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## Teacher Sustainability Cultural Wealth Among Suburban Educators of Color

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TEACHER SUSTAINABILITY  
CULTURAL WEALTH AMONG SUBURBAN EDUCATORS OF COLOR

by  
Verna Wong

A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Literacy Education

Hamline University

St. Paul, Minnesota

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Susan Manikowski: Primary Advisor:  
Tracine Asberry: Secondary Advisor  
Brandon Tuttle: Peer Reviewer

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **Introduction**

As a daughter of Chinese refugees from Vietnam, I grew up with parents who had first hand experience with war and loss. These pieces of my identity and history carry with me into my profession. They are the narratives I share as a teacher of English Learners, Asian students, students of color, young women, and students of immigrant families. Sometimes our stories overlap, intersect, or parallel one another. Yet, within these narratives that reflect the race, class, gender, language, nationality, and citizenship diversity of the United States, there are validations. The acknowledgment of our narratives reveals the potential for a foundation of learning. The background and unique skills I bring into my field become critical pieces to how I teach. These developments throughout my career have sustained my ability to stay within a challenging profession.

My research question is: How do teachers of color sustain themselves in a profession that struggles to retain teachers? This question will explore the ways teachers of color choose to stay in the workplace, as well as feel strengthened and thrive in the work as a means to meet the challenges of teaching. I will explore the following questions:

- What challenges do teachers face in the workplace?
- What additional challenges do teachers of color face?
- What factors strengthen and sustain teachers of color?
- How does sustainability relate to teacher retention among teachers of color?

The Educator Policy Innovation Center (EPIC) recently released a report entitled *Smart Solutions to Minnesota's Teacher Shortage: Developing and Sustaining Diverse and Valued Educator Workforce*, which exposes that the teacher shortage in Minnesota is in a state of crisis (EPIC, n.d.). The EPIC report also notes that while fewer people are pursuing teaching as a career, retention is becoming the more dominate problem. Attrition is also highest among young teachers (EPIC, n.d.). According to the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), 30% of Minnesota teachers are leaving within five years (MDE, 2015). Therefore, those who leave due to retirement are not being replaced by new professionals in the field, creating a “revolving door” effect of turnover.

This phenomenon is especially higher among teachers of color (Ingerstoll & May, 2011). As student populations continue to become more culturally, linguistically, and socially diverse, fostering a teaching force that reflects the diversity of students is very important. Unfortunately, even though there have been increases in teacher diversity over the last 25 years, the gap that exists between the percentage of students of color and teachers of color is still large (Ingerstoll & May, 2011; Casey, L., Di Carlo, M., Bond, B., & Quintero, E., 2015). While school districts and policy makers focus efforts to recruit teachers of color, the efforts spent in recruitment will be a waste if these teachers only temporarily occupy the classroom. This process will not create a long-term effective force within a school community that builds on the wealth and support from new and novice professionals.

If schools look seriously at addressing the shortage, they must especially consider the factors that impact retention. Teachers are met with larger obstacles than ever before,

more diverse populations in classroom, and more challenging learning standards (Darling-Hammond, 2010). In addition, schools need to make more serious considerations for how they support teachers of color. According to Burant, Quioco & Rio (2002), the commitment to teachers of color and equity can help address disparities in education. Therefore, if school districts and schools are committed to meeting the demands of ever growing diverse populations within schools, teachers of color must receive intentional and structural support in order to thrive.

### **Overview of the Chapter**

In this chapter I will share my background and teaching experiences as an Asian American woman. I will explain the importance of retention, especially for teachers of color, in relationship to the current and future demands within education. I will highlight some of the demographic data in regards to teacher diversity and provide a framework for analyzing the diverse challenges and sustainability of teachers of color and American Indian teachers within the frameworks of race, class, and gender.

### **My Background**

As an Asian American daughter of Chinese refugees who fled the East after the Vietnam War, my racial identity deeply impacts my work with students within my school community. When I started early in my career, I faced large amounts of work and stress as a high school teacher of English Language Learners. In addition to the challenges of learning curriculum, standardized testing, and classroom management, I had to navigate through a work environment as the only woman educator of color in my school. Without time or reflection to think about my own vision and style, I felt immense pressure to

conform to the management and teaching styles of my white colleagues. It took me a long time to be transparent and to share stories of my family immigrating to Minnesota and my personal development. I now know that these stories are foundational to how I connect with my students and provide opportunity to share about the ways we navigate through society. These authentic connections I have are not limited to the classroom, but also happen with other teachers and staff of color in my job. Together, the teachers and I share unique challenges in and out of the classroom and are forced to think about ways to support one another in a stressful work environment, which can be even more challenging for teachers of color. These connections have sustained my work and helped me find the value in what I do with students in the classroom.

### **My Challenges in the Profession**

However, when I first started teaching, I found very few who shared the same vision in my practice. I was one of four teachers of color and the only woman of color in a school that was rapidly becoming more culturally and linguistically diverse. I was working endless hours yet had a hard time finding a workspace that challenged and developed the critical lens needed in education. Standardized testing continued to be the center focus of instruction. This burden limited my abilities to be creative and engage students in meaningful ways. Most instruction was focused on the recall and retention of knowledge, much in line with the “banking system” of education. It created an isolating climate and instructional practice that did not serve students of color, English Learners, students in poverty effectively (Freire, 2010; Berry, 2010). Ultimately, these frustrations with the school system— a system that disfranchised my culturally and linguistically

diverse students—left me dissatisfied with my work and made me consider leaving the profession.

### **My Challenges in the Work Environment**

In addition to having tensions with education and instruction, My workplace did not offer the support systems I needed to help me navigate through my work environment to be effective. My upbringing and cultural context was very different from my colleagues. Many of my colleagues were white women with a different level of economic privilege. We shared very different cultural and political frameworks for understanding students and learning. At times, I was put in uncomfortable and difficult situations where I had to educate my white colleagues about race and social class in order to challenge the generalizations a staff member made about students of color. This work was often very draining and isolated me from working effectively with my colleagues.

### **Sustainability in my Work**

What I quickly learned after a couple years of teaching is that the energy I spent working with students coupled with the isolation I experienced from other staff caused stress that limited my ability to thrive. I wanted to utilize my skills to reach my potential and meet all students' needs. However, I did not have the support to do this. This was especially true as a teacher of color. After time, I desperately searched for and met consistently with others like me who would help sustain my work. I confided in teachers I could trust; some of whom were teachers or staff of color. They helped me develop strategies to sustain myself.

**Coalition building.** Through these relationships, I developed a coalition of teachers of color. My hope was that I could lead this coalition in a way that would facilitate possibilities for teachers of color to thrive individually and collectively in the workplace, utilizing their voices to potentially address educational equity.

Fortunately, the coalition gained the attention of the school districts, teachers, universities, and people across the state. It has given a platform to speak about the retention and work environments of teachers of color. More importantly, the personal connections I make with teachers and teacher candidates sustains the coalition efforts and keeps me in my profession. I value the relationships I have with teachers across my district. I value hearing about their love for students, and I benefit from unpacking the stress of our work environments. We share knowing that our stories of struggle are not isolated. Our stories parallel and intersect as part of something bigger. It is my hope that this study creates opportunities for teachers of color to share about the meaningful experiences to provide opportunities for sustainability in the workplace.

### **Rationale for the Study**

In *The Flat World and Education: How America's Commitment to Equity will Determine our Future*, Linda Darling-Hammond (2010) argues that the United States has to become more purposeful in educating all students within an equitable system. This commitment requires a shift in the overall school culture that includes a deeper value and commitment to teachers. "There is a growing recognition that expert teachers and leaders are the key resource for improving student learning, and the highest-achieving nations make substantial investments in teacher quality" (Darling-Hammond, 2010, p. 198).

However, with retention being a large concern, schools are unable to keep and develop the quality teachers needed to improve student learning. Therefore, a commitment to students and learning means that schools must make strong commitments to teachers.

### **Commitment to Teachers of Color**

Teacher retention is especially critical for teachers of color, who have higher attrition rates. Teachers of color are valuable to the workforce because they reflect the student populations that make up the classroom. In addition to this, teachers of color have a higher potential of understanding and identifying disparities in education (Achinstein & Aguirre, 2008). Perhaps if schools commit to support and develop teachers of color, they will have the capabilities to be the much needed agents of educational equity within public education.

To be committed to teachers and teacher retention, it is important to identify the challenges that impact retention. This is especially true for teachers of color who currently are underrepresented in the profession. Overall, a commitment to teachers of color, women of color, underserved communities, those whose identities challenge the traditional assumptions embedded in our social institutions, can help sustain the overall profession, shifting the school culture and meeting the demands for all.

### **Teacher Diversity**

There is little doubt that the education system needs more teachers of color and American Indian representation in classrooms. Teachers of African, Asian, Latino and American Indian descent currently make up 18 percent of the workforce nationally, while students of the same representation make up 50 percent nationally (NCES, 2013; NCES,

2015). In Minnesota the demographics mirror the national trends. According to the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), teachers of color and American Indian teachers make up 3.8 percent of the work force while students of color and American Indian students make up 29 percent of student population that continues to become more racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse (MDE, 2015). Even though Minnesota is not as diverse as the national averages, the lack of diversity represented in our teaching force is much more severe (EPIC, n.d.).

**Disparities in Minnesota.** The severity makes it important to understand the racial landscape of Minnesota. Minnesota's metropolitan area has been known for being one of the best places to live in the country, known for great parks, job opportunities, and education (Sinner, 2015). Unfortunately, this recognition fails to acknowledge the harsh realities for some communities of color. An online journal article ranked Minnesota and Wisconsin as the worst states for Black America, highlighting the massive amounts of incarceration and disparities in income between black families and white families (Frohlich, Sauter & Stebbins, 2015). These disparities are also apparent in education, Minnesota's achievement gap between whites and students of color reveal that the state is doing worse than the national average (Magan, 2015). Despite the positive recognitions, the reports hide the deep racial divides and disparities revealed in these reports.

These same divides are reflected in the gaps that occur in recruiting, inducting and retaining teachers of color and American Indian teachers. There is an increase in teachers among certain categories, but none of these increases are enough to catch the growing populations of students of color. Asian American/Pacific Islander and Latino teachers



have steadily increased by over the past five years (MDE, 2015). Asian American teachers make up 1.5% of the total Minnesota teacher workforce while 7.4% of Minnesota students are Asian American/Pacific Islander (MDE, 2015). Latino teachers make up .9% of teachers while 8.4% of students are Latino (MDE, 2015). The very slow growth of black teachers highlights the greatest demographic parity when compared to student demographics, making up 1% of teachers while 12% of students are of African descent (MDE, 2015). American Indian teachers make only .4% of the teaching force while they make up 2.4% of total student population (MDE, 2015).

**Limitations to data.** There are limitations to data when analyzing large populations of people. We potentially limit the quality and diversity of these narratives, perspectives and experiences. People of African, Asian, Latino, and American Indian descent do not all share the same experiences or hold singular stories (TED Talk, 2009). Therefore, while this research will explore the experiences of suburban teachers of color in the Midwest, further analyzing the diverse experiences of black teachers can help understand the reasons for a larger demographic parity. Understanding the factors for the growth of various Asian American/Pacific Islander and Latino teachers can provide guidance for teacher recruitment and retention within these communities.

Going further, each racial category has vast ethnic, cultural, and class differences that make each narrative more nuance and complex. Rather than making generalizations that define the stories of underrepresented populations of teachers, I to utilize language that maintains the racial, ethnic, gender, and class distinctions. People of color and American Indians hold intersecting identities of class, gender, linguistic, socio-

economics, and sexual orientation that all impact one's social location and experiences. Failure to acknowledge these factors can lead to labeling one social category as having a shared, monolithic experience, thereby limiting and reducing the experience for people who face multiple forms of oppression (Harris, 1990). In this research, I will identify challenges and narratives specific to certain racial, ethnic, gender and class classifications to capture the vast differences present in teachers.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Throughout this study, I utilized feminist theory as the framework through which I understand the environmental challenges and experiences for teachers of color. I also utilized the research of women of color scholars such as bell hooks to inform how to support teachers, especially teachers of color to sustain and thrive in a challenging profession.

### **Feminist Theory**

Much of the mainstream notions of feminism identifies the oppression of all women under the structures of patriarchy; however, this assertion suggests that women have a singular experience regardless of class, race, religion, and sexual preference. By isolating oppression within gender, this assumption lifts and empowers wealthy-class white women. Therefore, the scholarship of black women and women of color such as bell hooks, Patricia Hills Collins, Angela Davis, and Gloria Anzaldua criticize the mainstream feminist movement.

While it is evident that many women suffer from sexist tyranny, there is little indication that this forges a 'common bond among all women'. There is much evidence

substantiating the reality that race and class identity creates differences in quality of life, social status, and lifestyle that takes precedence over the common experience women share—differences which are rarely transcended (hooks, 1984, p. 4).

Also, as a black woman, hooks sees the ways movements against racism and movements against sexism have the potential to create other opportunities to oppress. By solely isolating race, it silences and limits the experiences of women of color without challenging patriarchy within racial discourse. Isolating sexism has historically silenced and marginalized women of color and working class women. Therefore, women of color must recognize the advantage of lived experience and criticize the “dominant racist, classist, sexist hegemony as well as to envision and create a counter-hegemony” (Hooks, 1984, p. 15). This “counter hegemony” of feminist theory—a framework that recognizes the race, class and gender distinctions—makes the experiences of teachers of color in education more nuanced and complex rather than singular and silencing.

### **Critical Race Theory in Education**

Critical race theory is often used within education to discuss racial disparities. Glenn Singleton's *Courageous Conversations About Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools* is used in many schools throughout the nation to discuss and dismantle racial disparities through critical race theory (Singleton, 2006). There is also a wealth of research that uses critical race theory to unpack the systemic challenges of teacher diversity. It's framework challenges the ideas and structures of white-supremacy, hetero-patriarchy, imperialism and capitalism that are imbedded in our social, economic, political and structural institutions. While the practice of objectivity, colorblindness,

gender blindness, neutrality, equal opportunity, and meritocracy make these ideologies universal, normative, and moral, critical race theory recognizes that these ideologies mask the ways they oppress people of color, women, and working-class communities, while promoting and protecting people of European descent, cis-gendered heterosexual men, and wealthy communities (Landson-Billings, 1998; Solorzano, 1998).

**Focus on an intersectional analysis.** Critical race theory focuses on the centrality of race, and while it recognizes intersectionality, this theory when applied to education limits nuanced dialogue and silences the experiences of women and GLBTQ communities who are also impacted by racial oppression. Therefore, under the large depth of scholarship within critical race theory, I focused the scholarship that addresses racism at its intersections as a central framework for this research, expanding to incorporate the experiences of women of color.

### **Hooks's Feminist Theory**

Bell hooks's feminist theory falls within the branches of feminist theory and critical race theory. It recognizes the intersections of multiple identities of race, class, and gender. It speaks to eliminate all forms of domination and systems of oppression by centering narratives of those who exist in the margins of society (hooks, 1984). Bell hooks's book *Teaching to Transgress* is well read and discussed by educators in schools and universities, and through feminist theory it addresses the personal and private relationships impacted by structures of racism, sexism and hetero-patriarchy (hooks, 1989; 1994). It suggests that liberation must not only occur within discourse, policies, and structural systems, but it must also be practiced in intimate relationships. Challenging

and eliminating domination in all forms must also occur in recognizing our own abilities to oppress and consider the ways we treat, care, sustain, and liberate ourselves and others around us. Within education, relationships are known to be a critical piece to learning. As an EL teacher, I know that my role is not just to strengthen the language skills of my EL students, but also to strengthen their sense of voice, value, and well being.

**Theory and practice.** Teaching is also a personal profession. As an Asian-American teacher, a woman, and a daughter of immigrants, my very identity exists within intersections. I incorporate these pieces of my identity to teach my students because I find this most effective in engaging my students. I am able to connect the content into the everyday lived experiences. I want the critical issues to be present in educational policy, curriculum, and discourse, but I also envision a social practice in my classroom that models a future that eliminates domination. Utilizing hooks' feminist theory to understand the challenges of teachers of color helped see the profession from an ideological, structural and personal standpoint. It also helped capture narratives with nuance that encompassed our multiple complex identities. Furthermore, utilizing feminist theory gave permission to seek out sustainable practices that strengthen the wellbeing of the whole teacher and the overall profession.

### **Chapter Overview**

Chapter One introduced the research by establishing the purpose, significance, rationale and frameworks for study. I described by background and personal story that sparks the personal and professional rationale for my research. I explained hooks's feminist theory in my research, its relationship with feminist theory and critical race

theory. Finally, I expressed my rationale for utilizing hooks's feminist theory to explore sustainability among teachers of color.

Chapter Two will provide a literature review on the factors that impact retention for teachers, specifically teachers of color. It will describe challenges in the workplace for the overall profession and challenges specific to teachers of color. It will also explore the ways teachers of color sustain themselves within the workplace, providing a model for sustainability utilizing cultural wealth.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Literature Review**

The purpose of this study is to determine how teachers of color sustain themselves in a profession that struggles to retain teachers. My research question is: How do teachers of color sustain themselves in a profession that struggles to retain teachers? I will explore the following questions:

- What challenges do teachers face in the workplace?
- What additional challenges to teachers of color face?
- What factors strengthen and sustain teachers of color?
- How does sustainability relate to teacher retention among teachers of color?

