UNDERREPRESENTATION OF TEACHERS OF COLOR IN K-12 CLASSROOMS:
PERCEIVING AND NAVIGATING RACISM

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Abstract

Teachers of color are persistently underrepresented in K-12 classrooms, relative to student populations. While nearly 50 percent of the national student population consists of students of color, 82 percent of the K-12 teacher workforce is White. This disparity persists despite public and private sponsored efforts at recruiting and retaining teachers of color. Achieving and maintaining a diverse pool of classroom teachers can benefit all students, especially students of color. Data indicate that access to teachers of color improves academic outcomes for students of color. Additionally, a diverse teacher workforce may benefit all students and support movement for educational equity. Racism is an aspect of education that is often absent or minimized in discussions, policies and practices addressing the persistent underrepresentation of teachers of color. This narrative study uses a critical race theory framework, and critical and indigenous methodologies to explore how teachers of color who persist in classroom teaching beyond ten years perceive and navigate racism. The narratives of seven diverse participants yielded individual experiences and overarching themes under two categories of (1) perceptions of racism and (2) strategies for navigating racism. The findings contribute to understanding the lived racialized experiences of teachers of color that may impact recruitment and retention. This study concludes with implications for practice in addressing the underrepresentation of teachers of color in K-12 classrooms, and suggestions for further research.
Dedication

This doctoral thesis is dedicated to my mother Dorothy Louise Chalk Davis. She did not live to see me make this journey. However, I felt her unlimited love, support, encouragement, and joy in my accomplishment as I completed this project. It is also dedicated to my Great Aunt Annie Mae Lewis who, at 99 years of age, is a model of an independent thinking Black woman. She has been one of my greatest cheerleaders.
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My doctoral journey has been a personally transformative process that has stretched and expanded me. As a Black African American woman researching, reflecting and navigating racism through a critical race theory lens, this growth process included experiences of “growing pains.” There were many, many times along the journey where the growing pains could have been too much to endure. At those times there were people who’d appear just in time to apply the right “salve” and ease the pain, which allowed me to move forward. I’d like to acknowledge all the people who helped me persist and complete this journey. Even if I don’t name them all individually, I am grateful for each one of them.

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I am thankful to my siblings, their partners and children for their abundant love, support and encouragement that sustained me. My sister Antoinette “Toni” Davis Hall helped me set a writing structure with weekly goal setting and check-ins. My brother Brian Davis was my self-care coach and massage therapist. My brother Carlton Davis provided reminders that this thesis project was so much more than academic – it was a mental, emotional and spiritual journey. My sister Kikora Davis inspired me to complete this journey and model that it is never too late to achieve new dreams. And, my brother Alan Stanley opened his heart and life to me during this journey, adding to the love and support channeled my way.

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The last member of my committee that I must acknowledge is my chair and advisor, Dr. Karen Reiss Medwed. Words cannot adequately express the depth and breadth of her role throughout this dissertation journey. She challenged me to develop, use and trust my authentic scholarly perspective and voice. She pushed me to complete the project while respecting my processes as a Black African American woman writing about racism in education while constantly navigating the racial trauma of the current socio-political climate of increased visibility of explicit racism. If not for her gentle and not-so-gentle nudging and prodding, there’s no telling how much longer I would have been working on the project. Thanks to her, it is complete and feels like an accurate reflection of the scholar practitioner I am and will continue growing into. I am honored and grateful that she was my companion and guide on this journey.

Finally, I’d like to acknowledge and extend deep appreciation to the seven teachers of color who shared their narratives for this study. Their diverse experiences with racism have contributed to a broader understanding of racialized experiences that need to be included in discussions, policies and practices addressing the underrepresentation of teachers of color. Even if their experiences are ignored or minimized in White dominated spaces in relation to the persistent problem, their stories have already begun to resonate with other teachers of color who
have learned about my research. All seven participants are passionate professional educators. I am honored that they trusted me with their voices and stories.
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Chapter One: Introduction

Educators of color (defined as those who do not identify as “White non-Hispanic”) are underrepresented in classroom environments in the United States of America (US). This is a condition recognized by researchers, education leaders, politicians, funding organizations, educators (Kearney, 2008; Villegas & Irvine, 2010), families of color and students (Gordon, 1993; Wilder, 2000; Branch, 2008). Programs to increase the diversity of the teacher workforce were established in the 1980s and lead to most states in the country adopting policies and practices aimed at recruiting and retaining teachers of color (Villegas & Irvine, 2010). However, despite efforts from federal, state and local education jurisdictions, educational philanthropists, and teacher preparation programs the underrepresentation of teachers of color in classrooms persists (Villegas, Strom & Lucas, 2012).

Based on data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), there has been little increase in the percentage of educators of color in the public elementary and secondary (K-12) classroom workforce (NCES, 2013b). Between 1987 and 2011, the percentage of teachers of color in the national K-12 workforce increased from 13 percent to 18 percent (NCES, 2013b) while students of color have increased to constitute over 48 percent of the national K-12 population (NCES, 2013a).

Teachers of color enter teaching at a lower rate and leave the profession at a higher rate than White teachers, and are more likely to staff urban schools that primarily serve students of color and students who experience economic insecurity (Boser, 2011; Ingersoll & May, 2011). A significant factor identified as contributing to teachers of color leaving the profession is school conditions and environments (Goldring, et al., 2014; Ingersoll & May, 2011). Yet, little empirical data examines the experiences of teachers of color once they are employed and remain
in classrooms, and how they perceive school conditions and environments (Achinstein, et al., 2010; Brown, 2014).

**The Research Problem**

Research indicates that embedded racism plays a significant role in the persistent underrepresentation of educators of color in classrooms at all levels of education (Epstein, 2005; hooks, 1994; Kohli, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2018; Rodriguez, Boahene, Gonzales-Howell & Anesi, 2012). Teachers of color enter classroom settings in public K-12 institutions at a lower rate, and leave the field at a higher rate than their White counterparts, who comprise 82 percent of the K-12 teacher workforce ((Boser, 2011; Ingersoll & May, 2011). An aspect of this problem will be examined through the research question: How do teachers of color who persist in K-12 classrooms perceive and navigate racism?

**Justification for the Research Problem**

The population of teachers in the United States (US) predominantly consists of White women from middle class backgrounds who are mono-lingual English speakers (Marx, 2004; Porfilio & Malott, 2011). As student populations grow increasingly diverse, the teacher pool continues to be primarily homogeneous (NCES, 2013a & 2013b). Some scholars argue that having a diverse pool of teachers provides students with opportunities to develop a connectedness and sense of belonging in an environment where they see themselves reflected in their teachers, which contributes to improved learning opportunities and outcomes (Walton & Cohen, 2007; Steele, 2010). Others argue that diverse teacher pools also allow improved cross-cultural understanding, and a broader understanding of the larger system of oppression that manifests as inequitable learning opportunities and outcomes (Epstein, 2005; hooks, 2003; Kohli,
(NCES, 2012) as measured by standardized test scores, high school graduation rates, and college entry rates which are all lower for students of color than for white students (NCES, 2012).

Teachers of color enter teaching at a lower rate and leave the profession at a higher rate than White teachers and are more likely to staff urban schools that serve communities of color (Boser, 2011; Ingersoll & May, 2011; NCES, 2012). Achieving and maintaining a diverse pool of classroom teachers can contribute to increasing equitable educational opportunities for all children by including diverse voices in educational equity discourse, policies and practices (Gorski, 2008; Kohli, 2012). Study of the experiences of teachers of color who persist in K-12 classrooms can contribute to understanding the complex nature of the problem of the underrepresentation of teachers of color. Through expanded understanding of the complex problem, efforts to recruit and retain teachers of color may evolve into measures that more effectively impact change.

Deficiencies in the Evidence

Empirical data addressing the underrepresentation of teachers of color in education is limited (Achinstein, et al., 2010; Sheets, 2006). Within that limited bank of data, the voices of teachers of color are scarce. Additionally, in much of the existing literature that directly discusses racism related experiences of teachers of color participants are pre-service and novice K-12 teachers, higher education faculty, and teacher educators’ (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2011; Brown, 2014; Kohli, 2012, 2014; Prado-Olmos, Rios & Vega Castañeda, 2007; Rodriguez, et al., 2012; View & Frederick, 2011). At the time of this writing, empirical data directly related to the underrepresentation of teachers of color and exploring the experiences of those teachers of color who persist in classroom teaching have not been identified by this author.

Relating the Discussion to Audiences
Through the narratives of teachers of color, it is anticipated that an understanding of how the participating educators recognize, experience and navigate racism, and persist in their work environments will be achieved. This empirical data may provide a significant contribution to complicating the understanding of the problem of underrepresentation of teachers of color. It is a problem which persists even with private, and federal, state and local school district efforts at recruitment and retention (Boser, 2011; Ingersoll & May, 2011; Kearney, 2008) that attempt to diversify the workforce by “changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation which oppresses them” (de Beauvoir, 1963 as cited in Freire, 1997, p. 55). In other words, efforts seek to change teachers of color to fit into the existing system without transforming the inequitable and oppressive educational systems. While this research has the potential to validate the experiences of teachers of color, it can provide information on the impact embedded racism in organizational cultures and structures can have on teachers of color. This is significant information for education leaders (at all levels of leadership) who seek to diversify the teacher workforce, including teacher education programs responsible for preparing an educator workforce capable of equitably engaging all students in a pluralistic society.

**Significance of Research Problem**

The population of teachers primarily consists of White women from middle class backgrounds who are mono-lingual English speakers (Marx, 2004; Porfilio & Malott, 2011). Data from the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2013a, 2013b) indicate that student populations grow increasingly diverse as the teacher pool continues to be predominantly homogeneous. Scholars argue that having a diverse pool of teachers provides students of color with improved learning opportunities and outcomes (Walton & Cohen, 2007; Steele, 2010; ), and
allow for improved cross-cultural understanding and a broader understanding of the larger system of oppression that manifests as inequitable learning opportunities and outcomes (hooks, 1994; Kearney, 2008; Kohli, 2012). The inequitable outcomes are measured by standardized test scores, high school graduation rates, and college entry rates which are all lower for students of color than for white students (NCES, 2010). Achieving and maintaining a diverse pool of classroom teachers can also contribute to increasing equitable educational opportunities for all children by including diverse voices in the educational equity discourse (Epstein, 2005; Gorski, 2008). Understanding the experiences of teachers of color who persist in the classroom can contribute to knowledge, policy and practices regarding the retention of teachers of color in K-12 classrooms. The knowledge may also prove generalizable to the recruitment and retention of educators of color at all levels of education in the US.

**Researcher Positionality**

Scholarly engagement in the research process is not neutral (Smith, 1999). Researchers carry their positionalities consisting of complex layers of socially constructed identities, experiences and perspectives into the process (Kincheloe, et al., 2013). Positionality influences how one perceives the world and, in turn, influences how researchers perceive and engage in the research process (Briscoe, 2005; Milner, 2007; Parsons, 2008). The choosing and formation of research topics, problems, questions/hypotheses, frameworks, methodology and interpretation of findings are influenced by researcher positionality. Therefore, it is important for researchers to engage in critical examination of their positionalities in order to minimize the risks of “misinterpretations, misinformation, and misrepresentations of individuals, communities, institutions, and systems” (Milner, 2007, p. 388) in the research process.
My positionality as a scholar practitioner is in process, rather than fixed. As a doctoral student engaged in critical examination of social justice and educational inequity, my knowledge and understanding grows and influences how I perceive the world at large, and the field of education. This process adds layers to my complex identity that include (but are not limited to) being an African American (ethnic identity), Black (racial identity), woman, teacher educator, doctoral student, and developing scholar from a working class background with a focus on social justice and educational equity.

These complex layers of identity contribute to my current positionality as a developing critical social justice practitioner (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012) and scholar. Rooted in critical theory, Sensoy & DiAngelo (2012) identify principles of critical social justice as:

- All people are individuals, but they are also members of social groups.
- These social groups are valued unequally in society.
- Social groups that are valued more highly have greater access to the resources of a society.
- Social injustice is real, exists today, and results in unequal access to resources between groups of people.
- Those who claim to be for social justice must be engaged in self-reflection about their own socialization into these groups (their “positionality”) and must strategically act from that awareness in ways that challenge social injustice.
- This action requires a commitment to an ongoing and lifelong process. (p. xviii)

It is through a critical lens that this thesis project was conducted in hopes of contributing to identifying and disrupting status quo ideologies which facilitate the persistent under-representation of teachers of color in classrooms.
Research Question

The embedded nature of racism in the US results in racism being a normal aspect of what teachers of color experience (Kohli, 2016). Racism, embedded in the systems and institutions of education, has been identified as a barrier to people of color entering and persisting in the field of education (Brown, 2014; Rogers-Ard, Knaus, Epstein & Mayfield, 2013). In order to add to the understanding of the impact of racism on the experiences of teachers of color, the central question for this study is: How do teachers of color who persist in K-12 classrooms perceive and navigate racism?

Theoretical Framework

Critical race theory (CRT) was used to frame the intended study and data analysis. It is a useful framework for the examination of racial disparities such as the underrepresentation of teachers of color in K-12 classrooms. This section includes discussion of why CRT is an applicable framework for the intended study with respect to researcher perspective of the problem of practice, the context of the study, and the intended audience and outcomes toward critical change in racial disparities in the teacher workforce. Tenets of CRT and the relevance of each tenet to the development of the research study are then explored. Next, the influence of CRT in developing research questions is discussed, followed by an explanation of how CRT helps shape and frame methodology for data collection. This section concludes with a reflection on how the exploration of CRT has influenced this researcher’s understanding of the scope of studying the experiences of teachers of color who persist in K-12 classrooms, and the limitations of CRT as a theoretical framework.

Historical Trajectory of CRT
CRT holds that race, as a permanently embedded aspect of American society, be placed at the center of analysis of conditions and contexts of inequitable and disparate social and educational outcomes (Dixson & Lynn, 2013). Its roots are in critical theory and critical legal studies (Brown & Jackson, 2013; Brown, 2014). According to critical theory, inequity in large societies is a function of hierarchies of dominance and subjugation, and socioeconomic structures are in place to privilege those at the top of hierarchy (Giroux, 1983; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2002). Critical legal studies use critical theory to expose and challenge the view of legal reasoning as neutral, and to critique how legal reasoning privileges hegemony (Brown & Jackson, 2013). While critical theory and critical legal studies examined socioeconomic hierarchy of privilege, CRT introduces race as a mediating factor in the hierarchy of dominance and subjugation that sustains Whiteness as hegemony (Brown, 2014).

CRT emerged as a means to examine Black-White power relations and has evolved to include the experiences and outcomes of other marginalized racial groups and their power relations with hegemony of Whiteness in the US (Teranishi & Pazich, 2013). Some of the CRT branches include experiences of Latina/o (LatCrit), Indigenous (TribalCrit) and Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) individuals and groups (Lynn & Dixson, 2013).

**Seminal CRT authors.** CRT was developed through the early work of legal scholars Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman in the late 1970s as a theoretical lens for the critique of racism and racial power dynamics in the US (Cheruvu, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Two other seminal contributors to the development and evolution of CRT include Cheryl Harris (who conceptualized whiteness as a valuable property interest), and Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (who first articulated the concept of intersectionality) (Brown & Jackson, 2013). Additionally,
Ladson-Billings and Tate, and Delgado provided seminal contributions to the development of CRT in education (Cheruvu, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 2013).

**Contemporary CRT scholars in education.** There are several contemporary scholars who have made significant contributions to CRT in education including (but not limited to): Richard Delgado; Rita Kohli; Gloria Ladson-Billings (a seminal contributor who continues to make significant contributions to CRT in education); H. Richard Milner, IV; Daniel Solórzano; and Jean Stefancic. Works by most of these scholars were published in the *Handbook for Critical Race Theory in Education* (Lynn & Dixson, 2013), and contribute to the evolution of CRT in education.

**Counterarguments to CRT.** Since the introduction of CRT to education in 1995 there have been critiques of its use. Ladson-Billings (1998) describes her experience after writing the seminal article, *Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education* (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995 as cited in Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Outside of the supportive confines of our own institution, we were met with not only the expected intellectual challenges but also outright hostility. Why were we focusing only on race? What about gender? Why not class? Are you abandoning multicultural perspectives? (p. 7)

Related to this criticism is the argument that CRT focuses on a Black-White binary (Cheruvu, 2014).

The evolution and expansion of CRT in education addresses some of the early challenges, and the Black-White binary argument as CRT complicated the historic, socioeconomic, sociolinguistic and sociocultural embeddedness of racism. As a result of this complication CRT has branched out to include LatCrit, TribalCrit and AAPI or AsianCrit. These and other
branches of CRT, including Critical Feminist Race Theory (FemCrit) and Queer Critical Race Theory (QueerCrit), align themselves with the tenets of CRT while addressing issues and dimensions that are group specific (Cheruvu, 2014). Deeper exploration of what was perceived as a Black-White binary using CRT clarifies that “the real issue is not necessarily the black/white binary as much as it is the way everyone regardless of his/her declared racial and ethnic identity is positioned in relation to Whiteness” (Ladson-Billings, 2005, p. 116).

Another counterargument to CRT is that its reliance on narratives and storytelling of marginalized racial groups results in subjective perspectives, qualitative data and analysis (Cheruvu, 2014; Covarrubias & Vélez, 2013). CRT scholars assert that narratives and storytelling are integral aspects of scholarship, and challenge concepts of objective or neutral perspectives, data and analysis as being White hegemonic perspectives rather than objective or neutral (Bell, 1995; Covarrubias & Vélez, 2013; DeGuir-Gunby & Walker-DeVose, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2013). Bell (1995) describes CRT scholars’ challenge of “objectivity” this way:

> We insist, for example, that abstraction, put forth as ‘rational’ or ‘objective’ truth, smuggles the privileged choice of the privileged to depersonify their claims and then pass them off as universal authority and universal good. (p. 901)

Thus, the use of narratives and stories of marginalized racial groups introduce no more subjectivity than do dominant narratives.

**Use of CRT in Education by Other Scholars**

There are numerous scholarly discussions that explore CRT in education (Lynn & Dixson, 2013). However, empirical studies that use a CRT framework appear to be limited. One of the empirical studies (Cooper, 2003) examines the experiences of African American mothers
with biased teachers and educational systems in an urban school district. In this study CRT is used to frame the study including the conceptualization of the study, methodology and discussion. The findings offered understandings of urban, lower income African American mothers that countered dominant narratives of their deficiency.

A search of empirical literature directly related to CRT and teachers of color, or the underrepresentation of teachers of color yielded five results (Brown, 2014; Cheruvu, 2014; Kohli, 2014; Lapayese, Aldana & Lara, 2014; Rogers-Ard, Knaus, Epstein & Mayfield, 2013). Two additional studies examined (1) the experiences of white teachers (Marx, 2004) and (2) experiences of language and teaching (Brandon, et al., 2009) from a CRT framework. In all six of the identified studies, participants were pre-service teachers in contexts of teacher education programs or courses.

Each study used the CRT framework differently. Brandon, et al. (2009) used counterstories, a CRT methodology, to examine language as a tool for dominance and oppression in education. Brown (2014) used CRT to review existing literature on pre-service teachers of color and teacher education. Cheruvu (2014) used a CRT framework throughout her dissertation which studied the experiences of teachers of color through participant counterstories. Kohli (2014) used CRT to frame her problem of practice and study methodology, and to interpret results related to data collected on the racialized experiences of pre-service teachers of color, and their experiences of dismantling internalized racial oppression. Lapayese, et al. (2014) presented their own and others’ counterstories as pre-service teachers of color enrolled in a Teach for America preparation program using CRT methodology. Rogers-Ard, et al. (2012) examined two teacher preparation programs designed to address barriers to increasing the number of teachers of
color in education using a CRT framework. In this study CRT is used to frame the assessment of the programs and for data analysis.

Finally, Marx (2004) states that the CRT concept of the centrality of racism in American society, along with Critical White Studies (CWS), are used to conduct her study of White pre-service teachers engaged in service work in communities of color. It is questionable whether CRT is used accurately to frame any part of this study. The study participants and researchers are White, and the context of the study is community service learning in lower income communities of color. While the researcher challenges the biased perspectives of the study participants, a CRT framework would challenge the methodology of the study that situates the White pre-service teachers as determining and providing for the needs of (and thus uplifting) communities of color.

How CRT Might Engender Change

The problem of teachers of color being underrepresented in K-12 classrooms is persistent despite focused efforts on recruitment and retention at federal, state and local levels (Boser, 2011, 2014; Ingersoll & May, 2011). Those focused efforts include incentive measures, alternative pathways into teaching, and pre-service training that supports the adjustment of teachers of color to the K-12 educational environments, with special attention to urban environments. These measures seek to change the ability of teachers of color to fit into the educational situation rather than transforming the environment into one that provides equitable opportunities. In other words, current recruitment and retention methods attempt to “change the consciousness of the oppressed, and not the situation that oppresses them” (de Beauvoir, as cited in Freire, 1997, p. 55). Using CRT to examine the racial experiences of teachers of color who persist in K-12 classrooms through their own narratives can provide an understanding of what
the needs and conditions are, within educational institutions and systems, which bar or facilitate the success and persistence of teachers of color. This understanding, in turn, may result in more effective recruitment and retention strategies and methods, and movement toward equity in the experiences of teachers of color.

**Tenets of CRT**

There are identifiable tenets of CRT that differentiate it from other writings and frameworks about race and racial issues (Ladson-Billings, 2013). In this section, I draw from scholarship of Ladson-Billings (1998, 2013), as a seminal and contemporary CRT scholar in education, in detailing five tenets of CRT.

**Racism is normal in US society.** The defining notion of CRT is that racism is deeply and permanently embedded in the structure of US Society (Bell, 1992 as cited in Ladson-Billings, 1998). As such, it is the normal order of societal functioning, rather than aberrant beliefs and acts of individuals and groups. CRT is a tool for “unmasking and exposing racism in its various permutations” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 12).

**Interest convergence.** CRT holds that significant movement toward racial and social justice, and equity in US society occurs only when it benefits the White hegemony – the interests of racially oppressed and marginalized groups converge with the interest of the dominant group. While Ladson-Billings (2013) suggest civil rights activist “look for ways to align the interests of the dominant group with those of racially oppressed and marginalized groups” (p. 38), that strategy does not appear to disrupt or deconstruct the order of dominance and subjugation.

**Race as a social construction.** Fields of physical science have established that race is not a scientific reality. Rather, race is a socially constructed category used as a mechanism for the creation of hierarchy and ideology of White dominance and supremacy. CRT accepts that
race is a social construct that is also a powerful social reality that facilitates significant disparities based on racial categorization.

**Intersectionality and anti-essentialism.** Every individual represents multiple identities in the complexity of real life. These identities may include race, class, sex, sexual orientation, ability, age, gender identity, and others. CRT includes recognition that our multiple identities intersect in complex ways that cannot be neatly separated and analyzed. Additionally, CRT decries the essentialism notion that “all people perceived to be in a single group think, act and believe the same things in the same ways” (Ladson-Billings, 2013, p. 40).

**Counter-narrative and voice.** Ladson-Billings (2013) uses an African proverb to illustrate the significance of counter-narrative in CRT. She writes, “Until lions have their historians, tales of the hunt shall always glorify the hunter” (p. 41). Dominant narratives in scholarship present ethnocentric and hegemonic perspectives of racial justice, social justice and equity issues. An essential component of CRT is the analysis of narrator positionality, and inclusion of counter-narratives that give voice to individuals and groups who are racially oppressed, marginalized and subjugated.

**Using tenets of CRT.** All five tenets of CRT named above were used in developing this study of the experiences of teachers of color who persist in K-12 classrooms. Because the problem concerns racial disparities in the teacher workforce, centering race and racism in the exploration of the problem is appropriate. Utilizing all five tenets helps ensure consistent and accurate use of the CRT framework throughout the study.

Institutionalized and structural racism are often rendered invisible in scholarship about the underrepresentation of teachers of color and “organizational conditions” (Ingersoll & May, 2011, p. 14) that contribute to attrition. Additionally, the voices of teachers of color who
experience racism and persist in K-12 classrooms are limited or silent in scholarly literature. The intention of this study is to contribute to explicit critical dialogue about racism in issues of racial disparities in education, and critical analysis about who benefits from contemporary educational policies and practices that exclude teachers of color. While there is concern about the study and framework making participants vulnerable to racial trauma, the hope is that participants’ experiences navigating institutional racism, as presented in their own voices, can provide data to be utilized toward effectively addressing the problem.
Racism is deeply embedded in US systems and structures (Bell, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2013; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). It is so deeply embedded in US education systems and structures that it can be rendered invisible in its normalcy (Dixson & Lynn, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 2013; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995/2006). It is a complex condition that is often minimized or evaded in scholarly literature, policies and practices addressing the underrepresentation of educators of color (Kohli, 2018). Whether the underrepresentation is viewed in comparison to the general population (based on US Census data), or the population demographics of school districts and schools (based on NCES data), there is disparate representation in the teacher workforce based on race (Boser, 2011, 2014; Ingersoll & May, 2011). This racial disparity has been recognized as a problem needing resolution for decades (Epstein, 2005). While strategies have been developed and implemented to address the problem (Bireda & Chait, 2011), there has been little change in the persistent underrepresentation of teachers of color (ToC) based on data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2013). Significant progress in addressing racial disparity in the teacher workforce is unlikely if racism is not explicitly addressed within the efforts to effect change (Kohli, 2018).

Aspects of racism that are most frequently included in discourses addressing the underrepresentation of ToC are quantifiable. However, the dominant reliance on the quantification of racism may serve to perpetuate dehumanizing marginalization of people of color and deny the validity of individual experiences of teachers of color (Hidalgo, McDowell & Siddle, 1990). This literature review includes examination of arguments based on quantification of racism, along with individual and collective experiences that are not quantifiable. It begins
with a brief overview of the history of racism in European based US education in relation to the inclusion and exclusion of educators of color. Next, dominant arguments for a diversified teacher workforce are examined. Finally, a review of literature on the experiences of educators of color with racism in other areas of education is presented.

The Embedded Nature of Racism in Education

Literature on the history of racism in US education systems provides evidence of education being a historic contrivance for the establishment and perpetuation of white dominance. In an extensive study, Wilder (2013) examined the intertwined history of race, slavery and education through the colonial and antebellum periods of what became the US. Although, Wilder’s (2013) research focused on the history of higher education, the work includes the history of educators and the role educators played in establishing and extending White European dominance. Following is a brief synopsis of this complex early history which evidences the embedded nature of racism.

Brief history of the purpose of education and role of the teacher. Some of the first European based institutions of education established by the colonizers of what became the US were colleges and universities. These first institutions were initially funded by European wealthy classes, governments, universities, and religious sects. Citing numerous historical documents, Wilder (2013) describes the purpose of these institutions:

Colleges were imperial instruments akin to armories and forts, a part of the colonial garrison with specific responsibilities to train ministers and missionaries, convert indigenous peoples and soften cultural resistance, and extend European rule over foreign nations (p. 33).
This means that the first institutions of higher education were established with the expressed purpose of establishing and perpetuating White supremacy.

