that the teacher education programs at the universities do not give admission to the immigrant applicants unless they have obtained the visa that allows them to work in the United States. In simple terms, the teacher education programs have a hidden criterion: “no work visa, no admission” policy. Interestingly, the reality is that if the immigrant teacher candidates are not admitted into the teacher education programs, they cannot meet the requirements to be a certified teacher in the U.S. public school systems. This means that they cannot obtain the work visa. As discussed in Chapter Five, the school districts do not hire immigrant teacher candidates without a work visa. This system is not workable for immigrants who want to be a teacher in the U.S. public school systems. This creates a systemic barrier that is confusing for immigrant teacher candidates. No matter how hard they try to meet the requirements and follow the rules of the system of the host society to be a school teacher, they cannot reach their dreams because the system is inherently designed to make the immigrant teacher candidates fail in the end.

This systemic barrier should be lifted for the sake of both the U.S. school system and the immigrant teacher candidates. The U.S. public schools will continue to have more students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and more teacher shortages as discussed in Chapter One, and will therefore continue to need teachers from diverse backgrounds similar to their students. With the current system that the United States offers to immigrant teacher candidates, however, there will be the loss of many qualified teachers who can contribute to solving the teacher shortage problem and improving learning experiences of students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

There are several tasks that the teacher education programs can do in order to alleviate the current systemic barriers for immigrant teacher candidates. First, it is important that the teacher education programs reexamine their current admission process to see if it conflicts with school districts' hiring process in terms of the work visa (H-1B) requirements as described earlier in this chapter. Second, if the teacher education programs find the discrepancy, they should work collaboratively with U.S. school districts so that immigrant teacher candidates do not give up their dreams to be a teacher in the U.S. public school systems due to the aforementioned systemic barrier. For instance, the teacher education programs can make it clear that they can accept the immigrant applicants without a work visa (H-1B). When those immigrant applicants complete their training and meet all of the requirements of the teacher education programs, the teacher education programs can play a role as the immigrant teacher candidates' liaison and recommend those immigrant teacher candidates to the local school districts. It is important that the U.S. school districts sponsor a work visa (H-1B) for immigrant teacher candidates who were recommended by the teacher education programs. The U.S. school districts can utilize their district attorneys and human resources department to assist school administrators who want to hire those immigrant teacher candidates because it is difficult for school administrators to deal with the immigration laws and legal documents by themselves. Once the collaborative system between the teacher education programs at universities and the U.S. school districts, is established, all relevant information should be made easily available and accessible to any immigrant teacher candidates and any school administrators who may want to hire them. Third, after the immigrant teacher candidates are hired by the U.S. school districts, the teacher education programs can work collaboratively with the school administrators to ensure that the immigrant teachers receive adequate professional support through qualified mentors and

professional learning (as discussed earlier in this chapter) so that the first year teaching can be an enjoyable and a positive learning process for those immigrant teachers.

For Parents, Students, and Teachers

As the findings of this study revealed, it is important for those parents, students, and teachers, who have never worked with immigrant teachers, to recognize the qualities these teachers bring with them to school. The immigrant teachers of this study wanted parents, students and teachers in U.S. schools to judge them by their teaching competence, not by the way they look or sound, and to consider them professionals who have a lot to offer to the field of education in the United States. It is imperative for parents, students, and teachers to remain open-minded even when they do not agree with everything that immigrant teachers do. The immigrant teachers in this study suggested that parents, students, and teachers, who work with immigrant teachers, talk to school principals or teachers who have worked with immigrant teachers about their experience with the immigrant teachers. These immigrant teachers also suggested that parents, students, and teachers not be afraid of talking to the immigrant teachers themselves and getting to know who they are, where they are from, why they came to the United States, and what they can do for their children and school. Especially, the more parents understand who immigrant teachers are, the more they respect these teachers. Mares suggested that one way to teach children to respect teachers from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds is to start with parents and encourage them to model how to show their respect for teachers. When children see their parents respecting teachers from different countries, they will learn to respect those teachers when they come to school.

There are several things that schools can do to help parents understand immigrant teachers better. Inviting an immigrant teacher as a guest speaker or as a facilitator of a workshop

can give parents a chance to interact with and learn from an immigrant teacher. Another way to help parents understand the immigrant teachers better is having these teachers talk to parents during teacher-parent conferences or Meet and Greet Nights at school about their life and work as teachers with multicultural and multilingual experiences and knowledge.

For Immigrant Teachers

When I asked the immigrant teachers if they had messages or advice for other immigrant teachers out there, they made a number of significant points detailed below.

For immigrants who hope to be teachers in the U.S. school systems, a good place to start with is to contact a practicing immigrant teacher who has experienced the visa and credentialing process and who knows what to expect from the first day of school and is familiar with curriculum, standards, and the U.S. educational system in general. If that is not an option, they can obtain information about how to apply and what they can do to be a school teacher in the United States from each state department of education website, professional standards commission, or school district websites. If they have a degree outside the United States, they need to contact educational credentialing services to have their credentials evaluated to find out the equivalent degree in the United States. After they find out about the equivalency of their degree in the United States, they can decide if they have to get a bachelor's degree or a master's degree to be fully certified or if they need to take only a couple of additional courses from a U.S. university. As Niang mentioned, it takes time to be a teacher and is wise to plan ahead of time. The immigrant teachers in this study pointed out that if they never taught in the U.S. school systems, it is important for them to understand that school principals are reluctant to hire someone without references from the United States and someone who does not have any knowledge of what it is like to teach in the U.S. school system. It is better for the immigrants to

start with substitute teachings or paraprofessional positions because such experiences will gain them not only the references they need but also insights into how to interact with parents, how to manage their classroom, how to interact with their students, and how to teach students to reach their full potentials. It is helpful for the immigrant candidates to have the background knowledge of U.S. schooling before starting their career as a teacher. Observing and being part of a classroom teacher's work as paraprofessionals or substitute teachers can prepare the immigrant teachers with problem solving skills. Annabel recommended a substitute teaching experience because this experience allows immigrant teachers to go to different schools and teach different grade levels. Such experience helps teachers decide if teaching is for them, which grade level they want to teach, or for which school they want to work.

For currently practicing immigrant teachers, the participants recommended finding someone they can trust and from whom they can receive instructional support in the school building. If they do not have anyone to help them, they have to be proactive and not be hesitant to directly ask other teachers or school administrators for help. The immigrant teachers in this study firmly believed that there is always someone in the school building who wants to help and work with an immigrant teacher. They encourage other immigrant teachers to look around and find that person who can provide them with support. Even if they have a mentor, they do not need to limit their circle of instructional and professional support to one person. Teachers should find someone who can be most helpful and supportive. For their professional development, the participants recommended pursuing advanced degrees. However, Annabel pointed out that it is not a good idea to pursue an advanced degree during the first year of teaching because the workload from a graduate school may keep the teacher from focusing on the classroom teaching. It may be too much to handle during the first year of teaching to juggle both work and study.

The participants also emphasized that it is important for immigrant teachers to recognize their strengths and contributions they bring with them to school. Although they may struggle to fit into the U.S. school culture, it is imperative for them to remember that they can help students, parents, and teachers value cultural diversity and teach that everybody is unique and brings something valuable to the society. Through their teaching experiences in the U.S. schools, the participants learned that no matter how different they look or sound, children do not judge them by the accent or skin color they have but their kindness, love, professionalism, how they recognize their individualities, and how much their teachers care about them. They also mentioned that immigrant teachers should not be offended when their students try to correct their English and that they should learn to laugh at themselves when they make mistakes and know that they can learn from their students too.

Lastly, it is important for immigrant teachers to understand that confidence comes with time and experience. They should not expect it to come immediately. No matter how challenging it is to work as an immigrant teacher in the U.S. schools, one should keep exhibiting a strong work ethic, willingness to learn something new and constantly endeavor to improve her/his teaching because, according to my participants' perspectives, these qualities are the trademark of immigrant teachers. Each immigrant teacher represents the image of immigrant teachers in general and paves the road for other immigrant teachers. It is imperative for them to hold themselves up to a high standard and make a good reputation for themselves. The immigrant teachers of this study pointed out that their ultimate goal is to work as a competent teacher because parents, students, and teachers see them as teachers, not as immigrants. So having knowledge of the mainstream culture is as equally important as keeping their heritage cultures. It is important to note that these immigrant teachers consider teaching as a gift that they get to

spend one hundred eighty days with children whom they love so much, and that they do their very best to take care of students who are under their care.

