

**Mapping and Mapping and Dreaming Together at the Kitchen Table:
An Exploration of What Allows Teachers of Color to Stay, Thrive, and Sustain Themselves in
Educational Spaces**

by

Sarah Day Dayon

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Doctoral Committee:

Professor Chauncey Monte-Sano, Chair
Dr. Maria E. Hyler, Learning Policy Institute
Professor Debi Khasnabis
Professor Kyle Powys Whyte

Sarah Day Dayon

sdayon@umich.edu

ORCID iD: [0009-0005-4569-8347](https://orcid.org/0009-0005-4569-8347)

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Dedication

To all the educators and students who have experienced marginalization and harm in schooling spaces. May this work be a love letter to you and a reminder of your brilliance.

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Abstract

Knowing that education has been a historically hostile space for Students and Teachers of Color, there's opportunity to further explore and learn from Teachers of Color about what it would take for Teachers of Color to feel supported and sustained in their well-being and work. In this study, I learn from experienced Teachers of Color who have stayed in education long-term, both those who continue to stay and those who have left, to understand their experiences with retention. This research examines how a group of current and former Teachers of Color think about enduring and thriving in educational spaces and the factors that sustain and support them to continue their work as educators. This study also explores how mapping and retreat can be used as methodological tools to deepen what researchers learn from TOCs about the conditions and resources that support and sustain their well-being and work. Data for this study included virtual and in-person semi-structured interviews with Teachers of Color, artifacts from their classrooms and lives, focus groups with teachers at a 3-day retreat, mapping artifacts they created at the retreat, their reflections about the process, and field observations.

Chapter 2 is the manuscript, ““It means to stay in a dysfunctional system at the detriment to my health”: How Teachers of Color Conceptualize Retention and Staying in Educational Spaces.” This paper presents a case study analysis of a group of current and former Teachers of Color (TOCs) and their perspectives on what staying in teaching means and looks like. Through my analysis of interview data with 25 current and former Teachers of Color, I provide insights into TOC's conceptualizations of staying, persisting, enduring, thriving, and sustaining their work in the classroom.

Chapter 3 is the manuscript, “Offering a Conceptual Framework for How Teachers of Color Navigate and Resist their School’s Racial Climates.” This paper examines how a group of 25 experienced Teachers of Color navigate their school environments and the resources they report as necessary for sustaining their work. Specifically, I ask what navigational and resistant resources a group of current and former TOCs draw on or identify as critical to sustaining their work and well-being. I bring together Yosso’s (2005) Community Cultural Wealth model and Kohli et al.’s (2022) framework for a healthy racial climate into one conceptual framework that integrates TOCs as individuals and the larger systems that situate their work. This study explores the experiences and strategies of experienced TOCs and how they maneuver within the racial climates of their schools.

Chapter 4 is the manuscript, “Learning and Healing at the Kitchen Table: Retreat and Mapping Reflections from Teachers of Color.” This paper considers how critical qualitative methods of mapping (educational journey mapping, ecomapping, freedom dreaming) and collective counterstorytelling in the space of a retreat provide unique opportunities for learning about TOCs and gaining insight into their experiences with staying. Drawing on frameworks of re-membering and freedom dreaming, I analyze maps created by 14 current and former TOCs in the context of a critical reflection retreat and their reflections about the mapping activities and retreat. This paper aims to support researchers in understanding different tools and approaches for learning about how Teachers of Color are staying in the classroom and the environmental conditions and holistic supports that allow them to continue their work.

Chapter 1 Introduction

Project Background

In this dissertation, I explore pathways and possibilities for supporting and sustaining Teachers of Color¹ in educational spaces. I was drawn to this project focused on Teacher of Color retention because of my experiences as a Filipina American high school social studies teacher who left the classroom after four years.

In my first year as a full-time teacher, a fellow Woman of Color teacher admitted to me that teaching felt like being in an abusive relationship—returning daily to a loved one who causes physical and mental harm. She left our school in the following year, though remained in education. I continued witnessing students and educators become disillusioned with schools, often regarding the silence, inaction, and retaliation they encountered when speaking out against systemic racism. When I felt forced to choose between access to adequate healthcare and my career, I also knew I had to step away from the classroom. I entered my doctoral program in

¹Historically, the terms “People of Color” and “BIPOC” have been contentious ones, receiving push back from many communities not seeing themselves as part of an “umbrella category” (Todd-Breland, 2022). I use the terms BIPOC, Black and Brown, People of Color, and Communities of Color as a way to collectively name Black, Indigenous, Latiné/o/a/x, Asian, Pacific Islander, and multiracial individuals and communities living in the diaspora, particularly the United States. Like Kohli & Pizarro (2022), I use “of Color” to refer to “multiracial groups of racially minoritized people in the aggregate,...and understand its history, current-day utility, as well as its flaws and limitations” (Kohli & Pizarro, 2022, p.4). I use the term Teachers of Color as a way to collectively name educators who are BIPOC. When possible, I use the specific identifications used by the participants or authors themselves. I also think it’s important to nuance the ways different communities and people have experienced white supremacy and honor the collective efforts and solidarity among Communities of Color without minimizing and implying that the experiences of People of Color with race and racism are the same. As such, Teachers of Color should also not be treated as any sort of monolith.

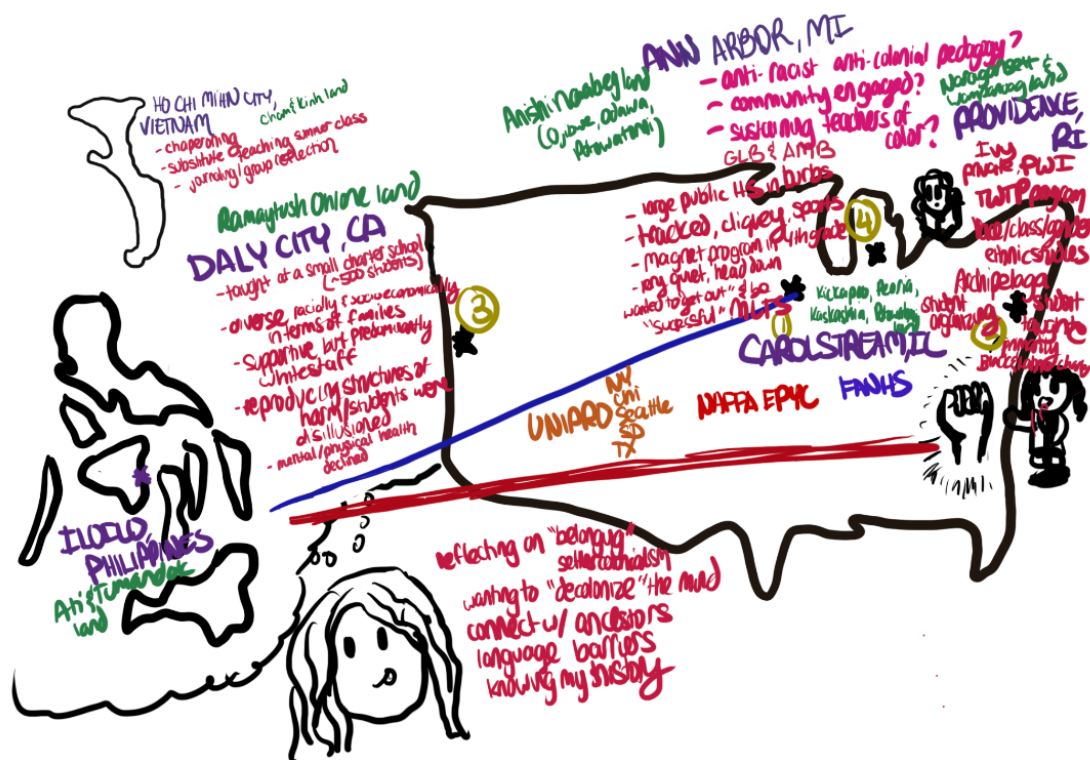
I also intentionally capitalize Black, Indigenous, Teachers of Color, Students of Color, etc. and use lower case for white. This capitalization represents “a grammatical move toward racial justice” (Kohli, 2009) that “honor[s] the dignity and identities of racialized people in formal ways” (Kohli & Pizarro, 2022, p. 4). Drawing again from Kohli & Pizarro (2022), I also “recognize the humanity of all people and acknowledge white as a racial category,...[and] the historical roots of whiteness, designed as a category of power and exclusion and leveraged through racial violence. Today, those legacies live on in both overt and implicit ways, systemically and interpersonally...[and] avoid affirmation to white power and racial domination, [and I] extend the resistance of Crenshaw, Gotanda, and many other critical race scholars [by maintaining] the term in lowercase (Drake & Oglesby, 2020; Kohli, 2021; Kohli et al., 2021; Pérez Huber & Solórzano, 2015)” (Kohli & Pizarro, 2022, p.4).

2020, grieving my experiences as a former Teacher of Color. I thought about the late nights spent rewriting curriculum to be more culturally responsive and witnessing my advisees, whom I had mentored for 4 years, graduate on my computer screen instead of getting to celebrate with them together in-person. Although schools, teachers, and curriculum can function to uphold oppressive systems, I sought to understand what it could look like for them to function as part of cultivating a just and shared future. In 2022, I joined the Institute for Teachers of Color Committed to Racial Justice (ITOC) as a teacher educator. Surrounded by teachers engaged in sessions on community and ancestral approaches to science education and on disrupting anti-Black language in schools, I realized how powerful critical professional learning spaces and communities would have been for me as a K-12 teacher. I also had the opportunity to spend time with a Black middle school social studies teacher with over 25 years of teaching experience, Mysteria, through a research project that I was involved with. It was through these experiences that I saw possibilities for Teachers of Color in the profession, and I sought to learn further from Educators of Color about what it takes to stay in teaching long-term.

Methods of mapping became a central part of my research design and data collection, and this was in large part due to my experiences learning in community with other graduate Students of Color and Educators of Color. As I was starting my graduate program, I was virtually introduced to some incredible Women of Color who inspired the trajectory of my dissertation. One of those introductions was to Camille Ungco, a Filipino American graduate student at the University of Washington, who shared a map of her educational journey with me as well as some academic articles about mapping as a qualitative method. Later that year, Camille and I, alongside Sinaya Surla and Claire Balani, developed a virtual workshop for the Bulosan Center for Filipinx Studies, “Mapping as a Healing Method: Educational Journeys of the Filipinx

Diaspora.” We shared our educational journey maps (Figure 1) and gave time for workshop participants to reflect on their experiences with education and miseducation throughout their lives. Educational journey mapping became an exercise that I used in future workshops and courses as a way for people to critically reflect on their educational experiences, and I carried this into the dissertation.

Figure 1. Sarah Day’s Educational Journey Map



Collecting data at a retreat space also became a focal point of the research project, and again, this lineage traces back to my experiences learning from other graduate Students of Color and Educators of Color. In 2020, I attended virtual porch sits hosted by Women of Color and the Academy (WOCATA), an interdisciplinary graduate student organization that centers the voices and experiences of students who identify as women, femmes, and non-binary folks of Color (Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, Pacific Islander, Middle Eastern, and North African) and

uplifts scholarship that seeks to eliminate and uproot educational disparities for Black and Brown people through research that invites equity, justice, and liberatory perspectives and solutions. Through these virtual porch sit gatherings, I found refuge, affirmation, and saw new possibilities for the research I could do. After that first year as a member, Laura-Ann Jacobs, Gaby Bernal, and monét cooper invited me to be a co-lead for WOCATA, and in the years following, I had the opportunity to work with Gaby, monét, Bernardette Pinetta, Saraí Blanco Martinez, Cat Ventura, Kati Lebioda, and so many others to carve out spaces for care and criticality for graduate students at Michigan. One of the ideas we dreamed up at a porch sit was a community writing retreat off-campus, where members could connect and make progress on their milestones. In 2022, we secured grants and funding to manifest the vision into reality and keep it going annually. WOCATA and ITOC were important anchors for me throughout my graduate program, and the annual WOCATA retreats and ITOC summer gatherings provided in-person community and nourishment to sustain my research and teaching. When my committee suggested using a retreat in my data collection during my proposal defense, this felt like a moment to bring together so many different aspects of my work in a way that felt authentic and affirming.

In this dissertation, I also build on a pilot study I conducted as part of my preliminary exams. This pilot involved interviews with one Filipina and two Black educators: Mayari, Mysteria, and JT. This pilot served to affirm and guide decision making about some of the mapping tools (educational journey mapping and freedom dreaming) that I selected for this study. Specifically, I saw how the different data sources reinforced and built upon each other in my analysis, and this allowed me to understand different aspects of teachers' sensemaking about what supports and sustains them. I designed this study as an extension of my methods-focused pilot study in order to investigate how veteran TOCs understand the various dimensions of their

working environments and what TOCs think about what it takes to persist, endure, thrive and sustain themselves and their work as educators.

As a Pinay woman who has worked in predominantly white and female teaching spaces and mainly white and male history and social studies spaces, I seek to disrupt dehumanizing systems in schooling by advancing diversity and well-being in the teaching workforce. Because K-12 schools are often overburdened and lack the structural supports to sustain educators from historically minoritized communities, I see my work in higher education as a site of possibility and partnership for supporting teachers to engage in the restorative, sustaining, and humanizing pedagogies that many of them are seeking for their classrooms and students.

Purpose and Opportunity Statement

Teacher of Color (TOC) retention is a pressing issue, with educators from ethnically and racially diverse backgrounds entering the field at lower rates and leaving at higher rates compared to white teachers (Brown, 2014; Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Carver-Thomas, 2018; Carver-Thomas et al., 2022; Dillard, 1994; Ingersoll et al., 2019; Sleeter, 2001; Sleeter, 2017). Research involving both Teachers and Students of Color consistently demonstrates the positive impact that TOCs have on the academic success and socioemotional well-being of their students (Dilworth & Coleman, 2014; Gist & Bristol, 2022; Villegas & Irvine, 2010). The existing literature on TOC retention predominantly focuses on the challenges contributing to the lack of workforce diversity and teacher retention. For example, recruitment, teacher preparation & the early career phase have been cited as challenges and spaces for opportunity within educational research and policy (Carver-Thomas et al., 2022; Herrera et al., 2022; Kohli et al., 2022; Nettles et al., 2011). Educational research has also demonstrated the various ways that racialized harm and systemic issues create barriers, isolation, and pressures for TOCs (Bettini et al., 2021; Gist &

Bristol, 2022; Goodwin, 2023; Kohli, 2018; Pizarro & Kohli, 2020). While these issues are significant, I see an opportunity to delve deeper into understanding the experiences of TOCs who stay in the profession and those who have left to learn from their perspectives about what is needed to support the well-being and work of TOCs in educational spaces. Because the educational literature on Teachers of Color predominantly speaks to student teachers and novice teachers, there is opportunity to learn from Teachers of Color who have persisted and endured in the classroom space and to consider the wealth of knowledge and experiences that veteran Teachers of Color (those who have 5-10+ years of classroom experience) bring to the field. While there are some retention studies that report on Teachers' of Color commitments and some of factors that support them, further consideration and exploration is needed to understand what makes it possible for TOCs to continue working in educational spaces.

Through my dissertation research, I ask what can be learned about retention, persistence, endurance, thriving, and sustainability from veteran TOCs who continue to stay in education long-term and those who have left the profession later in their career. I examine how current and former TOCs understand the various dimensions of their working environments and what experienced TOCs think about what it takes to persist, endure, thrive and sustain themselves and their work as educators. Given the long-documented history of public schooling in the United States as a historically hostile space for Students and Teachers of Color and knowing that the legacies of harm have been well documented in educational research, there's opportunity to learn from veteran TOCs and their experiences with remaining in educational systems while also attending to the complexities and nuances of the challenges they face and the costs of staying or leaving. I seek to gain insight into what is needed for Teachers of Color to stay, attend to their holistic well-being, and thrive. I use various critical qualitative research methods, including

mapping and counterstorytelling, as a way to learn about the environments, relationships, and practices a group of TOCs find supportive in their work. By better understanding the experiences and strategies of experienced TOCs, we can better prepare, support, and retain TOCs, ultimately leading to more sustainable and equitable educational systems.

Research Questions

In this dissertation, I investigate the following research questions:

1. How do Teachers of Color think about what it means to stay, persist, endure, thrive and/or sustain themselves in educational spaces?

1A: How do they think about the differences between staying, persisting, enduring, thriving, and/or being sustained as Teachers of Color in educational spaces?

1B: How do they think about the similarities between staying, persisting, enduring, thriving, and/or being sustained as Teachers of Color in educational spaces?

2. What navigational and resistant resources do experienced Teachers of Color draw on or identify as critical for sustaining their work in educational spaces?

2A: What similarities and differences are there between the resources that current and former TOCs report?

3. How can critical qualitative methods of mapping (educational journey mapping, ecomapping, and freedom dreaming) and a retreat space be used to learn about the perspectives of current and former veteran Teachers of Color on what supports and sustains them in their well-being and work?

3A: What are the offerings and constraints of Educational Journey Mapping as a tool to learn about Teachers of Color and their perspectives on what supports and sustains them in their well-being and work?

3B: What are the offerings and constraints of Ecomapping as a tool to learn about Teachers of Color and their perspectives on what supports and sustains them in their well-being and work?

3C: What are the offerings and constraints of Freedom Dreaming as a tool to learn about Teachers of Color and their perspectives on what supports and sustains them in their well-being and work?

3D: What are the offerings and constraints of a retreat as a space to learn about Teachers of Color and their perspectives on what supports and sustains them in their well-being and work?

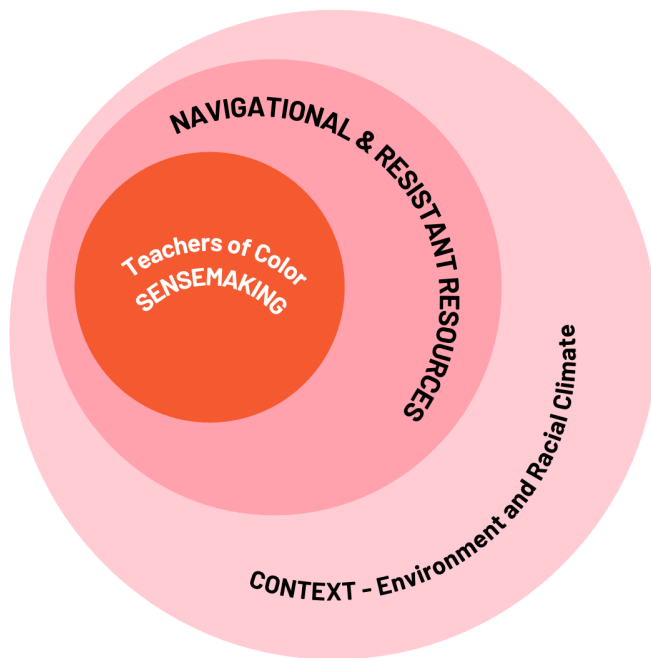
Guiding Perspectives and Literature

I frame my overall study through the lens of critical race theory (CRT) (Bernal, 2002; Crenshaw et al., 1995; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). An underlying premise of CRT is that racism is central, endemic, ongoing, and fundamental to the functioning of U.S. society (Bell, 1992; Crenshaw, 1989). CRT names race as a central component of educational theory and praxis. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) describe five core tenets of critical race theory and methods in education, including: 1) acknowledging how racism is endemic in the United States and how race and racism interacts with other forms of subordination, 2) challenging dominant perspectives that uphold the power of dominant groups, 3) demonstrating a commitment to social justice, 4) centering the experiential knowledge, particularly of People of Color, and 5) taking interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary perspectives. CRT centers the

racialized, gendered, and classed experience of people explicitly, names a commitment to social justice as a goal, and utilizes interdisciplinary methodology.

In Table 1, I provide my initial draft for organizing the dissertation into three potential articles, building on a conceptual framework that I developed for this study. This conceptual framework (see Figure 1) focuses on the relationships I am most interested in: the interplay between Teachers' of Color experiences, sensemaking, navigational and resistant resources, and environmental context. In Figure 2, I place the key actors, Teachers of Color and what they think, SENSEMAKING, at the center. They are surrounded by the CONTEXT, or the environment and racial climate, as the outermost circle, with NAVIGATIONAL AND RESISTANT RESOURCES, the individual qualities and resources that they use to navigate their experiences, in between. In designing this framework, I draw from critical race theory in education (Bernal, 2002; Crenshaw et al., 1995; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), theories of thriving (Beltman et al., 2011; Goh et al., 2022; Schreiner, 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2018), Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth model, Kohli et al.'s (2022) dimensions of a Healthy Racial Climate, re-membering (Dillard 2012; 2021; King & Swartz, 2014), fugitivity (Coles et al., 2021; Harney & Moten, 2013), and freedom dreaming (Kelley, 2002) as theoretical framings and lenses for exploring my proposed research questions.

Figure 2. Conceptual Framework



In Table 1, I detail the relationship between each research question, my conceptual framework, and the theoretical frameworks that guide my investigation of the questions. Under this format, Paper 1 (RQ1, Chapter 2 of this dissertation) centers understandings of thriving and the ways Teachers of Color offer new or different perspectives on what it looks like to survive and thrive in the teaching profession. With Paper 1, I focus on the fourth tenet of CRT, centering the experiential knowledge of People of Color, as a lens for analyzing how Teachers of Color are understanding and defining what it means or looks like for them to stay, persist, endure, thrive, and/or be sustained in education. Taking both critical race theory and previous theories of thriving as frameworks, I examine what it looks like or means for the Teachers of Color in my study to feel like they can stay, persist, endure, thrive, and/or be sustained in their work.

In Paper 2 (RQ2, Chapter 3 of this dissertation), I explore the navigational and resistant resources Teachers of Color draw on in their work while also considering the external supports,

environments, structural resources, and networks that Teachers of Color name as critical for sustaining their work. I investigate how Teachers of Color make sense of how to exist and be within their environments. As I think about this phenomenon of interest, I draw from Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth model, which challenges deficit framings of Communities of Color that focus primarily on their disadvantages and instead gives attention to the abundance of resources that they hold. Community Cultural Wealth draws from critical race theory and cultural capital frameworks to emphasize the knowledge, skills, and capabilities of Communities of Color such as their aspirational capital, linguistic capital, familial capital, social capital, navigational capital, and resistant capital (Yosso, 2005).

In Paper 2 (Chapter 3), I also use Kohli et al.'s (2022) dimensions of a healthy racial climate in teacher education as a framework for thinking about the racial climate that in-service teachers exist within. Kohli and colleagues (2022) draw from a body of racial climate frameworks in higher education that primarily consider the health of a university campus climate (Griffin et al., 2012; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hurtado, 1992; Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999, 2012; Hurtado & Ruiz Alvarado, 2015; Ledesma, 2016; Milem et al., 2005). Specifically, Kohli et al.'s (2022) healthy racial climate framework builds on racial climate in terms of health (Hurtado et al., 1998, Ledesma, 2016) and attends to the higher education context of university-based teacher education. I adapt Kohli et al.'s (2022) framework and apply it to the context and racial climate of in-service Teachers of Color. I elaborate and further specify Yosso's (2002) concept of navigational and resistant resources by thinking about it alongside Kohli et al.'s (2022) healthy racial climate framework and other literature on Teacher of Color retention to examine the resources TOCs draw on and identify as critical for staying in educational spaces.

Paper 3 (RQ3, Chapter 4 in this dissertation) has a methodological focus and examines the use of counterstorytelling and mapping tools utilized in the focus group sessions of this project. I build on the work of scholars who have worked on research related to Teachers of Color and their retention (e.g., Carver-Thomas et al., 2022; Gist & Bristol, 2022, Kohli, 2018; Kohli et al., 2022; Pizarro & Kohli, 2020). One way prior educational research on and with in-service Teachers of Color has explicitly made relationality and collective knowledge a priority from the outset of the research design through focus groups, group interviews, and affinity groups with or consisting of Teachers of Color (Duncan, 2021; Jackson & Knight-Manuel, 2019; Lee, 2016; Mosely, 2018; Pour-Khorshid, 2018). Other studies have examined and leveraged critical mapping methods with teachers and TOCs (Marx et al. 2023; Monreal, 2022; Ramirez et al., 2025; Sealey-Ruiz & Christensen, 2024) and identified their promise for learning about the experiences of teachers for different purposes. While prior research has not brought these mapping tools and collective counterstorytelling methods together as a way to learn about Teachers of Color and their experiences with staying and leaving schools, the effective usage of multiple mapping methods in other studies with different populations and research purposes (Annamma, 2017) suggest there is promise in bringing these methods together for the purpose of developing a more comprehensive understanding of what allows Teachers of Color to persist, endure, and thrive. With Paper 3 (Chapter 4), I examine how the critical mapping methods of educational journey mapping (Annamma, 2018), ecomapping (Hartman, 1978), and freedom dreaming (Kelley, 2002; Spaulding et al., 2021; Tolivar, 2021) might be useful tools in combination and in the context of a retreat space for learning about TOCs' experiences with retention.

I see my research project contributing to the ongoing research with in-service Teachers of Color, building on the ways counterstorytelling can be done as a collective and how such methods could help us to expand our scope for studying Teacher of Color retention.

Table 1. Research Questions and Alignment with Theories, Data Sources, and Analysis

Research Questions	Sub-research Questions	Conceptual Framework	Theoretical Frameworks	Data Sources
1) How do Teachers of Color think about what it means to stay, persist, endure, thrive and/or sustain themselves in educational spaces?	1A: How do they think about the differences between staying, persisting, enduring, thriving, and/or being sustained as Teachers of Color in educational spaces? 1B: How do they think about the similarities between staying, persisting, enduring, thriving, and/or being sustained as Teachers of Color in educational spaces?	Teachers of Color and their SENSEMAKING: Conceptualizing and defining: stay, persist, endure, thrive, and sustain	Critical race theory (CRT) in education (Bernal, 2002; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) Counterstorytelling (Solórzano and Yosso, 2002) Theories of thriving in education/work as teachers/students (Beltman et al., 2011; Goh et al., 2022; Nieto, 2009; Schreiner, 2013)	Data from both case study cohorts Counterstories in C-TOCs' and F-TOCs' interviews, artifacts from teachers' lives
2) What navigational and resistant resources do experienced Teachers of Color draw on or identify as critical for sustaining their work in educational spaces?	2A: What similarities and differences are there between the resources that current and former TOCs report?	NAVIGATIONAL & RESISTANT RESOURCES WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF RACIALIZED EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENTS: personal commitments, relationality and connection to others, attention to holistic well-being,	Community Cultural Wealth Model (Yosso, 2005) Healthy Racial Climate Framework (Kohli, et al. 2022)	Data from both case study cohorts Sessions of Focus: educational journey maps, ecomaps and freedom dreams Counterstories in C-TOCs' and F-TOCs' interviews and focus

		movement through conflict/tensions, dreams/futurity, continued practice of feeding the soul		groups, mapping artifacts (educational journey maps, ecomaps, freedom dreams), post-session surveys/ reflections
3) How can critical qualitative methods of mapping (educational journey mapping, ecomapping, and freedom dreaming) and a retreat space be used to learn about the perspectives of current and former veteran Teachers of Color on what supports and sustains them in their well-being and work?	What are the offerings and constraints of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational Journey Mapping • Ecomapping • Freedom Dreaming • Retreat as a tool/space to learn about Teachers of Color and what supports and sustains them in their well- being and work?	METHODS IN COMBINATION: educational journey mapping, ecomapping, freedom dreaming, retreat	Re-membering (Dillard 2012; 2021; King & Swartz, 2014) Fugitivity (Coles et al., 2021; Harney & Moten, 2013) Freedom dreaming (Kelley, 2002) Methods: Educational Journey Mapping (Annamma, 2018) Ecomapping (Hartman, 1978) Freedom Dreaming (Kelley, 2002; Neal & Dunn, 2020; Spaulding et al., 2021; Tolivar, 2021)	Data from both case study cohorts Counterstories in C- TOCs' and F-TOCs' interviews and focus groups, mapping artifacts (educational journey maps, ecomaps, freedom dreams), post-session surveys, one-year follow up survey

Overview of Methods and Data Collection

My study takes a critical race methodology (CRM) (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) approach that is informed by critical race theory and grounded in the experiences of Teachers of Color. CRM recognizes the ways that racism and systems of oppression manifest in our society and within education and also seeks to transform the ways that research can be done to challenge dominant research methods. For one, participants are not just data sources and CRM provides a framing that facilitates a relationship between participants and researchers and honors the brilliance, challenges, and complexities inherent in the experiences of those who share their stories and lived realities. I sought to deeply listen to Teachers of Color and those invested in sustaining the work of Teachers of Color. I saw this as a practice of citation, where TOCs are lifted as a community of experts whose testimonies and ways of knowing and being are sources of wisdom. With this, I aimed to position Teachers of Color as the stewards of their own information and saw my role as a researcher as one of a listener of and learner with the communities I'm in conversation with, making space for relationality and reciprocity when it comes to knowledge sharing rather than a one-sided extraction.

This project takes up a critical race methodology approach through the use of counterstories, or counterstorytelling. Counterstorytelling, is a critical race method informed by critical race theory, in which marginalized people are centered, and their narratives about and experiences with racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, and other systems of domination are validated and seen as necessary forms of data (Delgado, 1989; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Yosso, 2005). My research plan incorporates the method of counterstorytelling by centering Teachers of Color and their experiences, including both how they've been impacted by oppressive systems in schooling and recognizing their agency and testimonies of resistance. My project aims to

combine methods of counterstorytelling with collaborative and collective knowledge building practices by inviting participating teachers to engage with one another in the context of a retreat, positioning myself as a co-learner, and creating multiple avenues for teachers to reflect on the research process.

This project specifically employs a qualitative multiple embedded case study design (Brown, 2008; Merriam, 1998; Yazan, 2015; Yin, 2002). Like Merriam (1998) who writes about case study research in education, I define a qualitative case study as a description and analysis of an entity or phenomenon that is bounded. I agree with Merriam that the phenomenon cannot be separated from its context and that a case study analysis is fruitful for exploring and understanding a phenomenon's context and process. In alignment with Merriam's (1998) qualitative case study design, I conducted a literature review, constructed a theoretical framework, identified a research problem (or opportunity), crafted and sharpened my research questions, and have planned to select my cases utilizing purposeful sampling.

In accordance with Yin (2002), I designed a multiple embedded case study which involves multiple units of analysis. I looked at each individual Teacher of Color as embedded units of analysis within two cases: experienced Teachers of Color who have stayed in the classroom as in-service teachers and experienced Teachers of Color who have left the classroom, with one case being all individuals still teaching or taught through retirement and the other case being all individuals no longer teaching due to reasons outside of retirement. The sources of information that informed these cases are the responses from the Teachers of Color about their experiences with retention (staying and/or leaving), observations of how teachers engaged in the process, the artifacts generated from each session, and their discussion and reflections about the process. I made within-case comparisons to see what those still teaching had in common with

one another and what those who are no longer teaching had in common with one another as well as the nuances for each individual teacher embedded in the case. Following that, I completed a cross-case comparison, by comparing across the two cases - the case of teachers still teaching and those not teaching - to consider what I've learned through each case and also what is learned about the cases in comparison with one other. A multiple case study approach allowed me to explore the complexities and variation of teachers' experiences across varied contexts.

Retreat Context

I invited participants to one of two grant-funded, in-person, summer retreats where I co-facilitated three focus group sessions over the course of 2.5 days. In conducting this research, I considered the impact of physical spaces, the histories of harm done in schools and educational systems, and the labor of teaching. I sought to use research methods that reject extractive practices and support reciprocity. This included winning multiple small grants² to support data collection so that I could compensate teachers financially with stipends, minimize barriers to participation, and cover lodging, food, and transportation expenses. I intentionally designed data collection as a retreat that took place away from teachers' physical workspace and offered a less restrictive space to share that invited critical reflection, creativity, community, and healing.

Intentionality and care were a priority in the critical reflection retreat's design. For both groups, when teachers arrived for the first mapping session, they were given gift bags with goodies like facemasks and notebooks to write their reflection. Teachers were also given a selection of education-related books to choose from including Gholdy Muhammad's *Cultivating*

² This research was funded by the Elizabeth "Libby" Douvan Junior Scholars Fund in Life Course Development from the University of Michigan Institute for Social Research (\$11,000), the Riecker Graduate Student Research Fellowship from the University of Michigan Center for the Education of Women+ (CEW+) (\$5000), the Anti-Racism Graduate Research Grant from the University of Michigan National Center for Institutional Diversity (NCID) and Rackham Graduate School (\$5000), the Rackham Graduate Student Candidate Research Grant (\$3000), the Rackham Graduate Student Pre-Candidate Research Grant (\$1500), and the Marsal School of Education dije (Diversity, Inclusion, Justice, and Equity) Office Mini-Grant (\$500).

Genius (2020) and *Unearthing Joy* (2023), Tricia Hersey's *Rest is Resistance* (2022), Bettina Love's *We Want to Do More Than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom* (2019) and *Punished for Dreaming* (2023), and Bettina L. Love, Mariame Kaba, Jay Gillen's *Lessons in Liberation: An Abolitionist Toolkit for Educators* (2021) (Figure 3). These books were chosen because some of the teachers named them or their authors in the pre-retreat conversation as resources that have been supportive of their work as Teachers of Color.

Figure 3. Photo of Some of the Books Provided at the Retreat for Teachers to Take Home



The food, music, and schedule were also planned intentionally. During independent work time in the dining room and kitchen, there was a speaker that played songs from a shared playlist co-created by retreat attendees. Art supplies and snacks were readily available in the dining room space for people to work with and eat (Figures 4, 5, & 6). The retreat team also provided meals and snacks for teachers and the kitchen was open for teachers to use to prepare other food. There were also intentionally long breaks between sessions so teachers could process, rest, and enjoy and explore the town. Alongside the moments of vulnerability and grief, there was also laughter and joy throughout the retreat. Attendees would offer to grab snacks or make tea for each other.

We also spent a lot of time convening around the kitchen counter during and between meals, oftentimes extending on the conversations that were started during the mapping sessions.

Figure 4. Image of the Dining Room Space where Teachers Presented and Could Work on their Maps

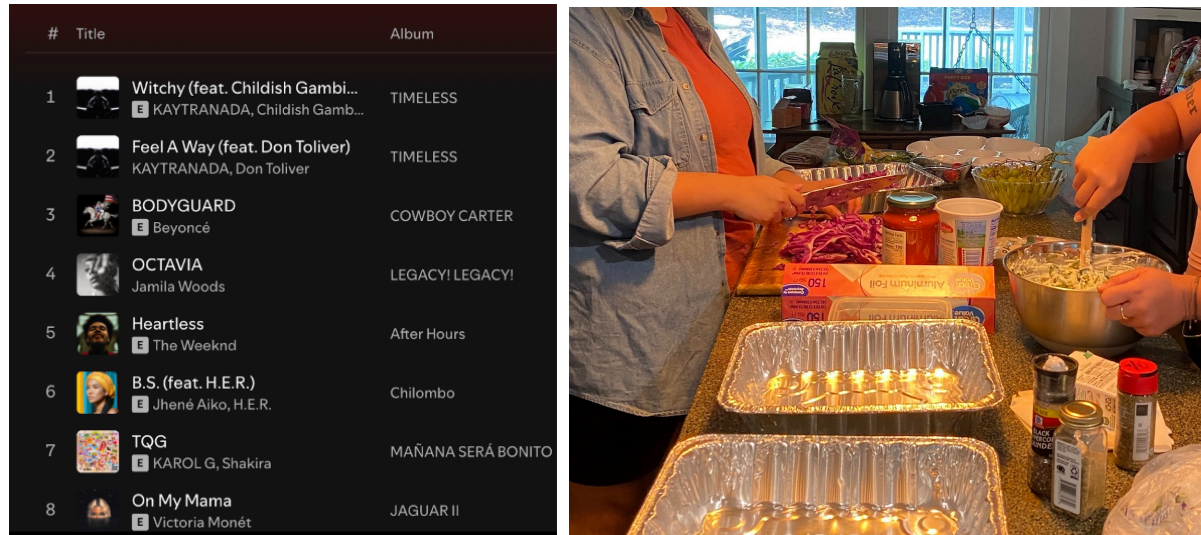


Figure 5. Screenshot of Select Songs from the Current Teacher Playlist and Photo of one of the Meals

#	Title	Album
1	 Belong in the Sun ¿Téo?, Lido	¿Téo?
2	 Beanie Chezile	Beanie
3	 Steeeam Shelly	Shelly
4	 Sweet Disposition The Temper Trap	Conditions
5	 BODYGUARD Beyoncé	COWBOY CARTER
6	 II HANDS II HEAVEN Beyoncé	COWBOY CARTER
7	 Little More Time Lucky Daye, Victoria Monét	Painted (Deluxe Edition)



Figure 6. Screenshot of Select Songs from the Former Teacher Playlist and Photo of one of the Meals



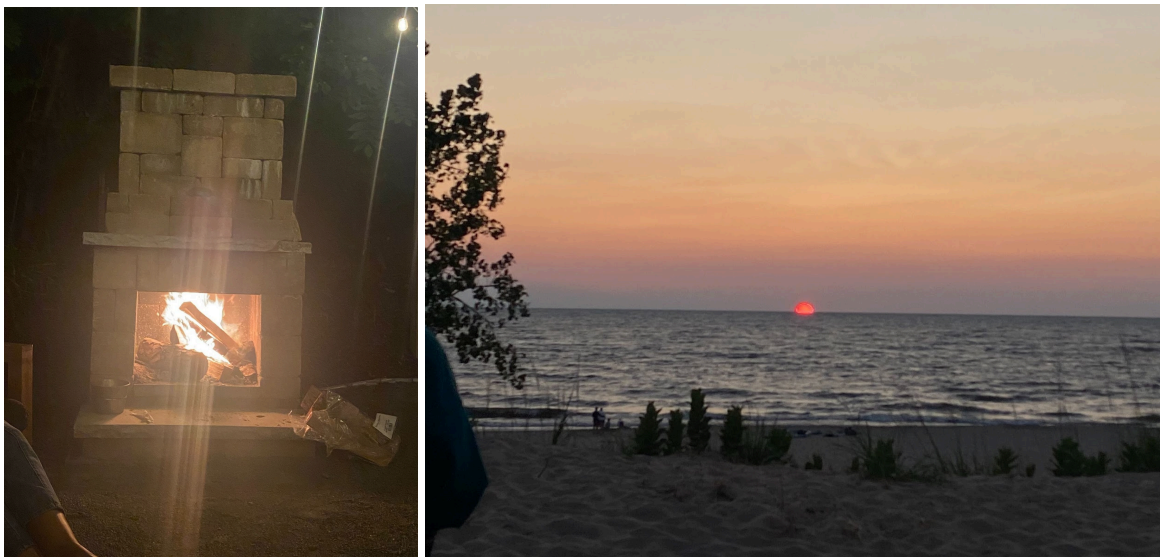
Teachers also found ways to further connect to themselves, to each other, and to nature. In the first group with current TOCs, Emilio would go for runs throughout town and several teachers mentioned seeing him run by. Savannah, CJ, Alejandra, and Lucia went on an adventure to a beach that required a long walking journey and then ended the night with inviting the group to make smores at the outdoor fireplace (Figure 7). The next morning, I had informal conversations with Roxanne and Anna at the kitchen counter about teacher education and mentorship. For the group of former teachers, some participants spent time in the downtown area, explored shops and went out for food and drinks. Juliana, like Emilio at the first retreat, took daily runs and explored different parts of the surrounding area. Some teachers spent time with one another and had conversations on the porch, the patio, or out by the water (Figure 8). On the final night after the freedom dreaming session, we had several informal closing circles as a group that was unrecorded. The first was immediately after the session during dinner, where teachers dug more deeply into systemic issues impacting the schools they worked in. Later in the

evening, we gathered around the outdoor fireplace to further connect and share about our lives. Overall, both current and former TOCs used the retreat context to build further connections with one another, establish trust and safety with me as a researcher and one another, made use of the resources available to them, and rested and recharged in ways that felt necessary to them.