According to Wilder (2013), the first educators in the “New World” were predominantly White Christian men from the existing and developing elite class of merchants, politicians and religious leadership. Students who completed their higher education often sought teaching positions as tutors for children in elite families throughout the colonies. These teaching positions provided opportunities for professional connections and mobility into, and amongst, elite classes that engaged in various aspects of the slave trade, exploitation of indigenous peoples, and confiscation of indigenous lands.

According to Wilder’s (2013) presentation of his historical research, the first intentional ToC in the Colonial system of education were indigenous people. The first Indian College was established at Massachusetts’ Harvard University in 1655 for the purpose of promoting, indoctrinating and assimilating young indigenous men into Christianity and White supremacy. Officers of this, and subsequent Indian Colleges were White men who directly supervised the indigenous scholars. The intention was that upon completion of their education (which included subjects that paralleled those of white students), the Native men would return to their tribes and nations to become teachers who in turn promote, indoctrinate and assimilate indigenous people into Christianity and White supremacy.

While the tactics had some success in achieving assimilation, it also successfully helped indigenous people understand and resist indoctrination and assimilation into whiteness and white supremacy. In response to the resistance, the colonial education of young indigenous men toward becoming teachers was discontinued, and the violent history of “Indian Schools” with young children and White teachers was initiated in the colonies. The officers of the Indian
Schools were encouraged “to get as many Indian children as possible, from friendly or enemy nations, by invitation, purchase, or kidnapping” (Wilder, 2013, p. 44).

In his book *Schooling the Freed People: Teaching, Learning, and the Struggle for Black Freedom, 1861-1876*, Butchart (2013) explored and discussed data on the population of teachers in Freedmen’s Schools (schools for formerly enslaved African Americans). He found the following information:

- According to US Census data, 12 percent of the total U.S. population were of African descent in 1870
- Nationally, 35.5 percent of all teachers of Freed People were Black between 1861-1876
- In the Northern region of the U.S. African Americans comprised 2 percent of the Northern population.
- Fourteen percent of teachers from the Northern region who taught in Freedmen Schools were Black
- Black teachers from the Southern region were 51.9 percent of all Southern teachers in Freedmen Schools.

While Butchart’s (2013) research indicates that African American teachers held significant numbers of teaching positions during the Reconstruction period of American history, Green (2004) examined the impact of desegregation on Black teacher populations. According to Green (2004), following the legal decision on Brown v. the Board of Education in 1954, which subsequently resulted in federally mandated desegregation of public schools, the numbers of African American teachers in public education declined significantly. Green used data from Hudson & Holmes (1994 as cited in Green, 2004) which reported the following
• Prior to 1954 there were 82,000 African American teachers educating two million African American children

• More than 38,000 African American teachers and administrators lost their jobs in southern states between 1954 and 1965

• Between 1975 and 1985 there was a 66 percent decline in the number of Black students majoring in education in the U.S.

• From 1984 to 1989 newly installed teacher preparation and certification requirements resulted in approximately 21,515 African American teachers and teacher candidates being eliminated from the field.

Additionally, Rogers-Ard et al. (2013) cited research indicating that the majority of African American teachers were graduates of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU). In 1974 there were approximately 9,000 teachers graduated from HBCUs, and the number was halved by 1984 (Foster, 1997 as cited in Rogers-Ard et al., 2013). This data supports Green’s (2004) findings and suggests a historical context for the underrepresentation of African American and other teachers of color.

Literature on the histories of Asian and Latin American public K-12 educators was found to be limited at the time of this review of literature. Literature that was found indicates that Asian and Latinx populations in the US were significantly influenced by immigration policies and practices, and dominant public perceptions (Rong & Priessle, 1997; Tamura, 2001).

Tamura (2001) examined the history of Asian Americans in education in a historiographical essay and found that empirical data was very limited. Specific information about Asian American teachers was further limited. According to Tamura (2001) the US exclusion acts of 1882 (Chinese exclusion), 1917 (South and Southeast Asian exclusion), 1924 (Japanese
exclusion) and 1934 (Filipino exclusion) strictly limited the Asian immigrant populations. Additionally, “… repeated incidents of discrimination, xenophobia, and violence aimed at Asian immigrants and their citizen children” (p. 59) likely presented barriers to Asian Americans access to the teaching profession. Rong & Priessle (1997) report that experiences of discrimination, xenophobia, and violence along with limited English language and literacy skills, and possible limited or undervalued education of immigrants may have also contributed to the underrepresentation of Asian and Latinx teachers, as those general populations increased.

In an examination of Chinese language schools in the US, Lai (2005) presented that the first US schools for Chinese American children were private schools with Chinese teachers. However, after an 1885 court case in San Francisco, Chinese parents won public education rights for their Chinese American children. Lai (2005) does not identify the racial or ethnic identities of the teacher(s) in that school.

This limited review of the history of teachers of color in K-12 public education appears to provide evidence that the underrepresentation of teachers of color has a history of intentional and default exclusion. The determination of who is permitted to become teachers, and in what capacity in public education has historically and continuously been a function of white hegemony. A review of literature on the concept of education as the property of whiteness (Apple, 2008; Gillborn, 2008; Patel, 2015) is relevant to this concept, though it is beyond the scope of the current project.

**Dominant Arguments for a Diversified Teaching Force**

There are three themes dominating discussions and arguments used to support increasing the number of teachers of color in the workforce. These themes include: role models, cultural matching, and staffing urban understaffed schools. The role model theme is the most pervasive
across the literature. However, arguments about what is potentially modeled vary amongst scholars.

**Teachers of color as role models.** Ingersoll & May (2011) describe the role model argument in relation to “demographic parity” (p. 1). With this argument the diversity of the teacher workforce should move toward matching the diversity of the larger society, and teachers of color would serve as role models (for students of color and white students) of a pluralistic society. Boser (2011), Meyer (1991, as cited in Kearney, 2008) and Villegas & Irvine (2010) provide similar arguments presenting teachers of color as role models providing all students with concrete examples of what diversity in education and society looks like. Additionally, Villegas & Irvine (2010) reviewed literature and found White students benefit from seeing adults of color as successful contributors to society (Irvine, 1933, as cited in Villegas & Irvine, 2010) challenging white students’ racist socialization (Waters, 1989, as cited in Villegas & Irvine, 2010).

Drawing from a review of literature, Sheets (2001) found the hypothesis that teachers of color serve as role models for children of color to be prevalent, yet unsubstantiated by empirical data. Sheets (2001) further found that the role model construct is used by scholars to justify the presence of teachers of color in schools. She describes the assumption that when teachers and students of color share the same racial, linguistic or cultural markers they also share similar needs, values and perspectives. This positions teachers of color as models of success to be emulated by students of color. According to Shaw (1996, as cited in Sheets, 2001) this positioning of teachers of color as exemplars of success for students of color based solely on race “is unrealistic and condescending” (Sheets, 2001, p. 27).
**Teachers of color on being role models.** Several studies were reviewed in which teachers of color voiced perspectives on being role models for students of color. Brown (2014) examined literature related to pre-service teachers of color in early learning and cited several studies (including Agee, 2004; Au & Blake, 2003; Guyton, Saxton & Wesche, 1996; Téllez, 1999 as cited in Brown, 2014) in which pre-service early childhood teachers of color identified themselves as potential role models for students of color. Additionally, Brown (2014) found that pre-service early childhood teachers of color expressed desires to transform educational environments for students of color and provide more equitable learning opportunities for their students.

The humanistic motivations to teach presented in Brown’s (2014) literature review are similar to those found by Gordon (1993a). Gordon (1993a, 1993b) conducted a study including 140 teachers of color from diverse backgrounds in three urban school districts across the US. Each participant was interviewed and responded to the question, “Why did you select teaching as a career?” (p. 1). Only two respondents identified being a role model as a rationale for being an educator. Although nearly half the study participants reported that their own teachers influenced their decisions to become educators, one third of those participants reported having negative experiences with their own teachers. The negative experiences reportedly influenced them to enter teaching and offer students better experiences and opportunities. So, while being a role model is identified as a significant rationale for diversifying the teacher workforce in scholarly and popular discourse, the role model construct is not well defined in the literature and does not appear pervasive in the ideology of teachers of color.

**Cultural matching between teachers of color and students of color.** Related to the role model theme, cultural matching is the idea that children of color benefit from being taught...
by teachers of color due to similar life experiences and racial, cultural, and sociolinguistic experiences that set up conditions of synchronicity between teachers and students (Boser, 2011; Villegas & Irvine, 2010). With this synchronicity teachers of color may engage in culturally and linguistically relevant pedagogy that results in improved academic outcomes for students of color (Achinstein & Aguirre, 2008).

The concept of cultural matching is a prominent argument in literature on the underrepresentation of teachers of color. This prominence is confirmed in studies of literature by Brown (2014) and Villegas & Irvine (2010). However, this concept can be problematic because it appears to essentialize people of color as a constructed group, and as subgroups. Within a CRT framework, essentialism is the belief that members of a specific group share the same or similar ideas, beliefs, perspectives and actions (Ladson-Billings, 2013). Essentialism negates or minimizes the complex and diverse identities of people of color. While cultural matching may occur in situations where teachers of color are from the same or similar communities as their students, intersecting identities such as class, gender, ethnicity, language, regional cultures (cities, states and regions), and education may challenge the achievement of synchronicity between teachers of color and students of color (Gordon, 2000 as cited in Achinstein & Aguirre, 2008). Additionally, a small body of literature found that teachers of color may internalize negative and/or biased perceptions of students of color that impact their interactions with and expectations of those students (Kohli, 2014; Siroti & Bailey, 2009; Warikoo, 2004). These negative and/or biased perceptions may be reinforced by sociocultural influences (Cheruvu, 2014; Padilla, 2004; Peacock, 2011; Pyke & Dang, 2003; Sundstrom, 2001), education, and teacher preparation programs (Achinstein & Aguirre, 2008; Achinstein & Ogawa, 2011; Birky et
Teachers of color on cultural matching. The idea of cultural matching between teachers of color and students of color is not only dominant in literature on diversifying the teacher workforce, it is also evident in the stories of teachers of color who identify working with children of color as a teaching goal. Achinstein & Aguirre (2008) examined the experiences of new teachers of color and expectations of cultural matching. They found that teachers of color may enter urban classrooms serving students of color with expectations of cultural match and cultural synchronicity, but subsequently experience cultural suspicion and unexpected challenges from their secondary school students. The novice teachers who participated in the study reported socio-cultural challenges about their racial, ethnic, linguistic, class, birth country, gender and other identities. The authors call for “moving beyond cultural match to an understanding of sociocultural differences amid convergences among teachers and students of color” (p. 1526).

Educators of Color and Experiences with Racism

Racism is a real and impactful part of the lived experiences of people of color in education (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Brown, 2014; Cheruvu, 2014; Epstein, 2005; hooks, 1994; Irizarry, 2011; Kohli, 2008, 2016; Lapayese, Aldana & Lara, 2014; McCarty, 2010; Patel, 2015) in employment (Alleyne, 2005; Hernandez et al., 2010; Offermann et al., 2014), and in everyday life (Sue, Bucceri, et al., 2007; Sue, Capodilupo, et al., 2007). Yet, there appears to be limited literature examining racism as a significant factor in the persistent underrepresentation of teachers of color in public K-12 classrooms. Some literature that does examine racism as a factor, limits the discussion to the gatekeeping practices that may restrict entrance into the field, such as deficient K-12 education quality for potential teachers of color, standardized testing for
teacher qualifications, and racial bias in defining teacher quality (Boser, 2011; Epstein, 2005; Ingersoll & May, 2011; Rogers-Ard et al., 2013).

One study was found that explicitly examines racism and the underrepresentation of teachers of color. Kohli (2018) conducted a qualitative narrative study that included 218 racial justice-focused teachers of color in urban schools that primarily served students of color. Kohli (2018) used CRT to conduct an analysis of data gathered through the overarching research question, “How does the racial climate of urban schools affect the professional experiences and retention of racial justice–oriented teachers of Color?” (p. 312). She found that study participants experienced racial macroaggressions (institutional) and microaggressions (individual) that manifested into racially hostile work environments. These racially hostile environments negatively impacted the professional development and retention of teachers of color. Kohli explained:

Teachers of Color are being recruited into schools for particular assets, such as their language abilities and positive student relationships. However, teachers of Color are far more complex than just these qualities. The participants in this study were committed to racial justice and, as empowered people, brought many strengths into the classroom with them—they brought history, knowledge of self, advocacy, and love, to name but a few. But they were not valued for these powerful and transformational tools. Instead, the teachers of Color were often invisiblized, stereotyped, questioned or even “othered” from their community. These interpersonal experiences with racism, reflective of institutional structures of racial inequity and racism, were indicative of the hostile racial climates in which teachers of Color work (p. 321).
Kohli (2018) describes the cumulative effects of these racialized experiences as contributors to teachers of color feeling that they don’t belong in the profession.

The literature included below is indirectly tied to the specific topic of the underrepresentation of teacher of color in K-12 classrooms. It serves to provide empirical presentation of the racialized experiences of educators of color in pre-service and higher education contexts. This literature is relevant to the discussion of the underrepresentation of teachers of color in K-12 classrooms by making visible the everyday ways that racism may impact the lived experiences of K-12 teachers of color.

Lapayese, Aldana & Lara (2014) conducted a qualitative analysis of the alternative pathway to teaching program, Teach for America (TFA). Using the CRT tenet of counternarratives, the researchers interviewed 15 TFA teachers of color who completed a five-week intensive summer program in preparation for placement in historically underserved public schools. The interviews yielded narratives including participants’ “(1) knowledge and beliefs about race, power and education, (2) information on the participant and [their] experiences in the program, and (3) perception of the program’s impact in economically disenfranchised communities of color” (Lapayese et. al, 2014, p. 13).

The researchers’ analysis indicates that teachers of color in the TFA program experienced racial macro- and microaggressions that impacted their feeling of belonging in the program, and their beliefs in the effectiveness of the program and its pedagogy. Through the lens of the CRT tenet of interest convergence, they concluded that the TFA program effectively benefits white teachers and the perpetuation of white dominance. From the practice of recruiting teacher candidates from predominantly White “elite” universities by framing teaching in underserved schools as a tool for professional advancement, to avoiding in depth discussions on race, racism,
White privilege and White supremacy, the program prioritizes the comfort of White teacher participants and program faculty. The study also revealed that African American male teachers in the program risked being penalized if they pushed discussions beyond the comfort levels of their White peers and faculty.

Gutiérrez y Muhs, Nieman, Gonzalez & Harris (2012) conducted a qualitative analysis of racialized experiences of women educators of color in academia. Through an anthology of essays by 30 women scholars of color, Gutiérrez y Muhs et. al (2012) found that the participants were exposed to a myriad of macroaggressions and microaggressions that contributed to hostile work environments. Many of the educators shared experiences of being “presumed incompetent” by students, colleagues and administrators. Some also described how they navigate these hostile conditions.

In the introduction to the volume, Harris & Gonzalez (2012) describe several themes across much of the literature contributed to the anthology. The themes “place the contradictory predicament of women of color faculty in a larger historical and cultural perspective” (p. 3). The themes common to many of the stories include:

- Negotiation of identity – Navigating the challenges and privileges of intersecting identities of race, class, gender, and sexuality against a backdrop of stereotypes and racialized expectations of higher education institutions, and individuals within the institutions.

- Linkage between individual agency and structural collectiveness – The personal stories of contributors were also symptomatic of a larger structural problem (beyond individual programs, divisions or institutions) that perpetuate and extend the hegemonic privileges created by the subordination of those outside of the hegemony.
• Academic culture that privileges White men, their perspectives, and their interests - Harris & Gonzalez (2012) write, ‘What is insidiously troubling about Western intellectual culture, is its espousal of “value free science” to mask the ways that the idea of pure and interest-free truth has been and continues to be used to perpetuate unjust social hierarchies’ (p. 5).

• Mechanisms for change – Due to a thorough and pervasive denial of its on flaws, “[t]he culture of academia, ultimately, is impervious to change because its power structure is designed to reproduce itself” (p. 7).

Harris & Gonzalez (2012) found the above noted common themes of racialized experiences identified by many of the anthology contributors. Additionally, they noted overarching themes of navigational resources many contributors identified to “name and heal their wounds” (p. 7) from being in hostile work environments of academia. Some of the resources include: developing and sustaining friendships, developing and sustaining alliances, and expression through poetry. Others “found ways of combating the relentless individualism of academic culture to reclaim community and solidarity in their professional and personal lives” (p. 8).

Conclusion

This review of literature provides evidence of the complex nature of racism in education. Although literature that examines the underrepresentation of teacher of color in K-12 classrooms is limited, related literature that includes the lived experiences of teachers of color through their own voices, provides evidence that racism impacts their sense of belonging in the field of education. Examinations, discussions and practices addressing the underrepresentation of ToC that do not include the complexities and nuances of racism in that examination, appear
incomplete at best, and complicit in the perpetuation of White dominance in education at worst. Understanding how ToC who persist in K-12 classrooms perceive and navigate racism can provide data on how and why racism needs to be explicitly integrated in dialogues, policies and practices addressing the underrepresentation of teachers of color in order to more effectively achieve change.
Chapter Three: Methodology

Educators of color (defined as those who do not identify as “White non-Hispanic”) are underrepresented in classroom environments in the United States of America (US). With a national average of 48% students of color in K-12 populations (NCES, 2013a), 80% of teachers are White (NCES, 2013b). Teachers of color enter teaching at a lower rate and leave the profession at a higher rate than White teachers, and are more likely to staff urban schools that primarily serve students of color and students whose families experience economic insecurity (Boser, 2011; Ingersoll & May, 2011). Several studies have found that pre-service and novice teachers experience institutional and structural racism that impacts their sense of belonging in the field of education (Kohli, 2008, 2012, 2014; Lapayese, Aldana & Lara, 2014; Mayes, Montero & Cutri, 2004). However, few studies examine how experienced educators of color experience racism in their work environments. The purpose of this doctoral thesis is to examine the experiences of ToC who navigate racism and persist in K-12 classrooms through the guiding research question: How do teachers of color who persist in K-12 classrooms perceive and navigate racism?

Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative design. A major characteristic of qualitative research is that it allows the exploration of a problem and the development of a detailed understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2015). There are a broad range of perspectives, methods and approaches associated with qualitative research that facilitate the investigation of complex problems, situations and conditions that have evolved over time, and continue to evolve. Denzin & Lincoln (2013) define the current moment in qualitative research as one which asks “that the social sciences and the humanities become sites for critical conversations about democracy, race,
gender, class, nation-states, globalization, freedom, and community” (p. 6). In alignment with this perspective, a qualitative research design was chosen to achieve greater understanding of how racism contributes to the complex issue of the underrepresentation of teachers of color in K-12 classrooms. By examining the experiences of teachers of color who persist in classroom teaching, a better understanding of the problem can be added to the scholarly bank of knowledge, as well as related policy discourse and planning.

Research demonstrates that teachers of color have different experiences than those of their white counterparts due to racism (Achinstein & Aguirre, 2008; Berta-Ávila, 2004; Epstein, 2005; Kohli, 2012, 2018; and Lapayese et al., 2014). The critical-ideological paradigm (Ponterotto, 2005) facilitates recognition and acknowledgement of experiences specific to ToC and exposes the ways racism performs (Cannella & Lincoln, 2013) that may challenge their persistence in classroom teaching. With this paradigm, the researcher role is proactive in interacting with participants to support the inclusion of experiences of racial and intersecting oppressions without directing participant narratives. The intention of this study is to elicit the lived experiences directly from ToC. The stories of ToC may counter narratives currently and historically dominating literature on the phenomenon that render the impact of racism invisible.

**Research Tradition**

The theoretical framework for this qualitative study is critical race theory (CRT) in education, a critical paradigm which serves to disrupt and transform status quo systems of oppression (Ponterotto, 2005). Three hallmarks of CRT are 1) racism is deeply embedded and normalized in US society, including education, 2) people of color experience and navigate racism in different ways depending on race, class, gender, and other identities, and 3) the voices and experiences of people of color who have been historically marginalized, silenced and
rendered invisible are centered in CRT (Dunbar, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 2013). Narrative inquiry is the research approach chosen for this thesis project as it aligns with a CRT methodology of storytelling and counter-storytelling that may challenge dominant stories of racial privilege, and “strengthen traditions of social, political, and cultural survival and resistance” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 32) for people of color in education.

Narrative research is a broad field of study utilized in a range of social science fields including, but not limited to, literary theory, the arts, anthropology, theology, psychology, education, (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) and sociolinguistics (Creswell, 2015). In narrative research *narrative* may refer to the phenomenon being studied (individual stories and experiences) or the method of study (Creswell, 2013). Narrative research has its intellectual roots in the field of narratology whereby narratives are examined in a variety of ways (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Creswell (2015) describes narrative research as having evolved into a distinct form of qualitative research that “typically focuses on studying a single person, gathering data through the collection of stories, reporting individual experiences, and discussion of the meaning of those experiences for the individual” (p. 504), and may also include multiple participants (Clandinin, Huber, Steeves & Yi, 2011)).

*Narrative inquiry* is the phenomenon and method of study (Clandinin, 2006). Connelly & Clandinin (1990) explain:

The main point for the use of narrative in educational research is that humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives. The study of narrative, therefore, is the study of the ways humans experience the world. (p. 2)

Drawing philosophical underpinnings from Dewey’s (1938) theory of experience, Connelly & Clandinin (1990) outline the importance of narrative inquiry in bringing forth theoretical ideas
about educational experiences as lived experiences that continually occur in relation to others and in a social context. These lived experiences also occur within temporal and spatial contexts (Clandinin, 2006), and are constantly shaped and reshaped by continuous interaction between contexts (Clandinin et al., 2011).

Connelly & Clandinin (1990) and other authors who practice and teach narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2006; Clandinin et al., 2011; Clandinin, Pushor & Orr, 2007; Thomas, 2012; Trahar, 2011) differentiate narrative inquiry from narrative research, while Creswell (2013, 2015) consistently uses narrative research as the phenomenon and method. For the purpose of this thesis project, narrative inquiry is the term used for the research methodology. Narrative inquiry requires the researcher to think narratively and enter into relational interactions with participants (Caine et al., 2013; Clandinin et al., 2011).

Clandinin et al. (2007) propose that the narrative inquiry process consists of three elements for designing the study, compiling field texts, and composing research texts (Clandinin et al., 2007). The first element is identifying the phenomenon to be explored. This phase includes justification for researcher interest, the benefit to the participant, and how the knowledge might change thinking and practice. The second element involves naming the phenomenon. The naming is clarified or refined throughout the narrative process. The third element of the narrative process is considering and describing the specific methods used to study the phenomenon. This element includes the researcher reflecting on how the topic, phenomenon, participants and inquirer exist in a “multidimensioned, ever changing life space” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006 as cited in Clandinin et al., 2007, p. 27). The researcher needs to maintain awareness of this multidimensioned space as narratives evolve in the telling, hearing and
retelling of lived and living experiences (Caine et al., 2013; Clandinin et al., 2011; Thomas, 2012)

Narrative inquiry was chosen for the current study as it supports the centering of experiences of people who have been traditionally and historically marginalized, in varied and complex ways, without reproducing that marginalization (Kincheloe, McLaren & Steinberg, 2013; Reissman, 1993). Instead, the researcher can bear witness to participants’ stories, and honor participants’ own subjective meaning making (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008; Reissman, 1993). In the traditions of various critical (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995/2006; Ladson-Billings, 2013; Huber, 2009; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) indigenous (Denzin, Lincoln & Smith, 2008; Smith, 1999/2003) and disruptive (Brown, Carducci & Kuby, 2014) qualitative methodologies, narrative inquiry allows for the participants and researcher to produce a valid narrative evidencing the complex nature and impact of racism for teachers of color.

Participants and Location

The study is situated in the State of Washington which is located in the Pacific Northwest region of the US. This general location was chosen for a number of reasons. First, it is the state within which the researcher resides, facilitating access to participants. Second, the disproportionality between K-12 teacher and student populations is greater in Washington than is the national average. According to NCES (2013) survey data, 18 percent of public K-12 teachers are of color, while 47 percent of students are of color nationwide. In Washington, 43 percent of K-12 students are students of color, while teachers of color make up less than ten percent of the teacher workforce (OSPI, 2016). Additionally, several urban school districts in Western Washington have student populations that range from 54 to 87% students of color (OSPI, 2016).
It is from within these urban school districts that participants were invited to share their experiences.

The population included in this study are K-12 teachers who self-identify as people of color (of African, Asian, Indigenous/Native American, Latin American, and/or Pacific Islander descent) and have been teaching in urban classrooms for more than ten years. Nationally, the majority of K-12 classroom teachers who leave the field do so within the first ten years of teaching (NCES, 2014b). Narratives of teachers of color who persist beyond ten years may provide valuable data that can contribute to understanding and effectively addressing one aspect of the systemic underrepresentation of teachers of color in K-12 classrooms – racism.

The embedded nature of racism and its influence on the experiences of teachers of color is complex. A CRT framework requires the researcher engage in anti-essentialism (Ladson-Billings, 2013) and challenge notions that teachers of color may perceive and experience racism, and its impacts, the same way. In order to achieve multiple perspectives on the complex nature of racism in the lives of ToC, maximal variation sampling (Creswell, 2015) was used to include ToC from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, and identities. Additionally, a network sampling method (Huber, 2009) was used to contact individuals in the target school districts, and groups and organizations known by the researcher to support people of color in the area. A target sample size of six to eight participants was pursued. Snowball sampling was used when network sampling did not yield a sufficient sample size.

**Recruitment and Access**

Initial invitations to participate in this study were extended to ToC known to the researcher through experience as an alumni parent of public schools in one of the one of the target school districts, professional contacts, and education community connections. Additional
invitations were extended through the initial contacts and organizations for ToC in the area. Including teachers from more than one local district with similar student populations offered a level of anonymity that would be less possible if subjects were from the same district, given the relatively small number of ToC in the workforce. Pseudonyms are used for the subjects and their locations. Demographic information that might compromise the anonymity of participants is presented as grouped rather than segregated data. Additionally, face-to-face meetings between researcher and participants took place in locations away from participants’ workplaces, unless the participant chose otherwise.

Individual stories of racialized experiences may be deeply personal and painful. Asking experienced ToC to share stories of their lived experiences, including how they perceive and navigate racism in order to persist in classrooms, is asking them to be vulnerable (Watts-Jones, 2002). There was the potential for the surfacing of “invisible injuries” (Alleyne, 2005) or experiences that previously went unexamined by participants. It was essential that the researcher be mindful of, and clearly present this potential risk to prospective participants in order to ensure “full and open information” (Christians, 2013, p. 134) for informed consent. This, and any other potential risks, were addressed in the prefatory statement, and throughout the narrative process as needed. Resources were made available to offer participants if telling their stories triggered racial, historic and/or personal trauma for which participants may need support. However, none of the participants accepted the offered resources.

