IMMIGRANT TEACHERS AS INTERCULTURAL WORKERS:
STORIES OF AGENCY AND HOPE

By

ESPERANZA AZUCENA MEJIA-SQUIANO

(Under the Direction of JoBeth Allen)

ABSTRACT

Freire characterized teachers as cultural workers, asserting teaching as a political act and arguing that teachers are inherently activists. This qualitative study examines Freire’s vision by investigating the experiences of eight immigrant teachers who can best be described as intercultural workers, or harmonizers who build bridges between their native cultures and their host cultures. Three teachers from Colombia, and one each from Mexico, Korea, Poland, Singapore and Spain, describe how their teaching experiences are shaped by their own agentic processes and an on-going negotiation of cultural identity. Denzin’s critical, interpretive interactionist approach is applied in the research, combining interviews, narrative analysis, and performance texts to allow experience to come alive in the form of dialogues, poems, or stories. Implications are relevant for teachers, administrators, and teacher educators because of the increasing importance of intercultural understanding in the U.S. and the growing numbers of immigrant teachers as well as immigrant students.

INDEX WORDS: Immigrant teachers, Cultural workers, Interpretive Interactionism, Agency, Identity.
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May 2015
IN MEMORIAM DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my father Pedro José and my mother Aura Mary, who were the inspirational force during our journey together; their courage and example of generosity and love are engraved in my mind and my heart. I also dedicate this dissertation to Jairo y Maria Helena, two immigrant teachers, for their extraordinary courage and dedication to their students.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to all the immigrant teachers for their unconditional love and exceptional dedication to their students, and especially for their great contributions to the education of a more diverse and just society in the United States.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people I would like to acknowledge for their significant contribution to this dissertation. First of all, to the eight teachers who shared with me many hours of their scarce time by talking about their lives, their struggles and challenges, their dreams and hopes: thanks, dear teachers, for the countless hours of conversations that helped me to understand what is to be an immigrant teacher; thanks for the generosity in exposing your soul and inner thoughts that shaped your driving force to teach in the U.S. I have learned enormously during our conversations, and later during the analysis of the interviews. Please acknowledge my deep appreciation always for you, dear teachers.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The processes of human mobility that involve a permanent or semi-permanent change of residence between regions, towns, or cities in a country, or across international boundaries, is broadly called migration. Migration has been an ongoing phenomenon over the course of human history and has taken the form of forced migration due to resource deprivation, wars, or environmental disasters, as well as voluntary migration for economic reasons such as scarcity of employment in the country of origin or job market globalization. Additionally, people migrate for personal reasons including family reunification or to pursue educational aspirations.

The archeological, genetic, historical, religious, economic, sociological, demographic, and anthropological literature provides us with a great deal of evidence and many illustrations of human migration. While genetic studies track the evolution of modern humans and study how mutations spread in a migrating population, anthropology, sociology, and economics examine migrant behaviors. Historic research examines the migrant experience, and other diverse areas such as demographic research focuses on population dynamics, while legal research concentrates on the legal implications of political and social treatment of migrants, and political science research centers on policy and outcomes of migration such as control and integration of migrants (Bretell, 2000).

As a consequence, readers may understand that migration scholarship is multidisciplinary and without an overarching theory but instead is guided by distinct disciplinary theories and
assumptions. Each field captures an element of this complex area, although Massey et al. (1994) argue that it is not clear which theory has the most precise explanatory power when considered alongside other theoretical propositions. Much of the scholarship on contemporary migration focuses on two phenomena: internal migration – the movements within national borders – and international migration – the migration across national borders. However, the massive international movement of the population witnessed during the last century has stimulated the development of extensive scholarship about international migration, with much research about immigration in the US.

Four important concepts under the umbrella of international migration studies are the notions of emigration, immigration, and returning and circular migration. Each concept implies movement from one country across a border to settle into another country. While in emigration studies researchers examine populations who depart (emigrate) from a sending country, crossing national borders to settle in a host country, in immigration studies researchers examine the displacement of people who arrive (immigrate) in a host or receiving country after crossing national borders. Research in international migration (Trager, 2000; Guarnizo, 1997a) widely recognizes additional concepts such as returning migration and circular migration which examine the processes of international migrants coming back to their home countries periodically. Most recently, researchers have expanded the area of international migration examining transnational (Bretell, 2003; Portes et al., 1999; Guarnizo, 1997a) and diasporic (Villenas 2007; Lukose, 2007) activities of individuals in host countries keeping strong cultural, economic, and political ties with their countries of origin. In the U.S., because of the long history of immigration into the country, the area of focus has been the immigration process, leaving the study of emigration to the respective sending countries.
Throughout its history, the United States has been the destination of a constant flow of immigrants from different countries representing a broad range of languages, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, socio-economic statuses, and educational and occupational attainments (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2000, 2001; 2008; Portes & Rambaut, 2001; 2006; Alba & Nee, 2003). According to the American Community Survey of the 2010 U.S. Census Bureau, the U.S. population as July 1, 2010 was 309.35 million inhabitants, with 12.9% being foreign-born individuals and 5.6% naturalized individuals, representing a population in which 18.5% of national inhabitants are individuals of non-U.S. origin. This group constituted the highest percentage of immigrants since 1930, when the category of “foreign-born” represented 11.6% of the total population.

Table 1. Population by Nativity Status and Citizenship: 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nativity and citizenship</th>
<th>Population1</th>
<th>Margin of error2 (±)</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Margin of error2 (±)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>309,350</td>
<td>(X)</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>(X)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native</td>
<td>269,394</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>87.1</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign born</td>
<td>39,956</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naturalized citizen</td>
<td>17,476</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noncitizen</td>
<td>22,480</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(X) Not applicable.
– Represents or rounds to zero.
1 Population as of July 1, 2010.
2 Data are based on a sample and are subject to sampling variability. A margin of error is a measure of an estimate’s variability. The larger the margin of error in relation to the size of the estimates, the less reliable the estimate. When added to and subtracted from the estimate, the margin of error forms the 90 percent confidence interval.


The need for labor is a fundamental motivation for sustained immigration into the U.S., particularly since the U.S. Civil War (1861-1864), although patterns of immigration also support
geopolitical and other considerations of motivations (Portes, 1994; Piore, 1979; Portes, 1978; Rosenblum, 1973, in Portes, 1994); the hiring of immigrant teachers is similarly influenced by fluctuating market demand. According to the Randy Barber Center for Economic Organizing (2003), an estimated 5,000 public schools hired more than 10,000 foreign born teachers under non-immigrant J-1 and H-1B visas during the 2002 – 2003 school year. Further, the Barber Center notes that a great number of public school districts and other state education agencies have developed extensive recruitment efforts aiming to hire foreign-born teachers. This flow of immigrant teachers includes teachers from different nationalities who have been hired by U.S. schools for three basic reasons: first, to alleviate teacher shortage in specific areas such as science and math, foreign language, and special education; second, because of the lack of competitiveness of the teachers’ salaries in comparison with other professions, and third, in order to deliberately enhance teachers’ diversity to serve an increasingly diverse student population in the U.S. (Barber Center, 2003). While these recruitment efforts are significant, hiring rates of immigrant teachers are also affected by a broader trend toward globalization, including an accelerated influx of immigrants during the last decades. The few empirical studies dedicated to examining the modes and outcomes of incorporation of immigrant teachers in the U.S. educational system call for a closer examination of these trends.

Unfortunately, precise data regarding immigrant teachers are difficult to obtain. In the first place, the 2010 U.S. census does not specify the number or the characteristics of teachers in the United States under immigrant status. Second, the definitions of immigrant used by the immigration agencies and academic scholars are inconsistent. While the terms immigrant and foreign-born are used interchangeably, the U.S. Census Bureau uses the term foreign-born to refer to anyone who is not a U.S. citizen at birth, including: naturalized U.S. citizens, lawful
permanent residents (immigrants), temporary migrants (such as foreign students), humanitarian migrants (such as refugees), and people illegally present in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010,). In addition, the Census Bureau defines a native as “anyone born in the U.S., or a U.S. Island Area, or born abroad of a U.S. citizen parent.” Conversely, the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) considers an immigrant to be any foreign national who is authorized to live and work permanently in the United States (USCIS, 2007). According to this USCIS definition, foreign national holders of visas such as H-1B “Specialty Occupation Program” or J-1 “Exchange Visitor Program” are referred to as non-immigrant or having temporary status because their visas only authorize the holders to work for a specific period of time in the U.S. (maximum 3 years for J-1 holders, and maximum 6 years for H-1B holders).

Third, on the academic side, migration theory has not provided a commonly accepted definition of who is considered to be an immigrant, though there is a consensus that two key issues should be taken into consideration: the degree of permanence, or the length of time spent in a host location, and the distance traveled in order to reach the host location (Trager, 2005). Nevertheless, the “movement to a new residence across international boundaries is always understood as migration, even when the distance between the old residence and the new one is negligible” (Trager, 2005, p.10). In this sense, in scholarly terms, any international migrants arriving to a host country are regarded as immigrants, regardless of the permanence of their transition.

Fourth, only two studies provide some data about the trends of foreign-born teachers in the United States. One of these studies is the Report to the National Education Association on
Trends in Foreign Teacher Recruitment created by the Randy Barber Center for Economic Organizing (2003), focused on foreign teachers’ recruitment under non-immigrant / temporary status. According to this study, of 14,943 estimated total primary and secondary foreign-born teachers working in the U.S. under temporary J-1 and H1-B visas, the public school systems are hiring as many 10,000 foreign-born teachers during the 2002-2003 school year on non-immigrant work or cultural exchange visas (p.3), addressing teacher shortages in specific subject matters as well as in poor urban and rural school districts (Randy Barber Center, p.1). In consequence, the Barber Center notes that teachers from India, Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom have been hired to teach math, science, and special education, and Latin American teachers have been hired to teach Spanish Language and ESOL courses (p.2). A second report, Importing Educators: Causes and Consequences of international Teacher Recruitment (2009) from the American Federation of Teachers, analyses the implications of the trend of international recruitment of teachers in both the U.S. and the sending countries. This study reported an estimated 19,000 teachers working on temporary visas in 2007. The AFT report states that “essential federal data for studying this trend is not available for public analysis” (p.5), and despite the fact that USCIS is required by law to provide data on the total number of H-1B visas issued and renewed every year for elementary and secondary teachers, the data don’t show the total number of teachers working on H-1B, but only the visas issued or renewed in a specific year (p.11). The report also examines examples of abuses of overseas-trained teachers and critiques the for-profit recruiting practices as almost entirely unregulated (p.5). It also advocates for the development of ethical standards of international recruitment of teachers and highlights the need for “improved access to the government data necessary to track and study international hiring trends in education.”
Statement of the Problem

The gap in the literature addressing issues of immigrant teachers in the United States schools is quite large. Qualitative and quantitative research documenting foreign-born teachers’ actual experiences of incorporation into the U.S. school system is difficult to find, and teachers’ voices remain unheard despite their increasing presence in the U.S. educational system. Despite the growing presence of immigrant teachers in the educational system in the U.S., and the importance of bilingual and multicultural education, only a few U.S. researchers (Buendia et al., 2003; Bustos Flores, 2001, Lee 2010) address the perspectives of immigrant teachers teaching in the U.S. schools, in contrast with other areas of the educational arena. Although several scholars (Arce, 2004; Varghese, 2004; Hornberger, 2004) have examined the experiences of bilingual and bicultural teachers, they do not address specifically the topic of immigrant teachers. The task becomes harder when we try to find research on immigrant teachers’ agency.

In contrast, there is a growing body of qualitative research in some other multicultural countries such as Australia (Kostogriz & Peeler, 2004; Peeler & Jane, 2005; Seah, 2002), Israel (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2004; Sabar, 2004; Remenick, 2002), and Canada (Thiessen et al., 1997; Beynon et al., 2004) addressing a variety of common issues such as the conflicts and challenges immigrant teachers face in their incorporation into school systems, the influences of teachers’ previous cultural experiences in their teacher identities, their articulations of perceived differences in terms of race, culture, and language, and the process of negotiation of their sense of “difference” in their professional lives.

Consequently, more research is needed to understand the issues of immigrant teachers and their agency (as well as lack of agency) as they incorporate into United States’ schools. We
need research that examines the immigrant teachers’ process from the time they arrive in this
country, documenting their attempts to negotiate full participation in their teaching communities.
I believe the present study is timely and significant because it addresses a topic that has not been
sufficiently studied, and it is needed for the understanding of the issues confronting immigrant
teachers who are key participants in any school system that hires them.

**Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of this study is to explore the different ways immigrant teachers see
themselves as agents who, as bicultural workers, contribute to multicultural spaces in their
schools. It examines the lived experiences of immigrant teachers in U.S. schools by focusing on
the immigrant teachers’ agency to navigate through the school systems in Georgia and New
Jersey (in the southern and eastern regions of the United States), and immigrant teachers’
perceptions of themselves through their interactions with school personnel and the broader
community, including during periods when their identities are challenged or their agency
thwarted. In doing so, this study explores teachers’ arrival to their new schools, the strengths
they bring, the challenges they face, and the strategies they use to address those challenges.

In the theoretical framework, I draw from critical and sociocultural theory. Paulo Freire
and his ideas of teachers as cultural workers, dialogue, social action, and praxis ground the study.
Sociocultural lenses include Vygotsky’s emphasis on the interrelation between the individual and
social and cultural events, and Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner and Cains’s (1998) application of
Vygotsky’s work. With Holland et al., I explore identity and agency in socially produced,
culturally structured activities that they call “figured worlds” (p.81). I will employ a
sociocultural approach to analyze agency in terms of three aspects that social theory has found
important for the study of human agency: planning agents, extended agency (Bratman, 2007), and reflectiveness or the “internal conversations” (Archer, 2004) as the link between individual and social structures. Although Freire (critical pedagogy), Holland et al. (sociocultural theories), and Archer (social theory) come from very different conceptual frameworks, I found points of convergence in their approaches to agency as the development of what they call reflection-action (praxis), “figured worlds,” and “internal conversations” as a key element of agency.

**Research Questions**

In this study I explore one central question: In what ways do immigrant teachers see themselves as cultural agents who contribute to their school communities by creating multicultural spaces? In order to answer this overarching question, I developed the following sub-questions:

1. What are the main issues that immigrant teachers face in their personal and professional lives in their incorporation into their U.S. schools? How do participants (immigrant teachers) face these obstacles, conflicts, and challenges? How do they describe their agency in facing these obstacles?
2. What do immigrant teachers define as “successes” in their incorporation into their schools? How do they see their agency in these successes?
3. How do immigrant teachers become part of the teaching communities at their schools? How do they see themselves as agents in their new school?
4. What strategies do they use for their incorporation? What are their agentive resources?
5. What are the strengths and contributions that participants bring to their school? What are their capacities as agents to make things happen?

6. What kind of support systems and networks do the immigrant teachers have in place? How do they use their social networks to support their individual and/or collective agency?

**Organization of the Study**

This dissertation is organized into six chapters. In chapter 1, I introduce the topic, including the background of the study, statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, and the research questions. In chapter 2, I lay out the relevant theoretical framework and develop the literature review. In chapter 3, I explain the methodology guiding the study, and in chapter 4, I offer portraits of the participants. In chapters 5 and 6, I draw links between the narratives provided by my participants and the theoretical framework in regard to immigrant teachers’ agency and identity. In chapter 7, I discuss the implications of the study, including the contributions of the study to the research literature and the field of education. Additionally, in chapter 7, I offer suggestions for future research.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of the literature will begin with studies that establish the broad context of immigration and education and studies of immigrant teachers. I then introduce my theoretical framework with an overview of critical theory, a specific focus on Freire’s critical theory, and then the theoretical framework I used specifically to analyze and discuss agency. Finally, I provide a thorough review of research most directly relevant to this project: studies examining foreign-born teachers’ teaching experiences.

Immigration Theories

In general, researchers agree that there is not an overarching coherent theory of international migration (Massey et al, 1993; Portes, 1997) but a series of fragmented theories developed separately (Massey et al, 1993, p.432). However, Massey and Portes disagree as to the need for a cohesive theory. While Massey suggests that to understand the contemporary trends in immigration, it is necessary to rely not only on one discipline or level of analysis, but on a “sophisticated theory that incorporates a variety of perspectives, levels and assumptions” (Massey, p.432), Portes believes that the different areas of the field of immigration are so “disparate that they can only be unified at a highly abstract and probably vacuous level” (Portes, 1997, p.810).

I agree with Bretell’s (2000) and Portes’ (1997) conclusions that the immigration process is very complex and that by trying to synthesize it into one overarching theory, researchers will lose in depth and understanding. But Massey’s point that it is important to break the isolation of
the different fields and examine the intersections of migration and other human activities, continues to be necessary, even if one resists a grand synthesis. In this case, a detailed analysis of the intersections between immigration and education will enhance our understanding of the immigration process of foreign-born teachers and the outcomes of their incorporation into U.S. school systems.

**Intersection of Immigration Theories and Education**

Current studies connecting immigration and education in the U.S. have predominantly focused on immigrant children and their adaptation to schools. Schools are the main site of contact with the new culture for immigrant children, and their adaptation to the school system is a “significant predictor of a child’s future well-being and contributions to society” (Suarez Orozco & Suarez Orozco 2001, p.3). In this sense, several researchers have examined the experiences of immigrants and their offspring in their process of “assimilation” into U.S. society (e.g. Alba & Nee, 2003; Portes & Rambaut, 2001, 2006; Suarez Orozco, 2001; Zou, 1997; Gibson, 1997). Moreover, a number of researchers have examined children and their school success (Gibson, 1988; Kao & Tienda, 1995; Suarez Orozco, 1989; Zhou & Bankston, 1998) and the school failure among immigrant children (Orfield, 1998; Trueba, 1998).

**Assimilation Theories**

Assimilation theories have had a very controversial existence, sometimes “dismissed by critics as deterministic and ethnocentric, as well as being a poor predictor of the kinds of identity choices and behaviors actually adopted by immigrants and their descendants in the U.S.” (Jones-Correa, 2007). However, in the current literature on immigrant adaptation, assimilation theory is one of the focal points of study that have dominated much of the sociological contributions on
this subject (Zhou, 1997). According to Portes and Rambaut (2001), assimilation became a master concept in social theory and public discourse in order to explain the “expected path” followed by immigrants in the United States; for them, “the concept conveys a factual prediction about the final outcome of the encounters between foreign minorities and the native majority and, simultaneously, an assertion of a social desirable goal.” (Portes & Rambaut, 2001, p.44). In other words, assimilation is both an observable historical pattern and a socially desired preference.


According to classical assimilationist theory, immigrants and their succeeding generations gradually assimilate to a unified, non-ethnic core as a natural process toward a homogenized society. Park and Burgess (1969) defined assimilation as the “process of interpenetration and fusion in which groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons or groups, and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated with them in a common cultural life” (1969, p.360). According to Zhou (1997), while Park (1928) saw assimilation as the natural process of reducing the differences between natives and foreign-born individuals through time and contact, Warner & Srole (1945) introduced in the framework the importance of structural forces. They emphasized the importance of factors such as social class
and race/ethnicity in determining the rate of assimilation and mobility (residential and occupational), and “skin color, language and religion as key factors in determining the level of acceptance of minorities by the dominant group” (Zhou, 1997, p.976). Furthermore, Gordon (1964) included in the analysis seven areas of assimilation: cultural (acculturation), structural (entrance into social institutions), marital (interrmarriage), identificational (degree of ethnic identification), attitude receptional (absence of prejudice), behavioral receptional (absence of discrimination), and civic assimilation.

By contrast, the multicultural perspective rejects the assumption of a unified ethnic core where minority groups are not considered as outsiders but as a part of the American society; instead, multiculturalism recognizes that the immigrant’s ethnic background never completely disappears. However, for Zhou (1997), the explanatory tools of the multicultural perspective are not clear because of “the elusiveness of the ethnic characteristics … [and] after all, how immigrants become incorporated into the American mosaic has not been clearly theorized” (Zhou, 1997, p.982).

Furthermore, Portes and Rambaut (2001), in their work on segmented assimilation of first and second generation immigrants, claimed that classical assimilationist theory was not adequate to analyze the immigrants’ experiences in the U.S. because of their heterogeneity and social class differences. Based on a longitudinal survey study of second generation Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study (1992, 1996), Portes and Rambaut examined the modes of incorporation and the consequences for immigrants and their offspring, and introduced a new multimodal theory: segmented assimilation. Segmented assimilation describes three different trajectories of immigrants’ processes of incorporation: upward mobility, downward mobility, and straight line integration into the middle class. Portes and Rambaut (2001) took into consideration the
differences among immigrants; they found that the immigration outcomes depend on important factors such as the history of the first generation, the pace of acculturation of the first and second generation, the cultural and economic barriers faced in their adaptation, and the family and social ties to face these barriers. They also focused on three fundamental dimensions that shape their assimilation such as the individual features (age, human capital, occupational and language skills), the receiving societies (government reception, societal attitudes, and presence of co-ethnic communities) and the family structures as a reflection of cultural and social structures. Similarly, Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (2001) and Zhou (1997) found that the cultural and social capital of the parents, family composition, the existence of a co-ethnic community and a network of friends and relatives that support preservation of the parental language and culture, greatly influence academic achievement and the modes of incorporation, as well as their consequences.

However, scholars from the new assimilationist theory such as Alba & Nee (2003), Jacoby (2004), and Kivisto (2005) do not completely agree with segmented assimilation theory. They claim that over time, most immigrants reach socioeconomic success similar to their U.S.-born counterparts, but ethnicity and race still matter. They also note that both native-born and foreign-born groups of individuals change in the long run (Alba & Nee, 2003; Jacoby, 2004; Kivisto, 2005).

**Acculturation**

Acculturation processes have been studied by several disciplines such as psychology, sociology, social work, and linguistics, as well as other interdisciplinary areas dedicated to the study of intercultural and interracial relations and immigration studies. Immigration scholars consider acculturation as the first step to assimilation (Gordon, 1964). Acculturation “is the
process of culture change and adaptation that occurs when individuals with different cultures come into contact” (Gibson, 2001 p.19). So, to understand acculturation we must examine the cultures that are coming into contact and the succeeding effects, including the immigrant’s situation in their homelands prior to emigration (Gibson, 2001 p.19).

Acculturation involves changes in both language and cultural norms. According to Alba and Nee (2003), language is crucial, as many aspects of ethnic culture are imbedded in the mother tongue, and communication in a mother tongue marks social boundaries by inclusion or exclusion. Alba and Nee identity linguistic assimilation as possibly the most prominent marker of both acculturation and the most promising prospect for resistance to acculturation (2003, p.72).

Moreover, in their analysis of immigrant children’s and their families’ assimilation, Portes and Rambaut (2001) defined 3 types of acculturation: dissonant acculturation, consonant acculturation, and selective acculturation (which Gibson has called accommodation and acculturation without assimilation). In dissonant acculturation, children’s learning of English and American culture, and consequent loss of immigrant culture, surpasses their parents’ pace of loss, leading to role reversal in which children become more accustomed to daily functioning in a host culture than their parents (p.53). In consonant acculturation, learning of English and American culture and gradual abandonment of immigrant culture occur approximately at the same pace across generations (p.54). In selective acculturation, the learning process of both generations is embedded in a co-ethnic community (sufficient size and diversity) that helps to slow down the loss of immigrant culture and promote the maintenance of parents’ language and cultural norms. Selective acculturation encourages a relative lack of intergenerational conflicts,
the presence of many co-ethnic children’s friends, and the achievement of full bilingualism in the second generation.

**Incorporation**

An examination of the previous terms shows the complexity involved in discussing the process of incorporation of immigrant teachers in the U.S. school systems. *Assimilation* and *acculturation* could both relay a negative and controversial connotation. Instead, I am seeking a term to refer to the process by which foreign born teachers arrive to a new country and become part of school systems in host societies. I intentionally choose the word *incorporation* for its etymological roots: it comes from Latin *in-* and *corpor-*, in which *corpus* means “body” (Merriam-Webster’s Online Dictionary, 2008). Incorporate, then, means “to enter into a new body.” Also, the Cambridge dictionary (2008) defines *incorporate* as “to include something as part of something larger” but does not imply any accompanying loss. Accordingly, the neutrality of this word suits my research in the sense that there are many different outcomes in the immigration process, and many associated terms with relatively positive connotations, such as *integration*, and somewhat negative connotations, such as *marginalization*. These terms form part of a complex and varied process of conceiving the incorporation of immigrants in a host society. The relevance of the terms’ connotations informs my understanding of immigrant teacher education.

**Other Perspectives**

On the anthropological side, an important framework for understanding the connections between education and immigration was Ogbu’s (1987, 1991) differentiation between immigrant/voluntary minorities and involuntary minorities. For Ogbu, the adaptation of minority
groups depends on the ways particular groups entered into the U.S. Voluntary, or autonomous, minorities came to this country by their own desires to pursue a new life, while involuntary minorities arrived to the U.S. forced by slavery, wars or persecution. Ogbu (1991) conceived his framework based on the history of African-Americans in the U.S. and used an oppositional culture model and the term *cultural inversion* to explain the process by which values, cultural representations and behaviors are associated with a dominant culture. Ogbu’s framework argues that the non-dominant culture creates an alternative cultural frame of reference with a set of values in opposition to the dominant white cultural framework, pushing African-American students, for example, to see the use of standard English and academic achievement as acting “white” (Ogbu, 1991). This framework has received several critiques because it “pits native-born minorities versus immigrant ones, is not able to account for intragroup differences and under-theorizes and de-historicizes what constitutes ‘the dominant society’” (Lukose, 2007, p.407). Moreover, Gibson (1997) claims that Ogbu’s typology does not apply to all types of immigrants, e.g. undocumented immigrants, and does not consider differences based on gender and generational groups (p.436).

More recent work on the intersections between immigration and education is being complemented with anthropological perspectives of the diaspora (Lukose, 2007) and hybridity studies (Villenas, 2007). Lukose (2007) and Villenas (2007) both call for a more profound analysis of the intersections between diaspora studies and the anthropology of immigrant education to interrogate hybrid cultural practices as a “third space” (Villenas, 2007). The concept of third space was first examined in cultural studies by Bhaba (1994) who describes third spaces as “discursive sites or conditions that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated,
translated and re-historicized anew” (p.37). Third spaces have been used to understand the process of negotiation in identity construction and reconstruction, and the sense of fluidity, ambiguity and hybridity in cultural studies.

Furthermore, it is important to include in this review on immigration theories and education gender as a key element of immigration, especially because of the gendered characteristic of the teaching profession. Feminist research has started examining the ways that immigration norms and institutions are permeated by gender concerns (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2003, p.9). That is, feminist researchers study the different patterns of labor incorporation, religious practice and values, ethnic enclave businesses, citizenship, sexuality, and ethnic identity in the daily activities of immigrants and how gender is incorporated in those activities (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2003). In this area, feminist researchers have started to accumulate rich individual case studies, but there is a need to develop theories and analytical frameworks “to capture and compare the simultaneity of the impact of gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, class, and legal status on the lives of immigrant and native-born men and women” (Pessar, 2003, p.36).