For Future Research

Carrison (2007) pointed out that “there has been very little published on Eastern European immigrant teachers” (p. 177). As several researchers (Monzó & Rueda, 2001a, 2001b; Sandoval-Lucero, 2006; Valenciana, Weisman, & Flores, 2006) have pointed out, much of the current research focuses on the experiences of Latinos. This dissertation study presents the lived experiences of an immigrant teacher (Annabel) from a European country, which serves to fill a gap in this research field. I hope that examining the teaching experiences of immigrant teachers from three different continents, including Asia, South America, and Eastern Europe, enables a wider range of readers to relate to the findings of this study.

I note here two main potential limitations of this study, which are both related to the participants. First, because all of the participants are female, the present study does not reflect the perspectives and insights of male immigrant teachers. The reason why a male participant is missing in this study is because I have not been able to find male immigrant teachers who meet the criteria that I set for the participant selection. Considering that female is the dominant gender in the U.S. teaching force as in many other nations, my participant selection represents the current gender representation of the U.S. teaching force. Second, I had a tendency to focus on the positive aspects of the immigrant teachers. I attribute this tendency to my personal experience as a former immigrant teacher, from which I observed the dominant discourses’ deficit perspectives against the immigrant teachers. So I was inclined to shed light on the positive aspects.

Gleaning from the discussion that the immigrant teachers had regarding their accent and students’ understanding, it is debatable if immigrant teachers’ accents actually kept students

from understanding these teachers. I think that it will be interesting to investigate a relationship between immigrant teachers' accents and their students' comprehension in the classroom. As for the measurement of how immigrant teachers' foreign accented English affects students' comprehensibility, students' academic progress between the first and the last quarter of the school year might be compared. In addition, a comparative study of performance between immigrant teachers' students and those of native English-speaking teachers with compatible education backgrounds and teaching experiences might also help us see the role of language and accent in teaching and learning. In order to test the generally believed assumption that teachers speaking standard English teach better than immigrant teachers with foreign accent, it will be useful to conduct these studies on teacher language and student performance.

The lived experiences of three immigrant teachers are shared in this study with its focus on the challenges they faced, their coping strategies, strengths, and positive experiences. Through the glance of three different immigrant teachers who are from three continents and have distinctive experiences as teachers in the United States, this study attempted to promote our understanding of the lives of immigrant teachers. Through this understanding, I hope that the readers can see that although immigrant teachers look and sound different from teachers born and raised in the United States, these teachers are competent professionals who enrich the lives of students and deserve our respect and appreciation.

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APPENDIX A

Phenomenological Interview Questions

1. Discuss the background of the interviewee.

A. Tell me about your life in your native country before you came to the United States.

Possible probes:

- How long did you live in your native country?
- What was your formal schooling from K-12 and college education (if applicable) like in your native country?
- Tell me about your family. (Parents, siblings, relatives, etc.)
- How are the schools in your native country and the schools in the United States alike and different?
- What kind of profession did you have before you came to the United States?
- If you were in the teaching profession in your native country, tell me about your teaching experiences there and how they are different from your teaching experience here in the U.S. school.

B. Tell me why and how you became an immigrant teacher in the U.S. public school system

Possible probes:

- Why did you come to the United States?
- How long have you been here?
- What kind of visa process did you go through to come to and to stay in the United States?
- How did you get the information about becoming a teacher in the U.S. public school system?
- Why did you want to become a teacher in the U.S. public school system?
- What did you do in order to become a certified teacher in Georgia? (e.g. credentialing process, PRAXIS I & II tests, teacher preparation programs, etc.)
- How long did it take for you to become a teacher in the U.S. public school system?
- What or who helped you most to become a certified teacher in the United States?
- What was your job interview process like?

2. Discuss the teaching experiences in the U.S. schools.

• A. Tell me about your first year teaching experiences in the U.S. school.

Possible probes:

- What was your first year teaching like?
- What kinds of responsibilities did you have?
- What was your relationship like with other teachers/ with your students/ with your school administrators /with parents in your first school?
- What was most challenging in your first year teaching?
- What was it like to experience those challenges?
- When you experienced those challenges, what did you wish to have in order to help you to meet those challenges?
- What did you do to meet those challenges?
- What or who helped you meet your challenges?
- Were there any programs such as in-service teacher education at graduate school or professional development that were helpful to you? If so, how were they helpful to you?
- If you can go back to your first year teaching, what would you do differently?

B. Tell me about your teaching experiences after the first year

Possible probes:

- What was your teaching experience like after the first year?
- How was your relationship with other teachers/ school administrators/ your students' parents?
- Did you move to another school? If so, why did you move to another school?
- Tell me about your experience in your next school
- What other challenges did you have after the first year?
- What challenges have you had as you teach your students or work with other teachers/ your school administrators/ your parents?
- Why do you think you had those challenges?
- What did you do to meet those challenges?
- What or who helped you meet those challenges?

- Was there any professional development or graduate school program that helped you to meet those challenges?
- If so, how did they help you meet those challenges?
- If not, what kind of professional development or in-service teacher education program would you like to have to help you with those challenges?
- If you are a teacher educator, what kind of in-service teacher education program or professional development would you create to help immigrant teachers like yourself?

3. Tell me about your strengths and contributions to the U.S. schools

Possible probes:

- Tell me about your positive teaching experiences.
- Tell me about the moments when you felt competent at school.
- Tell me about the moments when you felt valued and appreciated at school.
- Who and what helped you have such positive experiences?
- Tell me about your strengths as you find yourself in meeting those challenges. What strengths do you have?
- Who and what contributed to your strengths?
- Tell me about the moments that your teaching affected your students positively.
- Tell me about the moments that your work at school affected other teachers, parents, and school administrators positively.
- What else would you like to tell me about your teaching experiences in the U.S. schools?

APPENDIX B

Initial Bridling Statement

In this bridling statement, I will write as much as I can about my pre-understandings of the challenges that immigrant teachers have and how they meet their challenges. I will write what I think I will learn from my participants in order to get the assumptions out on paper.

There are several challenges that I can think of when it comes to immigrant teachers working in the U.S. public schools: cultural shock, lack of cultural capital, language barrier, prejudice, etc. These challenges are based on two grounds: my own teaching experiences as an immigrant teacher and research studies regarding immigrant teachers.

In order to get my assumptions of each participant's experiences out on paper, I need to think about what I think I will learn from each of my participant. I have known Annabel for four years and have discussed some of the challenges we faced in our own schools. They were about discrimination we experienced as an outsider, lack of support from the school principal, cultural differences, etc. However, we did not really talk about the language barrier as if it is not an issue for us. Is it really not an issue at all for her? She is very fluent in English but does have some foreign accent in her English. I am sure that there is something she wants to talk about regarding the language barrier issue. I need to ask her about it when I interview her. When she faces some challenges at school, there must be someone or something that helps her meet those challenges. What can they be for Annabel? I can only guess that her husband who is working on his Ph.D. and is an American citizen can definitely help her with her English. And I have no doubt that he gives her mental support. He will also probably give her a sense of belonging to the mainstream culture because the marriage to an American citizen surely gives the opportunity to live in the mainstream culture. I wonder how this acquired sense of membership to the mainstream culture

works for her as she teaches in her school. All of her family members are living in Europe. Has she gotten any support from her family? Has she received any mental support or financial support from them? One of the articles that I read indicated that many immigrant teachers' families in their home country supported them mentally and financially. I wonder if that's the case for Annabel, too. Does she have any close friends at school among teachers whom she can trust and ask for help? I find it very difficult to find a teacher with whom I can open up and discuss or ask help when I face some challenges at school. I wonder if Annabel has the same issue. I also would like to learn about her positive teaching experiences. What are the moments that she feels so happy to be an immigrant teacher? I know that we talked about mainly negative experiences in the past. However, I do believe that she has moments where she found herself to be satisfied, fulfilled, thrilled, and happy in her school. If I can measure the positive and negative experiences as an immigrant teacher in percentile, what will be the percentile of Annabel's positive experiences in her entire lived experiences as an immigrant teacher?

From Niang, I believe that I have more assumptions about her because I have taken several classes with her in a doctoral program in the same university. And we are close friends and have known each other personally. I believe that she has a lot of positive experiences as an immigrant teacher. Her school teachers like her very much. The reason I know this is because she was chosen as a teacher of the year in 2009-2010. One of the teachers I knew in the past told me that the teacher of the year award is a popularity contest at school. So based on her statement, Niang must be very popular among teachers in her school. And when Niang got her U.S. citizenship, the teachers at her school baked a cake and celebrated with her. And I have never heard her mentioning anything negative about her school or school teachers. I wonder if she has any negative experiences at her school with other teachers or with her school administrators.