Figure 7. Photo of Teachers Sitting by the Firepit Making Smores



Figure 8. Photo of the Outdoor Fireplace and the Sunset on the Beach



Overview of Dissertation Chapters

In my exploration of what allows Teachers of Color to stay, thrive, and sustain themselves in educational spaces, I organized the dissertation into three papers, each focusing on

one of the overarching research questions. Here, in Chapter 1, I provide an introduction and overview of the dissertation. In Chapters 2-4, I present manuscripts that I intend to submit to peer-reviewed research journals.

Chapter 2 is the first manuscript, ““It means to stay in a dysfunctional system at the detriment to my health”: How Teachers of Color Conceptualize Retention and Staying in Educational Spaces.” Drawing from critical race theory and theories of thriving, this paper analyzes the counterstories of 25 current and former Teachers of Color and their conceptualizations of what it means and looks like to stay, to persist, to endure, to thrive, and to sustain or be sustained in education. Through my analysis of pre-retreat interview data, I provide insights into TOC’s conceptualizations of staying in the classroom to better understand and support the retention of a racially diverse teaching profession.

Chapter 3 is the second manuscript, “Offering a Conceptual Framework for How Teachers of Color Navigate and Resist their School’s Racial Climates.” This paper examines how experienced Teachers of Color navigate their working environments and the resources they report as necessary for sustaining their work. Specifically, I ask what navigational and resistant resources a group of current and former TOCs draw on or identify as critical to sustaining their work and well-being. Building on Yosso’s (2005) Community Cultural Wealth model and Kohli et al.’s (2022) framework for a healthy racial climate, I developed a conceptual framework that explores how the Teachers of Color in my study navigate the racial climates of their schools. I analyzed interviews, educational journey maps, ecomaps, freedom dream maps, and focus group conversations in the context of a retreat space with 25 current and former TOCs.

Chapter 4 is the third manuscript, “Learning and Healing at the Kitchen Table: Retreat and Mapping Reflections from Teachers of Color.” This paper considers how critical qualitative

methods of mapping (educational journey mapping, ecomapping, freedom dreaming) and collective counterstorytelling in the space of a retreat provide unique opportunities and insights for learning about TOCs and their experiences with staying. Drawing on frameworks of remembering and freedom dreaming, a retreat space and different types of mapping tools were designed to intentionally center TOCs' holistic and relational knowledge. Through an analysis of maps created by TOCs and their reflections about the mapping activities and retreat, this paper aims to support researchers in understanding different tools for learning about how Teachers of Color are staying in the classroom and the environmental conditions and holistic supports that allow them to continue their work.

In Chapter 5, I offer my overall conclusions and discuss possible implications.

Role of the Researcher and Positionality

Through this research I grappled a lot with my identity as a researcher and former high school teacher. I used journaling and voice memos to process the feelings that were coming up for me as an educational researcher and former teacher and in consideration of my positionality within the space. Notably, I found it particularly difficult at the last retreat to center the stories and experiences of the participants after the freedom dreaming session concluded. For example, I had lengthy conversations with Riya and Erika about our experiences as former teachers and how we were making sense of being on the job market and our circumstances at the time, as all three of us were in a space of uncertainty about our job prospects. Many of my field observations at that time reflected a significant amount of my own grief and processing as a former teacher myself. I thought about different ways I could have approached situations with my former students or their families with more care and understanding. I thought about ways I could have advocated for myself, my colleagues, and my students or given myself more grace and

prioritized my health. I considered the very abrupt end to my time in the classroom and the collective grief of COVID and its impact on education globally. I embodied a lot of the pain and emotions that I had ignored for years. There were moments like this throughout the data collection and analysis process where I would remember and reflect on my time in the classroom.

The journaling, voice memos, and conversations with mentors and my research assistants made it possible for me to process the feelings that were coming up for me as an educational researcher and former teacher. At times, those practices may have limited the amount of time I spent writing about how teachers experienced the retreat and reflected on it, particularly at the end of the second retreat. Yet, overall, those practices served an important function in being able to place my personal experiences and reactions in a container. This allowed me to be more present as a researcher and to listen to my participants more fully, centering their perspectives and understanding their experiences from their point of view.

This research has always been a collaborative endeavor for me, and I position myself in a space of ongoing dialogue and iteration. I sought advice from fellow graduate students and reached out to professors I admired via email to chat with me about my work. These conversations became sounding boards for me as I designed the study, collected and analyzed data, wrote findings, and made revisions. I participated in multiple writing groups with people in my program (Karin Brown, Marcela Ortiz Guerrero, Bethany Eldridge, Becca Antecki), graduate students and faculty in other disciplines or at other institutions, and academic organizations. Writing in community and talking through the research and writing process allowed me to identify priorities and communicate my ideas with further clarity. I would also share sample data excerpts and outlines with colleagues alongside the research questions and we would discuss any

reactions and reflections that came up for them, which became another way to check my subjectivities and support the study's validity. I also conducted follow ups and member checks with participants. I shared drafts of my findings alongside quotes in a pdf file and asked them to share their reflections either through a survey, asynchronous commentary, or a virtual feedback session. I sought their feedback on my dissertation findings and my interpretation of their quotes to see if there was any disagreement, issues of anonymity, or opportunities to clarify or strengthen my analyses. This also supported validity as I asked teachers to share which findings and quotes resonated most for them, which affirmed many of the interpretations I had.

Significance of the Study

This study offers conceptual and methodological contributions to the field of Teacher of Color retention. This study contributes to the development of conceptual frameworks and research practices aimed at better preparing, supporting, and retaining TOCs, with the ultimate goal of improving educational systems to be more sustainable and equitable.

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Chapter 2 “It means to stay in a dysfunctional system at the detriment to my health”: How Teachers of Color Conceptualize Retention and Staying in Educational Spaces

Abstract

Given the retention research on Teachers of Color primarily focuses on the perspectives of students in teacher education and early career teachers and the factors that push them to leave, there is opportunity to learn from more experienced teachers and their perspectives on what staying in teaching means and looks like. This paper analyzes the counterstories of 25 former and current Teachers of Color (TOCs) and their conceptualizations of what it means and looks like to stay, to persist, to endure, to thrive, and to sustain or be sustained in education. Through my analysis of interview data, I found that both current and former TOCs in their definitions of the concepts shared negative interpretations, emphasized community and relationships, spoke about joy and care, and likened the words to resistance and refusal. This study, which centers TOCs and their reflections on staying in the profession, has implications for better understanding and supporting a racially diverse teaching profession.

Introduction

To stay means to neglect my health...It means to stay in a dysfunctional system at the detriment to my health. Staying means being okay with that. It took me a long time to get to the point where I was like, actually, I'm not okay with that.

-Inez, former TOC

Enduring is like...a battleground. Like I went through this battle, then I came out alive. I survived, I guess. What do you endure as a Teacher of Color? What

microaggressions, lack of humanity, is being highlighted in your profession, and how do you endure that and still show up for your kids?

-Viveka, former TOC

Both Inez and Viveka speak to the intensity of what it meant for them to live and work as a Teacher of Color. As former K-12 educators, Inez's and Viveka's words carry pain, they carry grief, and they carry the weight of systemic injustice. Their words reminded me of my own journey as Filipina American high school history teacher. They take me back to a conversation in the teacher's lounge in my second year of teaching. I was sitting with another Asian American teacher, and she shared that teaching felt like being in an abusive relationship. She felt like coming to work everyday was like returning to a relationship that destroys someone mentally and physically and, at the same time, tells them that it is normal. There was an embodiment to her metaphor that has sat with me throughout my career as an educator and education researcher. It is a metaphor that I have revisited in conversations with mentors and colleagues, and I continue to contemplate what it means for Women of Color and Teachers of Color to stay and endure in a profession and schooling system that has done immense harm.

A major challenge facing education today is the need to recruit and retain Teachers of Color (TOCs) (Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Carver-Thomas et al., 2022). This is amidst a historical and systemic backdrop that has pushed many TOCs out of the profession, including policies intending to promote racial integration such as *Brown v. Board of Education* (Gist & Bristol, 2022; Tillman, 2005). Despite extensive recruitment efforts, scholars have documented how racism and race-evasive discourse continue to push out TOCs throughout their experiences as students, teacher candidates, and in-service teachers (Matias et al., 2017; Pizarro & Kohli, 2020). Despite the growing population of Students of Color, we are witnessing yet another cycle

of TOC pushout following the COVID-19 pandemic and increasingly hostile racial climates caused by policy bans on critical race theory, and teacher candidates with strong ethnic studies and social justice training entering districts fraught with racial and political tensions, and little guidance on how to carry their ethnic studies training into schools (Jayakumar & Kohli, 2023; Kohli et al., 2022). My work responds to this critical moment by focusing on TOCs' counterstories to better understand and support the retention of a racially diverse teaching profession.

With regards to TOC retention, researchers have primarily sought out the perspectives of students in teacher education and novice teachers and examined the factors pushing them to leave (Bettini et al., 2022; Brown, 2014). Given that the retention research on Teachers of Color primarily focuses on the perspectives of students in teacher education and early career teachers and the factors that push them to leave, there is opportunity to learn from more experienced Teachers of Color and their perspectives on what staying in teaching means and looks like. Centering their thinking may expand existing conceptualizations of staying, persisting, enduring, thriving, and sustaining in educational research, which can deepen the concept of retention.

This paper explores counterstories of Teachers of Color and their experiences with the phenomenon of staying and leaving the teaching profession. This study draws on interviews with 25 former and current TOCs and their perspectives on what it means and looks like to stay and/or thrive in the teaching profession. It is situated within a larger research project that investigates how veteran TOCs understand the various dimensions of their working environments and what TOCs think it takes to persist, endure, thrive and sustain themselves and their work as educators. Specifically, this paper asks:

1. How do Teachers of Color think about what it means to stay, persist, endure, thrive and/or sustain themselves in educational spaces?

- 1A: How do they think about the differences between staying, persisting, enduring, thriving, and/or being sustained as Teachers of Color in educational spaces?
- 1B: How do they think about the similarities between staying, persisting, enduring, thriving, and/or being sustained as Teachers of Color in educational spaces?

Literature Review

The literature on Teachers of Color and their thinking have spanned various topics including race and racism, teacher identity, multicultural and culturally responsive pedagogy and practice, and curriculum and instruction (Gist & Bristol, 2022; Jackson & Kohli, 2016). While there has been careful consideration of the different factors and contributors to teachers leaving the classroom more broadly, understanding the nuances and the unique circumstances that Teachers of Color face with regards to retention is important in the wake of calls for diversifying the teacher workforce. Beginning with an overview of definitions, this review of literature examines prior research about TOC retention, and the factors and forces pushing teachers to exit the profession, and the factors supporting teachers to stay.

Definitions

The terms “stay,” “persist,” “endure,” “thrive,” and “sustain” are used throughout this paper. Drawing from both personal experience and the literature, I began with conceptualizations of staying, persisting, enduring, thriving, and sustaining that I expected to shift with continued conversations with participants, mentors and colleagues. When I use the term stay/staying, I refer

to Teachers of Color who have a presence in and remain in the classroom, are currently working as teachers, and plan to continue doing so for the foreseeable future. Here, staying involves the physical return to teaching in the classroom for the following year (Kardos & Johnson, 2008). When I use both persist/persisting/persistence and endure/enduring/endurance, I thought about Teachers of Color who have continued and had a prolonged presence in the classroom, likely in spite of obstacles (Kohli, 2018). However, persist/persisting/persistence foregrounds the individual and their continued movement through challenges, and endure/enduring/endurance foregrounds the systemic harm that TOCs experience in their work. I see thrive/thriving for Teachers of Color as having the capacity to flourish and grow in the workplace. Darling-Hammond (2018) found that queer emerging adults within the African diaspora spoke to five dimensions of thriving including community, selfhood, sufficiency, pleasure, and relief. Their participants also experienced thriving as temporary. When I use the terms sustain/sustaining/being or feeling sustained/sustainability, I consider the persistence and continuance of TOCs in the classroom with attention to the environment and conditions that allow them to thrive and create legacies of possibility in education. I build on the framings of Rita Kohli (2018; Kohli, et al. 2022), Marcos Pizarro (Pizarro & Kohli, 2020), Desiree Carver-Thomas (2018), and others who have examined the sustainability of Teachers of Color in a predominantly white profession for the long-term. This working definition also considers the resistance and joy of BIPOC communities, specifically Teachers of Color, and how they move within systems that work to destroy, like settler colonialism, racial capitalism, and other extractive industries.

Schools as Historical Sites of Harm for Teachers of Color

Despite the push for Teacher of Color recruitment and the ongoing call to diversify the teacher workforce (Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Carver-Thomas et al., 2022; Sleeter, 2015), the teacher education programs and school sites that TOCs are being recruited into have historical legacies of institutional barriers that continue to harm and further marginalize Black and Brown educators (Bettini et al., 2022; Gist & Bristol, 2022; Goodwin, 2023; Grooms et al., 2021; Kohli, 2018; Pizarro & Kohli, 2020). For example, the U.S. government has historically used Indigenous, Latinx, Pacific Islander, Afro-Caribbean, and Asian teachers as part of mass efforts to assimilate their communities and replace their education with one that was deemed more “civilized.” From around 1880-1930, government-run Indigenous boarding schools aimed to destroy Native culture and practices (Lomawaima, 1995). These boarding schools sometimes employed Indigenous teachers; however, those teachers were not assigned to teach students from their tribe and thus encouraged further deculturalization (Gere, 2005; Todd-Breland, 2022). Around the same time, light-skinned and often upper-class students from nations colonized by the U.S., such as Cuba and the Philippines, were recruited to U.S. universities to learn English (MacDonald, 2004; Todd-Breland, 2022). Additionally, Hawaiian and Filipino teachers were trained to implement a westernized curriculum in their homelands (Benham & Heck, 2013; Coloma, 2009; Todd-Breland, 2022). Through these multiple avenues, it's evident that teacher education has been an extension of U.S. empire. Exclusion acts, war, and nativism also impacted Asian American educators' historically minimal representation in the teaching workforce (Todd-Breland, 2022). Although there has been a rise in migrant, overseas-trained teachers hailing from countries like the Philippines, Jamaica and India in recent decades, these teachers are strategically recruited, sometimes predatorily through trafficking, and forced to assimilate and

teach in poor working conditions with little support and high-turnover rates (Bartlett, 2014; Dunn, 2016; Francisco & Rodriguez, 2015).

In the United States, legislation and racialized policies and practices have a legacy of preventing Indigenous, Black, and Latiné teachers from teaching in their own communities. One consequence of the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision to integrate schools in 1954 was that 38,000 Black teachers were left without a job, which resulted in a large-scale exit of Black teachers from the profession (Dilworth & Brown, 2008; Ethridge, 1973; Fultz, 2004; Tillman, 2005). During the 1980s and 1990s, xenophobia and anti-bilingual policies contributed to the increasing gap in the proportion of Latinx educators to Latinx students (Carver-Thomas, 2018; Todd-Breland, 2022). Later, with the institution of the No Child Left Behind Act from 2000 to 2012, there was a notable decrease in the number of Black teachers throughout the U.S. in major cities, including New Orleans which had significant school closures and a decline in the number Black teachers by 62% in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina (Bond et al., 2015; Ciolino et al., 2015; Cook & Dixson, 2013; Holley-Walker, 2007). In the 2010s and 2020s, increases in anti-CRT legislation and fears of teaching topics that might be considered controversial has silenced and pushed out K-12 teachers with commitments to racial justice (Jayakumar & Kohli, 2023). This historical backdrop contributes to the current lack of diversity in the teaching workforce.

Teacher of Color Retention in Educational Research

Studies on Teacher of Color retention have often relied on quantitative data. In addition to the disparity of numbers of Teachers of Color in the field generally, retention and turnover impact Teachers of Color at increasing rates with the growing national teacher shortage (Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Carver-Thomas, 2018; Ingersoll et al., 2019). Teachers of Color move schools or leave the profession at a higher rate and faster than teachers who are white (Carver-

Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Carver-Thomas, 2018; Ingersoll & Merrill, 2017; Taie & Goldring, 2017). Racially minoritized teachers leave the field each year at an approximate rate that is 24% higher than their white counterparts and an annual rate that is 45% higher than it was in 1980s (Easton-Brooks, 2013; Ingersoll et al., 2014; Ingersoll et al., 2019; Kohli, 2018). It is estimated that 90% of the demand for teachers is driven by teachers who leave the profession, and a majority of this attrition is voluntary and not retirement-related (Sutcher et al., 2016).

Reviews of the TOC retention research have illuminated some of the factors that contribute to TOCs exiting the profession. Achinstein and colleagues (2010) examined literature surrounding the retention of Teachers of Color and the various factors that contribute to high turnover or high retention. The systematic review included 70 articles and the analysis explored aspects of teacher personal and professional background and various schooling conditions that impact financial, human, social, and cultural capital as well as power structures and relationships, which notably had an impact on teacher workplace decisions and retention (Achinstein et al., 2010). For example, the review found that dissatisfaction with salary and poor school resources, policy pressures to reform, lack of mentorship and quality professional development (PD) opportunities, lack of support for culturally relevant and socially just teaching, and lack of administrative support were connected to Teacher of Color turnover. Achinstein et al. (2010) illuminated important factors impacting Teacher of Color retention; however, some scholars like Kohli (2018) have pointed out the review and studies within the review primarily focused on individualized explanations for leaving and failed to investigate systemic racism and racial climate as a factor impacting Teacher of Color attrition. For example, Kohli noted that “not one study explored the role of racism or racial climate as a possible factor in their attrition” (p. 6). Critiques of the earlier literature on retention explain that institutionalized racism that

Teachers of Color face in the field is often an underlying - yet, unnamed - reality. A more recent review of Teacher of Color recruitment and retention by Abo-Zaed Arar and colleagues (2025) of 813 articles over 2000-2024, found two main challenges contributing to underrepresentation: 1) barriers to recruitment, and 2) threats to retention. While there has been careful consideration of the different factors and contributors to teachers leaving the classroom and teacher recruitment, understanding the nuances and the unique circumstances that Teachers of Color face with regards to retention is important in the wake of calls for diversifying the teacher workforce.

Complicating What it Means for Teachers of Color to Leave

Several qualitative studies of Teachers of Color who left the profession found it was important to nuance and challenge the idea of leaving, particularly for Teachers of Color, and emphasize the systemic injustices at play. In their self-studies, Philip et al. (2016) and Hannegan-Martinez (2023) reflected on the tensions of being a former Teacher of Color and working as educational researchers.

Marx et al. (2023), Cariaga (2023), Hernández-Johnson et al. (2021) conducted studies where they interviewed individual Teachers of Color who left the classroom. Marx and colleagues (2023) worked with four Teachers of Color who either left or planned to leave the profession, and who had a range from 4 to 21 years of experience teaching in public schools in different geographic regions. They asked participants to share their journey in and out of teaching and the authors concluded that leaving teaching was a form of resilience for these teachers. Marx and colleagues (2023) worked with Evelyn, the daughter of Cuban refugees and the only Latinx teacher at her high school who endured several health and financial complications and left after 5 years of teaching, and Matthew, an African American English teacher and football coach who left after 21 years amidst frustration with standardization policies

and administrative restrictions following the No Child Left Behind Act. In their interviews about their journey maps, they explained the factors contributing to their departure from the profession. After sharing about the several health crises she experienced with her pregnancies and needing to rely on Women, Infants, and Children benefits to make ends meet as a mother, Evelyn shared ““You know...my parents are exiles. They didn’t [want to be] – they felt like they had to be, right? I always tell people I’m exiled from teaching, but I didn’t quit. The system quit me.” Matthew explained that the focus on meeting standardized testing benchmarks as the sole measure of success felt like the school was treating children like cattle or chattel and he no longer wanted to be part of it. “I love myself too. That’s why I should go” (p. 18). Marx and colleagues (2023) frame such statements as illustrations of Teachers of Color preserving their body and mind in the face of systemic racism despite teachers not explicitly naming structural racism in their stories. Evelyn brings up a public assistance program and Matthew identifies standardized testing programs, both of which are disproportionately used by or disproportionately disadvantage communities of Color. The teachers in this study revealed the unique traumas and grief associated with the work of teaching, but also placed the onus on the systems failing them and their decisions in light of that failure.

Hernández-Johnson and colleagues (2021) conducted interviews in 2017 with 10 former Teachers of Color as part of a larger study within an urban public school district in the Southwestern region of the U.S and found that teachers complicated, expanded, and rejected the notion of leaving. One participant, Deborah, an Afro-Latinx, Chilean, Egyptian teacher with 10 years of teaching in urban and rural contexts in the U.S. and internationally, expanded her definition of what it means to leave:

It was a difficult choice. I felt pushed out of the school. I use the word left because there was a sort of toxicity in the environment that was impacting every part of me, my physical health, my emotional health, my mental health and my spiritual well-being. And so leaving[,] using left as a word past tense, leaving was a form of empowering myself to reclaim my power and reclaim, perhaps, a different journey to do similar work, to support young people in a way that felt good to me where I could be my authentic self without feeling persecuted or antagonized, shamed for my difference. In a sense, when you become a teacher, you never stop being a teacher. (Hernández-Johnson et al., 2021, p. 14)

Here, Deborah explains why she rejects the idea that she has “left” teaching and uses intentional word choice to describe how she positions herself within this complex phenomenon. She also sees her identity as a teacher extending beyond the bounds of her official capacity and regardless of whether or not she’s in the classroom. While she has physically left the classroom, she still identifies as being a teacher, just in a different way. Both studies demonstrate a complex dynamic where Teachers of Color have ‘left’ the teaching profession in a technical sense but their commitments to their students, education, and their own well-being endured in ways that challenge systems of power that made it difficult for them to stay. This paper contributes to this literature that complicates what it means to *leave* the teaching profession by offering a parallel complication of what it means to *stay* in the teaching profession.

Examining What it Means for Teachers of Color to Stay

There's been some exploration of what allows Teachers of Color to stay. Johnson and Kardos' (2008) chapter in the *Handbook of Research on Teacher Education* discusses who is staying in teaching and why. They name an array of promising approaches to retention including timely and informational-rich hiring, mentoring & support, differentiated roles and career

growth, performance-based pay, and adapting to current labor market trends (Johnson & Kardos, 2008). Johnson (2020) continues this arc of research in her book *Where Teachers Thrive* to demonstrate the critical need for school systems and practices that strategically work in tandem to support teachers including hiring, curriculum, and professional development. Achinstein et al.'s (2010) review identified that Teachers of Color named humanistic commitments, for example their commitments to serving students from nondominant racial and cultural communities, as a reason for remaining in this challenging profession. Additionally, Teachers of Color were likely to remain in schools with higher populations of students from low-income and nondominant racial and cultural backgrounds compared to white colleagues (Achinstein et al., 2010). Kohli and Pizarro's 2016 article on community-oriented Teachers of Color highlighted Educators of Color who embodied relationality and relational accountability despite the individualistic climate of school systems they work within. Kohli and Pizarro (2016) highlight the various survival tactics Teachers of Color take up when they experience a cognitive dissonance in their workplace, compelling them to retreat further, find refuge elsewhere, or take action in response to the issues. Abo-Zaed Arar et al.'s (2025) review of literature on Teacher of Color recruitment and retention also found three main themes contributing to increasing the recruitment and retention of Educators of Color: 1) supportive work environments, 2) inclusive recruitment practices, and 3) policy and advocacy.

Like Hernández-Johnson et al. (2021)'s study which challenges and expands the concept of leaving, there is an opportunity to step back and consider TOC definitions of staying. While the retention literature discusses the reasons influencing TOCs to leave the classroom and some of the factors that support TOCs, there is opportunity to examine how TOCs define for themselves what it looks like and means to stay in the profession. This study examines how

teachers' definitions for staying might align with existing educational research like Marx et al. (2023) and Hernández-Johnson et al. (2021). It also explores how former and current Teachers of Color might differently characterize and explain the phenomenon of staying. Veteran TOCs and their perspectives on what it means and looks like to stay, persist, endure, thrive, and sustain may provide new or additional nuance to existing conceptualizations of retention, which could shape how we think about retention in the field.

Theoretical Framings

I draw from critical race theory in education and theories of thriving to understand how Teachers of Color think about what it looks like to stay, persist, endure, thrive, and/or be sustained in education and how they make sense of these terms. An underlying premise of critical race theory is that racism is central, endemic, ongoing, and fundamental to the functioning of U.S. society (Bell, 1992). Critical race scholars in education center the racialized, gendered, and classed experiential knowledge of people explicitly - particularly those from racially, ethnically and linguistically minoritized backgrounds, are committed to the goals of social justice, and use interdisciplinary perspectives and methodologies (Bernal, 2002; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). I focus particularly on the fourth tenet of CRT, centering the experiential knowledge of People of Color, as a lens for analyzing how Teachers of Color are understanding and defining what it means or looks like for them to stay, persist, endure, thrive, and/or be sustained in education.

Several scholars have conducted reviews of literature on and theorized about thriving in the workplace (Goh et al., 2022), for college student success (Schreiner, 2010; 2013), and for Black, queer, and trans* people in education (Darling-Hammond, 2018; Darling-Hammond & Evans-Santiago, 2024). With regards to teachers, Beltman and colleagues (2011) completed a

review of research on teacher resilience, defining it as “what sustains teachers and enables them to thrive rather than just survive in the profession (e.g., Gu & Day, 2007; Kitching et al., 2009; Sumsion, 2003)” (p. 186). Their review identified a variety of risk and protective factors, both individual and contextual, related to teacher resilience as well as implications for teacher education courses and employers (Beltman et al., 2011). Scholars have critiqued resilience as a myth, particularly in education, noting that it is typically framed as an individualized characteristic or trait rather than a response to systemic oppression (Goward & Tornsey, 2024). Because theories of thriving have primarily focused on nonteaching populations or teacher resilience and teachers' experiences more broadly, critical race theory can provide a framework for centering the thinking and lived experiences of Teachers of Color in further developing theories of thriving. I integrate critical race theory - specifically centering the experiential knowledge of People of Color - and previous theories of thriving as frameworks, to examine the perspectives of TOCs about what it looks like or means to feel like they can stay, persist, endure, thrive, and/or be sustained in their work.

Methods

Research Study Design

This project takes up a critical race methodology approach through the use of counterstorytelling. Counterstorytelling, is a critical race method informed by critical race theory, in which marginalized people are centered, and their narratives about and experiences with racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, and other systems of domination are validated and seen as necessary forms of data (Delgado, 1989; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Using a qualitative multiple embedded case study design (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2002) where each TOC is a unit of analysis, I look at two cases: current in-classroom TOCs (C-TOCs) and former TOCs who have

left the classroom (F-TOCs). I make within-case comparisons and cross-case comparisons, analyzing how current and former teachers are making sense of their experiences with staying and leaving.

Participants

This study included both current *and* former TOCs and considers what allows them to persist and endure for several reasons: 1) Teachers of Color give unique insight into navigating an educational and labor system with historical legacies and continued acts of dehumanization and marginalization; 2) The nature of existing and possible environments, systems, and supports and what we can learn from TOCs' experiences with those features can collectively contribute to the persistence and endurance of TOCs; and 3) There is potential for the deficit framing of teacher shortages to be approached through a more nuanced and holistic lens as part of the work to advance TOC retention and professional development. I intentionally included former teachers who have taught long-term as a separate case to explore their experience with leaving, their reflections on retention and educational systems, and what would it have taken for them to stay. I sought insight into their experiences with remaining in education long-term and how they might differently conceptualize what it means to stay, while also recognizing the complexities and nuances of the challenges they face and the costs of staying and leaving.

I used purposive sampling and specifically sought expert informants (Etikan et al., 2016). I recruited both in-service and former TOCs with the criteria that they: 1) identify as an Educator of Color (Black, Indigenous, Latiné/x, Asian, Pacific Islander, Desi, Multiracial, etc.), 2) teach or have taught in a K-12 classroom context, and 3) have at least 5 years of teaching experience. When selecting participants, I also considered proximity to the Midwest and the likelihood of teachers being able to attend an in-person retreat. Of the 37 teachers who had filled out the

interest form, 25 participated in the interviews (Table 2). This included 11 Black/African American, 6 Asian/Asian American, 3 Latiné/x or Xicanx, 1 Afro-Latina, 1 de-tribalized Indigenous Latina, and 3 biracial white educators. Teachers primarily were based in the Midwest (22 of 25) though many had teaching experience in other regions/countries. Of the 25 interviewed, 17 (68%) had taught high school, 11 (44%) had experience teaching middle school, and 7 (28%) had experience as elementary school teachers.

Table 2. Participant Demographics

Name	C-TOC/F-TOC	Race/Ethnicity	Teaching Experience	Elementary/Middle/High School	Grades/Subjects
Alejandra J.	C-TOC	Latíné/x or Xicanx	7	Middle/High School	MS and HS Spanish and Heritage Spanish
CJ K.	C-TOC	Black or African American, white	6	High School	9th, 10th & 11th Grade ELA
Emilio J.	C-TOC	Latíné/x or Xicanx, white	6	High School	Math, Algebra 1, Geometry, Algebra 2, 9th-12th
Hope D.	C-TOC	Black or African American	23	Elementary School	K-5, Reading Specialist, ESL certified
Kai W.	C-TOC	Black or African American	30	High School	9- 12; Variety of ELA courses such as English 9, 10, American Literature, SAT prep., African American Humanities, African American Literature
Kathryn H.	C-TOC	Asian or Asian American: Filipino American, white	15	Middle/High School	6-12 Spanish
Kaya R.	C-TOC	Asian or Asian American: Filipino American	6	High School	Dance/Physical Education
Roxanne T.	C-TOC	Black or African American	24	High School	ELA 9-12, AP Language and Composition, Humanities
Savannah J.	C-TOC	Asian or Asian American: Chinese American	8	High School	AP Macroeconomics, World History, Civics, Sociology, Latin History, Asian History

Shay C.	C-TOC	Black or African American	7	Middle/High School	6th - 8th & 10th: ELA / 9-12: Speech, Debate, Leadership TV Production and Newscast
Whitney K.	C-TOC, retired as a teacher	Black or African American	46	High School	9-12, English, Science, and Social Studies
Aaliyah V.	F-TOC, district support role	Black or African American	6	Elementary/Middle School	1-3; all subjects/self-contained, 6-8; ELA
Chernell T.	F-TOC, curriculum developer	Black or African American	11	Elementary/Middle School	K-4 and 7th grade
Dominique B.	F-TOC, education consultant	Black or African American	5	High School	Drama, Theatre, College and Career Readiness, ELA
Erika K.	F-TOC, laid off at the time of the retreat in July 2024 (returned to the classroom that fall)	Black or African American	8	High School	Mathematics: 9 - 12
Garrett (Donte G.)	F-TOC, admin (principal)	Black or African American	10	Elementary/Middle School	K- 8 Social Studies, ELA, Debate
Hana N.	F-TOC, graduate student	Asian or Asian American: South Asian American (parents from India and Bangladesh)	9.5	Middle/High School	Special education; 5-12: Muslim history and ethics, American Lit, foundational reading, World Lit, etc.
Inez N.	F-TOC, self-employed	Indigenous, Latiné/x or Xicanx	6.5	Elementary/Middle School	1st/2nd grade bilingual self contained: 4th, 6th, & 7th grade departmentalized math
Juliana E.	F-TOC, education-based non-profit coordinator	Latiné/x or Xicanx	10	Elementary/Middle School	Bilingual 2-4th grade Digital Literacy/STEM K-8th grade
Marie H.	F-TOC, graduate student	Black or African American	17	Elementary/Middle/High School	K-12; math, English, history, science

Ming C.	F-TOC, healthcare chief of staff	Asian or Asian American: Taiwanese American	5	High School	9-12 grade, government, economics, IB history HL 1(US history), IB history HL 2 (world history), ethnic studies
Riya C.	F-TOC, non-profit program manager	Asian or Asian American: Korean American	6	Middle School	6th/7th math and science; 6th grade humanities; 8th grade English
Sebastian L.	F-TOC, admin/multilingual division lead	Latiné/x or Xicanx	10	High School	Spanish Heritage, EL Social Studies, EL
Tiaga S.	F-TOC, professor	Black or African American, Latiné/x or Xicanx	5	Middle/High School	6 - 12 Spanish
Viveka J.	F-TOC, curriculum developer	Asian or Asian American: Indian American	5	Elementary School	elementary, K-5

Data Sources and Analysis

To investigate the research questions about ways to learn about TOCs and their experiences with staying, I conducted 1:1 interviews with 25 teachers prior to organizing two multi-day retreats, each including three focus group sessions. I first interviewed 10 current TOCs and 15 former TOCs. Each interview lasted approximately 90-120 minutes. Using a semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix A), I asked teachers about their teaching experience; racialized and social identities; and how they think about what it means to stay, persist, endure, thrive, and sustain as a Teacher of Color. Some participants engaged in optional photo elicitation (Harper, 2002), sharing photographs, videos and other artifacts of their teaching context as part of their interview to support their counterstorytelling.

I adopted a constant comparative method analytic approach (Merriam & Tisdale, 2015), which involves the comparison of segments of data with each other to determine similarities and differences, and grouping data together on a similar dimension based on patterns and connections I observed. Using deductive coding, I assigned codes that reflect the concepts in my conceptual framework. These initial codes involved teachers' conceptualization and definitions of what it looks like or means to stay, persist, endure, thrive, and/or sustain TOCs in educational spaces. I first applied these codes to the case of C-TOCs, conducting a within-group analysis, and then did the same with the case of F-TOCs. After this, I compared codes applied to C-TOCs and F-TOCs for a cross-case analysis to see where teachers' definitions overlapped with or differed from each other. Using inductive analyses, I identified emerging patterns in the data around teachers' definitions and conceptualizations of staying and wrote memos as a way to keep track of these more salient themes. In my analysis, I stayed close to teachers' words and use of language. This involved nuancing and complicating the working definitions that I began with and seeing where

there was alignment and disagreement in how researchers and teachers characterized and explained what it means to stay, persist, endure, thrive, and sustain in teaching. Below, I have a table of my deductive codes and example data for each code (Table 3).