Finally, an interesting approach is the conceptual framework developed by Suarez Orozco & Suarez Orozco (2000, 2001) that includes a multilevel, interdisciplinary analysis of the “incoming resources” and “host culture variables” in the adaptation of immigrant children in U.S. schools. In their framework to understand the schooling outcomes, Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco included not only the incoming resources and host cultural variables, but also social variables such as support networks, family cohesion, maintenance of culture of origin, peer orientation, race, gender and teacher’s expectations.

Current literature on immigrants facilitates the analysis of a wide variety of fundamental dimensions that may shape immigrant teachers’ experiences in a new society and their different
outcomes. For example, the analysis of individual factors such as immigrants’ personal and professional characteristics, their family structures, and the reception of host societies are critical in understanding the process of adaptation to the new society, and they are also key elements in the analysis of immigrant teacher’s incorporation in U.S. schools. Furthermore, the framework of Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (2000) to understand the schooling outcomes may guide us to develop a comprehensive framework for the incorporation of foreign-born teachers in U.S. schools.

**Immigrant Teachers**

There is not a single, unitary theoretical framework that accounts for immigrant teachers’ agentic processes of incorporation into the U.S. schools. Teaching is itself a complex profession and greatly depends on the cultural and linguistic knowledge and background of teachers (Elba-Luwisch, 2004). This dependence makes the adaptation of foreign teachers to a new job – new school system, new teaching pedagogies, new student-teacher relations, and new parent-teacher relations – more complex. For this reason it is important to investigate not only the process of adaptation to the new country by immigrant teachers, but also how immigrant teachers become part of the teaching communities, and what kind of networks and support systems they find in place. This requires a comprehensive approach that considers immigrant teachers’ backgrounds and strengths, including their pedagogical options, as well as the opportunities, struggles, and conflicts they encounter in their school systems and broader communities.

Because of the social nature of the immigration and incorporation to the U.S. school processes, I have found the explanatory power of sociocultural and critical theories to be generative of a comprehensive theoretical framework to examine the agentic processes of successful immigrant teachers in U.S. schools. The sociocultural theories based upon the work
of Soviet psychologist Lev Semonovich Vygostky (1978, 1986) and colleagues locate human
development in social interactions and view learning as constructed between individuals and
their social milieu, constituted by cultural and institutional contexts. Sociocultural theories allow
for the examination of both the social and cultural contexts as well as the social and interactional
dimensions of the immigrant teachers’ incorporation process in their school sites. In the same
way, as Holland et al. stated, “Vygotsky’s exposition of semiotic mediation as a means to agency
gives us a good vantage on the social and historical creation of identities as means to self-
activity” (Holland et al., p.40). Furthermore, Archer’s conceptual framework in the social theory
of “internal conversations” proposes that these conversations are one of the mediation devices
used by agents to establish links between structure and the individual. Examinations of these
internal conversations are realized in the consideration of immigrant teacher’s motivations when
dealing with constraints or challenges, as well as enablements, or strengths and supports, in their
work as inter-cultural agents.

Second, a set of critical lenses allow me to look in depth at individuals’ challenges and
conflicts by exploring the power relations that might arise from the process of immigration and
incorporation in the schools. According to Giroux, “critical education operates in two basic
assumptions. One, there is a need for a language of critique, a questioning of presuppositions…;
the second base assumption of radical education is a language of possibility” (1991, p.10).
Critical theories offer immigrant teachers the powerful language of critique and possibility, as
well as the capacity to transform individual and collective lives through praxis grounded in
reflection and action. It is this second assumption of the critical theories – the language of
possibility, reflection, and action – that I want to draw on, guided by the work of Paulo Freire
and his vision of teachers as cultural workers (2005). I examine immigrant teachers’ agency to
participate in the teaching and learning communities at their schools, and also to look at their possibilities of becoming *bi-cultural workers* and *mediators* by creating bridges among the different cultures at the school.

**Critical Theory**

Scholars locate the origin of critical theory in the work of the “Frankfurt school” established in Germany, which saw scholars including Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marchuse developing ideas based on dialogues with German philosophers and social thinkers such as Marx, Kant, Weber, Lukas, and Freud (Bottomoro et al., 1983). The Frankfurt school of social thought emerged as a “possibility of an alternative path for social development” (Bottomoro et al., 1983, p. 186) based neither in capitalism nor Soviet socialism. Ideas generally considered “critical theory” stress contextual dimensions of social investigation and knowledge, including history, relations, and norms (Giroux, 2003, p. 50). Critical theorists challenge historical objectivity, arguing instead that the actions of an individual may only be understood as a function of the society in which she lived, as well as her relations to her community, with both history and relations serving to shape prevailing social norms.

The interest of the Frankfurt school in theorizing and critiquing radical political movements based on many observed forms of domination therein (Bottomoro et al., 1983, p.187) had significant practical influence in the U.S. As critical theory challenges the strict adherence to positivism in social science, Adorno’s visit to the U. S. brought a conversation among scholars about the contradictions between the American public speech of egalitarianism and the reality of social class and racial discrimination in the U.S. (Kincheloe, 2004; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2002). After Adorno and Horkheimer returned to Germany in 1953, Marcuse’s work in the U.S.
on political and personal emancipation, including emotional and sexual liberation, greatly influenced university student movements during the 60s, as well as the scholars of that period (Kincheloe, 2004).

While a broad understanding exists of the ideas behind critical theory, scholars and researchers are careful to avoid outlining specific characteristics. Kincheloe and McLaren (2002) describe this conundrum by noting that critical theory is not unified and is more appropriately considered a set of critical theories. Further, as society changes, so does the critical tradition, which leads to significant disagreement among critical theorists (p. 89). Additionally, a specific list of fixed characteristics is contrary to the beliefs of critical theorists, who reject the “production of blue prints of sociopolitical and epistemological beliefs” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2002). Perhaps a more pleasing metaphor for social theory is offered in the form of a map to the social sphere; Kincheloe and McLaren advise that it does not dictate our perceptions of the world but instead guides our research, including questions and methods as a manner of exploration of the social world (2002, p. 90).

Generally speaking, a critical social theory is concerned with locating and describing power in society, as well as the influences contributed by distinct social discourses, social institutions, and personal characteristics such as race, class, gender, education, and religious identification (2002). In their re-conceptualization of critical theory, Kincheloe and McLaren (2002) describe ten aspects of critical theory useful to researchers: critical enlightenment, an inducement to analyze competing power interests between groups and individuals, and how power and privilege operates (p.90); critical emancipation, an effort by individuals to gain the power to control their own lives, guided by a social justice orientation (p.91); the rejection of economic determinism, an acknowledgement that many forms of oppression exist, such as racial,
gender, sexual oppression, and that economic factors are important and cannot be separated from other forms of oppression. Critical theory perceives *instrumental/technological rationality* as one of the most oppressive aspects of current society. It rejects the obsession with issues of technique, procedure and correct methods, which forget the humanistic purpose of research (p.92). Furthermore, reconceptualized critical theory values *the impact of desire*, and a post-structuralist psychoanalysis provides critical theorists new tools to examine the relations among power, identity, libido, rationality, and emotion. If the psyche is no longer separated from the sociopolitical arena, then researchers may understand how desire can be socially constructed and used by those in power for purposes of destruction and oppression (p. 92).

In addition, many critical theorists promote a *reconceptualized critical theory of power* with particular scholarly interest in understanding concepts of *hegemony, ideology, and linguistic/discursive power*. Gramsci’s notion of hegemony is fundamental to critical research; he argued that power is often exercised through social institutions, including religious, familial, and educational settings, as well as through popular media. In this case, hegemony is achieved when people consent to their own domination not because they have been forced to physically, but because they have been persuaded psychologically through their involvement in social institutions (p.93). Critical theorists understand that hegemony and ideology are linked (p. 93) and that reality, as we experience it, is socially constructed by hegemonic ideological practices and discourses (Lemke, 1995, 1998 in Kincheloe & McLaren, 2002, p.94). Further, critical theorists refute the neutrality of language as an objective description of the “real world,” arguing instead that the words, even the grammar, used to describe lived experience actually constructs lived experience, and can dominate and regulate the speakers and their experiences (p. 94).

Finally, critical theory focuses on the *relationship among culture, power, and domination*
and the role of cultural pedagogy. For critical theorists, culture is viewed as “a domain of struggle where the production and transmission of knowledge is always a contested process” (p.95). For Kincheloe and McLaren, popular culture – TV, movies, video games, computers, music, dance, and the like – play an important role in critical research on power and domination. A successful counter-hegemonic cultural research encompasses the capability to link the production of images, signs, and representations to power in the political economy and the capacity to show the effects of that link on individuals. Cultural pedagogy refers to the social learning process in which individuals are taught to interpret their own experiences through a hegemonic lens. As an example, cultural agents possessing the financial resources to use mass media are able to construct reality by producing and reproducing particular hegemonic lessons. Critical researchers may then examine and expose the process of cultural production as it “generates knowledge, shapes values, and constructs identity” (p.95-96).

**Freire’s Critical Theory**

Essential to this research project are Freire’s philosophical and pedagogical ideas. Freire advocated the connection of the word to the world. Based on his literacy programs with peasants in his native Brazil, Freire pointed out and clarified to teachers and educators all over the world the connections between critical theory and the pedagogical experiences lived every day for students and teachers. He introduced the concepts of problem posing, banking information, and conscientization as key elements in the struggle for liberation from ideological and other forms of oppression in education (Freire, 1970).

To understand the world, Freire used a dialectical approach and conceived reality as dialectical. Dialectical understanding indicates an intellectual exchange of ideas through
systematic reasoning or argumentation of different, sometimes contradictory ideas, aiming to overcome contradictions through conscientization and dialogue (Freire, 1970). He emphasized the contradictions in the social world as a way to think dialectically (Roberts, 2003). One such contradiction is between the oppressed and the oppressor. The fundamental pillar of Freire’s theory is dialogue and the ME-YOU relation; this relationship is based in the acceptance of difference (Casaly & Araujo Freire in Pruyn & Huerta-Charles, 2005). Then, “difference is the starting point of the dialogue between ME and YOU, so that knowledge interferes in the world” (Casaly & Araujo Freire, 2005, p.26). For Freire, it is through dialogue that men and women can take possession of the knowledge to make a better world (Casali & Araujo Freire 2005, p.26).

Further, it is through dialogue and reflection that conscientization may occur. Critical consciousness requires, for instance, an awareness of the different powerful groups that dominate the social relations of production, their influences on education, and their manipulation of ideas, as well as other media, to gain public consent to create an hegemonic worldview (Pruyn & Huerta, 2005, p.xxix). It is also critical to recognize the imposition of the worldview of dominant groups through given symbols, a structured body of knowledge, specific languages and social practices where unequal power relations and privileges are hidden (Chomsky, 1988; Herman & Chomsky, 1988; McLaren, 1989, in Pruyn and Huerta-Charles, xxix).

Another important influence of Freire’s philosophy in this research project is the concept of praxis as reflection and action for liberation. For Freire, “liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it” (Freire, 1970, p. 79). The challenge of this praxis for immigrant teachers is through dialogue to reach a deeper level of analysis and understanding where people from both cultures in the dialogue can work together even from different positions to transform the world (their realities).
Theoretical Framework on Agency

Agency has been a focus of study in many different fields in the social sciences such as psychology, philosophy, education, history, and others; therefore, agency can be examined in light of many different theories and epistemologies such as constructionism, subjectivism, structuralism and the Foucauldian principles of analysis.

As Emirbayer and Mische (1998) note, “the concept of agency has become a source of increasing strain and confusion in social thought” (pag.962), a confusion which has extended to the current project. In search of a theoretical framework, I first started studying the sociocultural framework. The sociocultural framework is built on the work of Soviet psychologist Lev Semonovich Vygotsky (1978, 1986), who has been recognized as a pioneer in developmental psychology. The work of Vygotsky has been appropriated and complemented by scholars in different fields (Lee & Smagorinsky, 2000), and it has also been refined, explained, and expanded (Valenzuela et al, 1999) by many educators and scholars across disciplines.

Vygotsky (1978) argued – in opposition to the behaviorist environment of his time – that learning and, consequently, human development is essentially social. His fundamental message was that it is through social interaction that mental processes and language emerge. One of the most important concepts of sociocultural theory is that human thinking is mediated. The concept of mediation has been explored in a great number of studies inspired by the work of Vygotsky and colleagues in different areas. According to Lantolf (2000), Vygotsky argued that humans do not act on physical worlds but rely on tools and labor activity to change the world and the circumstances in which we live, creating a very useful concept of “psychological tools.” According to Kozulin (2003), “psychological tools are those symbolic artifacts – signs, symbols, text, formulae, graphic organizers – that, when internalized, help individuals to master their own
natural psychological functions of perception, memory, attention and so on” (Kozulin, 2003, 1998). Psychological tools assist humans in mediating their thinking. Further theorizing follows a similar reasoning regarding the use of mediation as an active process. Halliday et al. (2003) argue that the products – improvisations – that emerge from the concurrence of persons, cultural resources and the appropriation of these productions can be used “again and again, they can become tools of agency or self-control and change” (p.40).

Holland et al.’s (2003) concept of a figured world proposes a location for individuals’ exertion of agency. A ‘figured world,’ Holland explained, is a socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others (Holland et al., p.52). As Holland further explained (2003), individuals are able to exert an amount of agency, no matter how small, or control, over their own behavior, by developing “more or less conscious conceptions of themselves” and processing these identities through Vygotsky’s semiotic mediation (Holland et al., p.40). Holland draws from Inden (1990, p.23, in Holland et al., 2003, p.42) the following definition of agency:

…the realized capacity of people to act upon their world and not only to know about or give personal or intersubjective significance to it. That capacity is the power of people to act purposively and reflectively, in more or less complex interrelationships with one another, to reiterate and remake the world in which they live, in circumstances where they may consider different courses of action possible and desirable, though not necessarily from the same point of view.

Later, in my intellectual traveling, I encountered the realistic social theory of Margarett Archer. Archer (2003) proposes one mechanism used to enact agency: *internal conversation*, by
which reflexive agents deliberate about themselves in relation to the social environment they confront, particularly in terms of social constraints and enablements. The internal conversation is the mediatory process between the structural and cultural influences; in other words, “reflexive deliberations constitute the mediatory process between ‘structure and agency,’ they represent the subjective element which is always in the interplay with the causal powers of objective social forms” (Archer, 2003, p.130). Internal conversations perhaps provide a clue as to the deliberate action or inaction of individuals: the subjective understanding of one’s circumstances or location within structural or cultural influences can affect one’s perceptions of ability to act and options upon which to act. This framework would turn out to be an important analytic tool in describing the entire agentic process of the teachers, in terms of sociocultural relations, internal conversations and the historical location of their actions.

In addition to sociocultural theories and realist social theory, Bandura’s social cognitive theory (2006) may also be used to understand the agentic processes of teachers. According to Bandura, social cognitive theory rejects a duality between human agency and social structure. People create the social systems and, consequently, they also influence people’s lives in a continual process. In this process, the capacity of people to create and manipulate symbols such as language and their capacity of comprehend, infer, and modify the course of events enables individuals to overcome the limitations of the environment and give them the power to delineate their life’s circumstances. For Bandura, cognitive self-regulation allows humans to create “visualized futures” that affect their present actions, constructing, evaluating, and modifying many courses of action in order to ensure their “valued outcomes” and overriding environmental influences (Bandura, 2006, p.164). This capacity to act according to the circumstances and to be an agent of change is part of human agency, the main focus of this research. Furthermore,
Bandura (2006) and Brattman (2007) agree that there are various core features of human agency: intentionality, reflectiveness, reactiveness, and agency that is temporally extended in time.

Emirbayer and Mische’s (1998) theoretical framework defines agency somewhat differently, noting the temporal aspect and the importance of context, historical situations, and the interplay of the different elements. They define agency as:

the temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments – the temporal-relation context of action – which through the interplay of habit, imagination, and judgement, both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations (p.970).

This definition encompasses the “chordal triad of agency” (p.970) that corresponds to what they call the 3 elements of human agency: iteration, projectivity and practical evaluation (1998). According to the authors, the iterational element refers to the influence of human desire for stability and order, as well as the need to sustain identities, interactions, and institutions over time. Actors may “selectively reactivate” patterns of thoughts, actions, and routines that support their preferences for stability and order in social situations and personal circumstances, through habit and repetition. Actors develop schemas of action from past experiences through recalling, selecting, and implementing them. These schemas are then corporeal, affective, and cognitive patterns (routines, dispositions, preconceptions, competences, schemas, patterns, typifications, and traditions). The agentic process lies then in how individuals “selectively recognize, locate, and implement” (p.975) these schemas in a specific situation. For Emirbayer and Mische (1998) then, the internal structure of iteration relies on individuals’ abilities to pay selective attention to life circumstances, to recognize sameness, likeness, or an analogy with past experiences, as well as understanding schemas used to classify other individuals, events, and contexts. The iterational
aspect of agency also involves humans maneuvering among repertoires, which is intentional and depends on individual and collective stories, as well as an orientation toward predicting what will happen in the future based on the knowledge and experiences provided by social schematizations.

Emirbayer and Mische’s (1998) chordal triad of agency also includes a projective element, which encompasses “the imaginative generation by actors of possible future trajectories of action, in which received structures of thought and action may be creatively reconfigured in relation to actors, hopes, fears, and desires for the future” (p.971). The projective element focuses on how the agentic process “gives shape and direction to future possibilities” (p.984) of action and thought. For the authors, the formation of projects is then always an interactive and culturally embedded process, where social actors negotiate their pathways through the future, finding their driving force in their conflicts and challenges. The main point here lies in the *hypothesization* of experience based on the reconfiguration of their schemas. The social actors reconstruct their schema by creating different possible images of what they want in the future, where they want to go, and how they can get there from where they are. Projectivity becomes the first step toward reflectivity and the mediating link between the iterational and practical-evaluative elements.

Emirbayer and Mische (1998) differentiate here three main internal tones in projectivity: *the narrative construction*, *the symbolic recomposition*, and *hypothetical resolution*. (p.988) Furthermore, they introduce secondary internal tones such as the process of anticipatory identification, using the previous schemas and memory by connecting the past to the present in order to map future trajectories. Actors draw upon past experiences to elucidate motives, goals, and intentions to identify constraints and possible solutions or course of action. The anticipatory
identification is always in a constant process of re-evaluation depending on the motivation and social relationships.

Narrative construction consists of anticipatory identification of trajectories connected to the narratives representing a particular cultural structure, offering cultural resources that provide social actors the sense of moving through the time. The repertoire of stories of social groups serves as temporal framing resources and helps to define membership in a community (Carr, 1986; Somers, 1992 in Emirbayer and Mische, 1998, p.989). Because of their flexibility and metaphorical structure, narrative can be used to propose new resolutions to emerging problems.

Symbolic recomposition involves the recombination of elements of meaning taken by the projective imagination into a variety of possible trajectories where narratives can be creatively reconfigured. After considering possible scenarios, social actors engage in hypothetical resolutions to respond to the challenges and conflicts. These resolutions can be synthetic in nature; this means that actors will try to solve several conflicts at the same time. For example, obtaining a teacher certification may jointly address a person’s desire for accomplishment, status, or money, as well as hope to make a difference in the lives of children. A final dimension of projectivity is the experimental enactment located on the borderline between imagination and action (future and present). Once the different options have been examined, the final resolutions are tested in tentative or exploratory social interactions.

The practical-evaluative element is the capacity of act, to make practical and normative judgements among possible alternative trajectories of action, in response to emerging demands, dilemmas, and ambiguities of presently evolving situations. (Emirbayer and Mische ,1998, p.971). According to the authors, this term responds to what is called practical wisdom, prudence, art, tact, discretion, application, improvisation, and intelligence. The main focus is the
contextualization of social experience. It is through the social relations, through deliberation with others and also self-reflexively, that social actors obtain the capacity to make decisions that may challenge their schemas (1998). It is then, when actors increase their capacity to make practical evaluations and strengthen their ability to exercise agency in a mediating fashion that potentially enable them to challenge the situational contexts. The internal structure of practical evaluation involves problematization, or the recognition of the conflict, problem, or situation, or the recognition that something must be done. Problematization includes characterization and deliberation; in which the problem must be in turn related to principles, schemas or typifications of past experiences, and patterns must be adjusted as well as a conscious search made of how to best respond to the demands of the present, the goals and the projects. Deliberation also involves emotional engagement, and it stands in the “border line between the intellectual and the passional, partaking of both natures: it can be described as either desiderative deliberation or deliberative desire” (Nussbaum 1086, pp.307-8 in Emirbayer and Mische,1998, p.999). Other internal components of practical evaluation are decision and execution. After deliberation, social actors arrive at a decision that points to action; the resolution to act here and now in a particular way does not always end in execution. Execution is the capacity to act toward established goals, in the right time, with the right people in the right circumstances.

Emirbayer and Mische (1998) stressed that these three dimensions of human agency are analytical distinctions and are to be found in varying degrees. Moreover, each dimension has also its own internal chordal structure. The most appealing characteristic is that these three dimensions do not correspond simply to the present, the past or the future in a linear succession of actions, but the social actions are constructed through ongoing temporal passage through emergent events.
Emirbayer and Mische (1998) stressed several clarifications. First, agency is a historically variable phenomenon; this means that not all times, persons and places are equally iterational, projective or practical-evaluative. Second, changes in temporal orientation may involve varying degrees of inventiveness and reflectivity in relation to action, such that longer exposures to a circumstance will encourage the agentic process. Third, agency is intrinsically social and relational (p.973). In this sense, Emirbayer and Mische define their approach to agency as relational pragmatics. From an internal point of view, agency involves different ways of experiencing the world just as consciousness of something and toward something since actors are always in relationship with persons, places, meanings and events. Viewed externally, agency involves actual interactions with its contexts, in something like ongoing conversations “filled with dialogic overtones” as a sort of “link in the chain of speech communications” (Bakhtin, 1986, p.92, 91, in Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p.973). In consequence, they stressed the importance of subjectivity, social interaction, and communication as the vital elements of the agentic process. Agency is always a dialogical process by and through actors who engage with others in collective contexts of actions. Lastly, Emirbayer & Mische ground agency in “the structures and process of the human self, conceived of as internal conversation possessing analytic autonomy vis-à-vis transpersonal interactions” (p.974).

The most compelling aspect of Emirbayer and Mische’s (1998) theoretical framework is that they incorporate all the elements of the previous theoretical frameworks I was looking for in my research: the social and cultural element (sociocultural theories), the internal conversations (Archer’s social realistic theory; reflection and praxis from Freire’s critical pedagogy), the figured world (Holland’s theory), the intentionality, reflectiveness, reactivity and agency that
is temporally extended on the time from Bandura’s theory (socio-cognitive theory), and the link to the historical location (socio-critical theories).

**Studies Examining Foreign-born Teachers’ Teaching Experiences**

In the United States there is no specific research on teachers’ agency in their process of occupational incorporation into the U.S. schools. However, in other multicultural countries such as Australia, Israel, and Canada, there is a growing body of multidisciplinary research that would allow researchers to see the “big picture” about the immigration process of teachers. Based on the purpose and research questions driving this study, this review of literature focuses on the existing qualitative studies examining immigrant teachers’ experiences in multicultural countries. Regarding the wide range of issues immigrant teachers face in their incorporation to the school systems, in this review of literature I analyze four fundamental themes identified from ten studies that are relevant to the topic. These studies examined:

1) the *challenges and barriers* faced by immigrant teachers in their incorporation into their school system;

2) the *construction and reconstruction of teachers’ identity* with the recurrent theme of otherness and the perceived sense of difference; this topic also includes *the constant search for place and sense of belonging* to the school system and the conflicts generated in that search;
3) **the need for mentoring and support networks** to make the incorporation of immigrant teachers a successful experience for both the immigrant teachers and the school systems that hire them; and finally,

4) **the strengths and coping strategies** displayed by teachers during times of conflict.

### Challenges and Barriers

The most frequent barriers to immigrant teachers’ incorporation into the school system found in these studies were command of the dominant language (Cruickshank, 2004; Bustos Flores, 2001); validation of the teachers’ credentials and experience from their home countries (Ramenick, 2002; Bustos Flores, 2001); discrimination for accessing jobs based on age and gender; stereotyping of the teachers and discrediting because of strong accents, and competition from some local teachers who felt threatened by the better educated foreign-born teachers (Ramenick, 2002); and lack of awareness of socio-historical context on the part of the immigrant teachers (Bustos Flores, 2001).

Studies of immigrant teachers in Israel have addressed issues related to immigrant Russian teachers and their professional adjustment in Israel, specifically their struggles and cultural barriers to successful work and performance (Remenick, 2002). In order to examine the main factors of professional integration of immigrant Russian teachers in the Israeli school system, Remenick interviewed 36 former Russian schoolteachers of math and physics, 20 of whom succeeded in obtaining and maintaining a teaching position in Israel, and 16 of whom quit teaching for a variety of reasons. The author found that despite the interest of the government,
the shortage of teachers in Israel, and the uniqueness of the “Israeli immigration and absorption policy” to accommodate skilled immigrants, it was a challenging task to successfully place all of the immigrant teachers. On one hand, the schools and government espoused an ideological commitment to aid immigrants to adjust to the country, but on the other hand, there was strong local competition for jobs (p.101). Furthermore, in the educational system, despite the large teacher shortage, many cultural barriers arose, complicating the successful adjustment of the Russian teachers to the Israeli schools. The most frequent barriers included: command of the dominant language; discrimination for jobs based on age and gender; stereotyping of the teachers as inflexible, authoritative- “school versions of KGB – disciplines, drill, total surveillance” (p.112), and discrediting because of strong accents. These barriers existed in addition to the need among teachers to adjust to a new school culture and to new student-teacher and parent-teacher relationships. Therefore, for Remenick, it was not surprising that the most successful teachers, and the ones who reported high work satisfaction, were young (in their 30s and 40s), with strong teaching experience and Hebrew proficiency, in addition to personal traits such as self-confidence and resilience.

In another study, an evaluation of a teacher education program for immigrant teachers at the University of Sydney in Australia, Cruickshank (2004) addressed the question of what constitutes an effective teacher education for immigrant teachers. According to the author, only 7% of Australian teachers were foreign, and an estimated 14,500 overseas-trained teachers were unable to get back into the teaching profession in Australia in 1991 (Inglis & Philips, 1995 in Cruickshank, 2004). With the growing shortage of teachers in Australia, Cruickshank highlighted the relevance of providing better pathways for these immigrant teachers to get back into the teaching profession. The goal of the study was to identify the issues faced by the
immigrant teachers in becoming certified educators in order to return to teaching in Australia and also to evaluate to what extent those issues were addressed at the University of Sydney.