Why does Niang have such a positive teaching experience in her school compared to Annabel? I know that Niang's school district is very different from Annabel's. I wonder if the difference between these two county schools makes such a difference in immigrant teachers' experiences at school. I would like to learn more about it during the interview. Niang never mentioned about her language barrier at school before, except with regard to her accent. I remember she mentioned that some of her parents worried that their children might learn her Asian accented English. And she speaks very fast. But Niang didn't seem to have any problem with assuring her parents about her linguistic competency. She has such a high work ethic, which I believe most of the immigrant teachers demonstrate. She is truly amazing. Being a mother of four children makes it hard enough for her to be a full time school teacher. On top of that, she is also a doctoral student. I wonder why she takes such a huge responsibility on her shoulder. She already had her specialist degree in her thirties. But she decided to pursue a Ph.D. in her forties. What drives her to be so multi-tasked? How does being a mother of four, a wife of an American citizen husband, and a doctoral student influence her lived experiences as an immigrant teacher?

From Mares, I am not sure if I have any assumptions about her experiences right now. I do not know her personally and I have never met her yet. However, judging by the county school where she is working, she might have experienced some negative experiences such as discrimination, isolation in her work, language barrier, lack of support from school administrator, prejudice, etc. This assumption is based on my personal working experience in the same county as well as the stories that I heard from other immigrant teachers working in the same school district. Perhaps I may be wrong. I need to be more open-minded and know that she may have many positive experiences. And the positive experiences are what I am trying to illuminate. She married a South Columbian man in her mother country and came to the United States with him. I

wonder how her experiences as an immigrant teacher are different from other immigrant teachers because she didn't marry an American citizen. She lived in the United States for 20 years just like Niang. However, Mares taught only for 7 years whereas Niang taught for 20 years. I wonder how the difference in the number of years of teaching in the U.S. would impact their experiences as an immigrant teacher.

APPENDIX C

Bridling Journal Entry

The first interview with Annabel

March 29, 2010

After the first interview, I learned so much about the educational system in Annabel's home country. Unlike the United States Public Elementary School systems where the grade levels start with Pre-K or Kindergarten and end with 5th grade, the school systems in Annabel's home country start with 1st grade, and Pre-K and Kindergarten levels are separate from the Elementary Schools. There is another difference: while the U.S. public school systems consist of Elementary, Middle, and High Schools, the public school systems in Annabel's home country consist of 9 years of required education, four years of College Prep or three years of technical or vocational schools. The students who wish to go to the university enter college prep. Unlike the U.S. education in undergraduate and graduate levels in which students have to pay school tuition and for their health insurance, the universities in Annabel's home country are tuition free and the students receive the benefit of health insurance automatically upon their entrance to the university. The school tuition and the health insurances are funded by the government. These free school tuition and health benefits encourage students to compete because there are only limited numbers of universities in Annabel's home country. Annabel successfully competed against other students in such a competitive and rigorous educational environment in her home country. I think that this experience made her a strong and resilient person. When she had to go through the visa and the credentialing process in the United States, I believe that the competition and rigorous study Annabel had in her home country probably prepared her to cope with such a challenging situation.

She also talked about her language barrier. She started learning English when she was in the 9th grade. Does it mean that she did not learn any English during the 9 year required education? Does it mean that Annabel's home country's public schools do not teach English during that 9 year-period? Why not? I need to ask Annabel about that next time I meet her. Because she started learning English from the 9th grade for four years and did not continue her English language education when she entered the university, she had very limited English proficiency. She still uses, „uh“and „you know“ a lot when she speaks English and makes a lot of grammatical errors. There are a lot of words that she does not know in Social Studies and Science because she was lacking the technical language due to the absence of her formal education in the United States. However, considering her English proficiency level she was in when she first came to the United States, she has achieved a lot over the eight years. She speaks fluently now. How did she meet her linguistic challenge? First, she has such a drive to improve her English. She looks up words when she does not understand. She reads constantly to improve her English. She studied very hard to improve her reading and vocabularies so that she could pass the TOEFL (Test of English as Foreign Languages). She also attended English language classes in local churches. Second, her husband has supported a lot too. Because she married an American citizen, she communicates with her husband in English at home. Her husband has explained the meaning of words that she did not know. He also used a bilingual dictionary to help her understand when he explained meanings of words. When I asked her how her English would have been different if she had married a man from her home country and spoke the Slavic language only at home, she answered that if she does not use English, it is forgotten.

The visa process was challenging. She came to the United States with the tourist visa. She and her husband had to go back to Annabel's home country to get married so that they could

obtain the fiancé visa. Several years after they came back to the United States, she obtained the permanent residency. She described the visa process as „tough“ and „complicated“.

On top of dealing with such a tough visa process, Annabel had to get a job. She started babysitting for her friends. Then she started with a substitute teacher position in a local school. Why did she choose the teaching field again in the United States? She could have changed her career so that she could do something totally different from what she studied in her home country. Is it the influence from her husband who has been studying Early Childhood Education and is a teacher in the public elementary school? I need to ask her about this next time we meet. She worked as a substitute teacher for two months and then became a para-professional in a pre-K classroom in the local elementary school. I did neither ask her what her substitute teacher experience was like nor what her four years of para-professional work was like. I need to ask her about the challenges she had and some positive experiences she had as a sub or para-pro next time we meet.

While she was working as a para-professional, she got admitted to the TELL program (Teachers of English Language Learners).

The Teachers for English Language Learners (TELL) Program is a scholarship program designed to increase the number of highly qualified bilingual teachers in Georgia's public schools. TELL began in April 2003 as a five-year Transition To Teaching Grant from the Office of Innovation and Improvement of the U.S. Department of Education. The goal was to help 49 talented bilinguals to become certified teachers. Currently, 52 non-certified bilingual teachers and paraprofessionals have been awarded scholarships and other support services to earn professional certification. In return, they commit to teaching three years in a high-need school in Georgia. Currently, TELL is not accepting more applications [for the lack of funding] (Teachers of English Language Learners, http://www.coe.uga.edu/tell/program_description.html)

Annabel had to take the TOEFL and passed it. She had to submit all her course work from the university in her home country to the U.S. educational credential evaluation services

agency. Fortunately her Spanish degree, which is a master's degree, was recognized by the agency. After that she took three ESOL endorsement courses and one Exceptional Children course at Piedmont College. Her school tuition for Piedmont College was paid for by the TELL program at the University of Georgia. She took the PRAXIS I, II test and became a certified ESOL teacher.

While she was working as a para-professional, she volunteered to interpret for Spanish speaking parents at school during the teacher-parent conference. She also worked for the After School Program and taught Spanish speaking students literacy skills. Her work with Spanish speaking parents and in the ASP program was recognized by the director of ESOL and Gifted Departments. The director was looking for an ESOL teacher who could work at two different schools that had multi-grade levels in each segment. She called Annabel for an interview and hired her the next day. That's how Annabel became an ESOL teacher.

Annabel had a difficult time when she first came here. She did not know if her degree from her home country would be recognized in the United States. She did not know what she would do for a living in the United States. She has done a wonderful job. She moved from baby sitter to a certified ESOL teacher. I believe that one of the reasons that her Spanish degree from her home country was recognized is because of the rigorous and high educational background that she had in Europe. According to Annabel, in order to be a school teacher in her home country, all teachers are required to have master's degree and study for five years to get a teaching certificate. Annabel said that the parents in her home country respect the teachers because of the teachers' high educational background. Annabel is very proud of her educational background from her home country.

Her rigorous and competitive education in Europe seemed to help her with her classroom management skills. The children in her home country show great respect for their teachers and the teachers are very strict with their students. Although the classroom size is over 30 and there is no para-professional in the schools, Annabel said that there was hardly any behavior issue. She expects her students in the U.S. public school to show respect for their teacher. She is strict with her students and does not praise them if they don't deserve it. She perceives that a lot of teachers in the U.S. public schools struggle with behavior management because they constantly give praise to students even when they don't deserve it. She believes that if the teacher constantly praises students when they don't deserve it, they will expect to be praised all the time when they become adults and will be disappointed if they don't get praised. I understand that she does not praise her students when don't deserve it. Then when does she praise her students? When a student is struggling during a learning process, I believe that the student may need encouragement which may motivate them to do a better job and not to quit. Does she encourage her students when her students are struggling? What does she think about giving praise and encouragement? How is praise and encouragement different to her? When did she get praised at her school in Europe? When did she get encouragement? How does that early childhood experiences in her home country influence her disbelief in praising students?

She also does not give many options to her students because she believes that it may create chaos. In Europe, Annabel was not given many options. Usually the government controlled everything. So there were not many opportunities for her to make choices. Things were assigned to her and given to her without giving her options from which to choose. I see the influence of this lack of choices in her mother country on her teaching style in the U.S. school. She does not give her children many choices because it is chaotic. I wonder if my other

immigrant teacher participants have the similar experiences and beliefs. I need to ask Niang and Mares about this.