### **Overview of the Chapter**

I will identify the ways teachers of color experience challenges in the workplace and highlight the ways teachers of color sustain themselves. Looking at the ways teachers of color are sustaining themselves with their work can provide opportunities to address how schools can better strengthen the work of teachers of color to address retention.

This literature review describes the state of teacher retention, detailing the impact it has on school organizations and student achievement. It details the challenges that impact retention, analyzing overall struggles in the profession as those specific to teachers of color.

Next, the review transitions to teacher sustainability. By gaining a common understanding of sustainability, one can utilize a framework that strengthens and shifts the profession. Bell hook's engaged pedagogy will provide a framework as to how to

view sustainability that supports the wellbeing of teachers. It will describe Yosso's (2005) theory of community cultural wealth in education and consider the ways cultural wealth sustains teachers of color. Finally, the literature review connects sustainability to teacher retention, especially for teachers of color. Examining sustainability that promotes the wellbeing of teachers of color can offer new insight on retention.

### **The Struggle to Retain Teachers**

Job retention is commonly known as the ability to keep employees within an organization. Many organizations understand that retention is important because it stabilizes an entity and provides long-term opportunities for effectiveness. Retention also saves money for organizations because fewer resources will be poured into recruiting and training new staff. In the case of teacher retention, these efforts are even more critical. According to Darling-Hammond (2010), the quality of a teacher greatly impacts student achievement. Teacher quality is not only defined by having strong teacher preparation, but it is also defined by teacher experience. Despite the images of "bad" veteran teachers, who are portrayed as lazy, within high-poverty schools where achievement is critical, veteran teachers who work long-term in schools with low test scores are more effective at raising student achievement than the new teachers who turnover (Goldstein, 2015). In addition to the effectiveness of individual teachers, the collective knowledge of experienced teachers within a school allows for the ability to have effective instructional practices shared amongst peers (Darling-Hammond, 2010).



## **Impacts of High Turnover**

While the critical value in teacher retention is understood, there are negative consequences of teachers not retained. High turnover drains financial and human resources. According to Darling-Hammond (2010), “Schools that hire a parade of novice and short-term teachers must constantly pour money into recruitment and professional support for new teachers, without reaping benefits from the investments” (p. 50). In addition, new teachers who gain classroom and instructional experiences in low-performing schools have the capabilities to transfer to higher-performing schools when they are dissatisfied with their jobs. These higher-performing schools reap the benefits of their growth and knowledge, while leaving low-performing schools as training sites that do not see the same benefits from teachers who become effective. (M. Melander, personal communication, April 14, 2016). Also, when students from year-to-year experience several inexperienced teachers in a row, this can potentially cause students to fall further behind, requiring additional resources for intervention and remediation (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

**Attrition among new teachers.** Some turnover is necessary to keep institutions from becoming complacent, providing new energy (Ingersoll, 2001). Yet the amount of turnover that currently exists in the profession currently is a concern. There is a large percentage of teachers who leave early in their career for reasons other than retirement. According to Ingerstoll (2003), between 40% and 50% of teachers leave within their first five years. When teachers begin their profession, they enter the job with few tools and little experience. Like many new employees, they are constantly learning how to manage

the new job and feel ineffective because of the lack of experience. Unfortunately, according to Darling-Hammond (2010), a large percentage of these new, ineffective teachers leave before they become skilled. Constant disruption exists within school organizations as high rates of new teachers continue to leave while percentage of experienced and veteran teachers decreases as they retire. The shift ultimately impacts the way schools can collaboratively work together, provide effective mentorship, and share knowledge and resources to meet the demands of teaching. Districts must consider why new teachers are leaving the profession and provide intentional support to develop and retain quality teachers.

**Attrition among teachers of color.** Among teachers who leave the profession within the first five years, teachers of color are more likely to leave than white teachers (Ingerstoll & May, 2011; Casey et al., 2015). Because of the critical need for a teaching force reflective of the student demographics, the high turnover for underrepresented teachers is especially startling. Many schools, districts, and lawmakers are focusing much of their efforts to recruit teachers of color; thus teachers of color are being hired at higher rates (Casey et al., 2015). However, these efforts are falling behind in comparison to the rapid increase of culturally and linguistically diverse student populations because of schools' inability to retain the teachers who are currently in the system.

### **Organizational Structure and Retention**

There is evidence that work conditions affect teacher turnover more than student characteristics (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003). According to Ingerstoll and May (2011), many teachers are turning over due to job dissatisfaction. Much of the research

finds relationships between retention and teacher characteristics; however, Ingerstoll (2001) suggested that retention is certainly linked to the organizational structure.

Organizational structure is known as the management and distribution of powers in an organization. In the case of a school, there are many people who make up the organizational structure and lead in different ways including support staff, teachers and administrators. Schools are governed by a district and a board in a larger organizational structure. An organizational structure allocates tasks, systems of accountability, and roles to meet a common goal (Pugh, 1990). Therefore, when an organizational structure has weak leadership or systems of accountability, it impacts the overall the organization.

School organizations fail for many reasons. One major reason is the disparity in funding between different school districts. Urban cities and rural areas do not have the revenues and expenditures like wealthy districts, leading to more challenging working conditions, differences in salaries, and a lack of resources that impacts retention (Darling-Hammond & Skyes, 2003). These schools are also more likely taught by less qualified teachers because of teacher shortage. These teachers are at a greater risk of turnover (Darling-Hammond & Skyes, 2003). As a result, teachers most often transfer out of low-performing schools with high populations of poverty and students of color (Darling-Hammond & Skyes, 2003; Ingerstoll, 2001).

**Impacts on teachers.** High teacher turnover can indicate an underlying problem with the effectiveness of an organization (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Ingerstoll, 2001). These problems place more burdens and responsibilities on teachers. Today, teachers face a larger demand to teach rigorous learning standards to diverse student populations. They

must meet the needs of students with various cultural, linguistic, socioeconomic, and special learning capabilities (Darling-Hammond, 2010). As a result, a strong collaboration of educators with various specialized forms of training is essential to meeting these demands. The reliance on an effective organization is essential in order to service all students.

There is research that shows that African-American male teachers were more likely to leave their urban setting despite the higher numbers of African-American male teachers and administrators within the schools (Nadworthy, 2015). Even though teachers of color are more likely to work in schools that are lowest performing and with high populations of students of color, those schools find it difficult to retain those teachers, particularly African American males (Irizarry & Donaldson, 2012; Nadworthy, 2015; Casey et. al., 2015). Researcher Travis Briscoe suggests that despite the isolation one experiences in suburban schools, the higher levels of resources in these schools helps retain these teachers (Nadworthy, 2015).

### **Challenges in the Profession**

Organizational structure is a contributing factor for why teachers stay in their schools and greatly impacts the work conditions. While disparities in organizational structures most greatly impact students in low-performing urban schools, the teacher shortage is becoming a crisis in all contexts. Many teachers are impacted by the lack of collaboration and agency that exists within their schools regardless of contexts.

### **Lack of Collaborative Support**

Teachers who lack the collaborative support of administration and teachers are also more likely to leave their schools (Borman & Dowling, 2008). Many schools across the nation implement professional learning communities (PLCs) that require teachers to meet regularly in a team to address instructional needs. In addition, for teachers who enter into the profession, a mentor is often assigned to support them as they learn how to navigate through the workload. Mentorship can take place through the support of a teacher and/or administrator. Unfortunately, when school professionals across all levels are overburdened, commitment to mentor and collaborate is difficult. In addition, the effectiveness of mentorship is limited when high turnover schools have an abundance of newly inducted teachers (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Darling-Hammond, 2010). This ineffective form of mentorship can cause isolation among new teachers and ultimately impact their effectiveness and satisfaction in the job (Benson, 2008). Finally, Ingerstoll (2001) suggests that a lack of community among teachers, students, and families weakens organizations structures, causing disruption that negatively impacts teacher retention. This disruption affects the overall sense of school cohesion that is important to supporting students.

### **Lack of Agency**

Another challenge teachers face that impacts retention is having little agency. According to Achinstein, Ogawa, Sexton & Freitas (2010) teachers leave the profession because they feel that they do not have decision-making power to address the changes they would like to see within their school. Many schools have teacher committees or

unions where they can collectively give input to class sizes, curriculum, school schedules, and student needs. Some of these issues involve work conditions. Work conditions also play a large role in job satisfaction. Ingerstoll (2001) states that higher rates of turnover are linked to lack of support from administration, student discipline, limited input in school decision, and low salaries. When they possess little agency to change working conditions, teachers often leave. In addition, high turnover schools have teachers with lower levels of decision-making influence and autonomy (Ingerstoll, 2001). Often these schools have many teachers with less experience and credentials to exercise agency. This is especially true for probationary teachers who have not received tenure. They do not yet have job security and are less likely to exercise agency in fear of losing their contract the following school year. When teachers feel unsupported and lack the decision making power to address issues that concern their workplace, it fosters a sense of hopelessness that causes teachers to look for employment elsewhere. Teachers will then seek employment in a school that has stronger organizational structures, or they will find a different profession altogether.

### **Additional Challenges for Teachers of Color**

While teachers face many collective challenges, much of the research on teacher retention focuses on white teachers (Irizarry, 2012). This is especially true since they make up the majority of the profession. However, since teachers of color are leaving at higher rates, it is assumed that teachers of color face even greater challenges that are unnoticed. In order to understand the challenges of minority teachers, men and women of

color, it is valuable to consider how education impacts people of color and working-class communities.

Teachers of color experience many social barriers because they do not fit fully into the dominate culture of traditional education. These challenges are often times not overt in public discourse; rather the racial, classist, and sexist assumptions and behaviors manifest within administrators, colleagues, students, and families and can be revealed in subtle and covert ways known as microaggressions (Solorzano, 1998). Teachers of color are not recognized for their strengths, but they become viewed through a stereotype, a lens of deficiency. When this occurs, these teachers can face challenges within the workplace because they are not given room to thrive. These various challenges include questioning credentials, role entrapment, compromising identities, isolation, and limitations to thrive.

### **Questioning Credentials**

Questioning credentials occurs when a professional's expertise in a field is in question, judging one's performance or knowledge in their field. Parents, administrators, and other teachers question the credentials of teachers of color when the credentials of white counter-parts are assumed. Lee (2012) interviewed various teachers of color within the secondary level of a suburban school setting. Lee reported that their knowledge of the subject matter and how they present themselves is questioned unlike their European-American colleagues. This was especially true for African-American male participants, who felt they had to prove their credentials by dispelling mainstream messages of African-Americans to their peers (Mobokela & Madsen, 2003).

**Stereotype oppression.** When there are dominate, stereotypical images of people of color, those images can be used to label and simplify their capabilities as a professional. Berry (2009) identifies this type of labeling as “stereotype oppression: The marginalization of a person based on who others believe they are” (p. 751). Berry highlights a case study of a Chinese-American bilingual woman in an education preservice program. This teacher was viewed as stereotypically Chinese through the demonstrations of being soft-spoken and compliant by the college supervisors. The college supervisors were also concerned about the teacher's ability to communicate in English fluently. For Asian-Americans, stereotype oppression happens when people assume limited or wrong characteristics of all Asian-Americans, such as all Asian-Americans are Chinese, first generation and are not able to speak English (Wu, 2002).

**Intersecting identities.** In addition, when women of color hold multiple intersecting identities such as race, gender, and language identities, their experiences become hard to capture in a monolith (Berry, 2009). Teacher supervisors can question one’s ability to be successful in the education program. Because they view the teacher through a stereotype and are unable to identify the strengths of a teacher who defies race, gender, ethnic, and language boundaries (Berry, 2009). Unfortunately, these challenges silence the contributions and scholarship of women of color.

### **Role Entrapment**

Role entrapment occurs when dominant images or stereotypes dictate the roles people play in their jobs. It assumes people to be monolithic and limit the possibilities of how teachers of color work within the schools when they are seen through a single lens.



According to Madson & Mabokela (2003), African-American male teachers are seen as a disciplinarian. They often play the role of disciplinarian for white teachers working with students of color. Many teachers would ask them for advice or intervention on issues pertaining to African-American students. While this role helped them advocate for students, it left them feeling limited when asked to solely speak to issues pertaining to students of color. Researcher Travis Bristol reports that colleagues viewed black male staff as police officers as opposed to educators (Nadworny, 2015). Colleagues do not provide black male teachers room to share their expertise on other educational topics because they were not respected as intellectuals.

Role entrapment can also occur in how teachers support extra-curricular and curriculum. Ramanathan's (2006) study of Asian-American teachers highlights the ethnic-specific cultural preference for language among the Japanese and Chinese teachers. The Japanese language teacher lead the Japanese club and the music teacher used Japanese songs. This reveals the ways Asian-Americans are limited in the cultural specifics they bring to their school community. They are allowed to share the visible features of culture such as food, language, festivities, customs, and rituals and less encouraged to share the vast historical, social, and intellectual context or backgrounds. This role entrapment provides a barrier for teachers and prevents them from upward mobility because they are tokenized and expected to be experts only in limited ways. As a result, they are not given space to provide expertise in other ways.

## **Compromising Identities**

When the majority of teachers nationally are European-American, teachers of color face the pressures to limit or compromise their identities to gain status. Burant et al. (2002) asserts that teachers face strong pressures to reduce the characteristics that make them different from their white colleagues, hiding aspects of their identity in their school to fit into the dominate climate. Lee (2012) considers this to be a part of the socialization experiences for teachers of color, especially for teachers who teach in suburban school districts with predominantly white populations. In order to understand socialization better, it is essential to examine the dominate culture that exists in schools.

Often, the school environment and climate is a space that allows white middle-class students to feel comfortable and enter school with a sense of ease (Banks, 1996). This is especially true in suburban school districts where the traditional styles and frameworks of learning are evident that do not consider the learning styles of diverse learners (Mabokela & Madson, 2003). Diverse learners often do not fit in the dominate culture and framework (Bode & Nieto, 2012). The ways education measures success is not by how diverse learners uniquely thrive, rather it is how they conform into the dominant frameworks of learning.

**Assimilation among Asian Americans.** The pressure to conform to the dominate culture is also known as assimilation. For some Asian-Americans who are coined as “model minorities”, many conform to the dominate culture, reducing aspects of themselves to appear different. In Ramanathan’s (2006) study, a number of Asian-American participants in the study did not identify as Asian American or see themselves

as teachers of color. The Asian-American teachers revealed conflicting ideas of the ways race impacts Asian-American educators. Perhaps these various perspectives have to do with the disconnect some Asian-Americans have to their history in the United States. According to journalist Helen Zia (2000), there is “A large population of recent immigrants with no link to the past struggles for equality by Asian-Americans and an entire civil rights movement of African Americans and others” (p. 273). Asian Americans are seen as individual achievers of the “model minority” often associated with assimilation. However, this notion presents larger barriers for racial solidarity among Asian-Americans and other oppressed groups.

**Pressures to reduce personal differences.** Vera Lee’s (2012) research of teachers of color within a suburban school district revealed the ways some of the teachers construct their identities at school, deciding which parts of their identity to reveal and which to conceal. The African-American teachers in the study reported neutralizing their racial identity to be accepted by other European American teachers. Teachers feel deeper pressures to reduce their differences among colleagues. One of the African-American teachers identified as a gay man and felt he needed to be cautious of being too open with his sexuality because of how others perceived him. One African-American female teacher reported being guarded about sharing family practices because they were fearful of perpetuating stereotypes to their European-American colleagues. The constant burden of being conscious of how one behaves within a field that is predominately European-American reveals how some teachers navigate through the environment. W.E.B. Dubois

(1990) considered the act of negotiating black identities as a form of “double-consciousness, the sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others” (p. 5).

In Mabokela & Madson (2003), African American teachers revealed the ways their suburban school district valued hiring teachers who appeared safe and could socialize with European-American teachers well. Three of the women who had been in the district the longest had lighter complexion and had been in the district long enough to see how their presence enabled the hiring of women with darker complexions and African American men. Regardless, the school district desired teachers who were not considered a threat. According to the participants in Mabokela & Madson (2003), “Those African Americans who understood the codes of power and the appropriate language and dress were more suited as the token African American” and more accepted within the school community (p. 19).

**Conflicts with identity and values.** Not only does negotiating identity play into how teachers feel accepted by colleagues in the work environment, but there is also evidence that shows that teachers make compromises with their identity and vision for teaching. There is research that reveals that identity is closely connected to motivations and visions for teaching. According Irizarry & Donaldson (2012), Latina and Latino preservice teachers entered teaching because they experienced negative difficult barriers in their schooling, especially in schools of high-needs. This motivation is different from their white peers in the preservice program because they had positive experiences with schools. These barriers teachers experienced in their school inform the ways they construct their personal vision in connection to their identity. However, some teachers

encountered challenges when they enter into a traditional education system in the teacher preparation program and school workplace. When the traditional education system is in conflict with one's cultural standpoint, vision for schooling, and identities, it places teachers in a position to make compromises that limit or reduces their identity or values (Berry, 2009; Brant et al., 2002; Lee, 2012). As a result, teachers feel pressure to conform to the dominant school culture and values, limiting their ability to speak to and carry out alternative visions.

### **Isolation**

A common theme that teachers of color experience is unwanted isolation (Lee, 2012; Ingerstoll & May, 2011). Teachers share a desire to connect, but there are fewer opportunities to connect in the midst of workload and lack of collaboration. Furthermore, teachers of color express challenges with isolation due to race.