The main issues for teachers in the study were: obtaining reliable information on the recognition of qualifications; obtaining advice and finding the appropriate courses; and dealing with family, work, and financial problems. Other issues were related to pedagogical conflicts and differences in approaches to teaching and learning, particularly the need for a greater school experience in Australian schools, and differences between the teaching at the university and the school culture. Language issues were also identified as another barrier, and from there arose the need for English language support during teacher education programs.

In the U.S., a study addressing immigrant teachers’ challenges and barriers was conducted by Bustos Flores (2001) on normalistas from the Project Alianza, a teacher preparation project being implemented at various universities throughout Texas and a university in California. According to Bustos Flores, a recent recruitment strategy to address the teacher shortage had been to employ foreign-trained teachers as paraprofessionals or teachers. Specifically, some Texas border school districts had employed normalistas, teachers educated and certified in Mexico (p.3), or had imported Mexican and Spanish teachers to instruct California’s and Georgia’s bilingual classrooms (Valadez, Etxeberria, Pescador, & Ambisca, 2000; Maggs, 1998 in Bustos Flores, 2001, p.3). The committee of the Project Alianza recognized several issues that normalistas needed to address, such as the improvement of the second language, English, in spoken and written forms and the datedness of the normalistas’ preparation, as some had not been teachers for 10-15 years. Also noted as a challenge for normalistas was their lack of experience within the social and political U.S. context: Bustos Flores argues that “although the normalistas had a strong sense of national identity as
Mexicans/as, they lacked an awareness of what it means to ethnically identify self, and they lacked knowledge of the Mexican-American struggle” (p.8). Finally, one of the greatest difficulties was in the accurate evaluation of a teacher’s credentials, specifically in determining the degree of equivalence to acquire a *licenciatura* (the equivalent to a Bachelor’s degree in the U.S.).

**The Construction and Reconstruction of Teacher’s Identities and the Constant Search of Self, Place and Sense of Belonging**

One of the most comprehensive studies of immigrant teachers is the edited book *Making a Difference about Difference: The Lives and Careers of Racial Minority Immigrant Teachers* by Thiessen, Bascia and Goodson (1997). The authors examined the life stories of six racial and ethno-cultural minority teachers in Canada, focusing on the lives of the individual teachers. This research revealed the various social influences upon teachers’ roles and identities, their articulations of perceived differences in terms of race, culture, and language, cultural conceptions of teaching, and the process of negotiation of professional identities and sense of “difference” (Thiessen, Bascia & Goodson, 1997, p.6-7). In their book, the more recurrent theme is immigrant minority teachers’ struggle with the consequences of their perceived “differences” from others, in their personal and professional lives. Those differences are articulated in two ways: in terms of the transition from one country to another, and in terms of other people’s perceptions, reactions, and responses. Differences of language and culture were managed through hard work, study, and time, but, as the authors note, racial and ethnic differences cannot be negotiated through learning and conformity (Thiessen et al, 1996, p.22).

Very related to the construction of immigrant teacher identities is the constant search for place and a sense of belonging. Elbaz-Luwisch (2004) examined personal stories that reveal
what it means to be an immigrant teacher in Israel and brought to light themes such as ‘self’ and ‘place.’ In her narrative inquiry, Elbaz-Luwisch focused on the different ways teachers’ stories revealed a sense of place and how they constituted an array of choices for the immigrant teachers. According to Elbaz-Luwisch, the common themes of ‘holding on,’ ‘holding together,’ ‘feeling like a fake,’ ‘learning how to behave,’ and ‘conflict with the system’ seem to encapsulate the essence of teachers’ stories in their struggles to adapt. ‘Holding on,’ and ‘holding together’ are related to the ways teachers hold past and present together (p.396). ‘Feeling like a fake’ arises from self-criticism and “reflect[s] the need of the teachers to find a way to belong as functioning members of the new society without losing completely their previous identity.” Telling the story of “feeling like a fake is itself a way of navigating the transition to a new identity” (p.402). Learning how to behave is another critical aspect of immigrant experience: learning from and laughing about their own mistakes is also how immigrant teachers make their place (p.402). Finally, ‘conflict with the system’ inevitably arises in the transition to a new culture and reflects the immigrant teachers’ difficulties in adapting to new rules and values. The author suggests that conflicts can also be “useful, enabling the teacher to construct her own story and stake out a claim to a place in the school,” providing an inadvertent pathway toward a teacher’s adaptation, and on her own terms (p.401).

In addition to those themes, she identified creative ways in which the ‘sense of place’ could be found or claimed and argued that they constitute a range of options for the immigrant teacher. One pattern (the ‘fait accompli’ story) in effect says ‘I’m here, like it or not,’ while a second pattern (the dialogic story) says either, ‘I’m here, and this is how I fit in,’ or ‘I’m here, and this is how I differ from you-let’s talk about it.’ The third pattern (the step-by-step story) says, ‘I’m here, and I’m learning (or have learned) to fit in’ (p.407). Finally, in Elbaz-Luwisch’s
analysis, teachers’ stories revealed that relationships are a fundamental piece in finding the sense of place. She notes an individual’s work may help them to create a sense of place, particularly if that work is received and acknowledged by others (p.408).

Following the theme suggested by Elbaz-Luwisch of ‘conflict with the system,’ U.S. researchers address some of the dilemmas confronted by bilingual teachers in the U.S. (Hornberger, 2004), and the specific teaching methods used by Latino bilingual teachers in public schools in order to “resist multiple layers of hegemonic structures” (Arce, 2004). In his article *Latino bilingual teachers: the struggle to sustain an emancipatory pedagogy in public schools*, Arce (2004) explores the methods used by five novice Latino bilingual teachers created “counter-hegemonic conditions – conscious acts of resistance to the dominant ideology – in their classrooms” (Arce, 2004). This participatory research took place in two school districts in California (one urban, one semi-urban) with three different bilingual programs (early exit transitional, late exit language maintenance, and two-way immersion), and included five Spanish-speaking bilingual teachers who were socially and politically conscious and prepared to teach under-served diverse children and their communities. The author identifies five themes relevant to emancipatory pedagogy: 1 – the isolation of bilingual teachers; 2 – the manifestation of power relations among students; 3 – the use of culturally bound pedagogy; 4 – the countering of hidden curriculum through critical pedagogy; and 5 – the development of identity and voice for both students and teachers. The main point of this article is that teachers deliberately used critical pedagogy to face the ‘multiple layers’ of hegemonic structures reflected in students’ “demeaning perspective of their own culture” (p.241) and lack of knowledge of their own history. The author stresses the importance for bilingual teachers (immigrants or U.S.-born) to enter into a collective dialogue to break isolation, as well as the importance of bilingual teachers
as cultural workers and the need to reclaim advocacy for bicultural-bilingual students, in addition to the need to redefine, restructure, and ground bilingual education in critical theory and liberatory practices.

In another study, Galarza (n.d) describes how Abigail – a Latina bicultural teacher – and a group of nine bilingual and bicultural teachers confront the challenges posed by the English-only school system in Cal Elementary. Cal Elementary is a school located in the Tijuana/San Diego border region, where 70% of the population is from Latina/o backgrounds, and most of the students are English language learners who were enrolled according to the mandated Proposition 227 in 1998, in the SEI -Structured English Immersion- program. What Galarza highlights in this research in order to explain immigrant teachers’ reliance on a particularly bicultural pedagogy are the importance of political and ideological clarity, the teachers’ solidarity, and the support of families and communities to resist the imposition of English as the language of power and education at the school. Abigail’s political clarity is the result of her own experiences as a first-generation Latina in the U.S, her experience as an English language learner, and as an experienced and educated bilingual teacher. Teachers’ solidarity with one another, with the students and their parents, and with their local and communities also “arises out of their own experiences as bilinguals and bicultural individuals” (Galarza, n,d. p.26)

Galarza provides a powerful example demonstrating the activist orientation of bicultural teachers in some teachers’ response to a piece of recent legislation that would have mandated the use of only English in the classroom. Abigail (and the nine teachers) confronted the dilemma of either teaching students solely in English, which would have contributed to students’ alienation from their own language and culture, or insisting that her own rich cultural heritage, and those of
her students, had value in the classroom (p. 22). Rather than acting as spectators while their common culture was erased, the ten teachers advocated and built a very successful quality two-way approach to language teaching programs in order to improve Mexican / Latina/o students’ educational experiences while also refusing to exercise hegemonic domination of the English language over their students.

In Australia, Kostogriz & Peeler (2004) explored the relationship between professional spaces, discourses, and subject positions imposed and produced in the construction of professional identities of immigrant teachers in Victorian schools. According to the authors, their theoretical framework goes beyond the “spatial-discursive category of context as fixed and bounded (Gotham, 2003, in Kostogriz & Peeler, 2004) by shifting the focus on extended in time and space social relationships and practices” (p.6). In order to understand the social practices and relationships, it is necessary to focus on the ‘production of space’ which implies to ‘decipher’ connections between the ways spaces are perceived, represented, and used (p.6). In this sense, Kostogriz & Peler call ‘orientation’ the ability to navigate – perceive, decode, and make sense – in social space (2004, p.6). In consequence, the production of teacher workplaces is in relation to the perception of space as a set of appropriate practices and attitudes is sometimes taken for granted, including how knowledge is constructed and decoded, and how space is lived in the local and global realities (lived experiences).

Two important concepts arise from this article: Anderson’s description of community as “imagined” (1991, by Kostogriz & Peler, 2004) and Matusov’s analysis of learning communities (1999, by Kostogriz & Peler, 2004). According to the authors, professional communities of teachers are “imagined as collectives that have a significant history and a common cultural
heritage, assuming the homogeneity of ‘insiders’ and ignoring their class, race or gender differences” (p.5). The design of learning communities based on the homogeneity of the teachers produce three strategies for professional community maintenance: the filter, funnel, and linear models (Matusov, 1999, by Kostogriz & Peler, 2004). In the filter model, the community “attracts” the individuals who fit the community philosophy and practices and rejects those who do not fit in the model. In the funnel, the community initially welcomes diversity among members, but later the members who do not fit in the community are marginalized or forced to leave, although they may be vocal before they leave. In the linear model, there is a process of homogenization through progressive assimilatory strategies; any community member who demonstrates “diversity” is considered “developmental” – still in the process of fully becoming a community member, whereas a “residual” community member is one who presents deliberate or non-deliberate deviation from the assimilatory tendency (Kostogriz & Peler, 2004). Finally, the authors explore the access of eight immigrant teachers to the professional communities in Victorian schools, where being culturally “othered” is a common experience, suggesting that the resolution of this alienation “can only be reached in an ecological model of professional community that makes diversity a resource rather than a problem” (Kostogriz & Peler, 2004, p.6). The authors invite the academic reconceptualization of workplaces as “multi-voiced collectives whose professional practices are related to the practices, discourses and lived experiences in other sociocultural spaces and places” (p.6), reinforcing the idea of cultural diversity in the classroom as a strength.

Another Australian researcher, Seah, has focused his research on the “nature of value differences” of immigrant teachers and “their responsive strategies to negotiate these cultural values differences /conflicts as they attempt to socialize themselves professionally in their host
culture” (Seah, 2002). Finally, Sabar (2004) made comparisons between novice teachers and immigrant teachers and found that “the transition and adaptation that novice teachers need to make in their new schools has much in common with that of immigrants in a new country” (Sabar, 2004). Her study examined the similarities and differences between novice teachers adjusting to the school culture in Israel, versus immigrants’ adjustment to a new country. She interviewed 46 beginning teachers from three different institutions, during their first year and toward the end of the second year. Based on the findings, the author points out that the main stages of socialization of teachers entering the teaching profession can be compared to the process of adjustment of immigrants, though “the immigrant’s ordeal was much longer than that of the novices before most of them became adjusted” (Sabar, 2004, p.146). She notes the “hope and despair” circumstances common to novice teachers and immigrants, due to their leaving behind a familiar culture and moving into an unfamiliar one that is both “attractive and repellent” (p.147). For novice teachers, the ‘instrumental adaptation’ is more difficult than for other professionals because of the conflicting need to adjust and adapt their own identities, while at the same time trying to introduce new pedagogical methods learned during their training. Moreover, while they are dealing with their own adjustment, they fulfill socializing functions for their own students.

Sabar (2004) noted that immigration literature has identified four stages of adjustment: fascination, crisis and hostility toward the host culture, adjustment, and genuine biculturalism (Anderson, 1994; Fried, 1977; Sabar, 2000, in Sabar 2004). In this article, Sabar identified three phases in novice teachers’ development: fantasy, reality, and adjustment. In the fantasy stage – called also “honeymoon” – teachers feel excited but not without doubts and reservations about their classrooms, while immigrants experience similar feelings of excitement and tension when
planning for their trip and upon their arrival to the new country. In the second phase, reality (cultural) shock and crisis occur, fantasies fall down, and teachers experience frustration, despair and failure (p.154). Other scholars have called this phenomenon “reality shock” (Veenman, 1984, in Sabar, 2004) and “transition shock” (Corcoran, 1981, in Sabar, 2004) and it is very similar to the “culture shock” that immigrants experience (Oberg, 1972, in Sabar, 2004). In this phase, teachers and immigrants feel like strangers to their circumstances and as though they are marginalized. In the third stage – adjustment through mastery, leading to influence (p.155) – the novice teachers begin to understand the complexities of the reality and are able to ‘read the map’ through trial and error. In this phase, novice teachers as well as immigrants try to navigate a strange culture whose rules are unclear. Many of the novice teachers who are unable to cope with this situation leave the teaching profession, and those who remain have to learn the logic of other players in order to control the situation. It is during this stage that teachers become more self-confident and think about having an impact broader than their original teaching responsibilities. In general, these stages are not linear, and progress through the stages may involve backsliding and experiencing more than one stage at a time. Regarding the differences, Sabar found that immigrants expect to face difficulties because of language, culture, customs and finances; moreover, there is no pre-service education for immigration. While teachers do not expect to face those difficulties (but immigrant teachers do) and have received school training, both groups experience “surprise that leads to shock” (p.158).

There are some differences, however, between the experiences of teachers and the experiences of immigrants. First is the duration of time that the incorporation experiences last; immigrants may experience this difficulty over a very long period – even many years – that often leads to depression; immigrants also have the incentive of a better future for their families to
push them through the difficult periods. Teachers generally have only one or one and half academic years to adjust; if they do not make it, they can be fired, or they may leave the profession. And while teachers have the choice to quit and get another job, very often immigrants do not have other choices. Other differences are also related to status and supportive environments that teachers have and that immigrants often do not; teachers need to face the conflicts between the teacher training and the school culture, while immigrants often adjust to the host country by maintaining their own culture and traditions.

In another study, Amobi (2004) described her journey as a teacher educator in the United States. She compares her professional journey of immigration to professorship as an act of border transgression – physical and literal borders, but also metaphorical ones – with checkpoints and gatekeepers in each stage: acceptance to the university, visa issues, registration, graduate education, and professional teacher education. One of the main obstacles she found in her continual border crossing was the feeling of ‘otherness,’ described by Giroux as: “the ‘devaluated Other,’ whose humanity suffers the threat of being ‘disparaged or ruthlessly denied’” (Giroux, 1992, by Amobi, 2004). In many different ways, Amobi was “the one designated as ‘Other’” (p.170) and, in consequence, marginalized and categorized as a weak link in the group (p.171). She writes that the main elements of her ‘otherness’ were the differences in communication styles, her strong accent, and the language of engagement in the learning community (despite being an English speaker educated in a rigorous former British colony graduate school). However, she was not only marginalized as ‘the other’ by professors, fellow graduate students, and her own undergraduate students, but also by herself, as she questioned her own abilities.
Amobi uses Heney’s description of centripetal (empowering participation to the center) and centrifugal participation (disempowering participation to the margins) to explain the effects of her participation in the different metaphorical borders. She also explains how she finally embraced her otherness as “a powerful and positive component of [her] uniqueness” (p.176), how she “reached out to build bridges of professional collaboration with like-minded others, while seeking to work productively” (p.177), and how with professional colleagues, her border crossing highlights “the coexistence of centripetal and centrifugal forces” (p.177). Amobi’s main point is that we are all border-crossers, and that acknowledging this idea can turn ‘otherness’ and perceived difference into uniqueness and self-affirmation, while also creating spaces to celebrate commonalities (p.177).

Mentoring and Support

It is evident from most of the studies that mentoring and support systems from the schools, universities, community and broad society are necessary to successfully incorporate immigrant teachers in the U.S. In their study, Peler and Jane (2005) emphasized the need for mentoring as a means to bridge the gap between newcomer immigrant teachers and the school communities in Australia. According to the authors, through both formal and informal mentoring structures, the immigrant teachers attained knowledge and understanding of an unfamiliar workplace, philosophy, and practice (p.326). Therefore, the authors highlight the importance of both formal and informal mentoring and induction programs for immigrant teachers to be able to access school communities. They argue that “hierarchical structures within institutions influence the nature of relationships between newcomers and old-timers and

Furthermore, they bring attention to the implicit rules and hidden agendas maintained by previous employees that encourage hesitation among newcomers, who act with caution in order to fit in with an unwritten rulebook (Goodson & Cole, 1993, by Peler & Jane, 2005, p.327). As Gee stated, “the process of articulation into a new community is dependent upon forming effective relationships” (2000, in Peler & Jane, 2005 p.327). The nature of these new relationships depended, then, on the ability of the immigrant teachers to have common experiences that potentially lead to a sense of belonging (Alfred, 2001, in Peler & Jane, 2005).

According to Peler and Jane, meaning is created in unfamiliar situations partly by knowledge, which can be provided to immigrant teachers, but only when the need is acknowledged (Peler and Jane, p.353). Finally, they call attention to the many advantages of mentoring relationships for newcomer immigrant teachers, not only for the teachers, but for the entire community.

In addition, Remenick (2004) found that immigrants struggling to define their own identities in a workplace benefitted from informal social support (p.115). One important aspect in the successful adaptation of the teachers was institutional sources of support such as an ‘accompanying veteran colleague’ and the participation of the teachers in the Immigrant Teachers Association, which helped them to persevere in their jobs by offering them psychological counseling, information support, and connections with other Russian teachers.

One important conclusion from Thieseen et al.’s (1996) study was that minority teachers will likely be unable to influence their colleagues in a substantial way if there are no institutional changes implemented (Thiessen et al, 1996, p.172). They asked for a healthy understanding of the limits of school capacities to challenge broader social values and practices and not expect
that immigrant teachers solely will act as catalysts to change organizational practices without addressing the characteristics of the school system.

Cruickshank (2004) claimed that, from the experience of the University of Sydney, it is necessary to respond to the growing diversity in Australia with teacher education programs that respond to four components: increasing access for students from minority backgrounds; introducing appropriate delivery modes and structures; developing inclusive curriculum along with a range of support programs for students; and incorporating equity provisions into institutional structures (p.136). These claims are convergent with Bustos Flores’ (2001) conclusion that a university can assist in the integration of foreign-trained teachers, and that, at a minimum, universities should offer guidance and mentoring, financial assistance, and motivational support (p.10).

Finally, the analysis of these studies leads to the conclusion that the process of incorporation of immigrant teachers traverses different stages in which issues and barriers occur at different moments of immigrant teachers’ lives. Some of the issues have more weight than others, according to the different socio-cultural and personal backgrounds of the immigrant teachers. However, there are some common experiences that arise when talking about the process of incorporation of immigrant teachers in the U.S. school system. Initially, the first situation that immigrant teachers experience is the adjustment to the host country after the migration journey; this adjustment sometimes takes several years, and for some immigrants it never happens. The second step is gaining access and learning how to navigate through the school system. This process sometimes also takes several years and encompasses validation of their teaching credentials to finding a job in the school system that values their teaching philosophy and honors their multicultural backgrounds. The last stage implies a learning process
about the host school culture and the social interactions they encounter. It is in this stage when the immigrant teachers exercise their agency and successfully contribute as inter-cultural agents helping to create bridges and multicultural spaces in their respective school systems, and it is this stage that has become the focus of this research project: how immigrant teachers negotiate full participation in their schools and their challenges and strategies in becoming inter-cultural workers.
CHAPTER 3

METHODS

This chapter includes the design of the research, the research sites, the sample and the sample criteria, the methods of data collection and analysis, limitations of the research, the researcher role and subjectivity statement, and risks and benefits of the study.

Study Design

This qualitative study utilizes an interpretive interactionist approach described by Denzin, which is meant to produce meaningful descriptions and interpretations of social processes while also acknowledging the influence of interpretive structures and social power relations (2001, p.43). In Denzin’s words,

Interpretive interactionists want to interpret, perform, and change the world. They understand that qualitative methods are material and interpretive practices. These practices do no stand outside politics and cultural criticism. Interpretive methodologies advance the project of critically imagining and pursuing a more democratic society (2001, p.26).

Denzin’s analytical framework draws on theories of social constructionism, which hold that meaning is not created but constructed; interpretive interactionism acknowledges that knowledge cannot be assumed to be objective, and that, consequently, interpretive studies can reveal only the “interpreted worlds of interacting individuals” (2001, p.51). Moreover, “meaning” in social constructionism cannot be described simply as objective or subjective (Crotty, 1998). In social constructionism, social reality is constructed, or created by social actors
According to Burr (1995), social constructionism is based on four fundamental tenets, including: a critical stance toward taken-for-granted knowledge (including ourselves); historical and cultural specificity; an assumption that knowledge is sustained by social processes; and an expectation that knowledge and social action go together. Further, Denzin argues that interpretive interactionism has a distinctly activist orientation, in that it is understood that politics and culture affect both the data collected and the analysis of data. Additionally, interpretive interactionism allows researchers to critically imagine and pursue a more democratic society by analyzing data with an eye toward the influence of social power relations (Denzin, 2001, p.26). Practitioners utilizing this research philosophy refashion traditional scientific research in the social sciences by showing rather than telling, and elaborating only minimally upon simplicity (p.1).

From a practical perspective, interpretative interactionism involves the collection of writings and performances (poems, dialogues, etc.) of thickly written descriptions of personal experiences. Thick descriptions generate and establish the grounds for thick interpretations (2001, p.52). According to Denzin, a thick description has the following features: it gives the context of an action; it states the intentions and meanings that organize the action; it traces the evolution and development of the action; and it presents the action as a text that can then be interpreted. A thin description simply reports facts, independent of intentions or the circumstances that surround the action (Denzin, 2001, p.53).

In the interpretative process of personal experiences connected to social interactions, the analysis is framed by two sources: the researcher and the subject, where the researcher uses his or her own life experiences as topics of inquiry (Denzin, 2001, p.70). In this case, I used my
own personal experiences, as an immigrant teacher in a dual immersion program, as a tool to analyze and interpret with different lenses the data that emerged from the study. I listened to and recorded the stories of the participants. I conducted open-ended, creative, active interviews. Later, thick descriptions, interpretations and a performance text were generated from these interviews (2001, p.26). For example, I created poems that evoked and represented the character of the participants (p.31) during challenging situations where teachers’ agency was revealed.

Because the research interest of this project is related to such personal topics as identity and agency, it is appropriate to utilize a research method that elaborates “outward from the biography of the person” (2001, p.2), which also speaks to the relationship between private lives and public responses to personal conflicts. This method offers potential to critical theorists, as interpretive interactionists are committed to social justice and propose that the practices of critical interpretive qualitative research can help change the world in positive ways (p.2). For Denzin, and for the purposes of my study, everyday life turns around our own interpretations and other people’s interpretations; sometimes those interpretations are misleading or based on multiple and, at times, conflicting, understandings. Interpretive interactionists are committed to the idea that social science research should be able to clarify and take into account the perspectives and attitudes of the persons served (p.3).

Moreover, the theoretical foundations of the research come from sociocultural theories of learning and human development and from a tradition of critical inquiry, especially from Freire’s work (1970) on critical pedagogy regarding issues of power and social justice, dialectical interpretation of knowledge, and historical context.
Participant Recruitment

I recruited participants for this study using purposive sampling, in which participants were chosen specifically based on the particular perspectives they could offer (Esterberg, 2000). I recruited participants from among my own professional and social circle, some of whom I have known from my previous work with the TELL (Teachers for English Language Learners) scholarship program, some from the classes at the University of Georgia and some also from my current school site. Other immigrant teachers have been referred to me by friends or colleagues. I specifically sought teachers who were competent teachers with established teaching careers, teachers who were born outside the United States, and those who were working in a public school.

The participants comprise a diverse sample. They come from different school sites in Georgia and the north east coast of the United States. I recruited participants both from different U.S. schools (public schools; charter public schools, and dual language programs) and from different native countries; European, Asian, and Latin American countries are all represented in this sample. The participants represent different races and ethnicities, genders, and marital and socioeconomic statuses. Moreover, this sample includes both educators with established teaching careers in their home countries and mid-career professionals entering the teaching profession. Some of them are in the U.S because of marriage to a U.S. citizen, and one of them because of political asylum. Details about their lives are provided in chapter (4) and, for the reader’s convenience, in the following chart.
<table>
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<th>Participant</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Years in the USA</th>
<th>Years of Teaching</th>
<th>Teaching Area</th>
<th>Former Teacher</th>
<th>Former Profession</th>
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<tr>
<td>Maja</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>30-35</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Elementary Spanish (Dual Language)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Lawyer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Collection

I utilized several methods for data collection. First, I used Seidman’s (2006) model of three separated interviews with each participant in order to elicit stories and thick descriptions of experiences.

**Interview one** focused on participants’ stories of immigration, eliciting narratives about participants’ personal histories of immigration to the U.S. (see Appendix C for interview schedule).

**Interview two** focused on concrete details of participants’ experiences as teachers before and after the immigration process. In this interview I explored immigrant teachers’ experiences in the context of their social setting; we discussed their relationships with students, mentors, other teachers at school, administrators, parents and the wider community. I explored challenging situations and how teachers faced these situations, particularly how the teachers exercised their agency in these situations and the internal dialogue that led to action.

**Interview three** focused on reflections of the meaning of teachers’ experiences as immigrants and as teachers. I asked teachers to explore the past in order to reflect about the future: how the teachers see themselves as agents in their process of immigration. I also explored teachers’ internal conversations in their interpretation of their successes and influences in the school systems where they work. It was an exploration of the teachers’ views of their agency.

During the interview process, I also sent e-mails to ask for clarifications regarding the topics that emerged from the interviews. I asked some participants, at my discretion, to write reflections or elaborations of “internal conversations” on topics that emerged during reviews of the interview materials.
I conducted interviews at a location in or near the schools where the teachers work after obtaining signed consent forms from participants. I conducted interviews with Maria, Susana, Helena, Victoria and Maja in Spanish; I transcribed those interviews in Spanish and later translated the interviews into English. I conducted interviews with the remainder of the sample in English. During transcription, I replaced all personally identifying information with pseudonyms chosen by the participants, and, in the case of the interviews conducted in English, a native English-speaking researcher checked the transcript against the tape for accuracy. The audiotaped interviews lasted from one and a half to two hours each. The tapes will be erased no later than December 31, 2015. Consent forms have been stored separately from the transcripts; once the tapes are erased, it will be difficult to link a participant to the data provided in any written or orally presented materials about the research.