Table 3. Overview of Analytic Codes

Code	Example of Data from Current TOCs	Example of Data from Former TOCs
Stay - Conceptualize or Define	Alejandra: For some reason, it gives me a negative...it brings up all the times that I wanted to leave and I questioned it and when I said, I'm just going to stay, it felt like I'm going to settle for now. But I'm not happy here...	Erika: So what does it mean to stay? I have such conflicting feelings about that. Because on one hand, staying is like showing up. It is trying to be there for people, trying to be there for your students, trying to be there authentically, trying to do the best that you can with your own hands. But I feel like now, staying is also kind of like giving up of parts of yourself and having to be okay with that.
Persist - Conceptualize or Define	Kaya: I guess as a teacher to persist is to keep going and keep pushing. We go through so much crap on a regular basis, and a lot of it can cause burnout. So it's like, am I going to keep going at it? Am I going to stop? Am I going to look at other options?	Chernell: I would say persist, basically just don't give up, just keep going. And what that looks like for a teacher, I think that that can evolve depending on their outlook of their career. So I would say for myself, initially, as a teacher. I was like, Oh, just persist from this year to the next year.
Endure - Conceptualize or Define	Roxanne: I have a negative reaction. Because for me, endure just means take it. Take it, take the injustice. Because endurance, enduring, or endure is not something nobody ever asked you to endure something that's great. Here, take this chocolate, this endless supply of chocolate, right? This endless supply of injustice and sadness and violence and people just not doing...not being kind to one another. No. Endure for me is the ability to take something negative and deal with it.	Tiaga: Yeah. Enduring is like persistence for me, but enduring to me has this element of pain in it. The overcoming some very painful or difficult situation that is almost, could be bearable sometimes, but you're doing this for your good or the good of others, right? That you're thinking that you're going to keep doing this because it will bring about something better than where you are now.

Thrive - Conceptualize or Define	Shay C.: So I think thriving is not just like doing it. But like you're enjoying the process. You're growing through the process. You're shining through the process. And shining for me doesn't always look like wins, like the ills too, because you learn from them. I mean, you adjust as needed.	Hana: I think thriving for me has come to mean being able to have space to be authentic to myself. In order to thrive, I need to be in a space that is going to be able to acknowledge all of me and not make me ignore parts of my identity and be able to take that in with open arms, to give me the space to be who I am at any given moment.
Sustain - Conceptualize or Define	CJ: I would say sustain is the more powerful meaning and version of stay. I am making the choice to be here because I love it. Or it's one of those, I don't like the way things are done, but I want to fix it, so I'm going to stay because I want to be here to help revitalize it. Being sustained. It means that others are pouring into the pot. Like they are helping relieve me...during our preps and our lunches, like the people I have those hours off with totally sustain me. We will share lesson plans. We will just talk mad shit, and just be human beings and I can feel relief and feel like I can come back to myself in those spaces.	Ming: The only thing I can think of is building community...I don't see it the same way as enduring and persisting. Because sustaining, I guess, in my sense, one, I can see it as a more systemic thing, sustaining a community rather than only sustaining yourself. Then the other is, I think that sustaining in my head, there's more agency of what you do versus persisting and enduring does not actually, I do not interpret it as a means of social change. I think of sustaining as a way of you taking some shit in your own hands to change it, so it actually is better for everyone else.
Other Words that Describe Teachers' Experiences	Kat H: So my vocabulary is not so great, but I want to say something along the lines of like corporation or corporate takeover there that is a part of what I've experienced in my first ten years specifically. And that has led to for periods a jaded look at education overall because it's just being run by somebody else. Then seeing, especially in the late 2000 early 2010, the rise and fall of multiple charter schools and various iterations of the same school pop up after the last one had failed makes me think about this corporate lens that education was looked at for a while.	Inez: Yeah, I feel like dysfunctional comes up a lot just because I know [the district] is a dysfunctional system. At times it would feel like they didn't want to do well, like a weaponized incompetence....I mean, I still want to note...working with young people and seeing their growth, that was always rewarding. I also want to note rewarding. I'm never going to deny that working with young people and being a part of their journey and not just academic growth, but their growth as people, that was always rewarding. That was one of the hardest things that made it hard to leave because

		you knew you were making an impact. You knew you were helping. You knew even just by existing in these spaces, you were showing kids that you can grow up and live your life like this.
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Positionality

I thought about my positioning (Boveda & Annamma, 2023) throughout the research, building upon my own experiences as a Teacher of Color and the grief I felt when leaving my classroom (Cariaga, 2022). I conceptualized this study informed by my own experiences as a student and teacher, witnessing the inequities and power dynamics inherent in the U.S. schooling system. In conducting this research, I considered the impact of physical spaces, the histories of harm done in schools and educational systems, and the labor of teaching. As a way to attend to issues of validity, I used memo-ing as a space to critically reflect on my subjectivities and positioning and consider alternative perspectives. I also elicited feedback from several advisors and other scholars about my research design and data analysis as a way to further check on my subjectivities and support the credibility of my findings.

Findings

In sharing their thoughts about what it means to stay, persist, endure, thrive and/or sustain themselves in educational spaces, current and former Teachers of Color offered nuanced and complex conceptualizations and questions of retention. Several key findings emerged, including:

- 1) Both current and former Teachers of Color did not interpret the words as neutral terms. For many of the current and former teachers, the words elicited a negative reaction.
- 2) Both current and former Teachers of Color considered relational meanings and envisioned the concepts as intertwined with community.
- 3) Both groups of Teachers of Color included in their definitions

the concepts of being cared for and feeling joy. 4) Current and former Teachers of Color framed the concepts as a resistance to or refusal of historically oppressive schooling structures.

Staying, Persisting, and Enduring as Harmful

Many teachers shared negative associations or complicated feelings with the concept of staying, equating it to being stuck, stagnant, remaining in place, settling or coasting. A majority of the teachers (n=18) used the phrases “in spite,” “despite,” “give up,” “sacrifice,” “negative,” and “sad” in their definitions. Primarily, these phrases came up in response to interview questions about staying, persisting, and enduring. Five of the teachers (n=5, 2 current TOCs, 3 former TOCs) used the phrase “in spite” or “despite,” seven teachers (n=7, 3 current TOCs, 4 former TOCs) spoke to the concept of “sacrifice” or having to “give up” parts of themselves, and seven teachers (n=7, 5 current TOCs, 2 former TOCs) used the words “negative” or “sad” in their definitions of “staying.” While their word choices varied, the other seven TOCs (n=7, 2 current TOCs, 5 former TOCs) also referenced the obstacles, challenges, or systemic injustices teachers experience in their definitions.

Many teachers offered different examples to explain their negative interpretations. Two of the teachers also asked if they could share memes which visually helped them to capture their definition of what it means to stay. For example, one teacher, Erika, shared the “This is fine” meme, the viral online image of a cartoon dog.³ Erika explained, “You know the dog that's sitting in the fire. It is like everything is fine. Yeah. That's that, because I feel like education was already on fire when I got there.... Then it just became a dumpster fire. It's like, oh, here we are.

³ This is a reference to the “This is Fine” meme created by cartoonist K.C. Green (2013) for *Gunshow* #648, “*The Pills Are Working*,” on January 9, 2013. In the first panel of the image, there is a light brown cartoon dog in the center of a room. The dog is wearing a hat and sitting on a chair next to a table with a mug on it. The entire room is engulfed in flames and there is a cloud of dark smoke above. In the second panel, the image zooms into the dog, who is smiling and quoted saying “This is fine,” despite the room burning down around him.

I feel like that meme is...what teaching is right now. We see everything's on fire. And we just say that it's fine. We know it's not all okay. We know it's not fine. But if we pretend that it is, then it should be okay.” Her words reflect the intensity of the challenges she felt teachers are facing in education and the cognitive dissonance of pretending that things are fine when they are far from being fine.

Teachers spoke to the sacrifice and challenges of teaching that have an impact on their livelihood and well-being. Chernell, a Black woman with 11 years of elementary and middle school teaching experience, compared the dreams of her childhood self with what she experienced as a teacher and mother:

What does it mean to stay? For me, when I was teaching, I used to wear this crazy badge of honor. I only really wanted to teach in Title 1 school. Title 1 schools because it was more connected to who I was as a child. And like I explained, me growing up, being able to see Black teachers, be a window to what could potentially be. I wanted to be that for other Students of Color. If they were Black, Asian, Hispanic. I just wanted them to be like, yes, there is a way out, just go to school, you can get out. And so, to stay was giving students hope. And then what it looks like to stay is the ultimate sacrifice. You're sacrificing parts of your personal life by staying. And if you have children, you're sacrificing having genuine connection with your children at home because by the time you get home from a Title 1 school, you're depleted. You don't have the mental capacity to really hold a conversation with your child. And I'm speaking from my own experience.

That's why I left.

Describing the work of teaching as the ultimate sacrifice and at odds with being a mother, Chernell emphasized the conflict and toll behind the desire to be present for Students of Color at

school but also her own child at home. Six additional teachers spoke to the tensions of being a parent while also working as a teacher. Inez, a detribalized Indigenous Mixteco woman who left the classroom after 6.5 years, explained, “It means to stay in a dysfunctional system at the detriment to my health. Staying means being okay with that. It took me a long time to get to the point where I was like, actually, I’m not okay with that.” Inez’s reflection invokes the inequities that these TOCs know continue to exist and the navigational ways they’ve had to move, recognizing that it might mean giving up parts of themselves or neglecting their well-being.

When asked to define “endure or enduring” in the context of teaching, Viveka, an Indian American woman who taught elementary for 5 years before moving out of the classroom and into a role as a curriculum developer, spoke about endurance as survival:

Enduring is like...a battleground. Like I went through this battle, then I came out alive. I survived, I guess. What do you endure as a Teacher of Color? What microaggressions, lack of humanity, is being highlighted in your profession, and how do you endure that and still show up for your kids?...How do you endure the world, especially this horrible...these horrible times, the world of capitalism, the world of Trumpism, world of COVID? How do you endure all those things, like murders, and still show up for your kids and be able to talk to them about it?...I think that’s a lot of what causes such burn out. Teachers are the only ones who have to engage with the world, and then push their feelings down and figure out [what] to do with their kids. Not push their feelings down. I don’t believe that you’d have to do that. In some regard, you have to minimize them a little bit in order to have a regular conversation and think about how to talk to kids about the shitty stuff that’s happening.

When she compared “enduring” to surviving a battle, Viveka shared that Teachers of Color often experience microaggressions and dehumanization in the profession. She spoke about experiencing and witnessing horrible violence, in their profession and in the world more broadly, which negatively affects them as educators, but also negatively affects their students. Alongside that, TOCs are expected to show up for their students in a way that minimizes their feelings about that violence. Her explanation highlights the cognitive dissonance that Teachers of Color regularly experience, but in their role, they are expected to disregard or diminish their feelings and the impacts of that violence on their lives.

Ming, a former Ethnic Studies teacher and Taiwanese American, shared in her interview that her understanding of “stay” was marked by moments of loss and decisions made beyond her control:

In this day and age, I don't know what staying is. No one is staying in the way that we had described. We don't even call it lifelong anymore. Right? I'm thinking about [why you chose the word staying]....It's still a little triggering for me. We all think this shit is by choice. I'm blacklisted from [a district]. I was displaced from my first school. I was escorted off of a campus. My third school, they made me sign a severance packet and an NDA at a Starbucks and would not let me leave the Starbucks until I signed the NDA. I think a lot of times for people who did not understand my experience was like, you don't fucking know what it is like...That's always been really hard for me.

For Ming, the word “stay” was not really reflective of her experience being pushed from multiple schools. Ming revealed at least three different ways she was severed from her classroom and students, none of which were by choice, and all of which elucidate a sterile and inhumane treatment of teachers as disposable.

When I asked questions about the words “persist, persisting, and persistence,” Ming explained:

Okay I kind of hate this. Yeah. You want me to say it....I reject the question. Overall.

The ideas of persistence and grit. A) We’re not talking about [the prestigious college prep schools in the city]. We're not talking about them. We're always talking about persistence in regards to the most marginalized people. Because they give up more often? No, give me a break. Persistence and grit, because they're oftentimes tied together, it is always individualistic. Are you going to tell the entire [city] to persist? No, you tell an individual to persist. That's my way of answering. Not answering your question.

Here, Ming is associating the word “persist” with grit and disagrees with the ways both concepts have been taken up in educational spaces. Her analysis situates the issue of Teacher of Color retention as much larger than the choice of the individual, and instead as part of a larger sociopolitical landscape. Ming’s refusal to answer how she defines and conceptualizes “persistence” is a critique of schooling and the ways teachers are often inundated with language that suggests to racially minoritized teachers that they can will themselves out of oppressive systems.

Inez brought up a related tension in her interview. She observed that professional development spaces have weaponized words like “stay” and “sustain” as individualized aspects of self-care. She spoke to some of the conflicting perspectives she’s observed:

I know a lot of these words, I feel like they come up in these professional developments like with self-care and, you know, some implications of, we're a school, we're a team, we're a community. But then, certain things are brought up to put the onus on the individual. Well, are you persisting enough? What are you not doing that you can't

thrive? That comes to mind. Then after contemplating ‘stay’ and ‘staying,’ the other part that came to mind was how often we’re kind of guilted into staying. Stay for the kids. Stay for the kids. I’m staying for the kids. But just larger conversations about staying in education usually involve these words.

Inez questioned this individualized framing of “stay” that evaluates and expects individual teachers to do more and places blame on those teachers if they do not stay. This hypocritical messaging from schools complicates how TOCs make sense of what it means to stay in the profession. Inez wondered how these educational systems might instead take ownership of bringing these words into fruition. Though it manifested differently and the examples they shared varied, most of the former and current teachers interviewed named the costs and tensions of staying in their explanations of what it means and looks like to stay.

Emphasis on Relationality and Community

Teachers of Color also emphasized the value of environment, community, and relationships in their definitions of what it means to stay, thrive, and sustain in the work of teaching. Every teacher (n=25) spoke about staying in relation to others whether it was finding a community amongst others within or beyond a school or amongst students or other educators. All but one teacher (n=24, 11 current TOCs, 13 former TOCs) spoke about connecting with students, reflecting on student learning, advocacy for students’ needs, or the conflicting sentiment of “staying for the kids.” The one teacher who did not name students directly primarily focused on experiences with other teachers, administrators, and families in their definitions and examples.

Dominique, a Black woman who formerly taught high school drama, theater, ELA and career and college readiness for 5 years, commented that her past-self saw a definition of “stay”

that was grounded in finding a homeplace, “If you would have asked a younger version of me, ‘staying’ meant being at, you know, you find your school home and you stay there. So that way when students come back, you’re still there, like probably in the same place. When their younger brothers and sisters grow up and they make it to your grade level, you’re still there.” While Dominique acknowledged that her definition of “stay” has shifted since she moved out of the classroom, she notes a physical and relational interpretation of “stay” where generations of students might come through over the course of a teacher’s career.

Four of the eight current teachers who attended the in-person retreat were working or planning to work in the districts or schools they attended as students. As he was entering his seventh year of teaching, Emilio, a biracial Puerto Rican and white male mathematics teacher, explained that in the fall he would be working in a new environment but also returning to a familiar community: the high school he went to as a student. He defined “staying” as “trying to give back or get back to the people or the places that raised you...and I would also add, I think staying is also showing up for others in the best way that you can repeatedly....[this looks like] continuing to show up for students on a daily basis in the best way that you can and working to ignore all the other, pardon my French, bullshit, that’s going on from like a systemic system and doing your best to support them in a classroom repeatedly day after day.” When asked about “thriving,” Emilio added that working with staff and other educators was necessary, “How are we all supporting each other and not isolated in silos? Or students working alone or staff working alone? How are we all connected together so that we can support each other in this broken system to make sure that kids are thriving, right?” Going beyond the individual, Emilio considers the larger ecosystem and importance of collective efforts in being able to navigate systemic problems within schools.

Shay, a Black woman and middle school ELA teacher with 7 years of teaching experience, shared her perspective on returning to work in the district both she and her mother attended:

It has been like this since the dawn of time. So as progressive as the district is, there's still a very prejudiced underbelly. And, you know, it is what it is. I mean, it's unfortunate, but we have adapted. And we know what we're getting. My mom, she had very similar experiences, but she also knew the value that comes along with being in this community. So if you can balance the value with the prejudices, you know, I mean, I think that this is a great district. It's a great place to grow up. I always tell people as somebody who grew up in poverty, this is the best place in America to be poor. There's so many free resources. Our public housing looks not like public housing, like, the school district is great. I really value this area.

She also spoke about her positioning within that community and how she views her role in supporting racially minoritized students in a historically white district and sustaining herself in the work of teaching:

I feel like this is a space to be sustained in because it is definitely a nine to five because the needs of this building are not as high. When you work in urban ed, you're the teacher, but you're also the parent. You're also the social worker. You're also the babysitter. Here, my job is just to teach. I feel like this could be sustaining. And does it sacrifice culture? Yes, because I've worked in spaces that felt like family. Does it sacrifice giving back to my community from a racial standpoint? Yes, but I also feel that I'm here to serve the Black and Brown students that live in the community [here]. So although I'm not surrounded by faces that look like me, I'm here to support the few that do. Because there

were times where or years that I didn't have any Black teachers, and I remember what it felt like. So to me, this experience, this building, it does feel like I could be sustained here.

Shay raises a number of considerations for community in her definitions, including the boundaries and roles that TOCs have to negotiate in their relationships and how she thinks about the contributions TOCs are making to their community depending on the places and spaces they work within.

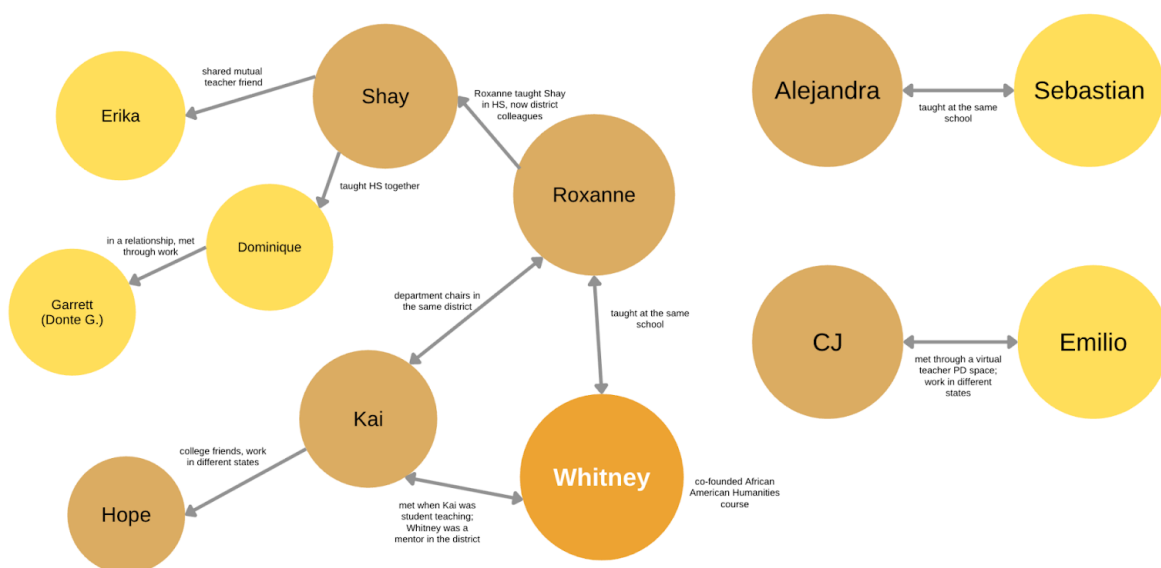
Teachers also spoke to the significance of their colleagues to their conceptualization of what it means to stay and be able to thrive and be sustained in their work as educators. Whitney, an African American woman who retired after 46 years of being a high school educator of English and Social Studies, shared that teachers like Roxanne (who was the first teacher I met and interviewed as part of this research study) supported her while her husband was in the hospital. During this time, Whitney had an administrator who called her to submit a month's worth of substitute lesson plans. Even though she had submitted lessons, they were asking her to prepare even further out in case she needed to be away for longer. She shared that her administrator did not appear to be understanding of her situation and she wondered if she needed to move on from teaching at the school. Whitney expressed gratitude to have colleagues who stepped up in her time of need. She explained:

When I look back, the people who I worked with...I can say, you know, all of them, you met Roxanne. But everybody was like, What can we do and how can we help? And they helped to keep me thriving. And you know, it was a difficult period in my life. There were some other times too, like, when my mother, my mother and my father both died in September, different ten years apart. Both of them were like within the first week or two

school opening. So I was fortunate because they were there. There were people there who helped sustain that.

In Whitney's reflection, she names the ways other teachers supported her during pivotal moments of loss and grief. Whitney also reciprocated being there for other teachers and was credited for being a co-founder of an African American humanities course in the district. She was a social studies teacher and partnered with a Black ELA teacher at her school to develop the course when they heard from students there was overlap in their content. She then brought the course to a different school in the district when she moved, working with Roxanne. She also worked with Kai (another Black teacher who participated in the project) when Kai was student teaching in the district and Kai taught the course in another high school in the district. In many ways, Whitney also provided this support for other teachers in her local community, building a legacy of teaching Black history in the district. These connections also became significant to my recruitment for this study with teachers introducing me and referring to other Teachers of Color (Figure 9).

Figure 9. Connections Between Several Teachers of Color in the Study



Hana, a Bangladesh and Indian Muslim woman, who taught various subjects across 5th-12th grade for 9.5 years and was a teacher educator and PhD student in education when interviewed, builds on the importance of co-workers who recognize and honor each other's humanity. Hana echoed several other teachers' who call for connection in her definition of thriving, "I will add that thriving also then means connection. It's not just about...I'm doing this in an isolated classroom and that's it, but having that connection with other teachers, with admin, with people. Again, we're going to acknowledge *all of you* is critical. I think that's sometimes difficult to find as well." Hana noted the complexity of the relationships that need to be built within schools in order for TOCs to stay and thrive.

When asked to give examples of thriving and also identify other words or phrases that represented their experiences with teaching, several teachers named words or ideas that were associated with collaboration and collective growth. Sebastian, a Mexican American man who taught Spanish for 10 years and became an administrator as the multilingual division lead, spoke about how all three of his recent hires in the Language department have stayed but overall the school has lost Teachers of Color in social studies and special education. He talked about how to sustain oneself you have to be nourished to be able to keep going and how he's witnessed an example of this in a former Latina student who became a teacher:

Well, sustain in Spanish is like *sustenencia*, which is like a synonym for sustenance for food...It's an example of how the Spanish word kind of influences the way you think about the words...I think about nourishment and food is kind of what you need to keep moving. It's kind of sustainment...about knowing what you need, seeking it out, getting it so that you can kind of keep showing up...It is cool when you're excited about a new teacher to see them gain confidence. Like a former student [that now] works here. She

still comes to see me as her former teacher sometimes and she has a lot of impostor syndrome. And she's like, "I'm one of the youngest people here. Are they going to listen to me for this presentation?" It's like, I'm kind of doing the same thing that I did in class. It's just a lot of reaffirming and affirmation. But she's thriving. She's going into year three with me now, too. And it's not because of me, but it's, like, you know, the situation has at least been one where she's gotten encouragement from her direct supervisor, and me when she needs it. It's working out. Same thing with a lot of other younger teachers in the department.

In his reflection, Sebastian spoke about the growth he's witnessed in his former student, now colleague and the significance of support and connection for younger Teachers of Color. He also mentioned "sustenance" as the Spanish word for sustain, which also means nourishment. In connecting these words, he acknowledged the necessity of food for growth and the necessity of getting what you need in order to keep growing as an educator. Later in the interview, he offered culture as a word that captures his experience in teaching and administration, "I mean, the only thing like, something related to culture and, like, building culture, maybe? Just because, I feel like the culture of the school is, I think, probably the biggest factor in a lot of the stuff. And I think some of those other words you mentioned are good, but it's like we think of them on an individual level. Culture is more collective." Many teachers conceptualized staying as a commitment to a place or to people and spoke about reciprocity and collaboration as part of their understanding of what it looks like and what it means to stay.

Stay, Thrive, and Sustain Associated with Feeling Joy, Love, Care, and Affirmation

Many teachers also spoke to the positive emotions of joy and love, and their need for care and validation in their work. Eleven teachers (n=11, 5 current TOCs, 6 former TOCs) spoke

about wanting affirmation, appreciation, or to be cared for to support their overall work and well-being. Eight teachers (n=8, 6 current TOCs, 2 former TOCs) specifically elevated the concept of joy, whether it was finding spaces for joy or experiencing joy for themselves or witnessing it in their students. With only two F-TOCs reporting on joy, it is possible former TOCs had less experience with joy in their work, which might be something worth pursuing more in future research. Fourteen of the teachers in the study (n=14, 8 current TOCs, 6 former TOCs) spoke about the concept of love, feeling loved, or their love of the opportunity to teach and work with young people.

Several teachers spoke about the necessity for acknowledgement and validation, particularly in contexts where they felt like Teachers of Color were not valued compared to white teachers. When reflecting on the word persistence, Hana pondered on the contrast between the unique positioning of TOCs and how their conceptualization of “stay” operates differently from their white colleagues who are also staying in the profession:

And there are days when I still think that, Oh, man, was I just too weak to make it as a long-term teacher, and I just kept having to move around? But I also think, when I think about these white teachers that have stayed for so long, like, is it persistence? I don't know. I think...it's more comfort. I think it's, I've got a good salary, I've got a good pension, and I know what I'm teaching. So why not just stay year after year and make it work? I don't think I see it as persistence, necessarily. I wonder how that would compare to Teachers of Color who stay for long periods of time. And what does it then take to stay? If I think about my experience, what would it have taken for me to stay? I needed people to acknowledge and validate me for the work that I was doing.

Hana witnessed white colleagues who were continuing to work in teaching but did not perceive their experience as persisting or enduring; rather, her perception was that these colleagues appeared to be couched in safety. In questioning how Teachers of Color might experience staying in the classroom differently, Hana considered the legacy of whiteness and white standards of professionalism embedded within the teaching profession, positioning it in contrast to her experience. Like other Teachers of Color who mentioned efforts and projects that were not accredited or celebrated for their impact, Hana also indicated a desire for her labor to be recognized and uplifted. This highlights one way Teachers of Color and their contributions feel less valued in a profession that reproduces white and capitalistic standards of professionalism.

Viveka spoke about a similar desire for recognition of the curriculum that she and a Black colleague developed:

And two white colleagues were leading the anti-racist work that we were doing at that school and no one mentioned me and Kiara doing our [curriculum] project, no one talked about it. The district didn't talk about it...And I heard from my husband, because he teaches at the middle school that [a district social studies coordinator] was like, "Oh, yeah, we told someone at this conference we went to about the [curriculum] work that happens in our district" and I'm like, you didn't tell me...Just a lot of unacknowledgement of the work that we were doing. In our plan, we had written that we were going to do for our school, that we're going to train teachers who opted in, and it was going to be district wide. The school, even one of the district administrators, she knew that was our plan and just no one helped us to make it happen, so it stayed in our classrooms forever.

Viveka explained that her and her colleagues' work was not validated or acknowledged directly by her district. The plans to scale up their curriculum project were not supported, and the one

time where a district social studies coordinator talked about the curriculum at a conference, the project wasn't attributed to Viveka or Kiara directly. This not only highlights the silencing and even co-opting that happens in schools and negatively affects TOCs, but it also illuminates several missed opportunities for districts to truly honor and uplift the work and contributions of TOCs.

When defining what it looked like to thrive as a teacher, Viveka spoke about the connections she developed with that same colleague, Kiara, who was a Black woman and her former mentor teacher:

To me, thriving with Kiara was like what we called recess talks. We'd teach the same unit. Then we'd come out for snack recess. And I'd be like Kiara. You got to hear what just happened when I taught this lesson. That type of energy and love and care is like thriving.

Viveka's comments were reflective of several teachers who spoke about the ways Teachers of Color carved out space for love, affirmation and joy, even in a schooling system that failed to honor their labor.

Roxanne also reflected on the concept of love and brought it up as another word that she would use to describe her experience teaching. She explained: "Actually I would also use love. I would use love. Love for me is an action. And I think you have to be able to, again, behind love is seeing a child's humanity. At the end of the day, they are not one action that they do. They are made up of all these different things." She reflected on the importance of witnessing, seeing the humanity and brilliance in students, holistically. She also explicitly called it an action, something that is not just felt, but embodied and enacted. Roxanne further shared that this love contributes to her capacity to stay in the work of teaching:

I love what I do. I stay because I love what I do. The children give me as much as, if not more than, I give them. Their energy. Their laughter. I enjoy teaching. I enjoy exposing the kids to different kinds of literature, the different writers, their backstories, why... why we are reading certain stories, whose story that we don't get to hear and why they are not in a particular piece. Why can you name the Nina the Pinta and the Santa Maria, but none of the Native American tribes? So yeah, I enjoy the questioning and the exploration that teaching allows me to do. So that's why I stay.

For Roxanne, her students pour back into her, giving their energy, laughter, and curiosities. She appreciates the opportunity to introduce them to new ideas through literature and to be able to think alongside her students and ask critical questions about the world.

Embodiments of Resistance and Refusal

Finally, several teachers offered new ways of framing how TOCs stay, engaging in resistance and refusal in spaces that may be counterproductive to their visions of education. Though the extent to which teachers enacted these practices varied, all interviewees acknowledged some of the ways they embody resistance and refusal as they defined all five sets of words. Ten teachers (n=10, 4 current TOCs, 6 former TOCs) spoke to the concept of finding balance or work-life balance. Twelve teachers (n=11, 5 current TOCs, 6 former TOCs) explicitly named boundary setting, saying no, or refusing to engage in harmful practices. Fourteen teachers (n=14, 6 current TOCs, 8 former TOCs) talked about standing up to unsupportive administrators or willingness to get in trouble. Thirteen (n=13, 4 current TOCs, 9 former TOCs) either acknowledged systemic injustices directly or spoke about challenging them. More F-TOCs than C-TOCs spoke to these themes.

Teachers spoke about work-life balance and establishing boundaries as a means of preserving their mental health and well-being as Teachers of Color. CJ (C-TOC), a Black and white woman and high school ELA teacher of 6 years, for example, shared one way she sustains herself as an educator is to not bring her work home with her: “In terms of sustaining myself, not bringing grades home. I think this year, I’ve only brought grades home a few times. I will leave that at school. I will grade it at school. When I come home, that’s my time.” CJ explained one way she established a boundary for herself in the work was through preservation of her time, making sure to keep grading as a task done while at school. Chernell (F-TOC), in her explanation of thriving, spoke about the general importance of boundaries for teacher well-being: “I would say now thriving is for an educator, teacher, having boundaries. Thriving now as a teacher or educator is feeling like you can advocate for what you need and taking care of your mental health, your emotional health, being able to take those days to reset, not being afraid to take days to reset.” In this case, the example of boundary-setting involves advocacy for your needs and taking time off to invest in taking care of different aspects of well-being.

For some teachers, this looked like not taking on additional labor or responsibilities. Alejandra (C-TOC) offered an example of this in a conversation with one of her administrators:

So this year, the DEI person at our district office. They do affinity groups for staff. He noticed that I wasn't a part of it and he called me out. “Why? Why haven't you gone this year?” I’m doing a master's, I have three preps, one of...I gave him all the excuses and he's like, No, the affinity group is different this year. There's two routes: the public change and policy or you can do the healing work. I was like, That's great. I'm glad you have that changed, but I still don't want to do it. I didn't do it. And happy that I didn't, because that can get exhausting if you do it year after year. Know that you haven't really

changed things or it's like a pendulum. It could be even more disheartening. I'm happy that I took that time off.

Alejandra's decision not to be involved in an affinity group space and DEI work at her school for the year was one way she established a boundary to not overburden herself. Knowing that there will constantly be school-wide initiatives to work on, Alejandra recognized her own bandwidth and was content with her choice to not take on additional responsibilities.

Engaging in intentional acts of refusal were also spoken about and leveraged by teachers in their definitions. For Riya (F-TOC), a Korean American and former middle school teacher (math/science/english/humanities) with 6 years of experience, this meant potentially more subversive acts of resistance. They shared: "When I think about what it was I had to persist through, it was mostly admin and the things that they demand, the decisions that they make that actively harm teachers and students. It means sometimes rebelling, like quietly rebelling and knowing what the rules are, but still doing something else that you know is better for your students." Resistance, here, involved disrupting harms at the school and district-level, whether more overtly or quietly through your actions.

Dominique (F-TOC) spoke about refusal through boundary-setting and making intentional decisions to center her well-being and personhood:

I always say I'm a Black woman first. Teacher second...just the humanizing of it and remind people I am not a robot. You know, I emailed you at 8:00 at night. You don't think I have a family. You don't think I'm cooking dinner. You don't think I'm watching TV. You don't think I'm sleeping. You know, people just expect you to be consistently just on your phone or on your laptop all the time. People want you to be accessible all the time. And once again, we just do not get paid enough to be that accessible all the time.

Recognizing that the labor of teachers is often undercompensated and the unrealistic expectation of constant accessibility, Dominique's words served as a reminder of her own humanity. She prioritizes her life and her needs as a Black woman and human being.

When contemplating the words persist and persistence, Viveka (F-TOC) shared an example of a counselor colleague who wanted Viveka to give her a list of names of the girls in her class for a girls' group:

She wanted us to give her the names of our girls in our class that she could pull them during lunch and lead this girls' group. And there was no boys' group. A lot of my kids were really exploring pronouns and really exploring gender identity and talking about that. I was like, I'm not going to send you a list. If you want to go to the school and get whatever where it says it from their families, you can do that, but I'm not going to be the one to do that...I'm not going to comply with that...

Viveka invoked the words of professors from her teacher education program who taught her about "creative non-compliance" and recognizing her power to not have to be involved with practices or programs that could have a negative impact on students. Her choice was an active refusal to be involved with a project that did not intentionally contend with issues of gender in a critical way.

Teachers also shared some of the ways they felt empowered to speak up against systemic injustice in education. CJ (C-TOC) spoke about the urgency of speaking up in this critical time: "I feel very, like, unafraid to speak truth to power. Maybe because there's a teacher shortage? I'm like, you're not going to fire me. But I'd also feel like this is not the time to be afraid because this is exactly how the system was built, to gut education, make teachers afraid, like book bans and censorship. I'm like, you were not going to silence me." CJ's comment reflected the many

challenges facing public education and teachers at the time of the study, which have only exacerbated since. She also understood her value as a teacher and highlighted how pivotal it was for her to speak up.

Teachers also considered how injustices played out at the school-level and their role in resisting or challenging those injustices. Riya (F-TOC) explained by giving a specific example of speaking up when a colleague said something harmful:

And it also means not letting other teachers and their incapacabilities continue to harm students. One example I'm thinking about is an art teacher in the middle school...It was during a team meeting. There was a new student, Alan, who was very clearly neurodivergent in some way. He was brilliant. He took these crazy beautiful photos of the night sky, but he was also socially awkward, and he's also new to the school. In a team meeting, she called him an alien. I was like, let's be careful with that word because not only is this a student, that's kind of ableist. But also he's half white, half Korean. There's also the racial connotation to that word. I'm just like, I don't give a shit if you think that I'm being ornery or you know, angry on purpose. But you're not allowed to... You're not really allowed to say that about a kid because that's really hurtful.

Riya shared one way they stood up against harmful behavior at their school, especially when a student was being implicated. Here, resistance looked like disrupting a harmful practice and encouraging colleagues to be mindful of their language and how they frame students.

Several F-TOCs envisioned their resistance as an ongoing practice throughout their career. When asked about what it meant and looked like to thrive as a Teacher of Color, Viveka shared, “Yeah, I think thriving is also success against the system. When you're able to skirt

around things that are oppressive to kids and families, and it works. I actually made a difference in how they engage with education.”

Later in her interview, Viveka gave a specific example of a pair of twins, a brother and a sister, who moved to their school district. The boy was placed in her class, and the girl was in Kiara’s class. Viveka shared how this placement led to students making fun of the siblings, because students didn’t believe they were twins:

I would say like a lot of my teaching experience was resisting. I don't think that's captured in these words. I think it was a lot of pushing against the system. So an example of that, I had a kid and Kiara had a kid who were twins. And they had just moved from the south, they were Black. They were low income. They were not living with their mom, they were living with their aunt—in a tricky home situation...And I was like, why don't I just move him up? Because it was post-COVID, and everyone's reading at a second grade level in my fifth grade class anyway so it doesn't make a difference. Why does he have to get made fun of? He's at a new school, no one even knows him. So we just moved them up to my room. That just feels like resisting the system, totally, like, tearing it down for what we believe in.

Viveka shared this anecdote as an example of resistance against an unjust education system. Both she and Kiara leveraged their power as educators to challenge a systemic issue they saw their students experiencing.

Viveka, built on this same example, and spoke to a different point related to resistance, where collective solidarity and support can have a powerful impact on Teachers of Color being able to sustain themselves in their teaching:

Another aspect that I really wanted to talk about, that Kiara and I talked about a lot that just didn't come up in this conversation, is the importance of what we call the power two. The way that we could persist, that we could endure, that we stay, that we sustain, literally all of them, because we had each other when something was wrong, when something was unjust, when something was hard. We could say something about it. We could resist. We could do something with the knowledge that this person was here, and they were on the same page. They're going to back us up, that we were not alone and not just going to get shut down, which is so often the experience being a Person of Color. I think you can feel that in some way, but you have to have such a strong bond with another Teacher of Color to actually be vocal. And that even if nothing changes, your articulation of resistance is enough to sustain you in the profession.