**Boundary heightening.** For African American teachers, there is a greater awareness of differences between being a minority and the majority group within the work environment. Mabokela & Madson (2003) refers to this as "boundary heightening", specifically in the ways they noticed their differences in pedagogy and cultural responsiveness from European American colleagues (p. 99). These perceived boundary differences between themselves and European-American teachers made some feel uncomfortable addressing the boundaries honestly with their co-workers. The experiences of feeling like an outsider, without the space to have healthy honest collaboration, leaves teachers isolated from their work community. In addition, when African American male teachers spoke up and challenged dominant frameworks of

culture within the school, they were placed in difficult working conditions and isolated from other African-American teachers (Mabokela & Madson, 2003).

**Support among teachers of color.** Furthermore, when teachers of color experience difficult and unique situations that the majority of teachers do not fully understand, or have conflicting views of, the lack of teachers of color within the schools for mentorship and support can cause further racial isolation. Having people with similar experiences can help mitigate feelings of isolation. Teachers of color have benefited and expressed a desire to gather with other teachers of color to share their experiences and gain mentorship from novice teachers (Achinstein & Aguirre, 2008; Castendada, Kambutu & Rios, 2006; Lee, 2012; Ramanathan, 2006). However, without the critical mass and support to connect these teachers together, isolation becomes extremely challenging in an already difficult work environment.

### **Limitations to Thrive**

Teachers face numerous challenges within the workplace. These challenges include challenging standards, test-based accountability, inequitable resources, and lack of collaboration. When teachers are not given support to meet and guide these areas, it impacts their effectiveness (Darling-Hammond, 2010). As a result, teachers are finding the workplace more difficult than ever before. Therefore, teachers are expected to meet rigorous and intense demands that limit their capabilities to thrive within the classroom.

In addition, teachers of color experience unique challenges in the workplace, especially pertaining to how they work effectively with administration and colleagues. The various experiences of teachers of color reveal the ways stereotypes and assumptions

make work challenging and trap teachers in assumed roles that do not fully measure their full capabilities as professionals (Lee, 2012). This challenge is especially true for teachers who hold multiple identities of subordination. They navigate a system that tries to make their experiences singular (Lee, 2012, Berry, 2009). In addition, while schools are desperately seeking a diverse workforce, there are still extreme pressures to conform and limit identities in order to gain acceptance and novelty, especially in suburban school districts (Mabokela & Madson, 2003). These challenges do not provide opportunity for teachers to thrive, especially when they feel isolated from sharing these experiences in their workplace.

**Minnesota in context.** The lack of dialogue about race is consistent with the racial atmosphere in Minnesota. In the 2016 anthology *A Good Time for the Truth: Race in Minnesota*, Japanese-American playwright and activist David Mura speaks to the unique characteristics of dominant white culture and how race is not acknowledged. In addition, he characterizes white Minnesotans as people who do not like controversy and default to “Minnesota nice”.

So many white people here subscribe to the following tautological wheel: The only time we encounter racial tensions is when the subject of race comes up. So the way to keep away tensions is to not talk about race. If no one is talking about race, that means that racism no longer exists (Mura, 2016, p. 54).

Yet the stark disparities between white Minnesotans and some non-white communities suggests another reality. A report by Frohlich et. al (2015) suggests that Minnesota’s high incarceration and disparities in income make Minnesota the second

worst place to live for Black America. The state also has an achievement gap that is worse than national trends (Magnon, 2015). The liberal state of Minnesota has failed to acknowledge the present disparities, and in doing so has not brought forth the structural and environmental supports for communities of color and indigenous communities to live and thrive.

Minnesota schools seek hard to find teachers of color despite the lack of support in places to address their systemic and environmental challenges. The challenges are of great concern considering the difficulties of retaining teachers, especially African-American teachers. Because teachers of color have a greater potential to identify educational disparities, they are a necessary voice to have in Minnesota's schools (Achinstein & Aguirre, 2008). However, teachers feel intense pressures to limit themselves, potentially silencing their abilities to speak to critical issues (Lee, 2012). Nationally, these issues of equity should be schools' top-priority to prepare all students for the global future (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Therefore, it is important not only to provide enough support for teachers of color to stay in the profession, but there also needs to be support to enhance their capacity to thrive, and lead school communities towards more equitable outcomes for all students.

### **Sustainability**

Despite all the demands teacher(s) face, teachers have found ways to sustain their work in the midst of stress. According to Merriam-Webster (n.d.), *sustain* is defined in two ways. First, sustain means "to give support or relief to" something or someone. For teachers, providing autonomy and valuing the collaborative expertise of teachers are



ways to support and relieve teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2010). The second definition of *sustain* goes even further: “To provide sustenance” to someone, as a means to provide nourishment or strength (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Perhaps a way to address retention is not just to develop strategies to keep teachers, but to strengthen the collective work of teachers in a way that provides better outcomes for the profession.

### **Collaboration**

Professional learning communities were established because they were critical to student success. Effective collaboration is described as:

A systematic process in which teachers work together to analyze and improve their classroom practice. Teachers work in teams, engage in an ongoing cycle of questions that promote deep team learning. This process, in turn, leads to higher levels of student achievement. (DuFour, 2004, par. 16)

Working together in effective learning communities can alleviate isolation and support teachers by sharing collective knowledge of meeting the needs of students. Another effective form of collaboration is mentorship, especially for new teachers. Providing ongoing mentorship with built in collaboration time can have a direct impact in teacher retention (Guarino et al., 2006).

### **Autonomy**

Providing opportunities for teachers in decision-making powers is another important way to sustain teachers. Teachers apply their professional expertise to what happens in the classroom, exercising agency on the issues that affect them and their students. Darling-Hammond (2010) emphasizes that teacher quality and experience both

have a significant effect on student performance. Therefore, when administrators look to the voices of teachers to help make important decisions, teachers will be stronger agents and advocates for students. For teachers of color who are more inclined to improve the educational opportunities of students most affected by the achievement gap, teacher autonomy is very important (Ingerstoll & May, 2011). They can contribute to curriculum and pedagogy because it provides opportunities for them to share their wealth of knowledge.

### **Strengthening the Profession**

Providing teachers a voice begins with trusting the expertise and knowledge of teachers and students that comes from their qualifications, as well as their social-cultural skills. To consider sustainability as a means of strengthening the profession and well-being of educators, there needs to be a model that is holistic and empowers teachers, especially teachers of color who face direct conflict and oppression in relation to their identities. This support is not just the organizational support needed for teachers to stay in the profession, schools need to fully care for teachers in a manner where they are capable to thrive and be effective to meet the needs of all students.

**Engaged pedagogy.** Bell hooks (1994) envisions a model of engaged pedagogy that utilizes “self-actualization” as a means to empower students in education through the process of the teacher integrating knowledge with social practices. Hooks (1994) considers engaged pedagogy as progressive, critical, and holistic, committed “to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own well-being” (p. 15). This is in counterpoint to the traditional views that supports what Paulo Friere (2000) calls a

“banking model” of education. In this model, teachers serve as a vehicle that delivers information to students, as if students are empty vessels. In addition, this model eliminates the personal and social engagement of teaching, one that centers around well-being and wholeness. According to hooks (1994), “The objectification of the teacher within bourgeois educational structures seemed to denigrate notions of wholeness and uphold the idea of a mind/body split, one that promotes and supports compartmentalization” (p. 16). This idea upholds a separation of public and private, disconnecting the life practices, habits, and roles of teachers. For teachers of color, the composing of one's identity as separate from one's racial, cultural, and socio-economic background supports the types of compartmentalization and conflicts one goes through in the workplace. Therefore, to exist in a way that promotes wholeness, engaged pedagogy utilizes self actualization to integrate the whole person in the practice of teaching.

**Funds of knowledge.** The integration of wholeness has often been associated with students and less so with teachers. One way to counteract the banking system is to tap into students’ “funds of knowledge”, the everyday knowledge drawn from home and community practices (Moll, 2002). Building on one’s funds of knowledge is often a term used in education to draw on the social-cultural and historical context of students in a classroom and view these foundational contexts as assets rather than deficits. Valez-Inbanez & Greenberg (1992) reveal the ways funds of knowledge have been used and transformed to allow social networks to thrive. For teachers, especially teachers of color, there is a great need to consider the ways they can sustain themselves to thrive in the workplace. Therefore, Monzo (2003) expands the idea by applying funds of knowledge

to Latino and Latina teachers and paraeducators. The use of funds of knowledge not only informs the way teachers understand the cultural and historical context of students, but builds a richer collaborative professional community that is strengthened and enriched by a diverse team of teachers.

### **Cultural Wealth Among Communities of Color**

Funds of knowledge serve as assets to students and potentially teachers, and yet Yosso (2005) takes the idea further by using this knowledge as a form of resistance by identifying funds of knowledge as “community cultural wealth... an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by communities of color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression” (p. 77). As teachers who live in systems of domination, these systems impact the ways women, educators of color, and teachers from working-class backgrounds experience the workplace. By drawing on the knowledge, experiences, and capital of these teachers, it can be used as a form to counteract the challenges and micro-aggressions they experience in the workplace in a way that centers around well-being and collective empowerment. There are six types of cultural capital: Aspirational capital, Familial capital, Social capital, Linguistic capital, Resistant capital and Navigational capital.

**Aspirational capital.** Aspirational capital refers to one’s ability to have hopes for the future in the midst of obstacles (Yosso, 2005). Oppressed communities face many barriers in society while they are capable of imagining new possibilities. Irazarry & Donaldson (2012) reported that Latina and Latino teachers entered into teaching because

they wanted to make a difference within their community by being a role model, even though they understood the challenges they faced being disenfranchised.

**Familial capital.** Another form of wealth is the cultural history, knowledge, and values nurtured in the family known as familial capital (Yosso, 2005). Valez-Inbanez & Greenberg (1992) revealed the ways familial capital has provided a foundation for Mexican-American families to pass down history and wisdom critical to identity development. Often these ties extend to one's immediate relationships to extended families of the past and present. Drawing upon this capital allows teachers to feel a greater sense of responsibility and connection to their community and resources.

**Social capital.** Social capital refers to the close networks one has to people and community resources (Yosso, 2005). These social contacts can provide instrumental and emotional support to navigate through society's institutions. While isolation is a challenge for teachers, teachers of color have benefited and expressed a desire to gather with other teachers of color to share experiences and gain mentorship (Achinstein & Aguirre, 2008; Castenada, Kambutu & Rios, 2006; Kohli, 2009; Lee, 2012; Ramanathan, 2006).

**Linguistic capital.** Linguistic capital refers to the intellectual, social and linguistic skills people develop through experiences in communicating in different contexts (Yosso, 2005). It builds off the tradition of storytelling, oral narratives, and artistic forms of communication that many cultures have. It also draws upon one's ability to code-switch as they navigate through different social contexts. Achinstein & Aguirre (2008) described the ways Latino, African American, Asian, Filipino, and biracial

teachers communicated with students of color in an effective way to expand their knowledge of race and culture when their identity was questioned.

**Resistant capital.** Resistant capital is the knowledge and skills one develops as a result of challenging inequality (Yosso, 2005). When systems of domination oppress, it builds a resiliency among oppressed peoples. African American male teachers in Mabokela & Madson's (2007) study were able to advocate for students of color, challenging perceptions and practices of white teachers.

**Navigational capital.** Navigational capital is the ability to navigate institutions that were not designed for them as people of color (Yosso, 2005). According to Achinstein & Aguirre (2008) teachers of color have a strong understanding of how to navigate the school system. It allows one to function in multiple contexts, especially ones that do not fit their own cultural experiences. Teachers are able to transfer those skills and resources to students of color as they journey through education.

### **Utilizing Cultural Wealth as a Framework for Teachers of Color**

Funds of knowledge and community cultural wealth are the practices that engages the social-cultural and historical experiences of students of color. Expanding this practice to teachers of color in their workplace can be an effective way to engage teachers in the practice of engaged pedagogy. Perhaps this practice can inform how schools can better sustain teachers in a challenging profession, especially for teachers of color. Lee (2012) points out that teachers who come from backgrounds different from mainstream culture tend to limit or reduce their identities. However, these reductions do not fully support the whole teacher and continue to reinforce a divide between the private and personal. When

teachers of color are critical and valuable assets to the education system, schools should consider the ways cultural wealth contribute to strengthening teachers and the profession. Thus, diverse teachers and voices needed in our education can potentially thrive in their work.

More research is needed on the sustainability of teachers of color. While much of the research seeks to retain teachers, especially teachers of color, there is little research that connects the ways schools can care for and strengthen teachers of color to thrive within their workplace. Therefore, this research will specifically focus on the sustainability of teachers of color in relation to how they utilize Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth in their workplace.

### **Chapter Overview**

It is clear that educators in general face many challenges in the workplace to meet the demands of diverse students. These challenges, along with little collaborative support and agency, are some of the many reasons why a large percentage of teachers are leaving teaching within the first five years of the onset of their careers (Ingersoll & May, 2011). For teachers of color, the rates are even higher. With these challenges, along with the demand for teachers of color and American Indian teachers, it is crucial to consider factors that support sustainability in the workplace. While there is a large body of research that focus on the profession's challenges, there is less research that discusses the ways to care for the wellbeing of teachers. For teachers of color who are in spaces that are racially isolating, this is especially important.

This understanding of sustainability can inform the ways we retain effective teachers in our school. Rather than compartmentalizing and limiting teachers that separate the knowledge from the social and creative act, we must find creative understandings of teaching that shifts the future of the profession to meet the needs of all students (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Teaching and learning become creative acts where teachers and students can collectively thrive.

Cultural wealth is a practice that focuses on the wealth students of color contribute to the learning experience. Cultural wealth can also potentially be a means to speak to the ways teachers of color contribute to the profession as a form of sustainability. Rather than limiting the identities of teachers, Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth attempts to integrate one's whole self into the active learning experience. Perhaps cultural wealth can better inform how schools can strengthen the voices and work of teachers of color to produce more equitable outcomes.

Chapter Three describes the methodology of how I conducted my research that utilized qualitative paradigm and narrative research. It will describe the rationale for using the qualitative paradigm and narrative research. It will detail the methods of data collection and the plan for analysis. Finally, it will contain ethical considerations while conducting this research.



## CHAPTER THREE

### Methodology

Because the teaching profession struggles to retain teachers, especially teachers of color, this study was designed to explore how teachers of color use cultural wealth to sustain themselves in their profession. This study analyzed the challenges of teachers in a suburban context and attempted to identify ways teachers of color sustain their work. My research question is: How do teachers of color sustain themselves in a profession that struggles to retain teachers? I will explore the following questions:

- What challenges do teachers face in the workplace?
- What additional challenges to teachers of color face?
- What factors strengthen and sustain teachers of color?
- How does sustainability relate to teacher retention among teachers of color?

I used narrative research for this study. Narrative research is a design where the researcher examines the lives of individuals by asking them to provide stories of their experiences (Reissman, 2008). I chose this particular method because experiential narratives are central in challenging dominant narratives (Yosso, 2005). It challenges mainstream ideologies and provides room for sharing the diversity of experiences through intersectional identities of gender, race, and class. Narrative research also allowed myself as a researcher to incorporate my own experiences into the work of a collaborative narrative (Creswall, 2014). As an Asian American woman and educator, my stories and experiences were connected to the stories of these educators.

I implemented this work in three phases over the course of three months with myself and five participants through personal interviews, a group interview, and reflection journal. The goal of my research was to understand better the ways teachers of color currently sustained themselves, as well as provide insight as to the potential of how cultural wealth strengthened the profession among teachers of color.

### **Overview of the Chapter**

This chapter discusses the methods used in this study. First, the rationale and description of the research is presented with descriptions of the qualitative research paradigms. Second, I describe the methods used to collect the data. Third, the methods used for data analysis is described and the verification data will be detailed. Last, I describe the ethical considerations in my study.

### **Qualitative Research Paradigm**

The qualitative research methods were appropriate for my research because it examined the way individuals or groups understood a social or human problem (Creswall, 2014). This approach was fitting for my study because I sought to understand the diverse experiences of teachers of color in a difficult profession, giving voice to their stories that cannot be quantifiable. For teachers of color who are underrepresented, qualitative research allowed their experiences to be nuanced and complex. I highlighted narratives that are absent from dominant narratives of the profession. By studying these experiences of teachers of color within this context, qualitative research was essential to how I developed my design.

Qualitative research has characteristics that enabled me to gather the appropriate data for my study. Qualitative research is designed to be done in a natural setting, established upon the built relationships of the participants providing an up-close perspective of their experiences with education. Also, qualitative research requires that the researcher collects data directly without the use of instruments. It collects and utilizes data from open-ended questions to identify larger themes. Most importantly, the reason why qualitative research was fitting for this study pertains to the role of the participants and researcher. It allowed the participants to give meaning to their experiences, specifically through self-determining how their experiences related to the larger picture. It is not the researcher's role to ascribe those experiences, rather the themes are in connection to the researcher. It allowed the researcher to reflect on their background and experiences as a means to shape the direction of the study (Creswall, 2014). Qualitative approach provided room for the study to shift and develop depending on the process of how the data was collected. Finally, qualitative researchers provided a holistic understanding of the research, providing multiple perspectives and angles to understand a larger, more complex picture (Creswell, 2014).

### **Narrative Research**

According to Creswell (2014), narrative research is designed to study the lives of participants, providing stories of their lives. Narrative research aligns with radical feminist theory because it centers the narratives of women of color, those who hold multiple identities of marginalization. Through the narratives, we are informed of the ways education disadvantages women and people of color by re-centering the focus and

challenging dominant deficiency narratives. Also, narrative research enabled us to encompass the “multiplicity and intersectionality of identities” that is emphasized through the lens of radical feminist theory. Providing narrative(s) based on a feminist lens became an act of resistance and liberation (hooks, 1994). One of the ways this occurred was through the shift in power. Rather than keeping the subjects and researcher at a far distance, the subjects had a powerful role of voice and authenticity through narratives.