In addition to the American Education Research Association (AERA, 2011) code of ethics, ethical considerations for this study are influenced by a code of cultural conduct prescribed for Maori researchers conducting studies in Maori communities. On page 120 of her

1. Aroha ki te tangata (a respect for people).
2. Kanohi kitea (the seen face, that is present yourself to people face to face).
3. Titiro, whakarongo…korero (look, listen…speak).
4. Manaaki kī e tangata (share and host people, be generous).
5. Kia tupato (be cautious).
6. Kaua e takahia te mana o te tangata (do not trample over the *mana* of people) [*mana* can be translated as spirit or spiritual power (www.maoridictionary.co.nz)].
7. Kaua e mahaki (don’t flaunt your knowledge).

These cultural principles helped ensure the researcher perceived and interacted with participants as sources of knowledge and collaborators, rather than objects of study (Canella & Lincoln, 2013; Smith, 1999; Stovall, 2013; Thomas, 2012).

**Data Collection**

The data collection process begins with the connection made and relationship developed between inquirer and participant (Clandinin et al., 2007). This relationship needs to be fluid as the two interact to elicit stories as data (Clandinin, 2006). For this study, data was collected by eliciting stories of participants’ experiences as teachers of color perceiving and navigating racism in their work as K-12 classroom educators. Each participant perceives and navigates racism in their own ways and hold varying degrees of experience with directly talking about racism (Alleyne, 2005; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). Eliciting data involved a critical co-creation whereby the researcher interacted with participants to support participants’ exploration and
sharing of their complex experiences as narratives at the specific moment in time of the telling (Caine, Estefan & Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin, 2006; Thomas, 2012).

The specific methodologies used to collect data emerged as the researcher and each individual participant engaged in the narrative inquiry process. Kincheloe, McLaren & Steinberg (2013) describe this process as *bricolage* – “using a variety of methodological processes as they are needed in the unfolding context of the research situation” (p. 350). Two face-to-face interviews/conversations took place between each participant and the researcher as part of the data collection process.

The first face-to-face meeting included a semi-structured interview/conversation for the purpose of initiating a trusting researcher/participant collaborative relationship for critical exploration. Kincheloe et al. (2013) describe the need to enter critical investigations with “assumptions on the table” (p. 348). Clandinin et al.’s (2007) three elements (as described above) were used to guide this introductory meeting - allowing both researcher and participant to make assumptions, expectations, purpose, and ways of expression visible. The semi-structured aspect of this interaction included a review of the prefatory statement and consent, and an opportunity for participants to ask any clarifying questions. Participant demographic information was also gathered during this meeting. Narratives of each participant’s perception and navigation of racism were collected during the second face-to-face meeting with the researcher. After participants completed the sharing of their stories, they were asked the following questions:

1. Why did you want to participate in this study? What’s in it for you?
2. Who would you like to know your story of navigating racism as a teacher of color?

The meetings where participants shared their stories were audio recorded and saved using a digital audio recording device.
Data Storage

The audio file(s) and transcripts were saved on a designated external storage unit (USB and SD) and backed up electronically on a second external storage device in order to minimize possible loss or corruption of files. Electronic storage devices, field notes and hard copies of transcripts were stored in a locked file box, accessed solely by the researcher. Participant identifying information was changed or removed from transcripts before printing hard copies for mark ups and notes, and researcher consultation with other researchers. Transcripts, audio files, research notes, and other artifacts will be destroyed three years from the date of dissertation approval, unless it is used for further study (with participant permission).

Data Analysis

The research question for this inquiry - *How do teachers of color who persist in K-12 classrooms perceive and navigate racism?* - was constructed with the understanding that participants will speak their own interpretations and meanings as they construct narratives of their lived and living experiences with racism (Caine et al., 2013; Cannella & Lincoln, 2013; Clandinin, 2006; Madison, 2008). The researcher listened to the speaker and asked probing or clarifying questions extracting interpretation and meaning in a collaborative exchange. Thus, data analysis began during the interactive data collection process (Caine et al., 2013; Thomas, 2012).

Caine et al. (2013) emphasize that the “understanding and social significance of experience grows out of a relational commitment to a research puzzle” (p. 577). As such, it is difficult to pinpoint an analytic process before initiating the narrative inquiry. The data analysis may be influenced by the researcher-participant interactive research process. The absence of a pre-determined data analysis process is supported by Kincheloe et al.’s (2013) use of *bricolage*,
as described above. Bricolage is a viable means to examine the complex nature of racism and how ToC navigate it.

Although specific strategies for data analysis were not pre-determined, critical race theory provided the leading theoretical lens focusing data analysis. Additionally, Madison (2008) describes some points regarding critical methodologies that were used to guide data analysis:

- A CRT framework engages the power and complexity of participants’ narrative knowledge.
- Theory serves to make visible “with fullness and precision what has always been present but before was obscure and more difficult to reach” (p. 394-395).
- Because the participant’s narrative is their interpretation of their experience, further interpretation of the narrative may not be necessary.
- Data analysis may include researcher commentary as subtext to facilitate, highlight or amplify meanings and implications that may be just out of focus or perception.
- The researcher’s role includes acknowledging the significance and validity of how narrators create “tactics for survival and victories out of vestiges of an extremely unjust state of affairs” (p. 395).

**Trustworthiness**

This study was conducted from the position that ToC are valid sources of knowledge about their experiences perceiving and navigating racism embedded in U.S. education systems. Member checking was a primary strategy toward maintaining the trustworthiness and validity of this narrative study. As part of the critical race theory methodology, it is important to include participants in the process of data analysis (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Creswell (2013) also
describes this as “a key validation step” (p. 188) in narrative research. Each participant was given opportunities to review and comment on their own interview transcript. The process helped ensure participants’ stories and meaning remained authentic and valid, rather than being re-created by the researcher.

Researcher’s statement of trustworthiness. As an African American emerging scholar practitioner and critical researcher-as-bricoleur, I carry my own experiences with racism. It was important for me to listen to participants’ stories without interjecting my own (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Understanding what the term *racism* means to each of them, in the contexts of their narratives, facilitated maintaining focus on the stories as belonging to participants. However, my positionality provides a measure of “theoretical sensitivity” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990 as cited in Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 33) and “cultural intuition” (Delgado Bernal, 1998 as cited in Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 33) that facilitated cross-narrative analysis and creation of a collective narrative, or counter-story, (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) that illustrates the collective experiences participants have with racism in education.
Chapter Four: Findings and Analysis

Educators of color (defined as those who do not identify as “White non-Hispanic”) are persistently underrepresented in classroom environments in the US. Despite efforts to diversify the teacher workforce from federal, state and local education jurisdictions, educational philanthropists, and teacher preparation programs the underrepresentation of teachers of color (ToC) in classrooms persists (Villegas, Strom & Lucas, 2012). Several studies have found that pre-service and novice ToC experience institutional and structural racism that impacts their sense of belonging in the field of education (Kohli, 2008, 2012, 2014; Lapayese, et al., 2014; Mayes, Montero & Cutri, 2004). However, few studies examine how veteran educators of color experience racism in their work environments.

This narrative study was conducted to examine the lived experiences of K-12 ToC, and how they perceive and navigate racism while persisting with classroom teaching. The intent is for their experiences to contribute to the understanding and resolution of the problem of practice – the persistent underrepresentation of ToC in K-12 classrooms.

Chapter Four begins with a presentation of collective contexts and demographic information about participants, and their identities. Next, themes threaded across participants’ narratives are identified and categorized, then defined or described. This is followed by excerpts of participant narratives interjected with researcher comments highlighting themes within the narratives. The chapter concludes with a summary of data grouped as themes.

Participants

Invitations to participate in the study were initially emailed to eight teachers of color known to this researcher. Three of the invited teachers did not meet the longevity criteria of teaching for more than 10 years. Another invited participant had recently changed to a non-
classroom position after more than 20 years of teaching in classrooms, and no longer met the criteria for being a current classroom teacher. Three ToC responded to an announcement placed in a social media group for educators of color. Two of the three respondents provided contact information and were sent invitations via email. One of those respondents did not meet the criteria of teaching in a school populated predominantly by children of color. However, the researcher acknowledged the respondents experience as a ToC in a predominantly white public K-12 classroom could provide valuable data.

Seven teachers met the criteria and agreed to participate in this study. All seven participants were teachers within four Western Washington school districts with school populations that are 54% to 77% students of color, and 17% to 19% teachers of color (OSPI, 2018). Additionally, participants were teaching in seven different schools with school populations consisting of 59% to 98% students of color (five of the schools’ populations were above 90%), and 18% to 50% teachers of color (OSPI, 2018). Five of the participants were teachers in elementary schools, and two were teachers in high schools.

The participants included five women and two men ages 36 – 61 years who self-identified as Asian (Hmong and Vietnamese), Black (African American, Haitian and Bi-racial), Indigenous (Meso-American) and Latina/o (Mexican American and Salvadoran). Four of the participants immigrated to the US and learned English as children or adults, and three were born in the US. The range of time participants have been teaching in classrooms was from 14 to 23 years, with only 1 teacher staying in the same school throughout their teaching career.

Pseudonyms were used for the participants in this study in order to maintain anonymity. Although providing identifying information with each participant narrative might assist readers in connecting to the narratives, some of the participants expressed concerns about possible
consequences in their work situations if their stories were revealed in those environments. Disaggregated demographic information identified in the previous paragraph provides general context without additional risk to participant anonymity. Additionally, for the purpose of this study, aggregated identifying information does not invalidate the narrative data.

Most participants chose pseudonyms that held meaning for them. Those who expressed no preference where assigned pseudonyms. The names used for this study are Herbie, Josie, Mai, Noemí, Rose, Thắng and Theresa.

**Themes**

Identifying themes threaded throughout participants’ narratives provides an organized presentation of data. However, focusing solely on identified themes risks essentializing the racialized experiences of ToC in the study. In alignment with the CRT tenet of anti-essentialism (Ladson-Billings, 2013), and critical and indigenous methodologies (Denzin et al., 2008), excerpts of narratives are presented to include experiences unique to each participant and their intersecting identities. Additionally, portions of narratives are presented as transcribed from the audio recordings (with minimal editing for clarity and anonymity), rather than being interpreted and translated into written hegemonic academic codes of English. Using direct transcription offers additional context and nuance to the narratives by showing participants’ storytelling processes. Presenting data in this form is consistent with the methodologies chosen for this research project described in Chapter Three of this document.

The themes that emerged from this study were intertwined throughout participant stories, rather than distinctly separate. They were identified based on common concepts present in narratives around the perceptions and navigation of racism. Researcher commentary is included as subtext to highlight the themes in context (Madison, 2008). The following themes emerged as
dominant across participant stories. They are categorized as “Perceptions of Racism” and “Navigational Strategies.”

**Perceptions of racism.** Four themes emerged across participant narratives under perceptions of racism. Each is named and described below:

- **Gatekeeping** is the process of controlling and limiting access. In the context of perceptions of racism, gatekeeping is used to control or restrict access of ToC, or favor access for White teachers.

- **Questioning competence and competency** is the direct or indirect questioning of the ToC’s knowledge and skills, and their ability to apply their knowledge and skills.

- **Racial microaggressions** are brief or subtle, commonplace verbal, non-verbal, or environmental insults and assaults based on race (Huber & Solorzano, 2014). The impact on targets of microaggressions is harmful whether microaggressions are inflicted intentionally or unintentionally (Sue, Capodilupo, et al., 2007).

- **Administrative/organizational support**, as a perception of racism, is the direct or indirect actions of principals, administrators, and/or education organizations that support policies and practices that marginalize ToC.

**Navigational strategies.** Four primary themes emerged across participant narratives under the category of navigational strategies. They are:

- **Access/use advocates and allies**,

- **self-directed professional development**, and

- **building and accessing community**.
- **Administrative/organizational support**, as a navigational strategy, is the direct or indirect actions of principals, administrators, and/or education organizations that support policies and practices that validate the experiences and meet the needs of ToC.

In addition to the four primary themes, sub-themes of *choosing battles*, and *focusing on students* emerged as navigational strategies for racism that is perceived or anticipated, and as a strategy to avoid experiences with racism. Themes are named in italics for clarity in interjected analysis comments.

**Herbie’s Story**

Herbie began his story by describing how his decision to become a teacher was influenced by a developing understanding of his historical relationship with racism in education. He describes his strategies for navigating racism before he had the language and knowledge to name it.

I was checked out of school and I did the bare minimum. Being a teacher would be the last thing I ever would've thought I would've been. I mean, coming through [high school], I just could not get out of school quick enough every day. And, I never would have thought I would've been a teacher. I did the bare minimum I needed to do to play sports while my mom expected a lot more. I did what her bare minimum was, and I got in my SAT prep class that I took over and over again until I got my score up to where I could get into college. I went just terrified. I knew it was my support system and my friends that got me through graduating [high school]. Now, I'm off on my own. I'm going to fail out. I knew I wasn't going to make it.

I somehow managed to get through my first couple of years before I found some professors that really lit my mind on fire, and just changed the way I saw myself and the
world. Teaching critical race theory and Cultural Studies and learning that race was a social construction… Like, what? This thing that has ruled my life, right, and how to make sense of being bi-racial and African American was difficult. And to understand the way that it's constructed by those in power for specific aims really transformed my self-conception, but also the way I saw the world. I wanted to figure out how to help students understand that a lot sooner than I did. And so, I decided I wanted to go into teaching when I graduated.

His story continued with a description of some of his perceptions of racism under the theme of gatekeeping in the predominantly White alternative pathway to teaching (APT) program in which he participated.

Had I known what I know now about the program, I wouldn’t have done the program. It’s this missionary model that is highly problematic. It’s a colonizer mentality about how to solve the problems of inner-city Black kids. But they came to my campus with glossy brochures and said, “You can be part of the next Civil Rights movement for education,” and it sounded nice.

[There were] very few [people of color]. Predominantly White. And then, my next-door neighbor in the barracks we were staying at (he was a Black graduate as well) and they put him on a Performance Plan because he kept raising issues about institutional racism and he wouldn’t stop. He said, “What about this?” and “What about this?” They labeled him a nuisance. The Performance Plan basically is a plan that you don’t have time to finish in five weeks. So, there’s no way you’re really going to complete that, and do your student teaching and all these intensive lesson plans. So, they drove him out of
the program. That was my first indication that there was something fundamentally wrong with this model.

Herbie knew he wasn’t prepared to work in the urban Washington DC school he was assigned to by the APT program. He described the racism he perceived in the conditions of the educational environment at every level. Navigational themes of building and accessing community and self-directed professional development are evident in these portions of his story:

I grew up Black in [Urban Washington] but that’s a whole lot different than growing up Black in Southeast DC where, I mean, it’s like an occupied territory with the police. The buildings all around our school were abandoned, and just brush growing through the windows and piled up cars that had been stripped of their parts and incinerated. The kids are going through so much drama - joblessness and mass incarceration - just devastating their communities. From the beginning, it became clear that my job wasn't just about teaching, reading, writing and arithmetic. I had to figure out how to nurture the students. I had to take on roles of psychologist and caregiver and all these other roles that, in the world's richest country, our government couldn't figure out how to address in the nation's capital. Those contradictions really shaped the way I viewed the systemic problems with public education in our country at large.

After describing the destruction of his students’ projects by rain entering through a hole in the classroom ceiling, Herbie continued with the theme of building and accessing community (in this case educational and community activism) and the sub-theme of focusing on students:

That was where I came to see there's something fundamentally wrong with our school system and our broader society that could allow children to be treated this way, and made me want to not only do my best in the classroom to meet the needs of my kids, but try to
figure out ways to challenge those in power who are misusing it, and to change the priorities of our society, and have to engage in activism to do that. That's been my perspective really, what's motivated me ever since.

A means of navigating the structural racism Herbie perceived in his first years of teaching was building and accessing community in the school environment. Although the APT program determined that Herbie’s skills were enough (an example of racist gatekeeping) to teach the underserved students he was assigned to, Herbie disagreed. In questioning his own competence and competency Herbie used the self-directed professional development navigational strategy.

Most of the teachers in the building were Black. That's a very different experience than what I had when I returned here to [the Pacific Northwest]. I got a lot of support and it was the veteran teachers there. An older Black woman who taught kindergarten, who had been there for most of her career, and other Black teachers, they took me under their wing and helped me through an impossible situation.

I realized I wanted to actually learn the craft of teaching. I learned a lot on my own in that experience but [the APT] was an inadequate program and so I applied to the [PNW University] to the Master’s in Teaching program after I did three years in DC. I did a year in addition to what [the APT] program asked of you. Then, I came here. I did my master’s in teaching and I started teaching middle school.

Now, in [Western Washington], it's dramatically different teaching environment. I mean, you're still dealing with poverty like high numbers of kids on free and reduced lunch and difficult poverty, but it's different. When it's so highly concentrated and when that poverty is so overwhelmingly and suffocatingly policed like it was in DC, but still so many of the challenges and traumas that come with poverty I'm dealing with in the
school. A difference is the staff is predominantly White, which was different, and it made for some challenges in my student teaching experience, working with a White mentor teacher who wasn't very socially conscious.

The theme of *gatekeeping* was evident in Herbie’s description of his student teaching experience and *building and accessing community* (in this situation reflecting a different experience in the lack of building and accessing community) continued to be his navigational strategy.

Teaching American History in that kind of a setting where I'm supposed to be the one learning from her - and there was things I did - but I had to do so much teaching about how we're going to talk about racism, how we're going to teach slavery, how we're going to teach the struggles and contributions of people of color. And having to constantly do a difficult dance of pushing back and getting the curriculum what I thought it should be without being that angry Black man that she's going to see as overstepping my bounds, and then not recommend me to become a teacher. That was a fear that I had to have as a student teacher.

I don't know, I mean, I can imagine that being really difficult for a lot of Black teachers. It wasn't easy at all. I think there's a lot of things that have sustained me in terms of being always connected to collective organizing and action outside of the classroom meant that that wasn't my only outlet. And so, it wasn't just spinning my wheels and getting frustrated in that classroom. I knew I could get through this period, this difficult relationship and get my classroom. And, I will still have ways, even if I wasn't able to shape the curriculum as a student teacher exactly how I wanted it, I still had ways that I was working in the community to challenge racism. And that was
important to me. If I hadn't had that, I could see myself getting really frustrated and upset, and not being able to go through with even finishing the student teaching program. Herbie later described why the strategy of building and accessing community outside of the school environment could be a significant survival strategy for ToC.

I think it's so important to have that connection to community organizing and activism outside of the classroom, because there are so many limitations that come with working in the institution of public schooling. There's so many ways that I've pushed back, and others push back, creates place in our classrooms and our school buildings. But having organizing and activism space outside the school too, where you're working to change those institutions and systems, I think really helps with burnout. It really helps with being able to not get frustrated at the lack of autonomy and control because we have multiple strategies for attacking this problem with institutional racism.

Herbie’s perceived experiences with racism changed once he completed his master’s program and was assigned his own classroom. The gatekeeping he experienced pre-service was no longer problematic. He was then able to build and access community within his own middle school level classroom.

That was great. I mean, it was a relief not to have to run everything I was teaching about history by somebody who had not investigated, in any meaningful way, the deeply racist structures that exist in our society and, generally, wanted to talk about diversity but without that lens of power. That was very difficult, and getting my own classroom was a relief and it was really exciting because now I had new strategies that I'd learned in the [PNW University] I wanted to apply. I mean, that experience [at the University] was also flawed. I kept raising, “But what about race and class and power and gender and
sexuality and all these ...?” We're teaching these diverse student bodies, and we need to be able to talk about the way this institutional schooling reproduces inequality, the way it reproduces all these different forms of oppression.

After being laid off from teaching and witnessing first-hand the 2010 earthquake in Haiti (which further impacted his perspective on structural racism), Herbie returned to the classroom teaching Advanced Placement (AP) US History in a PNW high school. Although the student population of the school was predominantly students of color, the AP classes were predominantly made up of White students. Themes of questioning competence and competency, building and accessing community, and racial microaggressions emerge in this portion of Herbie’s narrative.

I guess the first pushback I got was from the AP parents because here you have mostly White kids now. We have a diverse school but it's deeply [racially] segregated based on the tracks. And that's beginning to change now because educators here have decided to make a change even when the district wasn't of any help. Educators here decided we're going to do honors for all and we're going to erase the distinction between regular or general ed and honor students in the 9th grade. On their own time, their own dime, teachers just meeting and planning out new curriculum to make integrated classrooms. I've been really impressed with the teachers that undertook that project this year.

[That happened] this year. When I started, the segregation was even worse. It's still here especially in the AP classes but even worse then. So, vast majority of kids, White in that classroom. I really had this deep pressure to have to prove myself. I didn't get hired at the beginning of the year. It was a month and a half into the school year, so they'd had a sub for a while, while they were getting candidates. I got hired right before
the Back to School Night, so all the parents came in a day or two right after I started teaching.

[During a conference] this one parent just grilled me like, "What are you going to do to get my kid ready for the AP test at the end of the year? They've already missed a month of instruction." Like, "This school is not giving my kid what they deserve." I told them a little bit about my experience in Haiti to introduce myself like where I was last year and why I was coming in here. And she just didn't care about that and was like, "What does Haiti have to do with US History?" I was just like, "Well, I can break it down for you. Haiti has a lot to do with US history. For instance, the whole Western half, the Louisiana Purchase happened because Napoleon lost his colony with the slaves getting free and was short on money and needed to sell it. Then, the US bought it on the cheap and expanded ..." I could've gone into a lot of things but, basically, what I heard was like, "You're not going to be qualified to teach my kid." That was definitely racially ... There was a racial overtone to the discussion we had and there was a clear dynamic of power with a White parent and a Black teacher that there's not much support.

The sub-theme of choosing battles and focusing on students are evident in Herbie’s responses to this situation.

How do you navigate that? What do you tell that parent? There's no discussions or teacher training that is going to really help you with a situation like that. So, you have to decide are you going to push back and get in there, explain this firmly, the connection between Haiti and US? Or, why you have a right as a Black teacher to be here? Or, do you just let it roll of your back and move on, and just basically take that humiliation in front of a lot of people?
I'm not proud to say it but I just took that humiliation and didn't fight back, and just said I would do my best to help. I think the reason why I could do that and not be crushed by it is because I had lots of ways to fight back. That didn't have to be my way right there. [...] I can have an impact on the structure and nature of the public schools here, and I don't have to make the sword I die on this fight with this parent.

Those are just a choice I had to ... Stuff like that happens constantly. It's navigating which fights are worth it, and where I'm actually going to be effective in making change. I worked my ass off that year. I proved myself. I had a chip on my shoulder. I'm going to show them that I can do this, right? I prepared their kids for that AP exam, even though I don't really believe in standardized tests as a measure of anything - not of intelligence, not of skills. But I did it in a way that was actually about teaching social justice. What I found out was when you engage the kids in the issues that they're actually interested in, they'll end up remembering more anyway and they ended up doing pretty well.

The theme of building and accessing community is evident in Herbie’s description of the classroom community he was creating through his critical social justice and equity pedagogy. I began with a much more, I would say, dialogic approach to education where it’s a conversation between students and teacher, rather than just the teacher filling the empty vessel approach, and so much more like Socratic seminars and debates and different methods of trying to encourage critical thinking and collaboration in the classroom. So that was exciting.

Through this pedagogical practice, Herbie facilitated his students’ critical thinking about the racism (and intersecting oppressions) in their education environments. The strategy of building
and accessing community was also used by students to address inequitable gatekeeping of resources.

They [the students] talked about summer school got cut. So now, if you fall behind in credits, you don’t have any way to retrieve them. They talked about the cuts to the science program, and fine arts and stuff like that. They compiled it all and they led a walk-out the next day. Five hundred kids or more streamed out with all these signs, "Fund our Future!" They marched to City Hall and demanded an audience of the mayor. I opened my door and all these kids are flooding out, handing out pamphlets to their teachers about this. I was just blown away.

This pedagogy, and subsequent equity activism on the part of students in his classroom community, lead to Herbie connecting with social justice and equity focused colleagues in the school, further building and accessing community.

I was isolated my first year of teaching [post master’s degree]. I was down on the first floor where there aren’t many classrooms. I was actually in a classroom that’s stuck inside another classroom. So, I was really isolated and didn’t have much support. When that happened [the student action], people took notice. Now the other social justice teachers in the building, and I began to develop more relationships with them.

This was further evidence of the building and accessing community navigational strategy in response to perceived racism, in the gatekeeping tool of standardized testing.

One of the reasons was specifically the way the tests disrespect the linguistic and cultural diversity of our students. The way they especially are designed to punish English language learner and special education and students of color, label and shame them. They don't bring any more resources. These kids don't do well. It's not like all of a sudden, we
get more counselors and tutoring programs and stuff. There's so many ways that bias and racism are built into the test. That struggle just put my activism and passion for teaching on a whole another level because it really showed the power we had as teachers. There's a before and after moment on the [standardized] test boycott for sure. I mean, when the entire faculty voted unanimously to refuse to administer this test, and the faculty here was animated and excited about the arguments we made about racism in the tests. I was able to have that impact. It was like, "Wow! This is wonderful."

While Herbie does not mention the administrative/organizational support theme, it does emerge as evident in the ability of Herbie and his colleagues to act on their perceptions of racism in standardized testing.

**Josie’s Story**

Josie began describing her journey to becoming an experienced teacher and navigating racism along that journey with her first year of teaching. The building and accessing community theme is prevalent throughout her story. It was a strategy that supported her decision to become a teacher (Both her parents were ToC, as were many of her teachers throughout her K-12 education) and seemed to have shielded her from indirect racial microaggressions, that she later recognized.

I started my teaching career in 200_ as an official teacher. I graduated. I got my credential. That was in California. In ______, California at _____ Elementary. The population was really what I grew up with. I grew up [in that community], and so I ended up teaching at an elementary school in my city. At that time, and it's still, majority Latinos and African Americans. There's Asians and White. I mean there's White people, and kids, whatever, but majority was Hispanic or African American kids. A lot of staff
were Latinos, and I became really close friends with them, but there was also White staff. There was definitely a divide, now, reflecting back on it.

As a first-year teacher, you're just so focused on trying to survive in the classroom, that really, that's where all your energy and time and reflection go. But as I think back, there was definitely a divide because I think about a staff meeting that we had. It was very emotionally charged because we have the GATE students, which is like the students that ... It was like gifted and talented. It was like gifted and talented in California, they called it, the GATE class. The teachers were all White, and the students, majority of students were White.