Besides the linguistic challenge she had in the United States, she also had difficulty because she did not have knowledge of the US school system and the cultural beliefs and practices in the U.S. public schools. It is because Annabel did not receive any K-12 education in the United States. And this lack of formal education experience in the U.S. public schools gave her a hard time when she started teaching in the U.S. public school. One of the challenges she faced was the curriculum. Unlike the schools in her home country where there was a national curriculum guide which told teachers what standards to teach and when, the U.S. public schools' curriculum guides vary dependent upon states, counties, schools, and even teachers. Annabel expected to receive from her school the curriculum guide for her ESOL students which tells her what to teach and when. But there was none. Instead she was given QCC (Quality Core Curriculum) and felt lost. She needed specific guidelines. And the multi-grade levels placed in one segment were very challenging too. She did not know how to differentiate and individualize her lesson for her students from multi-grade levels. How did she meet her challenge? I will ask her about it in our second interview.

She also expressed her difficulty because she has no biological families in the United States. Although she tries to meet the challenge by having a good relationship with her husband's families, she said that they are still „in-laws“ and not the same as her family in Europe. I need to ask her about her European family next time when we meet. What was her relationship with her mother, father and other siblings? What kind of family background does she have? How did her European family support her when she was in Europe? How did they influence her? When the moments that she wishes her European family are here in the United States?

Annabel said that it took about 4 to 5 years for her to get used to U.S. culture. What and who helped her to assimilate into the U.S. mainstream culture and language? She mentioned about her husband's support in an effort to improve her English. How did her husband help her to learn and to assimilate into the U.S. culture? Who else or what else helped her to assimilate into the U.S. culture? What about church, friends, neighbors, etc?

She mentioned that she has a European mentality that is shaped by "American mentality". Because she grew up in Europe while her husband grew up in the United States, I assume that she and her husband may have some conflict or disagreement from time to time. What are those? And how do they negotiate their beliefs and how do they come to an agreement?

Bridling Journal Entry

The first interview with Mares

April 7, 2010

Family Background in Columbia

1) Family members

Mares was born in Columbia. Her family members are mother, father, and three sisters. She is the oldest.

Her mother was a house wife. Her father was an engineer who had his own company, so he could provide a financially comfortable life for his family. Mares was grateful that she could have things that other children could not have when she was a child in Columbia. For example, her family could have a vacation almost every summer in the United States and enjoy the expensive bilingual education in a private school where only privileged parents could afford to send their children.

2) Being Catholic

Her parents raised her in a Catholic environment.

3) English language Education

English language education was very important for Mares's family: "For my parents, it was always so important for us to know another language and they choose English."

4) Co-ed bilingual school

While most Columbian girls go to the girls' school, Mares's mother did not want to send Mares to the girls' school and wanted her to go to the co-ed school so that she could learn how to interactive with everybody regardless of gender. But she taught Mares to be always cautious

around boys: “When you go to the bathroom, you have to go by yourself. I don’t want you to have any boy around you in the bathroom.”

5) Caring and close family

All members of Mares’s family were very close to each other and valued sharing, caring, and being together. Mares, especially, was exceptionally closed to her parents. While all her sisters went to study abroad right before they started their study in college, Mares refused to go abroad because she did not want to leave her parents.

Whenever Mares’s family went on vacation, her mother invited her nieces and nephews as well as her daughter’s friends and did a cook out for them. Mares remembers that her house was always full of friends and families thanks to her mother’s hospitality.

6) Influence of her mother

Mares’s mother was very strict with all her children while Mares’s father was very soft and did everything to spoil his children.

- Controlling a circle of friends

Her mother controlled what kind of friend Mares could meet. She preferred Mares to bring friends home rather than going out with them so that she could supervise and monitor them in her house.

- Norms and Rules

She set the norms for her children which were strictly observed. For example, as soon as Mares came home from school, her mother made sure that she finished her home work first. She is grateful for what her mother did for her: “She was so on top of what was good for us and ...that’s the way she protected us from, you know, in any situation.” When Mares did not do a good job on her test, her mother gave her the same test until she passed it.

- Pushing Mares to achieve beyond her boundaries

Mares is thankful for her parents who pushed her and challenged her to achieve beyond her boundaries. She attributes her success to her mother:

“I remember sometimes my uncle or aunt say(s), „Don’t bother her so much. She has dyslexia“. (Mom said), „And? That’s not an excuse. I’m not sorry. I don’t feel sorry for her. She is going to move on...and she will!“ So I think that I am who I am because of the family that I have, because of the way I was raised, (and) because my parents never look at me with sadness or ... never thought about whatever difficulty we had was going to stop us being successful, you know. Every time we did something, they wanted a little bit more. Even though it was okay, (she would say), „Well, you have three now (but) next time you are going to have four“. It was always a challenge for us. She was always challenging us to be better (and) to do better thing(s)”.

7) Father’s support for her mother’s decisions

Her father always supported his wife’s decision no matter how hard Mares pleaded with him to let her get away from her mother’s rules.

Educational Background in Columbia

1) Private Bilingual School

She went to a private bilingual school from Kindergarten to Grade 3. The private bilingual school she attended in Columbia does not accept dyslexic students. When Mares was diagnosed as dyslexic, she had to move to a monolingual school because the school believed that she could not learn English due to her dyslexia. She received support from tutors and a psychologist for her dyslexia.

2) Her father's support for Mares to be a school teacher

Schools teachers in Columbia are poor. So when Mares decided to be a teacher, her family worried about her decision. However, her father supported her: "Whatever she chooses, it is going to be okay with me. Uh, when you choose what you are going to be, it has to be something that you will love because when you start your life, when you start working, you have to love what you do because if you don't love what you do, you will be the most miserable person in life no matter how much you have. Money does not bring you happiness. Money is important to be happy but more important than money is what you love. If you don't love what you do, you are going to be miserable no matter how much money they pay you." So Mares went to a college to study Early Childhood Education.

3) Mother's push for education

- Push for English

When the private bilingual school told her that she could not learn a second language because of her dyslexia, Mares's mother sent her to a place where she could learn English on Saturdays. She also sent her daughter to the United States almost every summer so that she could get her English language education. Knowing her daughter was shy and not confident in her English speaking skills, Mares's mother pushed her daughter to speak as much and often as she could: "She will make the way for us to use (English)...no matter what. We will go to church and she will make us to talk to the priest (in English) or talk to the person sitting next to us just use our (English) words...if...my father will ...rent a car so we can go different places and he got lost, we were the ones who had to go to the gas station, and ask, „sir, we are going to this place, we got lost, where are we?“...all those kind of things". In her reflection about her mother, her gratitude for her mother's push for her English language education is well expressed: "I'm

very happy to have the family that I happen to be raised in...because my mom was, even though everybody says that I wasn't able to learn English, here I am speaking to you in English being an English teacher for my students (thanks to my mother)".

- Her mother's Influence on Mares's Teaching

She challenges her students as her mother challenged her when she younger. She recognizes her mother's influence on her teaching: "I challenge them as my mom challenge(s) me. I have a collab(oration) classroom right now. And my expectations for every single one of my students are the highest expectations. I told my parents in my open house and I said, "I have five special kids in my classroom. I have African-American, I have Hispanic and I have American kids. And I want you to know that I don't feel sorry for any of them. I have expectations for every one of them. I want them all to go to that level of expectation. And they are going to go there. And if they need, some of them are going to need a little bit more help, and that's where I am going to be to help them move on. But I will not feel sorry for them. And I would not do anything for them. They will have to do it by themselves"...You have to go see my class (because) you would not realize which is the special ed(ucation) kid that I have or which is not special kids that I have because they all know how to walk in a line, they all know what to do and how to do it. So...I think it's because the way that I was raised, you know".

- Push for Bachelor's Degree

Being dyslexic, Mares did not enjoy being in school. When she was a junior in her college, she got married and decided to quit her study without graduating from the college. Mares's mother did everything she could to change her mind: she did neither see her daughter nor talk to her no matter how many times Mares tried to call her. Eventually Mares resumed her study and graduated from the college with bachelor's degree. She is grateful for her mother's push for her

education because otherwise she would not have been able to be a school teacher, neither in Columbia nor in the United States. And all of her sisters graduated from college and have a professional occupation thanks to their mother's push for their education.