Narrative research also combined the participants' narratives with the researcher's experiences. Throughout this research, I found myself personally impacted and connected to the themes and experiences of teachers of color in education. Narrative research and engaged pedagogy provided opportunities to reflect on my own experiences in relation to the participants' experiences.

Finally, narrative research was a collaborative approach that reduced the distance between researcher and participants by allowing the participants to define and self-determine their experiences. Together, we determined how to best capture these narratives. Throughout this process, the study shifted based on the collaborative direction of the researcher and participants. This approach requires that the foundations of this work are based on mutual trust and relationships as we collectively give voice to our own narratives (Huber, 2009).

### **Research Setting**

This research was set in a large suburban district in the midwestern part of the United States. It is a large district located in the second and third ring suburbs of a metropolitan area. Like many suburban communities, this district has seen a dramatic

change in demographics over the last 20 years due to the influx of communities of color that moved from the urban communities. Students of color made up 25% of the total enrollment. In addition, the populations of students of color differ greatly depending on the location of which the schools resides in. While there are a little over 2,000 teachers, as of 2015, less than 4 percent of them self-identify as being a teacher of color. Therefore, the school district implements professional development for teachers to address cultural responsiveness. This includes The National SEED Project (Seeking Education Equity and Diversity), Courageous Conversations, and Culturally Responsive Teaching Committee. Participation and leadership in equity teams vary at different schools. The school district also created a Recruitment and Retention Taskforce committee, focusing on increasing and sustaining employees of color in the district. This group meets regularly to discuss ways to increase representation in the school district. Many of the efforts have been concentrated on recruitment.

In order to support educators, a teacher led organizing entity formed focusing on the needs of teachers of color. Its mission is to work towards addressing recruitment and retention through building connections, empowerment, and mentorship. They have reached out to self-identified teachers of color district wide and have hosted a number of meetings throughout the year in partnership with its union.

### **Participants**

The participants included five self-identified teachers of color at the secondary level. All of the participants work at the high school level, spread throughout three high schools in the district. Three of the participants self-identify as cisgendered women; two

of the participants self-identify as cisgendered men. Two of the teachers are of African descent, and three of the teachers are of Asian descent. Three of the teachers teach English language arts. One teacher teaches math. One teacher teaches music. All of the participants graduated from a United States public school and attended a traditional teacher preparation program at a university for a masters or bachelors degree. All of the teachers are tenured. The years of experience ranged between 5 years and 14 years in the district.

As a researcher, I participated in the research. I am a Chinese-American daughter of immigrants from Vietnam. I self-identify as a cisgendered woman of color and also teach at the secondary high school level, working with English language learners from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. I was born and raised in the Midwest and graduated from a third-ring suburban high school of a similar metropolitan area. I attended a four year college and attained my degree and teaching license. I have been a part of school district for nine years.

### **Methods**

Through narrative research, I planned to collect data in three ways: personal interviews, a group interview, and a reflective journal. Through these methods, I hoped to analyze the following:

- What challenges do teachers face in the workplace?
- What additional challenges to teachers of color face?
- What factors strengthen and sustain teachers of color?
- How does sustainability relate to teacher retention among teachers of color?

Hooks (1994) utilized engaged pedagogy to bring teachers and students to a self-awareness, integrating and applying oneself to the active engagement of teaching and learning. In this research I applied hooks's theory of engaged pedagogy to understand sustainability. The theory attempts to integrate the awareness and practice of teachers' personal and professional lives, viewing them as foundational assets one brings to education as a part of teaching and learning. Therefore, the purpose of this research was to consider how this integration strengthened teachers of color in their profession, by considering their assets or community cultural wealth.

The process was conducted over the course of two months. The first part of the study began with personal interviews of members of the group interview. The purpose of the personal interviews was to identify challenges for these teachers within their workplace. I considered how the experiences of women and men of color in teaching relate to the research, specifically in suburban contexts. I assessed if the challenges were consistent with the research. The second part of the study involved a group interview, during which we utilized dialogue to converse about aspirations and collective challenges. We also considered how teachers of color found strength in their work through the lens of Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth. Teachers would write a reflection that highlighted a story of strength in their profession. Finally, I kept a reflection journal of the work as a researcher. I reflected on the ways teachers sustain their work and how that can inform retention.

**Data Collection Technique One: Personal Interviews**

After the participants gave consent, I conducted interviews of secondary teachers of color in the school district. The interview questions were pre-generated yet allowed room for flexibility so teachers could share and elaborate. I recorded and transcribed the interviews. Once the interviews were transcribed, I analyzed the ways teachers navigate through the dominant school culture and framework to see if it was consistent with the research from my literature review. Specifically, I explored the following questions: How did the teachers describe their experience within their school as a teacher of color? How did one's identity in school compare to one's identity outside of school? What challenges did the teacher identify that prevents them from thriving and engaging wholly within their profession? I reflected on how these interviews relate to the research as well as consider new findings.

**Data Collection Technique Two: Group Interview**

In addition to interviews, there was a three hour group interview session made up of the teachers of color who conducted the personal interview. The first hour was spent team building and establishing norms. The second hour we discussed reflections on Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth. Finally, the third hour was planned for teachers to illustrate and share their personal stories to serve as an outline for a narrative. Throughout the group interview, they would consider these questions: How do personal aspects of my life (cultural wealth) strengthen my work as a teacher? How has cultural wealth been used in our practice? How can it be used to sustain our practice? What



impact can discussions about cultural wealth have for others within my profession?

During the group interview, I recorded and took notes of the dialogue for analysis.

### **Data Collection Technique Three: Reflection Journal**

After each personal interview, I wrote a reflection on my work as a researcher in a field journal. I drew inferences and conclusions of these findings as it relates to sustainability and retention. I considered the following questions: How did this information strengthen the wellbeing of teachers in the teaching profession? What impact did the awareness of cultural wealth have for teachers in the profession? How did this inform teacher retention?

After collecting the data, I analyzed the data through triangulation. I observed how the data related to one another. Were there major themes that emerged consistently throughout? Was the data consistent with the research from the literature review? Did the data support or refute my hypothesis? What new findings did the data reveal and what were the limitations? I had also planned to select three participants and formulate three narratives that captured these findings. I planned to select participants whose narratives represented a diverse representation of cultural wealth expressed through Yosso (2005). For example, if teachers shared stories that focused on one type of capital, I would select participants based on diverse perspectives within the narrative. If the narratives highlighted various capital, I would select a diverse combination of the ways cultural wealth was used. Another criteria I planned to use in selecting participants was ensuring that there was gender and racial diversity in the selection. This would also provide insight on the ways class, race, and gender impact a teacher's experience. These narratives

would share the unique experiences of these participants and their assets but also reflect on the ways these narrative connect with conclusions drawn from research in relationship to the literature review. The narratives would also highlight the strengths and limitations of utilizing cultural wealth to strengthen the voice of teachers. Using pseudonyms, I would write about these participants and share their background and personal stories as it related to cultural wealth. I would utilize input from participants and transcripts from interviews and the group interview to write these narratives. These narratives would be shared with participants for review to ensure that they captured their experiences authentically. Finally, I would reflect on how these narratives can inform us about sustainability and teacher retention.

### **Ethical Considerations**

When conducting qualitative study with participants, it was crucial that the study was conducted with high ethical standards. The experiences of people of color in school systems can be difficult to share. Therefore, it was important that the integrity of participants and the schools be protected. Before conducting the interview and facilitating the focus group sessions, I sought approval from the selected school district to conduct the research. Afterwards, I issued out a letter (See APPENDIX A & B) explaining the research to participants and the confidentiality of their participation. If at any point during the research process the participants desired to be omitted from the process, they had the freedom to do so. In order to continue trust with the participants, I was in communication with the participants along the process.

Finally it was important to recognize how my lens and conclusions could represent a story that contained bias or a limited perspective of the “other”. Cole (2009) recognized the limitations of narrative research when they are used to explain someone else’s story. A narrative about another marginalized individual can continue patterns and discourse of domination (p. 570). Therefore, it was important that participants have the opportunity to stay actively engaged in the research process. I informed them of which pieces of their narrative from interviews and self-reflection will be used in the synthesis.

### **Human Subject Review**

The plan for research was submitted to Hamline University’s Human Subject Committee for review. The proposal detailed the research paradigm and rationale for utilizing narrative research to explore sustainability among teachers of color. It also explained the process for data collection, ethical considerations, and potential risks to conducting this research. The review board approved the research proposal before I proceeded to collect data.

### **Chapter Overview**

This study focused on the cultural wealth and sustainability of teachers of color. I used a qualitative approach because it captured the experiences of teachers and the researcher’s role in the study. I also utilized narrative research to inform how teachers sustained themselves through the lens of cultural wealth. This was accomplished through recorded and transcribed interviews, narratives and reflective journals.

Chapter 4 details the results of the study. Describing common themes throughout the interview that identifies teacher challenges in relation to identity. It also explains the

process from the group interview, analyzing how community cultural wealth informs sustainability. I also shared my personal reflections on this work and what I have learned about how sustainability informs teacher retention. Finally, chapter four connects these findings with the literature review.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **Results**

The purpose of this study is to use narrative research to better understand teacher sustainability and retention. My research question is: How do teachers of color sustain themselves in a profession that struggles to retain teachers? I will explore the following questions:

- What challenges do teachers face in the workplace?
- What additional challenges to teachers of color face?
- What factors strengthen and sustain teachers of color?
- How does sustainability relate to teacher retention among teachers of color?

### **Overview of the Chapter**

I will identify the ways teachers of color experience challenges in their workplace and highlight the ways teachers of color sustain themselves. Looking at the ways teachers of color are sustaining themselves with their work can provide opportunities to address how to better strengthen the work of teachers of color to address retention

This chapter details the methods and tools utilized throughout the three types of data collection: Personal Interview, Group Interview, and Post-Reflections. It identifies the strengths of each method and some of the challenges that took place when administering research tools. There is also a description of the adjustments made in the data collection process and the rationale for these adjustments.

Next, the chapter describes how the data was analyzed. It considers some of the strengths of qualitative study and challenges that occurred in the analysis. Finally, this

section reports on the results from the research. It connects the findings from the research to the literature review and draws conclusions of teacher sustainability and retention.

### **Context of the Study**

The participants in this study consisted of five high school teachers who teach in the second and third ring suburbs of a metropolitan area in the Midwest. Three of the teachers are of Asian descent. Two of the teachers are of African descent. All of them grew in the Midwest and spent their K12 education in the public education system. All of the participants attained their teaching degree and license in the Midwest. All have been working in the same district for at least five years. In the personal interview, I asked the participants to state how they would identify in terms of race, gender, and class. Many of the participants included their ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, and elaborated on their idea of class identity. I selected a pseudonym for participants to retain some anonymity. Their race, class, gender identity, and subject areas are listed below.

*Table 1-Demographic Summary of Participants*

Pseudonym	Identity	Subject
Samantha	black cisgender middle class woman	Music
Jason	asian cisgender middle class man	English
Tou	asian cisgender working class man	English
Mali	asian cisgender middle class woman	Math
Nicole	black cisgender working class woman	English

These participants agreed to meet with me over the course of two months to participate in a personal interview, group interview, and complete a post-reflection. When the interviews were completed, they were transcribed and given to the participants to review. Participants read over their transcripts and omitted portions they wanted removed from the data collections. They also had the ability to provide feedback on how the process went. This built and maintained trust between the researcher and the participants.

In addition to the teachers of color who participated in this study, I, as the researcher was involved as well. My background and experience as a teacher and my relationship to these participants also played a role in how I collected, analyzed, and reflected on the data. While my primary role was to gather information, my personal lens and background still included a level of bias on how I interpreted the information as a Chinese-American middle class woman and educator.

### **Data Collection**

Narrative research was central to data collection in the qualitative study. Teachers of color provided stories and life experiences that informed teacher challenges and sustainability. This form of research was fitting because of how few teachers of color there are in the overall profession. When the majority of teachers are white, the narratives of teachers of African descent, Asian descent, Latino and Native teachers are often absent from the mainstream conversations. It was also important to use narrative study because it was an effective way of capturing the diversity of challenges and experience brought up from the participants in my study. This provided more nuance because there were many variables that contribute to one's experience (Berry, 2009; Lee, 2012). These experiences

cannot all be isolated to one's race, gender or class identity. Narrative research provided the ability not to be limited by single variables but to see one's story through a whole lens.

Narrative research allowed the researcher to be more involved in the study. I found myself connecting my own experiences as participants were sharing. In addition to my connections, I allowed the participants to have flexibility and freedom to guide the discussion. This informed how I proceeded with each interview question; it also informed how I made final adjustments.

### **Data Collection Technique One: Personal Interviews**

At the beginning of the research process, personal interviews took place between the participant and the researcher. The purpose was to gather understanding of one's background, analyze the challenges, and understand the ways they navigate through their work environment. Interview questions were pre-generated and given to participants in advance (See APPENDIX B). Personal interviews took place during the month of August. School was not in session and teachers had yet to start their teacher workshop training. I contacted them personally by email, and we met in various public and private locations over lunch or coffee. At the beginning of each interview, there was time for the participant and I to talk and catch up from being away from school over the summer. This time provided space for participants to feel more comfortable before being asked interview questions. As a result, each meeting ran longer than an hour. This adjustment was necessary in order to establish trust between myself and the participant.



At the beginning of the interview, I asked the participants to share their race, ethnic, gender, and class identity. The purpose of the first question was to provide background to identify these classifications, however, this did not always happen in the response (SEE APPENDIX B). Also, I did not want to assume how someone would identify even though there may have been clues in one's narrative. Therefore, I asked a specific question that allowed for participants to share their identities.

As the interviews were taking place, I noticed that there were interview questions that were very similar to one another (APPENDIX B). Also, the participant would sometimes elaborate on a question which would answer a following interview question. When that happened, I would often summarize what they said, and follow up with, "Is there anything else you would like to add." Finally, when asked questions about support and thriving in the profession, teachers had different understandings of what thriving would look like. Some teachers felt that they were thriving because they were confident in their work. My intentions for thrive was to be viewed in a collective sense, one that would eliminate or strengthen and shapes the profession that prepares all students as what Darling-Hammond (2010) suggests. Perhaps it would be appropriate to have a more common understanding of thrive.

### **Data Collection Technique Two: Group Interview**

After personal interviews were complete, a group interview was held to discuss teacher challenges and sustainability. I also utilized Yosso's (2005) cultural community wealth as a framework for understanding sustainability. The group took place at the local library in late September. School had been in session for a couple of weeks and teachers

had been busy getting used to a work schedule again. There was a difference in the type of energy in the room. Not all the participants knew each other well, and it took some time to get used to having a conversation about personal experiences. Also, one participant could not attend the group interview due to a family commitment. Others who attended made time to do it in the middle of a busy school year. The participants and researcher were more tired, some were recovering from a cold. The fatigue from the beginning of the school year was a clear difference when comparing the group interview with the personal interviews.

**Changes to data collection.** I had originally anticipated a three hour interview utilizing the group interview questions (See APPENDIX C). We started a half an hour late because we needed time to converse informally. I also provided time for teachers to reflect on questions in writing before responding. This also lengthened the group interview process. Even though we completed Part One of the group interview, there was less time for Part Two and Part Three. In order to respect the participants' time, I had to shorten Part Two and shift Part Three to a post-reflection. Part Three was not covered in the group interview. Therefore, rather than having teachers formally share a personal story of strength with the group, I told the participants that they could write a personal reflection that highlights their strength as teachers. This reflection became a replacement for Part Three of the group interview.

In the methodology, it stated that I would record during certain parts of the group interview. I planned to record only during the discussion on teacher challenges and the discussion on sustainability. However, when teachers were sharing their vision and goals

for teaching, I felt that the information was necessary for data collection. Therefore after participants were responding for 5 minutes, I decided to record the group interview responses to their entirety. The recording was transcribed.

**Challenges to data collection.** Time became the biggest challenge for this data collection. Teachers were focused on the school year and could not provide the same commitment as they did when they were on summer break. In reflection, I believe it would be more effective to collect all data during the summer when teachers are physically and emotionally less tired. Also, I did not anticipate how much time it would take to complete all three stages of the group interview. The inability to stay on schedule made the group interview challenging for the researcher. Though I do not believe it would be appropriate to extend the length of the group interview, it would be appropriate to consider splitting the group interview over the course of three separate meetings. Teachers would prepare responses for the question before the meeting, allowing more time for discussion.

Throughout the data collection process, it became clear that it was critical to make sure participants and researchers had common understanding of key terms pertaining to this topic. Even though participants had time to read Yosso's (2005) article, the allotted time only introduced the ideas to the participants (See APPENDIX L). There could have been more time spent in understanding the different types of cultural community wealth. As a researcher, there could have been more facilitating and guidance in summarizing important concepts. Yosso's (2005) article focused the understanding and application to student populations. Gathering a clear, thorough and common understanding would have

provided more segue into applying cultural community wealth into the teaching profession.

Despite these obstacles with the group interview, the data was still very informative. The participants shared openly and with ease, relating to one another in their experiences. Because teachers were used to collaborating with other teachers, there was little need to establish formal norms for talking with one another. Everyone listened to each other's ideas, elaborated and made connections to their own experiences. There was a deep sense of mutual respect and understanding when the group interview was over.