Viveka's explanation of the power of two highlights the importance of having multiple Teachers of Color, and the burden that can be carried when a Teacher of Color works in isolation without support. Her interview highlighted examples of the many subversive ways Teachers of Colors are working within and against systemic harms by finding trusted collaborators to confide in and who can support them in taking action.

Discussion

The language choices Teachers of Color made in their definitions and conceptualizations revealed different perspectives about the phenomenon of teacher retention, emphasizing the negative emotions and struggles associated with staying, insisting that the onus should not be on individual teachers to stay, recognizing that relationships and environment are necessary, elevating the need for care and joy in the work, and highlighting the active resistance and refusals by TOCs in order to thrive and sustain. Across the interviews, both former and current

Teachers of Color acknowledged the white and capitalistic standards of professionalism and teaching that teachers are expected to endure. This includes evaluations and expectations focused on individualism and individual teachers. For many, staying did not feel like a choice. For some, their ability to stay was affected by pushout. For others, they refused to abide by or comply with processes and policies they saw as detrimental or actively harming students, particularly those from marginalized communities. They spoke about how dysfunctional systems often make it impossible for Teachers of Color to thrive and be sustained, but there appeared to be an ongoing desire to embody and collectively work towards sustaining and thriving as opposed to just enduring and surviving.

This research offers a complication of the concept of staying, affirming and extending on the work of prior scholarship that has examined TOCs who have left the profession (Cariaga, 2023; Hannegan-Martinez, 2023; Hernández-Johnson et al., 2021; Marx et al., 2023; Philip et al., 2014). I found that more former TOCs shared comments about the impact of systemic injustices and needing to engage in practices of resistance and refusal in their definitions, which may indicate the gravity of systemic harm and how it shaped their perspectives. Like prior studies, I saw how important it was for former TOCs to acknowledge the systemic factors that contributed to their exit and that their experiences highlighted their strength and resilience while also emphasizing the harm they encountered and the grief they felt.

This research also adds nuance to prior work that has explored teacher and TOC retention (Carver-Thomas, 2018; Kardos & Johnson, 2008; Kohli, 2018; Kohli, et al. 2020; Pizarro & Kohli, 2020) and theories thriving in education (Beltman et al., 2011; Darling-Hammond, 2018; Schreiner, 2010; 2013). My study, which centers how TOCs frame retention and what it means to stay in the classroom, highlights the complexities of TOCs in the profession who are expected

to give more of themselves and comply with a system of education that is not affirming of the ways they teach. For both former and current Teachers of Color in this study, their understanding of “stay” was marked by and mediated by all these experiences of joy, love, pain, and grief. Our understanding of Teachers of Color retention and how we support them to stay in the field, too, must be mediated by understanding of their experiences within education.

On rare occasions, environmental conditions might allow for teachers to thrive; more often than not, Teachers of Color, like Students of Color, are surviving and blooming in spaces not meant for them to thrive (Duncan-Andrade, 2009). They negotiate and navigate tensions with different ways of being and staying in the profession, resisting, refusing, and demanding something different from systems of education. Teachers are also engaging in fugitive practices (Castro-Gill, 2025; Stovall, 2024), working relationally and in community (Pham et al., 2024; Tintiangco-Cubales & Duncan-Andrade, 2021), and leaning into the emotionality and criticality of the work (Matias & Liou, 2014).

A notable limitation and strength of this work is that several C-TOCs and F-TOCs recommended one another for the study and participated in it together. Because of this, I was able to connect with more participants. At the same time, if this study only involved teachers who didn't know each other, the findings and notable patterns might have been different.

Conclusion and Implications

This paper is a counterstory of teacher retention that centers TOCs' experiences and perspectives. It is a response to prior conceptualizations of teacher retention in the field, including research that focuses on quantitative data, pushout factors, and TOCs who have left. In this paper, I center both TOCs who have stayed in and left the profession. Through the perspective of current TOCs and former TOCs, this paper challenges individualized approaches

to thinking about retention (e.g., individual factors and decisions, an evaluation of an individual's capacity), and expands conceptualizations of retention to include a systemic perspective and an understanding of how Teachers of Color see themselves existing within the profession.

This study contributes to ongoing research with in-service Teachers of Color, building on prior research that honors their knowledge and contributions, and expanding the scope for studying TOC retention in ways that center them and their experiences. Further research might benefit from collecting additional data from school sites to paint the context for what it looks like for current TOCs to stay in the profession including artifacts and field observations from their day-to-day in the classroom, testimonies from administrators, colleagues, and students, but also artifacts and observations of their lives beyond schools that influence their capacity to work within schools. Additionally, this paper puts into question the institution of schooling and the current and former Teachers of Color who find themselves not fitting within those systems. Participants' definitions provide new considerations for retention that moves beyond the confines of schooling structures. Further studies might also examine the lives of former TOCs and the ways they contribute to educational futures beyond the confines of schooling structures.

This paper also illuminates the lived experiences and theoretical offerings of Teachers of Color in the wake of dystopian and unjust devaluation of their work and livelihoods. Knowing that Teachers of Color enter a field that holds unsettled histories and legacies of racialized trauma, it is important to acknowledge and reckon with these histories and trauma to understand the larger context that TOCs work within in the present. When TOCs compare their experiences to abusive relationships, a room on fire, or battlegrounds, they are not speaking about interpersonal relationships or isolated events, but instead deeply entrenched webs of historical

and systemic harm. This study supports the case that retention is not about individual teachers and that thinking about teachers' decisions as existing within schooling systems that influence them can shift the conversation about retention to the school system level.

Through interviews with both current and former TOCs, it was clear that the questions that have been asked about retention - Why are TOCs leaving? Why are TOCs staying? - are not enough. Might that be akin to asking someone who has experienced an abusive relationship, “Why did you stay and not stay?” But, what questions should we be asking? The participants in this work give us some insights. How have schools been sites of struggle and harm? How might we reimagine schools as places where TOCs are thriving relationally and in community? What might it mean for schools to prioritize care, attention to well-being and grief, and joy? How might we follow the lead of TOCs who are already resisting and refusing historically oppressive schooling structures? This research offers a theoretical deepening of the concept of “retention,” which can benefit the field of education by offering a model for co-theorizing alongside TOCs and envisioning what staying in education means and looks like for TOCs.

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Chapter 3 Offering a Conceptual Framework for How Teachers of Color Navigate and Resist their School's Racial Climates

Abstract

While Teacher of Color (TOC) recruitment and retention are frequently touted as spaces for opportunity within educational research and policy, many Teachers of Color find that schools are unsupportive and even harmful to their well-being and work. Knowing that education has been a historically hostile space for Students and Teachers of Color, there's opportunity to further explore and learn from Teachers of Color about what it would take for Teachers of Color to feel supported and sustained in their well-being and work. This paper is an empirical study examining the navigational and resistant resources of TOCs. Drawing on Kohli and colleagues' (2022) Healthy Racial Climate and Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth model, this study examines a conceptual framework focused on how current and former Teachers of Color with 5+ years of experience navigate(d) their school environments and what resources they see as necessary for their work. Specifically, I ask what navigational and resistant resources are Teachers of Color drawing on or identifying as critical for sustaining their work in educational spaces. I analyze interviews, educational journey maps, ecomaps, freedom dream maps, and focus group conversations in the context of a retreat space with 25 current and former TOCs. The findings highlight the internal dispositions, emotions, and resources as well as the external supports, environments, structures, and networks that TOCs name as critical for sustaining their work.

Introduction

There are not a lot of jobs out there that are constantly telling you to improve. It is the capitalistic hellhole we all live in...I'm tired of being called a failure professionally, constantly...when I worked in Congress, people thought I was smart. That's when I had a lot of intellectual capital. Then when I became a teacher, I had a lot of moral capital. People don't tell you you're innovative. People do not tell you you are brilliant. People do not tell you you are smart. They tell you you're hard working, a good person, and that you have patience. I actually think intellectually that is such an insult. As we want to have more men as teachers, when we want to have more People of Color as teachers, think about what we are doing on a mass scale. If we in our society, if we have this inability to actually calculate and believe that teachers are not even smart, brilliant fucking people, then we are asking masses of People of Color to not be called smart. I'm not saying that this shouldn't happen. I'm just saying that things need to fundamentally change about the profession and about what we are doing and not doing in schools in order for people to be given the credit that they deserve.

-Ming, former ethnic studies teacher

Ming articulates one of many structural flaws and barriers to diversifying the teaching profession, a constant pressure to improve and a lack of acknowledgement of the brilliance and capability of teachers, particularly Teachers of Color (TOCs). From demands on their time and curriculum mandates to threats to their safety and livelihood, U.S. schools continue to be a precarious place for Teachers of Color. Policymakers and researchers alike have highlighted that one of the biggest challenges facing education is the need to recruit and retain TOCs (Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Carver-Thomas et al., 2022). Yet, many TOCs find that schooling

environments are unsupportive and even harmful to their well-being and work (Goodwin, 2023; Pizarro & Kohli, 2020). The retention research on Teachers of Color primarily focuses on the factors and conditions that push teachers to leave the field (Hernandez-Johnson et al., 2022; Marx et al., 2023). Studies have noted that the pervasiveness of whiteness and racism, racial battle fatigue, and the cumulative and ongoing impacts of systemic oppression have all contributed to early exits for teachers and TOCs. Knowing that schools have been historically hostile sites for racially minoritized students and teachers, there is opportunity to further learn from current *and* former TOCs about their experiences with staying.

Some studies have looked at Teachers of Color and why they stay (e.g., Castro-Gill, 2025; Kokka, 2016). Although there are reports on TOCs' motivations and some support factors that contribute to their retention (Gist et al., 2021; Kohli, 2018), further consideration is needed to understand what makes it possible for TOCs to persist and endure, as well as what else is needed for TOCs to feel supported and sustained in their work. There is also opportunity to look both at the external and internal factors and resources that TOCs identify as critical to supporting and sustaining their work in education.

In the retention literature, there has also been an intentional focus on early career teachers, which includes both students in teacher preparation and novice teachers in their early years in the classroom and recognizes these stages as pivotal departure points in the career trajectory of teachers (Bettini et al., 2022; Jimenez-Silva, 2024). There is opportunity to learn from current TOCs (C-TOCs) who are veterans and their perspectives on what has allowed them to stay in teaching, and to shift narratives about retention to center the very people who are staying, telling the story of retention from their perspectives. Alongside learning from current veteran teachers, there is opportunity to learn from former TOCs (F-TOCs) who are veterans and

their perspectives on what it would have taken for them to stay, again shifting the narratives about retention to center the very people who are leaving, telling the story of retention from their perspectives.

To examine how TOCs navigate schooling environments and the factors that support their well-being and work as educators, this study draws on the theoretical foundations of Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005) and Healthy Racial Climate (Kohli et al., 2022). Yosso's theory of Community Cultural Wealth has been valuable for recognizing the assets of historically marginalized students and communities. Yosso uses this theory to illuminate the experiences of undergraduate Students of Color navigating college. There is an opportunity to expand Yosso's theory of Community Cultural Wealth to a new population - TOCs - and consider what the different forms of Community Cultural Wealth mean, look like, and involve for Teachers of Color working in school systems.

Kohli et al. (2022)'s Healthy Racial Climate framework offers a useful guide for teacher education, specifically how teacher education programs can better serve Teacher Candidates of Color. There is an opportunity to expand Kohli et al.'s Healthy Racial Climate framework to a new population - TOCs - and consider what aspects are most salient for Teachers of Color working in school systems.

In this paper, I use Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth model and Kohli et al. (2022)'s Healthy Racial Climate framework to examine how experienced Teachers of Color navigate(d) their working environments. Drawing on these theories and my data, I introduce a conceptual framework for how Teachers of Color navigate and resist their school's racial climates and provide illustrative examples of how the framework might be a useful structure for understanding TOC retention. Specifically, I ask:

What navigational and resistant resources do experienced Teachers of Color draw on or identify as critical for sustaining their work in educational spaces? What similarities and differences are there between the resources that current and former TOCs report?

Literature Review

In an examination of the literature, I reflect on educational research on 1) retention, 2) the marginalization and exclusion of Teachers of Color, and 3) the reported supports that allow teachers, and TOCs in particular, to stay in the profession.

Retention

Educational research has primarily relied on data and quantitative analyses to explore teacher retention and attrition. This research tends to use the Teacher Follow-up Survey (TFS)⁴ alongside National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) or National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS). For instance, Sutchter et al.'s (2016) policy report that examines SASS alongside several other databases from Baccalaureate and Beyond, Higher Education Act Title II, and the State of California estimates 8 billion dollars are spent on replacement costs for teachers every year. Given the estimated costs of teacher turnover exceed \$8.5 billion annually, the need to address teacher retention is imperative (Carroll, 2007; Sutchter et al., 2016). Most estimates of retention utilize the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) which was redesigned and renamed as the National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS) in 2015-16 (NCES 2011; 2022). However, analysis of SASS and NTPS provides one lens for understanding teacher retention. One of the limitations of SASS/NTPS data is that it does not track individual teachers longitudinally.

⁴ The TFS has been conducted eight times: in the 1988–89, 1991–92, 1994–95, 2000–01, 2004–05, 2008–09, 2012–13, and 2021–22 school years (following the 1987–88, 1990–91, 1993–94, 1999–2000, 2003–04, 2007–08, and 2011–12 SASS administrations and 2020–21 NTPS administration. Due to the low response rate for the 2015–16 administration of NTPS, no TFS was recorded in 16–17.

Two surveys do exist as a supplement to SASS/NTPS that help us understand teacher attrition, the Beginning Teacher Longitudinal Study (BTLS) and the Teacher Follow-up Survey (TFS) (NCES 2012; 2013). The Beginning Teacher Longitudinal Study (BTLS) followed a cohort of public school teachers in their first year initially interviewed as part of the 2007–08 SASS and again each year through the 2011–12 school year. Gray and Taie’s (2015) analysis of BTLS data found lower turnover rates than Ingersoll’s earlier work, and suggested that 17% of beginning teachers have left the profession after five years. Elsayed and Roch’s (2023) analysis of BTLS explored former teachers who exited and re-entered the profession and found that female teachers and those who received an improved salary were likely to return to teaching. Papay and colleagues (2017) note that the national recession could contextualize the lower turnover rates and that the small cohort size and low response rates from BTLS may make these estimates on retention less precise. The Teacher Follow-up Survey (TFS) is a survey of K-12 school teachers who participated in SASS/NTPS during the previous school year with the intention of gathering data on teacher retention, attrition, job satisfaction, reasons for leaving or moving, and characteristics of those teachers. In analyses of SASS and TFS, Ingersoll and colleagues estimated that Teachers of Color leave the field each year at an annual rate that was 24% (2008-09) and 25% (2012-13) higher than white teachers (Ingersoll & May, 2011; Ingersoll et al., 2014; Ingersoll et al., 2019; Kohli, 2018).

Other studies of retention focus on teachers at the individual state and district levels which allows for deeper insight into longitudinal information. Yet, many of these studies collect data from one site, which limits the opportunity for cross-site analyses. For example, Goldhaber et al. (2010; 2015) examined administrative databases from Washington state to understand within-district teacher transfers and found that teachers were more likely to leave schools with

higher percentages of students with disadvantages (indicated by a large percentage of students eligible for free-reduced lunch or coming from an underrepresented minority background).

Several studies have affirmed this finding that teachers are likely to leave schools/districts with more disadvantaged students and apply or move to schools/districts with less disadvantaged students (Boyd et al., 2013; Goldhaber et al., 2010; Guarino et al., 2006; Scafidi et al., 2007).

There are studies that have looked at some cross-site comparisons, which gives even further insight into the inequities across districts and states when it comes to teacher retention. In an analysis of the administrative human resources records provided by states and districts themselves in 16 urban districts across 7 states, Papay and colleagues (2017) found that 13% to 35% of novices left their district after one year and 44% to 74% left within five years. They calculated that the lowest retention rates could cost a district as much as 4 million dollars annually on hiring new teachers for that district. They further concluded that predictors like student demographic characteristics, measures of working conditions, and economic conditions were not statistically significant with regards to teacher retention rates in the districts they studied. The authors also observed that educational research on teacher retention tends to focus on three areas: 1) traditional features of the labor market like pay, benefits, location, amenities (Brewer, 1996; Gritz & Theobald, 1996; Jacob, 2007; Mont & Rees, 1996; Shen, 1997; Stinebrickner, 1998); 2) the types of students teachers work with (Boyd et al., 2005; Clotfelter et al., 2011; Hanushek et al., 2004); and 3) teacher working conditions and organizational context (Simon & Johnson, 2015). Although there has been careful consideration of the different factors and contributors to teachers leaving the classroom more broadly, understanding the nuances and the unique circumstances that Teachers of Color face with regards to retention is important in the wake of calls for diversifying the teacher workforce. Recognizing the retention literature tends to

over-rely on quantitative methods and survey data, there is opportunity to further consider methods that center TOCs' experiences with retention.

Marginalization and Exclusion of Teachers of Color

Research involving both Teachers and Students of Color consistently demonstrates the positive impact that TOCs have on the academic success and socioemotional well-being of their students (Dilworth & Coleman, 2014; Gist & Bristol, 2022). However, TOCs are often recruited into teacher preparation programs and school sites with historical legacies of institutional barriers and racialized policies and practices that have enacted harm and further marginalize them (Bettini et al., 2022; Grooms et al., 2021).

Historical Policies that Systematically Pushout Teachers of Color. There has been a historical and systemic pushout of Teachers of Color through policy and programming. Despite the prohibition of literacy among enslaved peoples, in practice and in legislation, Black communities sought out education and self-organized to make literacy possible (Anderson, 1989; Provenzo, 2006; Williams, 2005). Post-Civil War, Black educators were prominent throughout the South as communities had formed their own educational collectives and even petitioned for community taxes to keep schools open (Anderson, 1989; Walker, 2000). Following *Brown v. Board*, however, it is estimated that over 38,000 Black teachers lost their jobs resulting in a mass exodus of Black teachers from the profession (Dilworth & Brown, 2008; Ethridge, 1973; Fultz, 2004; Tillman, 2005). This legislation, touted for desegregating schools and furthering the Civil Rights movement, had a negative impact on Black teachers at a systemic level. Despite earlier gains in bilingual education, xenophobic backlash and anti-bilingual policies took effect in the 1980s and 1990s which contributes to the increasing gap in the proportion of Latiné/x educators to Latiné/x students, the largest of any ethnoracial group (Carver-Thomas, 2018; Todd-Breland,

2022). Between 2000 and 2012 when the No Child Left Behind Act was instituted, the number of Black teachers decreased in major cities throughout the U.S., most notably in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina which saw significant school closures and a 62% decline in the number Black teachers (Bond et al., 2015; Ciolino et al., 2015; Cook & Dixon, 2013; Holley-Walker, 2007). Under a proposed revision to rescind Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) by the Trump administration, teacher recipients of DACA, which allows them to live and work in the United States without fear of deportation, continue to face precarity in employment and documentation status (Castro, 2022b; Treviño, 2017).

Current Barriers for and Continued Pushout of Teachers of Color. Since the turn of the 21st century, much has been written about the overwhelming presence of whiteness and anti-Black racism in teaching and teacher education (Lopez & Jean-Marie, 2021; Matias et al, 2017; Sleeter, 2001; Sleeter et al., 2015; Wilson & McMillan, 2024) and hiring practices (D’Amico et al., 2017) and its negative impact on Teachers of Color. Several studies identify how racism, institutionalized whiteness, and race-evasive discourse in education continue to take a toll on Teachers of Color psychologically and physiologically across their lived experiences as students, in teacher education, and as in-service teachers (Brown, 2014; Kohli, 2021). More recently, CRT-bans are contributing to the silencing and push out of K-12 teachers, especially those committed to racial justice (Jayakumar & Kohli, 2023). Though there has also been a legacy of Teachers of Color working in abundance in community schools and alternative educational programs, led or supported by families and students (Dilworth & Brown, 2008; Todd-Breland, 2022), systemic injustices at the policy and programmatic level have historically kept Teachers of Color from having a sustained presence in schools.

Retention Issues Among Novice Teachers. Current educational research has explored the schooling and teaching experiences of novice Teachers of Color and the structural implications of race and racism they've encountered which has consequences for retention (Bettini et al., 2022; Grooms et al., 2021; Kohli, 2009; 2018; Pizarro & Kohli, 2020). Bettini et al.'s (2022) review of 72 relevant studies examines novice teachers and their experience with the "double bind," or tensions of personal commitments to justice and combating systemic oppression while existing as professionals within an oppressive schooling system. They intentionally focused on the experiences of novice Teachers of Color and named this juncture in their early career as a pivotal moment where they are most likely to leave, which is supported by data collected through the National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS) (Bettini et al., 2022; NCES, 2016; Taie & Goldring, 2017).

Novice Teachers of Color often comment on their lack of exposure to and need for justice-oriented teacher education (Bettini et al., 2022; Herrera et al., 2022; Tenorio et al., 2022). In addition, the normalization of whiteness they've witnessed in education creates barriers, isolation and pressures for them in the early stages of their career (Bettini et al., 2022; Gist & Bristol, 2022; Lee, 2012; Pizarro & Kohli, 2020). For instance, a qualitative study done with Latinx graduates of a teacher preparation program revealed that the program was unable to adequately prepare them to return to their home communities to teach in rural, predominantly white schooling contexts (Herrera et al., 2022). In another study, Tenorio et al.'s (2022) found that American Indian/Native Alaskan graduates of a teacher preparation program demonstrated how culturally sustaining programming and partnerships with tribal communities could support retention, specifically through Indigenous communities of practice, a cultural and community-based pedagogical orientation, and a commitment to students and Native communities. These

studies with novice Teachers of Color speak to the necessity of systematically supporting the entrance of Teachers of Color into the profession. Although we have research to support understanding the experiences of early career TOCs, there is further opportunity to learn about experienced Teachers of Color and what they report allows them to stay in the profession.

Supports for Teachers of Color to Stay

There's been some exploration of what allows all teachers to stay in the profession. Several studies name the preferences of teachers and their likelihood to prefer schools with effective leadership, supportive colleagues and a strong school culture (Goldhaber et al., 2015; Horng, 2009; Johnson et al., 2012; Ladd, 2011; Papay et al., 2017; Sutchter et al., 2016). For example, Goldhaber and colleagues (2016) observed that teachers were more likely to stay in schools with advantaged students and Horng (2009) and Ladd (2011) found that teachers with a positive perception of their working conditions, which was often correlated with student demographics, also increased their likelihood of remaining at their school site (Horng, 2009; Ladd, 2011). Johnson and Kardos (2008) also named several factors that contribute to retention including timely and informational-rich hiring, mentorship, differentiated roles and opportunities for career growth, performance-based pay, and adapting to current labor market trends (Johnson & Kardos, 2008). Johnson (2020) further makes the case for strategic school systems and practices that support teachers in hiring, curriculum, and professional development. These studies highlight factors that contribute to teacher retention broadly, regardless of racial, ethnic, or cultural background.

The retention literature on Teachers of Color, in particular, often focuses on the features that contribute to TOCs leaving the classroom, with fewer studies examining what supports TOCs to stay, leaving room for more research to be done. The research that does speak to

Teachers of Color who stay primarily highlight their reasons for staying: autonomy in instruction, their commitments to teaching specific populations, and pedagogy rooted in community (Achinstein et al., 2011; Castro-Gill, 2025; Fraser-Abder, 2010; Kokka, 2016; Taylor, 2013). In one study with five Black female elementary school teachers, Dixon and Dingus (2008) shared a finding that teachers saw teaching as community work and a space for connection with their Black students and communities. Other educational researchers have explored Black women's intentions to remain in the classroom and how their resilience is fueled by their care for students and commitments to their success (Fraser-Abder, 2010; Taylor, 2013). These studies often speak to TOCs' personal commitments and values and less about the support factors that contribute to their tenure in the profession.

Several scholars have examined the supports for Teachers of Color as they navigate schooling, though some of this research does not explicitly center TOC retention and what allows TOCs to remain in the profession. Studies on the experiences and conditions that support Educators of Color speak to the importance of social relationships and communities of support (Dixon & Dingus, 2008; Kohli & Pizarro, 2016), support for TOC well-being (Kohli, et al. 2022; Pour-Khorshid, 2018), and structures and strategies for navigating racism and hostile climates (Monreal, 2022; Pizarro & Kohli, 2020; Rogers-Ard, 2019). Others have identified freedom dreaming (Neal & Dunn, 2020; Stewart, 2024), ethnic studies curriculum and fugitive pedagogies (Castro-Gill, 2025; Givens, 2021; Stovall, 2024), critical professional development (Kohli, 2019; Kohli, et al. 2022b), and re-membering practices (Dillard 2012; 2021) as significant tools and practices for Teachers of Color who are committed to racially just aims. Although educational researchers are beginning to explore the supports, conditions, and

experiences that support the practices and overall well-being of TOCs, research must further link these navigational supports and strategies to TOC retention.

More educational researchers are continuing to explore the circumstances, conditions, and experiences that make it possible for TOCs to stay and thrive. Although there are studies that report on TOCs' motivations and some support factors, further consideration and exploration are needed to understand *what makes it possible* for TOCs to persist and endure, as well as what else is needed for TOCs to feel supported and sustained in their work. Using frameworks and methods that center TOCs, my work responds timely to the pressing need to retain TOCs and transform specific institutional factors that create inhospitable environments.

Theoretical Frameworks

I draw from Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth model, which challenges deficit framings of Communities of Color that focus primarily on their disadvantages and instead gives attention to the abundance of resources that they hold. Community Cultural Wealth draws from critical race theory and cultural capital frameworks to emphasize the knowledge, skills, and capabilities of Communities of Color such as their aspirational capital, linguistic capital, familial capital, social capital, navigational capital, and resistant capital (Yosso, 2005). I draw primarily on Yosso's conception of navigational and resistant capital. Navigational capital, refers to the "skills of maneuvering through social institutions...[which] infer[s] the ability to maneuver through institutions not created with Communities of Color in mind (Allen & Solórzano, 2000; Alva, 1991; Auerbach, 2001; Solórzano et al., 2000; Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998)" (Yosso, 2005; p. 80). By resistant capital, Yosso refers to the "knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality (Freire, 1970; 1973; Giroux, 1983; McLaren, 1994; Delgado Bernal, 1997; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001)" (p. 80). I consider Yosso's

framework, which was originally used to think about Students of Color in higher education contexts, with the population of Teachers of Color and how they leverage navigational and resistant capital in their work.

In addition to an individual level of analysis, I also consider a systemic framing and how the structures and forces that shape the environment and contexts that Teachers of Color work within can align to support TOCs to stay. I use Kohli et al.'s (2022) dimensions of a Healthy Racial Climate in teacher education as a framework for thinking about the racial climate that in-service teachers exist within. Kohli and colleagues (2022) draw from a body of racial climate frameworks in higher education that primarily consider the health of a university campus climate (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hurtado, 1992; Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999, 2012; Hurtado & Ruiz Ledesma, 2016; Milem et al., 2005). Specifically, Kohli et al.'s (2022) Healthy Racial Climate framework builds on racial climate in terms of health (Hurtado et al., 1998; Ledesma, 2016) for teacher education programs and the experiences of Teacher Candidates of Color within those programs. This racial climate framework incorporates five dimensions: 1) the historical, 2) organizational, 3) compositional, 4) behavioral, and 5) psychological, while also considering the sociohistorical and government/political forces and the overarching culture and climates of the university and school site/districts that shape the racial climate Teacher Candidates of Color work within.

The historical dimension attends to both the legacy of inclusion and exclusion and the ongoing forms of racism within an institution, speaking to the policies, practices and foundations that guide the current context. This may include grappling with Indigenous history and relationship to the land, understanding impacts of segregation and integration policies and histories of resistance, and reckoning with how histories have shaped the school and the

communities it serves. The organizational and structural dimension refers to an organization's identity and commitments and the extent to which those features are reflected in the actual programs, leadership, and overall structure of the organization (Milem et al., 2005). Kohli et al. (2022) explain how a commitment to racial justice can be assessed and evaluated in teacher education particularly through recruitment, admissions, retention, curriculum, placement processes, and other policies. The compositional dimension considers the makeup and diversity of the population within the institution and how a critical mass of People of Color and greater racial representation can be supportive steps towards building a Healthy Racial Climate (Chang et al., 2006; Cuellar, 2014; Garces & Jayakumar, 2014; Hurtado & Ruiz Alvarado, 2015; Jayakumar, 2008; Kohli et al., 2022). The behavioral dimension considers intergroup relations between individuals from different racial and ethnic backgrounds (Hurtado, 1998). Kohli et al. (2022) encourage teacher education programs to attend to the behavioral dimension by disrupting racism and race-evasiveness, and providing opportunities for meaningful and collaborative learning and racial literacy. The psychological dimension speaks to the perceptions, experiences, positionality, and well-being of Teacher Candidates of Color and the extent to which those who shape their experiences are equipped to support them. Kohli et al. (2022) note that although many teacher education programs are making efforts towards culturally responsive curriculum and teaching for K-12 students, these asset-based, affirming approaches are not always applied or extended to Teacher Candidates of Color. Kohli et al.'s (2022) framework also names government/political forces, sociohistorical forces, university climate and culture, and school site/district climate as factors that impact the racial climate of a teacher education space.

While there have been studies that use Community Cultural Wealth as a framework for analyzing Teachers of Color and Teacher Candidates of Color (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018;

Maddamsetti, 2022; Perez & Jacobs, 2022), educational research has not used the Community Cultural Wealth model alongside a racial climate framework to analyze the situated experiences of K-12 Teachers of Color.

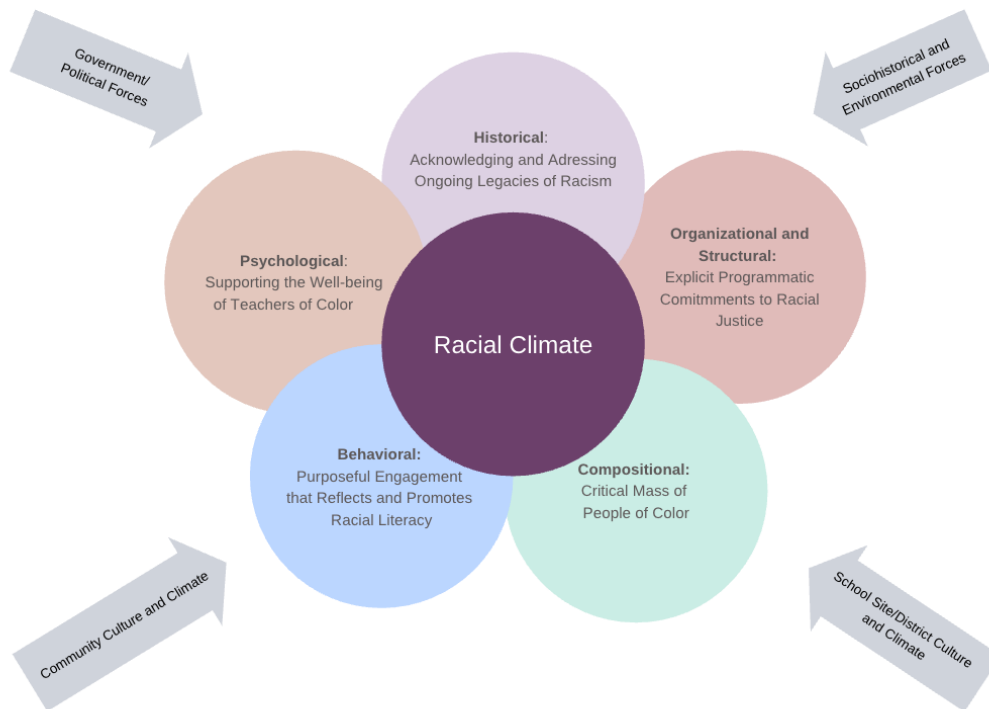
Conceptual Framework

My conceptual framework brings together elements of Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth model, specifically Yosso's conceptualization of navigational and resistant capital, with Kohli et al. (2022)'s Healthy Racial Climate framework. To guide my study, I drew on the existing literature to elaborate and further specify Yosso's (2005) concepts of navigational and resistant wealth alongside Kohli et al. (2022)'s Healthy Racial Climate framework with attention to Teachers of Color working in K-12 contexts, in particular (Figure 11).

To create my conceptual framework (Figure 11), I first adapted Kohli et al.'s (2022) Healthy Racial Climate framework for a K-12 teaching context by elaborating on the forces, climates, and cultures impacting K-12 classroom Teachers of Color (Figure 10). I retained the historical, organizational, compositional, behavioral, and psychological dimensions of a racial climate described by Kohli and colleagues (2022), but elaborate on them further in my adaptation for veteran TOCs working in K-12 schools. For example, sociohistorical and environmental forces that may impact K-12 TOCs could include the ways humans interact with their environment - both past and present - and how education is impacted by and has material consequences for society, culture, and history. Environmental conditions refers to the land, air, and water, as well as the pollution and toxins in our surrounding environment and infrastructure that affects Teachers of Color and their physical well being. Government/political forces might include policymakers, policies, legislation, standards, civics, and other political entities that can impact schools as organizations, the labor of teachers, and curriculum. School site/district

climate involves the administrative and organizational qualities that make up the environment in which K-12 Teachers of Color work. This may also include teacher unions and labor organizations. Because university culture and climate may not be as relevant or as present in a non-teacher education setting, I've adjusted the framework slightly to include a broader consideration of community culture and climate, which considers the neighborhoods, families, and students that exist in-affiliation with or beyond the school site/district. Across these forces, climates, and cultures, it's important to examine the role of power and how people are positioned in relation to one another and their environment. Also, in the description of the psychological dimension, I remove the word "candidates" from Teacher Candidates of Color and instead refer to the Teacher of Color population more broadly. Overall, this framework provides a lens for thinking about the various components of a teacher's environment whether that's spatially, temporally, socially, culturally, historically, psychologically, and/or materially.

Figure 10. Dimensions of a Healthy Racial Climate for K-12 Teaching, Adapted from Kohli et al. (2022)

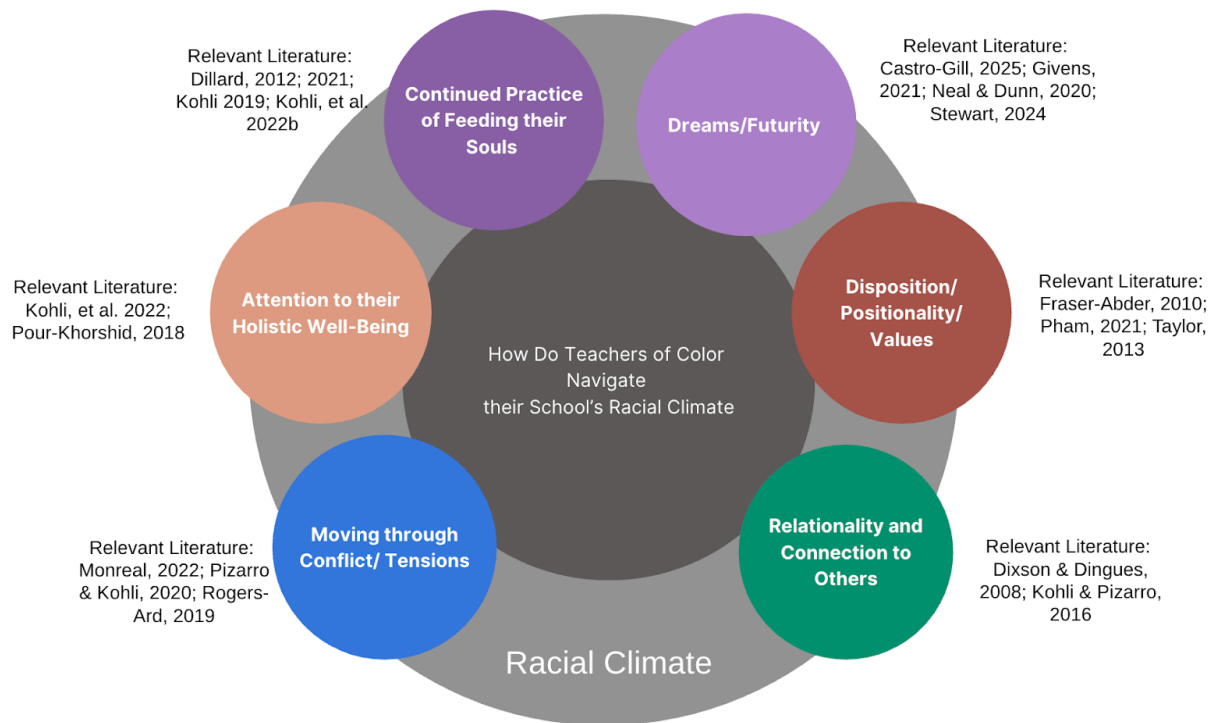


Then, I elaborated and further specified Yosso's (2005) concepts of navigational wealth by thinking about it alongside the adapted Healthy Racial Climate framework (Kohli et al., 2022), as well as the literature on Teacher of Color retention. The conceptual framework (Figure 11) I developed synthesizes ideas related to navigational wealth for Teachers of Color in the literature, delineating how they navigate their environments and make sense of their experiences based on existing research. In response to my data, I later added resistant wealth to the conceptual framework. Based on the literature, I hypothesized that Teachers of Color made sense of their experiences and navigated educational spaces through a combination of several factors:

- Personal Commitments - TOCs' disposition, positionality, and values inform the commitments they have and the decisions they make within the space of education (Fraser-Abder, 2010; Pham, 2022; Taylor, 2013).
- Relationality and Connection to Others - TOCs are informed by the social and relational experiences they have and the communities they exist within and are connected to (Dixson & Dinges, 2008; Kohli & Pizarro, 2016).
- Attention to their Holistic Well-being - TOCs consider their well-being and health not just physically, but emotionally and mentally, spiritually and socially (Kohli, et al. 2022; Pour-Khorshid, 2018).
- Movement through Conflict/Tensions - TOCs are provided with structures or adopt strategies and practices for navigating hostile racial climates and oppressive practices in schooling (Monreal, 2022; Pizarro & Kohli, 2020; Rogers-Ard, 2019).
- Dreams/Futurity - TOCs not only imagine but create and build towards the futures they want to see in education through fugitive pedagogies (Castro-Gill, 2025; Givens, 2021; Neal & Dunn, 2020; Stewart, 2024; Stovall, 2024).
- Continued Practice of Feeding of their Souls - TOCs engage in ongoing learning through critical professional learning and engage in ancestral and cultural remembrance to support their creative and spiritual selves (Dillard, 2012; 2021; Kohli, 2019; Kohli, et al. 2022b).