**Analytic Plan**

A hybrid of inductive and deductive analysis helped me synthesize the raw data into common patterns and categories to make connections between the data and the research questions. Narrative analysis helped me to go beyond the themes, patterns, categories or codes, and allowed me to reflect and analyze the meanings of the findings by using the participant voices. The reason for the use of these methods of analysis arises from my concern with capturing the meaning of experience, voice, and human qualities in relation to personal or professional dimensions (Cortazzi, 2001) and the appropriateness of the analysis to the methodology. Denzin provides specific instructions for interpretive researchers seeking to discover “recurring, structural, interactional, and meaning patterns” (2001, p.65):

1. Securing the interactional text
2. Displaying the text as a unit
3. Subdividing the text into key experiential units
4. Analyzing each unit linguistically and interpretatively
5. Serially unfolding and interpreting the meanings of the text to the participants
6. Developing working interpretations of the text
7. Checking these hypotheses against the subsequent portions of the text
8. Grasping the text as a totality
9. Displaying the multiple interpretations that occur within the text

I followed most of the steps, especially separating the text as units and comparatively analyzing them with different interpretations of the text. After the analysis of each unit, I checked again through the entire interview to grasp the text as a totality. I compared each individual interview of each participant, and then I compared and contrasted the different interpretations with the interviews of the other participants. When I had difficulties grasping the meaning or I wasn’t sure about one interpretation, I e-mailed or spoke directly with the participant to clarify the situation. Finally, I created performance texts in the form of poems when I considered it to be appropriate to highlight my interpretations in this way.

**Researcher Role**

To some degree, I have lived similar immigrant experiences to those of the research participants. For this reason, I am an insider presenting an emic view of some of the research questions. My challenge has been harnessing (as much as possible) my biases about the research, while simultaneously understanding and analyzing the data with multiple lenses. Denzin has argued that a qualitative researcher is always an interested party to the research she
or he conducts and that the researcher brings a particular perspective to the research project, including data interpretation, which is influenced by her or his own social location:

The qualitative researcher is not an objective, politically neutral observer who stands outside and above the study of the social world. Rather, the researcher is historically and locally situated within the very processes being studied. A gendered, historical self is brought to this process. This self, as a set of shifting identities, has its own history with the situated practices that define and shape the public issues and private troubles being studied. (Denzin, 2001, p.3)

As the instrument of data analysis and interpretation, it is necessary for me to acknowledge the ways in which my identity may influence the outcome of my research. My subjectivities come from different sources: first, from my collectivist point of view regarding culture; second, from my educational and professional background and multicultural life experiences; third, from my perspective as a minority Latina immigrant; and fourth, from my personal relationships with some of the research participants.
CHAPTER 4

PARTICIPANTS IN THE RESEARCH

This chapter is dedicated to depicting the lives of the eight immigrant teachers participating in this research project. In order to ensure diversity in the sample, I recruited teachers from different countries such as Colombia, Korea, Mexico, Poland, Singapore and Spain. They represent different races and ethnicities, genders, marital statuses, and socio-cultural and political backgrounds. Moreover, the selection of the participants ensured representation of individuals with prior teaching careers in their home countries as well as mid-career professionals entering the teaching profession for the first time in the U.S. Additionally, there are a variety of motivations for immigration represented in this sample: love and marriage with a U.S. citizen; search for political asylum after fleeing a native country; or hope that the U.S. would provide better professional opportunities.

I invite you to open “an imaginary window” and lean out to witness the fascinating lives of seven women and one man who migrated to the U.S. and are currently teaching in public schools.

Sweet María

*I came here to heal,*  
*my parents were gone...*  
*Both left us in one and a half years*  
*I was depressed...I was alone*  
*I didn’t have an objective,*  
*I was sad...very sad*  
*All my sisters were married,*  
*I was the only one at home.*
- Why don't you take vacations?
- Why don't you go? My sister asked me,
- You won't lose anything...
I followed her advice and I came,
I didn't come thinking I will stay,
I just came for vacation.
I started studying English
And this was the beginning
of two stories of love ...
I fell in love with a man
I had children of my own
I was all the time at their schools,
I observed their teachers’ work,
I saw their love and dedication,
And I was falling in love,
I was falling in love with education.

Maria is a 43-year-old Colombian teacher with eight years of experience teaching in the U.S. She currently teaches English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes in an elementary school where most of her students come from Hispanic backgrounds. She became a teacher in the U.S. through a number of steps, starting as a parent liaison and translator and later becoming a part-time teacher in the newcomers program of her school district. One year later, she started a full-time job as ESOL co-teacher, where she has remained with the same school district for eight years.

Maria comes from a modest family. Her parents didn’t finish elementary school, but they valued education, as many Colombian families do. Four of their five children finished high school, and two of them went to college. Her older sister is a lawyer, and Maria holds a degree as an industrial engineer. She also studied two semesters of accounting before coming to the U.S. In addition, she pursued a master’s degree in early childhood education in the U.S.

Her father worked for many years in a courtroom as an office worker until he broke one hand and lost his job; he never could get another formal job. Her mother was a seamstress who sewed clothing for the people living in the neighborhood. Maria and her three older sisters were,
from that time on, in charge of the family needs. When Maria graduated, she started working in a rural area in the Valle del Cauca, in an area controlled by the guerrillas. She recalls, 20 years later, regularly being forced to evacuate her bus or jeep at 5:00 am, as she made her way to the farm, by guerillas who wanted to explore the contents of the automobile. At that time, Maria worked as the assistant to the production manager in a maquila, a rural cooperative that sewed products for other companies. In this cooperative, the workers were the owners of the company. Her main responsibilities were to train the workers to measure production times in the clothing manufacturing processes, to create procedures manuals, and to teach workers to manage the production processes. After that job, and before coming to the U.S., Maria also worked in a factory that produced shirts for a company in Miami.

When asked about the reasons to emigrate from her native Colombia to the U.S., Maria replied that she had no real objective in immigrating, noting that she was, in that moment, suffering from depression:

At that time my father and mother both passed away in a year and a half, so I was very, very sad… Because all my sisters were married, and I was the only one at home with my youngest brother… (Maria, personal interview, April 4, 2011)

It was at her sisters’ urgings that Maria investigated emigrating to the US, although she was initially unconvinced that such an event would be possible, due to her own lack of financial stability. While her sister called it “a vacation,” Maria knew that the chance of receiving a visa was low:

I told her, “Nobody is going to give me a visa, I don’t have money, I don’t even have a bank account.” She said, “You aren’t losing anything.” And I went and they gave me the visa, and then I came here, and then… I fell in love and I stayed here (laughs). This is the entire story. I didn’t come thinking I would stay here; I just came for vacation. The only thing I did was that I started studying
English at La Guardia Community College.” (Maria, personal interview, April 4, 2011)

As Maria says, this was the beginning of a love story, a love story with education that has lasted for ten years. When she began looking for a job, she had only a work permit, and an interview at El Puente, an organization that helped pregnant adolescents, did not end successfully. However, in a stroke of coincidence, the person who helped Maria to write her resume asked her to pass along a copy, and he later connected her with the school district in her area.

As Maria started her job as Spanish translator and interpreter, she recognized the importance of work in education. She was able to help parents learn how to work with their children and to show them how mobility to different schools affected their children. She says: “It was a really nice job… it was beautiful.” Perhaps Maria’s personality was an asset to her enjoyment of the position; it was her enjoyment of speaking with people, teachers in particular, which led her to observe how they worked and the love that teachers put into their work. She notes that her interest in teaching grew over time:

And I was falling in love, every day I was feeling that... that was more a part of me. Not that I was looking for a job as a teacher, because I never thought I would have that opportunity. But, the more I was in the IEP meetings, the more I heard the things the teachers did for the children, and I observed that they cared so much for the children…that…I don’t know… I even want to cry. (Maria, personal interview, April 4, 2011)

Maria’s appreciation for the teachers’ strong emotional attachment to children, then, was a major motivation in her viewing teaching as a noble career path for herself.

Additionally, her curiosity about how the school would treat her own children was a motivation to become more involved in the educational system. At that time, Maria’s older child
was four and the younger one was two years old. She described the moment when she learned that some of the odd behavior she had noticed in her older child could be due to developmental challenges:

I knew that my older kid’s development wasn’t like any other four-year-old boy. He couldn’t talk in Spanish or English. He didn’t know how to play; he only liked to throw things up in the air. Then I was in an IEP meeting when I was parent liaison, and they started talking about a child that had the same characteristics of my child. They started talking about him, and it was like I was seeing my kid there. (Maria, personal interview, April 4, 2011)

After that meeting, Maria sought help from the psychologists and the special education personnel, and they assisted her in many ways, by giving her information and connecting her with well-known specialists in order to obtain a diagnosis for her child. She was very happy with the help provided by these educators, because their help changed her child’s future:

I think I fell in love with education because I saw that my child had possibilities; [I thought] that in the same way that my child had possibilities, other children if I started teaching, would have the same possibilities with me. I wanted to return to the world what they were going to do for my kid. (Maria, personal interview, April 4, 2011)

And so Maria’s journey into education sprang from a dark place, but ended with her shining devotion to her students.

**Courageous Susana**

*The world was wider ...
but it wasn’t enough for me
... I didn’t want to be in a school
In a vicious cycle... you are a leader,
You teach, you mentor and...
Year over year the same... the vicious circle
... I leave... I am going to look.
I already had my daughter and it was more difficult,
but then, I looked for how to come to here...to the U.S.,*
for the same reason,
to make my world wider.

Susana is a 41 year old Colombian teacher with 14 years of teaching experience, nine of them working in Colombia with international schools. She has a bachelor’s degree in Modern Languages, a master’s degree in Leadership and Education, and post-graduate studies in translation. She is currently a kindergarten teacher in a unique one-way immersion program in the southeastern area of the U.S, where all of the students come from Hispanic backgrounds. She teaches Spanish, social studies, and science in Spanish (in context). Susana came the first time to the United States through the Visiting International Faculty (VIF) Program, an exchange program that brings teachers to the U.S. from more than 50 countries. After a couple of years she returned to the U.S. to get married to a U.S. citizen and start a new teaching career in this country.

Susana is the youngest of 10 children. She comes from a family with a low economic status, in which the father was a tailor and the mother was a housewife. Susana’s mother was a very smart woman who, in Susana’s words, found a “strategic dynamic” to provide education for her children as the springboard to social mobility. As in many Colombian families, the older siblings went to study to the SENA (Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje) to learn a skill in order to work and fund the education of the younger siblings. As a result, all the children except two (the older sister and one brother who passed away) got a college degree in different areas: four in accounting, two in business administration, one in philosophy, and Susana in modern languages. This plan created a family dynamic emphasizing a strong education ethic:

Then, starting from the fourth one, everyone in my house did the same: when they were in ninth grade they went to study something at the SENA. More of them studied to be secretary or accountant assistant… They worked during the day, and they studied at
night... So, it became a dynamic that was very predictable, and I liked that structure. One already knew how the family life was. I mean, one grew up, one lived to study, to do sports and to have fun with the family. (Susana, personal interview, April 7, 2011)

When Susana finished high school she wanted to study social communication as her first choice, and modern languages as a second option. Coming from a public school that she claims did not provide her with a good education, she was unable to enter the social communication program based on her exam scores, coming close, but not being able to compete with students from wealthier, resource-rich schools. With modern languages as a second option, she entered the university.

On the first day of class in the language program, Susana’s professor asked the students to identify themselves if they had entered the program as a second choice, as if it were a common circumstance. His following comments made a large impact on Susana, as she recalls him pointedly telling students that they were “not here to learn songs in English;” they were there to become teachers, and that they should not continue in the program if they had a different goal. Susana frames her own identity as a teacher in that professor’s terms:

And when he said that, I thought that I wanted to be teacher, but I always thought that I wanted to be a language teacher, and I studied modern languages. [And, now.] I am a language teacher, a teacher of languages. That is what I am. I am not an elementary teacher; I am a teacher that teaches languages in context in elementary school. And I like it better. That is the perfect combination. (Susana, personal interview, April 7, 2011)

Susana started teaching English in a daycare center when she was in the second year of her college classes. When she finished her degree, she worked with different bilingual schools in Colombia, doing research, focusing on analysis of language production among the children: registering everything that the kids said, and then analyzing the sequences. While this was a
great learning experience for Susana, she realized that she was a great leader and a mentor for the new teachers year after year, and “it became a vicious cycle at the ninth year; I realized that it was the same, and when you are getting old in education, it is a vicious circle.”

She also realized that the newer immigrant teachers at her schools who ended up with better career opportunities were the teachers who had lived in Europe, especially in England, or the new arrivals from the United States who didn’t have her preparation but had a good level of English competency. She felt pushed out of her own teaching community in Colombia, and her disappointment led her to seek out a new life for her daughter and herself.

The world was wider, but it wasn’t enough for me … I didn’t want to be in a school where they give the language class to the architect who just arrived from England who didn’t know anything about education but had good English. So, I said to myself… “I’m leaving. I’m going to look.” I already had my daughter, and it was more difficult, but… So I looked for how to come to here, to the U.S., for the same reason, to make my world wider (Susana, personal interview, April 7, 2011).

In her search, Susana found out that one of her friends came to the U.S. through the VIF program and began working in a high school. Her friend’s difficulties adjusting to the school system in the States was compounded by differences in community socio-economic status and student age, but she persisted. Susana was bolstered by her friend’s success in the U.S., influencing her own decision to join her friend through the same company.

**Nostalgic Helena**

*I had the perfect life,*  
*One life that began with dreams*  
*of studying, of growing up, of going to college,*  
*of working and teaching at the school*  
*everything I had as a goal,*  
*I was reaching it, reaching it...*  
*But one day, I had to flee the country*
My family was caught in the middle of the drug war
Fleeing the country was our only option
Coming to the United States
To save our lives, to start a new, different life.

Helena is a 44-year-old Colombian teacher with 26 years of teaching experience, nine of them in the U.S. and the rest in Colombia. She currently teaches Spanish in a high school in Georgia, with students from diverse backgrounds. She has extensive experience in different types of private and public schools and also with different methodologies and teaching philosophies, from Montessori schools to dual immersion programs and international baccalaureate programs. She has a master’s degree in education and postgraduate studies in technology. In addition, she was nominated as Teacher of the Year in 2010.

She was born in a small town in the central region of Colombia. She comes from a large middle class family with 13 children, seven brothers and six sisters, with a father who was a farmer and rancher, and a midwife mother. Helena acknowledges the clear foundations provided by moral and religious principles in her family, as well as a strong sense of what “family” means: collaboration and accountability. Her parents were clear with their children about their own expectations for them, but they reinforced those expectations “with much love, yes.”

Her father came from a wealthy family, but he was very independent and never counted on his family’s fortune, building his own through hard work, and relying on creativity, rather than income, to handle the demands of a large family. Helena’s father was a leader in the community where she was born, and he emphasized what Helena considered to be a very smart outlook on the part of her father:

[He encouraged us to see that] a person’s worth is not because of their social class or their possessions, but…for what he/she gives, for how he/she helps. And so, I believe that was the foundation for us to know how he didn’t give importance to the material things,
but how he used the material things to help people (Helena, personal interview, June 7, 2011).

Helena says of her mother that she was also a leader in the community, acting as the community doctor, devoted not just to laboring women and their babies, but to everyone. She recalls knocks on the door late at night, followed by her mother retrieving her briefcase and climbing on her horse, to return the next day after helping to deliver a new baby. In their large village, with remote locations, her mother could not help everyone all the time, but their house served as the destination for people who had suffered from cuts or accidents.

Though the family was living in the countryside, Helena’s older sister brought the siblings to Bogota (Colombia’s capital city), where she was working with the military hospital. She helped the first siblings, and then each sibling supported his or her younger sister or brother in the chain. In this case, Helena knew the value of her place in the family order: “Being the youngest one, I was blessed because each of my siblings gave me the best of them and their support… even now that I am so far away.”

Helena moved to Bogota to study there when she was seven years old. She only came back to the farm during vacation time. When she finished elementary school, she entered the Normal school in Villapinzón to start her teaching education. In that kind of school in Colombia, students study in the 6th and 7th grade, and then in 8th grade they start practicing in the classrooms as teacher aides and later conduct their own classes in their practicum. This was Helena’s course, as well, leading to a life in her country of origin that she calls “perfect;” a life of studying, going to college, working and teaching in different socio-cultural levels, but also with the pleasure of reaching her childhood goals:

As a child, I was happily teaching while destroying my mother’s garden; I picked all the flowers and put them in rows and those
were the different grades: the blue ones, the red ones, the yellow ones, the white ones, each color represented a different grade level. I was very happy doing that and writing in the patio of my house... Do you remember the big patios in the coffee-growing regions that are big enough to dry the coffee? During the time that we weren’t drying coffee, that was my favorite board. I wrote there with charcoal and played all the time. I talked and talked and taught class until I fell asleep in the patio (laughing)... (Susana, personal interview, April 7, 2011)

However, in a country where a constant war against drug trafficking has spanned 30 years, there are few options for someone who is an active participant in that war, as Helena’s husband was. He worked with the government as an investigator of laundered money, and he was threatened in such a way that he knew that his life and his family’s lives were in danger. They left the country and came to the United States in 2000 without any psychological preparation to start a new life in a new country. They had only a couple of friends that introduced them to the church of the community where they arrived to live.

It should come as no surprise that Helena describes herself as eternally in love with a classroom. As an adult teacher, she loves knowing that she is doing something every day for the children and for parents and claims that every year that she teaches is unique.

Persistant Victoria

I always had that little thing inside me...
That... I wanted to change the world,
I wanted to leave this world
As a better place than I found it.
I was in politics but it didn’t work,
I realized that politics
Don’t change society...no.
When I graduated in Spain,
I started looking for a job,
Long lines, many curriculums,
for a store job...
Lot of professionals in competition
and nothing happened... no jobs
Then I decided... I’ll go away, I cannot stay
I’m going to study English and I will come back
With English I will find my job.
I was a fille-au-pair
I got friends, I got married
And I decided to stay in the U.S.A.
I started teaching Spanish
Perhaps... society could be changed by teaching,
Bringing cultures closer by teaching...

Victoria is a Spanish 41-year-old teacher with nine years of teaching experience in the U.S. She has a bachelors’ degree from Spain in Spanish Language Philology equivalent to a master’s degree in the U.S. She currently teaches Spanish to 7th and 8th graders in a middle school in a New Jersey school district. Victoria is the older daughter of a upper middle class family with three children. During her childhood, Victoria’s family lived in different regions in Spain. Her parents are Catalán, and because of her father’s job, the children were born outside Cataluña in Malaga (Victoria), Cadiz (sister) and Sevilla (brother). For this reason, Victoria feels that she is half Catalana and half Andaluza.

Victoria’s father came from a very modest family. Victoria’s grandfather was a construction worker who worked as stonemason in the famous Sagrada Familia cathedral in Barcelona, and he died when Victoria’s father was 14 years old; Victoria’s grandmother was a seamstress. Victoria’s father did not have much education himself, but he was very interested in education. He frequently recounted to his children that, when he was 14 years old, with his first paycheck, he bought a dictionary of synonyms and antonyms because he wanted to look like an educated person, “a person that had synonyms.” And, in reality, many people have asked Victoria to identify the university where her father studied, because of his “educated person” vocabulary. Although self-taught, he made his living after the Spanish civil war as salesman in the cotton industry, moving up the ranks until becoming the vice-president of the company.
Victoria’s mother, on the other hand, comes from a more educated family; she is the daughter of a journalist and a housewife.

Because of the high rate of unemployment in her area in Spain (25%) in 1996, when she was 26 years old, Victoria decided to come to the U.S. to learn English in order to have better opportunities in the Spanish job market. She came to Brooklyn, New York, through an au-pair agency to work for a family with two children, one of them autistic. She stayed there about six months and then changed to work with another family in the northern part of New York State.

When her one-year visa expired, Victoria decided to stay in the U.S. Although it wasn’t an easy decision, she was very enthusiastic about living in the U.S., where she had a boyfriend and some good friends. When she got married, she applied for regularization of her status, and when she received her work authorization, she started working as a Spanish teacher in a county community college. She worked part-time there for about three years and then began seeking better employment benefits through a full-time job teaching Spanish in the K-12 school system. When she found a job in a high school, she followed the alternative route to get her teaching certification: she taught during the school day and attended evening classes.

Victoria describes herself as a persistent person, who believes in herself and her ability to achieve her goals. She pursues what she wants and never stops short of success. It has been this persistence that has helped her find the ways to get what she wants. Her persistent personality spills over into her classroom, reinforcing her belief that she can make a difference in the world:

I always had that little thing inside me that I wanted to change the world. I wanted to leave this world as a better place than I found it. I was in politics in Spain for three years, and I thought after three years that with politics we cannot change society, that perhaps it could be changed by teaching. And what better than teaching Spanish, right? Bringing one culture closer to another. (Victoria, personal interview, June 15, 2011)
Victoria’s disillusionment with politicians and politics in Spain arose from intolerance on the part of both leftist and rightist political parties after the fall of the military dictatorship. Calls for regional autonomy and recognition of distinct languages fueled social division. In her mind, Spanish society would be better served finding a way to incorporate all perspectives, and her belief was that the mission of a politician was to “enter into a dialogue with the other to improve the country.” Victoria’s view of a united society is simple:

Yes, I would like people to change their mentality…. If people were more tolerant and could understand that people are all the same… It’s the same wherever you are, or whatever your race: everyone laughs the same way; everyone feels the same way; everyone has sorrows the same way; and all people do things based on their circumstances in life. Many times when I go to Europe – you know, in Europe people criticize the U.S. a lot – I have relatives and people that criticize the U.S., because they don’t know...they don’t understand what moves those people. They have not lived there (Victoria, personal interview, June 15, 2011)

**Free Jack**

*I came from Poland, three years after the fall of the Berlin Wall; I arrived in the U.S. for academic work That was extended twice for six months. I did my doctoral program and got a job top research in cloning was my work, but September eleventh, it changed my world, the company was closed and I lost my job, I applied to different post-docs, I was hired, but …I didn’t find satisfaction at work My visa gave me limited choices I had to stay with my employer, it’s kind of…a type of slavery, right? you cannot go wherever you want, you have to stay with your employer “it seems like slavery to me.” I contracted a lawyer, And I decided to be my sponsor, To get my green card, to be free to work to get my freedom, to be a free person...*
Now, I like my teaching job that gives me a satisfaction
I do something useful, my job is needed.
I cannot see its usefulness right away
But special moments give me that glimpse,
that kind of feeling of satisfaction
that... I made a change.

Jack is a 42-year-old Polish science teacher with six years of teaching experience. He has a bachelor’s degree in veterinary medicine from Poland, and a Ph.D. in toxicology from the University of Georgia in the United States. He currently teaches science in a high school in Georgia.

Jack is the older brother of two boys raised by a single mother. He was seven years older than his brother, so he contributed to his upbringing as well. In addition to his mother, he was surrounded by other relatives; he had a couple of aunts living in the same city and an uncle who had a farm. Jack used to visit his uncle on the farm almost every vacation. Born and raised in Poland under the communist political system, he describes his life in his home country as a “standard life” with many friends in school. Always a good student, and with a comfortable home life, Jack nonetheless experienced the fallout of the widespread economic crisis, including shortages “of everything, pretty much.” He recalls frequent queuing as a defining characteristic of his childhood:

I remember I had to be waiting in a line to buy, let’s say, simple food like meat or sausages or even then, later on, anything like shoes or clothing. You know, you had to wait in line to buy simple things. That was really a lot of time wasted just waiting in line. So that’s what I remember. That was a totalitarian system, wasn’t really a democracy, you know. But growing up, you don’t really pay attention to that, still you have a life like that, boy or teenager, you have your friends… (Jack, personal interview, June 24, 2011)

When Jack went to college to study veterinary medicine, the government covered the cost of college along with offering a generous stipend, and Jack enjoyed the comfortable life of a
college student. Living expenses were low-cost, and he was away from home surrounded by new friends and a sense of freedom. Studying and partying filled his days. Jack was ready to graduate in 1989, the year of the fall of the Berlin Wall, and changes in the government and political system made his future a bit uncertain. In contrast to his expectation of a good job and a good profession as a veterinarian, the fall of communism led to high unemployment rates, and fewer jobs for veterinarians than expected. Around that time, Jack met his wife and got married. He found a job in his college, and he became research assistant at a scientific unit that studied animal physiology. He and his wife decided to stay there and live with his wife’s parents until they could get an apartment.

After a year and half in his job, he was able to get an apartment, and his first daughter was born. He was offered the opportunity to visit the U.S., specifically Fargo, North Dakota, as a part of an exchange program through his job in Poland. He arrived in the U.S. with a J-visa (suitable for educational exchanges) authorized for 6 months and then extended twice for another six months. Later, he applied to the doctoral program in toxicology at the University of Georgia, and upon graduation, he got a job at the same university doing research in cloning in the Department of Animal Science. This training allowed his transition into private industry, doing the same type of research: competing to be the first research team to clone cattle, pigs, and rodents.

After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, in New York City, the private company where Jack worked was closed, and he applied to different post-doctoral positions, getting hired by the Genetics Department first, and later by the Medical College of Georgia in Augusta. Because of the circumstances of his visa, which was about to expire, he was advised by a lawyer that he could sponsor himself for his green card application, applying in the category of
extraordinary researcher. After three months he received the approval of his green card, and he regained a measure of autonomy and mobility:

So once you get this green card then you get your freedom. You are a free person. If you are under the visa, your choices are limited. You have to stay with your employer. It’s like being... it’s kind of, you know, a type of slavery, right? You cannot go where you want; you have to stay with your employer. It seems slavery for me. Once you get your green card you can go to Walmart to find a job. You don’t have to, and you have your options much larger in terms of employment, because you don’t have to ask for the sponsorship or the H-visa. And many employers don’t like to do this, because they don’t know, [won’t] go to the hassle. So then once I got this green card, I quit the job at the MCG because, well, first, I didn’t like it there, and second, that was in Augusta, and my family lived in Athens (Jack, personal interview, June 28, 2011).

Once Jack was free to look for a job, he became a science teacher in an alternative school in 2006, although he hadn’t thought before about being a teacher. It was his wife’s inspiration that opened his eyes. She reminded him that he had a degree, and experience, and that he hadn’t been enjoying what he had been doing so far. It was relatively easy for him to find a job because of teacher shortages, particularly in science classrooms. Even though becoming a teacher was not a goal of Jack’s, he does feel that he can make a change in students’ lives:

Well, I feel that I like my job and it really gives me a satisfaction that you do something, maybe it is something useful, you know, your job is needed. Sometimes you cannot see its usefulness right away, but there are some moments that gives you some glimpse or kind of feeling of satisfaction that you feel that you made a change (Jack, personal interview, June 28, 2011).