Background Information of Bilingual and Monolingual Schools in Columbia

Columbia used to bring teachers from the United States and provided them with many benefits for teaching English in a bilingual school such as housing, salary, airplane tickets, etc. As the economy started declining, Columbian schools started hiring Columbian teachers who were bilingual. Mares would not have been able to teach English in bilinguals if she were not fluent in English. A lot of Columbian teachers learn English to get a job at the bilingual schools or to teach English in a monolingual school. Teachers in Columbia do not get paid much in general. However, as Columbians schools greatly value English language skills, most schools pay higher salary for those teachers who have high English language proficiency. This phenomenon is common in other areas of professions in Columbia: "My sister ... studied a business administration...When she graduated from college, she went to apply to ...the company that she wanted to work ...She went with her best friend and both of them had been very good students...They...went to college together. My sister knew English but her friend did not... Both of them went to the same company. My sister had a better pay than her friend even though they were hired to do the same job just because my sister knew English and she did not".

Usually people with high socio-economic status can send their children to the private bilingual schools because of the expensive school tuition, which enables them to recruit higher quality teachers. Private monolingual schools are less expensive than private bilingual schools. However, they are still more expensive than public schools and provide better quality of

education than public schools do. So people with low socio-economic status send their children to the public schools.

As English language skill is highly valued in Columbian society, most monolingual schools have English teachers and emphasize English language education. Although there are only five bilingual schools in Columbia, many monolingual schools strive to provide the highest quality English language education to students these days.

Teaching Experiences

1) Paraprofessional / Art Teacher for Kindergarten (one year)

Mares started her teaching in a bilingual school as a paraprofessional and an Art Teacher in a Kindergarten classroom for a year. She thought that she was the worst Art Teacher because some of the Art projects she did with her students did not work well. Being a first year teacher, she thought that she was not prepared enough to feel comfortable in the classroom.

2) Total Physical Response Teacher for Pre-K to Grade 1 in a Bilingual School. (Three years)

The next year, she became a Total Physical Response teacher who teaches English to students from Pre-K to Grade 1 using total physical response in the same bilingual school. For example, her students did activities following Mares' direction in English. Because it was a bilingual school, students received instructions in both Spanish and English. She taught TPR for three years.

3) Kindergarten Classroom Teacher (4 years) in a bilingual school

She moved to another bilingual school where she taught Kindergarteners for four years. She taught all subject areas including Arts, Physical Education, and Music.

4) Pre-K Classroom Teacher (1 Year)

In the end of the school year, she moved to a Kindergarten Team because her school was closing one of the Pre-K classrooms.

5) Kindergarten Classroom Teacher (1 Year-Looping)

Being suggested by her school principal, Mares looped with her pre-K students to Kindergarten. Because her first looping was very successful, her principal suggested her to loop with the same class once more. So she looped with her Kindergarten students to Transition class the next year.

6) Transition Classroom Teacher (1 Year-Looping)

Mares really enjoyed looping with her students because she could see the growth of her students for three years and knew all her students and parents. The community of family she created through working with the same students and parents for three years made her teaching unforgettable.

7) English for Speakers of Other Languages Teacher

She taught English as an English for Speakers of Other Languages teacher from Pre-K through Grade 3 in a private monolingual school, which was the last job before she came to the United States. The school was for girls only and a Catholic school with an impeccable reputation for its well-disciplined students. Students wore school uniforms that were perfectly ironed, no make-up, nail polish or jewelry were allowed for students. In this school, Mares was the only bilingual teacher who had teaching experiences in bilingual schools. She reminisced about her teaching experience in this school with very positive memories because of her students who were very respectful to adults in the building: “Let me tell you how many kids were in that classroom. I had...thirty five students in my classroom with no teacher aid...not a teacher assistant or

anything like that. But I didn't have any problem because they were always ...well behaved...They would never get out of steps or anything, you know. It was incredible".

Although Mares was certified to teach from Pre-K through Grade 11, she chose to stay with primary grades for her love of teaching younger students.

Mares is 42 years old and lived in Columbia for 34 years.

Educational System in Columbia

Elementary Education: Pre-K, Kindergarten, Transition, Grade 1-5.

High School: Grade 6 - 11.

Columbian schools have a transition class that comes between Kindergarten and Grade 1. There is not a middle school but high school covers both middle and high school education. So Columbian students go to the elementary school and then move to the high school before their entrance to the university.

Coming to the United States/ Becoming an Immigrant Teacher in the U.S. School

As the economy started declining, Columbia was not a safe place to live for Mares's family any more due to kidnapping, bombing, and high unemployment rate (Push factors). So Mares's three sisters and her brother came to the United States in search for a safe place to live and a professional job to make a living (Pull factors). Her three sisters came to the United States with a tourist visa, then changed it to a student visa, and then to a work visa.

Due to her husband's declining business, they were on the verge of being broke. So he came to the United States alone to find a sponsor for his work visa. Mares was separated from her husband for six months and could not talk to him without crying every time they were on the phone. Although she did not want to leave her parents alone in Columbia, she followed her husband and came to the United States in June, 2001.

It was extremely difficult for Mares to be in the United States. While her husband was working, she stayed at home where there was nothing to do. She felt lonely, missed her parents in Columbia, and was terribly homesick: “So I would clean the house, I would do lunch for everybody...and after that, what do I do? Sitting until they come (home) from work. And it was awful...I would feel so lonely. (I had) nobody to talk to. I have no friends in here. Calling to Columbia would be so expensive. I would call my mom but I cannot call her every day. So I started crying here too. My husband said, „Okay, you cried six months for me to be here (when) you were in Columbia. Now you are here and you are crying because you want to go back. What are we going to do?“ And I said, „You don’t understand, you know, it’s so hard to come to this country. And I don’t have anybody to talk to!“

However, her husband was determined not to go back to Colombia because there was no hope for a better living there. In an effort to help her husband and to overcome her homesick, she looked for something to do and started working as a full-time baby sitter for a wealthy American family. Meanwhile, she was looking for a chance to change her tourist visa to a student visa as her sisters did. The American Language Program (ALP) at the local university helped her change her visa status to a student visa. Although she did not need to take an English language class due to her fluent English, she enrolled in the ALP because it was the only chance for her to change her visa status.

Since she came to the United States, she set her mind to become a school teacher which had been her profession for 15 years in Colombia. She was determined to do everything she could no matter how long it took in order to turn her dream to reality. After obtaining her student visa status, she looked for a sponsor who could change her student visa to a work visa. While working on the ALP at the local university, she shared her hope to be a teacher with a professor

who suggested that she meet with the superintendent at Anderson County School District. She also applied for a Family Engagement Specialist position in Lily Elementary. To her disappointment, she did not receive any job offer because the Anderson County School District did not sponsor a work visa for an immigrant. However, as told in an old proverb, where there is a will, there is a way. An opportunity knocked on the door for Mares. During the interview for a Family Engagement Specialist position in Lily Elementary School, one of the interviewers was from Twinkle Star academy and told her that her academy had sponsored an immigrant teacher from India before. So Mares got an interview opportunity with Twinkle Star Academy and passed it with flying colors. Thanks to Twinkle Star Academy who sponsored Mares for her work visa and her immigration law attorney who did the paper work for her, she finally got a teaching position in an American school. She was given a three-year work visa. She started with the baby room during the first year, then moved to a toddlers' classroom during the second year, and then taught in a Pre-K classroom on the third year which lasted for four years. While she was teaching in a Pre-K classroom, Twinkle Star academy promised her to sponsor her for a Permanent Resident Card. She worked for the academy for a total of six years and became a permanent resident in May, 2009.

Since she had an interview with Lily Elementary School in Anderson County School District six years ago, she has set her mind to be a teacher in Lily Elementary School. One day her hard work in Twinkle Star Academy paid off. Because of the partnership between Lily Elementary School and Twinkle Star Academy, the head of Lily Elementary School visited Twinkle Star Academy often and saw Mares and her teaching. She was not only impressed by Mares's teaching and work ethic but also offered her an interview at her school. For her credentialing process, she had to send her credentials from her bachelor's degree in Colombia to

the World Education Services which was a credential evaluation agency. Although all her credentials from Colombia were recognized, her fifteen years of teaching experiences were not. She had to restart from the beginning. However, her positive spirit and determination are expressed in her reminiscence: “when I got on that plane, I said, „I want to do anything to make me get to where I needed to go. I wanted to be a teacher. But if I have to do anything, (any) kinds of job, I will do them until I can do that. And I did. I was a baby sitter. I also cleaned houses for the family that I worked with. I also did nails. And I got my job in Twinkle Star Academy. (Although they didn’t recognize my 15 years of teaching experience,)... in life, not every single thing is fair. I had something that I was willing to have, which was working in Anderson County that was ...my biggest goal. And I did it. So it’s okay, you know. Nobody is going to take away my knowledge. Nobody is going to take away my experience. Nobody is going to take away what I know, you know. No matter they put it or not put it in there, I have it. And I feel proud of it. And that’s enough for me.”