### **Data Collection Technique Three: Post-Reflections**

There were two types of reflections that I used for my data. There were self reflections as stated in my methodology. Also, because of the lack of time to complete Part Three of the group interview, I requested that participants also write a post reflection. One participant conducted a post-reflection through a personal conversation. This self reflection was requested a week after the group interview (SEE APPENDIX D). I also felt that a self-reflection was another great way of getting a more authentic form of perspective. Therefore, the third data collection consists of my personal self-reflections throughout the research process and the participant post-reflections in this data.

**Post-reflection of participants.** The post-reflection was sent in an email, and teachers had a week to respond. Only two teachers responded to the reflection, due to their busy work schedules. The two that responded expressed some confusion over how to interpret the question. They were not sure if they were to share a story of cultural wealth as mentioned in (Yosso, 2005), or a highlight of their profession. However, both

shared a story that represents a meaningful moment in their career. One participant had a conversation with me on their thoughts on the research process. The conversation also created an opportunity to share ideas on sustainability and cultural wealth. These post-reflections were utilized as a part of the third data collection along with my own self-reflections.

After collecting all the data, I decided that it would not be effective to write narratives for participants that represent cultural wealth. The first reason is that I wanted to be sure that the participants' authentic voices were heard. Their experience is complex, layered, and nuanced and writing a narrative that captures their story can potentially draw false conclusions or create another monolith (hooks, 1989). The participants who were a part of this research shared stories of their experience and identity. As a researcher, my understanding of those stories can be based on my assumptions and experiences. Therefore, I have the potential to be biased. Personal post-reflections provided a more effective opportunity to authentically capture narratives from first hand experience rather than having the researcher attempt to write the participants' narratives (Cole, 2009).

**The importance of common terminology.** Finally, in reflection it is important as a researcher to clearly define topics and terms so the participants have a clear understanding of how to respond to questions. I found this especially important in the group interview as participants comprehended the questions differently. It made participants unsure of their response in a group setting. In a personal setting, I was more open to having teachers interpret a question the way they wanted because it allowed them time to reflect and share a personal story that they wanted the researcher to hear.

Participants shared different experiences or context pertaining to their personal background and upbringing, coming from different types of gender, race and class identities. Providing them the room to answer a question in their own way provided more flexibility and allowed the teachers the space to build trust and not feel restricted to rigid answers.

### **Data Analysis**

When the personal interviews, group interview, and self-reflections were complete, they were transcribed. I analyzed the ways teachers of color navigated through the dominant school culture. I utilized specific codes to classify the types of responses.

*Table 2- List of Codes for Participant's Responses*

Response	Code
Teacher Challenge (General)	CG
Teacher Challenge (Identity Specific)	CS
Navigational Capital	N
Social Capital	S
Linguistic Capital	L
Resistant Capital	R
Familial Capital	F
Aspirational Capital	A

I identified challenges to their workplace common to teachers and challenges that occurred specific to their race and gender identity. I also identified areas in their responses that signified an aspect of Yosso's (2005) cultural community wealth and analyzed how teachers utilize or hide their unique aspects of cultural community wealth at work. Finally, I considered the possibility of utilizing cultural community wealth as a

tool to inform teacher sustainability and retention. The data was synthesized in a way that drew on themes and connected back to the research in the literature review.

### **Challenges in the Profession**

Throughout the interviews, participants referenced their challenges in the context of suburban schools. Because there is greater revenue available to provide resources and support for teachers, participants spoke from positions of class privilege in their work context. Jason recognized this as he shared his vision as a teacher, one that “Comes from a place of privilege. If you don’t need to think about students, teachers, community, and expectations and what not, that means that things are going well enough for me and my practice that I don’t need to think about it. They are not current deficiencies that I’m facing” (Jason, personal communication, September 24, 2016). The resources provided in this context strengthen the organizational structures of schools and their districts (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Ingerstoll, 2001). Strong organizational structures also support the collaborative community needed to help students achieve. In contrast, urban and rural teachers face tend to face more challenging work conditions that impact teacher retention due to funding disparities in the school and surrounding community. Regardless, the challenges participants expressed relate to overall challenges in the profession regardless of context.

### **Negative Mainstream Messages about the Profession**

Despite all the work teachers put in, there was a general consensus that teachers do not have the full support of the community. Mali grew up in a family of teachers, her parents were teachers in Guyana before they immigrated to the United States.

In my culture, teaching is a huge honor. It's an honorable career. Having that clash with mainstream culture is very tough. I see myself doing a great thing and then, the biggest thing I hear from people is, "Oh you have the summer off, you must have it easy." So just seeing that and having strangers say things like that is really disheartening to me (Mali, personal communication, Sept. 24, 2016).

Tou, a Hmong teacher, revealed that teaching is a highly respected position in his culture as well. This perception appears different in the United States. Dana Goldstein (2015) identifies teaching as having a long-term history of attacks in the United States. Not only is teaching a profession that lacks respect, but corporations and policies do not always favor teacher's labor rights (EPIC, 2016). In the profession, participants recognized that some of the largest challenges included workload, the recognizable achievement gap, and the lack of support for new teachers.

### **Rigorous Workload**

Participants agreed that teaching is a very difficult profession because the demands placed on teachers go beyond contract hours. Mali expressed that when she started teaching, she stayed after school for two hours every day to work with students. She was able to share more personal stories because she had recently completed five years of teaching. "Last year was my fifth year, that's the statistics, the first five years, you'll make it or you'll be out. I still feel like I'm on the border of that" (Mali, personal communication, Sept. 24, 2016). Mali refers to a common statistic that highlights the challenges in teacher retention. 40-50% of teachers leave within the first five years (Ingerstoll, 2003). She felt that the demands are set at an unsustainable pace, at times



questioning her ability to stay in the profession due to burnout. Another participant, Jason, acknowledged that he was hired at his high school because he fit into the “workaholic” culture of his English department. He was a student teacher at the school, and people saw his work ethic. It was expected of him to go above and beyond to meet the demands of students. For other teachers, the demands are not just in the preparation and teaching, but there are many teachers who are committed to leading extracurricular activities. Outside of teaching music, Samantha also coaches sports in the fall and spring season.

### **Achievement Gap**

In the group interview, three out of the four teachers expressed the frustration of seeing common patterns in student achievement consistent with the achievement gap. As an English teacher, Jason reflects on the challenges of teaching honors classes in a school context with a small percentage of students of color.

The kids that tend to struggle, when there are kids of color, if they’re black, if they’re Latino, if they’re Southeast Asian, they are almost always the struggling ones...I don’t know how to help them. I hate how their struggle in my class is reinforcing that “Oh, black kids don’t get it. These Mexican kids, they can’t do english.” I hate it (Jason, personal communication, September 24, 2016).

As the demographics of student populations change in the schools, teachers need to be fully equipped to meet the needs of all students. However, despite these demands, teachers are unsure how to do this. The participants all expressed hope within education as a mechanism for opportunities, believing it as an equalizer to bridge the current

disparities that exist. However, despite these hopes, it is challenging to see the same systemic patterns of the achievement gap occur firsthand. One theory that explains the underperformance of some student populations is the disconnect students feel when they enter into a school culture that is very different from their own (Banks, 1997). Mali and Tou recall members of their immigrant family who struggled with performing well in school and were insubordinate to school behaviors and expectations. They also expressed a disconnect when attending family functions, seeing the members as honored, respected individuals in the family who frequently participated in and helped at family functions. There was a deep sense of concern for ensuring that all students were capable of succeeding in school; however, it became very challenging when teachers felt like they lack the tools to meet this challenge in a way that is effective and sustainable.

### **Lack of Mentorship and Collaboration**

When asked about the supports teachers need to thrive, three out of the five participants recommended a stronger mentorship program. In addition to mentorship is collaborative support. Three participants had a hard time feeling a sense of belonging in their department. Mali noticed that this was not just an issue with teachers of color, but also new teachers who entered into her math department and struggled to find their place in a large group setting. Nicole recognized this in her English department when she started at her school; she felt more comfortable in building personal relationships with a couple teachers. When Tou started teaching, he felt extreme isolation.

When I was in [High School 4], we had our own classrooms. I didn't collaborate or interact with anybody. I was also in yearbook, so no one talked to me. I

remember going into [High School 4] it was my first year. I would be there at 6:45[am], and no one would talk to me. We didn't have a place to eat lunch, so I would sit in my class and work on yearbook things. Then I would leave and never talk to anybody, nobody. No admin, just kids (Tou, personal communication, Sept. 24, 2016).

Jason felt nominal toward the current mentorship program in place to support new teachers. In order for it to work effectively, he suggested that new teachers be given support by not teaching a full workload when they first start. They should have extra time to meet with a veteran teacher where common time is shared for a true mentorship to take place. Overall, it was very clear that participants felt that starting in the profession is very difficult and there should be more support given to new teachers.

**Other factors that impact belonging.** Also, in the personal interviews, teachers expressed the difficulties of feeling a sense of belonging in the school culture when they did not fit into the majority and dominant norms of the staff that they worked with. Although research recognizes the problem with retaining teachers of color, participants recognized the additional factors that contribute to challenges for teachers. These factors include age, gender identity, gender, body type, class, political views, and religion. Therefore, while race may be one factor that contributes to challenges in the workplace, there are also additional factors of identity that can determine one's sense of belonging and one's sense of feeling like an outsider.

### **Challenges Pertaining to Teachers of Color**

A wealth of research expresses that teachers of color experience social barriers that separate them from the dominate culture of traditional education. Solorzano (1998) identifies these barriers as classist, racist assumptions and behaviors revealed in subtle and covert ways in the work environment. The literature review analyzes ways teachers are viewed through a lens of deficiency, lacking their ability to thrive. However, while collecting data, it was found that teachers experience these challenges in different ways, attributing them to various factors.

#### **Stereotype Oppression and Questioning Credentials**

Questioning credentials occurs when a teacher's expertise in a field is in question. Oftentimes this occurred when teachers exercise their agency in the classroom. It also occurred in connection to stereotype oppression that limited the ways teachers were viewed. Berry (2009) used the term "stereotype oppression" to define how some are marginalized based on who others believe they are.

Jason referenced a time where a parent challenged him for requesting students' preferred gender pronoun on student surveys at the start of term. Jason believes that one's gender should not be assumed but self-determined to respect students who are transgendered or gender non-conforming and prefer pronouns that do not correlate with their sex assigned at birth. The act created a process that involved administration and district personnel questioning his ability to include this in a survey. Eventually, after multiple meetings and documentation, the district did not see that Jason had violated his

role as a teacher. The experience put his capabilities as a teacher into question. Jason wished more of the energy would have been spent supporting students.

Mali referenced stories of questioning credentials, particularly by what was assumed by her identity as a young Indo-Caribbean woman. Mali shared a story about how a parent expressed doubt over her ability to speak English clearly enough for her student to learn from her. The parent also went so far as to request a change in teacher. Parents questioned and labeled Mali's ability to teach effectively based on false assumptions of her English language proficiency. She also cited how parents were often surprised by her ability to articulate in English so well at parent-teacher conferences. Other parents referenced the times they had had Indian professors at college, some of whom were not as fluent in English. These assumptions symbolize the many images that dictate Mali's identity that created a barrier for this teacher to fully demonstrate her level of expertise and ability to teach.

**Role entrapment.** Stereotype oppression can also cause teachers to be trapped in roles assumed of their race, known as role entrapment. Tou recognized the mainstream message of the "passive Asian male". This message dictates how he is perceived. He feels that people in his department make assumptions of his capability to lead. When asked about his experience at work as an Hmong, working-class man, Tou explained the following:

I'm not as commanding and I think things through and teachers and administrators categorize me a more quiet person. I do exhibit some of those qualities, but there's no opportunity to break out of that...There are younger

teachers who are white,... who get more leadership...because they're a little bit more vocal and it's not in my culture to be that way (Tou, personal interview, August 25, 2016).

This description connects the ways stereotype oppression can lead to role entrapment, one that dictates how they carry out their roles in their jobs (Madson & Mabokela, 2003). For example African American men describe how they are often viewed as cultural experts or disciplinarians, without the ability to share their professional expertise as a teacher in their field (Madson & Mobokela, 2003; Nadworthy, 2015). Role entrapment often limits one's ability to step outside of their assumed role. Teachers can also be viewed through the lens of deficiency. This makes it especially hard to identify teachers' strengths when they carry various forms of subordinate identity (Berry, 2009). For Tou, role entrapment as a Hmong Asian man makes it more difficult to be a leader in his field because that steps outside of what is assumed of his race and culture. As a result, he doubts his ability to be truly capable of taking leadership positions based on how he is perceived.

**Intersectional identities.** Samantha also shared how stereotype oppression occurs in her work due the fact that she does not fit within the mainstream image of black women, which subjects her to a lot of assumptions.

I've had students and coworkers make a lot assumptions about my sexuality because I'm not married. All of those assumptions being that I'm a lesbian, which I'm not. I like sports, I dress conservatively, and I build things in my own house. I

fix it, so I'm into ladies. That happens a lot. People are really bold with their questions (Samantha, personal communication, Aug. 25, 2016).

For Samantha, her marital status made colleagues and community members make assumptions about her sexual orientation. In addition, they acted on these assumptions by asking questions about her personal life and associating it with her being a lesbian. This questioning and marginalization of female teachers is consistent with how women of color experience multiple forms of oppression due to someone's inability to capture them in a monolith (Berry, 2009). As a result, teachers are viewed through a stereotype, and this limits the possibilities for these women to be recognized in ways outside of their race, gender, ethnic, and language boundaries (Berry, 2009).

### **Compromising Identities**

Lee's (2012) study of teachers of color in a suburban context reveals that teachers feel greater pressure to hide or reduce parts of their identity. Mali shared her heightened awareness of how she is possibly viewed among colleagues in her department as a young, single woman. She expressed how when she is spending time with her department, she does not want to appear wild. Many of the women in her math department married their high school sweetheart, and although she is a young woman who is dating and enjoys dancing, she does not share those parts of her life because she is afraid that it may present an image of instability. In addition to hiding differences about her social life, she reduces details of her family relationships and religion because she believes that colleagues will not understand. Mali's response shows her pressures to hide her differences pertaining to her identity. Lee (2012) considers compromising identities as a part of the socialization

of teachers of color in suburban contexts. Going further, Asians are known to assimilate into dominant culture (Ramantha, 2006; Zia, 2000). Yet this form of navigation still reveals the disconnect teachers feel when they enter their workplace where the dominant culture is very different from their own (Banks, 1997). Whereas Mali cannot control the way people respond to her physical differences due to her race, she can choose to withhold details of her values and culture.

**Pressures to be more extroverted.** While Mali feels pressures to reduce specific parts of her identity, both Tou and Mali shared about how their introverted personality made them feel pressure to be more extroverted. Tou recognizes how many of his colleagues are extroverted, and as a result feels he has to be a lot more outgoing in the workplace. In addition to personality clashes, he recognizes his conflicts as a Hmong man in a context that values Western individualism. Whereas showing honor by not vocally disagreeing to those in power is considered how one shows respect in Hmong culture, in Western culture it is seen as being passive, and it prevents him from leadership opportunities. As a result, there is a conflict, and he feels that he has to become more extroverted at work in order to be accepted. Therefore, compromising identities can also cause people to take on characteristics that they don't personally identify with in order to feel more accepted in their department.

### **Isolation and Boundary Heightening**

Many scholars cite isolation as a common challenge for teachers of color (Ingerstoll & May, 2011; Lee, 2012). Participants cited that isolation was not only intentional from the surrounding community, but was often times a choice by the



participants themselves. The choice to isolate occurred when teachers became aware of their differences from the larger majority. In Mabokela & Madson's (2003) study, boundary heightening was a common challenge for African American teachers, yet there was a sense of boundary heightening occurring among the Asian participants. Jason reported that while he finds support and trust in his department, he intentionally does not make efforts to build relationships with colleagues from different departments who he assumes ascribe to ideas of whiteness, patriarchy and homophobia. The real or perceived differences between one's identity and the identity of colleagues makes it challenging to build trust.

**Racial tensions.** Isolation becomes most difficult when there are clear racial tensions in the community. In a wealthy, white suburban community, Samantha expressed how difficult it was to be at work where there were a lot of conversations and news pertaining to the killing of Jamar Clark by local police. When a colleague made a comment about the current events that offended her, she purposely isolated herself as a means to cope with the overwhelming amount of tension she was feeling regarding the events because she felt that there was no one to confide in. It was a very difficult time in her career and made her question her place in the profession. During intense racial conflicts in the state and country, it becomes difficult to cope in a school environment with very few teachers and students to relate to in these times. This difficulty is especially pronounced in schools with very few people of color. There is a heightened awareness of racial differences, making it difficult for trust to take place. Therefore, isolation becomes a means to deal with the pain and hurt.

Nicole, another black female teacher, was very much affected by the death of another black man, Philado Castille, killed by police, seven months after Jamar Clark. She recognized how easy it could be to ignore such emotional events when school began again. Though deeply impacted by the local events that led to national protests, she fears that teachers will start the school year ignoring the fact the nation is in deep tension. When asked if participants felt their school embraced diversity, Nicole, Mali, and Jason all mentioned how even though there are efforts to recognize diverse voices, there is an imbalance of power, and it is not effectively elevating voices. Tou referenced the tension as a restless volcano that continues to bubble. While the district likes to present an image that they are one that values diversity and voices, there is a silent tension that exists.