Jack describes himself as a very positive person, with a positive attitude, who deliberately seeks a positive rather than negative viewpoint. He points out his intrinsic motivation as the key to his own success:
It’s hard to tell you now, it’s a kind of… you know, you have your own vision of having a good life, maybe, and having a good job that you like, and this kind of is part of the driving force for, you find an opportunity and you think is going to be good for you and so, you go for it, to do something that gives you satisfaction (Jack, personal interview, June 24, 2011).

**Determined Niang**

What makes me succeed?

Oh, determination,

My desire to reach at that point,

I set that goal and I will get there

... somehow.

So I think just persevere, the determination.

I definitely wanted to get a degree,

I wanted to teach.

I wanted to be married,

I wanted to have children so

I’ve had all those goals.

Goals I think are more concrete,

dreams it might be unattainable

or almost out of reach,

I guess in a sense.

Goals are more practical

and more attainable.

Niang is a Singaporean 47-year-old teacher with 16 years of teaching experience in the U.S. and four years of teaching in Singapore. She has a specialization in early childhood education and is working on her Ph.D. She is certified by the national education board and currently teaches 1st grade in a self-contained classroom in Oconee County. She has been chosen as the 2009-2010 Teacher of the Year at her school.

Niang comes from a working class family with 13 children, where she is the youngest. Her mother died when she was five years old, and her father was a widower for 38 years until he passed away three years ago. The older siblings (a brother and a sister) took care of the youngest
children in the family. Of the 11 children, all finished high school, and seven are college graduates; Niang is the only one earning a doctoral degree.

Niang’s father worked at the port for several years in a shipping company, and his long hours did not prevent him from being available to his children.

Sometimes he would work two shifts. Like, he would work in the morning and come back and rest, and then he’ll go back and work for the next shift so that he’ll get more money. So we couldn’t see him very much but he would call and make sure we had our work done and we had food and all that stuff (Niang, personal interview, October 22, 2011).

In spite of her father’s commitment to long working hours, the family’s living circumstances were modest, with 13 people living in a two-bedroom flat. After her mother died, the family moved to an apartment with one more bedroom, so that her father had his own room, and the girls and boys their own, respectively.

For the most part we were not rich or anything; we were probably working class, and the older siblings took care of the younger siblings. School was very competitive, but, you know, we were all expected to do well in it. And I guess it was kind of a rat race there because you know, school was very, very important there. So, basically, children – that’s your job, you go to school, and that’s it (Niang, personal interview, October 22, 2011).

Niang never thought about coming to the U.S., but she met her husband’s family at the Catholic Church where she attended with her sisters. They were the first U.S. citizens she met. Her future father-in-law worked with IBM in Singapore, and his husband’s parents sent him a ticket to visit them. They asked Niang and her sisters to meet him and to take him around the country. He stayed in Singapore for three weeks and gave Niang a ring before coming back to the U.S. After two and a half years, because Niang wanted to start a two-year teaching training program, and she had to commit for three more years with the Singapore government, they decided that they didn’t want to be separated for five more years, and so she came to the U.S.
Her husband’s parents sponsored her visa to study at GSU, and later she changed her visa for a fiancée visa.

Thinking of Niang’s memories of that time, she expressed that she was happy with her husband but she missed her family:

The first year, I think, was very hard, you know? I would call home, and then I would cry, “I don’t have my family here.” Because I didn’t have anybody, so I always wanted him with me. And then he was like “I have to go,” and I would [say] “No, I want you to be with me.” So I was very clinging, and I always wanted him to be here, and it’s almost like suffocating. Now I feel kind of embarrassed talking about it, but I think it was natural, because I didn’t have anybody, you know (Niang, personal interview, October 22, 2011)

Because Niang felt isolated from her family, she decided to focus on her work at school, practiced every day for four hours so that she could earn A’s. After her second year at college, she started working part time at a child care center. She also joined the Malaysian Singapore Student Association and started to connect with people of her country, in addition to her social circle at the church.

When Niang graduated from college, she started substitute-teaching and began her master’s degree while she waited for an opportunity to work as full-time teacher. After several interviews, she finally got a job, and she has been working as a teacher for 20 years in different schools.

Niang identifies herself not as an “immigrant teacher,” but as a “teacher.” She is very competent and very capable of doing a very good job. When asked to tell someone something about herself, she says that she is from Singapore, maybe says that she was the youngest in her family, and that she is a mother, but she doesn’t see herself as an immigrant teacher. That is not the primary description that she uses for herself.
In terms of success, Niang notices when a child understands a concept and applies it in a different situation. A child who remembers, “Oh yeah, we learned that. We did it this way then, and this problem will be solved,” and then explaining it to her, showing how they applied and adapted the technique, is a successful student in her mind. If she has taught the child to do that, then she knows that they really understand the concept and feels that she did a good job teaching them. But more than that, she considers teaching to be an act of goodwill toward herself and people around her:

For one thing, I think some of it, I’m changing the child’s attitude towards work and school trying to model, I think. I’m more confident in myself, definitely the education that I’ve had and just being knowledgeable…and learning how to be more compassionate and talking to people and trying to understand. My ability to listen to people and to be open-minded (Niang, personal interview, October 22, 2011).

Niang knows that she can teach children to be accepting of other people. She also shows compassion toward her students by recognizing that children often learn negative attitudes and behaviors from their parents, based on their parents’ beliefs. Niang is aware that she is not simply reaching children in the classroom; she may also be reaching their parents and changing their perspectives.

Niang anticipates finishing her Ph.D and perhaps taking on a leadership role among the teachers. For her, a quiet leader who doesn’t like to be the center of attention, leading children is easy, and adding more administrative responsibility than she has now will create difficulty. But after finishing her education and training, Niang may take on a new opportunity.

**Hardworking Sadie: Trapped in the Immigration System**

*I’m a teacher,*
*I work very hard,*

81
I love my job,
Even if there are some challenges.
I landed here because of my children
American father, Korean mother
Living in Hawaii and moving to Japan
I got my green card in Hawaii,
I lost it when moving to Japan
My children were Korean-American
But not immersed in their own cultures
I saw my kid intimidated by Japanese kids
“Speak American, Speak American”
Gosh! My kids need an identity,
They speak Japanese but ...
They are not treated as Japanese.
When visiting the U.S.
Immigration was my trouble
My passport expired,
And without the green card,
I couldn’t get the same passport
Without my passport
I couldn’t get the green card
Back and forth...
My life was just miserable for some months
My ex returned to Japan
But I stayed here to get the green card
It took me five years
the kids went to school...
they were happy here
why should I change?
Instead going back, I went to school
I got a teaching job!
That’s how I end up here.

Sadie is a 40-year-old Korean teacher with 10 years of experience in the U.S. She currently teaches kindergarten in a public elementary school where two-thirds of her students are from African-American and Latino backgrounds. She holds a teaching degree as a high school English teacher in Korea and a master’s degree in early childhood education in the U.S. Sadie started as a volunteer and substitute teacher in her children’s school, and later she became a para-professional. While she was working as a para-professional, she decided to pursue her master’s degree and her teaching certificate in early childhood education in 2004. Since then, she has
been working as a kindergarten teacher in the same school district where she worked as a paraprofessional.

Sadie comes from a family with six siblings, where her father was a government employee, her mother a housewife, and her grandparents were farmers. Reflecting on her childhood sense of well-being, Sadie notes that her family’s land-rich circumstances limited her personal exposure to poverty.

I didn’t feel poor at all because my grandparents owned quite a bit of land. They weren’t rich at all, but they had lots of land and they were in the position of helping other people in the village. A lot of people came to my grandmother to borrow rice and to borrow this or that, and my grandmother always let them have it. But then their payback was their labor when she needed it. So I never felt that we were poor, because we were always helping others. We had enough to eat. We didn’t have fancy things but I never worried about it. I felt even richer then than now (Sadie, personal interview, October 18, 2011).

She lived with her grandmother and her extended family until fifth grade. After that, her father got a job in the city, and they moved. Sadie stayed with her family only for three more years, and when she was admitted to high school, she moved to a bigger city. According to Sadie, at that time, the social, political, and cultural life in Korea were changing under the influence of western culture. Sadie calls her younger self “a strictly good girl,” in reference to her acceptance of western culture. As an adult, she realized that she had accepted her family’s interpretations without questioning them, as children are often expected to do, and she laments that she didn’t take steps to expand her worldview as a young person.

When Sadie went to college, she experienced the social uprising during the presidency of Park Chung-hee. She even participated in demonstrations, where she suffered from exposure to tear gas. Her experience at college was not one of freedom and autonomy:
Oh, my God, it was a scary time to go to school, especially college. There was the riot police, there was the stations in front of the gate with a big shield on top and everything. And if anything goes wrong, you know, it’s scary – life’s very threatening. Yeah, it wasn’t very, there was no freedom in many ways, you know. You were free, but lots of people were arrested and got tortured and disappearing people here and there, and I was scared at times (Sadie, personal interview, October 18, 2011).

At the time Sadie was finishing her college degree, she met and married an American professor in Korea, who wanted to finish his degree in the United States. So, they moved to Hawaii, where they stayed for 14 months before moving to Japan for eight years. She learned Japanese and started working as an English teacher for children and adults. But Sadie felt concerned that her children, who were American, were not immersed in American culture.

One time I saw two big kids pushing my son’s bicycle in Japan, and they were telling, like they were forcing my son kind of intimidatingly, “Speak American! Speak American!” And I thought, “Gosh, my kids, they need to have an identity.” If they live in that country, speak fluent Japanese, but they will not be treated Japanese at all, they need to have their own identity, and to be able to do that, you have to speak the language. But culture… you have to be in that place to learn it at least, you know, even if you don't live it (Sadie, personal interview, October 18, 2011).

When her husband had a long break, she brought the family to the U.S., where the children enrolled in an American school for 3 months. But soon Sadie got trapped in the immigration system; she is the wife of an American citizen, but because she wasn’t continuously present in the country, she lost her green card. When she tried to renew her green card, she needed her passport, but at the Korean embassy, she needed her green card in order to both renew her passport and apply for a new one, leaving her stuck in the U.S. While her husband went back to Japan to work, Sadie unraveled her immigration problems.

It took about five years to solve all the problems, and then, after that, my kids got used to it and the life here. And if we go back to Japan, their schoolwork will be, you know, their school…everything will be
behind and then they will be miserable. And they’re happy here, doing really well, why should I change? So instead of going back, I went to school here to get a job (Sadie, personal interview, October 18, 2011).

This decision to stay in the U.S. because of her children’s education was based partially on Sadie’s concern about her children socially, leaving behind their friends and everything familiar. But, additionally, she recognized that her children had become, perhaps ironically, too western to feel at home in Japan:

I could have moved back to Japan, but my children would have a hard time to readjust to the culture. And that’s a culture which is not their culture, which is the third culture for them, too. So there’s nothing really to push the move, and kids were enjoying here very much. They were active in extracurricular activities, doing well in school…(Sadie, personal interview, October 18, 2011).

Sadie’s desire for her children to find their own identity and be happy and do well in their country was her main motivation for remaining Stateside while her husband returned to Japan.

Sadie didn’t have plans to teach in the elementary school. She was trained in her country for teaching in middle and high school, which she did for four years in Korea before coming to the U.S. Sadie chose to teach as a profession because it seemed like a well-respected occupation that would provide a decent income. She also noted that this profession would give her access to marriage prospects like doctors, lawyers, and other teachers. While originally interested in becoming a pharmacist, teaching in Korea provided many benefits, particularly compared to teaching in the U.S: “here, teachers are not respected, teachers are over-worked, the pay is very low, and it’s a big contrast.”

Sadie considers herself a hard-working individual who loves her job, in spite of its challenges. She takes pride in putting extra time and effort into the projects that are important to her, understanding that nothing in life comes easily, but requires hard work. While she is certain
that she has been an agent of change in many ways, she feels she has done so unconsciously, and mostly in response to assimilation challenges. Conformity was prized in her culture of origin, and she is not eager to stick out in the U.S. As she gains confidence in her individuality, she feels less as if she needs to be like other people and can move toward being a conscious agent of change.

Dreamer Maja

I am Mexican and a dreamer
When I was in Durango,
I had a dream deep in my heart,
Learning English was my desire
but I didn’t have the means
it was my utopia…
Then, the world worked it out for me
I got married and came to the U.S.
I learned English and now I teach,
I am happy with my life.

When I arrived here,
I dreamed with this
And now, I am living it
Now I dream of an environment
Surrounded by students
With a prosperous future for every one
I dream of my daughters
Discovering all their potential,
Connecting with what they are,
With their essence, with themselves
I dream of my kids pursuing their goals
I dream of my kids being free,
Free to offer to the world what they came for.

Maja is a Mexican 37-year-old 1st grade teacher with four years of teaching experience in a dual immersion school. She earned a law degree in Mexico. Maja comes from a two-parent family with two daughters, living in rural Mezquital, where her family had a ranch and worked with cattle and agriculture. Maja describes her mother as an old mother, a mother who had
children when she was older than other Mexican women. She only reached third grade but had many moral values, “many principles that perhaps now more educated people do not have” (Maja, personal interview, December 9, 2012). Her father also went only through the 5th grade because, at the time, 5th grade was the highest grade available in his school. Because Mezquital was a small town, her family was connected with all the community and her social life centered around friends and family; Maja made some short trips to México or Mazatlán when she won various oratory contests. After Maja graduated from high school, she applied to be a community teacher with CONAFE (Comisión Nacional de Fomento Educativo), an institution that supports rural communities by training and sending recent high school students to teach as a form of social service. In return, the students receive scholarships to go to college. Maja received training as a community teacher and started teaching in a small community with 16 students from kindergarten to 5th grade. She taught for a year and received a scholarship for three years to train as a lawyer.

When Maja was at 17 years old, she met in Mexico a young Mexican who lived in the United States and was visiting his home country, and, after some years, they got married and Maja moved to the U.S.

When Maja was younger, her mother had advised her to become a teacher, but Maja always said that the last thing she would want was to become a kindergarten teacher. It wasn’t until she had children of her own that she realized the practical benefits of sharing a summer vacation with them. So she was encouraged by the prospect of being able to share the same schedule as her daughters, but also at the idea of planting “a seed of hope in young mentecitas (little brains) that are like a blank page” (Maja, personal interview, December 9, 2012).
Maja started working as parent-liaison, work that she describes as a nice job, due to the access to resources that could support parents, especially Hispanics or Latinos. But she also began to recognize the cultural disconnect that was happening in the families of her students:

With parents who do not speak English, children who are ashamed of their origins… because it hasn’t been instilled in them to have pride in their roots. And families are broken. Then I was like: ‘Oh, wake up! Look, this is what's happening in your community’ (Maja, personal interview, October 4, 2012).

Later, Maja worked as paraprofessional, and currently she has her own classroom. For her, teaching has been very enriching, particularly since she has the opportunity to interact with Hispanic children, who share her cultural heritage.

Maja describes herself as a dreamer and a free person. In her friendships and family relations, she provides freedom. She considers herself a person of moral, social, and spiritual values who loves her family, and her job, and her Hispanic culture. She also sees herself as an agent of change in the capacity to impact other people’s lives, and especially her students. Her approach to education has been to present facts and encourage students to form their own opinions rather than dictating to her students what they should think.
CHAPTER 5

IDENTITY

Who are we?
We are teachers with a soul
We are very competent
We are compassionate
We love our kids
We really make a difference
In students’ lives
We are role models
We are different
And we love being different
We are immigrants
We come from different worlds
We speak different languages
But we teach in a universal language
We teach hope
We teach tolerance and
respect for the other.
We are intercultural workers:
We are cultural learners
We are eye-openers
We are harmonizers
We are role models
We are teachers with a soul
We are immigrants
We are teachers!

Scholars differ in their approaches to the idea of identity, based on their specific theoretical frameworks. This project adheres to Halliday et al.’s (1998) conceptualization of identity: a figurative combination of “the intimate or personal world with the collective space of cultural forms and social relations.” In this understanding, identity is not only one, but multiple imaginings of the self in different worlds of action that live in and through activity and develop in social practice (p.5). Identity is relevant to society because human life cannot be understood
without “our abilities to figure worlds, act them out, and then make then socially, culturally, and thus materially consequential” (p.280). In this section, I will share the multiple imaginings of the self of immigrant teachers in their different worlds of action.

I Am a Teacher

“How do you see yourself as an immigrant teacher?” the study asked, assuming that the teachers participating in this research would identify themselves with the dual subject position of being immigrants and being teachers. Six of the teachers, specifically teachers from Korea and Latin America, identify themselves as immigrants and as teachers, combining the two positions. They see themselves as very competent, confident, hardworking immigrants with a strong sense of achievement, as well as teachers. Sadie, from Korea, describes her own personal identity in reference to her profession and her immigrant status:

I am a hard working immigrant teacher. I’m a teacher. I work very hard. I love my job, even if there are some challenges. I feel very confident, and I feel very competent. I don't feel that I’m exactly the same as the other native speakers here, but as far as the content – teaching… My heart goes into the teaching. And I pour a lot into my work, and I love the children, and the children’s growth is what matters. So in that sense I feel very good on myself (Sadie, personal interview, October 18, 2011)

Sadie’s dedication to teaching does not overpower her status as an immigrant but enhances it.

However, two of the eight participants resist the positioning as immigrant teachers and expressed that they considered themselves just ‘teachers.’ For Jack, the difference in identity lies in one’s previous work experience in the country of origin, either as a teacher or not, and then as an individual who later becomes a teacher in the U.S.:

Well, I see myself as a teacher, but I didn’t put too many thoughts that I am an immigrant teacher because I think, you know, I’m an
immigrant. But ‘immigrant teacher’ would imply that you were teaching in your native country and then you came to the US and then you do the same job, but in my case I wasn’t a teacher in Poland; I came here, I did my graduate study, and I worked for few years, and then I became a teacher. So, although I was grown in a different culture, I’m not really, I wasn’t considering myself as an immigrant teacher (Jack, personal interview, June 24, 2011).

Since Jack came to the U.S. as a researcher in a university 15 years ago, he didn’t have experience as a teacher in his home country. He completed the coursework, and his student teaching experience and certification process in the U.S. Consequently, he learned the philosophy, the environment, and the “figured worlds” of the U.S. school system, rather than having teaching experience in his country of origin as a point of comparison.

A similar case was Niang’s self-identification simply as a teacher, rather than as an immigrant teacher. She was a substitute teacher with no teacher certification or training in Singapore. When she came to the U.S, she pursued her teaching degree and specialization in early childhood education. For Niang, being an immigrant is not the most important position in her self-identification. She sees herself as well-rounded, and a very competent teacher, a mother, a wife, and an aunt:

I don't see myself as an immigrant teacher. I see myself as a teacher. I see myself as somebody who is very competent and very capable of doing a very good job. So I don't see myself, I just see myself as a teacher, so I am an immigrant but that is not the primary description …I don't see myself as an immigrant teacher. I see myself as a teacher (Niang, October 22, 2011)

These two examples highlight an interesting point that may explain some of the different experiences between teachers with previous teaching experiences in their own countries and teachers who had their teacher education and teaching experience in the U.S. Both Niang and Jack started their teaching careers in the U.S., and their processes of teacher identity formation occurred through cultural resources enacted in the U. S. social context. Halliday et al. argue that
a person “makes’ herself over into an actor in a cultural world,” while navigating collectively produced meanings; in other words, individual identities develop by way of already established selves and figured worlds. Niang and Jack, who have been in the U.S. for 20 years, developed their identities as teachers in a social and political context which encouraged them to consider their own identities around U.S. teaching discourses and practices, with the aid of U.S. cultural resources, and the behavioral prompting and verbal feedback of U.S. professionals (Halliday, p.285). Their training by the U.S. educational system allowed them to fit into the culture of U.S. schools without giving prominence to the reality of their being an immigrant. Each of the teachers is from a cultural or linguistic group that is not present in significant numbers in the US or in the schools where they teach. The Spanish-speaking immigrant teachers are all linked in some way currently to dynamic bilingual students and families as part of their teaching.

On the other hand, the immigrant teachers who had previous teaching experiences in their home country have the capacity to compare and analyze both figured worlds of teaching identities. If an individual’s teaching experience in his or her native country was comfortable and personally fulfilling, it may be more challenging for them to re-position themselves in their new world and incorporate themselves into their new environments. This is the case of Sadie, who compares her experiences in Korea, her home country, with her experiences teaching in the U.S.:

As a teacher [in Korea], you get pretty good income, you get respected, you get to marry nice good prospects like doctors and lawyers… So that was…how I become teacher. Here [in the U.S.], teachers are not respected, teachers are over-worked, the pay is very low, and it’s a big contrast (Sadie, October 29, 2011)

Sadie’s realization that teachers in the U.S. are not respected and are frequently over-worked, while receiving low pay, creates a sharp contrast to the circumstances of teachers in her
country of origin. Her comfortable and respected occupation was lost when she came to the U.S., and her ability to compare the two experiences made her incorporation into the U.S. education system more difficult, as the U.S. system is clearly inferior in terms of the professional status of teachers and associated benefits and satisfactions with teaching, in her experience. Holland et al. (1998) note Vygostky’s argument that the tools of self-management are cultural or collective resources, rather than personal inventions; Sadie’s culturally constructed figured world of a Korean teacher created a contested space of struggle in her consideration of her identity as a U.S. teacher.

In addition to a strong sense of achievement for all the immigrant teachers, Latino teachers who teach Spanish strongly identify themselves as language teachers who make a difference in the lives of their students. Susana explained, “I am a teacher, but I am not just an elementary teacher. I am a teacher who teaches languages through the elementary content, and that is for me the perfect combination.” Spanish language teachers see language as an asset in their job and see themselves as making a difference in the lives of the students. Maria says, “I think we are doing a great job… in the sense of giving support in both languages to the kids to help them to understand better” (Maria, personal interview, April 4, 2011)

They also see themselves as key players in their educational communities, because their use of the Spanish language allows them to build bridges of communication between teachers, parents, and students, as well as to provide academic and emotional support to the Spanish-speaking students:

I think I play a very important role in the sense of the relations among the parents, the children, and the teacher. And, in addition, to see the little face of a kid who doesn’t understand… And when they see me when I arrive to the classroom, and I talk to them in Spanish, it’s like the oasis in the desert. They know that they can
count on me. Especially at the beginning of the year, I feel that the language is very useful (Maria, personal interview, April 4, 2011).

Maria argues that her ability to speak Spanish helps her integrate into the U.S. school system, as she can meet needs of students and families that go beyond educational needs. Further, students can rely on her to understand them and their socio-emotional challenges in a way that they cannot with English-speaking teachers. This is a specific benefit to the school system and to the teachers, as it allows them to fulfill their desire to be influential in the classroom.

In general, all the teachers expressed a belief that they make the difference in the lives of students. Halliday et al. argued that identity is “one way of naming the dense interconnections between the intimate and public venues of social practice,” and these connections are related to the social positions of teachers. In the imagined world of education, teachers make a difference in the lives of their students. Maria describes this process in her own classroom:

The kids feel very comfortable. They feel [as if they are] in the ‘least restricted environment’ that they need to be able to learn. Sometimes I have students who don’t talk during the entire year - they talk only to me, and why? Because they are there, trapped in a classroom where nobody knows, where nobody understands them. And then I arrive and start talking and explaining, and in that moment, they feel that they can do it. They feel that they can understand what I am asking of them (Maria, personal interview, April 4, 2011)

Simply being able to provide a consistent and stable form of communication to children who may feel lost, misunderstood, and confused in their classrooms is an essential function of a Spanish-speaking teacher. This simple act – speaking to students in their native languages – increases the effectiveness of immigrant teachers. On the other hand, the other immigrant teachers speakers of Chinese, Korean and Polish have fewer or do not have an opportunity to draw on their strengths as speakers of those languages in their teaching situations.
Most of the teachers explained that the way they make a real difference in the lives of the students is in everyday life when the students are engaged, immersed, and happy. Sadie has explained how she knows that she makes a real difference in the lives of her students every day:

When the day is over, when they’re leaving and they say, “I want to stay at school longer!” When [I] hear that, I’m just so happy that they just don’t even feel the flow of time. They’re immersed, engaged, and just feeling happy. I know when they go home they will fall asleep when they have to take a nap probably. But they would just [say], you know, ‘I don’t want to go home yet.’ And that means I’m doing my job right. (Sadie, personal interview, October 29, 2011).

Finally, Susana summarizes the connection between immigrant and teacher implying that a conscious effort to affect change in a student’s life is a basic process in the formation of her identity.

I think that as an immigrant teacher you definitely, generally… you HAVE to make a difference, and, obviously, what I think of myself as an immigrant teacher, is that …I make the difference (Susana, personal interview, April 7, 2011).

I Am Different vs. I Love Being Different

“Being different” is a common theme found in previous research (Thiessen et al, 1996; Kostogritz & Peeler, 2004; Elbaz-Lewisch, 2004) regarding immigrant teachers. Immigrant teachers express in distinct ways their feelings of being different. For some, being different is a plus: a way to live, to understand, and to teach diversity, to learn about different cultures, and to open students’ eyes to another ways of being and thinking. For example, Victoria is genuinely proud of being different:

Yes, I like to be different in some way. That means I do not want to hide that difference. I like to be different in a sense, have an accent and be able to explain to children such different experiences of my childhood, how I went to school in Spain, or, you know, the
games that we did, which is something different that they have not
seen (Victoria, personal interview, Jun 17, 2011).

On the other hand, Sadie, from Korea, expresses a dual feeling of being aware of her own
value as a different person, versus her feelings of being an outsider because of her upbringing
and differences in values.

I am not shy about presenting myself in my culture. I don’t feel
that I’m “low” to them. I always feel like the culture is different.
The difference is it doesn’t have that some culture is upper level,
some culture is lower level; we’re just different, we are equal…Yeah, and as an outsider, as an immigrant, I don't have the
same experience as they did when they were growing up. So, they
have their own personal perspective of the teaching and some
expectations in the way things were done before (Sadie, personal
interview, October 18, 2011).

The struggle of the perceived differences from others in their personal and professional
life is a recurrent theme in previous research (Amobi, 2004; Elbaz-Lewisch, 2004; Kostogriz and
Peeler, 2004). Being part of a commonly called a collective culture, Sadie, from Korea, also
misses the sense of belonging to a community. She explains her feelings of isolation that come
from encountering the American cultural emphasis on independence and autonomy: “it’s like
you’re on your own, and you have autonomy, but it’s kind of isolating” (Sadie, personal
interview, October 29, 2011). She also articulates her isolation in terms of place, number of
teachers in her team, her race, and the lack of openness of co-workers.

Location-wise I was isolated in the school; number-wise, I was the
odd number five [on my grade level team]; and then, racially, I was
the only Asian, and that was enough. The location – out of sight –
and racially – ‘We don’t know her’… And they were not open
enough to reach [out] to me (Sadie, personal interview, October
29, 2011).