There was a flyer was made that really upset a lot of the staff. Again, as a first-year teacher, I'm just like, "What's going on?" When they called the staff meeting, it was like an emergency staff meeting. We had to discuss what was on the flyer. It was basically saying, "Apply for the GATE classes. It's accelerated. It's ... “I guess people took it as, "Well, what, so if you're not in the GATE class, you're not receiving accelerated, enriching education?" There was a huge, heated discussion and conversation and debate about that. That's what that staff meeting was about.

The teacher that wrote it, that day, wasn't there because she was pregnant at the time, and she apparently fell, and so she wasn't at work. It just kind of made things even more emotionally charged. As far as the beginnings of my teaching, that's what I remember. Everyone around me was similar to me in culture. I mean I knew my students because I was a student, and I was a product of the [same] School District. So, I really didn't think about racism like ... I mean I taught my students whoever you were. If you were in my class, you're my student and this is, you know, I had a responsibility to. As a
teacher, in the beginning, I didn't realize how important race was in the education system because I was beginning teaching. I was focused on trying to understand the curriculum and my class management.

Josie taught in California for three years before moving to Washington. She described how the move to Washington impacted her awareness or perception of racial tension. She used the building and accessing community theme to navigate that tension, and an experience under the theme of racial microaggressions. The sub-theme of choosing battles is also evident in this portion of her story.

In [my first Washington school district], I was [there for] nine years. And when I began, my ... I'm trying to think of like the staff. There [were] a lot more White teachers than minority teachers, but I grew very close to everyone. They're like a second family to me. However, when I was there, there was a teacher that said something that was extremely racist. I'm still shocked that she thought that she could say it. I don't understand what went through her head that she thought, "Oh, this is a good idea to say." I can't control what people think, but you're an adult. Have some ... It blew me away.

 [...] We were in the copy room. The teacher was White. There was myself, and there was my friend [...] He's Black. I'm Mexican American. She's White. We were just teachers making copies. You talk to your colleagues. Somehow, we got on the ... She mentioned that her husband was at home. He hadn't been working in a while. He told her, "Well, I'm your house nigga." In front of us. I was like, "Did she just say this?" We're, first of all, I ... I couldn't even like ... I was so shocked. I'm still trying to process things that ... because it's like, "Why are you talking ... Why? Why? Why? Why?"
[My friend] and I just kind of looked at each other, and I think he was completely shocked because aside from us being colleagues, he had worked with her like outside of work. He did some work for her. He did something for her at her house, so they were, you know, it wasn't just like co-workers. They were friends, apparently, so he thought. I didn't even say anything. I should've told her off, or I should've did something, but I didn't say anything at the time. We both walked out. We were just shocked. I couldn't believe that she said this.

I go back to my classroom, and maybe 30 minutes later, [my friend] comes to me, and he's like, "Hey." He's like, "Do you think I should say something to her?" I said, "Yes. Absolutely." I go, "I'm sorry I didn't say anything." Like I was so shocked that she said this, I didn't know what to say because I just ... I'm still in disbelief that somebody would say this. Let alone think it. Like what the fuck is the matter with you? That's ... He was like, "Yeah, I'm gonna have to."

[My friend] is so diplomatic, and he's such a good, kind person. He's just so mellow, but he was very, very upset. Of course. I was upset, and it wasn't even ... It wasn't directed towards me, but ... or it was directed towards me because she thought that it was okay. That it was ... Like, I don't know. What part of that did she think was ever going to be okay?

I go, "Do you want me to go with you?" He's like, "No." He's like, "But I'm definitely gonna." Then, I thought, "Should I go report it to my supervisor?" I didn't. Maybe I should've. I don't know. I don't know why I didn't report it because I should've. You know, reflecting back on it. I don't know. I didn't have the ... I don't know, the courage. I don't know. I don't know what ... because that's a serious accusation. Well,
it's not an accusation. It's the truth. It would've just been me reporting the situation. By not reporting it, I allowed her to think that I was okay with that. It feels like shit.

He went to go talk to her about it. He said that he talked to her that day that it happened. The minute that he started talking about it, she just broke down in tears. She apologized, but how ... I didn't like her in the beginning, before this. I don't ... You know, there's people that you like. Like when you're at work, there's the professional side of them, and then there's like that personal side. Sometimes, you get along personally and professionally. They coincide. Then other times, you just get along with them personal, but you don't really agree with their work ethic or their professionality at work. I didn't ... both of them. It was very hard for me to be civil. I thought, well, it's my job to be professional, so I need to at least be civil to her, but to this day, I don't like her. I feel ... like I should've said something because that's the only way anything's going to change.

Also evident in the above section of Josie’s story is the theme of access/use advocates and allies. This theme was evident in Josie’s position as an ally to her African American male colleague. Even though she questioned her role in the situation, and the colleague did not take her up on her offer to accompany him, it was a strategy used to navigate the microaggression.

Josie repeatedly stated that she didn’t perceive explicit experiences of racism. However, in the following section of her story, she describes her perceptions and assumptions around the theme of questioning competence and competency.

Because there's a lot of people that are like, "I don't see color." That's a bunch of bullshit. Everybody sees color because the minute I walk into a room, it's going to be very different from a person who's White and blond hair. That's just the bottom line. Like I
said, I haven't really experienced straight out, in-your-face horrible racist comments, but I know it's there. I know that people look at me differently.

Another instance is when I was ... I'm a national board-certified teacher. That takes a lot. It's a lot of work. I became a facilitator because I really believe in the process, and I love working with teachers. It's inspiring, and it's ... I just enjoyed it. My first time being a facilitator, my first class, I was really nervous. Of course, all my candidates are White. Female or male. I walk in, and a part of me, thinking back, is feeling like they looked at me, like, "Who are you?" Like, "What is your credit?" A part of me thought are they thinking this because they don't know me, and I look young, and so there's that piece, or are they looking at me because I'm brown? They're like, "You're my facilitator? You're the one who's going to help me ...” I go, "Yeah, I am. I did it the first time, all four components, passed it. [It only has a] 30% passing rate."

I guess that was always in the back of my head, but as we went through the process, they saw that I knew what I was talking about because I went through that process, and I certified the first time, so there's certain things that I know that ... I was a good facilitator, and so there's that piece.

As a woman in the field of education, I don't think I get ... I don't think people judge me as much because I'm a woman. There's a lot of women in the field, so it's not like I'm in a male-dominated field. I think it'd be very different if I was in mathematics or engineering. That'd be a different story, too. I always have it in the back of my head like, do people doubt me because I'm Latina? Do people assume certain things? I know they do. It's not something that I spend a lot of time thinking about, but ... it's there.
After many years in a school district that was a significant commute from her home, Josie applied for a teaching position closer to her home, for personal and professional reasons. Her description of her experiences during the hiring process and teaching in the new district include examples of administrative/organizational support, gatekeeping, and building and accessing community themes.

Now, 12, 13 years later, coming ... I started at [my current school district]. One of the questions that they asked me last year at the job fair was, "How comfortable are you talking about race?" That was the first question about race in an interview that I've ever had. In my head, I don't mind talking about it. I'm very comfortable. I know who I am as a Mexican American third generation woman. I know that people perceive me in certain ways and vice versa. I perceive people in different ways.

[…] Now, I think being in [this district], it's a topic of conversation. I think that's a good thing. I went to a training called Diversity... I can't remember the whole name of it, but it was like Diversity something. They had consultants come in and talk to us about having a courageous conversation. […] We've gone through these exercises. We talked about four agreements, the compass that you use to measure where you are in regards to having a courageous conversation, a professional courageous conversation about race. It was an amazing training. I think that training should be done for everyone in any field because it really makes you look at you, who you are, and where are you on the race topic.

[…] Here's the thing is that when I interviewed, I told them how important it was for me to be in a diverse population because that is, those types of schools, those schools are why I became a teacher. That's why I want to be a teacher because, like I said, you
learn so much from your students, the community. You learn about yourself, too. It pushes you. It makes you reflective. I didn't choose [this school], but I was placed there for a reason. Now, was I placed there because I'm brown and the kids are brown? I don't know, but I'm super happy that I wouldn't want to work anywhere else. I'm very happy at that school. They knew where I was coming from. My experience has really helped me work with students that are high needs, with families that are high needs. I learned a lot in [my previous school district], and I'm hoping to continue to learn. I'm learning a lot in [this district].

The theme of racial microaggressions is evident below, though not directly named, as Josie describes her hypervigilance in anticipation of teaching in the new district. The themes of building and accessing community and administrative/organizational support are evident in navigating the anticipated racial experiences.

…I was really apprehensive [moving to this district] because I didn't know what to expect. When you say ________ [District], people are like it's a very wealthy area. Very affluent. I was expecting these helicopter parents and lots of White people. I wasn't sure if I needed to put on ... be someone else, other than myself. I was really apprehensive, but it was a good move for me. The school that I'm at is diverse, and the teachers are diverse. We work well together. The parents have been amazing. The community has been amazing.

There's certain things that we need to work on as a school community, but I'm so happy that I moved because it was needed. It's like a breath of fresh air. We have a lot of important work to do at my new school. There was a lot of apprehension. I just didn't know what to expect because my perception of [the town] is upper middle class, upper
Parents who are extremely involved in their education to the point where, "Are they going to be telling me what I should be teaching?"

At my school, that is not the culture. See, my school is very different, too, from the surrounding schools, from any of the schools in the district because of our free and reduced lunch percentage. We have a really high transient rate, but there's a lot of parents on visas. There's a lot of homeless kids at our school. Our population's just completely different from, say [more affluent areas of the district], but I love it because the families and the kids are amazing.

The sub-theme of focusing on students emerged as a navigational strategy as Josie described her discussion about race (and other life skills) with her students. Josie’s process of building and accessing community provides an example of navigating racism that is not overtly perceived. It is an anti-racist strategy facilitated by administrative/organizational support for dialogue with students.

With my students, we talk a lot about ... One thing that I really love about [my current district] is that they have these virtues of the month that we are expected to teach. We have these conversations about integrity, about forgiveness, about respect, about cooperation. Really, it's like essential life skills that you need that are important because we're all human. You need to be able to express these values in the positive way, even when you're upset. It's really hard. It's very hard, whether you're a kid or an adult.

Having conversations with my students about our brown skin because I have majority [East] Indian students, and then I have two Latinos in my class. I have Ukrainian, Russian, and one Chinese student. The majority of my students speak like two or some of them speak three languages at a time or at home. One, I love it because
we learn from each other. We were talking about the days of the week, and how do you say it in Tamil? How do you say it in Hindi? In Spanish, this is how you say it. I want to show them that we learn from each other. When we're different, when you're around different people, you really start to learn about the world because everyone comes from all these different parts, and they have that piece of the puzzle that will help you become your best self. I want to communicate that, and I think that's important for my students.

When they come into my class, it doesn't matter ... Actually, it does matter where you come from because that's an important piece of our classroom that you're going to teach us about, because I don't know. I've been never been to India, but you know, majority of my students have. They've never heard about ... They don't eat tamales, or they've never been to Mexico or El Salvador. We teach each other just about little things. In those little things, you start to gain that understanding that, "This is cool. I didn't even know that this existed." To have that common respect and that common love of people and learning about where people come from. That's what makes you special. That's what makes you a part of this world.

Josie also described how she used self-reflection as a tool for *self-directed professional development* to better understand and navigate racism as she continues in classroom teaching.

I know who I am, now that I'm an adult. I'm still growing and figuring certain things out about myself, but I know what's important. I know that being around people that are different from me is important to me because that's how I learn. That's how I grow, and it's fun. [...] I think I've moved from that notion of thinking like, "Oh, I'm color blind. I don't see color," to, "Yes. It's a very real thing and everyone sees it, whether they admit or not." That's the first thing you see, when I walk into a room. You see my brown skin,
my brown hair, and my brown eyes. With that, comes certain perceptions. I'm aware of it, but do I let it stop me? No. Like I said, I've never been confronted with such, compared to other stories I'm sure are like in the news. I've never had to ... I don't know. I feel like I've never been slapped in the face with just straight-up except for that one time where I was in the copy room, and I just couldn't believe she said, that colleague said what she said. It's insane.

I feel very fortunate, but I know there's little subtleties all around. Everywhere you go. It's just something that I continue to be cognizant of, not only for me, but for my kids.

Mai’s Story

Mai began her story with her first year of teaching in the US, after teaching abroad for one year. The perception themes evident in the initial portion of her story are questioning competence and competency, and racial microaggressions as her colleague’s microaggressions and questioning lead to Mai questioning herself. Navigational themes that emerged are access/use advocates and allies, and administrative/organizational support, as Mai sought out help understanding and navigating the situation.

Then after that year, I came back, applied in my hometown of ________, and taught there for a year at a high school. I taught ELL there, and I felt very connected to the community, partly because I grew up there. Some of the teachers there were very, I'd say a handful of them that were just very open minded. They helped support my journey in being a first ELL teacher there.

But I had a colleague who wasn't always so open. She wanted things a little bit more rigid. She had kind of the way that she planned she wanted everything kind of
micromanaged. And that time, it was really early on, so I didn't know much. And so, I remember one incident that happened during the testing session, where you work with kids of color. Once again, I taught ELL, ninth through 12th grade. I was doing the testing. I did the Proctor Training, followed it to the "T," because that's kind of how I am. I color in between the lines. That's just who it is. I remember her coming in to observe me one day while I'm teaching. In the back of the room, without no ... She wasn't my formal evaluator. She wasn't someone that ... Not my mentor either. I had a different mentor.

For some reason she came. She sat in the back of the room. Being a first-year teacher, in America, I didn't know. I sat there. I taught, I continued to teach my lesson. Then afterwards she kind of walked up to me and said, "I just wanted to check in with you. Are you doing testing today?"

And I looked at her, and I thought, "Well, no. I still have classes. I thought I'm following the schedule you gave me, so I'm not testing today." She basically was confronting me, and belittling me, making me feel really belittled, right? Condescending, and saying, "Why aren't you doing it this way? Why don't you do this?"

And finally, I felt really uncomfortable. I had two incidents like that. Once again, I want to reiterate that, she observed me without telling me. Two, she's a colleague. Not an evaluator, or not a mentor. I think after the second or third drop in, I felt uncomfortable. I asked my mentor. I said, "____, I'm really feeling uncomfortable. Is this normal for someone to come in who's, yes, in my department (I believe she is the department head at that time), to come in and observe me, and then start giving me feedback?"
She basically, you know, I didn't even have the wording then, because I was, I think 22. First year teaching, not knowing a lot, and I thought, "I know my stuff." My original evaluator, when I was both in my practicum, said, "Wow, you are one of the most detailed teachers I've ever met. You are in my top 3%, and an honor to have."

I don't mean that to brag, it's just I work hard to get where I am. I knew my things. I knew the content, I knew the kids, I was still growing. And for her to come in and do that, that was kind of my first flag of, "Am I doing something wrong?" The first thing was being more introspective.

Then I realized after talking to my mentor, she said, "No, I don't understand why she's coming in. First of all, she's a colleague. She has no right to come in, unless she's talked to you, or unless you've asked for support." And I said, "I've never done any of that."

Then it kind of spiraled into a little bit more after the testing. Then she started questioning my testing techniques. I said, "Wait a minute, this is a state testing. I followed the training. I've done exactly what they've asked me to do." My sister actually was a teacher at ELL at that time too, who's taught for 15 years. I said, "I've checked in with her to make sure I'm following protocols. I'm not taking anything home, everything's locked up. What am I doing that I need to do that ...? You know, what am I not doing that you're asking me?"

When I asked her that, her face, she was just appalled that I was even going to question her. At that point, I mean, I had that gut stomach of, you know, we're young. We don't know any better. I thought, "What did I do wrong?" Then I find out later, I said, "I need to go above her." Being culturally, in my culture, too, being South East
Asian, you're not taught to question authority. You're not to even speak up when someone's talking to you. But I felt this, it felt wrong.

I went to my principal, who I had a good relationship with. I said, "_____, I really need your support in this, but I'm not sure how to ask. This is kind of what's been happening. And I want you to know even via email." He finally just said to me, "Wow. I didn't realize." He goes, "She is very strong, and she's very aggressive. But I want you to document it."

And that's the first time I ever learned, wow, I need to document everything when I work with teachers per se. I don't mean that to come out rude, or even reverse bait racism. If I'm working with White teachers, I need to document. I need to know how to follow the paper trail. And in our culture, we don't have that. When you're an upstanding citizen, you work hard, people respect you because of that. Not just because of the color. And now I mean, I hate to say it, but now I do. I document everything. I keep paper trails. Because you never know what people are going to say to use against you. As a teacher of color, it's kind of appalling to think that we have to think that way. I learned that that first year of teaching early on. I don't feel anyone should have to have that. That shouldn't even be a precedent.

After being in her first Washington school district for one year, life changes resulted in Mai relocating to a different school district. In her new district, Mai described feeling an immediate sense of “community” with the children, families, local area, and some colleagues. The building and accessing community, and self-directed professional development themes emerged as strategies for navigating the gatekeeping of knowledge and resources, and racial microaggressions Mai perceived.
And loved the kids and the population of the community. The way I describe it is I would have lived and died here. I love the families. I still keep in touch with them. Even though I've left, it's been what, almost ten years now since I've left [that] school district.

When I first arrived here, same thing, too. I oversaw seven different paras, and they were great, like phenomenally great. We jived well. Once again, like I said, I'm just open to the culture there. We learned from each other. We brought food, we had potluck. We were a family. The kids knew that.

However, I had a colleague once again, it happens. And I'm aware of that now too. He's Caucasian, married to a person of color. Generally, I think, "Okay, he's an ally. He's going to be more outspoken. He's going to get [meaning "understand"] us." And I started seeing differences based on what he said and did.

[...] When I think back to the gentleman that I worked with in ______, there were a couple incidences where I felt like ... For example, speaking of racism, not just undermining. I don't know if he knew what he was doing, or maybe he did. He was department head. I would attend some of the department head meetings for the ELL department, because I wanted to learn. I asked him if I could attend with him. Eventually I noticed that he stopped going. I thought, "Okay, this is a good opportunity for me to keep going, so I'm going to continue to grow, bring back, and then ... "

At that time, it was my second year of teaching in the U.S. system. Leaving [the first school district] and dealing with the other testing teacher. He was always very cordial, very polite. Not demanding, never out right rude, or anything. What I found out
through that lesson, was I would attend the meetings, therefore he wouldn't. I would then be doing his job and didn't realize he was getting paid for it.

But once again, I thought of it as a learning opportunity. And eventually after the third or fourth month, because our goal as department head at that point, would have been, because I wasn't, is to attend the meetings [at] district, come back, disseminate the information amongst the ELL teachers and the paras, and then set up goals to figure out how to meet these goals.

At that time, I didn't know any better. So, I attended the meetings the first couple months and learned. Then I continued thinking he would also go, because that's his job. And without saying anything, because I didn't feel I could be bold at that point. Paras and other teachers asked, "Hey, isn't he supposed to be going?" And I said, "Yes, but I don't know why he's not attending." So, I asked him. And one day he says, "Oh I'm busy. But you can go in there. Why don't you just come back and show it to me."

I had not known then that he was getting paid. He had a stipend for that. I did not know then that I was doing his job essentially. I don't mean that to dog him or put him down. It's just I felt, what's the word, defeat. I felt like he had taken me for granted knowing that I would step up to the plate.

I got smart. I stopped going to the meetings after the second year. However, I would question, "What do we need to do this month? What do I need to know?" Because last year's meetings, they always had a goal. I would prompt thinking that it would help grow our PD, right? Professional development. And eventually he said, "Oh, you know, I really liked when you went." I said, "Yes, but from my understanding ..." And I didn't
want to say it's his job, right? Like once again, if he were to ask me today, I would say it to him, "It's your job. You need to go." But I wasn't as strong then. I was young, naive.

Eventually I said, "You know, let me look into that a little bit. I think it's great for me because I learned a lot. But I'll look into it." Well, I got smart. I went in and talked to the retired teacher, who then actually was my husband's old ELL teacher. She gave me the insight. She said to me, "The reason I wanted you there at this school, and I found out who you were," she said basically, she says, "I've seen your work. I've seen how hard you care, and how much you care about the kids."

She goes, "I do not want him in this role as department head. I had wanted you, but because you were new, maybe you didn't feel comfortable." I said, "Well, it wasn't even offered to me." Because he had already, when I first got hired, I didn't know anyone in the district. He had gone to the principal and said he wanted the position.

I feel like all these subtleties are racism if it's about power. It's about having the control, and I hate to say it, but it was money. I think he knew. And so, he had just let me kind of slide in being new. And I feel like if it's like that, how can we work in a system like this to say we want to help under-privileged students and marginalized families, when we're also doing that ourselves as teachers?

The following portion of Mai’s story illustrates how she engaged in building and accessing community as a navigational strategy.

Once again, I learned a lot from that setting, too. And I stayed for about three years. Loved the families, loved the cultural things. But I remember one incident he had asked me before I left. It was always the beginning of the year. And I'd set up my classroom. And all the paras came in and they were helping me. And after they left, he
said, "Why do they all come help you? All the years I've taught here." He had taught there probably ten years before I did.

And he was also the, not lead department head, but he was the second teacher there. And he said, "After Mrs. ____ leave; so, and so, and so left," he goes, "The paras are always here. But they never come help me set up like this." And I thought about that, and I thought, "I know why now, being that it was my third year." I didn't say it to him.

The truth was, if you are accepting and open to your own group, and you treat them like family, then of course they're going to come. I didn't create a barrier. And I started seeing that. And it wasn't like we were talking trash on him; it was just they were honest. They were finally realizing. They were like, "Oh yeah, we know you're working with us. You're not working for yourself."

And I feel like he started then, how do I say it? Putting us at arm’s length. So, it's like, yes, we're an ELL department, but you're kind of over here kind of feeling. So, I realized I'm going to learn as much as I can in this district with all the teachers, and with my paras.

Mai continued with descriptions of experiences encompassed under the gatekeeping theme in the following portion of her story. Gatekeeping limited access to allotted resources for Mai and the paraprofessionals of color with whom she worked is evident. The self-directed professional development navigational theme is evident in Mai’s emphasis on being proactive in learning what resources are available. The access/use advocates and allies theme was also evident in Mai’s description of how she advocated for herself and the paraprofessionals of color.
The paras, yes. I also worked with them, too, through a little bit of racism, too. Even with the admin of not giving extra hours, or interpreting services, or the funding that we received that we should have received. I learned a lot in [that second school district], let's put it that way. That there were some funding, like two thousand dollars allocated for interpreting and translating services, that we never got to tap into because he [the program lead teacher] hadn't advocated for us. I did not know that my first year there.

Second year there, I found out we do have allocated, because I went to all the department meetings. And I started asking questions. Even then, the VP and, I wouldn't say the VP per se. It was more the principal who made the calls in. She had been funneling funds to help support to meet AYP [Adequate Yearly Progress]. But what I found is when I started questioning about it, I started getting pushed back. "Oh, don't worry about, you know. We'll handle it from here."

Then this is another thing about how racism kind of progresses, too. I started thinking, "Okay, the best way to get ahead, is to attain every PD that I can possible to make sure that I'm the best teacher I can." Really understand the school system, and work with the teachers who support and do the work that I do.

There was a training that year at the Teacher's College in New York. I wasn't even asked to go at all. And I find out after everyone, the group that they had chosen ... We called them cronies at the time, were asked to go. They attended New York. Maybe racism or not, but like I said, when you give an opportunity like this, you need to give it to every teacher who teaches language arts and reading. It shouldn't be you hand pick the ones you want.
After being reflective of that, I thought, "Why wasn't I asked? I'm an LA teacher." I teach ELL, but I also teach language arts. Why was I not asked? So, I did, I tried to gather my strength. I talked to other colleagues. And I said, "You know, I feel really uncomfortable with this, but I need to ask." So, I did. I asked the VP at that time. She basically said to me, "Well, I didn't know you were interested." Why would I not be interested? You're implementing this whole new curriculum. Why would I not be interested to further my students? Our students as well?

Finally, she said to me, "I didn't need you to go and ask other people. You could have came and asked me," is what she said to me. And that's why I'm here. So, I said to her, "Why would I not? This is what I'm trying to do." I had to think about that. And I thought, "Why am I not given the same opportunities as other teachers?" And she kind of backed off and she said, "Okay, if you'd like to, we'll send you to the next training." So, I was sent to the next training. My big question was, "Why was I not thought of in the first place?" Why was I not given the opportunity when every other teacher that taught the same subjects, regardless of ELL, or not. But ELL students deserve just as much, if not more, of the same curriculum.

In my job, as of now as a coach, I'm like, "Wow. Knowing what I know now, I would have spoken up a lot more." But not knowing that there was already that precedent set up, “oh we're going to pick” ... It was a piloted year. It was a year where they had funding and I think we received a grant or something that was particular for all. The whole school could have went technically.

Finally, after having to fight for it, I ask them for the meeting, presenting my case essentially. They did send me the second year, and it was great. Came back, and like I
said, I'm still using that knowledge now even as a coach to work with teachers in my own district now about it. And I can speak from that experience. But if I didn't fight for it, and I didn't ask, I probably wouldn't have been able to be given it. But it's appalling for me to even reflect on it.

My message to young teachers would always be, with all teachers, especially teachers of color, to say, "You need, whenever every PD chance you get and they offer, you go. You go, and you learn as much as you can. So that if anyone were to ask, any administration, any district you go to you can say, “I've attended this training. I've learned a lot. And this how I apply it." It's almost as if we have to fight just to get our own. And it's sad.

Noemí’s Story

Noemí began her teaching career in the field of early learning. She taught preschool, then moved to work as a bilingual assistant in a public-school district for eight years at the elementary school level. Noemí described experiences with racism that influenced her decision to become a K-12 classroom teacher. As a bilingual assistant and mother of a bilingual child, Noemí described some of the microaggressions she perceived directed at Latinx children she worked with.

One thing that I remember that really bothers me was…not every teacher did, I need to be very just about that because there were two occasions or three occasions I can tell. One was when a teacher told me, “This kid doesn’t know the numbers,” and I look at her and I go, “I tell you we’re supposed to teach and that’s why they come to school.” She was referring to my Latino kids. She looked at me and [I] said, “You’re a state worker and are just supposed to teach them.” Kids come and they don’t… are they supposed to come
in knowing the numbers? That’s what I was trying to tell her. It’s funny because she just
looked at me and she didn’t get it, or I don’t know. That’s one thing. Of course, since I
only was an assistant, I didn’t have the power to do things.

There was another occasion when I had [my daughter] in my school. I ended up
working as a bilingual assistant in the same school as [my daughter] when she started
first grade. I had a meeting with the teacher, and she was a very good teacher, I
remember. She had had high expectations. She told me that [my daughter] was not
reading and that she was very worried that she was not reading chapter books in first
grade. I said, “What do you mean about chapter books?” I know that [my daughter], she
isn’t really reading at that time because she was an active girl, she was everywhere. Also,
she was learning two languages. I tell her, I explained, “She needs time. She doesn’t like
to read right now, and I will support her.” She told me, “I think I would like to put her in
a remedial reading class.” I didn’t like it. I knew this school and I knew who were put in
remedial classes and I knew that number one, [my daughter] was an active girl.