All Mares needs to do to be certified in the state is to take the state teaching certificate exam. She is currently working on a provisional certificate and plans to take the exam in the near future.

As shown in her reflection, she has been working in Lily Elementary School in Anderson County for two years as a Pre-K classroom teacher.

Mares’s Strengths

1) Resisting the dominant discourses

She does not believe in discrimination and refuses to internalize the dominant discourses that she cannot be a teacher because she is from Colombia. She has confidence that she is the best teacher in her school district: “I never felt (discrimination), you know. Sometimes I met people here that say, „Oh, the American(s) discriminate me because I am Hispanic”. And I look at them and I say,

„Are you serious? I have never felt that from anybody“. I’ve never felt that because I’m from Colombia. (No one can tell me that) I’m not going to be a teacher. I think I’m the best teacher Anderson County has... And when I am in my classroom, I am the best teacher for those students”.

2) Her Passion for Teaching

Mares is very passionate about her teaching profession. Her love of children and teaching is enthusiastically expressed in her reflection: “I adore my students. I adore being a teacher. That’s the only thing I know how to do. That’s the only thing I have done (in) my whole life. And I am passionate with it. I think that if I had to choose another career, I would be the most miserable person in life. I think what I choose was what I had to be...I don’t see me in any other office, company or anything. I love what I did... I just think that that’s what I was meant to be, a teacher”.

3) Teaching others about her country

Mares has tried hard to introduce the positive side of Colombian culture and took a role as an ambassador of Colombian society: “Learning about the new culture (is) learning to respect this culture (and) to allow people to learn about my country, (especially) the good things about my country, not only the bad things, you know, because, I think, every single country has good things and bad things. But unfortunately the bad things come...before the good things. So (I’m) trying to show my friends and people who are around me what a wonderful country (Colombia) is (by) being that good teacher to show that...we have good people, we have honest people, we have people that are...willing to work and do good things for others...”

4) Teaching Parents and Students to be Proud of their Cultural Heritage

Mares noticed from Hispanic parents that they easily lost Spanish once they started learning English. Mares insisted that Hispanic parents and children never lose their first language because more opportunities will open up for them if they are bilingual.

She also taught her immigrant students that they should never be embarrassed for their diverse cultural heritage.

Mares's Future Plan

Mares has applied for a new position which is an Education Specialist for the Head Start program, which is helping other Pre-K classroom teachers as their literacy coach. Utilizing her 23 years of teaching experiences in both Colombia and the United States, she hopes to help other teachers to enjoy and improve their teaching. She did not get the coach position she wanted this year. However, I hope she never gives up and turns her dream to reality one day as she always has done so.

Bridling Journal Entry

The first interview with Niang

April 13, 2010

How Niang came to the United States

Her original plan was to go to a teachers college after graduating from high school. In order to be a teacher in Singapore, Niang was required to work in a Singaporean school for three years after two years of training in a teachers college. In other words, Niang was required to stay in Singapore for five years; two years of training in a teachers college and three years of teaching in a Singaporean school.

Niang met her American husband in Singapore and did not want him to wait for her for five years. So she decided to follow her husband and study Early Childhood Education in the United States. She was admitted to the Georgia State University in Georgia and came to the United States in 1987. She came to the United States right after she finished her high school. And she had a long distance relationship for two years and a half, which means that she met him when she was in high school. And she married her husband when she was a freshman in college. She really married young. She is only 10 years older than me but has been married for 22 years. I find this very interesting. Why did she marry so young? Is it common in Singapore? I think she was such an adventurous person who took a risk to start her life in a foreign country at such a young age. But when I reflect upon how I came to the United States, I understand her because I was just like her, too. It was rather reckless, not knowing what I was getting myself into. I could across the ocean and fly to the opposite side of the earth to have a new life in a foreign country because I did not know how hard it could be. If I knew what I know now, I might not have been able to come to the United States. Will she feel the same way? If she knew what kind of

challenges she was going to have, would she still have made the same decision? If she can live her life again, would she do it again?

How Niang met her husband

Her husband's father worked in Singapore for five years. He was working for IBM and also teaching in one of the universities in Singapore. Niang met him at the local Catholic Church. One day he invited his son to stay with him for three weeks in Singapore. Niang met him when he came to the church with his father. They fell in love with each other. On the third week of his visit, he and Niang decided to have a relationship. So they had two and a half years of long distance relationship before they got married. She was surprised that her father let her go to the United States.

Visa Process

She came to the United States with student visa. After a year, she changed it to a fiancé visa. After her marriage, her visa status changed to permanent visa. Although she could get the U.S. citizenship two years after her marriage, she waited for 18 years because her father didn't want her give up her Singaporean citizenship. The Singaporean government does not allow dual citizenship. Niang was sad when she had to give up her Singaporean citizenship. Overall, it was easier for her go get a visa because she married an American man. Annabel and Niang both married the European Americans. Interestingly, however, their view of the visa process is very different. For Annabel, it was a long, painful, and expensive process. On the contrary, Niang thought it was pretty easy for her to get a visa. I wonder what made these two people feel differently about the visa process. Niang is used to her life in America. If she goes back to Singapore, the adjustment would be difficult for her.

Niang's Educational Background

The Singapore education system is similar to that of the United States. Singaporean students go through K1 (pre-K) and K2 (Kindergarten), Grade 1-6 (primary school), Grade 7-10 (secondary school), and Grade 11-12 (junior college). Although K1 and K2 are not required, primary school is required. The Singaporean education system still follows the British Cambridge system. Niang omitted K1 and K2 and started from Grade 1.

Niang received her bachelor's degree, master's degree, and specialist degree in Early Childhood Education in the United States. Currently she is a doctoral student at the nearby university. I wonder why Niang did not receive K1 and K2 education. She told me that K1 and K2 are not required education. It probably means that her father had to pay for it. She said that her father had 13 children and Niang was the youngest. Is that why she did not have K1 and K2 education?

Her father's influence

He pushed Niang with education because he saw that education would get her far. When Niang got 99 points on her exam, her father always asked her why she lost that 1 point instead of being satisfied with the grade. So when Niang got 97 points on her exam in her undergraduate school, she asked her professor why she lost the three points. She also does that to her children too. She wants to dedicate her Ph.D. to her father because of his influence on her drive to pursue an advanced degree. She wants to make her parents proud of her because no one in her family has a Ph.D.

Because she was brought up in a strict education environment in Singapore, she is strict with her students and has high expectations for her children. Sometimes her parents complain about that.

Being an Asian, she does not want to confront people. She wants to respect people. Even when she wants to say something, she doesn't say anything because she does not want to offend any one.

Niang's qualities

The Singapore government recognizes four official languages: English, Malay, Chinese (Mandarin), and Tamil. However, English is the medium of instruction in Singapore. The reason is because historically Singapore became a British colony in August 2, 1824 and declared independence from Britain in August 1963. So students in Singapore are required to learn English and one of the three other official languages as a mother tongue. Niang speaks both English and Malay. She spoke Malay at home until she started going to school at seven. I wonder why Niang spoke Malay, not Chinese. She described herself as Chinese. But why was her mother tongue Malay? Was there any one in her family who came from Malaysia? When some Singaporean students don't pass their mother tongue, they can't go to the university. As an alternative solution, some of those students go overseas to get a bachelor's degree. When I was in undergraduate school in Seoul, Korea, I went on a study tour to Singapore and was amazed how educationally competitive a country Singapore was. One of the professors in the National University of Singapore told me that those students who couldn't enter the NUS because of their failure to pass the mother tongue go to the Cambridge University in Great Britain.

She proves herself to be professional and competent to her parents. She works hard to invite parents to her classroom as a volunteer because parents get to see her teaching. Currently three or four parents come to her classroom every week. Half of her parents have already come in to help. What parents see in her classroom is that she may have an accent but she is a good teacher because their children are learning a lot. I have read in another dissertation study that

teaching is not about the accent but about the teacher's professionalism; how well she teaches her students. Niang's example of how she gained her parents' trust about her teaching in spite of their concern about her accent supports other scholars' findings. When her students point out her accent, she doesn't take offense but she laughs at herself. It shows how comfortable she is with herself.

She has learned that once her parents see that she is a good teacher, they really trust her and count on her. Open communication with her parents through e-mails and phone calls also helped her gain parents' trust. When she receives an e-mail from her parents, no matter what, she always responds to them within 24 hours. She is the same way with me. When I send her an e-mail, she always replies back to me within 24 hours. She is really good at it. I guess it shows how accountable and reliable she is. She really builds her own reputation by keeping her word.