**Lack of dialogue about race.** Lack of In the group interview, all the participants agreed that their workplace is silent to issues of race. They feel that the district is afraid of directly addressing race and issues of power in fear of how the greater community will respond. Samantha referenced the term “white fragility,” one that details the emotional stress that causes the community to become defensive and emotional due to slight amounts of racial tension. Often, there is a culture that wants to assume that if no one talks about race, racism is not an issue (Mura, 2016). However, when policy changes occur due to racialized events in the district, participants felt that the district often fails to discuss the honest reasons why they would make such changes.

The district’s lack of intentionality to directly address race and power makes isolation unique and challenging. Teachers of color who experience challenges due to their identities have little opportunity to express them. When the stories of challenges

shared in personal interviews were shared once again in the group interview, Mali found many parallels as an introverted Indo-Caribbean woman that resonated with Tou when he shared his frustrations with not taking leadership opportunities. Jason shared his reflections about being a Korean adoptee and his uneasiness with identifying as a person of color. His narrative related to the ways Samantha developed a more critical racial consciousness much later in her life. The stories that were once in isolation became collectively heard and participants expressed how much they appreciated the discussion to share about challenges. This is consistent with the many scholars who cited the benefits for teachers of color to share about their challenges in the workplace, providing opportunities for mentorship (Achinstein & Aguirre, 2008; Castendada, Kambutu & Rios, 2006; Lee, 2012; Ramanathan, 2006).

### **Limitations to Thrive**

Despite the challenges that were consistent with those highlighted in the literature review, the participants had different responses in the personal interview in regards to the personal development as a teacher. Four of the five teachers felt they were thriving in their work. Samantha and Jason felt confident in their work to say that they felt that they were thriving. Both believe they are strong teachers who do their work well with students. Tou also felt like he had support systems in his school where he didn't feel like he needed anything else, and Mali, a fifth year teacher, felt that she was becoming the teacher she wanted to be. Nicole was the only one who didn't specifically identify a state of confidence or contentment with her job. She feels that she would thrive if she was in a place where teachers were more conscientious about race and the impact it has on

students and the community. Having her school collectively develop empathy to challenge the status quo would better support her as a teacher.

**Common language needed.** Perhaps the responses of participants may have been more consistent when considering what the potentials of the teaching profession could be. If participants gained common language on what it would be like to fully thrive in the profession, their responses to supports may be have been more directly linking to supports to help shape the future of the teaching profession.

Even though many participants felt confident in their work as a teacher, there is evidence that the challenges that they face limited their capabilities to move the profession forward. Teachers experience stereotype oppression and get trapped in assumed roles due to their racial and gender identity. Participants' explanations of how they navigate through conflict reveal the ways they limit parts of themselves to isolate or reduce white fragility and stereotype oppression in the workplace. These pressures to limit can also cause isolation when one's sense of belonging is in question, navigating a school culture that is very different from their own. Rather than isolate, hooks (1994) challenges the belief that teachers should separate the personal from the professional in the workplace. Because teachers of color have a greater potential to address disparities in education, it is important to allow them the space to integrate themselves wholly and authentically in ways that begins to lead the profession toward more equitable outcomes (Achinstein & Aguirre, 2008).

## **Sustainability**

This section utilizes Yosso's (2005) theory of community cultural wealth as a means of understanding the "knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression" (p. 77). While this theory has often been used to inform the ways teachers view students through their assets and not deficiencies, this research will expand this theory to apply the ways teachers of color utilize cultural community wealth to strengthen and sustain themselves in a challenging profession. There are six types of cultural capital: Aspirational capital, Familial capital, Social capital, Linguistic capital, Resistant capital, and Navigational capital.

### **Aspirational Capital**

Aspirational capital refers to one's ability to have hopes and dreams for the future in the midst of obstacles (Yosso, 2005). Despite the many challenges teachers face, especially teachers of color as minorities in the profession, all of the participants in the group interview talked about their profession through the lens of hope and possibility. High amounts of aspirational capital were present in all participants. This capital shapes the vision and motivation to understand why individuals enter into teaching. In addition, aspirational capital serves as a place of possibility for the teachers; they have desires to shape the profession to produce better outcomes for themselves professionally and for their students.

**Being a role model.** All of the participants in the group interview displayed a strong belief in their profession and its power to make a difference. Nicole remembered a

specific African American woman teacher she had in Chicago who displayed many of the professionalisms she wanted to display in teaching. Mali and Tou saw the profession as a one of deep respect. Mali and Tou gave context to their profession as one their culture respects, and for them, being a teacher was a way of serving as a role model. This is consistent with Irazarry & Donaldson's (2012) report of Latina and Latino teachers, who entered into teaching to serve as a role model for their community. All of the participants believed that the profession had the ability to make a difference, while understanding the challenges teachers faced. The difference may not be seen immediately, but the ability to see growth in students, to make small differences to produce students of character is something participants agreed upon. Samantha shared a time when a mother thanked her for being a role model to her daughter when she was a volleyball player on the team Samantha coached.

Having a strong, successful, biracial woman for her biracial daughter to see was a gift she had not anticipated and to have her daughter admire me was meaningful. I didn't know that my presence made such a difference for her or her daughter, but having her moved to tears three years after the fact changed my perspective. It's important for my students and coworkers to see and know me (Samantha, personal communication, Oct. 2, 2016).

**Belief in the power of the profession.** Max, Jason, and Mali referenced education as a means to “equalize” opportunities for students. Despite seeing some of the ways education disenfranchises students because of the conflicts between the dominate culture and the cultures of communities of color, these teachers saw the opportunities

education could offer to oppressed communities (Banks, 1996). Jason and Mali's vision for teaching connected to the concept of "the great equalizer", one that can eliminate social disparities. Tou, Mali, and Jason were aware of the ways society and the education system were broken. However, belief that their work could create more possibilities for students became an integral part of their vision for teaching.

**Vision for education.** All of the participants expressed a desire for education to foster critical thought. Max and Mali referenced a desire to produce lifelong learners. In addition to lifelong learning, Mali mentioned a desire for students to be "global learners." Education "Improves a democratic society, social engagement, critical thought...understanding today and the different forms of today can make tomorrow better, or just more equitable existence for all people" (Jason, personal communication, September 24, 2016). This type of analysis comes from an understanding that there is more work to be done to improve society, and education provides a gateway to be critical of the things people take for granted and push for something better for everyone.

**Growth in students.** Finally, Mali and Samantha both expressed a love and desire to see growth in students. The belief in the ability to grow and improve provides hope and strength to Mali. As a math teacher, she makes effort to allow students to struggle and be challenged knowing that it's an integral part of growing. Samantha is the orchestra teacher in her high school. She receives the privilege of working with students for four consecutive years. She finds the growth and development of high school students over that course of time to be rewarding.

## **Familial Capital**

Familial capital refers to the cultural history, knowledge, and values nurtured in the family or community. Teachers related to familial capital in different ways. However, familial capital provides a basis or foundation for teachers to gain a sense of their identity. The various connections to familial capital refer to how complex and nuanced our identities are. The identities of participants are greatly shaped by the ways they feel belonging and isolation from communities. This capital connects to hooks vision for an engaged pedagogy, one that brings teachers to a sense of awareness of themselves as whole beings (1994). The integration of the personal and private, the awareness of the many experiences that shape our identities inform how we relate to one another as educators.

Familial capital does not only exist in a family but in spaces where communities belong to one another, developing a form of kinship that goes beyond ancestry. Based on the context of participants, each drew different ideas and connections when reflecting on this type of capital.

**Family values.** Mali and Tou reflected their biological family experiences, values, and responsibilities. As an Indo-Caribbean woman, Mali has a close relationship to her family. Both of her parents were educators in their native country of Guyana, and the values of education and being a teacher were passed down to her. Many of the cultural histories, values, and faith practices were passed down to her from her parents and it informs her worldview and experiences. Tou and Mali referenced the values placed on education and teachers in their families. The role of a teacher in Hmong and Indo-



Caribbean culture has different connotations to mainstream messages of teachers in the United States (Goldstein, 2015). In their culture teachers are role models, and those ideas are a part of Mali and Tou's understanding of their profession.

**Identifying with marginalized populations.** Samantha moved to the state for college and stayed when she got her job. She considers her sense of belonging with other “transplants” to the area, referring to those who are not from the midwestern state but settle there. Though Samantha did not connect her biological kin to her family, she referenced her differences as a common point of belonging. In addition to finding a sense of belonging with those who are not from the state, in the personal interview, Samantha made strong connections with those who are considered different from the dominate culture. When talking about her discontent with the culture of her school towards transgendered students, she spoke in solidarity with transgendered students as a cisgendered woman. “I identify with people who do not fit into this white, I’m not a part of this as people on the outside, these are my people” (Samantha, personal communication, Aug. 25, 2016). As a black woman, Samantha understands what it is like to be a minority and lack systemic and social power. She feels like she is on the outside. It is in this feeling of otherness where she finds a sense of responsibility to not only speak against racial injustice, but other forms of injustice as well.

Jason's upbringing was also rooted in understanding his otherness. Growing up in an all white neighborhood, in a white home as a Korean-adoptee, he was one of the few people of color in his community. In addition to being racially different, he stood out by being a high functioning reader and excelling in school. He stated that there were many

reasons why he was different, and those experiences fueled his passion for social justice. He looks at social justice from various angles, not just through the lens of racial equity.

**Complexity of identities.** Jason's disconnect from his biological family makes familial capital hard for him to identify. He grew up in a white home and identifies with white culture, therefore it makes it difficult to find a sense of belonging to the Korean community because it is not his cultural context.

Sometimes when you are in a white household,... I don't always feel like I'm an authentic person of color. I don't have parents of color. I have white parents. I grew up in a white household that was a culture other than my white culture...There's a lot of ways where I feel like my experience is very different (Jason, personal communication, Sept. 24, 2016).

Jason's narrative connects to Ramathan's study that reveal conflicting ideas of identity and belonging to a larger community (2006). In addition, as an Asian man, a Korean Adoptee, his complex experience is often the narrative that is absent from mainstream dialogues that centers on a black white binary (Yosso, 2005). This complexity makes it challenging for Jason to draw upon familial capital despite his ability to be in solidarity with communities of color.

**Community values.** Nicole's familial capital was emphasized in her upbringing. Having grown up in another large metropolitan area. She attended a predominately black school with predominantly black teachers who were also residents. She gained knowledge and pride in her black history, values and culture. When she went to college, she was involved in a sorority with black women. She continues to stay involved in it

today. Natasha's sense of belonging is rooted in the models of black women professionals all around her; this has guided her passion and desire to support women. For Nicole, the community spaces have existed throughout her life have been foundational to her growth and development.

### **Social Capital**

Social capital refers to the close networks one has to people and community resources (Yosso, 2005). These resources shared can be instrumental in attaining something such as a job or promotion. Social capital can also be seen as a form of emotional support one offers to another. When considering social capital and its value to teachers, it addresses the very challenge of isolation that is common to teachers of color. Social capital provides the support for teachers to have space to share resources and skills and to network with one another in an environment not set up for them to thrive. Social capital also provides necessary and essential support for teachers of color during times when they feel most especially isolated to the point of wanting to leave the profession. Although it may appear that having more teachers of color in the same school will automatically address social capital, social capital is built when there is time and space for intentional relations to build among them.

**Mentorship to new teachers.** In the group interview, Mali spoke to her mentorship with Shoua, a Hmong teacher candidate from the local university. Mali's mentorship allowed Shoua to eventually get hired at Mali's school as a math teacher and help Shoua integrate into the math department more easily. Mali sensed that Shoua started her first year with an advantage, having her student teaching experience at the

same school and already gaining the trust of the math department. This relationship provided the ability for Shoua to be hired and be more prepared to start her career.

**Organizing with other teachers of color.** Mali also cited that the creation the teachers of color organizing entity in the district was another example of how social capital is used among teachers. Samantha agreed that this was a critical component to her staying in the profession. At her school, being one of two teachers of color, she was experiencing social isolation when racial tensions were high in the community. Coworkers did not understand. It was not until she connected with the teacher organization that she found a sense of strength once again. “It was the absence of the social which would push me away from education,” (Samatha, personal communication, September 24, 2016).

**Personal relationships with teachers of color.** In the personal interview, Tou and Mali cited friendships with other people of color in their school as a source of social capital. Tou has one colleague, James, in his department who is African American. James is who he confides in and who challenges him to take on opportunities to lead in his department. For Mali, she co-taught with a teacher of color her first year. This person became a good friend and helped connect her to other teachers of color in the school. At this school, there is a community of teachers of color who connect on a regular basis to provide emotional support. This community was different than the high school Jason and Nicole teach at. When Jason and Nicole spoke about the teachers of color in their school, they described the group as more isolated because they were in different departments and located in different areas of the building. This reveals that social capital exists within a

school where there are opportunities to build relationships with other teachers of color. However, schools that have few teachers of color may still feel isolated from one another and lack social capital to support one another emotionally and professionally.

**Linguistic capital.** Linguistic capital refers to the intellectual, social, and linguistic skills people develop through experiences in communicating with different contexts (Yosso, 2005). Particularly, linguistic capital is utilized to communicate effectively with different communities. Though there were participants who could speak multiple languages, they did not mention the use of other languages in the interviews. Tou, one who comes from an Hmong oral storytelling tradition spoke to the challenges and strengths of his form of discourse. Considering the value that communities of color bring through linguistic capital challenges the dominant narratives and serve as a form of resistance to stories of deficiency.

Tou shared of growing up in the Hmong oral storytelling traditions, and recalled stories passed down to him as a child in his post-reflection. The stories he heard in Hmong told a lesson, and those lessons he carried with him throughout his life and shared with his children. Tou recalled a story about the moon, and whenever he looked at the moon he could never point to it because of the fear of having one's ears cut off. Even as an adult, he refuses to point to the moon because the story attached to it had stuck with him. To him, the stories and emotions have as strong of effect as logic. In addition, whenever he has to prove a point at work or in the classroom, rather than utilizing facts and a logical argument, he chooses to tell a story. The stories appeal to one's emotions,

and to him the stories are harder to break or debunk. This form of communication, the cadence and pacing of oral storytelling is where he feels is a strength.

**Challenges with utilizing linguistic capital.** Tou's story sheds light on some of the challenges he mentioned regarding the frustration he feels when he gets passed up by less experienced teachers for leadership positions because of his style of communication. In addition, the sets of knowledge, skills and values that Tou utilized through his music and involvement in coaching speech is often overlooked. Though Tou clearly utilizes linguistic capital in his work, his communication style is still viewed through the lens of deficiency because of the ways he is not recognized in his department.

Although it was not addressed by all the participants, the narrative through oral histories and storytelling Tou shared was critical to the research. Linguistic capital reveals a strength that is often illegible to school institutions.

### **Resistant Capital**

Resistant capital is the knowledge and skills one develops as a result of challenging inequality through oppositional behavior (Yosso, 2005). Resistant capital requires that one possesses critical knowledge that views power through the lens of social inequalities. In addition to understanding such framework, one also uses resistant capital when they act upon that knowledges and challenges the status quo. All of the participants displayed many examples of resistant capital. All of the participants found ways to utilize their agency to challenge traditional frameworks in their profession.

Transformative resistant capital is the ability to exercise one's agency in the school. This capital allows the vision and motivation for why individuals enter into

teaching to become a reality by daily resisting micro and macro forms of oppression, while building an alternative for teachers and students to thrive. Having resistant capital requires trust from the institution for teachers to lead in a way that shapes the profession towards equitable outcomes for students. It also allows mentorship to take place that equips future teachers to do the same. Finally, rather than hiding or isolating oneself, it provides the room for teachers to be brave enough to engage in daily acts of resistance.

**Knowledge of systems of power.** In order to have and exercise a transformative resistant capital, one must have knowledge of systems of power and have the desire to transform them (Yosso, 2005). All of the participants displayed evidence of critical knowledge that critiques systems of power (Achinstein & Aguirre, 2008). Nicole, an African American woman, remembers her schooling experience rooted in the history, values and traditions of African Americans. Other participants grew up in a white community, all of them developed a critical understanding of oppressive structures from multiple forms of oppression. All of them were able to identify instances of social injustice in school and their personal lives. In addition, all of them expressed the motivation to transform oppressive structures in their school. Though each participant exercised their resiliency in different ways, their knowledge and desire to transform education was apparent.

**Incorporates diverse representations in curriculum.** Four out of the five participants expressed how they incorporated more diverse representation in their curriculum. For Tou, Jason and Nicole, texts written by people of color were added to their curriculum and shared among colleagues to teach as well. Jason, who was a part of

the team to select texts for 10th grade English, had the freedom with his team to select texts they wanted to meet learning targets.

Though the district curriculum suggested source texts that were mostly by men, all by white people...I attempted to include a wide representation of authors and primarily social justice subjects...I convinced the other Honors English 10 teachers to use the same approach and text, so I was able to have all the students examine these justice-oriented, language-rich texts. (Jason, personal communication, October 5, 2016).

Incorporating diverse representation and voices seems easier for a content area like English. For Mali, she finds ways to incorporate social justice in her math lessons. In addition, she chooses to talk about math history from both Eastern and Western perspectives and consults with colleagues about introducing women and people of color mathematicians to students who have made significant contributions to their field. Nicole also works with other teachers in other departments to provide more diverse representation.