I don’t think that she was ready to be a great reader for chapter book reading. It’s
not that she was not reading, or it’s not that she was not doing her worksheet or whatever.
I said, “No, I don’t want it.” “But she’s going to be behind.” “No, don’t worry,” I said.

That summertime, I said to [my daughter], “You are going to be learning to read
in Spanish and I don’t care.” I put her in my intense course reading. Every year the
[standardized] test came. She never passed the reading test all the way to fourth grade.
Every year the teacher will tell me. I remember that at that time I didn’t even was aware
about all this campaign against the standardized test. In my heart and my gut, I can feel it
that that was not what majorly what [my daughter] knew. I kept telling the teacher,
“Don’t worry, she’ll get it. She needs time. She needs eight years to be fluent in reading in English because she is a bilingual kid, a bicultural, bilingual kid.”

It was only until she was in fourth grade, she finally passed the reading test. I feel like in some way that was one experience that I have with mothering in the public schools. I was teaching at the same time in there.

[...] Yeah, part of that [influenced me to become a teacher], because the teacher used to say, “They’re not learning. They don’t… They don’t know the numbers. They don’t know the letters.” I got very mad about that. That’s when I decided I need to go into teaching. I need to get my bachelor degree. I went through the whole process of becoming a teacher.

After performing her student teaching in the same school in which she was a bilingual assistant, Noemí describes her experience with racism under the theme of *gatekeeping* when she needed her principal’s recommendation to qualify for a teaching position. The *access/use advocates and allies* theme is evident in her description of how she navigated the gatekeeping with assistance.

I was evaluated so highly. When I did my teaching, I did my practicum in there too. At that time, they were doing the possibility. When I finished, I got interviewed by a group of people from [the School District] when they go to get new teachers when they just graduate, and they interview them in order to give them contract. It’s that contract that they’d say, “We liked you. We want to have a …” I don’t know the name; I forgot the name. It’s a kind of conditional contract. When they interview about June, at the end of June or in the middle right after you graduate. And if they liked you, they say, “We want to offer you a job conditionally until we talk to the principal, because you [need] principal recommendation in order to get that.”
This lady who interviewed me believed strongly that I could go into teaching in _______ Public Schools. After being interviewed, a week after she told me. She didn’t assess specifically but I knew. She says that, “[Noemí], it will be better if you go out and start before because what you need is principal recommendation and your principal didn’t want to recommend you for a teaching job.” She didn’t say it that way, but I knew that that was the principal that didn’t decide [to give the recommendation]. It’s very interesting enough because there were three people of color who did the same year. There was a woman from Ethiopia, an African American woman who was an assistant in [the same school], she decided to do at the same time, and me. This was a counselor who came to do her master’s and I remember her because she was doing it to be a PE teacher and she [the principal] did not even recommend.

The sub-theme of *choosing battles*, along with continuing to *access/use advocates and allies*, is evident as Noemí’s narrative proceeds with a description of how she navigated the perceived *gatekeeping* by the principal.

All the three were not recommended by this principal. I was so furious. My blood was going. Next day when I went to work. Still was… the school was not over when I knew. And every time I see that woman [the principal] my blood went like I want to tell her off. I kept my mouth shut. I said, “What do I need to do myself? What do I need to do in order to first I don’t want to lose my job; secondly, how I can be an assistant, half time?” I went and talked to my supervisor, administrator which was a great woman. She was originally from this part of Spain. She was really very pushing at that time for bilingual education. We’re talking about with [my daughter]. That’s 1990’s, I think. At that time, not many… it was just at the beginning of accepting other
cultures. It was the beginning at that time. What I decided, I talked to this person and I
told her that, I told her very clearly, “My principal didn’t want to give me a
recommendation. I need to go and be a sub.”

I did the process of subbing and I said, I told her, “But I don’t want to work in
that school anymore.” Every time I see that woman [the principal] I feel like I want to
slap her. I say that but I feel like I could not stay with her. [The supervisor] recommended
to move to another school and then she told me, “There was a teacher who I used to know
and she’s now a principal in [a different school], so why you don’t go there. I’ll put you
halftime there, and go and talk to her.” I went and talked to her and I said, “This is my
situation.” She was, “Yes, come here halftime and we use you halftime as a sub.” She
was very embracing. I have at least the possibility I will not continue working halftime
and a possibility to be a sub [...] I decided, I said, “What about if I went ahead to apply
but she’s the one principal that she will blockade it?”

I talked to ________ which was my advisor in _________ College. She was my
advisor. I went and told her what happened. I said to her, “This is my plan.” I already
told her that I was going to move to ________ School, what this woman’s done, and I
said to her at that summer I was going to Central America in August or at the end of July.
I said to her, “I want you to have a conversation with this woman. You’re a White
woman, she’s a White woman. Talk to her about my situation. Tell her about why is it
that she did not give my recommendation, number one, and find out. Tell her that I am
applying to ________ Public Schools.” I decided I want to go and put applications to
_______ Schools at the same time too and teach. I cannot hold in all my little pieces off
the chest. I said, “Talk to her.”
[...] She was my ally. She sat with [the principal] and then she had a conversation. [My adviser] found that what [the principal] was saying is that she was in doubt that I could be a teacher because of the way I speak English. That was bias. She told her, “But look, [Noemí] has been working in the public school for eight years” (Because at that time I was on my eighth year. I could not move further. Even in my salary I could not move forward) ... “She will have more experience with any other call it, young person because she will have management, classroom management and that is important for new teachers. Put her out there,” and then she told her, “She’s applying for _______ Schools and she really would like you to do the recommendation.” She really convinced [the principal] to change her mind about that. I went and applied in three or four schools in [a different school district] and I left [for vacation].

Before leaving for vacation, Noemí applied for several open teaching positions. Upon returning from vacation, she had three interview requests. Noemí chose a position teaching children learning English as a new language. The gatekeeping theme is evident in her perception of the original principal’s decision to recommend Noemí as a teacher for students who are English language learners (ELL).

That school …was primarily White. The only kids of colors were my ELL kids. Practically the reason I got it is because this principal had shared her mind and she was willing to say yeah and okay. I always reflect on that. I did not have… my accent and my language was not good enough [for general education classrooms], but I was able to teach and support immigrants that come from outside, right? Do you know what I mean? I can see that as racism reflection.
The theme of *questioning competence and competency* is also evident in the last sentences of the above portion of Noemí’s story, where she pointed out the former principal’s reluctance to recommend Noemí for a teaching position because of her style of communicating in English. Noemí identified this as racism, and the theme of *access/use advocates and allies* is evident in how she navigated that experience of racism.

Noemí continued to describe some of her experiences navigating *racial microaggressions* in her first school as a classroom teacher. The themes of *building and accessing community* and *self-directed professional development* are evident in her navigational strategies, along with sub-themes of *choosing battles* and *focusing on students*. The following section of her story describes how these navigational strategies helped sustain her in teaching ELL students in a predominantly White school.

Yes, for the self-contained ELL for second and third [grades]. I got kids from coming, they were all over. At that time there was the war in Bosnia, a lot of Somalis or Latinos, and I’m teaching in there. I always believe a teacher cannot be teaching alone and I never felt that I was belonged in that school […] I was a new teacher. I did not receive any support at that time.

I don’t remember having a mentor coming to help me in my first five years. Four or three years, whatever. I did it. First year teaching was I worked from 7 to 7 and I almost quit. And the only reason I didn’t quit is because the custodian always sees me and will come. And I said, “I need to quit, and I want to quit. And the only reason I didn’t quit is because you always tell me, ‘No, the kids need you. You cannot quit.’”
There were few people of color in Noemí’s school building. She developed a friendship with the African American custodian, and through conversations with him, Noemí developed a plan for her *self-directed professional development* to better meet the needs of her students. In addition to the custodian, Noemí’s sustaining community within the school included her partner ELL teacher, and the students.

In the following portion of her narrative, Noemí describes how she connected with her partner teacher for support. She continues with a description of *racial microaggressions* she observed. The theme of *access/use advocates and allies* is evident in Noemí’s advocating for her students. The sub-themes of *focusing on students* and *choosing battles* are also evident in how she navigated the perceived racism.

I knew my partner, she was teaching [grades] four, five and six ELL. All the kids that I get, I get them for three… If they’re first grade, I get them for three years. In a way it was good because I was able to get to know the kids much better. It’s like looping with them. With her [the partner teacher] I’d say, “I don’t know what to do.” She was more experienced. She was very helpful with me. Things like when we went in the cafeteria and the kids were in line. And you know how kids are developmentally, they’re going like this. And then the whole line… You see the line. I used to see all of them. All the White kids and there would go my Latino… my kids of color and then the teacher [monitoring the student] will go, “Line up. Stay,” disciplining them. My kids.

I keep looking and looking and I watch. I was watching and watching. I always was quiet. I tend to advocate in different ways. Like I always think, what am I going to do? I keep looking and looking. There was a teacher in there. I have this, one day I was up to here with him. I say, “I need to talk to you about this. I do not have any problem
for you to discipline my kids. If I discipline kids, I discipline all no matter what, no matter what culture they are, no matter what color they are. If they are doing something inappropriate, I am going to call them out. What I noticed,” I say, “is that the kids in front of my kids are doing exactly the same and then you’ll notice my kids first and you scold them. And that’s called racism.” I said to him, “You’re spotting them immediately because they’re kids of colors.” And then he looked at me and I said, “I’m not saying you cannot discipline them, but I want you to just examine what you’re just doing. You have to see the kids in the developmental state that they are. Hear me when I’m saying all kids behave the same developmentally. It’s the society that has made to pinpoint the kids of color in a different way.”

In terms of how that impacted me that I knew that was happening. Practically in that school I didn’t have a choice because the majority were White. Now, the thing that I did is protect my kids as best as I could, if I knew something. And I told the kids, “You need to tell me exactly what happened.” I always tell them, “If something is going on and you don’t feel okay and safe, you need to come to me because I’m your advocate.” I act like the mama hen for that group of kids.

The themes of building and accessing community, and access/use advocates and allies are evident in Noemi’s description of how she worked with others in efforts to address racism through diversity work, curriculum committee work, and union activity.

Also, I was in the radar to look for allies. There was a woman […]who wanted] to do some more diverse things in here. And then there were a lot of White people who were adopting kids from Africa and from India, and then they’re in my class. They have felt strongly about bringing some more diversity into the school.
We did some modules about things around the world and trying to start more cultural and general things into the schools. We used to do art and craft and try to do something that bring the families to the school so families can be reassured. We started to do some dinners and that was the way that we deal with that situation in that school.

I had become involved with the district in terms of the curriculum and see if I could make impact in there. I became I want to be there in this committee about my curriculum or this curriculum or the ELL curriculum.

At that place, even though I was involved, and I used to go to [union] conference[s]. But I was not into the union because I felt like the union was all White and I didn’t feel belong. If I go to the Washington State Association Conference, I was the only one of the few [members] of color of the few in Washington State at that time. I did participate because the president when he told me, the last two years in that place where I was for 10 years, I became a rep. Now I remember the last two years with the other teachers. We did it together. I started to be a little bit more involved with the union but that was the last two years of the 10 years.

The accumulated experiences with racism contributed to Noemí’s decision to leave this school. In the next section of her story, Noemí describes that decision and process of transferring to a different school within the same district. The themes of building and accessing community, and administrative/organizational support are evident in this section of narrative.

Time had passed and then I realized that I had been there in that school for 10 years. You act like the ostrich that you put your head sometimes inside the sand sometimes and just focus and focus in your work. It’s an isolated job. I felt isolated in so many ways […] I think in many of this stuff that it made me to realize that my personal situation with my
family in all of this that put me in a very huge crisis, personal crisis and then I was not happy. I felt like I was not happy in that school and work too.

After 10 years. It just happened that year that I’d be counting years and one of my philosophies was not a teacher should be more than 10 years in one school or they should change in different places. One day I decided. It was just out of the blue. Even the transfer period had passed for a week and then silently I heard a voice say, “[Noemí], you need to get out of here.” I went and I transferred myself. I went to do the process. You had to go through the process, interview again like you are a new teacher. I was lucky and I want to really just teach one grade only because it was hard to do the all three grades. I said, “Now I need to one age, one grade only.” I know this school, they have a self-contained at that time still, kindergarten. They have an ELL kindergarten and at that time they had first too, first and second ELL self-contained and kindergarten.

That was the age I always wanted to teach at the beginning when I wanted to do. There were two ELL self-contained and two general ed. and I had the opportunity to be with the most wonderful team I ever have. These people, they were embracing me if I bring an idea. I didn’t know how to teach kindergarten either because it’s like you move from one place to another, you had to start all over. They helped me about what do I do, when do I intro those markers, do I intro the service? I got all of these questions. We have a team and I feel like I grew up the most as a teacher in there for five years, solid five years. People, they did not discount my ideas or if I have a question and we plan together, math together and the science together, the reading together and with a little difference. When I was teaching ELL, I’d go [more] slowly than the general level. I took my time.
I used a different technique with the kids, but I will ask, “It didn’t go to this lesson, what do you do?” “Come, I’ll show you. I did this and this,” and then I’d go, “That makes sense but maybe I should do this.” I had that support. […] 

[In my previous school] that piece was missing a lot - too to feel like I belong in something. The other piece as a teacher that you should belong to a team of people that support you is crucial. If we have people of color that they don’t have that, I don’t think it … we’re setting that for failure really and I believe that strongly in that part. In [the new school], in general the teachers were very supportive and welcoming. There were more kids of color and it was more of about 60 or 70% were kids of color in that. Maybe that changed a little bit the mentality of the teachers in there that they were in some way forced to serve the families and they really were making effort to. One of the things I was telling them, families’ involvement is crucial. We need to do a lot of activities. We became involved in a lot of stuff doing for the families. That really helped a lot.

Although Noemí described this new environment as supportive, the racial microaggressions theme is also evident in the following section of her narrative. The navigational themes of building and accessing community, and administrative/organizational support are evident. Additionally, the theme of access/use advocates and allies is evident as Noemí assumed the role of advocate/ally, and helped her colleague navigate racial microaggression. The navigational sub-theme of choosing battles is also evident as they negotiate how to respond. One thing that was so funny because, not everybody says that but one of my assistants who was a Mexican person, he told me, “Am I wrong about this?” I said, “Why?”
“Because I was speaking in the classroom with another person and then some of the teachers started saying please do not speak in Spanish because I think that you are speaking about me and that is rude.”

He was asking me, “What do I need to do?” I said, “I think we need to address that,” because the principal at that school also was a very good principal and she spoke some Spanish. Every time in the meetings, she’ll open up in Spanish. I said, “We need to talk to the principal about it then,” especially if the secretaries were the ones that are doing that. We talked to the principal. We made a plan of education about it. It’s okay. People don’t have to feel defensive about people speaking other language around you. I got more involved in that, built in more in different layers, the leadership team and family engagement and my hands in there, full in there. I felt like there were less [resistance], that teachers were more embracing of more of the diversity in that school specifically.

After being in the supportive school environment for five years, Noemí pursued teaching in a dual language (Spanish/English) program that was being started in her school district. In this next portion of her narrative, she describes how racism impacted her attempts to become a dual language teacher. The themes of gatekeeping and access/use advocates and allies are evident in this portion of her story.

That’s another thing. Now that’s another racism that I can see. I hear that they were moving towards to open up dual language program in [the school district]. At that time, I knew the person who was at that time the lead, the supervisor of the area of ELL. An ELL administrator who was part of the department, she was very great. She told me, “[Noemí], I want to push the bill, the district to do the dual language project.” I said, “My goodness, I want to be there.” Anyways, then she really tried, and I said, “Please tell
them I want to be there. I want to be the teacher.” Suddenly they start doing the dual
language program then and I called the supervisor and I said, “I know that there is a dual
but I assume that I automatically will be considered as the dual language teacher for the
new dual language class because Spanish is my first language.”

Guess what they did. They hired all these White teachers from California to start
teaching in the first batch of the program. Practically it was only they started with two
schools. It’s not that there were so many. By the time I realized, and you know how we
are teachers, we are so busy like oxen with this and by the time we realize, decision had
been made and you never realized that happened unless you are on to them. Wait a
minute. Nobody even picked up a phone and said, “[Noemí], we’re doing it and I know
you work as a teacher and I know you’re Latina,” nobody did it. There was a teacher that
was hired that is my friend […] I gave her so much hard time but just joking because I
know she’s very involved in dealing with racism with White people and all this.

She’s been very involved, and I said, “You know why you got the job, right,” I
said to [her]. And she goes, “I am sorry [Noemí].” “Don’t worry,” I said. And I said,
“But I do know why you get the job before me.” She was the one or the first one to start
working with. I said, “Okay, my time is going to come.” I know. You know me. Forget
it, I never give up. They decided that I was so excited to come and to incorporate two or
three more schools for the dual language program. They came to [my school] and I have
even convinced the other year teacher who was a White person, I said, “You can be my
partner. We can do it.” I was so excited. They come assessing. They didn’t pick [my
school]. But they picked [the school I ended up at] plus the other school. I don’t even
remember what [other schools]. There are two more. I said to myself and then I had
realized how old was I and I said, “Wait a minute […] I’m very close to retirement. I always wanted to teach dual language program and that will be a good thing for me. I moved from [the previous school] but not because I wanted to leave. But I said I want to be a teacher of dual language program.

By the way, I find out that the secretary of the ELL was one… She was my student and she came in third grade and now she’s in the reception office or whatever in the ELL department…. I called [her]. I said, “I know that this is happening. The last time I lost the opportunity because nobody even picked up the phone and tell me when I do have to apply or not. You are going to be the one making sure to tell me when and how and what to do because I need to apply.” […] A week after she called and sent me an email, “[Noemi], this is the time. You need to apply. You need to do this.”

[…] Thanks God I’ve been in the district. One teacher that I knew, and she knew me, and I think that she did advocate for me too for [the dual language program] when they were saying, “Yeah, [Noemi] needs to come.” I packed my things third time and I went to [the school where I teach now].

Rose's Story

Rose presented the outlier experience in relation to the other study participants. She described not having specific experiences with racism in her journey to being an experienced classroom teacher. She did describe why/how she may have been shielded from those possible experiences.

It could also be because I grew up in [a different country] and in [my home country] everyone in power was Black. Yes, there was the light color, dark color thing, but we're
still Black. And so yes, we were slaves, but we were slaves who fought our oppressors and kicked them out and killed them.

When I came to this country I had much less the burden, of this historical burden, that I think I would have carried if I'd lived in this country, [...] and from the time I was an infant I was being bombarded by all these instances of institutional and racism in every aspect of my life and even in the TV.

We had no TV. I mean, my first TV was when I was nine years old. We only went to the movies and when we went to the movies, we only went to see karate, Chinese karate movie, so it's not as if like ... So, the model that we saw was Chinese people. Chinese people, you know? We didn't have, maybe we had Chinese people. I don't remember. I know that when I went to Brussels and I heard a Chinese person speak French, that was the weirdest thing.

I think these 14 years having been in [my home country], where there was no, there's a shadow of racism and a burden that we carry as a result of that, because it colors the filters that we use for us to understand the world and to interact with each other. I've acquired those filters now because I live in this country. And I see this whole institutional racism where how you see that as a country, being White is a better thing than being Black. With this country, the life of a Brown child is not as important as the life of a White child. As a country, we allow Black people to kill each other, to suffer, to do all these things. But if they were White people, the government would have stepped in and done a lot of things to stop that from happening.
...All the bad things that are happening to Black people are being allowed only because we're Black. And if there were a lot of White people affected by it more would have been done to protect them and to sort of like make sure that it didn't happen again. Additionally, Rose chose to become a teacher after spending a year in a successful career as a lawyer. She enrolled in a Washington State University and was a student teacher at the school where she continues to teach. In the following portion of her narrative, the themes of administrative/organizational support, building and accessing community, and access/use advocates and allies are evident in Rose’s description of the environment that nurtured and sustained her.

As part of the program I did my student teaching at _________ Elementary. I stayed there and I really loved that school. So, after I graduated ... Actually, I had a job offer at [a different school] but then the new principal that we had [at my student teaching location] told me not to accept the job offer because she wanted to see if she could bring me to [the school as a new teacher] and so I went there.

I think one of the things that made my transition as a teacher generally successful was that I was working upstairs with [a woman] who was my master teacher. Because I did my student teaching here, I was always in a position of seeking help and wanting help. All the staff was very protective of me and all the staff wanted me to be successful and all the staff was working with me. Upstairs when I was on the upper floor, it was just an open concept room so _____, my master teacher, could see exactly what was happening; what I was doing that was good; what I was struggling with; and she was very accepting. She was not judgmental. She did not make me feel inadequate. She just made me feel like the struggles that I was experiencing was just due to the fact that this
was a new thing for me and that I needed for me to, and also, I needed to find my voice. Because I was trying to talk like her when this was not really who I was.

She wanted for me to find my voice and she said, "It's easier for you to have your voice if academically you're prepared, you know what you're going to be, you're very clear in terms of what your expectations are and you need to be consistent when you're interacting with the kids. Her advice was very helpful, and again, she shared the space with me so every day I had her. I had an opportunity also for me to go ahead and invite other teachers during their planning time for them to come in and observe me. To tell me what's going on; what am I doing wrong; what's working; what should I be doing; what should I be thinking. Having all of that support around me, and I think it is because the staff felt that I was there, right? They were invested in me being successful because they had worked for me from the time I was like a pre-teacher, to a novice teacher. They were committed to making me be successful and they were willing to give me their time, their resources and experience for me to go ahead and manage to do that.

That, I think, helped and also helped that the principal who hired me was _______ _______. She was a Black principal and she believed in me. One thing that happened is that one of the parents in my class that first year; she was teacher herself and a Black woman. She taught third grade in _____ school district. Or the _____ school district. I don't remember what. She came in and she actually asked to meet with the principal. And said she wanted to have her daughter removed from my classroom because I didn't have the mastery skills which you manage to get. I told her at least if it was my child, I'd want my child out of that classroom too because I know that I'm not good. I mean, I completely agreed with her. I would not have wanted my son to be in that class. That's
what happened as a first-year teacher. It’s that as you’re struggling there is a little bit of a learning loss that happens with the class because the new teacher does not have the experience and the set of tools that they need for them to successfully teach and manage a classroom at the same time. She asked to meet with the principal and the principal believed in me when I didn’t believe in myself. She said, “No.” She said that, “[Rose] has potential of being a great teacher. She is open for to receive criticism. She responds to it. She changes her behavior because of that. She never allows her ego to come in the way. She makes no excuses. She recognizes that she has things that she needs to work on,” and that she believed in me. And moreover, if she allowed that child to be taken out of my classroom, what does it mean for the other 26 other kids? She has an obligation to protect them but if she takes 20 out of my classroom it means that she's saying that I'm not good enough. And if I'm not good enough with [one child], then I should not be good enough for any of the other children, and she said, “No.”

The mother said that she was going to take her child out of my classroom. That mother, her mother, so [the child’s] grandmother, also was a teacher. She went to her daughter and she said, "You know, instead of like taking [my granddaughter] out of the classroom, instead of like being mad at Rose, what if you invite her to come to your classroom and teach her what you know so she can be a good teacher not only for your child but for everyone else." That's what happened.

Our principal gave me a day off for me to go, and a sub, to go to the mother’s classroom for me to go ahead and observe her. She taught me just so much. She taught me while it was good to see a Black teacher, teaching primarily… By the way, most of her kids were White kids.
My class had two White kids and one of them was special ed, and the other one was struggling with some emotional issues. It empowered me to see this beautiful Black woman, incredibly successful, gifted teacher just doing this masterful job teaching. Then during lunchtime, she talked to me. She answered all my questions. She stayed after school to talk to me. She gave me some assistance that I could implement in my classroom immediately. She gave me a chance for me to sort of like, she modeled for me some of the problems that she had noticed in my classroom when she came. Like in terms of how I could react to that. I came back the next day able to put into place systems that I still use right now. She came back to visit me again. Really, she came back a few months later and she was really impressed to see how well I had integrated a lot of the things that she had taught me and how better managed my classroom was, which meant that then the kids can learn more.

The theme of building and accessing community continued to be evident in Rose’s descriptions of experiences with her students and their parents. She describes her process and purpose of building and accessing community with students and families.

Well families… what I’ve known is that a Black mother or father don't automatically feel that a White teacher would love their children as much as a Black teacher. The reason that I think that it's so important for Black teachers to be in Black schools is it makes parents feel more secure. Parents tend to think that a Black teacher will take care of their children and will love their children much more than a White [teacher].

I'm happy that I make parents feel that way. That I make them feel safe. That I make them feel that their child is going to be loved when they come to the classroom. And that their child is going to be treated fairly, and that racism is not going to be a factor
in the way that I interact with their kids. And I'm not going to treat their kids badly because they are Black as compared to a White child.

To not have that burden hanging over their shoulders as parents, to not have that worry as they're working themselves and they entrust the kids to our care, must be a good feeling. You know? Also, because I'm a black person I can say things and the parents are more open and more accepting of what I've said because they don't think that I'm being racist. Because they look at me and they look at their kids. They said this is the same person so if she's saying that then you know ... Because a White person they're more likely, so likely thinking, is that person being racist in the way that they're interacting? It creates one less barrier, one less impediment, for a black child to have a black teacher in the way that we interact with the parents.

Again, as I said, I am always… whenever parents come to my classroom… so we know when we have the multicultural night in October, my primary purpose, my primary focus when I interact with the parents, is to let the parents know that their children will be loved and will be taken care of while they are with me. So that they will… they don't have to worry. “So, is my child going to be okay?” because I will know their child as individual and love them as such. And I will not let them fall through the cracks and I will not allow for them to fail. And I will push them, and I will nurture them. And I will be their mother while they're with me.

When I talk to families, that's what they get when they leave me. Yes, they find out about the academic, about the projects that we're going to be working on, about what we're going to be doing in the different subjects, but the primary things that they are left with is that feeling that wow, Ms. [Rose] loves my child.
I routinely call. I will tell my kids, “Wow, you look like you're going to need a phone call home. You've been doing some amazing thinking right now. I'm going to have to call your mother so we can discuss it all. Whatever she's feeding you, she needs to keep feeding it to you.” So, the parents know also that when I call it's not necessarily because there's a problem. It's just that I'm calling to just let them know, “Wow, thank you for the great job that you're doing with your child because this is what I'm seeing and thank you.”

Whenever there's a negative call I always try to find an opportunity within the next week or so to call the family to let them know, "Thank you so much for your help. It helped because the problem that we had is not happening again. The homework is coming back. Thank you so much for taking ..." I always assume and tell the parents that we are in this journey together. If the kids know that their parents and I are working together then we don't have to worry about like them wasting time trying to sort of like get the parents to be mad at the teacher, like try to, because it's not going to work.