I synthesized all of these ideas in Figure 11, which visually represents my initial conceptual framework.

Figure 11. A Conceptual Framework for How Teachers of Color Navigate their School's Racial Climates: A Literature-Based Elaboration of Yosso's (2005) Navigational Wealth



These points emerged from the literature on retention by considering some of the ways Teachers of Color make decisions about their roles as educators and whether or not to stay or leave teaching. The ideas here elaborate on Yosso's concept of navigational wealth by identifying some specific ways TOCs maneuver through institutions that are not necessarily built for them and the various skills or knowledge they draw upon to navigate their environments.

Methods

Study Design

Critical Race Methodology. I used a critical race methodology (CRM) (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) approach that is informed by critical race theory and grounded in the experiences

of Teachers of Color. Data gathering can be, and has historically been, an extractive process. CRM recognizes the ways that racism and systems of oppression manifest in our society and within education and also seeks to transform the ways that research can be done to challenge dominant research methods. For one, participants are not just data sources and CRM provides a framing that facilitates a relationship between participants and researchers and honors the brilliance, challenges, and complexities inherent in the experiences of those who share their stories and lived realities. With this, I aimed to position Teachers of Color as the stewards of their own information and see my role as a researcher is one of a listener of and learner with the communities I'm in conversation with, making space for relationality and reciprocity when it comes to knowledge sharing rather than a one-sided extraction.

This project takes up a critical race methodology approach through the use of counterstories, or counterstorytelling. Counterstorytelling, is a critical race method informed by critical race theory, in which marginalized people are centered, and their narratives about and experiences with racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, and other systems of domination are validated and seen as necessary forms of data (Delgado, 1989; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Yosso, 2006). Espinoza and Taylor (2021) named their use of testimonios and pláticas as a way to take up a counterstorytelling methodology with in-service bilingual Latinx teachers. Testimonios are critical narratives of participants' personal and professional stories and have been used by Chicano/a and Latiné/x scholars to bear witness to experiential knowledge (Blackmer Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012). Pláticas are “both a method and methodology rooted in Chicana Feminist theory, that call for a way of structuring culturally sustaining dialogue that engages the full humanity of researcher(s) and collaborators” (Fierros & Bernal, 2016; Hannegan-Martinez, 2023, p. 2). I incorporate the method of counterstorytelling by centering Teachers of Color and

their experiences, including both how they've been impacted by oppressive systems in schooling and recognizing their agency and testimonies of resistance. This paper is a counterstory of Teacher of Color retention because most of the research on TOC retention thus far primarily focuses on TOCs at the point of entering the field. This counterstory of retention focuses on the resources that experienced in-service TOCs reflected on as enabling them to continue teaching.

I combined methods of counterstorytelling with collaborative and collective knowledge building practices by inviting participating teachers to engage with one another at a retreat. In doing so, I positioned myself as a co-learner, and created multiple avenues for teachers to reflect on the research process. Another way educational research with in-service Teachers of Color has explicitly made relationality and collective knowledge a priority from the outset of the research design is through focus groups, group interviews, and affinity groups with or consisting of Teachers of Color (Duncan, 2021; Jackson & Knight-Manuel, 2019; Lee, 2016; Mosely, 2018; Pour-Khorshid, 2018). This paper contributes to the ongoing research with groups of in-service Teachers of Color, building on the ways counterstorytelling can be done as a collective and how such methods could help us to expand our scope for studying Teacher of Color retention.

Multiple Embedded Case Study. I specifically used a qualitative multiple embedded case study design (Brown, 2008; Merriam, 1998; Yazan, 2015; Yin, 2002) for this project. Like Merriam (1998) who writes about case study research in education, I define a qualitative case study as a description and analysis of an entity or phenomenon that is bounded. I agree with Merriam that the phenomenon cannot be separated from its context and that a case study analysis is fruitful for exploring and understanding a phenomenon's context and process. In alignment with Merriam's (1998) qualitative case study design, I conducted a literature review, constructed a theoretical framework, identified a research problem or opportunity, crafted and sharpened my

research questions, and selected my cases utilizing purposeful sampling. In accordance with Yin (2002), I designed a multiple embedded case study which involves multiple units of analysis. I examined each individual Teacher of Color as embedded units of analysis within two cases: experienced Teachers of Color who have stayed in the classroom as in-service teachers and experienced Teachers of Color who have left the classroom. In other words, all individuals still teaching and/or continued teaching through retirement were treated as one case, and all individuals no longer teaching in the classroom and have not yet retired were treated as another case. The sources of information that informed these cases were the responses from the Teachers of Color about their experiences with retention (staying and/or leaving), my observations of how teachers engage in the process, the artifacts generated from each session, and teachers' discussion and reflections about the process. I then conducted within-case comparisons to examine what current teachers had in common with one another and what those who were no longer teaching had in common with one another as well as the nuances for each individual teacher embedded in the case. Following that, I completed a cross-case comparison, by comparing across the two cases, the case of teachers still teaching and those not teaching to consider what I've learned through each case and also what is learned about the cases in comparison with one other. A multiple case study approach allowed me to explore the complexities and variation of teachers' experiences across varied contexts.

Participant Selection

This study's selection and recruitment process for cases considers my own educational lineages and who I see as contributing to sustaining the work of Teacher of Color in a K-12 context and their recommendations. My criteria for selection included that participants: 1) identify as an Educator of Color (Black, Indigenous, Latiné/x, Asian, Pacific Islander, Desi,

Multiracial), 2) currently teach or have taught in a K-12 classroom context, 3) have at least 5 years of teaching experience. In my selection process, I also considered proximity to the Midwest and the likelihood of teachers being able to attend an in-person retreat. I used purposive and snowball sampling and specifically sought out expert informants to explore what it takes to support Teachers of Color to persist, endure, thrive, and/or sustain themselves in an educational context (Etikan et al., 2016). In addition to direct recruitment, I used a limited snowball recruitment strategy, (Glesne, 2011) where participants and colleagues recommend or request that friends or colleagues participate in the study. Researchers who focus on Teachers of Color have used similar sampling methods (Bridwell, 2012; Farinde et al, 2016; Kohli, 2019; Monreal, 2022). This recruitment strategy was also informed by the approach I took with a pilot study I conducted the year prior.

Participants

I interviewed 25 current and former TOCs (Table 4). Of the 11 current TOCs interviewed, 8 attended the first retreat. Of the 14 former TOCs interviewed, 6 attended the second retreat. Participants represented both elementary and secondary schools, different subject areas, and years of experience.

Table 4. Participant Demographics

Name	current/former TOC	Participated in Retreat?	Race/Ethnicity	Teaching Experience	Grade Level	Grades/Subjects Taught
Alejandra	current	Yes	Latiné/x or Xicanx: Mexican American	7	Middle/High School	MS and HS Spanish and Heritage Spanish
CJ	current	Yes	Black or African American, White	6	High School	9th, 10th & 11th Grade ELA
Emilio	current	Yes	Latiné/x or Xicanx: Puerto Rican American, White	6	High School	Math, Algebra 1, Geometry, Algebra 2, 9th-12th
Hope	current	Yes	Black or African American	23	Elementary School	K-5, Reading Specialist, ESL certified
Kai	current	Yes	Black or African American	30	High School	9- 12; ELA courses like English 9, 10, American Literature, SAT Prep., African American Humanities, African American Literature
Kathryn	current	No	Asian or Asian American: Filipino American, White	15	Middle/High School	6-12 Spanish
Kaya	current	No	Asian or Asian American: Filipino American	6	High School	Dance/Physical Education
Roxanne	current	Yes	Black or African American	24	High School	ELA 9-12, AP Language and Composition, Humanities
Savannah	current	Yes	Asian or Asian American: Chinese American	8	High School	AP Macroeconomics, World History, Civics, Sociology, Latin History, Asian History

Shay	current	Yes	Black or African American	7	Middle/High School	6th - 8th & 10th: ELA / 9-12: Speech, Debate, Leadership TV Production and Newscast
Whitney	current, retired as a teacher	No	Black or African American	46	High School	9-12, English, Science, and Social Studies
Aaliyah	Former, district support role	No	Black or African American	6	Elementary/ Middle School	1-3; all subjects/self-contained, 6-8; ELA
Chernell	former, curriculum developer	No	Black or African American	11	Elementary/ Middle School	K-4 and 7th grade
Dominique	former, education consultant	Yes	Black or African American	5	High School	Drama, Theatre, College and Career Readiness, ELA
Erika	former, laid-off and seeking new employment	Yes	Black or African American	8	High School	Mathematics: 9 - 12
Donte (went by last name Garrett)	former, admin (principal)	Yes	Black or African American	10	Elementary/ Middle School	K- 8 Social Studies, ELA, Debate
Hana	former, graduate student	No	Asian or Asian American: South Asian American (parents from India and Bangladesh)	9.5	Middle/High School	SPED; 5-12: Muslim history and ethics, American Lit, foundational reading, World Lit, etc.
Inez	former, self-employed	No	Indigenous: Mixteco, Latiné/x or Xicanx	6.5	Elementary/ Middle School	1st/2nd grade bilingual self contained: 4th, 6th, & 7th grade departmentalized math
Juliana	former, education-based non-profit coordinator	Yes	Latiné/x or Xicanx: Mexican American	10	Elementary/ Middle School	Bilingual 2-4th grade Digital Literacy/STEM K-8th grade

Marie	former, graduate student	No	Black or African American	17	Elementary/ Middle/High School	K-12; math, English, history, science
Ming	former, healthcare chief of staff	No	Asian or Asian American: Taiwanese American	5	High School	9-12 grade, government, economics, IB history HL 1(US history), IB history HL 2 (world history), ethnic studies
Riya	former, non-profit program manager	Yes	Asian or Asian American: Korean American	6	Middle School	6th/7th math and science; 6th grade humanities; 8th grade English
Sebastian	former, admin/multilingual division lead	No	Latiné/x or Xicanx: Mexican American	10	High School	Spanish Heritage, EL Social Studies, EL
Tiaga	former, professor	Yes	Black or African American, Latiné/x or Xicanx	5	Middle/High School	6 - 12 Spanish
Viveka	former, curriculum developer	No	Asian or Asian American: Indian American	5	Elementary School	elementary, K-5

Data Sources

The data sources included recorded videos and transcripts of the interview and focus group sessions, artifacts from teachers' classrooms and lives (handouts, photos, videos, classroom/school tour), artifacts created by teachers from the mapping exercises (educational journey maps, ecomaps, countermaps and annotations, maps of freedom dreams, visual art/media, photographs, collages, screenshots of visuals), field observations, and surveyed reflections following the mapping activities about the process.

I first conducted 1:1 interviews with each of the 10 current TOCs and 15 former TOCs. Each interview lasted approximately 90-120 minutes. Teachers were asked questions about their teaching experience; racialized and social identities; and their perspectives on what supports them to stay in education (Appendix A). Some participants engaged in optional photo elicitation (Harper, 2002), sharing photographs, videos and other artifacts of their teaching context as part of their interview to support their counterstorytelling.

I also facilitated focus groups at two multi-day retreats, one for current TOCs and one for former TOCs. At each retreat, teachers engaged in three different types of mapping activities with a focus on their pasts, presents, and futures: educational journey mapping, ecomapping, countermapping, and freedom dreaming. Each session lasted approximately 2 hours. During each mapping activity, teachers were asked to respond to a prompt and given the creative freedom to create a visual or written representation to map their responses (Appendix B, C, and D). In the second half of the session, teachers were asked to share what they reflected on and created in a whole group conversation.

When I completed my pilot study, I found that the tools of educational journey mapping, countermapping, freedom dreaming and collective counterstorytelling worked together and

allowed me as an educational researcher to understand different aspects of teachers' experiences over time and in different spaces. I decided to continue using these tools as data sources because I saw how these different data sources mutually reinforced and built upon each other in ways that allowed me to understand different aspects of teachers' sensemaking about what supports and sustains them.

Data Analysis

I adopted a constant comparative method analytic approach (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), which involves the comparison of segments of data with each other to determine similarities and differences, and grouping data together on a similar dimension based on patterns and connections I observed. Using inductive coding as part of my initial read, I identified emerging patterns in the data. Using deductive coding, I assigned codes that reflect the conceptual relationships evident in my conceptual framework. These codes included the dimensions of Kohli's (2022) Healthy Racial Climate framework and elements of navigational wealth building on Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth model. My initial codes spoke to teachers' personal commitments, relationality and connection to others, attention to holistic well-being, movement through conflict/tensions, dreams/futurity, and continued practice of feeding their souls. They also included the dimensions of a Healthy Racial Climate (historical, organizational, compositional, behavioral, and psychological), enacting forces (sociohistorical, government/political), and existing culture and climates (community, school site/districts). Later, my analysis more explicitly took up Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth model to also include aspirational, familial, social, linguistic, and resistant wealth in addition to navigational wealth as part of my data analysis. This supported me in refining my conceptual framework and allowed me to see potential for further connections across Kohli's (2022) Healthy Racial Climate

framework and Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth model rather than treating them independently from one another.

Positionality

As a Pinay education scholar and former high school history teacher, my identities heavily shaped how I designed this study and carried it out. I sought to center the experiences and expertise of the current and former Teachers of Color in this project. In many ways, my prior experiences supported me in recruiting and building trust with teachers throughout the research process. I also wanted to be mindful to not project my own experiences into the data and my analysis of teachers' reports about their experiences. I used memo-ing and discussion with peers as ways to process any tensions that came up for me and to be mindful of my subjectivities so that I could focus on my participants' perspectives without imposing mine.

Findings

Teachers of Color drew on or identified a variety of navigational and resistant resources as critical for sustaining their work in educational spaces. From the data, five main findings emerged:

1. TOCs drew on **their values or commitments to justice** even in spaces that were not supportive of those values or commitments.
2. TOCs drew on **their positionality and criticality to think systemically** about their environments.
3. TOCs drew on **intergenerational knowledge and built community relationships** as systems of support.
4. TOCs drew on **resources to purposefully engage in racially literate practices** even if that was not the norm in their school environment.

5. TOCs drew on **resources to attend to their holistic well-being** and to protect themselves, their communities, and students.

Teachers in the study spoke to the ways they drew on or experienced these resources in their own work. In Table 5, I share a summary of the main findings and subfindings, which also includes the number of current and former TOCs that spoke to each subfinding. I then share one or two illustrative examples for each subfinding and highlight notable distinctions across the cases of C-TOCs and F-TOCs.

Table 5. Resources TOCs Draw on or Identify as Critical for Sustaining their Work in Educational Spaces

RQ: What navigational and resistant resources do experienced Teachers of Color draw on or identify as critical for sustaining their work in educational spaces?	Current TOCs Reported/Total	Former TOCs Reported/Total
Finding 1. TOCs drew on their values or commitments to justice even in spaces that were not supportive of those values or commitments.		
Commitments to justice evident in their reflections on <i>teacher preparation</i> , student teaching, and <i>mentorship</i> received as an early career educator	11/11	14/14
Commitments to justice in the classroom and at their schools, especially in designing or advocating for more <i>critical and culturally relevant curriculum</i> and programming	11/11	14/14
Finding 2. The majority of TOCs in the study drew on their positioning and criticality to think systemically about their environments, although it appeared that current TOCs found more ways to navigate within school systems while former TOCs expressed uncertainty that schools could be a place for justice.		
A criticality of systems and awareness of their <i>positionality</i> within systems of power and schooling spaces	10/11	13/14
A criticality of systems of the <i>trauma and systemic harms of schooling</i> and urgency needed to address those harms	7/11	13/14

Finding 3. TOCs drew on **intergenerational knowledge and built community relationships** as systems of support.

Intergenerational knowledge and community building in ways that are <i>familial or honor ancestral and community perspectives</i>	11/11	14/14
Intergenerational and community building amongst <i>colleagues and leadership</i>	11/11	14/14

Finding 4. TOCs drew on **resources to purposefully engage in racially literate practices** even if that was not the norm in their school environment.

Racially literate practices in the form of <i>linguistic and cultural resources</i>	11/11	14/14
Racially literate practices in the form of <i>asset-oriented approaches</i>	11/11	13/14

Finding 5. TOCs drew on **resources to attend to their holistic well-being** and to protect themselves, their communities, and students.

Attention to Holistic Well-being in the form of <i>external supports</i>	11/11	14/14
Attention to Holistic Well-being in the form of <i>protective strategies</i>	11/11	13/14

Finding 1. Drawing on Commitments to Justice

Finding 1. TOCs drew on their values or commitments to justice even in spaces that were not supportive of those values or commitments.

- Commitments to Justice: Teacher preparation and Mentorship (C-TOCs - 11/11; F-TOCs - 14/14)
- Commitments to Justice: Critical and Culturally Relevant Curriculum (C-TOCs - 11/11; F-TOCs - 14/14)

Teachers of Color in both groups reported experiences that highlighted their valuing of and commitments to justice in education. This mostly came through in their reflections about the extent to which they were exposed to or developed culturally relevant or justice-oriented curriculum and programming. When asked about their teacher preparation, student teaching

experience, and any mentorship they received as an early career educator, TOCs reflected on their justice-oriented values to affirm or question the training they received. Both C-TOC and F-TOCs also spoke about their commitments to justice in the classroom and at their schools after they started working full time. This primarily looked like designing or advocating for more critical and culturally relevant curriculum and programming. They saw these resources and programming as valuable tools for supporting their students and colleagues.

1.1 Commitment to Justice: Teacher Preparation

Both C-TOC and F-TOCs drew on their values of justice in education as they reflected on the extent to which they had critical and culturally relevant curriculum and programming in their teacher preparation or from mentors in their early career. During the 1:1 interviews, I asked TOCs about their teacher preparation, student teaching experience, and any mentorship they received as an early career educator, which all teachers (n=25) responded to with varying degrees of specificity. The majority of both former and current TOCs reported mixed reviews (n=16, 7 C-TOCs, 9 F-TOCs) regarding access to culturally relevant curriculum and preparation to work in diverse schools. Only a few teachers reported their programs failed to prepare them adequately (n=2, 2 F-TOCs). The rest reported positively about participating in teacher education programs that strengthened their racial literacy and understanding of systemic injustices (n=7, 4 C-TOCs, 3 F-TOCs). Those who witnessed strong examples of teaching in their teacher preparation, student teaching, or early career mentorship (n=7, 4 C-TOCs, 3 F-TOCs) talked about how their experiences were conducive to supporting their future work with Black and Brown students. While not the case for all teachers, there tended to be more positive reflections from current TOCs (4 of 11, 36%) than former TOCs (3 of 14, 21%) about their teacher

education in terms of access to culturally relevant courses or more diverse cohorts and teacher educators.

One aspect of teacher preparation and early career mentorship that several current and former TOCs drew on as a resource was the opportunity to learn from Black teacher educators and Teacher Educators of Color, which provided a supportive structure for learning about and supporting their justice-oriented teaching. For example, Viveka, an Indian American woman and mother who taught elementary for 5 years before moving out of the classroom and into a curriculum development role, talked about learning about systemic racism in one of her courses:

Multiculturalism and education. The history of red lining, the history of housing segregation, residential segregation, those are not things I had learned about before that class. And so that understanding of how systemic racism was, I didn't get that until I was in her class. And that was pretty transformative and just how I viewed myself and how I viewed teaching in general...I had been someone who fought for justice before that, but I hadn't had a platform or a belief system or anything until thinking about it in the context of schools and that kind of lighted a fire in me that shifted the way I engaged with anti-racist type of work, especially in education and the piece of culturally responsiveness...[but] it wasn't integrated throughout the whole program. And I was constantly talking with people and talking with professors about how that thread wasn't in other classes, really at all.

Viveka spoke about one of her professors, also a Woman of Color, who taught one course in particular that shaped her trajectory as a teacher and understanding of anti-racism in education. This class exposed her to understanding the historical context of many of the systemic issues embedded within and creating inequities in schooling and for students in the United States.

Viveka explained that the concepts learned in this course were not woven across the program and this lack of alignment was something that she advocated for and spoke about with her professors. Viveka also mentioned the significance of having a Woman of Color teacher education professor and also three Black mentor teachers at her internship and student teaching placements. Having highly effective Teacher of Color mentors who engaged in restorative practices or were heavily involved in the local community and built strong relationships with families allowed Viveka to see the possibilities for herself as a Teacher of Color. Not only did Viveka draw on her values of justice in education to both critique the curriculum and programming offered in her teacher preparation, she also affirmed the importance of getting to work with Teacher Educators of Color and mentor Teachers of Color, which served as significant resources for her moving forward in her career. Both current and former teachers, like CJ and Inez, also shared having mixed experiences with mentorship and teacher preparation, reflecting on the limited opportunities to engage with justice-oriented pedagogies.

1.2 Commitment to Justice: Critical and Culturally Relevant Curriculum

Both C-TOC and F-TOCs spoke about drawing on, designing, or advocating for more critical and culturally relevant curriculum and programming, which indicated a commitment to justice in education. They reflected on any existing justice-oriented programming and mostly spoke about critical and culturally relevant resources they've developed to support their students and colleagues. All teachers (n=25) from both cases spoke to utilizing or advocating for inclusive and responsive curriculum and oftentimes doing so without or with limited support from their administrators and districts. Many TOCs also spoke about valuable collaborations and partnerships that emerged or contributed to these curricular and professional projects.

Both current and former teachers spoke about ways they worked to be responsive to students' experiences, which demonstrated their commitments to justice-oriented practices in education. One powerful example of teachers' commitments to justice in the teaching practice that spans across three different teachers' stories was that of an African American humanities course. Whitney, Roxanne, and Kai contributed to developing this interdisciplinary course across multiple schools in their district, each having co-taught the class with another colleague at their respective schools. Whitney, a Black woman who taught high school social studies, ELA, and science for 46 years until retirement, alongside a colleague Ms. Hill, who is now a principal in Texas, created the course when they realized that their students were coming to them saying that the other teacher was teaching similar content. The two teachers jointly created African American humanities as a way to enhance each others' instruction. Roxanne, a Black woman and mother and 9-12th grade ELA and Humanities teacher and department lead with 24 years of teaching experience, explained the significance of the course for her and her students, which demonstrates her commitment to providing students with a culturally relevant curriculum:

Each year for the last 12 years, my class, the African American humanities class, they are responsible for the Black History Month Show...Humanities is art, music, dance, literature, and history, so we take those five disciplines and we create a show that educates first and entertains second. The students really love it. It's the highlight of the year. But I think in the class we built this community of learners, and it's a unique experience because again, we have this class in a white centered space. For a lot of kids in [the district], this is the first time that they are taking a class like this, and it is also the first time where they have been surrounded by so many Teachers of Color...and humanities is also...it's an AC (accelerated) course. But we take any kid. You don't have

to be approved to take the course. We've had kids who are on IEPs. We've had kids who are on 504s. If you want to do it...if you're willing to do the work, we are willing to have you in the class. It doesn't matter. And so, it's been a joy to have these kids, and they get to see something, you know? Like the whole show is the project, and then they get to see the recording for years and years. So they get to see the product of what they've done.

As Roxanne speaks to the long-lasting legacy of this course she has taught for 12 years, she demonstrates her commitment to her students and justice in teaching. By providing students with the opportunity to teach their peers and community, celebrate their humanity, and cultivate a space of fugitivity, Roxanne provides a Black-centered learning experience in a predominantly white district.

Roxanne also explained that the African American humanities course often thrives in spite of administration and pushback, which highlights Roxanne's commitments to justice that enable her to continue despite the lack of administrative support:

One of my principals, he's no longer there. Well, he's still in [the district], but he's no longer principal [at my school]. He talked about the African American humanities class, and the success of that class. And I had to be honest with him. I said the success of the class is not because of you, but it's in spite of you and what happened in the community. It's not one Black history month where we put the show on and we don't get pushed back from the community, asking why we do the things that we do? If a poem hits too close to home, why are they saying that? One year, the kids, it was during a lot of demonstrations, right? Social protests. They were highlighting social protest. So the kids held up signs. It was a skit and they held up signs. And then one of the parents, who was a big donor, apparently to the swim team, wrote the principal and said, you know, how come you said

that the other teacher and I were teaching our kids to hate law enforcement? And why don't we teach our kids to obey law enforcement and therefore they won't get shot?

Despite opposition from wealthy donors and administrators, Roxanne explained that the course continues to have a powerful impact and is a testament to both her work and her students' work. She only received praise in retrospect from one of her principals, and Roxanne let him know that he had no claim to its success, but rather the course succeeded in spite of him. While receiving pushback every year has been a site of struggle, Roxanne understands that this course and her presence, and what she and her fellow Teachers of Color represent, are significant.

Finding 2. Drawing on a Criticality of Systems

Finding 2. The majority of TOCs in the study **drew on their positioning and criticality to think systemically** about their environments, although it appeared that current TOCs found more ways to navigate within school systems while former TOCs expressed uncertainty that schools could be a place for justice.

- Criticality of Systems: Positionality and Being Positioned as Teachers of Color (C-TOCs - 10/11; F-TOCs - 13/14)
- Criticality of Systems: Addressing the Trauma and Systemic Harms of Schooling (C-TOCs - 7/11; F-TOCs - 13/14)

The majority of TOCs in the study drew on their positioning and criticality to think systemically about their environments, although it appeared that current TOCs found more ways to navigate within school systems while many former TOCs expressed uncertainty that schools could be a place for justice. Both former and current TOCs shared that they thought about their positionality or perceived positioning as a Teacher of Color within systems of power and schooling spaces. Although both groups advocated for schools to take accountability for systemic change, it seemed that more former TOCs (n=13) than current TOCs (n=7) emphasized the urgency for institutions to acknowledge, address, prevent, and minimize the trauma and systemic harms of schooling and identified ways to serve education outside of schools.

2.1 Criticality of Systems: Positionality and Being Positioned as Teachers of Color

Both current (n=10) and former (n=14) TOCs spoke about how they were positioned within structures of power and systems of oppression in schooling and education as Teachers of Color. Most teachers drew on a critical analytic lens, leveraging both navigational and resistant capital, when reflecting on their experiences as educators. Their critical analyses and reflections informed how they maneuvered through educational structures that are typically not designed with them in mind and also informed how they respond to or challenge inequities. They discussed different ways of grappling with their racial and ethnic identities and other intersecting identities like gender and class. Some considered not only their minoritized identities, but also the privileges they have and how that impacts how they show up as a person, and as a teacher, in different spaces, or how they are perceived by others in those spaces.

Both former and current TOCs grappled with the tensions of their roles as teachers and used their criticality of systems as a resource to reflect on how they are perceived and how they see themselves in relation to those perceptions. Riya, a queer Korean American teacher who taught middle school for 6 years before transitioning to working at an educational non-profit, spoke about their identity as a queer Teacher of Color. During the interview, Riya spoke about their decision to go by Teacher Riya after three years, a title that designated respect but wasn't gendered, highlighting a navigational and resistant resource of creativity and problem solving within institutional norms:

I thought about how in Spanish and in Korean, you literally used the word teacher to refer to them. And so, my teacher name, beginning in my third year and after, was Teacher Riya. I felt really good because it's not gendered. It uses my first name, which I like. And

it is still a sign of respect because you are saying that I am your teacher, but it's a sign of respect without it focusing on the power dynamic.

Amidst a societal and school culture where going by Mr., Ms., Mrs., or Mx. is the norm, Riya found a solution that worked well for them and allowed them to honor their gender identity more fully as an educator. Later in the interview, Riya further commented on their experience as a queer Teacher of Color and how they leveraged their navigational and resistant resources to sustain their work at their second school. Riya reflected on their positionality as a queer Teacher of Color and the intentional choices they made to disrupt power dynamics and gendered norms through their teacher name. They drew from both the Korean and Spanish languages to position themselves in the classroom with students and with their colleagues, who Riya admitted had a difficult time with getting used to saying “Teacher Riya” compared to Riya’s students. Similarly, other F-TOCs and C-TOCs spoke about the ways institutionalized whiteness and race-evasive discourse shape their experiences and how they are positioned in their roles as educators, revealing the different ways their critical consciousness allowed them to understand how distinct and interlocking systems of power worked across schooling experiences. For some teachers, this looked like understanding where they can leverage their privilege, and for teachers like Riya, this looked like understanding structural limitations and making decisions on when and the extent to which they could push back.

2.2 Criticality of Systems: Addressing the Systemic Harm and Trauma of Schooling

Many current and former TOCs drew on their criticality of systems to identify the urgent need for institutions to acknowledge, address, prevent, or minimize the trauma and systemic harms of schooling. Although almost all TOCs (current, n=10, and former, n=13) drew on their criticality to talk about the necessity for systematic approaches to diversity, equity, and inclusion,

fewer TOCs (current, n=7, and former, n=13) directly critiqued the structural and systemic failures of their districts or schooling broadly. When drawing on their criticality to discuss addressing the traumas of schooling, current TOCs primarily spoke to the needs for effective, systems-wide DEI implementation as well as their presence in schools as a source of possibility in spite of systemic forces. When drawing on their criticality to discuss addressing the traumas of schooling, former TOCs spoke heavily of the grief and trauma that contributed to their departure from the classroom. A few of the former TOCs reported moving into educational leadership roles in the hopes of having a structural impact (n=2), the majority envisioned ways to support education outside of the classroom or schools (n=10), and many of them questioned if schools will ever be places for justice (n=7).

Current TOCs. Current teachers also critically reflected on the importance of their continued work in classrooms. This understanding of their continued presence seemed to operate as an important resistant resource in spite of systemic challenges. During the retreat, CJ commented appreciatively after everyone shared their educational journey maps, “I think it's really great that we're all not spiritually gone because the system is built to break all of us. And some of us have felt like we've hit that wall, but I feel like overall, not all of us have had that moment...This system is going to kill us. It's trying. It's trying to, every day, but we're still here, and I think that's really beautiful.” Despite an educational system that is set up to kill them and break them and their spirits, CJ acknowledged the beauty and hope in their collective presence at the retreat. The gratitude she shared highlighted the almost immediate impact these teachers and their stories had on one another. While naming the very real and urgent challenges they face as educators, CJ also spoke to the importance of being present in spite of everything stacked up against them. On the second day, Emilio, a biracial Puerto Rican and white male mathematics

teacher with 6 years of experience, shared a similar reflection with the group, commenting on being surrounded by like-minded educators, highlighting how they center positivity and joy in their discussion, “I think in all the conversations that we had so far, I appreciate that we're all leading with positivity and joy first and speaking positively about students and ourselves, and all of our “negativity”, put that in quotes, is with the schooling, of the system, which I think is just a good it's always important for reframing for me....” Emilio shared an appreciation for the language and framing that the group was using to speak about students and themselves in a positive light. He spoke to the ways that they are able to reclaim their joy and humanity even amidst all the negativity that is associated with schooling systems. This reclamation of their joy and humanity as they continued their work as classroom teachers served as an important navigational and resistant tool that current TOCs leveraged in their work, which contrasts with the sentiments former TOCs shared and how they saw themselves working in spaces outside the classroom or school.

Former TOCs. Former TOCs drew on their criticality of systems to question whether schools were the place for systemic change, and some specifically commented on contributing to educational justice in roles outside of the classroom. Dominique, a Black woman and former high school teacher with 5 years of experience in teaching drama, college/career readiness, and ELA, drew on this critical understanding to reflect on the teacher she wanted to be growing up and the version of herself that is having a different impact and sustains her work in education in a role that is outside of the classroom. She explained this as “giving space and grace to my 5-year-old self.” Dominique spoke about a tension she feels, where a part of her holds on to guilt and grief for her former self and inner child, but also she recognizes that she is expanding her definition of what it means to be an educator and where she can do the work of contributing to

her community. Dominique drew on this criticality to bring nuance to the idea of what it means to stay in education and sustain the work of Teachers of Color, envisioning new pathways for her contributions. Building on what Dominique shared, Juliana, a Mexican American woman who taught elementary/middle school for 10 years before transitioning to work for an education-related nonprofit organization, added:

Something I want to share too as you talked about your 5-year-old self. I have a brother who's four years younger. He is going into his second year teaching. Taught first grade...and just be able to support him. You know? In different ways, like setting up his classroom? Like going in and...I can do activities with the kids, while you grade, you do work. I can be whatever you need me to do. So to support those that are still in the classroom, because I feel like that is so important and I feel like that's what is missing.

Juliana found that while she was no longer a classroom teacher, she could still contribute to supporting the next generation of teachers that follows her through her younger brother who is an early career educator.

A notable contrast was how each group referred to continuity in teaching. Many of the current TOCs spoke to the continuity of and joy in their spirits despite working within schooling systems devoid of that continuity and joy. Although former TOCs left teaching full time, they saw their contributions to education and their communities still continuing, even if it was outside of the walls of a classroom or in a supporting role to current teachers. While many of them did not see schools as the place for them to fully enact the educational justice they were hoping to see as Teachers of Color, a majority of the former TOCs critically reflected on alternative ways they could still contribute to education.

Finding 3. Drawing on Intergenerational and Community Building

Finding 3. TOCs drew on intergenerational knowledge and built community relationships as systems of support.

- Intergenerational and Community Relationships: Familial and Intergenerational Influences (C-TOCs - 11/11; F-TOCs - 14/14)
- Intergenerational and Community Relationships: Colleagues and School Leadership (C-TOCs - 11/11; F-TOCs - 14/14)

TOCs drew influence from familial, intergenerational, and community relationships to both inform their teaching and create networks of support for themselves. Both current and former TOCs drew on their family and various intergenerational community influences to strengthen their pedagogical approaches. They also spoke about the significance of their colleagues and leadership in cultivating a community of support. More C-TOCs (n=7, 63%) than F-TOCs (n=2, 14%) chose to work geographically in a place where they had roots and spoke to the ways that they saw themselves giving back to the communities and places where they were both educated and miseducated.

3.1 Intergenerational and Community Relationships: Familial and Intergenerational Influences

TOCs drew influence from familial, intergenerational, and community relationships to inform their work as teachers. Most of the current (n=10) and former (n=13) teachers either spoke to their personal families and ancestors or generally discussed intergenerational perspectives and community influences in their teaching. Several of them even spoke to the way that ancestral or Indigenous community values and practices shaped the values and practices they hoped to carry into their teaching. Other ways this manifested was through stories of immigration and displacement, connections to community, and considerations of change over

time. These influences are indicative of TOCs' abilities to draw on social, familial, and navigational resources as well as the historical and behavioral dimension of their environment.