**Utilizes teachable moments.** Resistant capital not only is exercised through one's agency in curriculum, it is also exercised in how teachers respond to messages that attack one's identity or the identity of others. Participants often respond to instances where students display comments that are ignorant of marginalized populations (Achinstein & Aguirre, 2008). For Samantha, she has more tolerance for her students who display signs of ignorance and uses those opportunities as teachable moments. For example, when students at her school were giving donations to those who were in need, Samatha shared



her experience living on assistance as a young child to counter inappropriate assumptions that lessened the dignity of those receiving donations. For Samantha, she is willing to take the time to address this to students. Though many of the students Samantha worked with came from wealth, they are still learning and developing as young adults, so she provides room for them to make mistakes.

**Expresses concerns with staff and administration.** Unlike addressing situations directly with students, participants were selective in how to respond to situations of social injustice when it is specific to working with administration or staff. For Samantha and Jason, they both shared instances where they had spoken to administration regarding their concerns about policy or climate. Though this took time and energy outside of their job description, they were heard and did not feel the need to compromise. Samantha stated in her post reflection, “I am less concerned about looking like the PoC who always brings up race and more concerned about not letting people get away with being wildly offensive, unprofessional and/or generally inappropriate around issues of injustice” (Samantha, personal communication, October 2, 2016). For Jason and Samantha, they feel that they have enough credibility in their school to exert their resistant capital to administration.

Nicole and Mali referred to instances where they responded to comments made by staff by talking to the colleague directly. They are selective in how to respond to situations, understanding the context of their school. They decide how to be effective in addressing the concern if they choose to address it. Nicole expressed how some teachers are not ready to talk about deeper issues of race, and sees that in exercising resistant

capital, it takes small steps. All the participants shared how they turn to their social networks for advice or processing. This time also provides room for mentorship to take place if a teacher were to go through a similar situation.

### **Navigational Capital**

Navigational capital refers to one's ability to navigate through institutional spaces not designed for people of color. This capital refers to the ways people are resilient to challenges they face and find ways to integrate into the culture of the institution. All of the participants shared the complex and various ways they navigate through the context of their suburban school.

When considering navigation capital and its value to teachers, it is a necessary component to how teachers manage being in a space that isn't designed for them. Navigation capital can assume a form of assimilation or reduction of oneself, yet it is understanding the educational system well enough to work effectively in the system. While navigation is necessary for teachers to stay within education, it is just one component and does not push and challenge the profession towards transformative practices when exercised in isolation. When it is utilized to elevate other forms of capital, it can begin to lead the profession towards promoting more equitable outcomes.

**Understanding the dominate culture.** For all the participants in the group interview, navigation was a necessity for them to make it this far in their careers. It is valuable to address that four out of the five participants interviewed grew up in rural or suburban contexts, with majority white populations living in their community. Though some of these participants stated they came from poor or working class backgrounds,

they all attended schools that had a lot of resources for them to succeed socially and academically. This type of upbringing reveals the ways these participants have had the experience and resiliency to be in environments and institutions not designed for them (Yosso, 2005). For Jason, a Korean adoptee of a white family, he sees how his culture has benefited him socially to navigate in society, despite the other barriers presented to him.

The participants upbringing, educational experiences and work experience developed their strong awareness of the dominate culture and power in the Midwest. Samantha referenced the term “white fragility”, referring to how sensitive the nature of race topics can be for colleagues. This awareness comes from their experiences of living in the state, being in their work environment for a number of years, growing up in the Midwest, all of the participants displayed knowledge about how white colleagues responded to situations.

**Responding to microaggressions.** Often this awareness is where teachers have to make the decision about how to respond carefully and effectively or not at all to microaggressions.

I do experience things like microaggressions. It’s usually from older people in the community and I still have an issue like, “How do I say this without sounding super aggressive or passive.” I can’t get the in the middle to say it just right. I have to think about it (Mali, personal interview, September 24, 2016).

For Nicole and Mali, when having a discussion about how they navigate, they both referenced how they listened to their colleagues; sometimes they didn’t respond when issues were brought up that they disagreed with. Sometimes it wasn’t the right time,

others it was because it was hard to find the words. However, it was referenced in the group interview that the lack of response from Mali can be a result of the ways cisgendered men are viewed differently than women. These personal reflections teachers draw upon reveal how they must navigate the school system and analyze the benefits and costs if they were to respond to these situations. In addition, teachers who carry multiple identities that impact their experience must navigate through their environment in different ways than men do in fear of appearing too assertive or outspoken.

**Building relationships with staff.** Although three participants mentioned initial challenges when starting at their school, all found individuals they connected with. Mali mentioned the importance of individual teachers, who with their experience served as mentors when she started teaching math. One of those mentors was an elder teacher who she went biking with outside of school hours. Despite their difference in age, gender, race and cultural background, they both found a commonality when talking about their families. The other mentor Mali referenced was the math department leader as someone she talked with often and others who were around her work space who served as mentors for her when she started working.

For Nicole, she was able to eventually find people to trust in her department and felt there had been some hiring shifts that eventually allowed her to feel more open to her colleagues in her department. When she first started working at her school, she connected with members from a different department over socializing events after school. In addition, Nicole mentioned the value of connecting with the union representatives in her school. “You know, because they can be really instrumental if you need them in the

future,” (Nicole, Personal communication, September 4, 2016). For Nicole and Mali, they referenced other colleagues in leadership positions as support to them, knowing that they are people who they can trust within their work environment.

**Gaining respect from the community.** Another way teachers navigate through the school is by gaining the trust and support of the school and outside community. All of the participants mentioned that they were strong teachers. All of them felt confident in their work and seemed like they were or developing to be the teacher they aspired to. Going further, two participants specifically mentioned the support and respect they have for their work. For Jason, he is seen as a leader in his department. He attributes this to being at the school long enough where he has established enough connections. He also attributes this to his ability to think and communicate very logically. Jon’s ability to listen and present ideas clearly using support and evidence is a source of strength in his ability to the respect of other professionals.

Samantha, as a black woman music director at her high school, understands that the community respects her work and it is seen in the thriving music program she has helped maintain. Because students love her class and there are many resources available for them to be enriched, her program is well respected. Samantha also referenced three important community figures with children in her music program, “It’s good for me to have these kids with parents who are very influential and love my class. It’s helpful. Very helpful actually” (Samantha, personal communication, August 25, 2016).

### **Retention of Teachers of Color**

Linda Darling-Hammond (2010) argues that the United States has to be more purposeful in educating all students in an equitable system. This requires not only a commitment to students but a commitment to teachers in order to shift school culture. Schools need to make stronger commitments to support the quality of teachers.

According to Ingerstoll (2003), the biggest concern of the profession is retention. This is especially important at the start of one's teaching career. 40-50% of teachers are leaving the profession within the first five years (Ingerstoll, 2003). In addition, teachers of color are leaving at higher rates than their white counterparts (Ingerstoll & May, 2011; Casey et al., 2015). Because teachers of color have a higher potential of recognizing educational disparities, they are much-needed agents in shifting the direction of schools for more equitable outcomes (Achinstein & Aguirre, 2008).

#### **Recognizing their Strengths**

In order to support teachers, especially teachers of color, it is important to identify challenges that they face in the profession. However these challenges are often viewed through the lens of deficiency. Yosso (2005) recognizes the importance of utilizing the cultural wealth of communities of color as foundational to learning in the classroom. Since much of the discourse is centered around student learning and the achievement gap when addressing cultural wealth, it can be an appropriate lens to utilize when looking at the strength of teachers of color in the profession (Monzo, 2003). Similar to Monzo's (2003) study, which applies the funds of knowledge of Latino teachers and paraeducators, this framework informed the ways teachers of color survive and resist micro and macro

forms of oppression in the workplace that is not designed for them to thrive (Banks, 1997; Yosso, 2005; ).

### **Developing Navigational Skills**

Navigational capital is one aspect that allows teachers to understand the institutional system of education and function within the system. This navigation will only promote a form of retention that supports the same system that disenfranchises populations. It does not challenge the status quo that is maintained in schools, especially suburban schools. In addition, navigation is a necessary component to survive in the profession when the dominate culture conflicts with one's personal identities. One way teachers do this is by hiding or reducing parts of their identity in order to integrate as found in Lee's (2012) study of suburban teacher's of color. However, if navigational capital is not coupled with other forms of cultural community wealth, it will not challenge and shift the profession in the necessary ways to produce equitable outcomes.

### **Establishing a Vision**

Aspirational capital connects to the vision the teacher has for teaching. It is in aspirational capital where teachers are able to dream and create new possibilities in the profession to shift education (Irazarry & Donaldson, 2012). Similar to Irazarry & Donaldson (2012), the participants in the present research had great amounts of aspirational capital. Much of their vision and aspirations were rooted in social justice and social responsibility, despite the many challenges. Aspirational capital is important because it allows individuals to imagine something new. It also helps to realize the progress that is needed to shift the profession.

### **Providing Agency and Voice**

Resistant capital is the knowledge and skills needed to challenge inequality. For the participants in the present study, they each utilized resistant capital in their own ways in order to encourage critical thought, elevate absent voices, and challenge issues of power. This capital, when exercised well at various levels of the educational organizational structure, can challenge the culture of schools. In addition, linguistic capital refers to the strength of communities of color in their communication. Communication is the way in which teachers can express that resistance through a discourse that challenges Western linear assumptions. Berry's (2009) case study of the Chinese-American bilingual preservice teacher highlights the assumptions made about teachers' deficiency in language and communication. The same findings were consistent with the present research, recognizing how dominant cultures overlook the strengths of teachers with non-traditional communication styles. Therefore, in order to shift the profession, schools must provide space for teachers to lead and express themselves authentically as a means of utilizing resistant capital.

### **Sustaining their Work**

Finally, social and familial capital speaks about the personal and collective voice in communities of color. It connects with hooks's (1994) practice of engaged pedagogy, one that integrates the personal and the private lives of students and educators. For teachers, the history, values, and knowledge nurtured in the places of belonging that help form one's identities is at the heart of familial capital. Although familial capital may look very different for each participant, the knowledge shared amongst the group was that they



utilized social capital to strengthen themselves personally and collectively. Tou spoke about this at the end of the group interview as he affirmed other participants who shared, “As I listen to you, it helps me see where I’m at; it helps us see where we’re all at you know. I can’t put it into words right now, but I know that it’s impacting this conversation” (Tou, personal communication, Sept. 24, 2016). Tou spoke about the importance of having conversations with other teachers of color who come from various backgrounds and identities and work in different capacities. Sharing with one another affirmed their voices and provided deeper perspectives of themselves and how they carry out their profession. Social and familial capital function as the means for sustainability, to strengthen and support themselves and one another so they can better navigate, resist and push forward new possibilities in the profession to thrive.

### **Limitations**

This research utilizes hooks’s feminist theory as a framework that informs the challenges and strengths of teachers of color. Although, critical race theory is often utilized in educational discourse to speak about racial equity, hooks’s (1984) feminist theory centers narratives from the margins as ones who hold multiple forms of identity. Yet utilizing Yosso’s (2005) framework specific to communities of color did not provide room for nuance when speaking about communities of color that make up large diverse linguistic, gender, class, and cultural diversity. For Stacy, Mali, and Nicole, who represent women of color, it is valuable to consider furthering the challenges and strengths of these women. Although there were some common themes raised by women of color, it would be valuable to gather more data to explore these themes further.

Yosso (2005) speaks of community cultural wealth as characteristics unique to communities of color that allows them to resist forms of oppression. In the group interview, Jason, as a Korean-Adoptee was raised in white context. He obtained and utilized some forms of cultural capital. Jason also raised concerns about whether or not cultural capital was specific to communities of color. He referenced supporters of Donald Trump as a group who have high amounts of aspirational and social capital in the election season. White Americans of working class were enthusiastic and hopeful and rallied together for a change in opportunities but also promoted white nationalism in their ideas towards people of color and immigrants. Therefore, while there were benefits to looking at sustainability through the framework of cultural community wealth for communities of color, there was some doubt to the validity of the theory when referencing to the cultural capital present in other contexts.

It was clear that participants in the study utilized cultural wealth and expressed the importance of it in their workplace. The frameworks Yosso (2005) utilized were helpful in informing the possibility for teacher sustainability. However, it is not clear whether or not the absence of cultural wealth is the reason why teachers leave the profession. The participants interviewed have been in the profession for over five years. These participants intend to stay in the teaching profession. The lack of voices from those who actually left teaching reveal some of the limits to how this research informs teacher retention.

Though there were participants in the study who were bilingual, there was little data that tapped into the linguistic capital some teachers of color possess in utilizing

languages other than English. Tou, along with some of the participants shared narratives that parallel the oral storytelling traditions common among African and Asian traditions. His insight on storytelling provided context of his contributions as a teacher with a non-Western communication style. However, the participants in this study did not speak specifically to the ways possessing skills in languages other than English promote sustainability.

Finally, while there is little research about teachers of color and in suburban contexts, the results report from this context reveal a class privilege. Suburban schools have higher revenues of funding that impact the working conditions and resources provided for teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2010). This research provides great context in understanding the experiences of teachers in suburban schools, yet it lacks the voices of teachers of color sustainability in urban and rural contexts, one that presents different challenges and forms of navigation due to funding, students populations, and community support.

### **Chapter Overview**

The purpose of this study is to understand how teachers of color sustain themselves in a difficult profession. This study collected data through personal interviews, a group interview, and post-reflections. The personal interviews gathered information on teachers of color and their background, upbringing, and challenges in the workplace. Next, the participants also came together in a group interview to discuss teacher sustainability, utilizing Yosso's (2005) theory of cultural community wealth.

Finally, participants submitted a post reflection, highlighting their contributions to their profession.

The challenges expressed in the interviews were consistent with the research. In addition to challenges related to the overall profession, participants shared unique challenges related to their racial, gender and class identities. Teachers shared about the challenges of navigating the workplace and microaggressions they experienced. These microaggressions included role entrapment and stereotype oppression. Teachers also described boundary heightening and the ways it causes isolation. Finally teachers would limit aspects of themselves in order to fit into the dominate culture. In addition to these challenges, there was little space to share and find opportunities for mentorship.

To inform sustainability, Yosso's (2005) theory of cultural community wealth was applied to the experiences of teachers. Despite these challenges, participants utilized many different forms of cultural wealth to sustain their practice. They expressed their vision for more equitable outcomes and hopes for growth in education. They utilized navigational capital with resistant capital to assert agency when speaking about issues of equity. Linguistic capital also informed the types of discourse that presents strengths and challenges. Finally, familial and social capital is utilized to sustain the work of teaching in a way that integrates one's whole self. This self-awareness allows teachers to feel strengthened as they share knowledge as teachers of color. Yosso's (2005) framework provides the ability to look at the narratives of teachers of color through a lens of strength, one that values the unique work and commitment teachers have to students.

The next chapter will describe my personal journey with this research. It will inform the ways I view my profession, and how I can better support myself and colleagues. I will detail implications and limitations. It will also detail further questions I would like to explore for the future.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Conclusions

When I started this research, I wanted to find a clearer vision and purpose of my work as an educator. Sometimes in the whirlwind of tasks and schedules, I forget why I entered into teaching in the first place. I wanted to be an alternative voice. I wanted to participate in a practice that allowed room for students to connect to learning that depends on the engagement collective contributions of others. Yet, there are many challenges to this job that limit my abilities to develop in this capacity. The work and culture makes little room for transformative practices to take place in my work. At the same time, I felt the school culture and teacher preparation programs were not spaces that allowed me to develop into the teacher I wanted to be. I wanted to strengthen and sustain my voice, vision, and values to shift the profession that would reaffirm my sense of purpose and continue my practice. I also wanted to provide more pathways for teachers to enter and stay in the profession.

The purpose of this study was to determine how teachers of color sustain themselves in a difficult profession. My research question is: How do teachers of color sustain themselves in a profession that struggles to retain teachers? I explored the following questions:

- What challenges do teachers face in the workplace?
- What additional challenges do teachers of color face?
- What factors strengthen and sustain teachers of color?
- How does sustainability relate to teacher retention among teachers of color?

### **Overview of the Chapter**

This chapter shares what I have learned as a researcher, gathering narratives from teachers committed to their work and seeing the ways their stories connect with my experience as a teacher. I have grown immensely as Asian American woman through personal reflection and engagement with this research.

This chapter also revisits the literature review, highlighting important areas of research that impacted my findings. It addresses teacher challenges in a larger profession, and sustainability of teachers of color through cultural wealth. Finally, it looks at the implications of the research. It describes how this information can be shared because it has profound impacts to the profession.

### **Discovery**

When I first started this research, I began exploring critical race scholars. Landson-Billings (2010) provided frameworks and language to understand race in education. However, I was challenged to go deeper, exploring race, gender and class at its intersections. At first, it was difficult to articulate how to utilize a feminist lens to interview men and women educators. Yet the history of the profession and the models of women of color in education challenged me to further analyze race and gender in education. I gained perspective to capture the nuanced experiences that reflect the multiple identities teachers possess. Hooks's feminist theory became a valuable framework, speaking with race, gender and class considerations enhances the quality of teachers' narratives.

This research also deeply connects to who I am as a learner. I explored a wealth of literature from scholars who are at the forefront of race, gender and equity in education. I had the privilege to participate in an advisory board to help guide Education Minnesota's Educator Policy Innovation Center's recent publication, focusing on the teacher shortage. I dialogued with teachers and teacher educators across the state and nation, gaining context of the state of the profession, specifically the need for teachers of color. My research provided a deeper understanding of teacher recruitment and retention. This research is deeply relevant because of the critical state of the profession.