Because it's like the whole village raising the child. I cannot do my job without the parents so I'm always thanking the parents for sending me kids who are ready for them to learn. I rely on them so whenever there's a problem I said, "You know, blank and blank is usually such a focused child in all these things. Today this is what I'm seeing. Did something happen at home that I need to be aware of?" Sometimes they will say yes, somebody's sick or their grandmother just died all this excess. And then they will say, “Oh.” You know, sometimes they'll say the father just went to jail or something like that. So, I said, "Oh, thank you. Thanks for telling me. Now I know where they're coming from. I can give them more love. I can give them more support."
Rose also emphasized the importance of a supportive teaching and learning community in the following section of her narrative. The themes of building and accessing community, access/use advocates and allies, and administrative/organizational support are evident here as key navigational strategies.

I think that the journey, for a teacher to successfully travel through the path of being a teacher for 10 years in the same, especially in the same school, it's crucial that they feel supported. It's crucial that they feel that they have a support net. It's crucial that they know that they have people that they can go to who are going to help them. It's crucial that they have people in power who believe in them and tell them that they believe in them. And stand by them and support them.

I think that support can come from anywhere. But that again, my experience of having gone to [my student’s mother’s] class and seeing a Black teacher who looked like me teaching and being successful. And knowing that she's there for me and that despite whatever her personal feeling is, because she started out just not wanting her daughter in my classroom because she didn't think that I had the skills yet for me to teach her child. She didn't want the child to lose a whole year, especially in third grade.

All these things made me stronger. And because they made me stronger, then whatever challenge may have come along the way, I was able to overcome those because I knew that a whole bunch of people had my back and that I was not alone. If someone feels that, I think they will be successful. I think that they will stay in their field. I think also that they will become better and better every year.

Tháng’s Story
Tháng taught in his home country before immigrating to the United States and learning English as an adult. He received college scholarships and fellowships geared toward “minorities” in STEM (Science, technology, engineering and math). He describes how he, as an adult immigrant, attempted to avoid “racism.”

When I was back in [another state] ... I don't really perceive a lot about racism. It's probably in [that state] especially around ... It's not in the center of the city but I'm living in the next city.... I spend a lot of time I go to the library to study and not really have a lot of socializing life. I didn't want to go to school and see a lot of racism happening. The only thing I see even ... Actually, the competitive happening a lot in my own group. So, between the [Southeast Asian] people. They compete with each other. They try to look at each other and say, “Hey this guy, better than me” kind of stuff. I feel that way actually in [that city]. But not really about racism.

And on one occasion we did a talk about that in class. In one of the classes. And one I took with University of _________. And the kid bring up about, the student, about racism. And then I remember I ... Actually, even my voice, I said you know, probably because I don't ... the way I get out of racism is not paying attention to that. And I just focus on my learning and to make myself better. That's why, I don't look around. So, I don't perceive racism as a student in the classroom because other students in the classroom perceive racism around ... And then I remember that many agree with me on that.

Tháng began his teacher preparation through an “alternative pathway to teaching” (APT) program that recruited and trained potential ToC to work in inner city underserved schools. As Tháng describes his entry into teaching and his first teaching experiences in the US, the themes
of gatekeeping, and building and accessing community are evident. Also, the theme of self-directed professional development is evident in Tháng’s decision to leave the APT program. His narrative also illustrates how his limited experience and understanding of racism may have impacted how he viewed and interacted with students.

Project [Alternative] is the one that's not …the program that take the student's major in math or something directly to their school to teach. Because at that time they really need teachers, especially math teachers. They don't have enough. So, they created the program in between the master degree and the credential. The project, it is like a kind of credential. But they go and get you in the school and you register for that, then you follow the [alternative] program at the weekend. And they give you the perfect credential to teach math.

But I followed that, and at the end I realized that it's not that good. If I apply to the master program doing credential, I apply to …after UC _______, and then getting applied math degree, a bachelor degree. So, I spent like one year on Project [Alternative] and after that I quit. And then applied to University of ________ to do teaching credential at the same time with a master degree. I got a master’s degree, not on education but on like a teaching language and a second language. And at the same time, I got a teaching credential too. So, they like give you two degrees at the same time.

Yeah. So then now you know I become a teacher. And then…Oh, I start off with …Oh, I should mention that. I start out with the school [in an infamous inner city area]. It's called ________ High School. An area where totally like 80% more African American. […] So, but I ... My first year teaching without credential because I am on
the Project [Alternative] so you can teach, but you have to teach those ones who need you. Like in [the infamous inner city area].

So, the school is ________. And this school is ... was totally like a cultural shock to me because of like a Black kid there they don't really learn. But at that time ... I have to say like my English is not really perfect. So, you're limited to make good communication. So, that's why the first year it totally like bad to me, and I got fired from teaching there after the first year. So, I got fired from [the district], I mean _________ High School of [the inner city] school district. But actually, that school they don't even have a teacher enough. There's some teacher coming even directly from Philippines or some other country.

So, I don't know whether you know the situation. Its community is really, really bad. A poor, insecure community. And the school left really bad impression. Like the majority is a black kid and then ... At the end of the school year, two kids got shot right in front of the school. So, you know the situation. If you know [the infamous inner city area] you probably...a lot of people know about that. [That City area] is really bad, and then ________ [High School] is the one of the worst one. You have to start teaching from there as a minority teacher. I don't think there's a better school that would more want to accept me.

So, then I ended up teaching at another school which is [#2] High School. The majority Hispanic, Mexican, and Vietnamese mixed kids. And White students low too. That school is, I feel that I can like ... How do you say it? I feel like the school. The teachers there teach me, I mean treat me ... No. In general, I have to say that those administrators in [that state] or the teachers in [that state], they treat me really well. I
think they treat me really fair and then they help me. Even though I got fired they still be a reference for me [...]. They write something good about me so I can find a job in another place.

In the school I [taught] in before I came here, it's a really, really ... You know that denomination is not that good. Those are still minority. And then in this school I'm teaching there's two policemen there at all time. They call them resource … We still have two of them in my school. That mean the school is not that good. But I feel that the students are still not that good. I'm teaching a normal class, so some of the students still don't learn. But there's some still learning. But I still feel the full support from that school. Like for example they put me on a class that like portable, and then the whiteboard doesn't have it. Then my department chair, he really come in and fix the whiteboard. And I’m still new teacher.

Some students do not like me. They could go to the image center and talk about the ... One day for example, I showed a movie, but I'm not supposed to. At the end of the semester for example. Or they can say they don't understand me. And then the administrator still call me. But she actually a minority too. She's probably a Mexican. Ms. ___, I remember. But she's the one who taught math before in that school. So, she supports me. She says something really very supportive. She doesn't call me up there in order to find fault with me, or say, “Why you do that?” She just says I'm glad you don't show movie anymore. I'm glad that you don't show R rated movie. Which is [just don’t do so anymore].

And she even say, “Mr. [Thằng],” … I think the things that she told me she was not supposed to say. She said sometimes, “Mr. [Thằng], you have a kid that don't learn.
Then please focus on the kids who are on the border line. Help them first. Because there's some kids they just disrupt the class. You can’t teach them anymore. So, I don't tell you to give up, but focus on the kids on the borderline first.” So, I feel that, you know? They really support me by just asking me about a situation first, give me the benefit of the doubt, not taking the student's word. Even though I understand that. Right now, I'm doing reflection. Couple years of teaching, new school, the students don't understand me. I'm not gonna be that good compared to me myself [now]. But they still really support me.

Tháng taught in the first state for two years before he moved to Washington state pursuing personal opportunities. He encountered a different racial dynamic when he moved to Washington:

So, but the thing getting really different when I come to Washington state ... So, some of the ... The denomination change there's more White people in here. Not a lot of Asian people. The minorities look like a smaller amount comparing to [my previous state].

After successfully going through the process of being credentialed to teach high school math and computer science, Tháng was hired to teach in a high school that predominantly served students of color. One of the first classes he was assigned included a group of 26 students, 17 of whom had previously failed three or more math classes. As Tháng describes his experiences and perceptions of racism in this portion of his story, the theme of gatekeeping, is evident. The navigational strategy of access/use advocates and allies is also evident in his descriptions of relationships within the school community that sustained him in continued classroom teaching.

And then when I come here, there's another thing I should tell you. They put me in one of the class. And I found out it’s 17 kids [in one] period learning algebra one. […] 16-17
kids. Having 3 of 4 E/failed classes, learning algebra one. Can't teach them. Then they put another minority teacher, he's Chinese, he doesn't really speak English very well and support me in my class, to take care of those special-ed kids. Man, this is nightmare. Seventeen kids have a 3 of 4 E in a classroom of about 26 kids [in one] period.

[I checked their records] because I want to know why I can't teach this kid. Why they keep talking. And I look at that and when I bring it up to the administrator or the counselor, they shut me down. They say you talking bad about student because of the reason that I'm asking why I have that. I cannot teach. And then I talk to my department chair which is […], African American. He tried to help me a lot, but he said he couldn't do anything about it. But he knows, he could feel me.

There was another department chair before that. He's a good guy. […] But he just ... I only worked with him one year. The first year, and then he left. He retired. […] He is the one that I feel support because he always tell me the truth and then accept that. Then my friend ____ this year he die already. I can talk whatever I want to him. He's the African American. I can talk to him about this and that and this and there's no hiding things. Racial, whatever. About the administrator, he only give me the right thing to do. He doesn't fake, that's all. But he died.

The gatekeeping theme continued to be evident as Thằng’s narrative continued, and he described White teachers being given preferential assignments in honors level classes. Access/use advocates and allies also continued to be an evident navigational theme, as his perceptions of racism were confirmed by colleagues of color. The theme of administrative/organizational support is also evident in how Thằng describes the impact of not having that support.
And the reason I know that there's some unfairness from the school is because of we talking. I don't keep my own opinion as a minority. I always discuss with other minorities ... And even some many White teachers and different teachers, and we try to give opinions and perceive the same thing. They treat teachers as a minority, it's not that fair because ... One example is, one of the [White] teachers one year, they wanted to keep her. She was a first year. She teaches the same class ... You know, a not good kid like I teach. But she has ... Not only her in the classroom. They assigned another teacher in the classroom and that teacher is a really experienced teacher. He's a graduate from [a well-known university] and he's like 50 years old. He teaches alongside her for the first year. And beside that, there's another one, really experienced TA in there. So that's why she survived the first year in there. And then after that they should give her a not so bad class. And right now, when the new teacher come in and they White, my department talking to each other and talking to them, I know that. They mention that they don't want to give them the kids like the ones that I have.

[...]... I talk to [a colleague] which is another African American retired teacher. She's still teaching here. So, she perceives the same thing to me. She never gets any honor [classes]. Right now, she teaching geometry because she is a retired teacher. So, she's still teaching sometimes, and she told me that she can't even handle her fifth and sixth period class right now of geometry. [...] That's what I don't like. And, I talked with [the same colleague], the African American teacher, she perceives that way too. They [administrators] never assign the honor or the good kid to most of minority teacher, if not all. But right now, they assign to them [new White teachers] because they say that if they assign other kid, those teachers may be quitting. But they don't care about me quitting.
They don't care about ... I spend time with, I was teaching here like almost 10 years. Teaching those kids every single day. My blood pressure's going up or something.

But right now, that happen. There’s the guy, White guy, he came here last year. He is White and he's a teacher, so they hire him. And then they give him three honors [classes], that’s it. Now he's teaching honor and he's not even majored in computer science. I have a minor in computer science. He majored in math and minored in physics. They still give him computer science class. So now he's teaching three honors [...] and two computer science. So, they give him all of the [best] class. And then we talk to each other. That's another minority and there's an African minority and that's not happened to any of us. So those ... If he [the White teacher] was assigned those geometry or something he could get into a hard time.

But the thing is, I don't understand. Like you're a new teacher. I don't care who you are or whatever. Just like me or myself and the majority of the teachers. They only give us the low-level class. The one not challenging [behaviors is] for all of the new [White] teachers, that's how I see that. Not only this school, maybe another school too, only assign that. But the difference is they don't think. So, when you do the difficulty, they know that. They accept that. Your class is difficult, and they try to help you hang in there. That's what they want.

An additional strategy Thắng used to navigate the gatekeeping and lack of administrative/organizational support he perceived, was to build and access community. He describes how he used humor and popular social culture to build community with his students, including those who he perceived as challenging. Some students registered complaints about Thắng’s humor, which he perceived as being related to racism. The theme of racial
microaggressions is evident in his description of the complaints. The navigational theme of building and accessing community and sub-theme of focusing on students are evident as Thạng described how he connected with his students and solicited student feedback for validation of his perspective.

Let's say about Black student. The majority, most of them, not saying like 100%, like 98% or more, when they see me, I taught to them before, they still fist bump with me and understand me. And some kids who are rude when I am teaching them, they come back and they visit me. I feel that is encouraging. And when I talk to them, when I see them outside, I have the way of ... I try to get a sense of humor. Sometimes a sense of humor, the kid laughs so that they can learn. So that way they like me. […] I get] like a lot of cards saying that you funny kind of stuff.

And then I use a joke. A political joke. Like to three White kids. I say, “Hey.” I kind of mention like, “your Uncle Trump,” “You call Trump ‘Uncle Trump,’”” It's a kind of joke. But those kids they understand my joke. They don't have any problem. There's some bad kids. They use that thing and say that I'm racist. And then I really go to those White kids and talk to them and say, “Hey this is my joke. Do you think that my joke is ...?” “Yes, you make a joke, I understand that.” And even the White kids say, “I support you Mr. Thằng. Those kids need to grow up to understand your joke.”

[…] But the thing is, about racism here, we don't want to avoid it. We should talk about it. Like I’m able to make a joke with my White kid. And they understand me. Like for an example like using an idea from the movie White Charlie and the Bag of Chocolate, they laugh at me. You can even mention it in a very comfortable level because they already know that. I have even my [student], for example, my African
American female kid and we know each other and feel comfortable to make a joke. She's sitting there, she said “Mr. [Thằng]...” Actually she is a senior. Sitting on the windowsill on the sunny day. “Mr. [Thằng], I’m gonna get tan.” And I tell her, “Hey, you are not gonna get a tan anymore. You got enough tan. Get off the windowsill now! It's old now, you're gonna fall down.” And she laughs at me. Now she still texts me. I'm teacher, not text me, but she still can contact me. One other student has her Snap chat or something. I say hi and she still say, “Hi.” And they put the love logo. A lot of them. That level, you bring it up like that, they don't feel the border. You can make jokes with them.

Every single race has nice things to say. You joke about the good thing. But even though we talk about ourselves and bad things too and joking about myself too. And joking to my kid saying like ... There's a joke like, “What do you need to blindfold an Asian kid?” You know what they need? They need only the dental floss. You know why? Because they make fun of those Asians with the small eyes, or something. But when you bring it up, they know it is a joke. I joke about myself, not about other kids.

[…] You connect, and you make them laugh, you know? So that's the thing that keeps me. I can feel that. As a minority, I was not born here but I can understand those kinds of jokes probably because I watch... you know... I go and look and watch the movie and read something and try to... Because I learned that, if you teach... I have a teenager student and kid too. So, if you teach the kids as your teenager, you need to know what they think, what they're interested in. They're interested in Snapchat or probably Beyoncé. You should know that stuff and go talk to them. So that's why it really good rapport with kids. Because I try. You know what I mean? I even look up
the ... Like this week there's some Billboard song. Then I talk about it. I still tell them
the rap... the lyric is not that good. Like YG kind of stuff, the lyric is so bad.

I try to get into the culture, that's why. You know? And then also sometimes I
use the slang of the kids use. Oh, “you're gassing me,” you know? They laugh at you. At
the same time, you still have to create the distance because you want them to do work.
You don't want to just keep talking about it the whole time.

So that's the way, you know. But it's still ... Now, after all the years of teaching, I
perceive that racial is a big issue. It's not like what I think when I first came any more.
And it happens in different forms. It could be in the form of hurting people, fighting
people kind of stuff, or like favoritism. It happens. But to me I choose that, I'm not hold a
grudge on that. It's just do my best and then try to treat my students as fairly as I can,
that's all. Or like more sensitive, look at the kid and try to understand their own situation,
you know. Their religions, something, you know. Then just respect them. And then just
say sorry when I misunderstand, that's all.

Theresa’s Story

Theresa began her teaching career at the preschool level. She describes how her
preschool program being terminated lead to her subsequent decision to pursue elementary school
teaching. The theme of gatekeeping is evident in this portion of her story, as she describes the
termination of her preschool program.

I've always been in education, but it was always in preschool. Then I went into business,
and then I thought this is not for me. I decided to go back into education. When I went
into education, it was in the preschool level, teaching students of color that
predominantly did not have a ... They didn't have a preschool background. It was the
program that was started by African American women for their children and they wanted them to be prepared for kindergarten. So, that's the program that I went into initially.

They discontinued that program. It's interesting that they discontinued that program because it was benefiting students of color that was created by parents of color, African Americans. They were told that, really, it's not a program that is suitable for children this age, because by the time they got into kindergarten, they were already reading. They knew how to carry on a conversation. They knew how to write, and it was just a two-and-a-half-hour program. It was a program that had a morning and an afternoon.

Somehow, they figured out how they could cut that program through the school district and just have Head Start. The students that it hurt the most, of course, were African American students or kids of color. There were a lot of Asian kids in that program that were from Southeast Asia.

I found myself going into education as an assistant in the classroom. What I found was I ended up doing some of the same things as the teacher [who was Caucasian] and having to do the discipline. I thought I might as well get my degree in teaching and have some sense of control over what's going on in my classroom.

That's how I started, and the principal, who happened to be Asian at the time, really encouraged me to go back to school. I had to go back for a short period of time. She said, “We need people of color, and you are really good at what you do. So, you need to go back to school.” I did that.

As Theresa continued to describe her journey into K-12 teaching, the theme of *questioning competence and competency* is evident in this portion of her narrative. The
navigational themes of *administrative/organizational support, self-directed professional development,* and *building and accessing community* are evident in following portion of her narrative. Theresa describes questioning her principal’s confidence in her qualifications to teach “gifted” students and was questioned by White parents.

I worked at the same school that I was an assistant in. When I received my teaching credential, the same principal said, “You're going to teach [Accelerated Learning (AL)],” which is the gifted program. I said, “I'm just getting my feet wet. I really don't want to do that. I need to understand more.” And she said, “Well the other teacher doesn't want to teach it because she doesn't want to have to put up with the parents that are [raising] these gifted kids. Essentially you're going to be it.” Then she said, “And besides there's not many people of color teaching gifted, so this is your opportunity.” I said, “Okay.” I really didn't feel like I had a choice of saying okay or not saying okay. But in the public school, if your kid's in gifted, it's usually that they were White kids, with a few African American kids. Though, this program, the preschool program that I had mentioned earlier, they had some of the kids go into [AL] because they were prepared and were really ahead of the other kids. So, they would entered into the [AL] program.

Predominantly it was White. So, when you enter into that arena, you have to face the parents of these Caucasian kids wondering, “What are your qualifications, and how are you qualified to teach this?” I found myself constantly trying to figure out what kind of training was available through the district so that I could take the training and get some support that way, which there was some help. But I was still having to reassure, not the kids of color, but just those White parents. I knew what I was doing even though it was
my first year. And they knew that I had some support, so I was qualified to teach the students.

There wasn't any real qualification. You didn't have to have any kind of endorsement or anything like that. You just had to be willing to do that and then go through some training.

So that's what I did. I had the support of African Americans and Asian parents. I don't really recall just how many White kids there were, but it seemed like I had an awful lot of Black kids in my class, too. There were kids, of course because it wasn't a full classroom, that you had kids in there that weren't [AL] tested. So then you had to deal with the parents that were concerned about the kids that were not [AL] tested and how they were in that classroom, and how I was going to make sure the needs of the [AL] students were met. It wasn't so much concern about all the students, but just [Gifted Program] students, their needs being met.

I just felt like I had to prove over and over and over again that I knew what I was doing. It was a first-grade classroom, so it was similar to what I'd taught in preschool and things like that. So, I felt really comfortable. I just wasn't accustomed to being questioned to the same degree as to, “What are you doing? My child is really smart. What are you going to do to challenge them?” That was kind of uncomfortable for me, and I think what helped was having other parents of color that were in the room that had kids that were in [AL] as well and just feeling the support of that.

Then eventually those White parents began to come around, so I felt like there was a relationship building. And it always seemed to be that there was a relationship
building with White parents and their children, not so much with parents of color. It was like there was already that connection [with the parents and children of color].

As Theresa describes her perceptions of racism that she experienced as a teacher of color in the AL program, the themes of racial microaggressions, and questioning competence and competency are evident. The navigational themes of administrative/organizational support and building and accessing community are evident in her descriptions of how she navigated that perceived racism. Additionally, Theresa describes the hyper-vigilance she felt when being observed by White prospective parents.

I taught first grade and then second grade in [AL]. The first probably eight or nine years, I taught [AL], and as I moved, I moved from second grade to fourth grade, which is what I'm currently teaching now (But it's not AL. It's just gen ed). I found that parents would come and go. New parents would come to the school. There was a big push for the [AL] program in our school. They would have school tours, and the majority of the parents coming in were White parents because the demographics of the school was changing. There would be nothing to see anywhere between 15 to 20 parents coming just to look at what was going on in the school. They definitely wanted to see the [AL] classrooms and what that looked like. They wanted to hang behind and talk. They might want to set up an appointment to talk with me later.

Because they're considering coming to this school, their child might not even be coming in fourth grade. It was like they were coming in kindergarten, but they wanted to know who are the teachers who will be teaching my child in this gifted program. It was nothing for them to say they just wanted to have a conversation with me. Sometimes they would send somebody in to observe me, and they would come in and say, “Yeah,
I'm here for such and such and such and such. I just want to see how you are doing.” “I heard some really great things about your teaching style,” and stuff like that. Not necessarily knowing that they were coming or not, but they wanted to come in and sit in the classroom and see what was going on.

Every single time a big group of parents would come in, or somebody would come in and say I just want to observe you, I'd always be nervous because I'd always be wondering, “Okay, so what are they really looking for? What are they really expecting? Am I not saying things correctly to their satisfaction? What is their ulterior motive?” I have one parent to come in and she watched me all day for two or three days, and her son was not in the school. She had home schooled him, and she wanted to know... and he had said, “I don't want to be home schooled anymore.” And so, she had to come and observe me, and bring him and allow him to sit in the classroom just for her own comfort level. Just to make sure this was a good spot for him.

I felt like I was on display, that I had to perform instead of just teach. I was always wondering, what is the purpose of what I'm doing? Is it to prove that I'm capable and able to teach their children, or am I just ...? What is it? There was always the question in the back of my mind. What are they really looking for?

Eventually, the students that were in my classroom that were Caucasian I had developed a great relationship with their parents. And sometimes they would admit that they were a little nervous because their child had never had a teacher that was any other color but them, or it would be their first opportunity or something like that. Some of them admitted that they were nervous about it, but they felt really good about having gotten to know me and felt like it was a rich, rewarding experience for their child. I was
like okay, so this is an enrichment thing for your child, you know. I don't know. There's lots of things that go through my head at the time.

In order to navigate her experiences related to the theme of *questioning competence and competency*, the self-directed professional development navigational theme is evident as Theresa described choosing to attend training opportunities to ensure her competency as a teacher in the AL program. In the following portion of her story (which occurred during her third or fourth year of teaching), the themes of *racial microaggressions* and *gatekeeping* are evident in her experience attending a meeting to choose students for entry into the AL program.

So I continued to just try to make sure that I was trained (go to the trainings, whatever was offered) and be a part of that whole [AL] - how you decided, if they [the students] tested into [AL]; or they were really close, but they didn't quite make the score. I was curious about that. I mentioned that to my principal, and she said, “Oh there's a meeting they have that you can go to, to see how they make the determination when kids are really close, how do they make the cut.” I thought yeah, I want to go to that. It was really interesting.

It was some teachers in a room in the district office, and they would look at the test scores. Sometimes it came down to whether or not this was a student that they knew, a child that they knew that might've been in a school. And yeah, their parents are really supportive, and they are part of the PTA. It was really an eye-opening experience for me.

It was my first time. I think I only did it once. But I didn't have that same sense of entitlement as they [the other people in the room] felt like they had, that they could just make these decisions cavalierly. I'm trying to look at the data and say this student based on what they've shown makes sense that they should be able to enter the program. But
there were kids that were close, and they still didn't make the cut. Sometimes you could tell - African American - depending on what school it was. They were trying to get somebody else in the school. The decisions were pretty arbitrary, how they did that.

[The people in the meeting] were all educators. They were all teachers. They were from various schools. [...] They were all White, and I was the only person of color. I kind of stood out. They didn't have a whole lot of conversation with me. I just had to state what I thought, and then they went on. And sometimes, I could push back a little bit, and it would just depend on where the school was, what the school was. Then they would just make a quick decision, and it didn't necessarily have anything to do with my opinion.

After a while, I just thought this was a waste of my time. I don't want to do this again. Maybe I should have went back and tried several more times, but I didn't think that was a good use of my time, so I didn't do it. I only did it one time. I did tell my principal that I didn't want to go back, that it felt staged. And I didn't feel like I had a voice unless the makeup of the people would change so that there would be more people of color on there. But yeah. I didn't go back. They may have changed it with more people of color, but I couldn't do that.

The last statements above are evidence of the sub-theme *choosing battles*, as Theresa decided to disengage with the process.

In the next portion of her story, Theresa describes how her experiences with racism intensified when she moved from teaching the lower grades, to teaching fourth grade AL. The theme of *racial microaggressions* and *questioning competence and competency* are evident.
The thing that I really remember where things really changed for me is when I went to fourth grade, and there were a lot more White kids that were in [AL], and the majority of my class for the last probably three or four years were largely White, and they were kids whose parents had affluent positions. Their behavior was a lot different. They acted entitled. Their parents treated them that way. The challenges that I faced as far as their behavior towards me and their sense of I can do whatever it is I want or say whatever it is that I want because I'm smart.

This is the children. The children would question me. They would try to correct me on things. They would challenge me on what I was teaching them. They'd say, “Oh, I already know this,” and “Why do I have to do this if I already know it?” Then the parents would come in and say, “Yeah, they're saying that they're not really challenged and wondering if they could do something else, and could you give them more project-oriented things so that they can work kind of independently?”

For me, that was like code, you're not teaching my child. I want to be able to have more control over what they're doing so that I can control what grades they're getting. What I saw is that you can tell the difference between a child's work and a parent's work, and there was a lot of parent work going on in their children's… the things that they would turn in. It was difficult for me to just come out and say, “This is not your child's work. Your child is in this room every day, and I know this was not produced by them.”