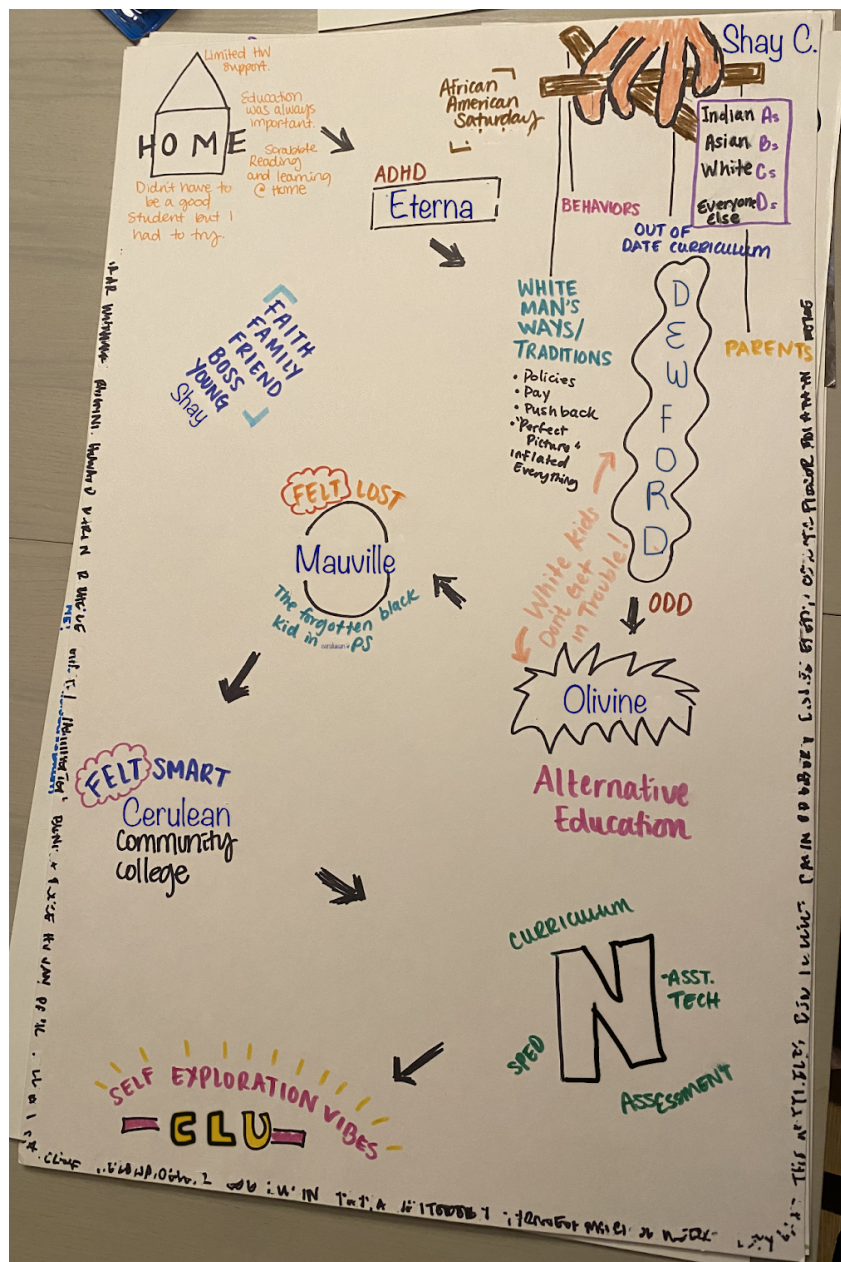
Shay, a Black woman and English and Language Arts teacher with 7 years of teaching experience at the middle school and high school level, drew on an intergenerational understanding of her lived experiences as a Black educator. Informed by her experiences in alternative education and the experiences that she and her mom had as students in the same district, Shay's perspective of teaching in the district where she attended shaped her approach in a way that was intergenerational. At the retreat, Shay drew on her experiences as she shared her educational journey map (Figure 4) with the group, highlighting different moments of connection and disconnect in her district:

For middle school, when I was thinking about, like, what type of education or miseducation that we learned? My mom always talks about when I came home the first week and I gave her the racial breakdown of the grades because I heard a kid talking about it, that the As were for the Indian students, and the Bs were for the Asian students, and the Cs were for the white students, and the Ds and everything else was for everybody else. And I also learned that white kids do not get in trouble because I mean, it was constantly Black and Brown kids in the intervention room, and for white kids, it would just be like, okay, don't do that again. And it is what it is. I teach at this building now, that I was kicked out of. And it can be challenging sometimes because I see it's a beautiful place to be, but we still have so much growth, because they really struggle with identifying their own problems. But I work there because I remember what it was like to be isolated there. So that's how I try to get back. And then my border just represents all of

the Educators of Color that I've had through my K-12 experience. Honorable mention, Roxanne was my English Teacher.

Shay draws on her knowledge and experiences of attending the district she now teaches in as a student. In this district, she experienced disciplinary harms and witnessed structural inequities play out. While Shay doesn't necessarily have many students that look like her, she draws on her experiences of isolation as a student to inform how she works Black students in this district who may experience the same isolation. She also drew on this experiential knowledge to reflect on the potential of her district and the contribution she wants to make as someone who understands what it's like to be a student there. Like Shay, there were several current teachers who taught in the communities where they are from or where they went to school including Emilio, Alejandra, and Kai. Among the F-TOCs, only Inez and Juliana taught and remained in the communities they grew up in. There is this notion of return reflected across Shay's story and in many of the others who also returned to teach where they were students. For many of them, there seemed to be a yearning to be able to pay it forward or provide support to students in ways they would have wanted as students.

Figure 12. Shay's Educational Journey Map



3.2 Intergenerational and Community Relationships: Colleagues and School Leadership

Both current (n=11) and former (n=14) TOCs spoke about the significance of their colleagues and leadership as contributing to their community of support. This includes Colleagues of Color, white colleagues, and supportive administrators who have shared values or serve as possible mentors or partners. For the group of current Teachers of Color, many of them

found a unique point of connection across their experiences: having a white woman ally who they perceived as actively supportive of them and their work. Both groups spoke about drawing on colleagues who support them as resources even in districts with oppositional colleagues or in spaces with few TOCs, whether that was through a critical mass of TOCs and/or white women allies, but former TOCs often framed this through a lens of having those supportive relationships threatened.

Multiple TOCs spoke about having strong connections with colleagues, specifically other Educators of Color. For example, Kathryn, a biracial Filipina and white woman and Spanish teacher with 15 years of teaching high school and middle school, mentioned that sometimes teachers bond with colleagues through trauma, forming temporary friendships, but at her current school she has found a strong community among two fellow Women of Color teachers:

I have phenomenal colleagues that support...that help problem-solve with me. There's a like mindedness in the way in which we work, but also in the way in which we approach students. So my two very close teacher friends, one who is Honduran, one who is Indian. We all approach our classrooms like I'm here to support you. I'm here to watch you make mistakes. I want you to make mistakes, and I want you to learn from those mistakes. Because in the school environment itself, we see a lot of perfection is the only thing that you can produce, otherwise, I don't want to see it. Knowing that I have those two pillars in my life, it really just helps me want to do more for my students and for my own personal growth as an educator.

Kathryn shared how she found solace and support in two Women of Color teacher friends at her school site who have a shared commitment and willingness to collaborate to best serve their students. Her description of the relationship she has with these two colleagues and how they

support each other through mistakes and learning opportunities indicates that this collective mentorship was developed through trust and has opened up new possibilities for teacher learning and growth. As Kathryn describes wanting to do more for her students, having this informal professional learning community with two Women of Color teachers seemed to increase her capacity to do more for students. This also appeared to counter narratives of surveillance like when teachers are highly scrutinized and evaluated for their teaching, for example, with the Danielson framework that other current TOCs in this study described as frustrating. Here, the conversation about imperfection and learning with another trusted teacher to work on improving one's teaching is more about abundance and opportunities for growth through collaboration and support.

The group of current TOCs also mentioned how allyship from white teachers could be a significant resource in predominantly white spaces. A notable conversation that came up amongst the group of current TOCs after Roxanne shared her ecomap was when several teachers reported having at least one white woman colleague who they perceived as effectively working with them as a TOC:

Roxanne: I have...one of the ladies that teaches with me, Kelly, white lady about five foot two, blonde, very non-assuming. Have you ever seen Key & Peele? They have this skit where one is Obama and the other one is Obama translator. [laughs] This little white woman is my Obama translator because they accept what she... like if I put an edge in my voice and I'm almost six feet tall and Black and a woman, oh Roxanne, you're so sassy. I'm not at all. But I'll have Kelly. Kelly will be like. Roxanne, I got this. What she said was....[laughs]

Kai: That's my Kate.

Roxanne: Oh that's your...See in this district, if you want to stay in [this city] and you're Black...

CJ: Find that white ally.

Kai: Yeah. Mine, she's from South Africa...but she's white. Because she's from South Africa, when she came here, she said I can't stand how these white people act. I'm like....[makes a face]. But she'll say it like she's not white, like they're white. She's saying I can't stand the privilege. She's like it's just bleeding everywhere.

Savannah: I had that in my community too that I didn't mention. I had a co-teacher, white lady, Kim. She's an English teacher, so we taught...[a class] they were tracked below regular. But whenever I talk about race and the kids are like, ugh, here's our Asian teacher talking about race. It was nice having a white ally...So she was an important part of me teaching in the community.

This discussion indicated that white women allies could play a pivotal role in department meetings with other educators or in the classroom with students. The teachers identified the value in having white women co-conspirators in their work, especially when trying to advocate for their ideas in predominantly white and privileged spaces. This conversation was reflective of how teachers from privileged positions might support TOCs by recognizing the pervasiveness of whiteness and privilege in schools and more effectively amplifying their voices and needs. Although most of the conversations about whiteness in schooling tended to reflect on its harms on Communities of Color, several C-TOCs spoke about having positive interactions with one white colleague. This moment reflected a notable shift and indicated the promise of effective forms of allyship from white colleagues.

Teachers, like Whitney, also spoke to the power of having strong school leaders who create opportunities and pathways for teacher leadership and professional growth. Several former TOCs also shared examples of the support they received from Colleagues of Color. Though for some like Dominique and Aaliyah, this was through a lens of increased scrutiny and having those relationships challenged.

Finding 4. Drawing on Resources to Support Racially Literate Practices

Finding 4. TOCs drew on resources to purposefully engage in racially literate practices even if that was not the norm in their school environment.

- Racially Literate Practices: Linguistic and Cultural Resources (C-TOCs - 11/11; F-TOCs - 14/14)
- Racially Literate Practices: Asset-Orientations (C-TOCs - 11/11; F-TOCs - 13/14)

Both former and current Teachers of Color drew on resources to engage purposefully with racially literate teaching practices, even if that was not the norm in their school environment. Specifically, they reported drawing on their linguistic and cultural resources, their knowledge of other languages and cultures, and their communication and storytelling skills to support their students. They also spoke about their asset-oriented approaches in their work with students, drawing on their aspirational wealth and knowledge of students' capacity and brilliance.

4.1 Racially Literate Practices: Linguistic and Cultural Resources

Both former and current teachers reported utilizing their linguistic resources, their knowledge of other languages and cultures, as well as their communication and storytelling skills, to support their students. All current TOCS (n=11) and former TOCs (n=14) brought up some form of linguistic resources that supported their work with students and communities. Most teachers spoke generally about their understanding of different cultures and languages and their

values of multiculturalism, while some spoke more specifically about their language knowledge and communicating as bilingual/multilingual speakers. A few teachers talked about different forms of storytelling and communication and ways they sought to incorporate these modes of expression in their classrooms.

Many of the current teachers spoke about how they valued language. Alejandra, a Mexican American high school Spanish teacher entering her 8th year of teaching, shared that her dad would send her to his hometown in Mexico during the summers so she would not forget her Spanish and could strengthen her language fluency. She spoke about the power of those experiences in influencing her decision to become a Spanish teacher where she draws on her language knowledge to support her students' learning. When asked to create an educational journey map of her experiences with education and miseducation, Alejandra made a connection to an assignment she uses in her Spanish classrooms, "I have them map where they learn their language...And then I end up teaching the ethnic studies component of that later on...Where have you felt safe speaking Spanish and where have you not felt safe and why? And then we also look into the raciolinguistics within the Spanish world." Alejandra draws on her educational journey and own language learning of Spanish to support her students to reflect on their own language use. Also, by adding an element of critical analysis in the assignment, she understands valuing her students' storytelling practices and supporting them to have a deeper understanding of the role of language in society. Hope, a Black woman and K-5 Reading Specialist with 23 years of experience and an ESL certification, told the group at the retreat that she was learning Spanish. Aware of the growing Latiné and Spanish-speaking population in her community, Hope saw developing her own language skills as a way to improve her abilities to communicate and interact with students and families in her district. Former TOCs, like Juliana and Chernell, also

spoke about drawing on language skills and cultural knowledge to connect with and see value in their Black and Latino students, who were often vilified at school for communication styles that were perceived as too loud or indicative of a lack of knowledge.

4.2 Racially Literate Practices: Asset-Orientations

Both current and former TOCs spoke about their asset-oriented approaches in their work with students, drawing on their knowledge of students' capacity and brilliance as well as their criticality of schooling systems that disproportionately disadvantage Students of Color. While they may not have spoken positively of all students in every interaction, all current (n=11) and former (n=14) teachers spoke about their belief in students' abilities at least once during their interview or at the retreat. Some teachers had specific examples of how they took asset-based approaches in their teaching practices, which allowed them to engage in racial literacy practices in a meaningful way.

CJ drew on her asset-oriented approach as she worked with students even when her practices were questioned by colleagues. Responding to a conversation about the Danielson Framework and policing students' bodies, CJ drew on her asset-oriented framing as she recalled a colleague who indirectly complained about the way she managed her classroom:

I got a letter of complaint about me this year. I'm like, This is crazy because this was nine days before the school year ended and she was retiring. I'm like, You must have been bored because...the crazy thing is, my admin never brought it up to me, but that coworker told another coworker who was like, I'm telling CJ. She's like, I got to let her know if this is coming. It was never brought up to me. So the good news is my admin did not elevate it to me at all. But the teacher complained I was too free with my students by letting them go to the bathroom when they wanted to and to let them work in the hallway.

I've got a windowless classroom. It gets hot. If my kid wants to work in the hallway because it's too stuffy, I'm going to let them work in the hallway. We'll get a clipboard and a pass and they can go sit right outside the room, and she was like, she's too free with them. She lacks the discipline. She was white, yes. I just was like, Huh. Interesting. Because to me, I'm not going to tell a kid when they can and can't go to the bathroom. I'm not their bladder. They got to go, they got to go. And just, it was so weird. That's the only time I've ever really been checked for that. And I just was like, it's nine days before the end of the school year. This is a weird hill to die on.

Through the complaints from this colleague who spoke from a deficit-based perspective and viewed CJ's actions as lacking "discipline," CJ shared some of the ways she understood the situation and ultimately attended to students' well-being. By allowing students to go to the bathroom or work in the hallway and using asset-based language when referring to her students, CJ was being responsive to her students' needs rather than policing their actions and exerting unnecessary control over how they show up in her classroom. CJ demonstrated a racially literate practice by subverting an often racially-coded practice of policing of students' bodies. Her approach was rooted in a criticality of disciplinary systems and the restrictiveness of the classroom environment. Ultimately, across both cases, teachers centered relationality and care for their students. They often took an affirming stance towards students and shared how they worked to build community within and beyond their schools in order to be responsive to students' needs. Both former and current Teachers of Color demonstrated a deep care for students and families by listening to them and being present for them, recognizing their ability to affect change in a local context.

Finding 5. Drawing on Resources to Attend to holistic Well-Being

Finding 5. TOCs drew on resources to attend to their holistic well-being and protect themselves, their communities, and students.

- Attention to Holistic Well-being: External Resources for Health and Well-being (C-TOCs - 11/11; F-TOCs - 14/14)
- Attention to Holistic Well-being: Protective Strategies (C-TOCs - 11/11; F-TOCs - 13/14)

Both current and former TOCs drew on resources to support their holistic well-being. They spoke to healthcare benefits that were provided to them but also leveraged external resources to support their health. Both C-TOCs and F-TOCs drew on different protective strategies to maintain their well-being, understanding their personal needs within schooling systems. For the group of F-TOCs, walking away from the profession became one of those protective strategies.

5.1 Attention to Holistic Well-Being: External Resources for Health and Well-Being

Both C-TOCs and F-TOCs reported drawing on external resources to support their well-being, oftentimes without the support of their institution. Though all teachers across both cases (n=25) talked about the need for resources to support their livelihoods and well-being, most teachers spoke about not necessarily having the resources they needed to take care of their physical and mental needs. More often, teachers spoke about these resources from a place of absence, either wanting to see more support for well-being or needing to access external supports outside of their districts.

Teachers spoke about access to healthcare and benefits as a resource that many of them found necessary. However, their reported coverage seemed to range from being adequate and supportive of their work to being a point of frustration and not enough. Access to therapy was mentioned multiple times by teachers as something that could benefit teachers and be better

supported by districts. Several teachers mentioned it as a necessary financial burden that they pay for outside of their benefits or that they had to find informal structures for mental health support. This was a throughline for Savannah, a Chinese American woman, mother of two boys, and high school history and social studies teacher with 8 years of teaching experience, who made connections to mental well-being across all three mapping sessions, and later shared “that the specific reason I went to therapy was to deal with a bullying parent, who was an older white male who has a history of targeting female teachers.” She first wrote down, “Support: going to therapy on my own dime” on her educational journey map and again wrote “therapist” on her ecomap. When sharing her ecomap with the group, Savannah added “I circled therapist. My therapist has been really helpful. They should compensate teachers for therapy. Goodness.” she carried this concept through to her freedom dream collage (Figure 13) and shared aloud, “Structures for collective healing would be great. Maybe even during the school day, so kids don't have to come to my club after school, because they've got other things they're doing, but if it was part of the structure, that would be cool.”

Figure 13. Selection of Savannah’s Freedom Dream



Savannah references therapy or structures for collective healing in every mapping session, signifying how important it was for her to have mental well-being prioritized for both herself as a

teacher and for her students. Savannah referenced therapy or structures for collective healing in every mapping session, signifying how important it was for her to have mental well-being prioritized for both herself as a teacher and for her students. In her interview, Kaya also spoke to wanting grief counseling and resources extended to teachers in addition to students following tragedy and loss. Given the many mentions of therapy, healthcare benefits, and current TOCs wanting further socioemotional and mental health support, it is evident that teachers value external resources and seek stronger structural resources for themselves and their students when it comes to their health and holistic well-being. Former TOCs, like Erika and Garrett, also spoke about tapping into outside resources to support their well-being, and wanting structures to support teacher well-being.

5.2 Attention to Holistic Well-Being: Protective Strategies

Most current (n=11) and former (n=13) TOCs drew on their understanding of schooling systems and their personal needs for protective strategies, particularly with regards to their well-being. Several teachers chose to establish boundaries for themselves, leverage their silence, or challenge and/or walk away from unsupportive working environments. These choices are indicative of their ability to negotiate their priorities, and navigate or push back against structures that were not designed with them in mind. For the former TOCs in particular, leaving the profession was used as a protective strategy when a lack of institutional support negatively affected their well-being and ability to show up for their students.

Like several other teachers, Alejandra reflected on how she has navigated self-protection in the face of systemic issues and barriers, choosing to say no to requests and also re-linguaging or adjusting how she does things for her own protection. Responding to an incident that Shay

brought up with a parent who accused her of stealing, Alejandra leveraged different navigational and resistant strategies in her work:

That's the trauma I'm dealing with now [with] how many people I've seen leave or get fired....I just like constantly "Am I next?" I worked with him on the mural. I did this with this person. I did this community event...because I'm really involved. I think I put it on there [her educational journey map], I'm just learning how to say no thank you. I'll do this on my own accord. And sometimes I'll do cookouts with the students and I'm like, this is not a student organization cookout. You just saw Maestra Alejandra at the park and I was grilling and you came over and ate. It looks different now for my protection.

Alejandra admitted feeling pressure to reconsider and reframe her actions after witnessing many of her colleagues, who she viewed as strong leaders, lose their jobs. Several teachers like Shay and Savannah also spoke to the increased scrutiny and litigious atmospheres in their districts. Alejandra spoke to a few strategies she uses to protect herself including setting clear boundaries over what is considered a school-based event. Knowing the realities of the systems they work in, current TOCs continue to find ways to survive and navigate the challenges. Another example of teachers speaking to self-protection and preservation was in a conversation raised by Roxanne and Hope about teacher lounge culture and being mindful of the people they surround themselves with at school. Rather than exerting the limited energy they have on spaces that would further drain them, they chose not to engage with the lounge as a way of protecting their peace and well-being.

Former TOCs. Former TOCs also spoke about leveraging different protective strategies as navigational and resistant resources and some commented on how walking away from the classroom was a form of protection against systemic harm. For instance, Garrett spoke about

how he was perceived as a Black man in education and shared how uses silence as a strategy in his work. Garrett explained, “I am not a handler, because I am an intellectual, but I'm one of those intellectuals where I'm going to be quiet until I have a full grasp of the situation and I know what I'm supposed to know. And they take that as well, you really don't know what's going on. No, I'm listening. So I don't misspeak, you know?” Garrett spoke about how his silence is often misinterpreted as a lack of knowing, but he sees it as a navigational resource. He leverages his silence as a form of critical reflection, observing his surroundings and making intentional choices based on those observations. He chooses to be strategic in how he responds, understanding his own worth and knowing that he’s qualified. This is indicative of the ways TOCs use quietness as a strategic response in the face of racially hostile environments.

Almost all of the former teachers spoke about how a lack of institutional support and absence of resources impacted their well-being, and for many, their exit from unsupportive schooling environments was a form of protection for themselves and their students. Inez critically reflected on her capacity to be present for her students and explained how a continued lack of institutional support negatively affected her well-being and ability to show up for their students. She leveraged walking away from the profession as a form of protection, though recognized this exit may be a temporary one and still could envision returning to the classroom:

I had a small class of 12 students. They were second graders who still had...who needed severe help, and that's why they put them in a tiny class to get more specialized help.

Unfortunately, as a first year teacher, I was not the person that they needed. This wasn't told to me until after the fact, but this teacher was super upset when, when they told her I was going to be her replacement, a brand new teacher because she had told them that, these students need someone who can help them gain everything that they need in terms

of literacy and math, and I do agree that comes from someone with more experience. I did what I could. I know that's not what they needed. They needed more intervention, more help. They did grow, but I know they would have grown more under a seasoned educator....I tried to make every holiday memorable. I was buying all the things because I also only have 12 students. This is really...when am I ever going to be able to spoil my students ever again, essentially. And I have considered...I'm not there yet. My nervous system, unfortunately, is too wrecked to be in a classroom. I'm not at a point where I can be the stable adult that children need at this time...but I do want to keep my license active. I do think maybe I'll go back.

In this quote, Inez explained the difficult position she was put in as a first year teacher, having to support 12 students with severe needs. Her experience aligns with literature that reports on inexperienced teachers often being placed in classrooms that have the most need (Johnson & Kardos, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 2004). Inez did what she could to support her students despite her lack of experience, but she also understood that she lacked the institutional support to fully do so and made the choice to walk away to attend to her well-being. Walking away from an unsupportive environment was a protective strategy that she leveraged as a resource. At the same time, Inez also reflected on the state of her well-being and shared a desire to someday return to the classroom. Though she reported not yet feeling like she was in a place where she could be the stable presence that students deserve and need, she has kept her certification active and envisioned a possibility of return, which speaks to the flexibility and transience of the protective strategies that TOCs leverage depending on their needs.

Across both cases, teachers reported on resources they drew on or didn't have access to in regards to their health and well-being. In lieu of resources to support their health and well-being,

teachers discussed different ways they drew on their own resistant resources to challenge unfair policies or systemic inequities and protected themselves. They also spoke about establishing boundaries, leveraging their silence, and choosing to disengage or walk away. For former TOCs walking away from the profession was sometimes described as a protective measure and preservation of health when institutional supports were lacking. TOCs reported leveraging different strategic moves depending on their personal and community needs, allowing them to survive and navigate their environments accordingly.

Discussion

Observed Patterns Across Cases

Across all five findings, former and current teachers seemed to report similar experiences regarding the challenges and supports they've experienced within their school's racial climates, with both groups identifying a variety of navigational and resistant resources that sustain their work in educational spaces. Despite the nuances across TOCs differently racialized experiences and whether they were currently in the classroom or not, participants across both cases offered similar conceptions and questions of what it means to navigate and resist in the racial climates of schools. However, there were a few notable differences that emerged in how those resources manifested.

Current TOCs. Several former and current TOCs reported positive experiences learning from Black teacher educators and Teacher Educators of Color, who affirmed or enhanced their commitments to justice. While not the case for all teachers, there tended to be more positive reflections from current TOCs about their teacher education experience in terms of access to culturally relevant courses or diverse cohorts and teacher educators. Although both groups exposed multilayered challenges that TOCs experience and leveraged a criticality of systems, the

current TOCs primarily spoke to ways they've navigated issues with some level of success. Some observations made by current TOCs was that they saw a spirit and love that has not yet been fully shattered in spite of the system. In terms of intergenerational knowledge and community building, several current TOCs chose to work geographically in a place where they had roots and talked about giving back to the community that raised them and the places where they were educated and miseducated. A conversation that came up amongst the group of current TOCs was that several of them noted having at least one white woman colleague who they perceived as effectively working in solidarity with them. In comparison to F-TOCs, C-TOCs continue to leverage strategies for their protection and well-being within schools, still seeing hope despite also recognizing the schooling system as designed to break them.

When it came to their hopes and dreams for the future of education, C-TOCs had the tendency to be more focused on tangible solutions that they've seen work. They commended each other for their presence and ability to still show up regardless. It seemed that the current TOCs still envisioned some potential for good work within the system of schools.

Former TOCs. In terms of commitments to justice, the only two TOCs who reflected negatively about their teacher education experience were F-TOCs. While both former and current TOCs witnessed and critiqued the structural and systemic failures of their districts and schooling more broadly, more F-TOCs than C-TOCs emphasized the urgency for institutions to acknowledge and address the trauma and systemic harms of schooling. Former TOCs spoke heavily to the grief and trauma that contributed to their departure from the classroom, and many of them reported moving into educational leadership roles with the hopes that they could have structural impact and support C-TOCs from a place of leadership. F-TOCs also reported more instances of having their communities of support threatened and questioned at the school-level.

Ultimately, F-TOCs seemed unsure that schools could ever be just places and saw the process of leaving the classroom as giving up on existing systems of schooling or working within them from positions with more power.

For the group of former teachers, their hopes for the future were shaped by their departure from the profession, whether by choice or by being pushed out. This voluntary or forced departure seemed to invite a different lens for thinking about what freedom might look like in a school setting, with F-TOCs sharing multiple examples of working outside of the system or in different roles outside the classroom space. Perhaps because of the ways they have seen the system fail them, many of the former TOCs had creative visions for redesigning schools in their freedom dreams.

Revision to Conceptual Framework

Analysis of the data and consolidation of findings has led me to update my conceptual framework for how Teachers of Color resist and navigate their school's racial climates. Through multiple rounds of analysis, I further developed my conceptual framework so that it clarified the connections across Yosso's (2005) Navigational and Resistant Capital within the Community Cultural Wealth model, Kohli et al.'s (2022) Healthy Racial Climate framework, and my data. After more expansively including Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth model in a round of data analysis, I found that the TOCs in my study were not just engaging their navigational capital through many of the examples, but also leveraging their resistant capital. This led me to expand my overall research question and conceptual framework to center both the navigational and resistant resources that TOCs drew on in their work.

The five findings from my study also became the main tenets of how Teachers of Color resist and navigate their school's racial climates, as represented in my conceptual framework (see

Figures 14 & 15). These tenets include: 1) commitments to justice, 2) criticality of systems, 3) intergenerational knowledge and community building, 4) racially literate practices, 5) attention to holistic well-being. While my initial conceptual framework which emerged from my reading of the literature seemed to be reaffirmed by the data, I found the process of updating the conceptual framework to be supportive of clarifying and organizing the findings that emerged in the data.

Through this revision of my conceptual framework, I saw opportunity for alignment not only across Kohli et al.'s (2022) Healthy Racial Climate framework and Yosso's (2005) Navigational and Resistant Capital, but also the broader literature on Teacher of Color retention and the motivations that support TOCs to stay in the profession (Castro-Gill, 2025; Kohli, 2019; Kokka, 2016). I retained many of the concepts listed in my initial design, collapsing some ideas and rewording the language in other places. With this updated version of my conceptual framework, there is clearer alignment across my data and the frameworks I drew on.

For example, I specified elements from my first version of the conceptual framework including personal commitments, relationality and connections to others, movement through conflict and tensions, and continued practice of feeding their souls. "Personal commitments" became "commitment to justice" which elevates the justice-orientation of the TOCs in my study and aligns with Kohli and colleagues' (2022) historical dimension of a Healthy Racial Climate. "Relationality and connections to others" and elements of "continued practice of feeding their souls" became "intergenerational knowledge and community building." Like others who have highlighted the significant role of collective practice in teaching for social justice for Educators of Color (Navarro, 2018; Sacramento, 2019), this tenet specified the influence of familial and intergenerational knowledge on TOCs and their teaching practices as well as the communities

they built with supportive community members, colleagues, and administrators to sustain their work. This aligns with the compositional component of the Healthy Racial Climate framework. Attention to their holistic well-being remained the same and corresponded to Kohli et al.'s (2022) psychological dimension, aligning with others who have called for greater attention to TOC well-being and centering racialized experiences in considerations of retention (Abo-Zaed Arar et al., 2025; Griffiths et al., 2018). “Movement through conflict/tensions” and “dreams/futurity” appeared in almost all the aspects of the new conceptual framework including “criticality of systems,” “attention to holistic well-being,” and “racially literate practices.” Throughout the data, I saw TOCs adopting strategies and practices for navigating hostile racial climates and building towards the futures they wanted to see.

The additions I made with “criticality of systems” emerged as a key feature in the data with TOCs speaking and critically reflecting on the impact of systemic injustice on their schooling and teaching experiences, which dovetailed well with the historical dimension of the Healthy Racial Climate framework. Finally, “racially literate practices” emerged as TOCs continued to talk about the pedagogical practices they leveraged in the classroom to support historically minoritized students, which seemed to correspond to the behavioral dimension of the framework. Like Burciaga & Kohli (2018) who used a Community Cultural Wealth framework to examine how racial justice-oriented TOCs disrupt whitestream perspectives of what is considered quality teaching and others who highlighted the Community Cultural Wealth of TOCs (Castro-Gill, 2025; Cuevas, 2016; Maddamsetti, 2022), this research offers further elaboration on how TOCs navigate racial climates that are not necessarily affirming of their contributions.

Figure 14. Updated Conceptual Framework for How Teachers of Color Resist and Navigate their School's Racial Climates (see middle) that Draws on Yosso (2005 - see left) and Kohli et al. (2021 - see right)

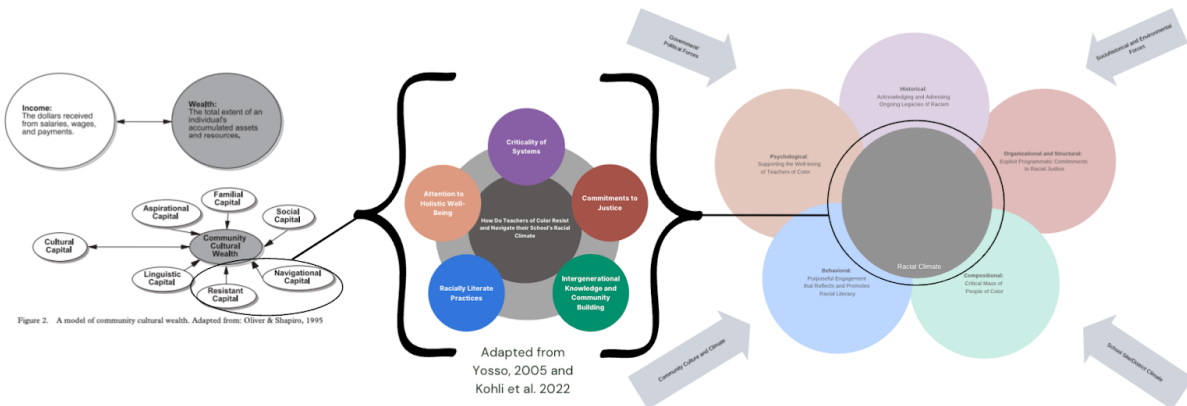
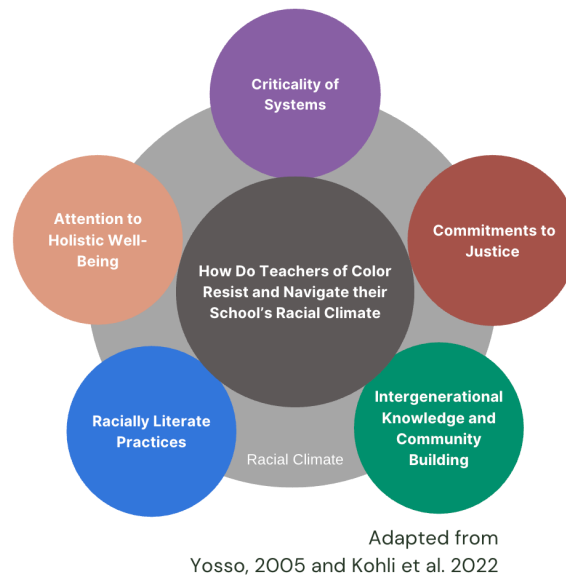


Figure 15. Conceptual Framework for How Teachers of Color Resist and Navigate their School's Racial Climates (Zoomed-In Version)



Limitations

While this study aimed to speak primarily to the assets of TOCs, the factors that allow them to stay, and opportunities for retention, it would be a disservice to not acknowledge the

trauma and multilayered toll of schooling on TOCs. These factors played a significant role in informing and shaping TOCs experiences with staying. I'm not arguing that current TOCs, who are able to withstand the pain of systems, are more equipped or more resilient for being able to stay in the classroom. Rather, their environment and context in combination with their navigational skills create the conditions that might allow for them to stay. This reaffirms other literature that has spoken about the ways systems fail educators and affects retention.

That said, the case study design of this study means that the findings are generalizable to theory which can then be further tested with a larger group of participants to understand whether and how these findings extend beyond the 25 participants in this study.

Conclusion and Implications

It was evident that many of the teachers in my study were doing many of the things they needed to do to support themselves in navigating their schools' racial climates. Both current and former TOCs in my research also contributed to building a more Healthy Racial Climate in the respective environments even in cases where they lacked administrative and systemic supports. Many F-TOCs seemed unsure that schools were the place for them to successfully engage in justice-oriented work and many viewed the process of leaving as a refusal of the existing systems of schooling. Many of the C-TOCs have continued to navigate their schooling environments in spite of the systemic injustices they encountered and still saw some hope in working within the system to affect change. This research is evidence that the TOCs who participated in this study have laid the groundwork for what building a Healthy Racial Climate could look like at the micro-level. I believe schools, districts, teacher education programs, and educational research could benefit from following in their direction.

Through this research, I offer a nuanced look into the concept of “retention,” centering the perspectives of current and former Teachers of Color and offering a conceptual framework for how Teachers of Color are resisting and navigating their school’s racial climates. This work not only applies Yosso’s (2005) Community Cultural Wealth model and Kohli et al.’s (2022) Healthy Racial Climate framework to a new population – TOCs, but also it bring together these frameworks to offer specific insights into how Teachers of Color are maneuvering through inequitable schooling systems. The retention literature could benefit from a stronger attention to the grief, healing, and well-being of those who have lived through these systemic harms as students and teachers. This conceptual framework also offers a way to speak across both the internal resources that TOCs draw on while also giving attention to the environmental factors shaping their experiences, highlighting the ways TOCs operate within the racial climates of their schools. A future study could examine this conceptual framework more directly with Kohli et al.’s (2022) Healthy Racial Climate framework by analyzing different racial climates including where veteran TOCs work and where there's been high turnover for TOCs. Analyzing data about the school climates alongside learning from TOCs working in those contexts would allow for a systems analysis that complement the individual teachers' perceptions and experiences that are foregrounded in this study. This could allow for stronger conclusions about the environments that TOC are working in.

While I offer a conceptual lens that is attentive to both the community knowledge and skills of TOCs as well as the systems and environments they work within, there are further implications for schools and districts looking to retain TOCs, and there is a real need to support and uplift people in the profession who deeply understand these issues. Revisiting Ming’s grievances about professional development and how it played a significant role in their exit from

the classroom, it is imperative that educational scholars and schools reflect on the expectation that teachers always need to be improving and the message that sends to TOCs in particular. We cannot expect to solve retention by just hiring more TOCs or hosting singular professional development sessions on topics like socioemotional learning, the school to prison pipeline, or self-care. Retention is not something that we can expect to change with easily digestible and packaged PD sessions or constantly setting impossible expectations for teachers. There is a clear need to understand and learn from the perspectives of TOCs as we seek to transform schools into places where all students and teachers feel safe and able to learn. There is a need to pour resources into communities and spaces for TOCs that are healing and committed to ongoing racial justice work. There are also implications for reevaluating structures of evaluation and professional development that continue to reiterate to TOCs that they are not enough as individuals. Instead, we could provide opportunities for intergenerational mentorship, collaboration, and racially literate practices. The approaches and framings that the TOCs in this study spoke about give us some tangible ways of doing this work and if we can attend more structurally to supporting and furthering their: 1) commitments to justice, 2) criticality of systems, 3) intergenerational and community relationships, 4) racially literate practices, and 5) well-being resources, we might just have a path forward.