Throughout my journey, I have discovered the fragility of the teaching profession. Our mainstream media and community portrays us in a negative light. Although it is very important to be honest about the ways our profession has failed, the lack of support, collaboration, mentorship, and demands placed on teachers can inform these setback. In addition, teacher unions need to be honest about the ways they have historically silenced and pushed out teachers of color when they were vocal about issues pertaining to the students and families in their communities. I come from a long legacy of courageous educators who have fought hard to better serve their students. I must be brave, along with the many other teachers who do this work today. There is so much to do, yet I have to pace myself, allowing myself room to complete this stage of my professional development before I advocate in other capacities.

### **Review of Literature**

This research reaffirms the powerful role teachers play in education. Today, there is a wealth of curriculum that is scripted. There is expectation to teach content with the



same curriculum, utilizing the same approaches. Unfortunately, these measures assumes that teaching is like a form of production, and all students receive information the same way, regardless of the teachers in front of them (Freire, 2010). Unfortunately, this perspective can attempt to take away the art of teaching, one that encourages meaningful engagement between all participants (hooks, 1994). Darling-Hammond (2010) spoke to the critical role of teachers, the expertise and knowledge they bring is essential to student achievement. However, Vera Lee's (2012) research reveals suburban teachers of color feel limited. The immense pressures to reduce their personal characteristics to fit into the dominate culture of school make it difficult for them to thrive. Therefore, integrating teachers' whole selves to further sustainability can begin to address this challenge.

### **Sustainability and Cultural Wealth**

Tara Yosso's (2005) theory of cultural community wealth became a valuable framework as a researcher to analyze teacher sustainability among participants. Cultural community wealth highlights the ways students of color develop skills to navigate in systems not designed for them. Because of the challenges in retaining teachers of color, analyzing the ways participants in this research utilize cultural wealth provided language and a framework to understand how they resist the dominant systems that oppress them in the school structures that currently exist.

Yosso's (2005) theory listed six types of cultural wealth teachers bring to the profession. From the interviews and personal reflections, I discovered the unique ways teachers utilized their cultural wealth. Teachers' narratives also helped understand the relationship each aspect of cultural wealth can further sustain one in the profession.

Teachers of color develop the navigational skills when they come from predominantly white communities and teacher education programs that transfer into their work environment. In addition, teachers have gained a set of skills and knowledges that has informed their vision for teaching. The participants in this study expressed aspirations with knowledge of disparities consistent with Achinstein & Aguirre's (2008) study. They were more capable of identifying disparities in their work and utilized their agency to address them. Finally, participants in my research stated the importance of having teachers of color gather together. This relationship lays a foundation on how I can further support teachers' to be critical voices in their profession.

### **Intersecting Identities**

Finally, Berry's (2009) study of a bilingual Chinese American preservice teacher in her teacher education program provides the language for me to understand the nuance of our identities. Women of color can experience unique challenges and are not recognized for their contributions in the field. Our schools can miss the qualities of a diverse teaching force if they do not support and validate the ways they contribute to the profession.

### **Implications**

This research reveals the challenges of the teaching profession and the lack of support provided to meet them. Support is especially critical for new teachers who first enter their career. Teachers inducted into the profession have higher rates of turnovers. Strong mentorship relationships for new teachers are critical as they begin the profession. These mentorships can help assist new teachers to better navigate work challenges and

provide a greater sense of belonging with the school community. This requires time and resources built into the work day for teachers and mentors. This investment over the course of a couple of years for new teachers can make longer impacts in retention.

Many lawmakers, districts, and schools invest in recruitment efforts for teachers of color, however the biggest concern is retention. Because teachers of color are leaving at higher rates, school needs to identify the reasons why this happening to stop the revolving door effect from continuing among our diverse teachers. Not doing so would drain revenue and resources from schools that train and develop new teachers and yet do not gain the benefits as they become more effective over time and experience due to high attrition rates.

One way to address retention for teachers of color is by having a space for teachers of color to talk about race and their experiences in the workplace. This can reduce isolation that results from a school climate that often silences topics of race and power. This space can also provide opportunities for more meaningful mentorship that helps them further navigate and assert their agency. This can also reduce their pressures to limit or hide themselves, so they can be a more critical voice in their schools to potentially address educational equity.

Our education systems and profession needs a strong shift to address disparities. The achievement gap has been at the forefront of this disparity. It is important to create a learning environment where all students can thrive. However, the dominate culture of education does not easily allow some students of color to succeed in this environment. Students of color often experience conflict between their personal identities and the

dominant cultures of schools. This conflict is consistent with the ways teachers of color experience navigating a system that does not provide them the capacities to thrive. Therefore, schools must consider how to better create environments for teachers to be valued and recognized for who they are. Teachers of color have a greater potential to identify and address educational disparities, this support will give them spaces to lead in shifting the profession.

The traditional model of education sees teachers solely as messengers of information. This model is reflected in current classrooms and policies. Standardized education, testing, teacher licensure requirements, scripted curriculum, all attempt to limit the creativity and agency of teachers. Freire (2010) critiques the banking model of traditional education because it neglects the social and relational engagement that takes place between teachers and students. Hooks (1994) critiques this model and promotes a practice of self-awareness, integrating the personal and the private identities to further engage students and teachers. Therefore, in order for the practice to move forward in transformative ways, we must consider a practice that integrates identity, vision, and agency for those whose identities exist at the margins of education. These integrations can shift this challenging profession and promote sustainability to increase retention.

### **Limitations**

While these implications speak to further support teachers of color, we must also acknowledge the potential of creating monoliths (Harris, 1990; TED Talk, 2012). Using the terms teachers of color speaks of them as a singular group and isolates race. Often this resorts to the black and white binary rhetoric used in racial discourse. Isolating race

will silence the collective voices of a diverse teaching force, especially those who hold multiple forms of subordination. Race, gender, class, sexual orientation, age, religion, culture, language, marital status, all impact how one navigates a social environment. Failing to speak of teachers of color with intersectional identities will continue to perpetuate oppressive language that silences those at the margins.

These implications still limit our understanding of challenges for women of color and the unique ways they sustain their voice and vision through cultural wealth. Because a large majority of the teaching profession is made up of women, it would be valuable to explore further the from the perspective of women of color. This can further inform the ways patriarchy and white supremacy has impacted the profession and education.

While research shows the value to have spaces for teachers of color to come together, these implications do not recognize the challenges in building solidarity among them. People of color experience oppression and still have the power to carry it out. Therefore, we each must understand the ways we relate to power. Teachers must also acknowledge their power over students. Men of color must consider the ways women of color are silenced. Cisgendered men and women must analyze their power over those who do not fit within gender binaries. This will then create a transformative space for people to acknowledge the diverse voices, and move the profession forward. Unfortunately, these implications do not lay out how to build that transformative spaces between people of color and American Indians from many walks of life. This form of social capital is valuable, but we must also recognize how the work can be difficult when

people of color want to exert their power to silence those who exists in the margins.

Finally, these implications reveal the powerful role of teachers of color in education, one that is needed to reflect the diverse families and communities that exists in the classrooms. However, to assume that teachers of color are the only transformative voices in the profession is false. White teacher allies are also critical to promoting a space for all students to thrive. Collectively we must work together to address needs that begin to shift the overall profession towards more equitable outcomes.

### **Moving Forward**

When I first started this research, it was to guide my steps in coalition building among teachers of color. This journey has laid a foundation for how I will proceed in this work. Over this time, I have had many opportunities to share about this research and I hope that this research will allow more opportunities for me to consult with other educators, administration, school districts and teacher education programs.

I also have the opportunity to work and meet with teacher candidates. Some of them have told me how much they feel isolated in their teacher preparation courses and are nervous about learning how to navigate the environment as they begin their careers. I would like to explore how this research can be utilized in providing purposeful mentorship for teacher candidates and new teachers. An effective mentorship program for teachers of color can better assist in retaining and developing quality and critical teachers.

Many people have asked me if I would consider pursuing a doctoral program as a result of this work. I would like to consider this option because I believe that this work

can greatly contribute to addressing the problems we face in the profession. Although I love my profession, I am fearful of leaving it temporarily or permanently. I do believe this work can enrich the quality of the profession and elevate the needed voices of teachers to shift in producing more equitable outcomes for all students.

### **Chapter Overview**

This chapter shared my final reflections on my research. I highlighted important research from my literature review that informed my work and shared new discoveries about myself and the critical need to further support teachers, especially teachers of color. The challenges teachers shared varied, but reflects the research in the literature review. I listed implications regarding teacher retention and sustainability and potential limitations. Finally, this chapter concluded with next steps as a scholar.

### **Conclusions**

In addition to learning about the experiences of suburban teachers of color in my suburban district, I have developed a deeper understanding of my own experience as a Chinese-American woman educator in my field. There were many instances where teachers of color utilized cultural wealth to strengthen their capacity to work and promote agency. This agency can potentially shift the profession to better retain teachers. A framework based on the navigational, social, familial, linguistic, aspirational and resistant assets can inform teacher sustainability in a very challenging profession. I look forward to seeing this work continue in my pursuits as a scholar and organizer.





## **APPENDIX A**

### **Letter of Consent**

#### Letter of Informed Consent for Qualitative Interview

June [date], 2016

Dear [insert name of participant],

I am completing my capstone project for my Masters of Arts at Hamline University, St. Paul, MN. My capstone will analyze the ways teachers of color sustain themselves in a profession that is difficult to retain. My research will consist of an interview and a focus group with secondary teachers of color within [District 1] of various race, class and gender identities.

I am requesting your participation in a one-hour interview. Interview will take place outside of the duty day at the location and time we agree upon. The interview questions are open ended and are attached for your advance preparation. If possible, I would like to audio tape the interview to capture your responses. Following the interview, I will transcribe the interview. I will email you the transcript and my findings from our conversation and ask for your final consent to use all or portions of the interview as data for my capstone. The interview tape will be destroyed after the approved transcript is complete.

After the interviews, you will be invited to participate in a three-hour group interview. The group interview will take place outside of the duty day at the location and time we agree upon. It will be an opportunity to get to know other teachers, reflect on research regarding our cultural wealth and share stories that sustain ourselves in a difficult profession. These stories will provide a framework to write narratives of the ways teachers of color are strengthened in their profession.

The interviews will discuss personal stories of your own experiences in your workplace. Some of those experiences may be challenges, other stories may be stories of strengths. They can be very personal and require transparency. In addition to the large amount of time participating in the research, you will be working with a group of people to discuss your experiences with. Some of your stories may overlap, other stories may be in tension with one another. It is important that as researchers and participants that we take

ownership of our own stories, and be willing to let others speak for themselves. You will also be working closely with me, the researcher. I will be in communication with you throughout this process and will have the opportunity to see rough drafts of the final product. In the end, I would like the final product to reflect the real life experiences of teachers. Because little is done to share the unique wealth of individual teachers of color in suburban schools, this research can inform educational practices that value diverse teachers in order to sustain them.

Your participation is voluntary. If at any point you wish to withdraw from the project, you may do so without any negative consequences. There is little or no risk involved in participating in this research. Your identity will remain anonymous. In addition to your identity, the school district will be described as a suburban school district of a metropolitan of a midwest state of the United States. [District 1] will not be identified in the final report. Though, I may use your stories in the final report, I will share my final product with you before it is submitted to ensure that your experiences are accurately captured. The research is public scholarship and the abstract and final product will be cataloged in Hamline's Bush Library Digital Commons, a searchable electronic repository and that it may be published or used in other ways. If you agree to participate, please sign the attached consent form.

Thank you for your willingness to support my learning in this way. Attached is a consent letter from [District 1] who has given me permission to conduct this research with teachers of [District 1]. If you need additional information, please contact me.

Sincerely,

Verna Wong

**Informed Consent to Participate in Qualitative Interview**

(Keep this portion for your records.)

I have received your letter about participating in an, audio-taped interview. I understand that the interview is a part of your research on the sustainability of teachers of color. I agree to participate in the interview at a time and place of my choosing outside of the duty day. I understand that there is little to-no risk involved in participating in the interviews, that my confidentiality and anonymity will be protected, and that I may withdraw from the project at any time without penalty or consequence.

---

Participant Signature

---

Date

**Informed Consent to Participate in Qualitative Interview**

(Please deliver this portion to the researcher.)

I have received your letter about participating in an, audio-taped interview. I understand that the interview is a part of your research on the sustainability of teachers of color. I agree to participate in the interview at a time and place of my choosing outside of the duty day. I understand that there is little to-no risk involved in participating in the interviews, that my confidentiality and anonymity will be protected, and that I may withdraw from the project at any time without penalty or consequence.

---

Participant Signature

---

Date

## APPENDIX B

### Personal Interview Questions

1. Please start with talking about your background. How did you grow up? Tell me about your schooling experiences.\*
2. Why did you decide to become a teacher?\*
3. What made you decide to teach at ...High School?\*
4. Describe the demographic population of students, teachers, staff and administrators at your school.\*
5. Describe the community that surrounds your school.\*
6. How would you describe the culture of your school?\*
7. Are there particular traditions that symbolize what your school is about?\* Explain.
8. How does your school support diverse perspectives? Explain.
9. Describe your experience being a [race/gender self-identification] teacher at your school?
10. How would you describe your relationships with your colleagues?
11. Do you believe all teachers are able to easily integrate into the school community here at the high school? Why or why not?
12. How would you describe your identity (who you are) outside of the high school?\*
13. Does your identity change or remain the same when you are in this high school? Explain.\*

14. Have there been times where you feel pressure to hide or limit aspects of your identity? Explain.
15. What can your school do more to support you at your high school?
16. How can these supports help you thrive within your profession?
17. What can your school do more to support all teachers who work and potentially come to work at your school?\*

\* questions were drawn from Vera Lee's (2010) research on retention of teachers of color in suburban contexts, analyzing school culture and identity

## **APPENDIX C**

### **Group Interview**

#### Hour One: Introductions and Establishing Norms

The purpose of this group is to have discussions about our profession and identify the ways we sustain ourselves within our profession. My definition of sustain is one that is different from retention. For this group, we will talk about sustainability as a means to strengthen and nourish the profession, one that is historically struggled. Therefore, the conversation will be about the ways we care of our whole being as teachers of color in our school settings, one that integrates our identity and personal lives with our profession. The first hour will be laying groundwork of establishing norms and building relationships of trust. The second hour will be spent sharing about our assets or cultural wealth we each bring to our profession. For the third hour, we will utilize personal narratives to discuss how these stories relate to teacher sustainability.

Throughout this process, I will be taking notes and recording the ideas we share together. I do have pre-generated questions to guide the discussion, but I will also allow room for that discussion to be guided by you, the participants. I will also be recording our conversations for data collection. The data will be collected and analyzed to inform us about teacher sustainability. From the data, I will select three participants to write narratives that capture the themes and findings of this research. These narratives will be constructed using pseudonyms and will be reviewed by the participants involved. Any direct quotes that and details of your narrative used in that will be reviewed by you. If

there are portions of the discussion, narratives, conversations you would like to omit for confidentiality purposes, they will be done so without question. It is very critical that your voices are authentic and that I do not misinterpret your words. It is also important that you give consent to everything that is reported.

Finally, it is important that our group builds and establishes a relationship of trust between you and myself as the researcher/facilitator and with the other participants in the room. Therefore it is important that there are common agreed upon expectations about the way we share our ideas and personal stories. It is my hope that this research be honoring of you and your profession, one that you give tirelessly to everyday. It is also my hope that this discussion can inform us of future possibilities of how we can support one another in this field.

#### Hour One: Discussing Values in Education

1. Establish norms for discussion. (We can always add or go back to this list)
2. With a partner, share a bit about yourself. Your background, field, and why are you here. Be ready to share about your partner.
3. How would you describe your beliefs about teaching?\* Draw pictures or symbols that represent these beliefs.
4. How would you describe your experience as a teacher? Draw pictures or symbols that represent these experiences. Do they match your beliefs? Why is this?
5. Based on our discussion, what challenges do you experience within your profession?

### Hour Two: Cultural Community Wealth

6. What makes you unique as a teacher? What do you bring to your classroom and profession?
7. Read Yosso's (2005) article. Were there aspects of Yosso's description of cultural wealth that you connected with? Explain.
8. Where there aspects of Yosso's description of cultural wealth that do you disagree with? Explain.
9. While the focus of this is on student learning, how can this article inform our practice and work we do as teachers?
10. Describe a time when you have utilize a cultural capital within your work environment. Share a personal story.
11. What insight can these stories provide to us?

### Hour Three: Reflection

12. How do you sustain yourself within education? What strengthens your work and gives you the passion and energy to do your job everyday?
13. If you could choose one moment that captures who you are as a teacher, what would it be and why? Draw a picture of this and share.
14. What reflections can you draw from these stories? Write them down and attach to each illustration.
15. How do these stories inform us about teacher support and sustainability?
16. How can they inform the ways we better retain teachers in our schools?



17. Take some time to write about this experience. What have you learned?

How can the discussion and stories impact you and your profession? What do you take away from this experience?

**APPENDIX D****Post Interview Reflection Question**

9/27/16

Hello Everyone.

First of all, I wanted to say thank you once again for making Saturday happen, even with our tired and sick/recovering selves. It was an honor to hear your stories and thoughts, and I feel very grateful and fortunate to have you a part of this group.

If you have thoughts, feedback, and critiques of these last two months of working with me, share with me in an email or let me know in person. Again, Thank you.

Final Reflection: If you could choose one moment that captures your strength as a teacher, what would it be and why?

Can you get it to my by Monday, October 2nd? You can email it to me via school email or my Hamline email.

Verna Wong

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