I felt like no, I needed to keep more control in the classroom. And I could send things home, little projects that they could work on, but the bulk of it had to be done in class, just so that… I didn't know how to say, “I don't want to disrespect you or anything,
but you're teaching your child dishonest, and you're wanting me to go along with it. What it says to me is that you don't trust me in my ability to teach your child, but you want them there to have the experience of having an African American teacher.”

There were days when I'd be frustrated because they didn't want me talking to them about their child's behavior. Sometimes they'd just say, “Yeah, she's really strict. You just need to suck it up” is what they would say to the kids. Then the kids would come back to the school, and they would say those things. “My parents just said that I should suck it up, that you're pretty strict.” Just having conferences with parents to say, “My class is very structured. I have expectations for student behavior. When they don't meet those behaviors, there's a consequence, there's a conference. I might be calling you so that we can get a clear understanding.” They'd be real nice, and they would listen to that.

Really, they're just saying, “It's your teacher. She's strict.” I'm thinking, “No, your standard of living is much different than what my standard of living is and what my expectation is for your student.” It's okay to tell these little white lies or say, “Oh I forgot” or “Yeah, I remember you saying such and such, but I didn't really think I was going to get in trouble for that.” Or telling other students, “Just suck it up.” I just had a hard time understanding why is it okay? Why can't you just explain to your child that this is the expectation, and even though you may not be in agreement with that personally, that this is where you are. This is the person that you're working with. This is your teacher, and you need to respect that.

I felt like they [the parents] didn't really respect what I was doing, and so the students didn't really either. I should say not all students. But some of them just, they
were going through the motions, going through the process of, “Yeah, this is what you
got to do buddy to get through. You're going to be going on. You need to stay in the [AL]
program. This is the only person that you have to deal with. It's only for a year. Then
you're going to be in the fifth grade,” kind of stuff.

In the following portion of Theresa’s narrative, she describes how she navigated the racial
microaggressions and questioning competence and competency themes presented above. She
includes examples of the administrative/organizational support and gatekeeping themes as both
perceptions of racism and navigational strategies. The following portion of her narrative takes
place after the retirement of the principal who encouraged Theresa to enter K-12 teaching and
supported her through those initial years of teaching.

Well you know, it's interesting. I had a new principal. […] The principal had been
a teacher before, so she was pretty savvy. She knew what teachers went through, and she
was really very supportive of me. We'd had an opportunity to kind of talk, so she was
supportive of me. She always came to bat for me. If there were some really difficult
students in there or difficult parents, she'd always say, “How can I help you? How can I
support you?” She would always support me with the most challenging parents or
students. I just felt as though she knew what was going on without really saying, “Yeah,
you're dealing with a bunch of White parents” and things like that.

But she was the one also who really pushed for these school tours, and she was
the one who was leading the school tours. She knew about who was coming in. She was
supportive of that. She was encouraging that parents come in in a cohort with their kids
in kindergarten. She knew all that. She was there in the beginning.
Actually, when she came, because the other principal was Asian, and she never got that kind of support. Once she stepped in (she was White) the parents felt really comfortable, [and] start talking about taking the school back. And one way for them to do that is to bring in cohorts. And their idea is that we want our child to be in a neighborhood school, but we want them to know somebody before they come in. So, they would start arranging play dates, and they would bring the kids in and be at the school library just so they could get a sense of, “this is going to be your school.” These are predominantly White families bringing their kids in and making themselves known in the building, that this is our plan, this is what we're going to do. They had the support of the administration of course.

They did come in, and I think they started becoming more and more demanding. After a while I just thought I don't want to deal with this anymore. I said to the principal, I'm not going to teach [AL] anymore. I had never taught general education students other than the ones that were sprinkled in my classroom to make up the number of kids that I needed to have. She was okay with that. I switched from teaching [AL] to gen ed.

In the following portion of her narrative, Theresa describes how she perceived racism differently in the general education classroom. The themes of building and accessing community, and administrative/organizational support are evident in her description of the new classroom teaching situation.

The demographics changed totally then because the majority of the kids that I had in there were African American or Asian, and a few Native American kids. I think maybe I had one White child. That kid wasn't [AL] tested. It was almost like culture shock because I didn't have to give answers so much to the parents of general education
students. They [the parents] came in. They were respectful. They honored me as an educator and what I had to offer.

[…] Here's the thing that I really struggled with after going into general education. I struggled with okay, so how do I teach general education students that they're not motivated in the same way that [AL] students are motivated? And they don't have parents necessarily that are motivated to finding out what it is that they're doing or what it is that they need to know? That was the challenge for me.

I felt as though then that there's a lot of pressure to bring kids that may be failing or below grade level up to a level where they're passing. And when you don't do that, I'm being judged again because it takes some time to build student growth. You're dealing with a totally different mindset. My mindset had to change as well because then I have to think about [how] my pace has to be different. My pacing is much slower with general ed kids, and I need to really fully understand what it is that they need in order to provide that. For me, it really became building a relationship with students, not so much with parents, because that's who I was in the classroom with. If I pushed too hard about what they needed to know or what they needed to be doing, then they shut down.

I felt then that the support was different. The support was, ‘Do you have enough books in your room that are on the level that the kids can read? If somebody is really having some difficulties, meaning behaviors, then we need to do a [behavior assessment referral]. What kind of supports can we put in place?’” Really, there was very little support for kids that were either struggling behaviorally. They're either going to be in a ... Is their behavior so severe that they need to be tested so they can go into a [special education behavior] program or something like that? It was just really different.
Then I felt as though there's kind of a separation that I didn't feel before between
students of color that were in general ed and then the [AL] kids that had all their needs
met and more. It just felt like there's more of a separation in the school and the building. I
don't know if that existed before and I just wasn't aware of it because I was in that part of
the building ... I don't know. It felt different. I would hope to think that I made a point of
speaking to all parents, and getting to know parents, and being a part of the PTA and stuff
like that. So, I kind of knew what was going on in other places in the building other than
the [AL] classrooms. But once I was in the general ed classroom, it felt really different.
Theresa remained at this school for 18 years with two different principals, and a school
community of colleagues that she perceived as supportive of her as a teacher of color.

I stayed there because I love that school. I felt like the people that came through that
school, it's either going to be about the kids, or you're going to be gone. It's going to be
about who's in the building, the adults that are in the building, and what the adults are
saying about the kids and what we want for the kids. It was easy to stay there. I loved
that school. I enjoyed working with the people that were there. Everybody has their
difficulties, but I think at the end of the day, it always came down to, we could always
say what's good for the kids? Anybody that didn't think that way, they didn't stay. I
didn't feel like I need to go anywhere. If somebody was unhappy about what was going
on at this particular school, then they could leave.

She chose to leave this school after a new principal was hired following the retirement of her
second principal. Theresa described the new principal’s way of functioning as divisive and
disruptive of the existing school community, evidence of the *administrative/organizational*
support as a perception of racism. She subsequently applied to teach general education at another school in the same district.

The school Theresa transferred to included a larger population of students of color and teachers of color than her previous school. As she describes the environment she transferred into, the themes of build and access community, and administrative/organizational support are evident. In the following portion of her narrative, Theresa includes descriptions of how an apparent lack of administrative/organizational support limited the ability to build and access community in the school environment prior to her first year at the school. Gatekeeping and racial microaggressions themes are also evident in this portion of her narrative. Additionally, this portion of narrative Theresa describes how faculty and staff of color reflect internalized racial inferiority in their distrust of each other.

Yes, my first year. So, it's like, “Oh my goodness, what have I walked into?” If I had known this was going on, I don't think that I would be able to ... I would've stayed where I was. Anyway. It wasn't quite as bad as it could have been because they had a veteran principal in there that had come in to assist the interim principal. She’d retired. She [the veteran principal] was in there helping.

But I could see that they didn't have a lot of processes in place, even for the interim coming in and the people that had already been there. They seemed a little backwards. That was a concern for me because it was like here's all these kids of color in here, got all these adult people of color in here. Their principal was a woman of color, and there's an investigation going on. It's like oh my goodness, this is not good.

But it turns out that every principal that had been in there for the last five years had been assigned there. It wasn't always the best situation. They were just getting the
principal that had been assigned by the district into their building. It wasn't necessarily
the best person to be in a building like that, but they didn't have any choice. The staff
was really bitter. They didn't feel like they could trust administrators. They felt as
though the district had done them a disservice by just keep plopping people in there that
they [the district] were trying to find a place for. When they hired the new principal, they
said they [faculty and staff] wanted to hire a principal. They did not want the district
assigning them. The area managers took that back to the superintendent, and they
[faculty and staff] were able to hire this new principal that's in there now.

Yeah, it just felt as though okay, this is kind of like a throw away school, with
some throw away students, and they’ve been throwing some principals in there. And then
the people, the staff that was there, they didn't trust one another very much. It was so
different.

It's kind of like the downtown administrator, the district offices, it was like we
(faculty and staff) were pitted against each other. They [the other teachers] didn't know
who I was. They didn't feel like I should be able to come in, ask any questions or make
any suggestions, and so it was kind of like that self-hatred kind of thing. It just felt so
strange and sad. And it seemed as though we should be able to know what's going on in
the school, be able to make some good decisions about what students need when a new
administrator comes in. But that wasn't the case.

That's why I said when I felt like, “Oh it's the great White hope [the new principal
was White].” Really, it felt like they had been functioning dysfunctional for a period of
time. It was like the administrator didn't trust people. They [the administrators] were
always making all the decisions. She had a few people that she would allow to do certain
things, but if she didn't like you, then you were on the outs. She had her people that she would work with, and they would get all the goodies or whatever. The supplies, everything was locked up. Everything was locked up. You had to ask everything. You had to ask for pencils. You had to ask for colored paper. [...] It was really strange. This was Black people and people of color doing this to each other. It was like, how did it get like that? How long had this been going on? There was no sense of cohesion.

Theresa chose to return to this school after the experience of her first year. She explains her decision in the following portion of her narrative. The navigational theme of building and accessing community, and subtheme of choosing battles are evident.

And I went back because I felt like this is my opportunity to make a decision and make a change. We were in a staff meeting, and I don't know, when they were talking about getting a principal or something like that. And I don't really remember the context in which the conversation was going. But it was in a staff meeting, and somebody said something about the school, and I said, “Well you know, the culture of the school can change. We are the culture. We make the difference of how this feels.” That person kind of laughed at me. I thought, oh okay. She doesn't really believe that, that we have some control over this.

Then later on, she kind of made a joke about it, repeating my words. But it's like I believe that. When we get a new principal, we can be part of that change. We can be part of that shift, but we have to decide what we want. Do we want it to remain the way it is? Because right now, the way it is, the staff lounge is like stark. There's nothing in there. There's nothing that says come in. It's not inviting. It's like, “Where is stuff?” [She said,] “Oh girl, you can't have stuff in here because people will steal it, they'll take
I'm like, “Oh my gosh, are you serious?” They're like, “Yeah. People steal all the time.” Then they say, “Why do you think everything's all locked up?” I'm like, “I don't know.”

I don't understand that. How do you function when nobody is trusting one another? I don't understand that. Here we are, a school predominantly ... I think there is probably two White kids at our school. I'm like oh my goodness. It was kind of like put these people in here. Let them do whatever it is that they think they need to do, but you guys are failing. Your school is failing. You're in failure mode. I thought we have to make a difference.

My thinking is that here's my opportunity. I can make a change. I can make a difference in the lives of students, and in the lives of the people that I work with. I didn't even consider not coming back because I thought here's a building I haven't been in with a bunch of Black people, and people of color, predominantly ELL students. Oh, heck yeah, I'm staying.

The above portion of Theresa’s narrative also includes the navigational theme of *self-directed professional development*. This theme is evident in Theresa’s description of the experience, knowledge and skills she hoped to share with her colleagues in order to facilitate collective professional development.

In the following section of narrative, the theme of *racial microaggression* is evident in Theresa’s description of an encounter with administrators and administrative policy that she perceived as racist. The navigational theme of *administrative/organizational support* is evident as a developing navigational strategy.
There's a lot of racism around, between the races. We still have the dark kids with the light kids, and that's even in the [African immigrant] community. How do you deal with that and how do we bridge the fact that we've got administrators that are thinking, “We don't want you calling home.” It's like, you cannot tell me not to call home. I'm sorry. If you think that they're going to be abused or something like that because I'm calling home, then they're already being abused. It's not because I'm calling home. There will already be evidence of that. Don't tell me not to call home because I need to communicate with parents. I need to let students know that this is serious enough that I need to call home, and for you to tell me that. I'm sorry, I just have a hard time not doing that.

It's one thing, I like calling home with good news, but there's times I have to call home with bad news. For you to say don't do it, that feeds into that whole notion of “trauma.” We're always being judged by what they [administrators] don't do. I usually say it's still not against the law to whip your kids. It might not be something that you want to do. They [parents] can still do that. They just look at me, and usually, I try to honor them as much as I can - meaning the administration.

I try to honor them as much as I can by saying what I will do. Like I try to be upfront about the things that I will do. If I'm not in agreement with something, I will say that. I've said to them, “I don't have any problems saying if I agree with you or not, and I'm okay if you still don't agree with me, but I believe I have a right and a responsibility to say that.” I think that in itself builds relationships because then you can see if what I'm saying to you is true. Then you can trust the things I do for students or families are things I do because I want to do them, and I think that is in the best interest of their student and the best interest of the school. I won't ever intentionally say one thing and do something
else. I don't believe in that, and I would just ask that you would do the same thing for me.

**Summary of Data**

A diverse group consisting of seven teachers of color provided data for this research study. They each shared stories of how they persisted in becoming experienced classroom teachers, and how they perceived and navigated racism along their teaching journeys. Each participant’s narrative presented unique perspectives with some common overarching themes. Below is a summary of how the perception of racism themes presented in the narratives. The summary is arranged with perception themes described collectively, followed by summary of the themes used to navigate the perceived racism.

**Gatekeeping.** The gatekeeping of access to teaching, students, knowledge and resources was a common theme in participants’ perceptions of racism. Participants shared examples of the racist gatekeeping that they navigated in order to become teachers. Those experiences occurred in Alternative Pathways to Teaching (APT) programs and at the end of pre-service teaching when participants were dependent on mentor teachers’ and principals’ approval or recommendations in order to become qualified to teach in their own classrooms. An additional example was given of a school district’s gatekeeping of school leadership that impeded teachers’ ability to teach effectively. This occurred in a school that predominantly served students of color and had a significant population of teachers of color. A variety of principals were assigned to this school that appeared to have ineffective or insufficient leadership and community building skills.

Examples of racist gatekeeping of teachers of color’s access to groups of students were presented by some participants. These examples included being denied access to teaching
students who participants perceived themselves as qualified to teach based on participants’ own knowledge, skills, training and experience. However, they were denied access in favor of White teachers with the same or less knowledge, skills, training and/or experience.

Study participants’ stories also provided examples of racist gatekeeping of access to knowledge and resources. The descriptions included experiences of not being informed of professional development opportunities that White colleagues (teaching the same content areas) were informed of and attended; not being informed of upcoming or available positions (such as department lead teacher and dual language teacher positions) that White colleagues were given information about, and were hired or promoted into; and participants not being informed of or given access to funds that were specifically for their programs, students and support staff. An additional example of racist gatekeeping presented by a study participant was the gatekeeping of materials (office supplies and equipment) by people of color who had internalized messages of anti-blackness and mistrust of teachers of color.

**Questioning competence and competency.** Most participants described experiences where their capability to teach and/or teaching knowledge and skills were questioned. This questioning was perceived as being related to their racial identities, and originated from others or from participants themselves. It occurred directly or was inferred in descriptions of White parents of students (or the children themselves) in accelerated or advanced learning classes questioning the study participants who taught those classes. Other examples of competence and competency being questioned by others include a White principal denying approval to teach unconditionally to a study participant reportedly because of how the participant spoke English, even though the participant had numerous years of classroom management and planning
experience in the same school; and a White colleague who repeatedly observed and questioned a participant’s teaching and testing strategies without being asked or assigned to do so.

Participants also described experiences of questioning their own competence and competency. Most examples of this self-questioning were in response to or anticipation of interactions with White parents (in conferences or during school tours and visits), being in predominantly White spaces (staff meetings with few or no other people of color, moving to a district with a predominantly White population, and facilitating preparation sessions for National Board Certification with rooms filled with White teachers).

**Racial microaggressions.** Several participants described racial microaggressions that targeted them directly, targeted colleagues, or targeted their students of color in subtle or direct ways. One example of a perceived microaggression is an experience where a White teacher created a flyer for her accelerated learning program, which was populated predominantly by White faculty and students within a school populated predominantly by faculty and students of color. The flyer was apparently perceived as a slight against the faculty and students of color in the school, which highlighted a “racial divide” (Josie, 2017) amongst staff.

Another example is of a White teacher who causally mentioned to two teachers of color (one of whom was Black) that her White husband called himself her “house nigga” (Josie, 2017). The White teacher cried in response to being told how what she said was problematic, by the Black teacher. The crying response was also be perceived as a microaggression.

Other examples of perceptions of racism under the racial microaggressions theme include a White colleague’s uninvited policing of teaching and testing strategies of a teacher of color in a school dominated by White faculty; teachers of color not being invited to professional development opportunities provided to White colleagues, and being told the administrators did
not think they would be interested; witnessing students of color being disciplined more severely than their White peers engaging in the same behaviors; White students challenging and defying their teacher of color because those students perceive themselves as privileged over their teacher; a White parent who admitted to a teacher of color that she was nervous because their White student had only previously had White teachers; and a teacher of color who’s input was ignored when she attend a selection meeting for the AL program where all other participants were White. Additionally, two participants described experiences where the racial microaggressors were people of color – colleagues and students. The theme of racial microaggressions was also evident in some of the experiences included under the gatekeeping and questioning competence and competency themes summarized above.

**Access/use advocates and allies.** Accessing and using advocate and allies was a strategy used by several participants to navigate some perceived experiences of racism. Advocates and allies included a college advisor, mentors, colleagues, and others who may have had more power to act than the participant in a situation. This strategy was used to navigate racist gatekeeping that denied participants access to teaching, students, knowledge and resources. Additionally, as some study participants developed their knowledge and navigational skills through experience, they choose to be advocates and allies for their students of color, support staff of color, and other teachers of color experiencing racism.

**Self-directed professional development.** Strategies under the theme of Self-directed Professional Development were used to navigate racism and persist as classroom teachers of color. The professional development participants engaged in ranged from formal continued education coursework, workshops and training, to self-reflection on the impact of racism on them as teachers and on their students of color. It also included self-directed research on the
resources and opportunities available to participants that they may not have had access to due to racist gatekeeping.

**Building and accessing community.** Building and accessing community was a significant strategy for navigating perceived racism under the themes of racial microaggressions and gatekeeping. All the study participants described experiences of navigating racism that can be grouped under this theme. The parameters of “community” were varied. However, the commonality is that participants had relationships with community members which participants found to be supportive, validating, and safe. All participants included descriptions of communities within their classrooms with students and support staff (if they had support staff). Several classroom communities also extended to students’ parental figures. Communities were built within the school buildings, within departments in schools, and with individuals throughout the school building.

Some participants built and accessed communities that were outside of their school environments. These included connecting with the social justice groups and organizations, and teachers’ unions. Connecting with family members, friends and/or colleagues with experience as educators were also strategies under this thematic category.

**Navigational sub-themes.** There are two navigational sub-themes evident in the narratives presented – *focusing on students* and *choosing battles*. These strategic sub-themes were evident throughout all participant stories. Focusing on students was used to navigate perceived racism under gatekeeping, questioning competence and competency, and racial microaggressions themes. It was also used to assist participants in determining which personal experiences with racism they would address, and how they chose to address them. This included
the determination of what self-directed professional development strategies they engaged in. Additionally, focusing on students was used to avoid personal encounters with racism.

The choosing battles navigational sub-theme was also evidenced throughout all participant stories. Under this navigational sub-theme some participants chose to work in isolation in efforts to minimize exposure to personal experiences with racism within the work environment. It was used to weigh the potential consequences of their responses to perceived experiences of racism and decide whether or not to respond. This sub-theme was also used to decide what non-teaching work related activities to participate in including unions, advanced learning program selection process, mentoring other teachers (especially teachers of color), and advocating for other people of color.

**Administrative/organizational support.** Administrative/Organizational Support emerged as an overarching theme under navigational strategies and perceptions of racism in participant narratives. In experiences where principals encouraged collaboration; expressed understanding of or acknowledged racialized experiences of teachers of color; and allowed race related dialogues as part of the organizational culture, it was used as a navigational strategy. Descriptions of Administrative/Organizational Support that was perceived as racism included: principals’ or district administrators’ support of White teachers for assignments over/instead of equally, or more qualified teachers of color; principal supporting students and support staff’s racialized complaints about a teacher of color without providing that teacher professional development around the complaint issue; and district placing underqualified or inexperienced principals/administrators in a school with a significant number of teachers of color, facilitating conflict rather than collaboration and community building.
Chapter Five: Discussion, Implications and Recommendations

The purpose of this narrative study was to contribute to understanding the persistent underrepresentation of teachers of color (ToC) in K-12 classrooms. This contribution is being made by examining the lived experiences of ToC who persist in classroom teaching beyond 10 years. The study specifically looks at how experienced ToC perceived and navigated racism along their teaching journeys.

There were four resources that significantly supported the exploration of this research topic and the framing of the research. The first is Sensoy & DiAngelo’s (2012) *Is Everyone Really Equal? An Introduction to Key Concepts in Social Justice Education*. It provided cited and sourced language and definitions for the academic discussion of racism. The next resource is Wilder’s (2013) study of the history of racism and higher education, *Ebony & Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America’s Universities*. This study presented an historical context of education (specifically higher education) as an intentional tool for establishing and perpetuating White supremacy, and how that intention was subsequently veiled while the roots remained deeply embedded. A third key resource was Lynn & Dixson’s (2013) *Handbook of Critical Race Theory in Education*. This anthology provided examples of varied ways Critical Race Theory (CRT) was used as a framework for research and analysis and included limitations and possibilities of CRT. Finally, Denzin, Lincoln & Smith’s (2008) *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies* provided an anthology of studies utilizing methodologies that “speak to oppressed, colonized persons living in postcolonial situations of injustice” (p. x). Choosing to frame this inquiry as a qualitative narrative study using CRT and centering the experiences and voices of teachers of color, without questioning the validity of their stories was inspired by these four resources.
Role of the CRT Framework

In conjunction with the resources identified above, CRT played a vital role in the conceptualization, framing, implementation and analysis of this study and findings. CRT tenets provided the lens through which the literature was reviewed and counternarratives included, the research process was focused, and the data was managed and validated. The defining CRT notion that racism is normal, and deeply and permanently embedded in the structures of US society was the seed point from which the study evolved.

CRT as the research lens. The utilization of CRT as the research lens facilitated the structure of this thesis project. Based on literature reviewed for this study, much of the existing literature which explored the underrepresentation of ToC in K-12 classrooms minimizes, or renders invisible, their lived experiences with racism in their work and pre-work environments. The CRT defining notion that racism is so deeply embedded as to be normal in all aspects of US society (Bell, 1992, as cited in Ladson-Billings, 1998) was used as the foundation for the research question. This tenet made it unnecessary to ask whether ToC experience racism in their work environments. Thus, allowing the research to focus on how they perceive and navigate that racism.

CRT and narrative inquiry. One of the essential components of CRT is the inclusion of narratives that center voices of individuals and groups who are racially oppressed, marginalized and subjugated (Ladson-Billings, 1998, 2013). This tenet supported the use of narrative inquiry and participants’ interpreting their own stories in the process of telling. CRT and narrative inquiry work together to center the voices of ToC and validate their stories as data.

CRT also supported the research design allowing for participants to provide their own definitions of “racism” in the form of their described perceptions of racism. Additionally, the
CRT tenet of intersectionality and anti-essentialism supported choosing a diverse group of participants and guided the identification of themes in the data.

Common themes were identified, not from words used to describe experiences, but rather from an understanding that people of color experience, navigate and talk about racism in different ways depending on race, class, gender, and other identities. Through listening to the descriptions of participant experiences, common concepts were identified and named as specific themes.

**CRT and the researcher.** As the researcher, I entered this thesis project from my positionality as a Black African American woman educator. As a developing scholar practitioner, I had an awareness that lived experiences of racism were often minimized or rendered invisible in discourse about the persistent underrepresentation of teachers of color. Through the literature I’ve reviewed, it appeared that when racism was included in the discourse, it was in relation to historical experiences (for example, looking at how racism impacted the quality of pre-teaching education), rather than present and ongoing experiences with racism.

CRT provided a theoretical framework for me, as the researcher, to rely on in accepting each individual story as valid and not in need of researcher interpretation. It also provided the lens and language used to identify and name themes. Further, using the CRT framework impacted my positionality as a scholar-practitioner. Some of those impacts will be discussed later in the “Implications” section of this chapter.

**Research Question**

To contribute to the understanding of the persistent underrepresentation of ToC in K-12 classrooms, this study explores the lived experiences of teachers of color who had been teaching
in classrooms for more than 10 years. The research question that guided the study is: How do teachers of color who persist in K-12 classrooms perceive and navigate racism?

There were seven study participants who self-identified as teachers of color. The group of participants were diverse in race, ethnicity, age, sex, country of origin, first language, grades they teach, and other identities. The amount of prior experience they had talking directly about racism, and specifically talking about their own experiences navigating racism as a ToC, was also varied. The prompt used to elicit the narratives was: Please tell me about your journey to being an experienced classroom teacher, and how you navigated racism along that journey.

Summary of Findings

Each study participant shared their story of how they perceived and navigated racism along their journeys to being experienced ToC. While each narrative presented a unique experience, there were identifiable common overarching themes throughout the narratives. In descriptions of perceptions of racism, the following themes emerged:

- **Gatekeeping**: Participants identified experiences of racist gatekeeping of access to teaching, students, knowledge and resources that their White colleagues may have received facilitated or open access to.

- **Questioning competence and competency**: Most participants described experiences where their capability to teach and/or knowledge and skills were questioned in part or entirely due to their racial identities. The questioning originated from members of their teaching and learning communities who were White, or from the ToC themselves engaging in self-doubt in response to racialized experiences.

- **Racial microaggressions**: Most of the participants described racial microaggressions (and to a lesser extent, macroaggressions) that targeted them directly, targeted colleagues, or
targeted their students of color. Experiences of microaggressions sometimes overlapped with gatekeeping and questioning competence and competency themes.

Themes that emerged as strategies for navigating perceived racism include:

- **Access/use advocates and allies:** Several participants described how they accessed and used advocates and allies who they perceived as having more power in situations than the participants themselves. Some participants became advocates and allies for other people of color in their teaching and learning communities as those participants developed skills and confidence in their own navigational strategies.

- **Self-directed professional development:** All study participants describe engaging in some form of self-directed professional development as strategies toward navigating racism. Professional development (PD) included formal continuation of academic coursework, certifications, and advanced degrees; and PD workshops and training. It also included informal PD in the form of self-reflection practices, and independent research to increase knowledge and awareness of resources that they should have access to.