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Chapter 4 Learning and Healing at the Kitchen Table: Retreat and Mapping Reflections from Teachers of Color

Abstract

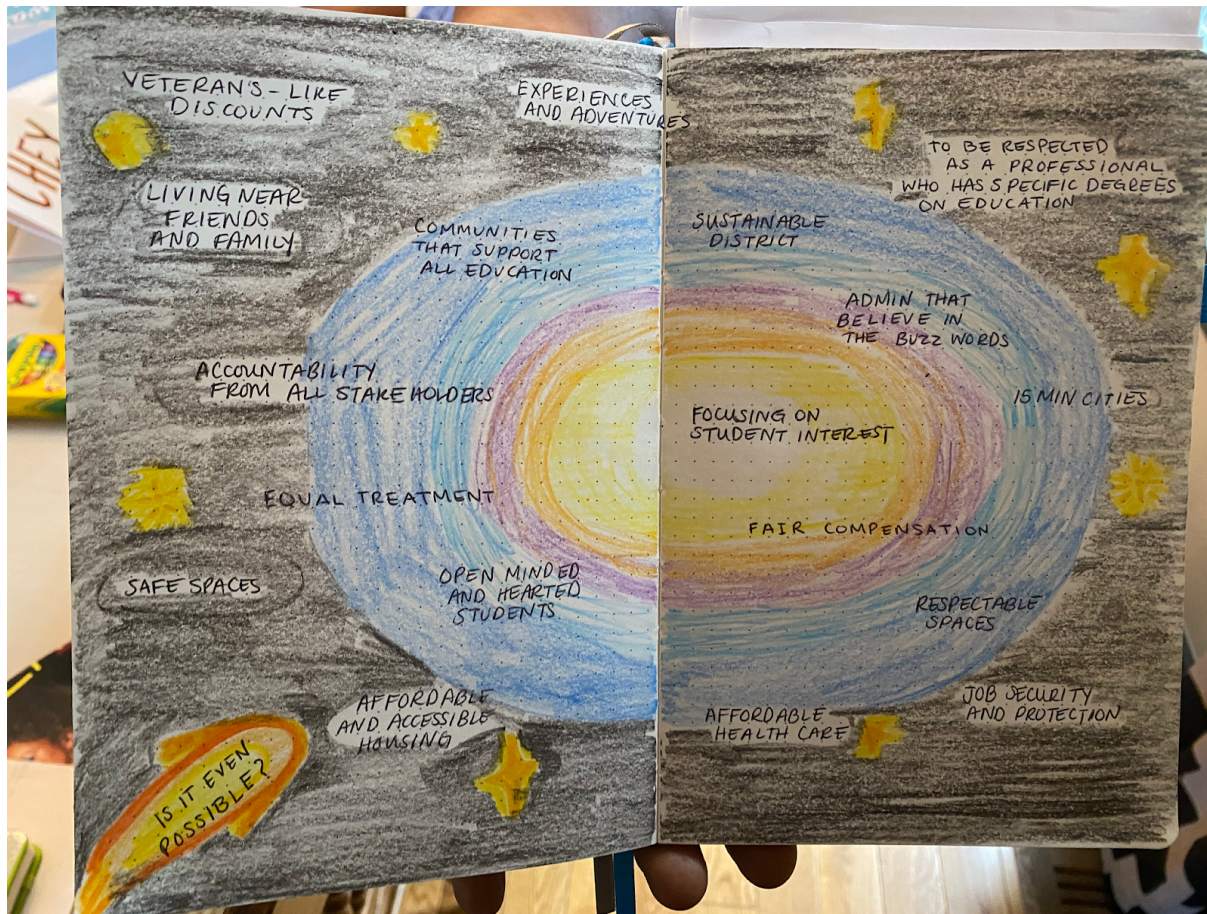
This paper considers how critical qualitative methods of mapping (educational journey mapping, ecomapping, freedom dreaming) and collective counterstorytelling in the space of a retreat provide unique opportunities and insights for learning about current and former Teachers of Color (TOCs) and their experiences with staying. Drawing on frameworks of re-membering and freedom dreaming, a critical reflection retreat space and different types of mapping tools were designed to intentionally center TOCs' knowledge. Through an analysis of maps created by TOCs and their reflections about the mapping activities and retreat, this paper aims to support researchers in understanding overarching approaches to and specific tools for gaining insight into how current and former Teachers of Color think about staying in the classroom and the environmental conditions and holistic supports that allow them to continue their work.

Introduction

What can bring this dream to reality? What can be done to make us stop leaving? Start with giving us our dignity. Pay attention to our sanity. Look at our humanity. Know that we are somebody...We all wanted to be here...see here...live here...but here is not always the safest place. We have all had the baton to run this race, but some of us have passed it on because we have been laid to waste...by a system that gets off on giving chase....But we still root for those on the next leg, because lord knows they need a friend.

-An excerpt from a freedom dream poem by Erika, a Black woman and high school mathematics teacher who was recently laid off after teaching for 8 years

Figure 16. Shay's Freedom Dream



A freedom dream visual map drawn by Shay, a Black woman and middle school English and Language Arts teacher with 7 years of teaching experience. The image is drawn with colored pencil and features a space-theme with a galaxy and stars. Different phrases appear within and across the drawing including: "veteran's-like discounts," "communities that support all education," "focusing on student interest," "fair compensation," "to be respected as a profession who has specific degrees on education," "admin that believe the buzz words," "15 min cities," "job security and protection."

What might be possible when we invite Teachers of Color to come together and dream?

What might be possible when we invite them to reflect on their educational journeys and schooling environments and what sustains them in the work of teaching? How might a research context be attentive to the work and well-being of Teachers of Color? When provided with time, a retreat space, and art materials, how might Teachers of Color convey their experiences and

hopes for the future? How might art support their reflections? This paper offers reflections on a research design and process that honors the labor and commitments of TOCs and also centers their well-being.

More educational researchers are beginning to explore the supports, conditions, and experiences that make it possible for Teachers of Color (TOCs) to stay. Some of these include their commitments to teaching, strong preparation, administration and onboarding, and critical mentorship and professional development (Achinstein et al., 2011; Carver-Thomas et al., 2022; Castro, 2022; Flores & Claeys, 2022; Gardner et al., 2020; Kohli, 2021; Mosely, 2018; Pour-Khorshid, 2018; Taylor, 2013). While there are studies that report on TOCs' motivations and some support factors, further consideration and exploration are needed to understand not only what makes it possible for TOCs to continue their work and what it would take for TOCs to feel supported and sustained in their well-being, but also how to learn from them in ways that are supportive and sustaining of their work.

Knowing that education has been a historically hostile space for Students and Teachers of Color and that the harms have been well documented in educational research, there's an opportunity to further learn from TOCs and their experiences with retention, particularly with research methods that intentionally center their voices and their well-being. Although several studies have used educational journey mapping, ecomapping, and freedom dreaming in educational spaces, primarily with students and young people, there are just a few that have been used with teachers and Teachers of Color (Marx et al. 2023; Monreal, 2022; Ramirez et al., 2025; Sealey-Ruiz & Christensen, 2024). These studies have examined the life journeys, experiences, relationships, or freedom dreams of teachers and Teachers of Color through their respective critical qualitative mapping tools. However, there has yet to be a study that explores

the promise and possibilities of these mapping tools in combination with each other in the context of a retreat space for the purposes of learning about Teacher of Color retention. There also has yet to be a study that examines the experiences of current TOCs alongside former TOCs.

The overarching study investigates how current and former TOCs with 5+ years of experience understand the various dimensions of their working environments and what TOCs think about what it takes to persist, endure, thrive and sustain themselves and their work as educators. This paper specifically explores how a critical reflection retreat space and methods of mapping provide unique opportunities that can deepen researchers' understandings of TOCs and their experiences with staying. This paper asks: How can critical qualitative methods of mapping (educational journey mapping, ecomapping, and freedom dreaming) and a retreat space be used to learn about the perspectives of current and former veteran Teachers of Color on what supports and sustains them in their well-being and work? Supporting research questions include:

A: What are the offerings and constraints of Educational Journey Mapping as a tool to learn about Teachers of Color and their perspectives on what supports and sustains them in their well-being and work?

B: What are the offerings and constraints of Ecomapping as a tool to learn about Teachers of Color and their perspectives on what supports and sustains them in their well-being and work?

C: What are the offerings and constraints of Freedom Dreaming as a tool to learn about Teachers of Color and their perspectives on what supports and sustains them in their well-being and work?

D: What are the offerings and constraints of a retreat as a space to learn about Teachers of Color and their perspectives on what supports and sustains them in their well-being and work?

Theoretical Frameworks

This work is anchored in the theoretical and epistemological lineage of Black feminist, critical race scholars in education (Bernal, 2002; Crenshaw et al., 1995; Dillard, 2012; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). This study draws particularly on frameworks of re-membering (Dillard 2012; 2021; King & Swartz, 2014), fugitivity (Coles et al., 2021; Harney & Moten, 2013), and freedom dreaming (Kelley, 2002).

The literature has examined the ways a deep and profound sense of history, culture, and ancestral memory is often embedded in the reasons why Teachers of Color enter the profession and this rich genealogy can also be supportive of their continued work. King and Swartz (2014), and Dillard (2012; 2021) have written extensively about the process of re-membering, centering Afrocentric theory and ancestral ways of being and knowing, acknowledging the long legacy and contributions of Black life, and the importance of critical memory work for teachers, particularly Black teachers and Teachers of Color. Learning from Black women's wisdom is both radical and spiritual and Dillard (2012; 2021) identifies re-membering as an endarkened feminist praxis that resists the fragmentation and divisions in our lives and necessitates an intergenerational, collective, familial, global approach. I take up re-membering in the form of critical reflection and the reflective work that I asked participants to engage in during the mapping exercises to think about their experiences in K-12 schooling, their current working environments, and the educational futures they envision.

Another space of possibility that has emerged in the literature for sustaining and supporting Teachers of Color is that of abolition, fugitivity, and freedom dreaming. Benjamin (2019) invites readers to “imagine and craft the worlds you cannot live without, just as you dismantle the ones you cannot live within” (p.14). Her words echo the ethos of Kelley (2002) and the concept of freedom dreaming, a practice of imagining worlds where current structures of oppression do not exist. The practice of freedom dreaming has been associated with different approaches to teaching and pedagogy including: abolitionist teaching, a liberatory pedagogy that humanizes children and disrupts and dismantles racist systems (Love, 2019; 2023); fugitivity, an escape from and refusal of oppressive systems and taking flight towards emancipatory futures (Coles et al., 2021; Harney & Moten, 2013); and fugitive pedagogy, a liberatory vision of schooling and the world (Givens, 2021). Spaulding and colleagues (2021) offer their own freedom dreams in an essay as “a road map to justice that is focused on healing, love, Black joy, and understanding how critical and uncomfortable conversations are necessary for antiracism work...they are deliberate and intentional structural changes that work to free us all and heal us all” (Spaulding et al., 2021, p. 16). Theories and practices of fugitivity and freedom dreaming become ways for teachers to not only reimagine how schooling can better serve students, but also become a tangible tool for building the futures they want to see in education. I take up abolition, fugitivity, and freedom dreaming through the design of the research, cultivating a deliberate and intentional structure for data collection at a retreat. Also, freedom dreaming became a central focus for one of the mapping tools that I selected.

This research builds on prior studies that have involved re-membering (Gardner et al., 2020; Vickery, 2019), fugitivity (Stovall & Mosely, 2023; Stovall, 2024), and freedom dreaming (Monreal et al., 2023; Neal & Dunn, 2020; Spaulding et al., 2021; Tolivar, 2021) as frameworks

for understanding the experiential knowledge of Teachers and Students of Color and how they critically reflect upon and orient themselves spatially, temporally, and socially in relation to their trajectories in education.

Literature Review

To examine Teachers of Color and their experiences with retention, educational researchers have primarily utilized survey, interview, and focus group data. This paper investigates mapping and retreat as tools to support an arts-based and critical qualitative methodology. Mapping methods such as educational journey mapping (Annamma, 2018; Marx, 2023), ecomapping (Hartman, 1978; Monreal, 2022), and freedom dreaming (Kelley, 2002; Spaulding et al., 2021; Tolivar, 2021) have been explored in some educational-related research contexts. We know that individual types of mapping tools have been useful in contexts with students and teachers, but less is known about how multiple mapping tools work in combination to support learning about teachers and their retention in the profession.

Methods in Teacher Retention Research

The research methods we use to learn about TOCs and their experiences, particularly with retention, typically involve multiple-choice and open-ended surveys, interviews, and focus groups typically done at the end of the academic year. Many analyses of teacher demographics utilize the National Center for Education Statistics' (NCES) National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS), formerly known as the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) (NCES 2011; 2022). Teacher retention and attrition is further analyzed through supplemental surveys to SASS/NTPS: the Beginning Teacher Longitudinal Study (BTLS) and the Teacher Follow-up Survey (TFS) (NCES 2012; 2013). Studies on retention and Teachers of Color tend to incorporate survey data (Elsayed & Roch, 2023; Goldhaber et al., 2015; Gray & Taie, 2015;

Ingersoll, et al., 2022, Kohli, 2018; Kohli, 2019; Kohli & Pizarro, 2016; Papay et al., 2017; Sutchter et al., 2016). Qualitative studies on retention with current and former Teachers of Color often utilize semi-structured interview (Bridwell, 2012; Carrol, 2017; Darwich, 2021; Duncan, 2021; Farinde et al., 2016; Hernández-Johnson et al., 2021; Kohli, 2018; Kohli, 2019; Kokka & Chao, 2020; Loder-Jackson, 2012; Marx et al., 2023; McKinney de Royston et al., 2017a, Pizarro & Kohli, 2020; Taylor, 2013; Williams, 2018). Several studies have made collective knowledge a priority from the outset of the research design through focus groups, group interviews, and affinity groups with or consisting of Teachers of Color (Duncan, 2021; Jackson & Knight-Manuel, 2019; Lee, 2016; Mosely, 2018; Pour-Khorshid, 2018). These methods of data collection provide us with helpful insights and reflections, but they provide a limited understanding of the in-depth wisdom and creativity of TOCs.

Arts-Based Methods

Arts-based methods have been used in social science research and education including photo elicitation (Harper, 2002; Kokka & Chao, 2020), collaging (Curammeng, 2020), and other forms of visual media and art-making (Coles, 2025; Coles & Player, 2024; Player & George, 2025; Player & Thakurta, 2024; Wissman, 2024). Photo elicitation involves using photography and visual media to elicit and evoke different kinds of information about the self in relation to concepts like identity, community, culture, and society (Harper, 2002). This could involve photos brought in by participants or other audiovisual content that might be found on social media, the internet, or elsewhere. Kokka and Chao (2020) interviewed their four participants and asked them to select five photos or images and share how they see themselves as a mathematics teacher or Asian American. They saw that teachers employed two different stereotype management strategies, 1) distancing themselves from Asian Americans and their Asian

American identity and 2) redefining mathematical success and challenging traditional demonstrations of how students show their understanding of math concepts, and noted that teachers' words sometimes reflected internalized racism, which the authors interpreted as the pervasiveness of white supremacy and reflected the ongoing need to disrupt Anti-Black and Anti-Brown sentiments in Asian Americans (Kokka & Chao, 2020). Collaging involves cutting, layering, and reinterpreting different images and materials to "engender new meanings" and Curammeng makes the argument of portraiture as collage (Curammeng, 2020; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). By writing their own stories and lived experiences into their map, the open-ended nature of the questions and map making process invites participants to portray their storytelling in ways that are accessible, most relevant, and honoring of their creativity and joy. Player and Thakurta (2024) further explored uses of arts-based methodologies in educational research and emphasized art as portal-making, as a rupture to racialized violence, as a way to capture everyday practices of justice, as a practice of slowness, as a form of healing, and as a way to map out and envision speculative futures. Although educational research has explored opportunities for arts-based methodologies in the social sciences and in educational contexts, they have not been used to research questions of teacher retention. Given this underexploration of arts-based methods in teacher retention research, I employ art-based methods as part of my approach to data collection to understand what unique insights they may offer.

Mapping

Maps are subjective; they are perceived as a reproduction of reality, but they often reproduce a reality that is hegemonic. Maps represent all kinds of data and differences visually, and are easily manipulated, often taking something 3-dimensional and rendering it in a 2-dimensional format. They can establish sovereignty, help identify where things are in relation to

where other things are, and are often used to support navigation or conceptual understandings. I define mapping as a process of developing a visualization or creative representation of experiences, relationships, processes, or ideas. Mapping has been utilized by various educational researchers in empirical studies as a methodological tool (Annamma, 2018; Futch & Fine, 2014; Marx, 2023; Monreal et al., 2024; Souto-Manning & Martell, 2019). Marx argues the process of mapping can, “offer creative and mediational ways for exploring experiences, processes, growth, and other forms of journey within a critical theoretical and/or methodological context” (2023, p. 12). Mapping has been leveraged by Indigenous communities and Communities of Color as a way to reclaim stolen land and affirm sacred practices and ways of life (Buente et al., 2020; Diaz, 2011; Goeman, 2009). In thinking about critiques of settler colonial methods and developing decolonizing research paradigms and methodologies, several scholars have emphasized the importance of Indigenous ways of knowing that are place-based, relational, and holistic (Held, 2019; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). I used different types of mapping in order to center the holistic and relational knowledge and affirm the experiences within a community as well as learn about how participants made sense of their experiences in relation to place.

Educational Journey Mapping

Educational Journey Mapping is an exercise that asks individuals to map out or represent their experiences with education and is one tool educational researchers can use to learn about what brings Teachers of Color to the classroom and what sustains them in their teaching. Katsiaficas and colleagues (2011) used Identity Mapping with Muslim American youth and Annamma (2018) used Education Journey Mapping with students of color with dis/abilities to draw and write narratives of their experiences in education. Mapping was used to highlight key turning points in their learning, whether that included specific moments in time, people, or

locations. In these studies, mapping allowed for participants to represent not just particular memories and moments in their lives, but also spaces and places. Annamma (2018) explains that Education Journey Maps are counter-cartographies, which echoes Solórzano and Yosso's (2002) work on counternarrative and counterstorytelling, and can be interpreted as an act of resistance to dominant narratives found in maps. The educational journey mapping exercise used in my study also considers the importance of Black Intellectual tradition and theoretical discourses in history, education, and sociology around the concept of miseducation, or the failures of U.S. schooling to recognize and uplift the unique contributions of Black individuals and communities and instead exploits and paints African Americans as inferior (Grant et al., 2015; King, 2020; King & Swartz, 2015; Woodson, 1933). The Teacher of Color Collective and Souto-Manning (2021) called on teacher educators to reckon with the miseducation of Teachers of Color particularly in teacher education, which has repeatedly failed to prepare teachers to address white supremacy in education and contributed to cycles of inequitable educational outcomes (Haddix, 2017; King, 1991). An educational journey map is one way for marginalized people to examine their experiences with formal and informal education and also the role miseducation has played in their lives.

Mapping as a method has served to support more pluralistic research designs, especially when considered alongside and in conversation with other pieces of data, in ways that enhance both research participation and data analysis (Futch & Fine, 2014; Katsiaficas et al., 2011). Scholars have found methods of mapping to be supportive as a discursive tool in qualitative research and to be a way to center participants and how they see themselves in relation to others and the world around them (Futch & Fine, 2014). In her work with disabled, incarcerated Girls of Color, Annamma (2018) found that education journey mapping created “opportunity to

explore the terrain between embodied experiences and social realities” and for youth to capture their trajectories allowing for shifts through time and space (p. 29). Mapping became not only a tool for studying injustice from both a social and spatial, or sociospatial lens, but also an opportunity for resistance to inequitable cartographies through the creation of countercartographies. Annamma (2017b) also found that there were multiscalar impacts, meaning “injustices do not simply occur on the individual level but also within community and global contexts” (p. 47). By using education journey maps, Annamma contributes to a growing critical qualitative methodology that employs a critical spatial analysis to examine how physical space and how internal conceptions of space influence the schooling and educational experiences of youth that have been historically and intersectionality disenfranchised. The process of educational journey mapping gave educational researchers a visual way to learn from students’ experiences with unjust systems and affirmed and centered students’ place-making and sense-making abilities.

Given the affordances other scholars have named in their work with students, I used educational journey mapping with Teachers of Color in order to take a critical spatial approach in examining their narratives about their experiences in schooling, with both education and miseducation, and what has allowed them or not allowed them to feel supported and sustained in their work. One study using journey maps has been done with Teachers of Color who have left the profession to understand Teacher of Color attrition (Marx et al., 2023). Marx and colleagues (2023) found that for former teachers, there was a lack of control of their bodies, their language, and their relationships in teaching, and that leaving was an act of resilience. Educational journey mapping emphasized the experiential knowledge of Teachers of Color and how they critically

reflect upon and orient themselves spatially, temporally, and socially in relation to their trajectories in education.

Ecomapping

Ecomapping was developed by Susan Hartman (1978) in a social work context and was designed to represent an ecological system, emphasizing the formal and informal systems of support around an individual or group. An ecomap uses circles to represent different entities (individuals, groups, systems) as potential resources, lines to demonstrate the flow, connection, and distance of those entities, and types of lines to delineate the status of relationships (strong/tenuous/stressful). Ecomaps can be used as an assessment of existence, potential, and barriers to resources and can also be utilized to plan, intervene and mobilize. Ecomapping has primarily been used in social work, caregiving, and healthcare settings as well as for qualitative research (Bennett & Grant, 2016; Early et al., 2000; McCormick et al., 2008; Rempel et al., 2007). When used with young people, children, and in education spaces, ecomaps were used with children labeled “at-risk,” in alternative schooling, or non-school settings (Baumgartner et al., 2012; Bell et al., 2015; Crawford et al., 2016, Grant et al., 2017).

Ecomapping provides a process for learning about the health of one’s environment, relationships, and networks. One study using ecomaps has been done with Teachers of Color, particularly with Latinx im/migrant teachers in the South, (Monreal, 2022). Monreal’s (2022) study revealed the need to consider relational spatial thinking and methods like ecomapping to support that approach in educational research. With ecomapping, I sought to understand how Teachers of Color might react to and critically reflect upon their existing relationships and resources and how they might resist or build upon those resources, connections and systems.

Freedom Dreaming

Freedom dreaming and speculative mapping can be a process for manifesting and visioning in the present what is possible in education. Love (2019) explains that freedom dreams "are not whimsical, unattainable daydreams, they are critical and imaginative dreams of collective resistance" (p. 101). Tolivar (2021b) discusses speculative maps and how endarkened adults and youth have mapped out Afrofuturism and continue to do so, and also in this process of dreaming and creating, they are not only imagining, but theorizing. In this case, freedom dreaming can also be a tool for educational researchers to learn about what is supportive of the ongoing work and retention of Teachers of Color in education.

A growing number of educational researchers use freedom dreaming in their methodology and these educational researchers have found it to be a useful tool for both resistance and creation. Through her work with Black girl youth, Toliver (2021a) argued that "Amber, Avenae'J, and Terrah show readers their freedom dreams in a world that continuously tells them that their lives and futures are meaningless. They center Afrosurrealism as they place Black people at the core of their science fiction stories, not as the obstacle, but as the solution" (p. 102). By connecting lived realities with their imaginations for a better future in their science fiction writing, these students demonstrated how the process of dreaming can be a tool for liberation and empowerment. While not a qualitative study, Neal and Dunn's (2020) work looked back on the labor and freedom dreams of Black women abolitionist teachers throughout history. Neal and Dunn (2020) identified several implications for teacher education including the necessity of ongoing, lifelong, and intergenerational commitments to radical love and liberation and recognizing that dreams can fuel social and political movements in education. DeMartino et al. (2022) present educational narratives from two administrators, who are both practicing

educators and advanced doctoral students, about their experiences with past and current implementations of socioemotional learning (SEL) programs in schools and their freedom dreams for a more equitable and just future. They warned of traditional SEL programs reproducing educational and systemic inequities, or “white supremacy with a hug” (according to Simmons, as cited in Madda, 2019) and found that freedom dreaming with their participants gave them an opportunity to ground abolitionist practices and imagine opportunities for transformative abolitionist SEL (TASEL) to “create spaces for all PreK-12 actors rooted in love, safety, liberation, justice, and truth” (DeMartino et al., 2022, p. 163). As freedom dreaming continues to be taken up as a methodological tool and practice, we are seeing the various ways educators are theorizing and building towards a sustaining future rooted in abolition. Recognizing how freedom dreaming has been a helpful method for educational researchers and the different communities they’ve worked with, I included freedom dreaming as a method because the process elevates what Teachers of Color believe are necessary next steps and goals for education.

Counterspaces and Retreats in Educational Research

Scholars have written about the exchange of knowledge between Black women and Women of Color particularly around the kitchen table, with the table serving as a physical and metaphorical counterspace. Barbara Smith (1989) alongside a group of Women of Color authors and creators developed the Kitchen Table Press to provide publishing opportunities outside of white feminist and white-dominated journals and publishers. Navarro and colleagues (2013) wrote a reflective kitchen table text about their experiences as Women of Color anthropology faculty in the academy and in the field of anthropology, describing the kitchen table as a site for cross-cultural exchange, solidarity-making, and recognition and valuing of the labor of Women of Color in informal space. They call on the field to take meaningful action towards transforming

inequities and providing structural supports including cluster hires, funding, mentorship and feedback (Navarro et al., 2013). Haddix and the other members of the Black Girls' Literacies Collective (BGLC) (2016) opened the special issue on Black Girl Literacies in *English Education* with a virtual kitchen table. These English teacher educators and scholars who foreground Black feminist and womanist epistemologies reflected on the criticality and necessity of their work and the importance of the kitchen table as a symbolic, historical, and ancestral space for Black women and girls “to be seen, to be heard, and to just be” (p. 380).

Among the various opportunities and communities that have been supportive to Teachers of Color, educational research has emphasized the value of counterspaces via informal gatherings, formal programs, and professional development that offer space for Teachers of Color to engage in meaningful dialogue and learning. These spaces may be embedded within or connected to a school site or district, and others exist at the state, regional or national level. Teachers of Color may also opt into joining groups based on racial/ethnic identities, or groups catered to a particular orientation, pedagogy or experience. Several studies have explored the value of critical racial affinity spaces and spaces for critical professional development and their role in sustaining Teachers of Color (Chen & Mensah, 2022; Harmon & Horn, 2021; Kohli, 2019; Kohli, 2021; Kohli et al. 2022; Kohli et al., 2022b; Mosely, 2018; Pour-Khorshid, 2018; Stovall, 2024; Stovall & Mosely, 2023). These spaces can create opportunities for teachers who feel they are isolated at their school sites to heal, learn, collaborate, and create in community with others with shared visions/values in education (Kohli, 2021; Pizarro, 2017). They may also be opportunities to learn racial justice, racial literacy, pedagogies of organizing, and intergenerational approaches to resistance (Duncan, 2021; Kohli, 2019; Kohli et al., 2019; Kohli, et al., 2021; Loder-Jackson, 2012; Malone et al., 2025; Pham & Philip, 2021; Quince et al., 2024;

Sacramento, 2019; Stovall, 2024; Stovall & Mosely, 2023). In a research project that examined critical professional development (CPD), or collectivized teacher-led spaces of racial literacy development, Kohli used narrative inquiry to learn from 11 Women of Color veteran teachers. Kohli's analysis demonstrated how racial affinity groups and CPD opportunities were leveraged by Teachers of Color as a tool of survival and resistance. Pour-Khorshid's (2018) ethnographic study with teachers in a Teachers 4 Social Justice (T4SJ) critical racial affinity group found that the space cultivated between participants allowed for fugitivity and the opportunity to reconcile their racialized experiences in schools. Antero Garcia (2019) describes the need for addressing the healing gap in education, where teachers are expected to support students with socioemotional learning but are not necessarily supported to work through their own struggles, grief and healing needs as individuals. These studies suggest that the mental and physical well-being of Teachers of Color and cultivating spaces for collective learning and healing can further contribute to their retention.

Some researchers have used retreats to examine the experiences of Women of Color educators and students in higher education settings (Hernandez Rivera, 2020; Lee et al., 2025; Overstreet et al., 2021; Wheaton & Moore, 2019). Wheaton and Moore (2019) examined a multi-institutional writing retreat network for Faculty of Color in STEM at minority-serving institutions. Lee and colleagues (2025) explored the values Black Women Faculty of Color in counseling to support navigate the tenure and promotion process. Overstreet (2021) analyzed a Black women faculty and graduate student retreat. Across these studies, scholars have noted the value of retreats in supporting the academic and professional advancement of participants, fostering community amidst systemically-marginalizing contexts, and promotion of holistic wellness. Although scholars have explored the promise of retreats and kitchen table talks as

counterspaces for Women of Color in different postsecondary education settings, retreats have yet to be studied within K-12 Teacher of Color retention research.

Methods

This project takes up a critical race methodology approach through the use of counterstorytelling. Counterstorytelling, is a critical race method informed by critical race theory, in which marginalized people are centered, and their narratives about and experiences with racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, and other systems of domination are validated and seen as necessary forms of data (Delgado, 1989; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). This project combines methods of counterstorytelling with collaborative and collective knowledge building practices by inviting participating teachers to engage with one another, positioning myself as a co-learner, and creating multiple avenues for teachers to reflect on the research process. This research project contributes to the ongoing research with in-service Teachers of Color (Duncan, 2022; Jackson & Knight-Manuel, 2019; Kohli et al., 2022; Lee, 2016; Mosely, 2018; Pour-Khorshid, 2018), building on the ways counterstorytelling can be done as a collective and how such methods could help us to expand our scope for studying Teacher of Color retention. This also builds on the growing empirical scholarship about the unique and rich lived experiences and funds of knowledge Teachers of Color acquire through their life trajectories, which shape their pedagogies and practices of social studies and racial justice (Kim, 2023; 2024; Kohli, 2015; Kohli & Pizarro, 2016; Monreal, 2022; Rodríguez, 2018; 2019; Vickery, 2016).

This project specifically employs a qualitative multiple embedded case study design (Merriam, 1998; Yazan, 2015; Yin, 2002) with each TOC being a unit of analysis. I look at two cases: current in-classroom veteran TOCs and veteran TOCs who have left the classroom. I intentionally include former teachers who have taught long-term as a separate case to explore

their decision to leave, their reflections on retention and educational systems, and what would it have taken for them to stay. My analysis involves within-case comparisons and cross-case comparisons to examine multiple teachers' identities, experiences, and thinking as well as a consideration of the nuances for each individual teacher embedded in the case.

I conducted 1:1 interviews and organized two multi-day retreats, each including three focus group sessions. The focus groups involved the mapping methods of educational journey mapping (Annamma, 2018; Marx, 2023), ecomapping (Hartman, 1978; Monreal, 2022), and freedom dreaming (Kelley, 2002; Spaulding et al., 2021; Tolivar, 2021). In creating their maps, participants explored photo elicitation (Harper, 2002), collaging (Curammeng, 2020), and other forms of art making and visual media.

Participants

I choose to look at both current Teachers of Color (C-TOCs) and former Teachers of Color (F-TOCs) and what allows them to persist and endure for several reasons: 1) Teachers of Color give unique insight into navigating an educational and labor system with historical legacies and continued acts of dehumanization and marginalization; 2) The nature of existing and possible environments, systems, and supports and what we can learn from TOCs' experiences with those features can collectively contribute to the persistence and endurance of TOCs; and 3) There is potential for the deficit framing of teacher shortages to be approached through a more nuanced and holistic lens as part of the work to advance TOC retention and professional development. I intentionally included former TOCs who have taught long-term as a separate case to explore their experience with leaving, their reflections on retention and educational systems, and what would it have taken for them to stay. I sought to gain insight into their experiences with remaining in education long-term and how they might differently conceptualize what it means to

stay while also recognizing the complexities and nuances of the challenges they face and the costs of staying and leaving.

I used purposive sampling and specifically sought out expert informants to garner whether further study using methods of mapping and counterstorytelling would be worthwhile (Etikan et al., 2016). I recruited both in-service and former TOCs with the criteria that they: 1) identify as an Educator of Color (Black, Indigenous, Latiné/x, Asian, Pacific Islander, Desi, Multiracial, etc.), 2) teach or have taught in a K-12 classroom context, 3) have at least 5 years of teaching experience, and 4) have proximity to the Midwest. I chose to include teachers with over 5 years of teaching experience because studies have found that over 44% of teachers leave teaching within their first five years (Ingersoll et al., 2018). Given my interest in conducting in-person focus groups at the retreat, proximity of location made traveling to a common location in the Midwest easier.

Of the 37 teachers who had filled out the interest form, 25 participated in the interviews (11 Black/African American, 6 Asian/Asian American, 3 Latiné/x or Xicanx, 1 Afro-Latina, 1 de-tribalized Indigenous Latina, and 3 biracial white). Eight teachers attended the retreat for C-TOCs and six teachers attended the retreat for F-TOCs. Teachers primarily were based in the Midwest (22 of 25) though many had teaching experience in other regions/countries. Participants had varying degrees of teaching experience (Table 2). All names of participants, people they reference, cities, districts, and schools are pseudonyms. At the retreats, the research assistants and accompanying family members contributed to the sessions and collective conversations. One attendee, Alejandra, asked if her cousin, Lucia, could drive her to the retreat and shared that Lucia had therapy and social work experience and could support and participate in sessions.

Lucia contributed an educational journey map in the first session and participated as a listener and shared some comments in the last two sessions.

Table 6. Participant Demographics

Name	current/former TOC	Race/Ethnicity	Teaching Experience	Elementary/Middle/High School	Grades/Subjects
Alejandra J.	current	Mexican American	7	Middle/High School	MS and HS Spanish and Heritage Spanish
CJ K.	current	Biracial, Black and white	6	High School	9th, 10th & 11th Grade ELA
Emilio J.	current	Biracial, Puerto Rican and white	6	High School	Math, Algebra 1, Geometry, Algebra 2, 9th-12th
Hope D.	current	Black/African American	23	Elementary School	K-5, Reading Specialist, ESL certified
Kai W.	current	Black/African American	30	High School	9- 12; Variety of ELA courses such as English 9, 10, American Literature, SAT prep., African American Humanities, African American Literature
Roxanne T.	current	Black/African American	24	High School	ELA 9-12, AP Language and Composition, Humanities
Savannah J.	current	Asian American, Chinese American	8	High School	AP Macroeconomics, World History, Civics, Sociology, Latin History, Asian History
Shay C.	current	Black/African American	7	Middle/High School	6th - 8th & 10th: ELA / 9-12: Speech, Debate, Leadership TV Production and Newscast
Dominique B.	former, education consultant	Black/African American	5	High School	Drama, Theatre, College and Career Readiness, ELA

Erika K.	former, laid off at the time of the retreat in July 2024 (returned to the classroom that fall)	Black/African American	8	High School	Mathematics: 9 - 12
Garrett (Donte G.)	former, admin (principal)	Black/African American	10	Elementary/Middle School	K- 8 Social Studies, ELA, Debate
Juliana E.	former, education-based non-profit coordinator	Latina, Mexican American	10	Elementary/Middle School	Bilingual 2-4th grade Digital Literacy/STEM K-8th grade
Riya C.	former, non-profit program manager	Asian American, Korean American	6	Middle School	6th/7th math and science; 6th grade humanities; 8th grade English
Tiaga S.	former, professor	Black, Latina	5	Middle/High School	6 - 12 Spanish

In conducting this research, I was witness to several constellations of Teacher of Color relationships, a rich genealogy of informal and formal mentors and co-conspirators, that contributed to their tenure in the profession. For example, I was connected to Erika, a Black woman and former math teacher of 8 years, through one of the current teachers who attended the first retreat, Shay. Shay, a Black woman who has been teaching 6-12 ELA and electives for 7 years, was recommended to me by the first teacher I spoke with, Roxanne, her former English teacher and now district colleague, a Black woman with 24 years of teaching experience. Shay had shared a positive testimony of attending the retreat with several teacher friends, who shared the opportunity with other friends. Shay's recommendations connected me to 3 former teachers, Erika, Dominique, and Dominique's partner, Garrett.

Data Sources

To investigate the research questions about ways to learn about TOCs and their experiences with staying, I conducted 1:1 interviews with each participant and facilitated focus groups. I first interviewed 10 current TOCs and 15 former TOCs using a semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix A). Each interview lasted approximately 90-120 minutes. Data for this study included video and transcripts of each of the 25 interviews and any artifacts from teachers' classrooms and lives that were shared during or in the context of each interview such as photographs or videos. Eight teachers participated in the first retreat for current TOCs, while six former teachers participated in the second retreat. Data also included field notes, digital artifacts, and recordings from pre-retreat conversations, the mapping artifacts that TOCs created at the retreat, video and transcripts of the focus group sessions, TOCs' survey reflections about the process, photographs and artifacts from the retreat, and field observations.

The focus groups engaged in mapping activities such as educational journey mapping (Annamma, 2018), ecomapping (Hartman, 1978; Monreal, 2022), and freedom dreaming (Kelley, 2002; Spaulding et al., 2021). In creating their maps, participants also explored photo elicitation, collaging, and other forms of art making and visual media. While Teachers of Color and Indigenous teachers and their experiences have been studied quite broadly (Bettini et al. 2022; Gist & Bristol, 2022), a combination of mapping methods have yet to be explored with Teachers of Color and doing so might allow for a nuanced exploration of the experiences of Teachers of Color and an asset-based orientation that centers their knowledge.