For Wenger (1998), there is a deep connection between identity and practice; and
developing a practice requires the creation of a community where every member of the
community participates and recognizes each other as participants. During the first two years of teaching in the U.S., Sadie struggled with her feelings of isolation and of being the “other,” with the unsatisfied desire of belonging to a community in her school context. She had to negotiate her own interpretation of her otherness recognizing some of the causes as her own independence and lack of confrontation.

I don't know...in some ways, maybe I’m too independent, but in some ways I’m too intimidated to challenge them in a better way. Because if I start to say something, they usually try to ignore me, and I don't like that and I don't want to get hurt feelings. So, okay, I’ll do my thing, and I try not to feel any complex; I try to stay away from it. Maybe that's one of the isolation feelings, too, because I don't talk and confront and I don't do that either (Sadie, personal interview, October 29, 2011).

As Wenger states, “identity is a layering of events of participation and reification by which our experience and its social interpretation inform each other” (1998, p.151). It is in the relation with others that those layers that our identity is built upon each other, in order to produce our identity, and we construct our ‘self’ by a constant renegotiation with ourselves (p.151).

Finally, for Sadie, the sense of being different becomes a challenge and a motivation to work harder: “So maybe that’s why I work too much, and because I’m different, because I feel some lack in that area, maybe confidence; that’s why I put a lot of work there.” (Sadie, personal interview, October 29, 2011).

The Intercultural Worker (I.W.)

Freire’s work on *Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters to Those Who Dare to Teach* was an important influence in my decision to research about what immigrant teachers do as intercultural workers. As Antonia Darder (Darder, Baltodano & Torres, 2nd Ed., 2009) articulately explains Freire’s ideas, to be a teacher who dares to teach implies a set of capabilities and
attitudes such as humility grounded in courage, self-confidence, self-respect, and respect for others (p.575-577). According to Darder, “Freire associated humility with the dialectical ability to live insecure security” (p.576) which means that teachers function in a space of not needing absolute answers and are able to deal with uncertainty, making them open to new ways of thinking, new ideas and new dreams (p.576).

This dialectical competence to live insecure security and the tension between patience and impatience, decisiveness, and the joy of living (Freire’s set of indispensable qualities for a ‘teacher who dares’ in Darder, 2009, p.576), are abilities present in most of the immigrant teachers participating in this research. In addition, they see themselves as cultural learners, eye-openers, role models for their students, as well as harmonizers. I will let the participants to speak in their own voices to explain what it is to be an intercultural worker.

An Intercultural Worker Is a Cultural Learner

An intercultural worker is a cultural learner, a researcher and a reflective learner of different cultures. Because the teachers in this study have come from different places, visited different countries and entered in contact with other cultures, many articulate attitudes and perspectives associated with this stance of being an intercultural worker. In addition to the awareness and the openness of being cultural learners, they also have demonstrated the ability to reflect and make comparisons with their own perspectives and visions of the world that are different from their own. Jack, for example, describes his impression of the opportunities for immigrants in the United States:

You come to a new country, so your attitude is to learn about the new country… So, you take this opportunity to learn and to see new places. And, again, you learn about a new life and the way
people live here, and you always make this comparison with your own country (Jack, personal interview, June 24, 2011).

Being open to new ways of thinking and understanding and recognizing that teachers can learn in every moment of their teaching work is a common trait found in every participant. Sadie echoes Jack’s sentiments:

I don’t agree with a lot of things that they [white European American colleagues] do, but I know I can learn from them in many ways too. The lack of cultural experience [knowledge, upbringing], I would say, and when we talk about the lesson plan and other things, that a lot of things come out, a couple of things here and there… I can peek through the little window to go back and learn culturally.

It is clear that teachers as intercultural workers constantly live, experience, struggle, learn, ask, research and reflect on different cultures and try to build up “tools” to help them to understand and respect the cultural differences and beliefs of each culture. Sadie describes her attempts to see people as individuals, rather than as representatives of their culture

I think if I can deal with them individually, I can do well. But I have to consult with other people and [inquire] “What do you do? Why do people do that?” So, I get to learn their culture and be a little bit more open-minded – not judge them by what they’re doing, but accept them as different individuals.

In her reflection, Sadie acknowledges her limited ability to understand the cultural dynamic but notes that she can easily take cues from individuals. Embedded in her statement is an articulation of her own inquiry stance and her willingness to learn about other’s cultural perspectives, to be open-minded and to use what she learns to avoid making judgements.

Moreover, all of the participants recognize the richness that a diverse society offers. Susana describes the value that she finds in seeing cultural representatives as simultaneously distinct and similar:
Indubitably, to share with different cultures, with different people, with different ideas… Sometimes when you're in the same social group, you don’t realize the great richness, [the] humongous richness in seeing [different] people and their ways in their social behavior …it’s a beautiful thing. We can all be equal as human beings: physically we can have some differences, socially we have differences, and deep down we all are walking toward the same goal. But you can understand people when you know that culture, when you know the differences within that culture, too. There are big similarities but also large differences, and you have to see them with intelligence, with an open mind (Susana, personal interview, September 25, 2011).

One of the biggest struggles encountered by the teachers as intercultural workers is to be a cultural learner who consciously embraces the struggles to identify cultural differences and to grapple with the human tendency to judge difference, to generalize and assume regarding cultural practices, and to try to respect each individual and be open to his or her uniqueness. As Susana states, you have to see the differences with intelligence, with an open mind; and this involves a lot of work, reflection, self-awareness of your own limitations, biases and assumptions, patience, and practice.

An Intercultural Worker Is an Eye-opener, a Challenger, Not an Invader

In this section, I would like to refer to Paulo Freire’s discussion of “invaders,” specifically his suggestion that individuals avoid displaying characteristics of invaders. In his book We Make the Road by Walking (Horton, M. & Freire, P., 1990), Freire explained that interfering in the host culture results in an invasion, if an individual does not understand and engage with the “soul” of the culture (p. 131). Moreover, he specifies that not invading doesn’t mean that we cannot criticize or challenge the cultural traditions. Rather, he suggests that the educator should seek to work strategically and tactically. In practice, this requires developing a
strategy regarding which aspects of an educational system can be targeted, and creating timely and effective tactics for addressing what is unjust or unfair (p.136-136)

Immigrant teachers often follow Freire’s directive to avoid becoming invaders or interferers in a culture. As one example, Jack describes his own reluctance to insist on cultural changes in his workplace:

I would say I’m not really in an attitude or position to ask for or to impose changes or dramatic changes, you know, demanding, like, ‘Ok, I’m from different culture or a different country so, let’s do it this way, because this is much better.’ You know, ‘what you’re doing is wrong.’ That’s not my approach or philosophy. (Jack, personal interview, June 30, 2011).

Jack notes here that immigrant teachers may try or may actually learn to accept and respect the differences in cultures and values of the host society, even though they may not agree with them. They have learned how to manage the public and the private spheres: they act and believe in their own values in their private life and at the same time they respect and appreciate the host society’s values. They have learned to be culturally flexible and understanding.

Freire argued an important point about tolerance, which is worth noting, particularly in regard to Jack’s experience in the U.S. educational system. Tolerance is described by Freire not as a function of “playing the game, not a civilized gesture of hypocrisy, nor a coexistence with the unbearable” (Darder et al., 2009, p. 576). Instead, tolerance manifests in a sincere effort to honor “basic human principles of respect, discipline, dignity, and ethical responsibility.” Jack explains his own experience of developing a sense of tolerance:

Of course, I think the way you do things, the way you act, sometimes is kind of self-conscious. Very often I’m aware of these things, and I don’t like it, but, hey, people have built this society, and this is the way they live, so… I don’t feel I have to really go and change everything. And if you have your private life, you can live your family life the way you want, the way you’ve been raised. You can keep the same traditions and culture, but then if
you go to the American society, then you have to accept it, you know. You are still the foreigner or the immigrant, although you accept, ‘this is an open society’ and still, you feel welcome. You can blend in and feel comfortable. But it’s not like I would say or describe [myself] as an activist and to change everything or impose changes on people (Jack, personal interview, Jun 30, 2011).

Freire also agrees that when speaking of cultural traditions, one of the responsibilities of an educator is to evaluate the culture, to accept and to understand it, while also criticizing what seems unjust or unfair about it (Third party, in Horton & Frieri, 1990, p.136). In this way, an intercultural worker is an eye-opener and a challenger, not an invader; an inter-cultural worker is reflective and facilitates understanding.

An Intercultural Worker Is a Teacher of Cultures

As inter-cultural workers, immigrant teachers are guides and researchers, who immerse students in other cultures; they do not just teach culture as a content lesson. They expose students to different cultures and show them how to be culturally sensitive and appreciative of other cultures. Niang describes her impression of the effect of ignorance in regard to the importance of understanding and appreciating other cultures:

I say ignorance makes people afraid of other people. So I’m trying to expose my students to other cultures, in the sense, now, so that when they meet people from other countries, they’re not scared of them. You don’t have to be scared of them; they’re just people, just like you and me. And you know, I encourage them to bring food, clothes, music, teach us how to count, say simple greetings, and all that just to have a really introductory exposure to different cultures. And I think I do that more because I am from another country, and I’m culturally sensitive to it, and I want people to appreciate other countries and cultures. People from other countries, just because their English might not be good, doesn’t mean they are any less of a person. They know more, because they already know a language, and they’re learning a second language (Niang, personal interview, October 22, 2011).
As intercultural workers, immigrant teachers, rather than simply teaching about cultures, are promoting the development of skills or abilities that will allow students to understand how to appreciate, accept, tolerate and respect cultural differences. Niang continues describing her motivation around this type of education:

Some children – they have just one point of view of people in general. And a lot of it...they learn it from their parents. And I think some of it, if I can teach their child and explain it to them, and if they go back and explain it to their parents, then maybe I might be changing their point of view plus the parent’s point of view (Niang, personal interview, October 22, 2011)

Niang’s experience provides insight into the scope of inter-cultural teachers’ influence, and her realization that she might be able to teach parents as well as children how to practice tolerance for other cultures, is a major motivator for her to continue to teach these skills in her classroom.

Immigrant teachers as inter-cultural workers are enriching the lives of students when sharing and providing them with unique cultural experiences that cannot be provided by a person who has not lived in other parts of the world. Maja explains how her lived experiences enable her to enrich her classroom:

Through my schema and my culture, I can provide to children some attitudes, feelings, knowledge, experiences that a person who has only lived in a certain area, say a person of X country, who has never left X country, even with another level of education – s/he won’t be able to provide these experiences, because I am the one who has lived them (Maja, personal interview, October 4, 2012).

In addition, teachers argue that the exposure to another culture and different ways of thinking and experiences must be an enjoyable and fun experience that enlarges children’s worlds and enrich their lives.

In reality, you are exposing the children who come to your hands to your experiences, to your culture, to your way of thinking and
because you come from another culture it must be different from the way of thinking here. You are enlarging their world and their way of thinking. I think it is enjoyable, that means, it would be... is a pleasant experience. ‘Oh, I have a teacher from another country!’ (Maja, personal interview, Dec. 9, 2012).

Maja’s orientation toward pleasurable education corresponds clearly to Freire’s idea of a teacher being able to live joyfully in the everyday routine despite the challenges and difficulties teachers encounter in their job.

Finally, immigrant teachers, and especially the language teachers, are very committed to sharing their cultures. They are very self-conscious that when they teach a language they are sharing themselves as well as immersing the students in the cultures of the target language. They see themselves as the eye-openers for their students, and they use every opportunity in their class as a teachable moment to make the students be aware of cultural differences in our diverse society.

An Intercultural Worker Is a Harmonizer

The majority of the immigrant teachers see themselves as harmonizers and promoters of diverse societies by being strong advocates of different cultures. Maja describes her belief that her school’s cultural context contributes to her role as a harmonizer.

I believe if I had stayed in a common school in the U.S., I would be made [to adhere] more to the American culture, because the atmosphere would have me wrapped up. But being in this school, where we value the differences and values of being Hispanic, to speak Spanish, gives me a chance to be in the American culture. But also being just as firm and strong, that I conserve my roots, that I must preserve my culture, my pride of being Hispanic and transmit that to the children of my race, my family, and tell the children who do not belong to our ethnic group that being Hispanic is good. It's good to be open to cultural differences, to different
ways of life, different ways of thinking, then it is actually we're like ... harmonizing society. Harmonizing... what do you mean?

Because in reality, outside of our little world, you can see the differences: the intolerance, the intolerance in some ways from groups or individuals who may not have the vision of a diverse world. And maybe, I do not know if it is just my perception, or if it really happens, right? But it's like, ‘Oh, you are less, you are a Hispanic’ or ‘I do not appreciate you the same way as my friend who is from here.’ And then how do you see yourself as an harmonizing teacher? The content of the class is there, but for me, it is not the most important. The most important thing for me is just to do that, to expand the vision of the students, to do that with students ... is not doing it only with the students, but with their families and circle, their social circle, then we are in some way impacting more lives and more. We believe it is just the little boy, but actually it goes beyond the little boy. What we are doing is expanding their vision, [teaching] acceptance of cultural differences...and that we are all important in shaping society. And no matter where you come from, you have the same chances and opportunities, or you can become someone who benefits or changes the world. No matter where you came from (Maja, personal interview, January 17, 2013).

I Am a Role Model

Many of the participants express their conviction of being a role model for their students in everyday life. For instance, Maja believes that she can teach her students best not by telling and repeating, but by teaching with her own example:

The ability to impact that God gives you...is with the example, giving you the example, being the model that you could be. It would be ideal, to become a model... and that people around you say, “Oh, she is not telling anything but she is teaching through her actions.[by doing, not by telling]” Then, I feel that, with the children, is how mostly you will be, saying, and repeating and repeating. But the greatest impact is going to be through your example, through the way you act in the classroom (Maja, personal interview, October 4, 2012).

In addition, some of the participants see themselves as role models in several capacities: as a professional, as a student, as a mother, and as a teacher in a global society.
Making the difference to me means to become a role model to students, community, colleagues, and family. As we have started over our lives (more than once) and have become fulfilled professionals, I make the difference because I come from a low income family. I succeeded as a student, and I pursued a career that required to be exposed to new cultures. Therefore, I can consider myself a role model. Also, I am an educator who uses the global view of education to lead new generations of global students. (Susana, e-mail, March 8, 2015)

In summary, immigrant teachers identify themselves as very competent, hardworking teachers who make a difference in their students’ lives. Because of their bilingualism that parallels that of their students and their families, many of the immigrant teachers see themselves as key players in academic, social, and emotional areas, especially in the communication with the students, parents, and school personnel. Participants in the research see themselves as cultural learners and teachers: eye-openers who immerse their students in the knowledge of other cultures and teach tolerance and respect by their own example. The last and probably the most important self-identification is that they see themselves as harmonizers. This set of characteristics is what I will call “intercultural workers.”

Finally, in my internal conversation, the question that comes to my mind is how immigrant teachers have arrived to this stage of tolerance and respect? What specific experiences support their intercultural understanding? There are several mechanisms that I believe have contributed to this process, including their exposure to different life circumstances in different countries, their sociopolitical understanding of their world, their conscientization, and their immigrant experiences that necessarily have helped them to learn how to live the “insecure security” (Freire, 2005). Furthermore, the immigrant teachers in this sample demonstrated significant persistence in obtaining their teaching certification and immigration authorizations after several years of hard work, their patience and their determination to reach
their goals, and in general their lived immigrant experience, their resilience and hope in a better future for their students.
CHAPTER SIX

AGENCY

Vocación is my driving force
And it is born with me, I bring it traced inside me,
Aligned with my dreams,
Aligned with my decision to do things for others,
With the possibility of creating and producing freely,
My vocación gives me a feeling of integration with the child,
It identifies me with the human part of a child in development
Not only with the knowledge of the child
But also with the spirituality of the child,
Vocación is born with me,
And enables me to be more positive in my teaching job
With vocación, difficulties are my tools to reach my goals
My vocación as a teacher gives me strength to face situations
Helps me to see the social needs
And enriches my possibilities
Of being an agent of change.

-Helena

The Spanish word vocación corresponds to the English word “vocation,” a strong inclination to a specific job or occupation. In Hispanic cultures, a vocación is more than a professional inclination; it is a mission in life: to be a good teacher or a good doctor, one must have a vocación. While vocación can be enough to turn one’s head toward a specific occupation and can help to sustain a long-term devotion to an occupation in spite of challenges and barriers, actors must engage in an agentic process in order to implement vocación.

Agency can be described as the “realized capacity of people to act upon their world and not only to know about or give personal or intersubjective significance to it” (Inden, 1990, p.23 in Holland et al., 2003, p.42). This definition of agency acknowledges the capacity of
individuals to act “purposively and reflectively” as an effort to make sense of the world and their interpersonal relationships, as well as the ability to live and flourish alongside perspectives that are different from their own. Inden’s idea of agency turns out to be quite influential in understanding immigrant teachers’ decision to move to the U.S. and their incorporation to the school system. This process of understanding involves learning about their immigration process, their navigation through the school systems in the U.S., and their incorporation into the school culture. Teachers learn about themselves, their strengths, and their coping strategies, while deliberately facing challenges and barriers in the process of becoming a teacher in the U.S. and interacting with the school members and the broader community, even when their agency is thwarted.

Bandura’s (2006) social cognitive theory and Emirbayer and Mische’s (1998) theoretical framework of “the chordal triad of agency” illuminate the analysis of the findings from the point of view of a relational process, corresponding to what the authors call the three elements of human agency: iteration, projectivity and practical evaluation. On the other hand, exploring the process of immigration from the beginning to the end using Bandura’s framework helps explain immigrant teachers’ cognitive sense of agency. Based on this understanding of how agency works, I will elaborate the analysis of the findings, exploring what validates the theoretical framework and previous research studies, in addition to new understandings that come to light. I will divide the analysis related to immigration and teaching in three sections: the purpose, the challenges, and the agentic resources. Because the massive amount of data of each of the eight participants, I will choose a couple of examples in each section that best represent the process.
The Purpose of Immigration

The immigrant teachers of this research project arrived with a variety of different purposes in relation to becoming teachers in the United States. They came to improve their professional and employment prospects, to reunite a family, to enjoy a vacation, or to escape political situations in their countries of origin. As Portes & Rambaut (2006, p.179) explain, there is typically a difference between “involuntary and relatively unprepared migrants ‘pushed out’ by coercive political conditions…versus immigrants as voluntary and better prepared movers ‘pulled in’ by perceived opportunities for economic advancement or family reunification.” That is the case of Helena, who was “pushed out” of her own country and arrived seeking political asylum, with no knowledge of English, no friends, and no experience living in another country. On the other hand, Victoria, Jack, Lihan, and Susana were “pulled in” and arrived looking for economic and professional advancement. For example, Victoria, a Spanish economist, came to the U.S. as a fille-au-pair in the 1990’s in order to beat the high rate of unemployment in Spain and because of her desire to learn English; Jack, from Poland, came as a researcher through an exchange program. Both, Maja, a Mexican lawyer, and Niang, a student from Singapore, arrived because of marriage with a U.S. citizen, in an effort to reunite their families.

In all of these cases, the travel to the United States has been the result of an agentic process that started with the selective recognition of a problem and the realization that something needed to be done (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). That is the case of Victoria, who decided to come to learn English to improve her chances of getting a job in Spain. That was also the case for Maria, who came because she was sad and depressed after her parents passed away, and also for Susana, who came to “widen her world” after being a master teacher for several years. By
using their cognitive patterns, their schemas, routines, dispositions, preconceptions, they used their personal competencies to obtain the information and resources necessary for immigrating to the U.S. They also had to imagine future trajectories of action. Victoria, for example, planned to learn English and return to Spain better prepared to find a job, and in making her decision about where to study, she considered the differences between coming to the U.S. to study or going to England. She exhibits the projective element described by Emirbayer and Mische in the form of her friend’s advice to her before leaving: “if you have the opportunity to go to England or the United States, you’re better off if you go to the U.S. because of the houses, and… Look, in everything you will be better off.” This comment by her friend allowed Victoria to creatively reconfigure her thinking, and it considered several options, giving shape and guiding her future possibilities.

In her narrative, Victoria explains that the preconceptions of the work done by the fille-au-pair in England was a constraint in her choosing England over the U.S. She explained her understanding that the English fille-au-pair would have to clean and work long hours, “almost like slaves…” Her anticipatory identification of the characteristics of her job in England caused her to engage in a hypothetical resolution that was synthetic in nature (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998) with Victoria trying to solve several conflicts at the same time: her personal desire for independence, the guarantee of a job, and the improvement of her professional qualifications by learning English that would help her in getting a better job when she returned to Spain.

Once the different options were examined, her final resolution was tested in exploratory social interaction with her mother. Her mother wanted her to go to England, because of its geographic proximity to Spain, while her friend advised her to commit to the U.S. Victoria researched numerous employment agencies and, after having all the different alternatives,
Victoria made use of what Emirbayer and Mische (1998) call the practical-evaluative element, the capacity to act and make judgements between the two options. It was through the social interaction and internal conversation that she made the decision to emigrate to the U.S. In summary, in this process, Victoria problematized her current situation of dependency and unemployment, recognizing that something must be done. She researched different alternatives and adjusted her patterns of action by consciously searching the best agency for fille-au-pairs that would help her to accomplish her goals. From this experience Victoria developed schemas of actions that were replicated in different circumstances later in her navigation through the school system in the U.S.

Portes and Rambaut clarify that voluntary migrations are not always as voluntary as they were planned to be. Such is the case of María, a Colombian industrial engineer, who vacationed in the U.S., fell in love, and married a U.S. citizen, or the case of Sadie, a teacher from Korea who married a U.S. citizen living in Japan and stayed in the U.S. because of a circumstantial issue with her visa status, which eventually took five years to resolve. Only Susana, an experienced Colombian teacher, came with the express purpose of being a teacher; she came through the Visiting International Faculty (VIF) program to teach in a U.S. middle school. And while Susana did specifically desire to become a teacher in the U.S., she was also strongly motivated by her desire to break what she called “a vicious cycle” of being year after year the master teacher who trained newcomers, because she was organized and the most experienced teacher at her school.

That was not enough for me. Because, for example, the level of my English was not the one I wanted. I realized that suddenly they gave better opportunities to the person who had lived in Europe, in England, or the United States so far as I knew. So I obviously do not want to be in a school that gave the job of [English] language
teacher to the person who had just arrived: the architect who had just arrived from England and knew nothing about education but had good English. So, I said: ‘I’m leaving.’ (Susana, personal interview, April 7, 2011).

Susana’s immigration to the U.S. was an action that she wanted, but her desire to leave Colombia can also be understood as a reasonable response to professional limitations in her country of origin.

In Susana’s agentic process, all the elements of the “chordal triad of agency” (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998) are present. In the internal structure of the iterational element, Susana first selectively paid attention to her situation at her school regarding her level of English. By comparing her professional opportunities with the teachers who had just arrived with no educational background but great command of the language, she recognized a problem. Her pre-existing patterns and schema constructed by experiences in different schools since her time as a student teacher made her recognize her need to improve her command of the English language. Here it becomes very important to highlight Emirbayer and Mische’s (1998) point that agency is “oriented variously toward the past, future and present, then what we call the iterational dimensions appear as that chordal variation in which the past is the most resonant tone” (p.975). In this sense, Susana had former experiences of being discriminated in previous jobs in Colombia by students and parents because of her strong accent, especially in comparison with native English-speaking teachers who worked at the same bilingual school. After selecting and recognizing the conflictive situation, Susana located her problem in relation to other teachers who had a better level of English language. While Emirbayer and Mische argue that the main focus of agency for the iterational dimension is the schematization of the social experience, one of the main results is that provides to individuals with some reliable knowledge to be able to
reproduce past experiences and patterns of action (1998). Susana shows the schematization of her social experiences at different schools in Colombia regarding her expertise and experience:

The more skilled you are, the less they will want you, because you're older, and they have to pay you more because you have many years in the school. So, you already knew that suddenly you would be out of school, because with the money they paid you, they can pay two new teachers. So, since the beginning, you knew that at one point you would have to leave these schools, because despite the fact that one had worked nine years with them, one has no stability (Susana, personal interview, April 8, 2011).

After selecting and recognizing the problem, Susana looked for possibilities by connecting with colleagues who were working in the United States. She had a group of language teachers in Colombia who were colleagues and who communicated their experiences of leaving and working abroad. The repertoire of narratives of her colleagues and friends were the cultural resources that Susana used to developed anticipatory identification of possible alternatives of action (projective element). Finally, there was thorough deliberation after conversations with her friends and her family that encouraged Susana to make the decision to apply to the VIF program to work in the United States. Susana then arrived at a decision that pointed to the execution (practical-evaluative element) of her career objectives.

**The Challenges of Immigration**

As was explained in the review of literature, the most frequent issues and barriers found on previous studies in several countries were command of the host country language (Cruickshank, 2004; Bustos Flores, 2001); validation of the teachers’ credentials and experience (Ramenick, 2002; Bustos Flores, 2001); discrimination for accessing jobs based on age and gender; stereotyping of the teachers and discrediting because of strong accents, and competition
from some local teachers who felt threatened by the better educated foreign born teachers (Ramenick, 2002); lack of awareness of U.S. socio-historical context of the part of the immigrant teachers (Bustos Flores, 2001). Other researchers also encountered challenges such as dealing with family, work, and financial problems (Cruikshank, 2004), conflicts with pedagogical approaches, conflicts with the system, and the need to find a sense of self and place (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2004). Finally, most of the research found mentoring and support as one of the needs of immigrant teachers for successful incorporation into the school systems (Peeler & Jane, 2005; Lee, 2010). This research project validates most of the issues presented in previous studies such as the command of the language of the host country, discrimination because of accents, dealing with family situations, and the need to find a place and a sense of belonging to the teaching community. In addition, data from this research shows difficulties adjusting to the new country in daily life, cultural shock, and miedo al cambio – fear of change.

**Communication Skills: Language and Accent Limitations**

In similar ways to previous studies, the participants in this research faced language challenges in different degrees, depending on their language abilities or their accents. For example, knowledge of the English language was the main challenge for Helena, a very experienced Colombian elementary school teacher who had to flee the country and arrived to the U.S. seeking political asylum, with no English knowledge, no friends, and no experience living in another country. She was a very educated person, very successful in her country of origin, but her lack of command of the English language was her greatest challenge:

I have lots of experience, lots of love for education. I miss the classroom I left in Colombia... And I came here, and suddenly I see that I don’t have the most important tool to support me in the...
education system, which was my language. So, how to address this possibility? To follow my dream, what I've always done, what I love? Or, to say ‘leave it there…”? (Helena, personal interview, June 7, 2011).

For Helena, her ability to communicate is the most important “tool” in her teaching job. She expresses the way her identity and integrity as a teacher has suffered because of her difficulties with communication:

I cannot say today that I had the best feelings and best emotions, [with] my heart every day torn in sadness. I left my country, my family, my parents; I left my career and have left everything on standby at one point. [Being] unable to talk about how much you had in experience and knowledge is emotionally… it’s a process of silence. You have to be silent. You have to live this process within yourself. And, at one moment, I had high anger with myself knowing that I had worked so hard to make my career and my studies. And suddenly having to come here to listen, to hear, and not to understand…to be silent. And people look at you and see you as nothing, because you do not speak the language…(Helena, personal interview, June 7, 2011).