- **Building and accessing community:** This navigational strategy was used by all the study participants, although participants described their communities in varied ways. Commonalities were that they all developed “community” within their classrooms, and relationships with community members were supportive, validating, and relatively safe.

Two navigational sub-themes were evident throughout all participant narratives. The sub-theme of choosing battles was used to navigate perceived racism and decide which racist experiences they would address, and how they would address them. Focusing on students was a navigational strategy sub-theme that participants used to address perceived racism and to avoid personal encounters with racism.
There was one overarching theme that emerged as a navigational strategy and perception of racism. That theme is administrative/organizational support. It was included as racism when principals or district administrators were seen as supporting or promoting White teachers and their interests over interests and needs of ToC and other people of color. When principals/administrators encouraged collaboration, acknowledged racialized experiences, and allowed race related dialogues as part of the organizational culture, administrative/organizational support presented as a navigational strategy.

**Discussion of Findings**

Although literature examining the underrepresentation of teachers of color in K-12 classrooms is limited (Sheets, 2006; Achinstein, et al., 2010; Brown, 2014), literature that specifically examines the lived racialized experiences of teachers of color in relation to their underrepresentation is further limited (Brown, 2014; Sheets, 2006; Villegas & Irvine, 2010). The findings of this study provide a glimpse into some of the complex and nuanced ways racism is experienced and navigated by teachers of color in public K-12 classrooms. The experiences of racism perceived by study participants were uniquely theirs and were similar to those experienced by ToC in teacher preparation/education programs (Irizarry, 2011; Kohli, 2008; Kohli, 2012; Lapayese, et. al, 2014; Rogers-Ard, et. al, 2012; View & Frederick, 2011), novice ToC (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2011), in-service ToC (Kohli, 2018), and ToC in higher education (Gutiérrez y Muhs, et al., 2012; Rodriguez, et al., 2012; Williams, 2001). What appears be a contribution unique to this study is the inclusion of navigational strategies that participants used along their journeys of persistence in K-12 classroom teaching.

The process of framing the narratives within the overarching context of the underrepresentation of ToC appeared to facilitate the narrators’ inclusion of impactful
experiences with racism. This included impacts on Herbie’s, Noemi’s and Theresa’s decisions to become teachers; Mai’s, Noemi’s and Theresa’s decisions to relocate to different schools; and Mai’s and Noemi’s considerations around leaving the field of classroom teaching at the time of the data collection. While framing the narratives within the context of the underrepresentation of ToC, most participants also included messages to prospective and early career ToC about navigating racism that may be encountered. This data can contribute to understanding, and more effectively addressing, the persistent underrepresentation of ToC in K-12 classrooms.

**Implications for the Recruitment and Retention of Teachers of Color**

This discussion of implications for the recruitment and retention of teachers of color centers the input of study participants. Once each participant concluded narrating their experience, they were asked two post-narrative questions:

1a) Why did you want to participate in this study? 1b) What’s in it for you?

2) Who would you like to know your story of navigating racism as a teacher of color?

Some of the responses speak directly to the implications for recruitment and retention. Below are participants’ responses to question one:

Herbie gave this response:

The study needed to be done. There needs to be a lot more research. One of the fights that we need to initiate here in [my school district] is about how to get more teachers of color into the classroom and so I think this is one of the key struggles to improve public education so I'm really excited about your research. I hope it leads to more change.

Josie provided this response:

I think it's important work that you're doing because no one really, again, has talked about teachers of color and the system that they enter into. At least, I haven't read it. Maybe, I
don't know. I don't think there's a lot of research and talks about it. I think that's it's an important work that you're doing, and so I want to ... I think it's important, so I decided to participate.

Mai shared the following:

…I really hope this dissertation and this research will help support new teachers. The system itself has to support that work. If it doesn't, then we're lying to ourselves. I've been in this field long enough, 15-16 years now. This will be the end of my 16th year. It's like if I'm considering…I'm going to put this on…I'm considering even changing careers, I'm not someone… I'll tell you honestly. I went into [education] because I love it. I love the kids. I love the support of the families and ... Yeah… I've changed. That's sad.

Noemí responded:

…The union had been pushing the district to change their policies to recruit more people of color. We’ve been pushing and pushing and finally the other time I heard that they were doing more recruiting in a different way than they used to. It’s been a pleasure to see when I meet with the teachers in different places. I felt like I’m not the only Latina anymore, or I see a Black teacher, or I’d see an Asian teacher. I feel like things are changing. … We’re here, but we still feel isolated. That we’re still… I feel like that piece is very important about how can we support our teachers of color in a profession that is a very tough profession? Sometimes they don’t receive the support that they should have, that’s one thing.

Rose’s response was:

I wanted to participate in this study for the same reason that I want to teach and that I want to have student teachers. It's because if there's something that can help someone
else, if in my story someone can learn something about themselves, if in my story someone can have a better insight into something, then I want to share that story. I've been teaching for twenty-something years. If there's something that I can teach others based on the experience that I have had that would help them, then I'd like to do that. Many people have been there for me the whole time that I was becoming a better and better teacher. If I can give back in some ways, I would like to do so.

Tháng shared this:

I probably, I just told you I have a problem with administrator that's why I feel that, you know? I feel the need of telling you the truth, telling you what I think. It's just one of those. I don't want to hide that. Cause the way I present to you is the best truthfulness. I try to present to you in the point of view that is fair. It's the best view that I have on those issues.

And finally, Theresa provided this response:

I think the story needs to be told. I think that I never really thought about it from the perspective of the adult and the racism that occurs. We always talk about it from a student perspective, but when you mentioned that, it's like yeah, that's really true. I really never thought about how have I dealt with racism in [my] school district and how has that impacted me. Just to say I didn't really think of it in those terms kind of brought that to light, and I thought yeah, I have. I've watched other people, one teacher in particular, that was actual railroaded out of the school district by the principal, to the point where she would not be able to get a job anywhere in [my] school district. That blew me away. Yeah, I thought yeah, there's a lot of racism that goes on. It's covert racism. It doesn't really look like it. Doesn't necessarily always feel like it, but it feels something. That was
the reason. When you said, it's like yeah, I think this would be good. I think that is a story that really hasn't been told.

There's fewer and fewer people of color going into the education field, and there was a time when [my] school district, which was the largest school district, was really encouraging assistants, special ed assistants, or just assistance to go into teaching and get their certification. Because there were so many people of color in those [assistant] positions. They kind of eliminated all those positions except for special ed. There's no longer a push for encouraging people to go into education or become certified. The people that are of color that are in these assistant roles are ELL, the majority of them, or they're special ed. It's almost like they're doing away with any incentive for people of color to come into the education arena, and I don't see ...

They used to have a program at [a local high school] (I don't know if they still do), where it was encouraging students of color to work in a school that gives them an idea of what teachers do and would kind of move them towards that as a career. I think they discontinued that a while back. I don't know. It's kind of scary.

Question two yielded responses that can also contribute to understanding implications for recruitment and retention. Herbie responded:

Especially young teachers of color who are coming into the profession, for strategies for coping and making it through. I hope that some number of them may learn lessons about combining your practice with activism and take strength from that. It might not be for everybody. I may have had certain unique situations but for those who that works for, and that it's useful for, I think, can become incredibly powerful way to be an educator and keep you in it for the long haul.
Josie said:

Well, just teachers that are going into the field. Anybody really because racism isn't just in one system. It's in all our systems. Having that courageous conversation across the board in all fields is important, I think. So, everyone.

Mai provided this contribution:

Wow, I think everyone. I think new teachers, administration specifically. The board, the district. I mean, even OSPI. I think they need to hear this. If they don't know the stories, it doesn't […] You can do policies up the ying yang. The policies are not ... They can trickle down in the building, even to teachers. But if they don't understand each other…

We know relationships is the key. If you don't care enough about each other as a group, you don't care about each other period, you can get some work done, right? You might have one or two. I can think of sports analogies. I also play sports, and I coach too. I think you can have the best players, but if they don't work together, you can't do much with that.

You might have one or two wins. You might have one or two elitist teachers. But at the end of the day, everyone else ... Kids are the ones that are failed, right? I guess essentially, we failed the kids if we aren't working together. But we have to care about each other. If we don't care, we can't go anywhere. So, who? I think everyone. I want young, new teachers of color to be able to hear these stories and experience. Because what they're experiencing might be different. It might parallel. But I want them to be able to say I can grow from this. I can learn from this. And you keep chugging along.

But like I say, if I'm considering changing my profession, if I'm the last person you would ever think that would. And it's not that I don't want to fight the fight. I'm still
going to fight, but I want to fight on policy level. I want to fight on the state level. I want to do more. I feel like it's not enough to just be in the classroom anymore.

I told my boss that this past year. She said, "Oh my gosh, you're one of my best teachers." I said, "Yeah, but that's not enough anymore." I'm seeing these inequities, and these huge disproportionalities among not just marginalized kids anymore, but marginalized communities. If I can’t be that voice, and I'm not sharing what their concerns are, and then you as the [inaudible 01:05:52] per se, but the system itself isn't supportive of that, or not hearing it, then I feel like I'm not doing enough.

I think everyone, everyone needs to hear, yes.

Noemí provided this input:

Who? I’d like the new teachers to know my story because of complainers, complain, complain, complain. Me, I didn’t complain much. I keep my head down and continue working. When I needed to make change, I did some changes, a little bit. I did whatever I could. Talk less and do some more. I want them to see what I went through, what I did or not did (because some things I did were that bad) and see how they can feel like they are not alone. That what they’re going through is what everybody was going through. When you start a new job you always had to go through the same process in the program. Now, with us [teachers of color], it’s more tougher.

Rose shared this response:

Definitely I think upcoming teachers. Principals so they can know the power that they have in terms of being able to support new teachers. The school district to remember to provide support for new teachers and to believe in them and not give up and have specific resources available for them. Other teachers in the school so that they can know wow, if
there's a new teacher coming in, those are some of the things that I can do for me to support them. The whole system. For them to understand that all of us are part of that same journey and we need to keep in mind the fact that we have a common goal. And, teachers are so important that we need to make sure that the teachers are as good as they can be. Because they have an impact on such a whole generation that will be coming up.

And, Theresa provided this statement:

Well, I think that people that are in positions of power, when it comes to educating children, and who's educating them. That would be ... Those are the people that need to know there's another perspective, and oftentimes they only hear one side of it, and it's one that's more familiar to them. That would be who I would say.

Thang’s response to question two was more personal. After expressing concern that his story might result in backlash if his identity was revealed, he shared the following:

I tell [my story] in the best of my knowledge, and as truthful as I can. But I think probably if you showed it to the professor or something, they may have a better perspective about it. And they may perceive things in a better way I think. They may understand me. That's the one I need. I need understanding, that's all.

**Recommendations for Meaningful Change**

The cumulative data and responses to the post-narrative questions in this study support implications that manifestations of racism in education can be significant experiences for teachers of color. Those manifestations can contribute to the formation and perpetuation of overtly and covertly hostile teaching and learning environments for ToC (Coleman & Stevenson, 2013; Kohli, 2018). The experienced ToC in this study provided strategies they used to successfully navigate the racism they perceived throughout their careers. Also, within their
stories are glimpses of opportunities for their journeys through persisting in classroom teaching to have been derailed. Their narratives highlight a need to complicate understandings of the persistent underrepresentation of ToC in K-12 classrooms. Significant meaningful change in the problem is unlikely to be achieved if discussions, policies and practices do not include the exploration of racism as a contributing factor. Following are some recommendations based on the study findings, participant input and existing literature.

**Talk about “racism.”** The first recommendation is to include the topic of racism in discussions and research addressing the underrepresentation of ToC, in pre-service teacher preparation programs, and in-service professional development. To examine and address the problem of persistent underrepresentation of ToC, “racism” must be integrated into the discussion (Rogers-Ard, et al., 2014; Little & Bartlett, 2010) using a research supported critical theoretical framework like CRT, and Critical Whiteness Studies (Leonardo, 2002; Marx, 2004). Developing this practice may contribute to increased education equity and social justice literacy amongst those engaged in addressing the problem (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). It may also counter socializations of silence about racism (Dixson & Lynn, 2013) that appears evident in the literature reviewed for this study. Increased equity and social justice literacy may, in turn, reduce reliance on arguments for diversifying the teacher workforce that essentialize and problematize people of color. It may also heighten awareness of how individuals, institutions, policies and practices participate in, and perpetuate, racially hostile or unwelcoming environments for teachers of color.

It is further recommended that explicit discussions about racism in education include preparing ToC to recognize, name, navigate and challenge embedded racism (Prado-Olmos, et al., 2007; Rodriguez, et al., 2012) and racial microaggressions (Huber & Solorzano, 2014; Sue,
Bucceri, et al., 2007; Sue, Capodilupo, et al., 2007) they may encounter in their teaching and learning environments/organizations. Explicit discussions can also prepare ToC to recognize and dismantle internalized racial inferiority or oppression they may bring into the environment (Huber, Johnson et al., 2006; Kohli, 2014; Watts-Jones, 2002) that impact their own experiences and the experiences of other people of color in education (faculty, staff and students). Examples supporting this recommendation are present in Thằng’s and Theresa’s narratives.

Thằng reported having no significant education about racism in America when he immigrated to this country. He also reported that he did not engage in any significant professional development that expanded his understanding of racism. So, although Thằng described how he was impacted by racism he perceived in the workplace, he did not recognize that some ways he implemented navigational strategies were rooted in White superiority (as reflected in him asking his White students if his joke about Asians was racist). Some of his perceived experiences around racism may have been significantly different if his professional development included explicit learning about racism. Thus, contributing to an environment where he might feel a greater sense of belonging and appreciation, and continue his classroom teaching.

Similarly, Theresa’s observations and experiences with the faculty and staff of her second school provide an example of a culture of distrust rooted in unaddressed structural racism. The culture in the school may have been more of an effective teaching and learning community if the people of color in the environment had professional development opportunities to discuss and dismantle internalized racial inferiority and oppression. Thus, creating a more welcoming and supportive environment for recruiting and retaining ToC.
Center the voices of experienced ToC and students of color in recruitment and retention strategy development and implementation. Including these voices can add understanding of actual lived racialized experiences and barriers that contribute to the persistent underrepresentation of ToC. This is data that appears to be minimized or absent from dominant narratives and efforts toward the recruitment and retention of ToC that center the perspectives and interpretations of White scholars, educators, administrators and policy makers. The varied narratives from the small group of participants in this study, adds to existing data (Gutiérrez y Muhs, 2012; Kohli, 2018) that illuminate the realities of racism in the experiences of educators of color. Their voices and those of other teachers of color can complicate the understanding of the problem of persistent underrepresentation with realities of racialized experiences. These racialized experiences are in addition to professional challenges experienced by White colleagues.

Support the development of formal ToC-to-ToC mentoring and support networks. Implementation of this recommendation could provide new ToC with access to teaching models and strategies for understanding and navigating racialized experiences they may encounter in teaching environments. Study participants Herbie and Rose had informal mentoring from experienced Black teachers during their first years of teaching. Both identified those experiences as significant in their development and persistence as teachers. Experienced ToC can become advocates and allies for pre-service and novice ToC and provide recommendations for professional development to support other ToC. Most study participants described situations in which they used their own experiences to advocate for other ToC or staff of color. As experienced educators who successfully navigated experiences with racism and persisted in classroom teaching, they provide valuable data which could be utilized in formal arrangements.
Formal mentoring and support networks may be physical (with face-to-face contact) or virtual (including online networks). Formalizing ToC-to-ToC mentoring and networking could be significant increasing success in recruitment and retention.

**Develop and support critical affinity groups in schools and districts.** The intention of behind this recommendation is to facilitate the retention of ToC who want to work on organizational change toward anti-racist teaching and learning environments. Study participants Herbie, Mai and Noemí expressed needing outlets for activism toward change. However, Herbie was the only participant who described having such outlets within their school building community. Additionally, Mai and Noemí reported considering leaving classroom teaching in order to work toward anti-racism and educational equity with less resistance than they experience as classroom teachers. In the current US pluralistic education systems, there is a broad continuum of understanding about racism and its embeddedness. The affinity groups could be specific to racial identities, interracial, or alternating in make-up, depending on topics and needs. This could provide options and outlets for critical intraracial, interracial and intercultural dialogue (Kearney, 2008; Kohli, 2012, 2014) toward equity and change, while persisting in classroom teaching.

**Implications for the Researcher**

This study resulted in several implications for the researcher, as a developing scholar practitioner. Utilizing the CRT lens for the research project influenced my positionality as a researcher. The CRT lens, along with the individual participant narratives, influenced my pedagogy as an educator, and has ongoing implications for my continued development as a critical social justice scholar practitioner.
An implication for my positionality is a need to continue recognizing and deconstructing my own socialization into structural, systemic and cultural racism. Challenging my own internalized socializations into racism has been constant throughout this research project. It occurred as I considered (and reconsidered) my audience, how I used language in the presentation of information and ideas, and how I centered the participant narratives. CRT is a significant lens for this continued evolution of my researcher positionality.

An implication for my practice as an educator is that it’s necessary to be persistent in integrating anti-racism work into my pedagogy – as a teacher educator and general educator. One technique that I’ve begun using since gathering the research data is providing students with anti-racism, social justice and equity vocabulary. Given the variation in how the study participants defined and perceived racism, establishing common language has proven helpful in course communication. It has also often proven challenging as adult learners who have been socialized to deny or minimize racism, it’s impacts, and their participation in it resist expanding their understandings. This study has fueled my understanding of the need to be persistent in the pedagogy if I am committed to being a critical social justice scholar practitioner.

**Limitations of This Study**

This narrative study included seven diverse participants of color who had been teaching for more than 10 years at the time of data collection. Participants were teachers of color in schools and districts that predominantly serve students of color in the western region of Washington State. This is a geographic and socio-political area that is often identified as “progressive” and several school districts have historical or active initiatives focused on diversity, equity, inclusion, anti-bias and/or anti-racism. Given these conditions, specific
findings of this study may not be generalizable to the experiences of ToC in other areas of the state, country or beyond. This is one limitation of the study.

Another limitation of this study is the small sample size. Although the small diverse group of participants offered varied perspectives that provided insights into their experiences as teachers of color, the generalizability of the findings is limited. Additionally, the narrative and CRT methodology used for this study accepts participant narratives as valid data. The fact that there is no additional documented data to verify participant stories, can be considered a limitation.

**Recommendations for Future Study**

This study provided insight into the racialized experiences of K-12 ToC from a small geo-political area of Washington State. It is recommended that the study be replicated in other areas of the country in order to continue building scholarly knowledge about the lived racialized experiences of ToC. Any new data from future study can contribute to further understanding of the impacts of those experiences on recruitment and retention.

Another recommendation is for the future narrative study of racialized experiences of ToC in predominantly White public K-12 schools. The current study participants were situated in schools that served populations that were predominantly students of color. Studies that examine how ToC who work in predominantly White public schools perceive and navigate racism could provide valuable perspectives that further contribute to the understanding of persistent underrepresentation of ToC in K-12 classrooms.

It is further recommended that future study be conducted that gathers narratives of ToC who left classroom teaching. Examining data on how they perceived and navigated racism
(successfully or unsuccessfully) could provide a valuable contribution to the knowledge bank. This might be especially insightful for the development of effective retention strategies.

**Closing Statement**

This study contributes to the understanding of the persistent underrepresentation of ToC in K-12 classrooms, and why efforts focused solely on increasing numbers have had limited success. The findings support existing literature that describes racism as significant in the experiences of people of color within educational institutions (Achinstein & Aguirre, 2008; Apple & Gillborn, 2008; Brown, 2014; Epstein, 2005; Kohli, 2018; Stovall, 2013) and other workplace environments (Alleyne, 2005). If racism continues to be minimized or rendered invisible in the ongoing discussions, research and practices addressing the underrepresentation of teachers of color, it is unclear how significant change in the problem might be achieved.
References


Network Sampling

Email Script for Recruiting Participants via Professional and Community Networks:

I am a doctoral candidate at Northeastern University conducting a research study for my doctoral dissertation. The overarching topic of my research is the underrepresentation of teachers of color in K-12 classrooms. Through a critical race theory lens, racism is deeply embedded in the systems, structures and institutions of education, and experienced in different ways by educators of color. However, racism is often left out of public conversations about the underrepresentation of teachers of color.

For this research project, I want to learn more about the experiences of teachers of color who:

- Have been teaching in classrooms for more than ten years.
- Teach in Puget Sound area school districts that predominantly serve students of color.

I’m specifically interested in understanding how teachers of color perceive and navigate racism in ways that allow them to continue teaching in the classroom. I am looking for participants willing to share their stories of navigating racism as educators of color. These stories can help broaden understanding, and give insight into how to prepare other teachers of color to succeed and thrive in classrooms and school environments. Participation is entirely voluntary.

If you, or someone you know would like to participate in, or learn more about the study, please contact me at davis-vanloo.c@husky.neu.edu.

Thank you,

Cynthia Davis-Vanloo, MA, EdD Candidate
Davis-vanloo.c@husky.neu.edu

Snowball Sampling

Email Script for Recruiting Participants Referred to Researcher:

I am a doctoral candidate at Northeastern University conducting a research study for my doctoral dissertation. The overarching topic of my research is the underrepresentation of teachers of color in K-12 classrooms. Through a critical race theory lens, racism is deeply embedded in the systems, structures and institutions of education, and experienced in different ways by educators of color. However, racism is often left out of public conversations about the underrepresentation of teachers of color.

For this research project, I want to learn more about the experiences of teachers of color who:

- Have been teaching in classrooms for more than ten years.
- Teach in Puget Sound area school districts that predominantly serve students of color.
I’m specifically interested in understanding how teachers of color perceive and navigate racism in ways that allow them to continue teaching in the classroom. I am looking for participants willing to share their stories of navigating racism as educators of color. These stories can help broaden understanding, and give insight into how to prepare other teachers of color to succeed and thrive in classrooms and school environments.

Your name was given to me by a colleague as someone who might be interested in participating in this research study. If you would like to participate in, or learn more about the study, please contact me at davis-vanloo.c@husky.neu.edu to schedule a time to meet. Participation is entirely voluntary.

Sincerely,

Cynthia Davis-Vanloo, MA, EdD Candidate
davis-vanloo.c@husky.neu.edu
Appendix B: Prefatory Meeting “Script”

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. As you know, I’m a doctoral candidate at Northeastern University. I am conducting a research study for my doctoral dissertation. The overarching topic of my research is the underrepresentation of teachers of color in K-12 classrooms. Through a critical race theory lens, racism is deeply embedded in the systems, structures and institutions of education, and experienced in different ways by educators of color. However, racism is often left out of public conversations about the underrepresentation of teachers of color.

For this research project, I want to learn more about the experiences of teachers of color who have been teaching in classrooms for more than ten years. I’m specifically interested in understanding how you, as a teacher of color, perceive and navigate racism in ways that allow you to continue teaching in the classroom. Your story can help contribute to that understanding and give insight into how to prepare other teachers of color to succeed and thrive in classrooms and school environments.

(1) Review and discuss the HSRP Consent form.
(2) All information captured will be kept completely confidential and anonymous. No identifiable information about you or the organization will be used, instead I will insert pseudonyms for you and your organization. I invite you to choose a pseudonym that will be used in place of your actual name
(3) I’d like your permission to tape record our next session so that I can focus on our conversation. After the session is transcribed, I’ll give you a copy of the transcript to verify, and edit if needed. All copies of audio recordings and written transcriptions will be secured so that only I have access. Recordings and documents will be destroyed three years from the date my dissertation is approved.
(4) I want to ask you some questions in order to gather demographic information. This information will be grouped with the information for other participants, so it will not be connected to your story.
   • How many years have you been in your current school?
   • What grade do you teach?
   • What is the percentage of students of color in your school?
   • What are your racial and ethnic identities?
   • What is your gender identity?
   • What is your age?
(5) Would you like to choose your pseudonym?
Appendix C: Unsigned Informed Consent Document

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies
Names of Investigators:  Principal Investigator, Karen Reiss Medwed, PhD; Student Researcher, Cynthia Davis-Vanloo, EdD Candidate
Title of Project:  Teachers of Color in K-12 Classrooms: Perceiving and Navigating Racism

Informed Consent to Participate in Research Study

We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask the person any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

We are asking you to be in this study because you are a person of color who has been teaching in a K-12 classroom for more than 10 years.

Why is this research study being done?

The purpose of this research is to increase the understanding of how K-12 teachers of color experience and navigate racism, and continue teaching in classrooms.

What will I be asked to do?

If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you to:

- Tell your story of navigating racism as a K-12 teacher of color in two separate interviews, which will be recorded and transcribed.
- Review your transcript for accuracy, and correct any errors.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?

The sharing of your story will take place at an agreed upon private location that is convenient for you. We anticipate it will take about 1 hour of your time.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?

There is no physical risk participating in this study. However, talking openly about racialized experiences may be uncomfortable during or after the experience. A list of local support resources for teachers of color will be available for participants. You are also encouraged to contact your health care provider if you have a reaction that interferes with your daily functioning.
There may be no direct benefit to you for taking part in this study. However, the potential benefit to others includes expanding understanding of how racism is part of the experiences of teachers of color. Your story may help contribute to the understanding of how to address racism in the education environment, and prepare teachers of color to succeed and thrive in more equitable classroom and school environments.

Your identity as a participant in this study will not be known to anyone except the researchers. Your identity will not be matched to your story.

You are encouraged to contact your health care provider if you have an emotional or psychological reaction that interferes with your daily functioning. No special arrangements will be made for compensation, or for payment of treatment solely because of your participation in this research.

If you begin the study, you can to stop participating at any time. If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Cynthia Davis-Vanloo at davis-vanloo.c@husky.neu.edu, the person mainly responsible for the research. You can also contact Karen Reiss Medwed at k.reissmedwed@neu.edu, the Principal Investigator.

If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 490 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

You will not be paid for participating.

It will not cost you anything to participate.

Will I benefit by being in this research?

Who will see the information about me?

What will happen if I suffer any harm from this research?

Can I stop my participation in this study?

Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?

Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?

Will I be paid for my participation?

Will it cost me anything to participate?

Is there anything else I need to know?
You are welcome to ask questions to any other information you may want to know.

I agree to take part in this research.

Signature of person agreeing to take part __________________________ Date ______________

Printed name of person above __________________________

Signature of person who explained the study to the Participant above and obtained consent __________________________ Date ______________

Printed name of person above __________________________
Appendix D: Narrative Prompt and Final Questions

Narrative Prompt (Interview “Question”):
Please tell me about your journey to being an experienced classroom teacher, and how you navigated racism along that journey.

After completing the narrative of their experience, the participant will be asked the following two questions:
1. Why did you want to participate in this study? What’s in it for you?
2. Who would you like to know your story of navigating racism as a teacher of color?