She has an intrinsic motivation that drives her to pursue her next goals. Niang said that during her own graduation ceremony, she was motivated to pursue a doctoral degree when she looked at the people who were receiving their Ph.D. She said that that she could always improve herself: "So what else can I do?" She and I have something in common in terms of motivation. I also find myself motivated when I go to a graduation seeing people getting the degrees higher than mine. During my master's degree graduation, I told myself, „Just you wait, I will be walking down the aisle to receive my Ph.D. in four years. I am going to do it". I constantly think about how I can improve myself. I wonder why Niang and I have the same kind of drive and motivation. Is it because we are Asian growing up in an educationally very competitive area? Or is it because we both had parent(s) who pushed us to go further in education?

Her current principal encouraged Niang to think about being a school administrator because she knows what good teaching is and what good teachers do and how to weed them out.

I hope she becomes a school principal or a professor in a college of education because she is not only professional but also caring and attentive. Being a mother of four children, having experienced two different cultures, getting through many challenges but never becoming bitter because of them, and living her life in a good faith of God, she has such a wonderful quality that will help a lot of teachers, students, and parents.

She teaches her students not to get jealous of their friends for their good job to be happy for them. Niang said that being jealous of others' success is like having a green monster that is going to eat them up. She teaches her students to value what they have and be grateful for it because there are many people who have much less than they do. **What is the green monster? Is it an imaginary character in Singaporean culture?**

She redoes her lesson plans every year. Although her husband asks her to only change the date, she refuses to use the same lesson plan because the children are different from last year and God knows about it that she has to answer to in the end. She takes her calling to be a teacher very seriously. Even after she finishes her work at school, she is still a teacher as a priest in a church is always a priest outside the church. She believes that she should be a role model and won't go out and do bad things. **I really believe her when she says this. She is a living role model wherever she is and whomever she is with. I have known Niang for almost five years now. In the beginning, I did not know how spiritual she was. But she really finds her strengths in her prayer and by applying words of God to herself. I am Catholic just like Niang but I don't usually talk about my spiritual connection to God like Niang does. I hardly speak about my spirituality to other people. But Niang seems to be very comfortable with talking about God and her faith. However, I must admit that I learned from her and came to be more self-conscious about my conduct after she said that God knows what she does and she has to answer to Him in the end.**

Now I keep thinking, „He is watching me and I have to answer to him in the end. Am I doing the right thing?“

She believes that teachers can make or break a child. She is careful about what she says to her students.

She has always loved being with children. Since she was seven, she was a babysitter for her nephews and she loved being with them. She is very grateful for her four children. She has one son who is almost 20 years old now and a sophomore in college and three daughters who are 16, 14, and 12 years old.

She loves teaching and doesn't want to quit teaching. Having four children, she cannot afford to stay at home. Doing what she loves to do makes her a better person. She doesn't like to be a house wife staying at home. For Niang, teaching is not a job. It's her calling. Teaching students is like breathing to her. If it is taken away from her, she won't be able to breathe. She is born to be a teacher. She is truly living her dream because she always wanted to be a teacher since she was seven.

Niang has been successful in juggling work and her study in a graduate school. Her children are so used to it. But she sees that her pursuit of advanced degrees and her success at school definitely support her family. But when she finished her Ph.D., she will take her family on a cruise trip as a gift for their support.

Niang's teaching experience in the United States

She has a total of 18 years of teaching experience: 16 years in Kindergarten and 2 years in first grade. She is a national board certified teacher. She had two sets of student teaching: practicum and student teaching. Niang was pregnant during her practicum. Fortunately her mentor teacher was very supportive and understanding of her condition. She had a very positive

experience because of her support. However, her student teaching experience after the practicum was a nightmare because of the personal conflict that she had with her mentor teacher. Her mentor teacher was an old divorced woman. She saw Niang as a young lady whose life is starting and blossoming. She was jealous of Niang. Her mentor teacher thought that Niang should not be in the teacher education program because she has too much on her plate. Niang thought it was unfair when she had been a straight A+ student and she had never been late or absent during her student teaching. And she always stayed until six o'clock. In spite of her hard work, her mentor teacher didn't guide her. She simply gave her things to do. When she brought her lesson plans, the teacher asked her to correct almost everything telling her, „You can't do this“, and „I guess you are not ready for this“. She thought it unfair to hear that she was not ready after all the hard work she had done. Because of the painful experience she had during her student teaching, she still does not like to do lesson plans. After her student teaching, Niang told her professor about her experience privately. Her professor wished that she could have told her earlier. But Niang could not let her know because the mentor teacher was supervising her and she did not want to fail the student teaching because of insubordination. She wanted to graduate without any unnecessary delay. I think of this unfortunate incident as a teacher educator. If I were her professor, what could I do for her? If I knew that her mentor teacher was being such a negative influence to her student teaching experience, what could I have done for her? Changing a mentor teacher in the middle of her student teaching? Or talking to her mentor teacher about how Niang was offended and hurt by her treatment? If I talked to her about it, would she have changed her attitude toward Niang? Or should I have reported the incident to her principal and have the principal talk to her to change her behavior toward Niang? What is the best way to help a student teacher in this situation? Can a professor really change such a negative situation to a positive

one? After her graduation, she had to go to Singapore. When the airplane took off, she was so happy to leave America. It shows how bad her student teaching experience was. Three years later, Niang met her mentor teacher by chance and let her know that she had her master's degree. Instead of congratulating her, she rolled her eyes at Niang. When Niang saw her the second time after she had her third child, the teacher told her that she was unbelievable with a very sarcastic tone of voice. Niang couldn't understand what her problem was. But she did not let the teacher break her spirit or give up her dream. Her perseverance is shown in her reflection:

“If I saw her today, I would tell her, „Look, you tried to beat me down. But look at what I have accomplished. I am not what you think, what you wanted to make me.” This reminds me of Yosso's community cultural wealth that immigrant teachers bring with them as a teacher. In spite of a low expectation from people in a dominant culture, she not only survives but also thrives and pursues her dream. Her determination that she can overcome this obstacle and will do what she wants to do helped her meet the challenge she had.

She got her first teaching position in a predominantly African American school in Aaron County. She was the only Asian teacher in her school. And it has been always that way. And she's used to it now. Her students want to touch her hair and think that she speaks Spanish because that's the only foreign language they know. She worked in Aaron County for five years. Then she moved to Baron County and taught for three years.

Niang, her husband, and her children lived in Singapore for 4 years. Niang's husband promised her to move back to Singapore when they got married. To keep his promise, he got a job in Singapore and they lived in Singapore for four years. She worked in an international school there. The international school she worked in Singapore had a program that was world-wide recognized and had 40 different nationalities. The school had an international festival and

taught students about different countries. She had students from 11 different countries in her school. Her children attended both international and local schools. In a local school, her children had to take Chinese as their second language. They regret that they didn't pursue it after they came back. Niang's teaching experience in the U.S. schools was considered as credit to her parents and they really opened up to her. She taught Kindergarteners and then looped with her students the next year. Except one parent who wanted a White teacher, rest of the parents wanted her again.

After she came back to the United States, she worked in Camry County for three years. Camry County recognized her teaching experiences in Singapore. This is surprising because most counties do not count the foreign teaching experiences toward the teacher's TRS. I think it's because she worked in an international school. The Camry County school district did not have a good system. Her principal wondered why she wanted to work in her school with her qualifications. Niang decided to leave Camry County because it was not good for her children.

After that she moved to Newman County and has been teaching there for four years now.

Her future plan

She is satisfied being a classroom teacher at school right now. In the future, she wants to train new teachers as a teacher educator in college. She likes to have a student teacher in her classroom because that way she gets to train a new teacher and continue to be a classroom teacher which she loves. Her principal and her husband encouraged her to think about being a school principal one day. Whether she chooses to be a school principal or a professor training new teachers, I have no doubt that she will make a fine leader with her 18 years of teaching experiences in both Singapore and the United States.

Challenges

1) Language:

1.1) She speaks too fast. She explains that culturally Singaporeans tend to speak fast. **It took me a time to transcribe Niang's interview because she spoke too fast.** Because she speaks too fast, she drops her ending sound and sometimes does not enunciate her words distinctly. Her students correct her English when she mispronounces a word. She is not offended by that. Rather she thinks that it is good to learn from her children. **She is obviously very comfortable and confident with herself because she is not offended by her children when they pick on her Singaporean accent.**

1.2) Some of the English words and phrases she used in Singapore were not understood in the U.S.