Helena struggled and felt powerless, unable to communicate, lacking her most important tool in education: her voice to teach, and also her voice to express herself as an individual. Helena’s emotional process reflects Palmer Barker’s (1998, p. 21) idea of dismemberment: the deeper-down pain that comes from being disconnected from Helena’s own self-image, because of her inability to express herself.

People belittle you at times because you cannot express yourself, or you cannot play with words to say: "Hey, excuse me, but I deserve respect as a human being, because I have done this, because I've done that.” Then, you start to recognize that communication is one of the most important elements of the human being. When you can tell people “Look, what you're talking about, I also know what you're talking about.” I think it is a very hard time for all immigrants to see that you had to keep silent. Totally conflicting emotions (Helena, personal interview, June 7, 2011).
Helena demonstrates her agency by overcoming her challenges using two different strategies. First, in order to cope with this emotional process, she remembered what she had done in her native Colombia: the successes she had as a teacher in order to find assurance and affirmation of who she really was, reminding herself that her situation was temporary and she would be able to fulfill her dream. As Parker (1998, p.20) states:

Remembering ourselves and our power can lead to revolution, but it requires more than recalling a few facts. Re-membering involves putting ourselves back together, recovering identity and integrity, reclaiming the wholeness of our lives.

Helena uses her thoughts and actions related to past experiences (iterational element) in order to obtain stability. Helena not only evokes her successes and dreams, but she also analyzes the possibilities and makes decisions to change the course of actions. For example, she used the technological tools with which she was equipped in her previous teaching experience, and she used technology and a thorough planning of her lessons. She prepared her classes word-for-word and presented everything using different software; she used games and a lot of songs and TPR (total physical response) strategies to convey her messages.

In her search for reassurance, her continuous reconstruction of her identity and self-image, Helena changed her job from teaching ESL to working as a Spanish teacher in a dual language program. She was very content and successful to the point that she was elected “Teacher of the Year” at her elementary school. However, still, language was a constraint in her teaching career, when the school required her certification as an early childhood educator in addition to her Spanish certification. Helena had to move to teach in the middle school grades due to her difficulties with language, specifically her inability to pass the test in English for her teaching certificate as an early childhood educator. Unfortunately, this is an example of how the
credential process is not ready for accommodations for immigrant language teachers who have the experience, the content knowledge of the foreign language, and have also had a successful career in both countries. For teachers who have learned to speak English as an additional language, having a bit more time to complete a credentialing exam could be a reasonable accommodation.

One important differentiation regarding Helena and the other immigrant teachers is that Helena came to the United States without voluntarily making that decision. She had to flee the country and leave the happy life she remains nostalgic for. Before coming to the U.S., she didn’t have the opportunity to project her future trajectory as a teacher; she didn’t have the cultural resources and the knowledge or have social narratives that would provide her some ideas of her future course of action when arriving to this country. She had to start remaking her own world and her family’s world “on the go.”

In addition to the challenges of learning a new language fluently, the majority of participants found that their accent was a challenge when communicating with students, parents, colleagues, and administrators. For example, on the other side of the spectrum, with a high level of command of the English language, Jack from Poland evidenced in his reflection his own challenge with accent:

You can sense sometimes from the students that maybe because of the different accent, they may have difficulties understanding. I can always repeat or rephrase and find out, but, again, because of different accents, they find an excuse not to really participate or, you know, maybe find the way to get away with something. Part of those issues that you have with discipline, or maybe being disrespectful, you know, sometimes they say, ‘Go back to your country.’ (Jack, personal interview, June 28, 2011).
Several teachers face these circumstances and used different copying strategies. One of these strategies is the use of humorous reasoning, including simply dismissing the comments, as we can see in Jack’s response:

I used to answer, “I have been in this country longer than you have lived in this country, so, you don’t have really a reason to say to me that I have to go back to my country.” Now, I don’t take it seriously or really let it bother me or offend me too much, no (Jack, personal interview, June 28, 2011).

This is a clear example of how the reiterative use of the humorous reasoning to answer his students gave him the confidence to dismiss the student’s comment without letting it affect him adversely.

One of the biggest challenges Maria faced is related to prejudice and discrimination from students and parents because of her accent. Speaking with an accent is one of the sources of prejudice and discrimination immigrant teachers have to overcome not only from other adults, parents, and colleagues, but also from students. Immigrant teachers express the lack of respect from their students because of a different pronunciation. Maria expresses her limitations with pronunciation:

The most difficult for me has been my English, because my English still has many limitations, specifically in pronunciation. Then, sometimes, children disrespect me, and it may also be part of my personality, right? I'm not a very strong person, so probably that part makes me so that they can disrespect me. But disrespect in what aspect? In that I do feel bad; I feel sometimes discriminated by them, because they believe that because I do not pronounce the English like the other teachers, I don’t know what they know (Maria, personal interview, April 4, 2011).

Maria recounts a couple of instances when students discriminated against her because of her accent. For example, one day, she, as an ESOL teacher, was working with another teacher in a first grade classroom. Maria edited the work of one of the students and told him to go fix the
errors and bring his paper back to show her. However, the kid went to get in line with the other teacher, and when she asked him why he was there if Maria had already edited his paper, the student said:

Ah, “because she doesn’t know what you know.” And for me, that was like…I felt terribly, and of course I wanted to cry, but I became strong there. But, when I came home, I cried a lot, because I was sad. Not for me, but because we, the Hispanics – we are not proud of ourselves. Because never has a native English speaking kid been disrespectful with me (Maria, personal interview, April 4, 2011).

In another case, one of the female students asked Maria if she spoke Spanish and when Maria confirmed the student responded: “Ah, then that is the reason why you don’t know how to speak English.” Maria, added, though, “But then those things are not going to stop me.” (Maria, personal interview, April 4, 2011).

In addition to problems related to accents, several of the participants expressed their feelings of being discriminated against at the beginning of their immigration journey:

In the beginning, I felt a lot of discrimination here and there, even in stores, and that would just make my day miserable sometimes. “Why did I come here?” and “why do I have to deal with these kinds of things?” But I can’t go back; [I] have to make it work here. (Sadie, personal interview, October 18, 2011).

Actually, the feelings of discrimination expressed by Sadie at the beginning of her arrival have changed with time, especially because she found the way to overcome those feelings by having a social network with close friends outside the school that helped her to understand the cultural differences, opening her mind to different ways of thinking; or just by learning to deal with them, learning to act more competently in the new culture, and also learning by her own experience to avoid and resist unthinking prejudice and discrimination.
So dealing with making a lot of friends really helped me, not at work...but then, I play tennis, and my tennis friends, sometimes, if I don't understand a certain situation, I would ask them “Why do people do this?” and “What should I do?” And because they’re friends, they would understand, and then sometimes they would advise me, and then I could understand the different perspective that they were dealing with, too. It went well friendship-wise. I realized that a lot of people here – they like to help, they want to be helpful, and if I don't ask for help, they don't know. So, opening my mind up opens up the other person’s mind, too, and then I think it goes both ways. And, it’s been a very meaningful experience for me. And not just living in one culture, but dealing with many different kinds of people and trying to open up, and I think I have grown as a person as well (Sadie, personal interview, October 18, 2011).

The importance of the social networks has been constantly expressed in previous research. For example, Elbaz-Luwish (2004) identifies “the importance of the relationships in transcending space and time” (p.408) in the sense that relationships are essential to the way the teachers elaborate their place in the culture and in the school (p.408). Furthermore, Remenick (2002) found that informal social support was very important for immigrant professionals when incorporating in a new work and a new culture. These social networks included not only family and friends, but also colleagues and other immigrant students with their families.

Finally, it is important to highlight here that to be able to function competently in everyday interactions with students’ families, in the classroom with students, and in the school with colleagues, learning new cultural practices becomes necessarily a precondition for learning a language.
Dealing with Family Situations

For Sadie, besides the feelings of otherness and feeling different because of her race, the biggest challenge was the lack of emotional and social support for her family while her husband was working in Japan.

Dealing with a new career, and new culture, and trying to be assimilated into this culture, that was hard definitely. The most difficult part was with all of the things, raising my kids. That was the hardest part as a mom, not as a teacher. As a mom, especially when their dad was away, even if I got financial support, I didn’t have the emotional, social kind of support. That was the hardest part. (Sadie, personal interview, October 18, 2011).

The positive influence of emotional support of the family and especially of the husband and extended family was one important finding in Lee’s research (2010). According to her, husbands and in-law families were the key element in the social support, because they acted like the bridge that helped the immigrant teachers to transition to the mainstream culture, making the process easier. This can be seen very clearly in Susana’s case. The first time she came to the U.S. with her former Colombian husband, he couldn’t work because of his visa; he blamed her for his unemployment and his condition of stay-at-home husband with few options. Furthermore, she blamed herself for her daughter’s separation from her extended family, including cousins and grandparents, exacerbated by being alone in the house with only her father.

Conversely, the second time Susana came to the U.S. as a tourist, when she met her current husband, a U.S. citizen, she was more prepared to deal with all the circumstances. She returned to Colombia, and when they decided to get married, she started looking for jobs and made contact with different schools with different types of teacher roles, as a Spanish elementary
teacher, ESOL teacher, and English teacher. She was more selective looking for a place where her professional background and teaching experience with both languages would be appreciated.

**Additional challenges**

In addition, as Susana expresses, her “cultural shock” and the fear of change was one of the causes of her difficulties in her adjustment to the life in the host country that pushed her to return to Colombia. When Susana accepted her job as Spanish teacher in a middle school in the U.S, she had only had experience in private elementary bilingual schools in Colombia. She came to work in a public school where she was the only Spanish teacher. She missed her colleagues, her teamwork, the planning time with colleagues, her position and history she built in Colombia, and especially her sense of belonging:

> I didn’t meet with anyone; my planning was by myself. I remember telling myself “I plan with the walls.” And the worst… ‘Why did I do this?’ I thought that life was that way here, that the work was like this (Susana, personal interview, April 8, 2011).

On the other hand, Susana had friends working in elementary schools in different states. From communication with them, she understood that although the schools were different from the schools they had experienced in Colombia, the problem was that she didn’t have the cultural capital to negotiate the experience of working in middle school in a very diverse society. The only preparation she had was a conference during a week in a hotel with other recently hired immigrant teachers where they received “information-prevention” about what to do or not to do regarding ethical issues with students. Susana may have benefitted from additional training focused on cross-social class learning, which may be particularly helpful when immigrant teachers begin their teaching careers in “elite” bilingual schools in their home countries and are
hired to teach in schools serving children from different socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds.

**Agentic Resources**

In this section I will analyze immigrant teacher’s agentic resources used to accomplish their goals, specifically looking at their plans and intentionality, examining their reflections (internal conversations) and self-awareness about their personal circumstances, and their ability to overcome the challenges and difficulties they encountered in their daily jobs.

**Setting and Achieving Goals: The Driving Force**

Immigrant teachers see themselves as purposive agents. The first characteristic of a purposive agent is intentionality (Bandura, 2006) or purposive planning (Brattman, 2007). People are purposive agents (Brattmann, p.21) who formulate intentions or resolutions and set goals that involve action plans and the strategies to accomplish the goals and plans. The participants in this research decided to become teachers in the United States in many different ways and due to many different sets of circumstances. In the end, all of them had the purpose of teaching in the U.S. school system. They set their goals of becoming teachers and worked through the different alternatives they had to reach the goal over a period of time. They established their plans to obtain certification via college or alternative routes, overcoming at the same time all the difficulties implied thereby to navigate the immigration system, adapting to the new environment and new life style, and for most of them, to learn to communicate in a new language and act in new cultural contexts.
According to Bandura, the ability to imagine or visualize desired outcomes encourages people to develop “anticipatory self-guidance” and “purposeful and foresight behavior” (Bandura, 2006). In this case, in addition to intentions, plans, and time, immigrant teachers have also intrinsic motivations of what they want as a goal (anticipatory self-guidance) and work toward reaching it (development of purposeful and foresight behavior). Jack describes his own intrinsic motivation:

I think the motivation is kind of intrinsic. You have your own vision of having a good life, maybe, and having a good job that you like and this kind of…it’s part of the driving force for it. You find an opportunity, and you’d like to pursue it, and you think it’s going to be good for you, and so you go for it (Jack, personal interview, June 24, 2011).

All of the immigrant teachers expressed that having a purpose was their driving force. For example, for Niang, as for many of the immigrant teachers participating in this research, what helps her be successful is to set her goals and to persevere until she reaches them somehow. In addition, Victoria, the Spanish teacher, sees herself as a very persistent and confident person.

I'm a constant person, so I'm here in the United States… I believe in myself, that I can do things, and I pursue what I want… I do not stop until I get it. I look for the ways to get it (Victoria, June 15, 2011).

On the other hand, Maja, in addition to having her goals and dreams, explains that her family is her driving force as well as commitment.

Family makes me go ahead. Luchar (advocate, stand for, sacrifice) for my family, to feel the engagement. When, for example, in your work, you acquire a commitment…commitments make me succeed. The dreams themselves, the goal you can have, and, well, above all, the goals (Maja, personal interview, Dec. 9, 2012).
Moreover, Maria explains that her love for education and her social responsibility are her driving force:

I take very seriously the responsibility that I have as a person in society, and as a mom, and as an educator. I always want the best for my students as well as for my children. My students are as valuable as my children. All I can learn, if I could pass on to my children ... (Maria, personal interview, April 4, 2011).

In similar ways, Victoria reflects on her driving force as the desire to be an agent of change: “I've always had, like, that little thing inside, wanting to change the world. I want to leave the world as a better place than when I found it.” (Victoria, personal interview, June 15, 2011). For Helena, her vocación and her love for education are her driving forces:

Trying to look inside what you want. Vocación is what gives you the strength to face all kinds of situations. Vocación... vocación to teach comes with me, it is with me, and is something that I don’t look for limitations when you face the possibility to teach. The difficulties… I can see them as tools that motivated me to reach what I want (Helena, personal interview, June 7, 2011).

Clearly, immigrant teachers are purposeful agents who set goals and use their personal powers – persistence, determination – and intrinsic motivation to reach their goals. Their visualizations of their dreams are their driving force and their “anticipatory self-guidance” (Bandura, 2006) while they develop purposeful behavior to accomplish their goals. It is not only the setting of goals that makes immigrant teachers move forward and succeed, but a combination of goals and their own personal powers such as determination, perseverance, and self-confidence in their own strengths.

It is very important to highlight in this section two important findings: the concepts of “vocación” and “social responsibility.” Several participants, mainly the Spanish-speaking
teachers, explained that their love for education and their vocación are the driving forces that permit them to face challenges and succeed. Vocación is a concept embedded in Spanish culture, similar to avocation in English. The idea of vocación is prominent in Catholicism, characterized by the belief that each person is born with talents and qualities oriented toward a specific type of life: marriage, religious service, doctor, artist, other types of work. It also implies that a person will find fulfillment if s/he follows her or his vocación. In other words, in Spanish culture, vocación is “a call,” a mission in life.

As members of collective cultures and citizens of countries where Catholicism is the predominant religion, a religion in which social justice and solidarity are common teachings, most of the Spanish-speaking participants expressed the importance of social responsibility as a motivator to being agents of change. Maria notes her own sense of responsibility toward other children after seeing the benefits of education in her own child:

I think I fell in love with education because I saw that my child had possibilities; [I thought] that, in the same way that my child had possibilities, other kids, if I started teaching, would have the same possibilities with me. I wanted to return to the world what they were going to do for my kid (Maria, personal interview, April 4, 2011).

The desire to serve is also one of the themes that arise from the findings. For Susana, teaching in the United States has given her the opportunity to do community service when working with Latino students. In Colombia, she had been a language teacher in bilingual schools with high socioeconomic status. In the U.S., she realized that she was “the only person working to give disadvantaged students a few opportunities” (Susana, personal interview, September 25, 2011); it is this ability to help students that she finds most rewarding about teaching.
Victoria expressed her explicit desire to be an agent of change in the field of education after she became disillusioned by politics.

I always had that little thing inside me that I wanted to change the world. I wanted to leave this world as a better place than I found it. I was in politics in Spain for three years, and I thought after three years that, with politics, we cannot change society, that perhaps it could be changed by teaching, and what better than teaching Spanish, right? Bringing closer one culture to another… (Victoria, personal interview, June 15, 2011).

Reflectiveness and Self-reactiveness

Other properties of human agency are reflectiveness (Brattman) or self-reflectiveness and self-reactiveness (Bandura, 2006). In addition to setting goals and plans that will be developed in time, agents also have the ability to monitor their own behaviors by reflecting on them, setting back, modifying the course of action, or just changing plans. These are two different features of agency: it is through reflectiveness that agents can make choices and change the course of action. The ability to regulate their behavior and construct, correct, or modify plans is what Bandura calls self-reactiveness.

In addition, agents do not live in a vacuum, nor are they isolated; they receive influences from the social milieu including family, friends, site of employment, and the media, as key influences. However, it is through reflection and social interaction with friends and people they trust that immigrant teachers find their strength to overcome difficulties and open their minds to dealing with difficulties.

Agents not only receive influence, but they also can influence other people. It is also through reflection and internal conversations that immigrant teachers realize their capacity for
being leaders, negotiators, and agents of change. Bandura’s concept of functional self-awareness provides us a framework to analyze how individuals reflect on how they behave, how they interpret the things that happen to them, and how they make changes in their lives when necessary (Bandura, 2006). Susana explains how she realized her capacity to be a leader and an agent of change:

Before, I thought that I wasn’t a leader. But, I was the oldest person in the school, I knew more about the school than the others, one of the oldest ones. And I thought at that time that what I was doing…it was to help people, but I didn’t do it to facilitate teamwork. I knew I was helping the new teachers, but that had no impact at an institutional level. It was more that I was helping the new teacher who came to my grade level. But when you’re a leader…it is to attain, it is to achieve institutional changes. How did I realize it? Because of the experience you have. It has been acquired over the years in all areas: when I worked in Colombia, when I came here, when I returned there. What it does is to reaffirm your abilities, right? Also, on a personal level, you gain more confidence, and I think that for you to be a leader you have to be a person that is convinced that what you know is the only right thing. But you have to have high confidence in the knowledge and experience you have, and realize that you have to use it not for the benefit of a person or two but for the benefit of an institution. For me it was an awakening overnight. That helped me a lot. To realize that as a leader, what you know can facilitate the work, not just to one person or two, but it has more scope (Susana, personal interview, September 25, 2011).

For Susana being a leader is related to serving others; a leader influences others in different ways to achieve institutional changes. In addition, she realized that negotiation is a key element of leadership.

You – as a leader who wants to influence and who wants to accomplish a change – I learned that you have to go slowly, not like entering in a conflict, in a fight with each other, but have to see the other person, have to study their strengths and propose or simply let them to take the leadership. And, in many cases, yes, too, it has to come from the other person that trusts your abilities,
and there – it is where the problem is – that the other trusts you
(Susana, personal interview, September 25, 2011).

Negotiation is an important skill that immigrant teachers learn during their process of
incorporation: negotiation with their own beliefs, and their own ideas regarding their pedagogical
and cultural practices, and negotiating with others. For Maja, negotiation implies the exercise of
freedom and to learn how to choose your battles. Maja’s interesting idea about freedom in
negotiation is related to be free of attachments to ideas, and to be able to see other points of
view:

…being free, being free of attachments, the fact of not sticking to
things … or ideas is what allows you no to enter in conflict. Ok,
you let it go, then there is not much conflict. It is a process. It’s
not that I have always been like this, it has been a process. You
are learning, you have to pick your battles (Maja, personal
interview, January 17, 2013).

**Internal Conversations**

In the case of Susana, the process of reflecting and having internal conversations leads to
awakening of a teacher’s strengths and her abilities as a leader and negotiator. Based on her
reflections about her strengths and her awareness as a leader, Susana decided that she wasn’t a
local teacher, but that she was an international teacher. And as international teacher she had to
develop a different vision of the world and especially a different image of herself, because the
people around her developed a different image of who she was, based on how she projected and
positioned herself. Susana describes some of her thoughts resulting from her internal
conversations:

I still believed that I was the college student with such a low
profile for the parents, because I feared them. I also believed that I
was that person. Then, I realized that I was a different person, that
my interests were the languages, educating others in other languages and after that, to learn about other cultures, that my students would also know about other cultures and, as such, I watch myself. I did not have a higher status, so I had to project myself as an international educator with a multicultural vision, and I started to realize who I was, what I had, what I needed. And I realized that what I needed was a master’s degree. I already had a specialization in translation, but it was more technical. It wasn’t at the pedagogical level, so I took the opportunity at the school, and they offered me a chance to do the master’s degree. With the master’s, I learned a lot, to know myself as a leader, and I learned about school improvement plans and all the processes of implementing new pedagogies to improve the school (Susana, personal interview, April 8, 2011).

In this passage, Susana clearly articulates the process of “figuring her world” (Holland et al, 2003) deciding to deconstruct her previous position of having a “low profile” in which parents seemed to put her and which she had taken up herself, and ref igured her world to project herself as an international educator. In a ‘figured world,’ Holland explained, individuals are able to exert an amount of agency, no matter how small, or control over their own behavior, by developing “more or less conscious conceptions of themselves” and processing these identities through Vygotsky’s semiotic mediation (Holland et al,2003, p.40).

As Susana says in her self-description, she widens her world through academic preparation. Education and professional development are then some of the tools that help immigrant teachers to develop agency, especially if the professional development provides guidance in cultural background and develops teachers’ professional and socio-culturally contextual communicative skills (listening, speaking and writing in English) that will open more opportunities to participate in the school community and in society in general. Similar to Lee’s findings (2010), the participants in this study continuously strived to improve themselves as
competent teachers by being open-minded to learning something new and pursuing advanced degrees or a higher-level teaching certificate.

The Human Resource

In general, most of the immigrant teachers voiced that one central agentic resource is the access to a social network, especially as it may manifest in a formal mentoring program, not only for the immigrant teacher but also for the new teachers. However, the key element in a successful incorporation of immigrant teachers is the human resource, an administration culturally sensitive enough to support and empower teachers that gives the immigrant teachers the opportunity to show themselves as persons and as competent teachers, an administration that knows and understands the challenges of the immigration process and offers creative solutions to the difficulties. Most of the teachers expressed that an administration that is supportive and has an open communication and listens is a fundamental element in their success as teachers. As Maria states,

I have very good administrators. When I felt I do not like something, I’ve talked. And then luckily, they got together and changed things. But I’m not saying that changed for me. I just spoke up because I felt stifled, and it turned out that way and I’m glad. Because I cannot stay with anything that bothers me, because I think ‘You better go talk to them instead of whispering with others to reach their ears anyway’. But when I can go to talk and say things and in advance I say, ‘I’m not saying that this will change anything, but this is my opinion’, then I already feel better. Although things happen, this is the policy of mine. At least, I expose my point of view as well, whether it changes or doesn’t change things (Maria, personal interview, April 4, 2011).

Lee (2010) notes that leaders develop with the support of the administration and the vision to make the work of the school easier for the entire school, rather than just for one person.
Time

Finally, agency is not stagnant or fixed in a moment but is extended over a period of time. The intentions and plans of immigrant teachers do not happen immediately; they need time to develop activities in order to achieve their goals. In consequence, agency is temporally extended (Brattman, 2007) and forethought, or projected over time, to provide direction, coherence, and guidance (Bandura, 2006). For all the participants, the accomplishment of their goals took several years. For example, Susana’s first intent to come as an international teacher with the VIF program was not very successful, and she returned to her home country. Later, she decided to come back when she positioned herself as an international educator, and she currently is a successful teacher, a leader, a mother, and a wife. For some teachers like Jack, it took some time to move from one visa to another, but finally, when he decided to sponsor himself, he was able to get his green card and stay in this country as an effective science teacher. Maja’s dream was to learn English and later to be a teacher. She found the perfect environment for her and her family, working in the same bilingual school attended by her daughters, looking at them to grow and develop as bicultural and bi-literate persons with many talents to offer to the world. Helena now is taking the time to deliberate her next step in her life, enjoying her family, and remaking her world. Niang has reached another of her goals, to obtain her Ph.D degree. Finally, Sadie is a competent teacher who has cultivated a social network with friends and colleagues who appreciate her as a person, a great teacher, and a friend.
CHAPTER 7
DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In this discussion I will undertake the following tasks: first, I will draw the big picture of the process of incorporation of immigrant teachers in the U.S. school system; second, I will focus on the conclusions of the research by answering the main research question: in what ways do immigrant teachers see themselves as cultural agents who contribute to their school communities by creating multicultural spaces? Finally, I will make a number of suggestions regarding the practical application of this research as well as possible theoretical directions for future research.

Currently, thousands of immigrant teachers are helping to fill critical teaching shortages in areas such as math, science, foreign language, and special education in the United States and other multicultural countries such Australia, Israel, and Canada. Meanwhile, in the United States, quantitative data regarding the size of the workforce, the nationalities of teachers, subjects taught, and kind of schools (rural, urban, public, private) where immigrant teachers work is very limited or nonexistent, and qualitative studies are in small number (Ramenick, 2002; Lee, 2010).

Most of the existent literature on immigrant teachers in multicultural countries different from the U.S. addresses the conflicts and challenges immigrant teachers face in their incorporation in their school systems (Cruishank, 2004; Ramenick, 2002); the influences of teacher’s previous cultural experiences in teacher identity (Elbaz-Luish, 2004); their articulation of perceived differences in terms of race, culture, and language (Thiessen et al.,
1997), the process of negotiation of their sense of difference in their professional lives (Elbaz-Lwish, 2004; Kostogritz & Peeler, 2004); the process of validation of teaching credentials and experience in their home countries; discrimination for accessing jobs based on age and gender; stereotyping of the teachers and discrediting because of strong accents; and competition from the local teachers who felt threatened by the better educated immigrant teachers (Ramenick, 2002). As noted previously in this paper, it has only been during the last decade that researchers from the U.S. have focused on immigrant teachers, despite the increasing importance of bilingualism and bilingual education in our globalized society (Arce, 2004; Hornberger, 2004; Bustos Florez, 2001; Yee, 2008; Lee, 2010).

Although these findings illuminate the process of immigrant teachers outside the U.S., it is important to focus our research efforts on specific questions in this country because the unique characteristics of the U.S. immigration and educational system, compared with the educational and immigration systems of countries such as Canada, Germany, United Kingdom, Denmark, Israel, and Spain. Learning about the lives and experiences of our own immigrant teachers in the U.S. and comparing the findings with other countries fortifies and enriches the understanding of the process of immigrant teachers’ incorporation in their respective school systems.

**The Incorporation of Immigrant Teachers**

After analyzing the process of incorporation of immigrant teachers in both the previous and the present research projects, my interpretation is that the incorporation of immigrant teachers could be represented in a continuum. At one end, we can observe the marginalization of immigrant teachers, in which teachers are engaged in conflictive opposition to the dominant school culture. At the other end, we may observe the full assimilation of immigrant teachers into the school culture excluded from the school culture. On this continuum, we may find that most
of the experienced successful teachers settle somewhere along the middle area of the continuum, a point of equilibrium where teachers are integrated into the large society, and consider themselves to be the mediators and builders of bridges between cultures. In fact, most of the teacher participants in this research are situated in that middle range. As mature and experienced teachers with strong content knowledge and extensive multicultural and life experiences, as well as extended teaching backgrounds, they already have lived and overcome the initial difficulties of being newcomers to the country and school system, and they have confronted and made peace with many of the issues and barriers reported in different studies.

Based on the analysis in this research study, it appears that the issues and barriers experienced by the immigrant teachers might take place simultaneously and/or in different moments in teachers’ lives. Some of the issues have more weight than others according to each teacher’s socio-cultural background, their senses of personal power and abilities, and the support system they engage in order to face them. However, there are some common trends in their processes of incorporation; these trends are not linear and sometimes occur simultaneously, complicating the process of incorporation.

First, immigrant teachers have to learn how to navigate through the immigration system. In general, it is a quite a long process to obtain visas, work permits, and the green card. For example, it took Jack several years and utilizing several different visas to obtain his green card, and Sadie had to wait 5 years to fix her visa status, even though she was married to a U.S. citizen. Second, after the migration journey, the immigrant teachers have to overcome their adjustment challenges in the host country that involve differences in their family lives, lifestyles, friends, social networks, foods, public services, laws, traditions and religions, and sociopolitical
contexts. This adjustment can sometimes take several years, and for some immigrants it is an ongoing and often conflicted process. As Susana expressed,

> Nothing replaces your family and the long-term friendships from your home country. Nevertheless, a supportive system should be put in place. It should be not the isolated offer provided at schools to the new teachers that can be translated into ‘Call me if you need help.’ It should be an organization within the organization to develop that supportive system left back in your country. People with specific roles should be part of this supportive system school organization (Susana, personal communication, April 25, 2015)

Third, immigrant teachers have to learn how to access and how to navigate through the school system. This is a long process that encompasses the validation of their teaching credentials and experience in their home countries and later, finding a job in a school system. In this stage, teachers who are successful, according to both current and prior research, are those who have found school systems that value their teaching philosophies and honor their multicultural backgrounds. Teachers who lack this support leave the school and look for new places of employment that acknowledge and value them.

Fourth, teachers have to learn and understand the school culture, the pedagogical approaches, and the sociopolitical context where they are working. Finding a job in the school system may seem to be the culmination of the trip, but, in reality, it can mean that the struggle for incorporation might start all over again. Adjustment to the school culture involves learning about new rules, norms, and school policies, social networks, teaching philosophies and practices, cultural traditions, student-teacher and parent-teacher relationships. And it is in this stage that two of the most important constructs emerge from my research: the construction and reconstruction of the teachers’ identities, and the emergence of their agency. We can find issues of negotiation of social and cultural dissonance that could lead to either complete assimilation into the host culture, conflictive confrontation, or integration with selective embracing of the
host culture. Teachers also need to learn to negotiate the differences articulated in terms of race, social class, culture and language, in all stages of incorporation, but particularly this one.

Finally, the last stage in the incorporation is full participation in the school communities by taking leadership roles and participating in the civic and political arenas. In this sense, the present study provides a space for analysis of immigrant teachers’ capacities to act upon the world by answering the main question: in what ways do immigrant teachers see themselves as cultural agents who contribute to their school communities by creating multicultural spaces?

In the first place, immigrant teacher participants in this research project see themselves as competent teachers with solid content knowledge and cultural competence. They see themselves as role models who teach by example. They are supporters and motivators, cultural mediators, and harmonizers who seek to create understanding between the native and adopted cultures. They are patient and reflective negotiators and door-openers to multiculturalism. They also feel comfortable and supported. Most of them believe that their voices are heard, and that they had recognition and acceptance in their respective school systems. In addition, immigrant teachers see themselves as teachers who make a difference in the lives of their students. And, although some of them expressed the feeling of being different, they also take into account that being different may be a plus and can be a way to teach diversity, in that it might open up students’ minds to other ways of thinking and understanding the world.

After analyzing the data, I came to interpret the findings under the concept of immigrant teachers as intercultural workers:

1. An intercultural worker is a researcher and a reflective learner of different cultures.
2. An intercultural worker is an eye-opener, a reflective facilitator of cultural understanding, not a cultural invader.

3. An intercultural worker is a teacher who immerse students in other cultures (teacher of cultures).

4. An intercultural worker is a social harmonizer.

5. An intercultural worker is a role model of cultural sensitivity and understanding.

6. An intercultural worker is an agent of change.

Regarding their agency, immigrant teachers see themselves as purposive agents. Although the majority of the immigrant teachers of this study arrived with a variety of purposes different from being teachers in the United States, they found the opportunity to serve as teachers. Once they made the decision to be teachers in the United States, they established plans to obtain or validate their teaching certificates and access the school system, overcoming all the challenges and obstacles in their path for certification. In addition to having a purpose, immigrant teachers have intrinsic motivations as a driving force, and work toward reaching their goals by using their personal powers and abilities such as persistence, patience, commitment, determination, endurance.

As in the majority of the previous research, this study validates the findings regarding the challenges and obstacles immigrant teachers faced in their incorporation to the school system. Communicative limitations due to strong accents and lack of command of the English language pose a serious barrier, which is compounded by the lack of knowledge of cultural and social practices, which is obviously closely tied to knowledge of a language. This is one of the biggest
challenges immigrant teachers face, as it affects one of the most important tools that teachers have in their profession: communication. Teachers in this study, as well as in previous ones, also reported experiencing discrimination because of their accented English. Immigrant teachers felt discriminated against by their own students, parents of students, and colleagues.

Another important challenge is the validation of foreign certifications. To provide just one example from this study, Helena’s failure of the Early Childhood Education certification test obliged her to move to another school, even though she passed the Spanish language content test. Unfortunately, the credentialing organization doesn’t provide the accommodations that may be necessary for non-native English speakers, which could include extended test-taking time for teachers whose subject content area is a foreign language. This situation seems to be one of the biggest sources of teacher shortages in the area of foreign language: the English-speaking teachers’ major challenge in getting their certification in the foreign language is passing the content test in the target language; the foreign-born teachers who are native speakers of the target language and have full command of the content area may not pass the general tests because of their limitation with the English language.

“Otherness” and the feeling of being different is a common trait found in the previous and the present research. Otherness and feelings of isolation affect their sense of belonging to a community. For most of the teachers, the sense of belonging to a community is very important, especially if they came from a collectivist culture. However, among the participants of this project, the sense of otherness and being different becomes a motivation to work harder. For some of the teachers, differences are embraced as a tool to teach diversity and cultural understanding. In addition, immigrant teachers have learned to be culturally sensitive and to accept differences respecting other people’s values even though they do not agree with them, by
separating their private life and public life. They replicate their culture and traditions in their private life, but also they respect and appreciate the host society values with a critical eye.

Implications

Limitations

Qualitative studies with small samples are particularly suited for in-depth exploration of specific topics. This research study focusing on the experiences of immigrant teachers provides a close look at how these teachers navigated agency and identity in their adopted environments. However, it is not appropriate to extrapolate the findings from this research to a larger population, whether immigrants, or teachers, and specifically not the general population. There may be similarities, as noted previously, between the experiences of teachers and immigrants, but each has distinct responses to the challenges presented by their circumstances. The theoretical concepts introduced here may be used as a starting point for understanding the experiences of immigrant teachers in other countries, or in different parts of the US, perhaps.

Implications for Immigrant Teachers

First, it is important for immigrant teachers to be recognized as fundamental players in the construction of a globalized society: they are intercultural workers and agents of change for a better society. It is imperative for them to know that they and their multicultural and life experiences are invaluable resources to be used in classrooms and schools. By reading the teachers’ life stories and discussing the findings, immigrant teachers could mirror their experiences. They could compare and contrast with the immigrant teachers from the research their difficulties and challenges. At the same time, they could learn about the strategies and
personal abilities the participants developed in their navigation of the immigration and school systems. Immigrant teachers can reflect within themselves and find through their internal conversations their motivation to be successful teachers. When teachers have a range of possibilities, if they have more information, they could make better choices when looking for schools or in the process of integration to the school and the society in general. Other immigrant teachers can learn about the tremendous importance of timely and meaningful social support and mentoring. Furthermore, for aspiring immigrant teachers, it is crucial to understand the challenges represented by limitations with language and accent. For this reason is very important that immigrant teachers learn the English language and find meaningful ways to become familiar with the local culture and the socio-historical background of the host society in order to be successful teachers.

**Implications for School Administrators**

This research can help school administrators to appreciate the importance of having teachers from different cultural backgrounds who can open multicultural spaces in their respective schools. Many schools have been implementing multicultural education curriculums, but this initiative would be more powerful if it is implemented with teachers from different backgrounds who can be role models of cultural sensitivity and understanding. The findings regarding the self-image of immigrant teachers are a good portraiture of the teachers who could be intercultural workers: competent teachers, eye-openers to multiculturalism, and reflective facilitators, harmonizers, and role models for their students. With immigrant teachers, school administrators have also the possibility of integrating agents of change and team members into their schools who would work hard to make a difference in the lives of students. It is imperative
for school administrators to learn about the difficulties and obstacles immigrant teachers face in their visa and certification process. This knowledge is necessary to be able to support them by developing mentoring programs and social networks to facilitate the lives and well-being of the school personnel in general. Since new teachers are similar to new immigrants in a country, new teachers may benefit at the same time from these mentoring programs. As several participants suggested, it is important establish a support group in schools not only for immigrant teachers but also for students and families who are newcomers to the country.

This support group needs to consider several dimensions of support. The first could be emotional: listening and understanding newcomers’ difficulties in adjustment, exploring emotional reactions and supporting them in their cultural shock. The second aspect could be social support: exploring differences in culture, traditions, social networks. Another element could include academic support, in the form of guidance with tests and certification issues, and financial support, including providing resources and information for taxes and insurance matters, which may be different from their countries of origin. Although schools have in place some informal support in these areas, it is important to put in place a formal and organized group of teachers, administrators and parents’ representatives who accompany the newcomers to navigate the school culture and ease the transition to life in the new country. It is clear that this support group will offer guidance and support to help immigrant teachers to be empowered and take ownership of their own personal development.

When participants in this study were asked what they would like their school administrators to know about their needs, this is what they suggested:
1. Guidance to new social systems with new rules, not in the form of a training, but rather consistent accompaniment throughout the first and second year of experience in the new country.

2. Building a high level of trust through clear communication and honest feedback. Susana describes how this might work:

When you have been a successful and effective professional and have been hired because you are considered high quality teacher that meet the international standards of what a high performing professional is, you feel that should not ask or should not show that you do not understand or simply do not get the academic and social relationships. You fear asking questions, or you fear being given any kind of feedback in regards of any opportunity for improvement. Principals fear they will mislead you with any ‘straight forward talk’ or simply they do not want to make you feel bad if you are told there is something to be fixed. Therefore a "false empathy" and a ‘hollow communication’ takes place. There is not true honesty and genuine guidance for the new immigrant teacher. A kind of ‘secret code’ is developed and a lot of underlying messages are told. A lot is left to the immigrant teacher’s interpretation. The variables in this process of being able to ‘decipher’ the hidden messages might take a long time and it plays a huge role in teachers' overall ‘professional self-esteem.’(Susana, personal communication, April 25, 2015).

3. Providing training/counseling opportunities for immigrant teachers to become high performing leaders. Susana further suggests:

Immigrant teachers who have shown or even taken roles as leaders in education come to the new country, [and] in many different ways, they have to ‘start over’ in order to be recognized as potential leaders. Language barriers, as well as cultural differences, and the typical learning curve that takes place while you are building ‘relationships with a high level of trust’ interfere in your ability as an immigrant teacher and potential leader to be able to perform and be seen as a leader. When new schools hire these teachers with potential leading interests, they should support
them, embrace them, educate them and offer opportunities for them to train and gain new ‘cultural values’ added to their profile as leaders (Susana, personal communication, April 25, 2015).

Implications for Teacher Educators

This research presents the big picture of the immigration process of immigrant teachers and suggests the need for mentoring and social networks to support immigrant teachers in their work. Teacher educators can learn from the difficulties and struggles immigrant teachers face and can develop creative programs and curriculums that support multicultural education and teachers from multicultural backgrounds. Some of the most important suggestions for teacher educators are:

1. To develop a course work or workshops where the immigrant teachers and pre-service teachers could learn, analyze and feel safe in discussing their pedagogical experiences and comparing and contrasting them with the new philosophies and pedagogies applied in the United States.

2. To disseminate research on immigrant teachers and find a place in the educational program to analyze and discuss all the different challenges we know from research on immigrant teachers preparing them to develop coping strategies based on their strengths and agentic resources.

3. To provide opportunities for teachers to learn about socio-historical and cultural contexts in the United States through coursework, presentations, performances or any other creative activities, giving the teachers the opportunities to compare, contrast, and reflect about their own personal, cultural and socio-historical experiences in their own countries.
4. To provide pre-service teachers with spaces of reflection about their own assumptions, biases, or cultural differences to develop awareness, cultural sensitivity, and cultural competence.

5. To provide pre-service teachers with opportunities to reflect about their own identities, how they see themselves as teachers and immigrants, and how they have changed, and to reflect on their strengths and the things they would like to improve. It is important to help the new teachers to recognize their qualities and helping them to articulate them.

6. To connect pre-service teachers with other immigrant teachers who could be their mentor and establish professional and social networks to support them during the first year of teaching.

A personal implication of this research project has been my understanding of the immigrant teacher life and my continuous informal support of new teachers in my dual immersion bilingual school where many immigrant teachers teach. Furthermore, this understanding prompted me to create and participate in a special group of interest who researches and supports immigrant teachers in Georgia through GAOME (Georgia Organization of Multicultural/Multilingual Education), where I am a founding member and vice-president.

A final implication is that the message of this dissertation is a message of hope, a way to tell immigrant teachers that although the path has many obstacles, there also can be fulfillment and personal satisfaction down the road as they pursue goals of becoming powerful teachers in the United States.
Future Research

Selecting the data to analyze for this research project was a challenging process because of the massive amount of data I collected in 24 interviews. Many areas of rich data are waiting for future research. Because currently I am a bilingual teacher in a dual-language immersion public school, I intend to extend my research about immigrant teachers to illuminate the path of new immigrant teachers. I intend to coordinate through GAOME, a special group dedicated to serve and support immigrant teachers in Georgia. Regarding areas of research, there are many topics in which I will be interested. Some of the participants’ interviews have rich data that would make compelling case studies, especially if I collect additional insights based on the themes I have developed in the analysis presented here. I would like to do participatory action research with some of the teachers who are immigrants by exploring their teaching philosophies, beliefs, and practices and their negotiation in the classroom. Also I would like to focus on future research on teachers on different settings: the dual immersion programs vs. mainstream classrooms and establish a dialogue about the differences in both settings and the implications for immigrant teachers. Another important topic for future research is the point of view of principals and school administrators as well as mentor teachers. Additional research could focus on mentoring immigrant teachers. I would like to help schools to develop strong mentoring programs that support teachers in their work. In this area, professional organizations and universities could play a role by offering support to schools by developing professional development and social support. This would be the final product of my dissertation, a dream come true: a support group for immigrant teachers.
Researcher Final Reflections: Hope

When I started this project I assumed teachers would share with me interesting stories of immigration and teaching experiences. I anticipated learning about how teachers deal with power struggles, believing that some of their stories would resonate with my personal story of immigration and my personal struggles with power. My dilemma was in understanding and negotiating my role as the researcher, a researcher who at that time was not an immigrant teacher. With what authority would I observe, interview, analyze, and make suggestions on a topic that involves human beings who feel, who live a reality different from mine? Fortunately, the opportunity arrived and I found the way to become a TEACHER, an immigrant teacher who has a passion and a mission in life. Later as I undertook the research, my dilemma became the biases I surely have, and how to face them. Today when I am writing my dissertation I feel that I have accomplished my goal: I have lived the lives of my participants in my research, and I am trying to interpret as a scholar what I daily live as an immigrant teacher.

As with many of the immigrant teachers, I am an also an idealist and a dreamer. Esperanza – the name that my parents gave me at birth, and which in Spanish means hope – has marked my life. As Paulo Freire (2007) stated:

Without a vision for tomorrow hope is impossible. The past does not generate hope, except for the time when one is reminded of rebellious, daring moments of fight. The past, understood as immobilization of what was, generates longing, even worse, nostalgia, which nullifies tomorrow (p.45)

After reading and re-reading and analyzing the interviews, I arrive with the feeling that there is hope. In these times of disenchantment with public education, I refuse to give up the dream of an education for every child that responds to their needs and their upbringing.
Like Paulo Freire, “I reject the notion that nothing can be done” and for someone I will be the “bourgeois idealist” and “another dreamer” (Freire, 2003), or a “naïve educator.” Today more than ever I believe in a pedagogy of the heart, a pedagogy of hope, a caring pedagogy, a pedagogy of solidarity. I believe that teachers are at the foundation of the change that must happen in educational arena, because they are the “ones who know,” the ones who live the daily lives of their students and understand their challenges and their dreams; the ones that “do everything for the boys and girls” they are teaching. However, teachers are not usually the ones in charge of the changes, in charge of the decisions. I believe it is the time for teacher’s liberation. Liberation begins as Freire teaches, with conscientization, and conscientization begins with empowerment to help teachers, especially immigrant teachers, to recognize their strengths and reach the potential of their incommensurable power of love in every teacher’s heart.

Like Martin Luther King Jr., I have a dream. In my dream, I see teachers as members of a community of practice who love and respect their students, teachers who teach not only the reading of the word, but also the reading of the world, reading of the text/reading of the social context (Freire, 2003); teachers who are critical, “who have a taste for freedom, for commitment to the rights of others, and for tolerance as life-guiding rule” (p. 52). I also see in this dream of hope, teachers who believe in students’ empowerment to help them to arrive to their own conscientization. I see students who learn from their teachers to be critical of their reality, to have also as their teachers, “a taste for freedom, for commitment to the rights of others, and for tolerance as life-guiding rule” (Freire, 2003, p.52).
This is my vision of our future. Is this possible? A soft voice in my dreams whispers, “Yes… Si…. Oui…” The soft voice asks me, “Where does this dream start?” In my dream I see vignettes of immigrant teachers teaching in their classes. I see Maja with her love for freedom and harmonization. I see Maria in love with her students in spite of being discriminated against by them. I see Sadie in her struggle for cultural, social and professional acceptance but always being a hardworking, competent teacher. I see Susana in her awakening as a leader. I see Victoria wanting to leave the world a better place. I see Helena with her vocación as a driving force. I see Niang and her commitment to her students. I see Jack instilling his love for science to his students…

At the end of my dream I realized that this dream is becoming true when I see the work of these teachers as intercultural workers who exercise a pedagogy of tolerance and respect. They are culturally responsive teachers who understand what is going on with their students. They are social harmonizers in their classrooms and school system. They are the dream keepers we need in our society.
AFTERWORD

“Marionette”

By Esperanza A. Mejía-Quijano

This is a discovery and a big confession.
I cannot write a canonical academic article
without sufferance, without feeling exposed
and punished for not being a native speaker.
I will take the mask off!
This marionette is tired of being told what to say,
how to say things, how to think,
how to perform as a scholar.
I cannot naturally perform the academic rules,
nor the structure of your language.
It is not in my nature,
and I resist doing so.
I need to raise my voice to say, “It is enough!”
I need my freedom,
I need my circular thinking
And my unstructured recreations
I need lots of story-telling,
my long introductions
and my sensitivity,
That is me!
And it is your challenge
To read me, to interpret me,
To understand my oppression
And my resistance
To understand my words through your world
To see my world through your eyes
To find the connections
Of your world and my world!
And it is my challenge
to learn to communicate
beyond the linguistic privilege,
To be a scholar, to find my words

And to find my voice in a universal language!
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A: Teachers’ Consent Form

Title of Research: ¿Immigrant teachers as inter-cultural workers?

Stories on agency, resiliency, and hope.

Researcher: Esperanza Mejia-Quijano, from the Language and Literacy Education Department, the University of Georgia
Faculty Advisor: Dr. JoBeth Allen, Language and Literacy Education Department, University of Georgia (706-546-0234).

You are being invited to participate in this research study. Your participation is voluntary. Your refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You can ask to have all of the information about you returned to you, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The main objective of this study is to explore the different ways immigrant teachers see themselves as agents who contribute to multicultural spaces in their school systems by examining the lived experiences of immigrant teachers in U.S. schools.

You may benefit from participation by learning more about the research process as well as reflect on your own immigration process and collectively find strategies to improve your professional life. Additionally, the researcher hopes this will benefit the field of language and teacher education since the findings from this project may provide interesting information on immigrant teachers’ incorporation in schools.

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to do the following things:

1. Participate in 3 one or one and a half hour audio-taped interviews: one in Jun-July 2010; one in Aug-Sep 2010; and one in Oct-Nov 2010.
2. Create one self-reflection journal of your reactions and connections (internal conversations) to the conversations held during the interviews.
3. To review with the researcher the transcriptions of the data and the analysis to validate the information.

The researcher wishes to make audio-tapes of the interviews and video-tapes of the focus groups. Please check the appropriate box below if you are willing to allow the researcher to audiotape your voice during your interviews and videotape your person during the focus groups.

The researcher wants to make sure that you do not feel compelled to participate due to the fact that she is your colleague at the school site. Participation or non-participation will not affect your relationship with the researcher. You will not receive any compensation for participating in this research.

No risks are anticipated from participation in this study.
The researcher will keep your identity confidential. The results of this participation will be confidential, and will not be released in any individually identifiable form without prior consent, unless otherwise required by law. You will be assigned a pseudonym and this fake name will be used on all of labels, transcripts, and class work. Audiotapes of the interviews and any individually identifying information collected from you will be kept in a locked file which only the researcher can access. All audio tape recordings will be digitalized on CDs, leaving out identifying information wherever possible. Original audio tapes will be destroyed; CDs will be kept indefinitely. The CDs will be securely stored in the researcher’s home.

The researcher can be contacted for any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project. See contact information for the researcher at the bottom of the page. Additional questions, concerns or complaints regarding your rights as a research participant or in the event of a research related injury should be addressed to The IRB Chairperson, University of Georgia, 612 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address: IRB@uga.edu

OPT-OUT: You can participate in the study even if you opt-out of certain procedures.

Please choose one of the options below and hand it to Esperanza Mejía.

☐ I give permission to the researcher to be interviewed.

☐ I give permission to the researcher to be audio-taped during interviews.

☐ I give permission to the researcher to analyze my e-mails, journals and self-reflection related to the research.

☐ I give permission to the researcher to write and publish the findings from my participation in the research.

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

I agree to take part in this research study. I will receive a signed copy of this consent form for my records.

_________________________  _______________________  ______
Name of Participant        Signature                  Date

_________________________  _______________________  ______
Name of Researcher         Signature                  Date

Esperanza Mejía-Quijano
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College of Education
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APPENDIX B – Interview Guides

Interview one: It will focus on eliciting narratives about participants personal histories of immigration. This is only a guide. The possibility to ask about the internal conversation is open in each question.

1. Tell me about your life in your home country
   - Family composition, education, SES, sociocultural life, job positions in the family
   - Participant’s job experiences (teaching and other)
   - Socio-political context
   - Immigration experiences in the family
   - Networks?

2. Tell me about your immigration experience starting with the immigration decision process.
   - Why did you decide come to the U.S.? Which was that turning point?

3. Tell me about your life in the U.S. and your process of incorporation in the sociocultural life of the community.

4. Tell me about your experiences in your incorporation in the U.S. job market

5. Did you see differences between what you expected and what you found? What are these differences?
Interview two: will be focused on details of participants’ experiences as teachers before and after the immigration process. I will ask teachers to examine their experiences in the context of their social setting (their relationships with students, mentors, other teachers at school, administrators, parents and wider community). It intends to explore challenging situations and how teachers face these situations. How do the teachers exercise their agency in these situations? The possibility to ask about the internal conversation is open in each question.

1. **Tell me about your teaching experience in your home country, if you have one**
   - Why did you choose teaching?
   - Describe your pre-service experiences, mentoring and/or support programs.
   - Please describe a day in your teaching job in your home country.
   - Describe your relationships with the students.
   - Describe your relationships with other teachers and your mentors if you had them.
   - Describe your relationships with your administrators there.
   - Describe your relationships with the parents of students in your home country.

2. **Tell me about the process you followed to get a job in the U.S. school system.**
   - Immigration requirements
   - Requirements, tests, documentation, etc.
   - Did you come by yourself or through an agency?
   - Why did you choose teaching in the U.S.?

3. **Tell me about your teaching experience in the U.S.**
   - Please describe a day in your first teaching job in the U.S. Please describe a day when you felt that you had made a difference in students’ lives. Now describe the most challenging situation.
• Please describe a day in your current job in the U.S. Please describe a day when you felt that you had made a difference in students’ lives. Now describe the most challenging situation.

• Describe your relationships with the students in the U.S. Please describe the most positive as well as the most challenging situations.

• Describe your relationships with other teachers and/or your mentors in the U.S. Please describe the most positive as well as the most challenging situations.

• Describe your relationships with your administrators in the U.S. Please describe the most positive as well as the most challenging situations.

• Describe your relationships with the parents in the U.S. Please describe the most positive as well as the most challenging situations.

• Describe any mentoring and/or support program in your school.
**Interview three**: Reflections of the meaning of immigrant teachers’ experiences. It will be an exploration of the teacher’s view of their agency. The possibility to ask about the internal conversation is open in each question. The guiding question for me is: Do immigrant teachers exercise their agency and negotiate multicultural spaces that support them in taking action in their schools? How do they do that?

Questions to explore:

1. How do you think yourself as an immigrant teacher? How do you see yourself as a bilingual or multilingual teacher?
2. How do you see yourself bringing bi-cultural or multi-cultural knowledge into your teaching work? Give me examples. (Explore these question as much as you can)
3. What of the different life experiences you described in previous interviews shaped yourself as teacher? (have notes available from interview 1)
4. How do you see the process of your incorporation in your school?
5. What do you see as strengths that you bring to teaching? Describe one or more incidents when you called on these strengths. What was the outcome?
6. Let’s chose some specific challenging situations. Did these challenging situations generated conflicts? How would you describe the conflicts?
7. How did you negotiate these conflicts? What strategies did you use? How do you see the conflicts you have experienced?
8. Has your home language been an issue in your teaching in the U.S.? In what ways? How did you deal with the situations?
9. Have you ever felt powerless in your teaching life in the U.S.? How did you deal with issues of power in the school?

10. How do teachers see your participation in the school system? How do you see your participation in the school community?

11. How do you see your future in the U.S. school system?