1.3) She was offended when she was asked to take the Test Of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) because although she got an A on the Singapore-Cambridge General Certificate of Education (Ordinary Level) Examination, which is harder than TOEFL, her GCE O-Level test scores were not recognized by the American university. **I can infer from what Niang said that the universities in the United States do not recognize that English is one of the four official languages in Singapore. It is funny that the American university tells Niang who has learned English since she was seven as her official language that she needs to take an English language test designed for people who learn English as a foreign language. Obviously the dominant discourse in the U.S. schools think that they have the right and power to tell immigrants like Niang if their English is good enough to study in the U.S. universities.**

1.4) One principal concerned about what parents would say about Niang's accent and didn't hire her in spite of her qualities.

2) Adjustment

2.1) When Niang first came to the United States, she was emotionally very dependent on her husband. She didn't have any friends in the beginning because it takes time to build up relationships and friendships.

2.1. Solution: However, as she started going to the nearby university, she started forming her own circle of friends. Having her own family helps her be happy too.

2.2) Missing important family events in home country: The first year was the hardest time for her because two of her sisters got married in Singapore and she could not attend the weddings. She goes back to see her family every two or three years. And when her brother and father passed away, she couldn't go back to be with her family in Singapore right away. She has accepted it as part of the sacrifice she has to make to live in the United States.

2.3) In Singapore, teachers give very specific directions about how to solve problems. On the contrary, in the United States, students are encouraged to find the solution more independently. She still performs better when she is given a more specific direction to solve problems.

3) Being different, Prejudice

3.1) Because Niang is not a typical white American teacher, every time she moves to a new school, she has to prove herself to other people at school. Some teachers doubt her teaching competency because she is neither White nor Black.

3.2) One principal asked Niang to show him her long hair during the interview. When she told her husband about it after the interview, he said that she shouldn't work for that kind of principal even if he offers the position. Niang thought that she should be judged for her professional qualities not her appearance.

3.3) Her mentor teacher during her student teaching discouraged her and told her that she was not ready for it.

3.4) Niang got a B on one of her specialist degree courses because her presentation was not like other American students". She thinks that Americans are performers when it comes to presentation. But she doesn't feel comfortable with presentation and she is not a performer. She thought it was unfair to receive a B just because her presentation style was different from other American students.

3.5) One parent who lost her job because Japanese took over her position thought that Niang was Japanese and showed her anger toward Niang. She was surprised that the parent thought she was Japanese just because she was Asian. She pointed out that some Americans think that Koreans, Japanese, Chinese, Singaporeans are all the same and lump them all together. When parents complain to her and tell her that it is not her race, she knows that it is because of her race.

4) Current budget crisis in the U.S. schools

Because of the current job situation, American teachers are trying to get a job. So they don't like that immigrants are out there to compete with them. Although there is a need for immigrant teachers because of the increasing number of immigrant student population in the U.S., it is harder for immigrant teachers to get a job. During her second year as a teacher, her paraprofessional was upset with her because Niang got the teaching position that she wanted.

5) Race

When she was hired as a teacher in Aaron County, the human resource office person told her that she is marked as White. Niang told her that she was not White. The lady said, „You are obviously not Black. So I'm going to mark you as White". It is because of the lawsuit the county school district had because of the dominant number of Black teachers. So they needed to have a

certain number of White teachers. That's why Niang was asked to be marked as White. She didn't say anything because she wanted the job.

When she was working for a principal who did not value her as a competent teacher, she was questioned for the things that she did for her students and did not feel supported. When a jealous teacher next door told on her to her principal that Niang took her students outside twice a day, he questioned Niang for it. But being a first year teacher, she did not know what to say or how to handle a situation like that. And the teacher next door was jealous of her and questioned her when she actually spent any time with her children while working on her master's degree.

Factors that helped her transition to a new country

- 1) Praying and going to the church helped her get through the hardships she had in the U.S.

Because the Catholic church mass keeps the same rituals no matter in what country it is performed and no matter in what language it is conducted in, Niang felt at home in the Catholic church. *I felt the same. Although the Catholic Church mass was performed in a different language, I still could understand what was going on during the mass and was happy to see something that reminded me of my life in Korea.*

- 2) Her husband who has been married to her for 22 years, helped her with her English to speak slowly so that people could understand her. But when she gets excited, she tends to speak fast. Her husband is open to her Singaporean culture: He loves to eat the Singaporean food she cooks, visits Singapore with her, and even lived there for four years with her. It was easier for her to adjust to the U.S. culture because he was American. Her husband has been supportive for her study while he himself has been working on his MBA. When Niang has classes on Tuesdays, her husband makes sure that he does not have a class that day so that

he can take care of the children and vice versa. They work out their schedule so that they can support each other.

- 3) Her parents in-law have been supportive because they lived in Singapore for two years and a half. They understood what she was going through and were appreciative of what she does here.
- 4) Rigorous training in Singapore: Having been rigorously trained in Singapore, studying in the United States was easier for her. She was considered as an average student in Singapore but in America, she is above average.
- 5) Her determination that she can overcome this obstacle and will do what she wants to do helped her meet the challenge she had.
- 6) When she felt discriminated, she did not keep quiet and voiced her opinion. She has learned to be assertive since she came to the United States. Her sister said that Niang has been Americanized because she speaks her mind too much.

Family Background

Her father's influence on her to be a competitive teacher. Her mother passed away when she was five. She was brought up by her father. She has thirteen brothers and sisters. She is the youngest. He worked two jobs to raise 13 children. Although they were poor, she never felt that she was poor. Over illnesses, she lost some of her siblings and has 8 brothers and sisters now. One sister lives in Australia and the rest of them live in Singapore. A few weeks before the interview, Niang lost one of her brothers. She lost her father two years ago. I remember how sad she was because she could not go back to Singapore right away to bury her father.

If she married a Singaporean man?

If she married a Singaporean man, it would have been more difficult to be accepted by the community at large because both of them would have to adjust to a new country. But then the Singaporean husband would have understood how challenging it was for her to live in a foreign country.

Her family in America

Niang has been married for 22 years now.

She has four children: one son who is almost 20 years old, a sophomore in college, and 3 daughters who are 16, 14, 12 years old. Her son was a gifted student. She admits that some gifted students can be disrespectful to their teachers when they get bored. Although some teachers knew how to work with a student like her son, some other teachers did not understand him and asked Niang to come to school to discuss her son. Niang believes that God gave her a son like that so that she can understand boys like her son that she teaches in her classroom. Her parents respect Niang for being a parent who raised four children because she can emphasize with her parents and understand what parents are going through when raising children.

Why she wouldn't go back to Singapore to live

Although she misses her family in Singapore, she does not want to go back to live in Singapore. In Singaporean culture, she and her husband are considered to be too old to get a job, in spite of their qualifications. She also does not like the over-crowd living environment in Singapore. She believes that her life is much better in the United States. Although one of her sisters couldn't understand how Niang could enjoy this not so eventful environment, Niang is used to her life in the United States and loves it. My mom described my life in the United States as „a boring paradise“ and her life in busy Seoul as „an entertaining hell“ when she visited me in Georgia.

Growing up in a busy, crowded Seoul city that never sleeps, I was surprised how quiet, slow, and uneventful Georgia was compared to Seoul. But as Niang said, I am used to living in such a hassle free and quiet place and find myself completely lost when I go back to Seoul.

Implications

- 1) Principals: Those principals who have multicultural experiences in the past are more open-minded toward hiring immigrant teachers. Her current principal hired her because she has such a high regard for Asians because of their work ethic and studiousness. Her principal hired her on the spot during the job fair because of her preconception about Asians and is glad that Niang proved her right through her excellent teaching. Another example is that she was hired by an assistant principal who had military experiences that exposed him to other cultures. He was open-minded and had a very positive attitude toward Niang. So the more the principals are exposed to other cultures, the better attitude they have toward immigrant teachers. Some principals are afraid of hiring immigrant teachers because they don't know about them. Professors: American professors are not really adequate to guide immigrant teachers because they have not experienced what immigrant teachers have. Professors who have immigrant teacher experiences like Niang and I have are more appropriate to guide other immigrant teachers because they can totally empathize with them.
- 2) Professional Development: Her previous professional development was not helpful because she didn't have many choices about it and there were hundreds of teachers listening to a speaker, which was not audible to her. The professional development was not effective because it was given in the end of the day when everybody was tired. Teachers were there because they had to. She believes that teachers need to pursue

advanced degrees paying their own school tuition. When teachers pay their advanced degree out of their pocket, they will work for it to make it worth it. If the teachers really love what they do, they will do it. Advanced degrees help her to become a better teacher because she gets to learn from people who work in other schools. The new research studies she learns from her graduate school helps her be open to learning and trying new things when she teaches.