While prior research has not brought these mapping tools and collective counterstorytelling methods together as a way to learn about Teachers of Color and their experiences with staying and leaving schools, the effective usage of multiple mapping methods in other studies with different populations and research purposes (Annamma, 2017) suggest there is promise in bringing these methods together for the purpose of developing a more comprehensive understanding of what allows Teachers of Color to persist, endure, and thrive. This work also builds on a pilot study I conducted as part of my preliminary exams involving one Filipina and two Black educators. This pilot served to affirm, enhance, and validate the aforementioned mapping tools. Specifically, I saw how the different data sources reinforced and built upon each other in my analysis, and this allowed me to understand different aspects of teachers' sensemaking about what supports and sustains them. I designed this study as an extension of this methods-focused pilot study and investigated how veteran TOCs understand the various dimensions of their working environments and what TOCs think about what it takes to persist, endure, thrive and sustain themselves and their work as educators.

Data Collection

Teachers were invited to one of two grant-funded, in-person, summer retreats where three focus group sessions took place over the course of 2.5 days. Given the intended design and analysis, there was one retreat for current TOCs and another for former TOCs. During these retreats, I or my research assistant facilitated three focus groups: 1) Educational Journey Mapping, 2) Ecomapping, and 3) Freedom Dreaming (Appendix B, C, and D). Across the focus group sessions, TOCs engaged in activities, reflection, and dialogue to explore and define the concepts of staying, persisting, enduring, thriving and sustaining and what that looks like for teachers, by 1) mapping their experiences with education (Educational Journey Mapping), 2) completing an exercise about their navigational and contextual resources as teachers (Ecomapping), and 3) sharing their hopes for TOCs in educational spaces (Freedom Dreaming). Following each session, teachers were asked to complete a survey about the mapping session and retreat experience (Appendix E, F, and G). Below is an overview of the retreat schedule which includes each of the mapping sessions, meals provided, and free time (Table 2). The retreat was located in a spacious vacation rental home that used to serve as a bed and breakfast inn. Each mapping session took place at the dining room table with the flexibility to work outside or in another room. The outside of the home had a porch, a bench swing, an outdoor fireplace, and patio furniture. Outside of the sessions, teachers were free to explore and rest however they liked. We were located in a town that was known for being a vacation destination so there were a lot of local shops and restaurants within walking distance, and a lake with a beachfront within driving distance.

Table 7. Sample Itinerary from Retreat

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3:
<p>4 p.m.: Check in to VRBO, connect, rest</p> <p>5-7pm: Dinner provided (catered/take-out)</p> <p>Free Time - Enjoy, connect, rest!</p> <p>7-9pm: Session 1: Mapping our Educational Journeys</p> <p>Focused on your educational journey (includes individual reflection time + discussion)</p>	<p>Before 9:30am: Breakfast (food available to make your own meal)</p> <p>9:30am-11:30am: Session 2: Mapping our Current Context/Resources</p> <p>Focused on your current/most recent teaching environment and resources (includes individual reflection time + discussion)</p> <p>11:30am-3pm: Lunch Provided</p> <p>Free Time - Enjoy, connect, rest!</p> <p>3pm-5pm: Session 3: Mapping our Freedom Dreams for Education</p> <p>Focused on your dreams for Teachers of Color/future of education (includes individual reflection time + discussion)</p> <p>5-7pm: Dinner Provided</p> <p>After 5pm: Free Time - Enjoy, connect, rest!</p>	<p>Before 9am:</p> <p>Breakfast (food available to make your own meal)</p> <p>Free Time - Enjoy, connect, rest!</p> <p>Packing Cars and Cleaning up the Space</p> <p>9-9:30am: Closing Circle and optional group photo</p> <p>9:30-10am:</p> <p>Breakfast (food available to make your own meal)</p> <p>Free Time - Enjoy, connect, rest!</p> <p>Packing Cars and Cleaning up the Space</p> <p>10am: Check out</p>

Several research assistants attended the retreats to support me with data collection. One research assistant, Anna, attended both retreats. Anna (she/her), a Black biracial educator, former K-12 classroom teacher, and PhD candidate whose research focuses on the life and school stories of Black, Afro-Indigenous and Lakota educators in South Dakota, supported the facilitation of the mapping sessions and overall retreat logistics. Anna also brought various magazines and supplies for collaging. At the first retreat, the second research assistant was Sara (she/her), an international graduate student from Pakistan and former middle school drama teacher, supported with the video recording and meal preparation. Sara's husband, Ammar (he/him), also came to support with meal preparation and logistics. Ammar was also a former history teacher in Islamabad. At the second retreat, the second research assistant was Mez (she/they), a Latinx PhD

candidate who designs and researches making-based, community-oriented, STEM learning experiences to see how youth use these spaces to enact agency in and with time. Mez supported the retreat with video recording, meal preparation, and providing additional art supplies. At times, research assistants played more of an active role in the sessions and conversations and at other times they listened in or worked on preparing meals. We found times at the retreat, during the scheduled “free time,” to coordinate logistics and debrief the sessions from our perspectives as graduate students, educators, and researchers. Anna and I would go for walks around town after the ecomapping sessions, and I audio recorded some of our reflections during that time. I also spent time at the beach, with others and by myself, writing down reflections in my notebook. I also asked teachers to complete a follow up survey one year after the initial data collection (Appendix H).

Data Analysis

I adopt a constant comparative method analytic approach (Merriam & Tisdale, 2015), which involves the comparison of segments of data with each other to determine similarities and differences, and grouping data together on a similar dimension based on patterns and connections I observe. I developed and refined codes based on emerging themes and patterns, applying codes rooted in my conceptual framework to the data, and revising the codes and process as necessary.

Positionality

As a Pinay, or Filipina American, former high school history teacher and current graduate student, my own educational journey influenced the study design and my analysis of the data. I thought about my positioning (Boveda & Annamma, 2023) throughout, building upon my own experiences as a Teacher of Color and the grief I felt when leaving my classroom (Cariaga, 2022). In conducting this research, I considered the impact of physical spaces, the histories of

harm done in schools and educational systems, and the labor of teaching. I sought to use research methods that reject extractive practices and support reciprocity. This included compensating teachers financially with stipends, attempting to minimize barriers to participation, and covering lodging, food, and transportation expenses. The retreat design was intentional, hosted away from teachers' physical workspace, offering a space to share that was less restrictive and invited critical reflection, community, and healing. Once I had a full draft of the findings, I asked teachers to provide feedback via a member checking survey (Appendix I). I also offered several drop-in meeting times for teachers to provide verbal feedback and reflections. This was done to ensure that the findings aligned with teachers' experiences and to follow up on any concerns with anonymity. In order to check on my own subjectivities, I used memo-ing as a space to critically reflect on my positionality and also sought feedback from my advisor, on-site retreat team, and other scholars throughout the process. In doing so, I found myself at times being challenged as a researcher and grappling with my own grief as a former teacher. This illuminated the need for bearing witness to experiential knowledge and engaging the "full humanity of researcher(s) and collaborators" (Hannegan-Martinez, 2023b).

Findings

Several findings emerged from my data analysis: 1) The retreat, which utilized an intentional combination of three different mapping tools, provided an opportunity for multi-layered meaning-making with TOCs, extending on what can be learned in an interview or focus group; 2) The mapping and retreat provided a multi-modal opportunity where visuals and creative expression offered insight into TOCs thinking and became a tool for communicating their experiences; 3) When asked to share and respond to each others' maps at the retreat, teachers collectively built on what was shared in their initial maps and 1:1 interviews,

contributing additional knowledge in a collective space. The retreat not only served as a unique conduit for research, but also functioned as a space of collective theorization and professional learning amongst TOCs. 4) The retreat, as context for the mapping reflections, gave insight into how research methods might better affirm the work of TOCs and can contribute to TOCs' healing and well-being.

Finding 1. Combination of Mapping Tools Supported Multi-layered Meaning-making

Mapping during the retreat provided an opportunity for both individual and collective reflection. Each mapping tool allowed for greater insight into the experiences of the participating Teachers of Color. With each map they created, both current and former TOCs offered multiple counterstories of schooling and how they made meaning of their experiences. This combination of mapping tools supported learning about TOCs because the process provided a multi-layered account of their experiences with K-12 schooling as students and teachers as well as their hopes for education. The mapping artifacts and the process of mapping also added texture to the stories that Teachers of Color shared during their pre-retreat interviews and in the focus group sessions. I share examples from a current TOC and a former TOC to highlight the multi-layered reflection across each mapping session.

1.1 Uncovering Roxanne's Perspective through Multiple Maps

Educational journey mapping, the first type of mapping we engaged with in both groups, provided an outlet for teachers to reflect on their childhood, formal schooling and informal education and journey into and throughout teaching. Through these educational journey maps, I saw how teachers did not just name the miseducation the experiences, but also told the stories and counterstories of it, bringing nuance to the ways people have navigated schooling and the supports around them. The process enabled teachers to think about their experiences over time,

across different geographies and spaces, and in relation to others. The group of current teachers mostly worked on visual maps of their educational journeys with six teachers creating posters, one teacher, Roxanne, creating a digital slide deck, and one teacher creating a poem that she ended up not sharing with the group.

For her educational journey map, Roxanne used digital media and photographs from online and her personal albums. Roxanne is a Black woman and high school English and Humanities teacher and department chair with 24 years of teaching experience and taught in the same district as 3 other participants Shay, Kai, and Whitney. With her first and last slide (Figure 17), Roxanne shared the reasons she cares and the reasons she stays in teaching. On her first slide, she spoke about the influences of family, her work with students, and literature, and on her last slide, she explained:

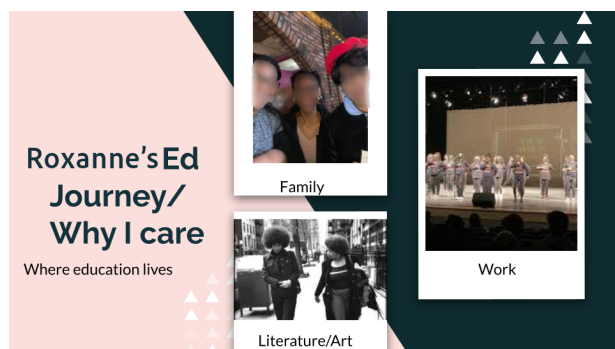
What makes me stay? Elijah. So that's my baby, when he was a little bitty kid. That's my son, my only one. This was in May when he graduated from college back in the day. Okay. So it's why I stay. And of course. This is a picture of my kids. Again, their Black History Month show. I teach a course called African American humanities. Kai and I teach it. Well, I teach it at [my school], she teaches it at [a different school in the district] and...that's why I stay. I get to teach. Even when I wasn't teaching the humanities course, I've always taught the stories of kids who look like what I'm teaching. I've always diverted from the canon. I don't care, bring a parent in, and do what you got to do. I think it's important because children should be able to see themselves in literature, and that's why I stay.

Roxanne used photos and images to emphasize the people and relationships that are critical to her work and allow her to remain in teaching. She bookended her slides and explanation with the

same main themes of her family, her students, and literature that represents Black experiences, emphasizing the impact of these influences on her trajectory.

After creating and sharing her slide deck, Roxanne wrote in her survey that using images from online were supportive of her mapping process, because “it’s easy to catalog moments. Timelines are noted and what I was thinking at those times.” Looking back at one’s personal timeline or images from online can spark memories. In her pre-retreat interview, Roxanne shared some public images and video clips about the African American Humanities program at her school. During the retreat, the personal photos she shared of her students alongside that of her family and her son and an image of Angela Davis and Toni Morrison brought greater texture to the stories she shared about her education and miseducation. Through reflecting on and sharing these images, Roxanne could share her relationships and the care she puts into her teaching across different moments in time. The educational mapping process emphasized the influences at the heart of Roxanne’s reasons for caring about education and staying in the profession of teaching and the images she selected allowed for deeper insight into the most significant influences on her trajectory and longevity: her family, her students, and her love of culturally-affirming literature.

Figure 17. Select Images from Roxanne’s Educational Journey Map



The second mapping exercise - ecomapping - provided a pathway for TOCs to more precisely define their community and clarify their connections, relationships, and positionality. Some teachers highlighted more of the tensions and negative aspects of their working environments while other teachers intentionally chose to shed light on more of the positive relationships and connections in their lives. Through the ecomaps, I could see how emotions and relationships guided teachers' thinking about what resources, communities, and dynamics to focus on.

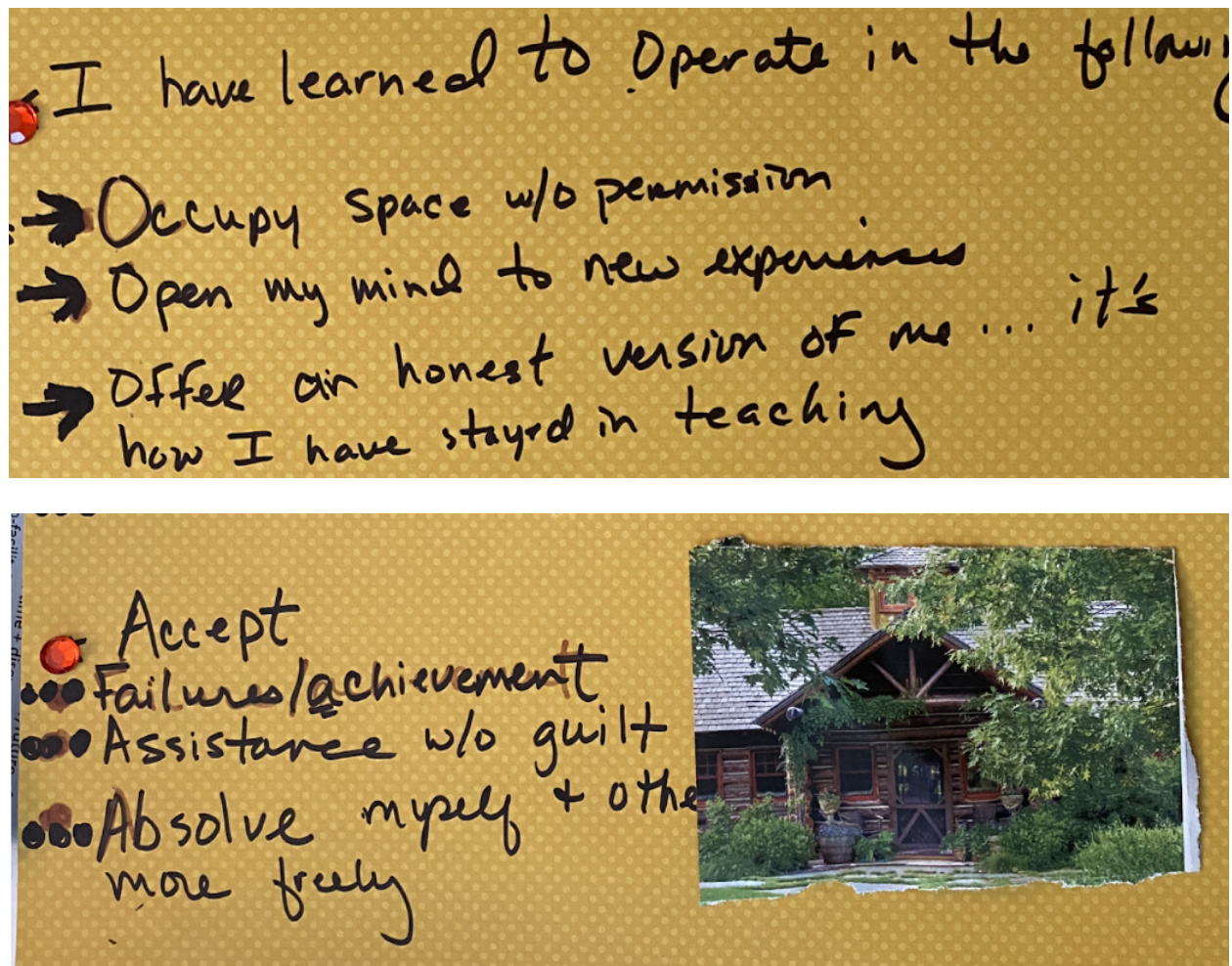
As she drew on collaging poetry as a way to reflect and process, Roxanne's creativity during the ecomapping session revealed new insights into her perspectives. Roxanne used her name to make an acrostic poem, sharing what the O and A in her name stood for (Figure 18):

The O in my name, these are the things that I want for myself and I put in the legend, the things that I'm working on...there's a straight line in some places and arrows and dots, but occupying for the O. Occupying space without permission, being open minded and offering an honest version of myself...and then the A, I put acceptance. Accept the things that I fail at and the things that I achieve...have achievement with. Accept assistance without guilt. I'm a Scorpio since we were saying signs...so I have a hard time, and absolve myself and other people and things a little bit easier.

Roxanne explained how she organized her thoughts into a poetic format, finding prompting language and aligning her ideas by using the letters in her own name. Her writing provides insight into the tensions she faces within her work and the strategies she has for navigating those challenges. She drew on her skills as an English educator and wove poetry into her artistic expression. She wrote on her survey reflection that "writing helps me keep on track with ideas/main points I want to share." In using a structured poetic format, Roxanne seemed to be

processing the reality she was navigating, the goals she wanted to work towards, and how she wanted to focus her energies. This process also gave her a way to organize the ideas that she planned to share out with the group. The ecomaps provided a structure for TOCs to evaluate the existing resources in their environment and how they interact with those resources. Building on the educational journey map, the ecomaps allowed me to further understand how TOCs made sense of their energies and their relationships within their school environments.

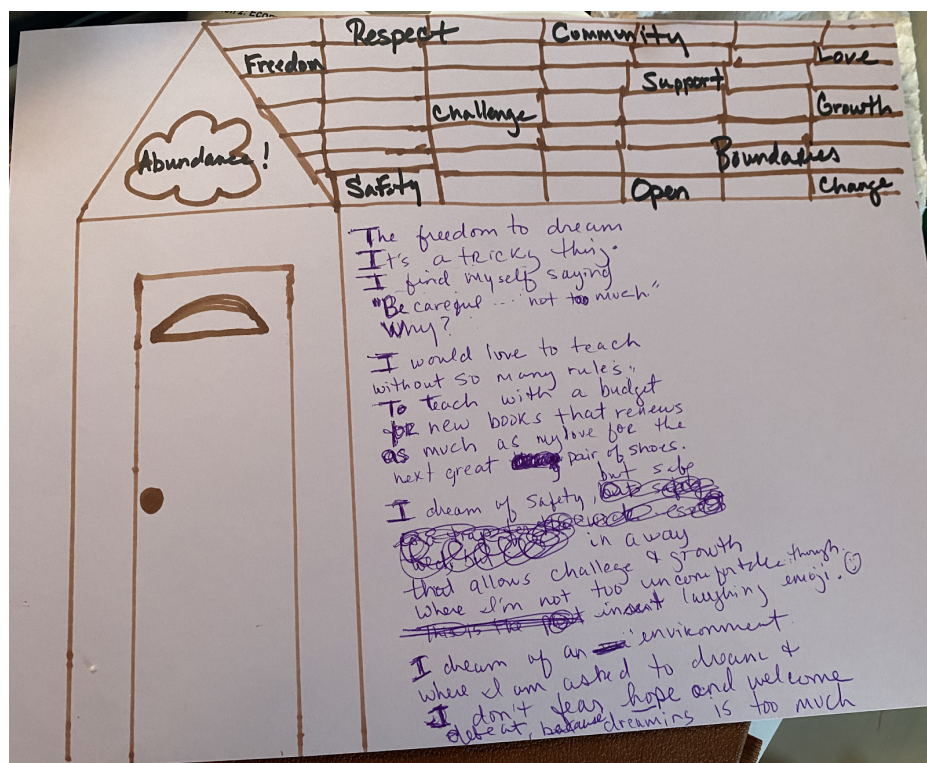
Figure 18. Selections of Roxanne's Ecomap



The third map - freedom dreaming - invited TOCs to imagine a future for education devoid of systemic oppression. The activity prompted them to describe the types of schools and education they want to see in the world and what resources would be available to teachers and students. One of the prompting questions was: What are the types of places and spaces that you could see yourself living in, being in, working in, thriving in, and loving in? The freedom dream maps that participants created revealed how TOCs understood the impact of systems on teachers' and students' experiences and described their visions for more humanizing and supportive structures within schools that center TOCs and their Students of Color.

For some of the teachers, their reflections about their freedom dreaming process was more focused on using writing as a tool for uncovering ideas and supporting their organization. Roxanne wrote in her survey response that mapping her freedom dreams (Figure 19) and “writing poetry helps me tap into a stream of emotions and ideas.” She explained the process as helpful and used poetry as a way to further access her inner emotions and thoughts. The shingles of the house in her drawing highlight the ideas and concepts that Roxanne “wants...[and] dreams of” which included “freedom, respect, challenge, safety, community, support, open, boundaries, love, growth, change.” In the last line of her poem, she wrote “I dream of an environment where I’m asked to dream, and I don’t fear hope and welcome defeat, because dreaming is too much.” Here, Roxanne spoke to the complexity of dreaming in an environment that does not support dreaming and where teaching is inhibited by many rules and regulations. Several of the current teachers similarly commented on the challenge of freedom dreaming exercise and holding concepts that felt incongruent and in conflict with the reality they knew. Roxanne’s poem highlights the tensions of wanting to dream freely, without fear and without feeling like it is too much to wish for. In combination with educational journey mapping and ecomapping, the freedom dreaming exercise gave TOCs another way to access their experiences but with the future in mind. As teachers created an artifact to represent their freedom dreams, I saw how the process involved not just dreaming up the possibilities of what could be but also remembering and reflecting on their experiences. Some of the teachers expressed the tensions of wanting to dream freely and some commented on the need to reflect before imagining what education could be, which indicated the important role memory work played in the freedom dreaming process.

Figure 19. Roxanne's Freedom Dream



In the last two sessions, Roxanne crafted an acrostic poem for her ecomap and another poem for her freedom dream, which was embedded within a drawing that she created. Roxanne wove together writing and visual media as a way to reflect on and tell the story of her experiences. With each map, Roxanne was able to tap into different creative methods which allowed her to reflect on aspects of her life with further nuance, capturing a multi-layered account of her experiences with and hopes for K-12 schooling. Roxanne's examples are reflective of the array and nuance across C-TOCs maps. With each map created at the retreat, I was able to uncover another layer of each TOC's counterstory, how they oriented themselves in relation to their work and what they believe matters most for their retention.

1.2 Multiple Maps Deepen Access to Riya's Perspective

Former teachers also began their reflections on their experiences with learning in and out of schools through the educational journey maps. They reflected on their formal and informal

educators as well as relationships and pivotal learning experiences at different stages of their lives. Riya, a Korean American and former middle school teacher of both STEM and humanities who taught for 6 years, expanded on the educational journal mapping process when they explained what they created with the group:

I got way into the drawings, so there are no words yet, but I will tell the story of it. So I wanted to do mine like a triptych, and each part telling a piece of my education journey. The panel on the left is representative of my K-12 education. I was in school every day of the week. And I was a good student so it wasn't uncomfortable and I felt really successful. But every panel in the triptych, there's an education aspect and a miseducation aspect. So once I fill this out, the lightning strike is kind of like, the other side of it where there is a lot of internalized homophobia and also a lot of internalized racism, and then the panel on the right was...is representative of my time in college, which was really formative for me...

Riya used a triptych format to highlight different chapters of their journey (Figure 20). Riya thought about how the prompt of education and miseducation informed each panel or chapter of their journey. Riya added in their survey reflection that, “Drawing and storytelling are natural conduits for me for processing and expressing my inner world. It helps me to draw connections across different periods of my life. In this case, those connections were about the institutions that have been most present in my educational journey.” Riya spoke about how their storytelling and drawing were supportive of their ability to process and express their thoughts. They also identified the presence of institutions (e.g., Korean church, university) and the significant role those institutions played in understanding connections and where internalized homophobia and racism was learned. Riya spoke about mapping as “a conduit for processing” complex concepts

and emotions. This process seemed to be edifying of Riya's values and agency in a personalized and creative way. Through the maps that F-TOCs created, I could also see the pivotal moments, relationships, and institutions that shared their journeys in and through teaching.

Figure 20. Riya's Educational Journey Map - Triptych

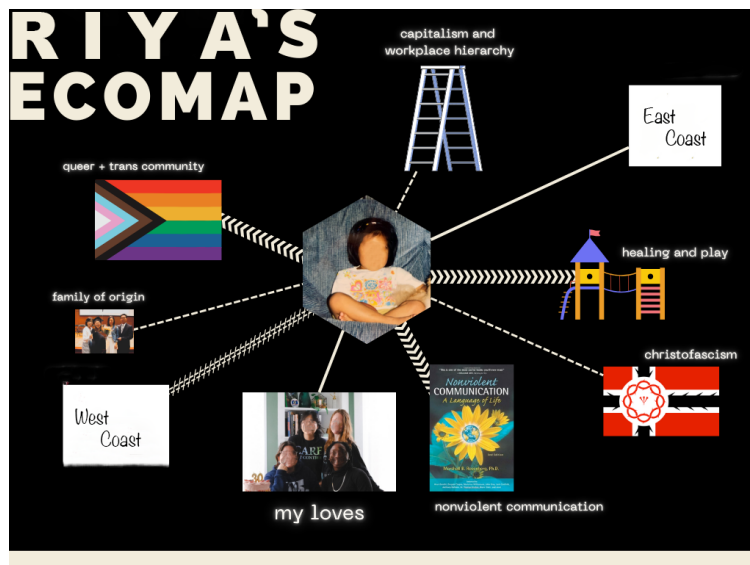


Former TOCs also expressed how the second, ecomapping activity gave them an opportunity to reflect on connections and support systems. Like the group of C-TOCs, they used different arrows and lines in the ecomaps to represent energy flow and to support them to reflect on what things give and take energy in their lives.

Riya's ecomap (Figure 21) was created using Canva, and their ecomap features images and photographs and different types of lines to indicate the strength of relationships. In Riya's survey reflection, they shared, "I liked having the opportunity to weigh the different push and pull factors in my decision to exit classroom teaching. To see them all on one page created a sense of completeness—that my decision was not made lightly and that it's reflective of a lot of

different factors that exist beyond the school.” Riya thought about different factors, including the relationships and communities in their life as well as the influence of systems like “capitalism and work place hierarchy” and “christofacism” that made it difficult to navigate educational spaces. The ecomap Riya created intentionally emphasized the institutions and relationships that have been harmful or supportive, contributing to their capacity as an educator. While others reflected on their relationships and experiences in terms of energy being expended or given, Riya explained that ecomapping was an opportunity to weigh different push and pull factors, emphasizing the role that environmental factors played in their experience. Ecomapping provided a method for Riya to process and clarify how these different factors contributed to their values and ultimately their decision to leave teaching. Building on their educational journey map, the ecomap gave me further insight into Riya’s criticality of systemic oppression and the environmental conditions that pushed them from the classroom.

Figure 21. Riya’s Ecomap



During the final, freedom dreaming session before individual reflection time, the group of former Teachers of Color had a conversation about the word “imagine” and the privilege of

being able to dream. Tiaga, a Black woman of Spanish-speaking heritage, former secondary school Spanish teacher (5 years) and now a Linguistics professor and director of an out-of-school community academic program, reminded the group that not everyone has the luxury or feels readily able to dream. At the same time, Tiaga wondered about what it might be like to give oneself permission to dream even when dreaming does not always feel possible. Tiaga initially conceptualized the concepts of imagining and dreaming as passive, but also acknowledged it as a potential initial step to engage and move toward deeper action. Riya made a connection and gave a recommendation to read an NK Jemisen short story “The Ones Who Stay and Fight.” Riya previewed the story by highlighting one of its themes, “But essentially, could we have [a world without oppression or utopic society] if there's always going to be curiosity? And doesn't choice and autonomy also mean the choice to hurt people? So that's kind of what I think about. It's like, we could make a world without oppression, but we can't make a world without choice.” This conversation about the freedom dreaming prompt prefaced the individual reflection time. The group of former teachers went into creating their freedom dreams informed by these questions that Anna, a Black woman graduate student facilitator and former Teacher of Color, called “juicy...and important provocations and offerings.”

Riya created a tree house as their vision of a freedom school that centered on sustainable education and living (Figure 22). In making a representation of their freedom dream, Riya was inspired by the form of a tree and represented their dreams with a treehouse. Riya explained this choice with the group, “I decided to go with a tree house because...my dream is to be part of an outdoor school that's focused on outdoor education and sustainable living. So the basis of everything, I think, is “connection and togetherness.” I think that's something that we don't know how to do right now and that is deeply needed. ” Both Tiaga and Riya created trees as the basis

for their freedom dreaming, drawing on the natural world, which supported their reflection. Riya imagined a school where everything was rooted in connection and sustainable practices were the focus of students' learning. They explained in their survey that drawing, collaging, and writing "helped me think outside of the box because I was cutting and pasting paper without a template or a plan." The process of mapping without a template gave Riya the flexibility to think innovatively and create the structure with each new idea. Riya further shared in their survey response insights into their reflection process:

Thinking about schooling/education as integrated in a community (imagined as a treehouse) and not separate is something I think about often. I was able to reflect on how school as an institution often hinders people from learning and it affirmed my decision to walk away from classroom teaching. Even though I was free to dream, I couldn't help but consider how long and complicated of a history American education has. Its ties to capitalism and the prison-industrial complex are deep, so it's easy to dream of better schools but not so easy to actually build and sustain them.

Like with the group of current teachers, former teachers like Riya noticed the freedom dreaming activity elicited conflicting feelings. Riya shared that their reflection was accompanied by thoughts of systemic oppression and forces that prevent schools from being built and functioning in a sustainable way. Through Riya's reflection process, they were also able to affirm their decision to walk away from the classroom. By mapping their experiences and dreams at the retreat, Riya could reflect on the nuances of their teaching trajectory, the environmental and systemic influences, their dreams for sustainable learning spaces, and the connections and challenges across these arenas. Seeing Riya's freedom dreams juxtaposed with their educational

journey map and ecomap, I could further understand the lack of alignment across Riya's values and the educational context they were working in.

Figure 22. Riya's Freedom Dream



1.3 Retreat Created Additional Opportunities to Support Reflection and Amplify

Counterstories

The retreat created further opportunities for each attendee to more deeply reflect on their education experiences. In the pre-retreat interviews, some teachers took up the invitation to share photos, videos and artifacts of their teaching, but not all did. The retreat provided time and space for teachers to reflect over the course of multiple days as well as a variety of creative materials for teachers to use in their reflection. TOCs were invited to process creatively and collectively

among other teachers. The range of what teachers created, through visuals and creative writing, enabled an amplification of the counterstories that teachers shared during their pre-retreat interviews. Mapping offered a creative outlet and setting where deep reflection could emerge through counterstorytelling.

Not only did the mapping tools provide a flexible structure to support counterstorytelling, in combination they also supported a multi-layered process of reflection and re-membering that might be limited in an interview setting. With each session, TOCs considered prompts focused on a different theme and created maps that reflected and amplified different elements of their educational trajectory into and through teaching (as well as out of teaching for the F-TOCs). Each map provided a new layer to the counterstories that TOCs shared, which allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences with retention and the supports that allow them to stay in or exit the profession.

Finding 2. Visual and Creative Expression Offered Insight into TOCs' Thinking and Supported their Communication

The sessions not only provided extended time for teachers to critically reflect on and process their experiences, but also they supported teachers to articulate what is most important to them through different forms of art and storytelling. Each educator opted to engage in the messiness of art making as part of their counterstorytelling. In this setting, teachers made different choices in how to represent and tell the story of their experiences. The mapping and retreat provided opportunities for teachers to engage with multi-modal visuals and creative expression, which supported the research process. Art done in the context of a retreat gave insight into TOCs thinking and became a tool for communicating their experiences. Again, I

share examples from current TOCs and former TOCs from each of the mapping sessions to showcase how visual and creative outlets supported TOCs with communicating their stories.

2.1 Using Visual Maps Supported Shay with Communicating Her Experiences

Being able to use different kinds of written and visual representations as part of their mapping enabled some teachers to share their stories more fully. Teachers also made intentional choices with selecting colors, formatting, and images. This supported them to communicate the educational narratives that they shared with the group. Several teachers spoke about the choices they made with the format in which they depicted their educational journeys.

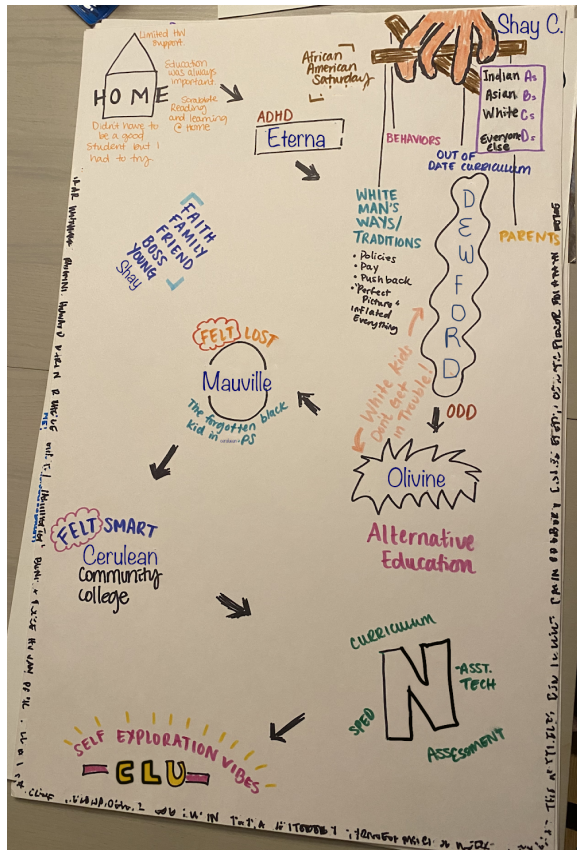
Shay, a Black woman and middle school English and Language Arts teacher with 7 years of teaching experience, found that creating an educational journey map (Figure 23) allowed her to express herself more fully. In explaining her map with the group, Shay shared about her childhood and schooling experiences and then named some of the overarching challenges teachers face:

At the top, I got like the puppeteer's hands of the challenges...I'm not saying this hypocritically because I was in alternative school, but, there's some new shit out here...it's crazy. Also, the white man's ways and traditions, regarding policy, pay, and pushback on what we teach and stuff like that. And then my border just represents all of the Educators of Color that I've had through my K-12 experience. Honorable mention Roxanne was my English Teacher.

Shay drew puppeteer hands at the top of her map with different strings representing some of the challenges teachers face. These puppeteer hands creatively depicted the systemic nature of different forces that make it challenging for TOCs to be successful. She concluded by mentioning that her border reflected the names of all the Teachers of Color she had growing up,

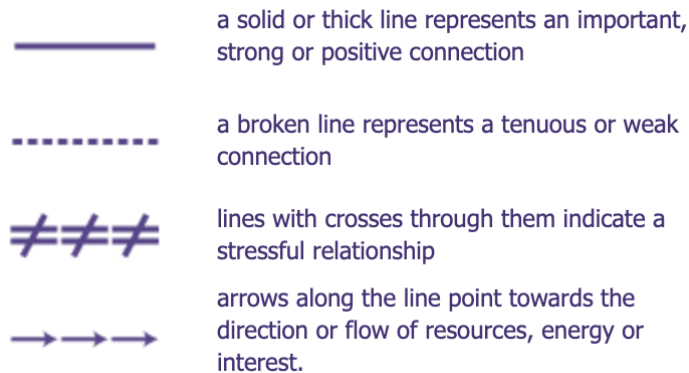
specifically naming Roxanne who was her former English teacher, now colleague, in the same district. While she was impacted by systemic challenges and through her experiences with alternative education, she was able to simultaneously highlight the many Teachers of Color that influenced her journey. This list of names could be interpreted as a protective border that has fortified and supported Shay to grow in her journey. Shay wrote in her reflection that, “Drawing/mapping made reliving [my experience] tangible. I was able to express my experience through colors and shapes.” Shay elaborated on how the process of drawing and mapping supported her in being able to express herself and her experiences. The mapping and drawing of her experiences on a poster gave Shay a tangible structure to relive and represent her experiences as a young person going through a schooling system. The colors, shapes, and overall imagery of Shay’s educational journey map enhanced the stories she told about her experiences with education and miseducation. This indicates that the process of creating through visual media provided teachers with further clarity in how to express the story of their experiences.

Figure 23. Shay’s Educational Journey Map



Different aesthetic and stylistic choices during the ecomapping exercise offered insight into teachers' thinking about their contexts. Teachers used visual symbols and poetic choices to communicate what features were particularly valuable or caused them stress and frustration. Images like arrows, lines, and symbols were used to signify energy flow (how energy is directed). Some used proximity and variation in types of arrows or lines to indicate the strength of relationships or connections (how energy is used/given/shared). Many teachers drew on the facilitator-provided legend of sample annotations (Figure 24), where solid lines meant stronger connections, broken lines spoke to weaker connections, and lines that were crossed through indicated a stressful relationship. Teachers also leveraged different forms of expression and selected words or formatting intentionally. These symbolic representations and formatting choices reflected teachers' evaluation of the different aspects of their environments.

Figure 24. Legend of Sample Annotations Provided During Ecomapping Activity



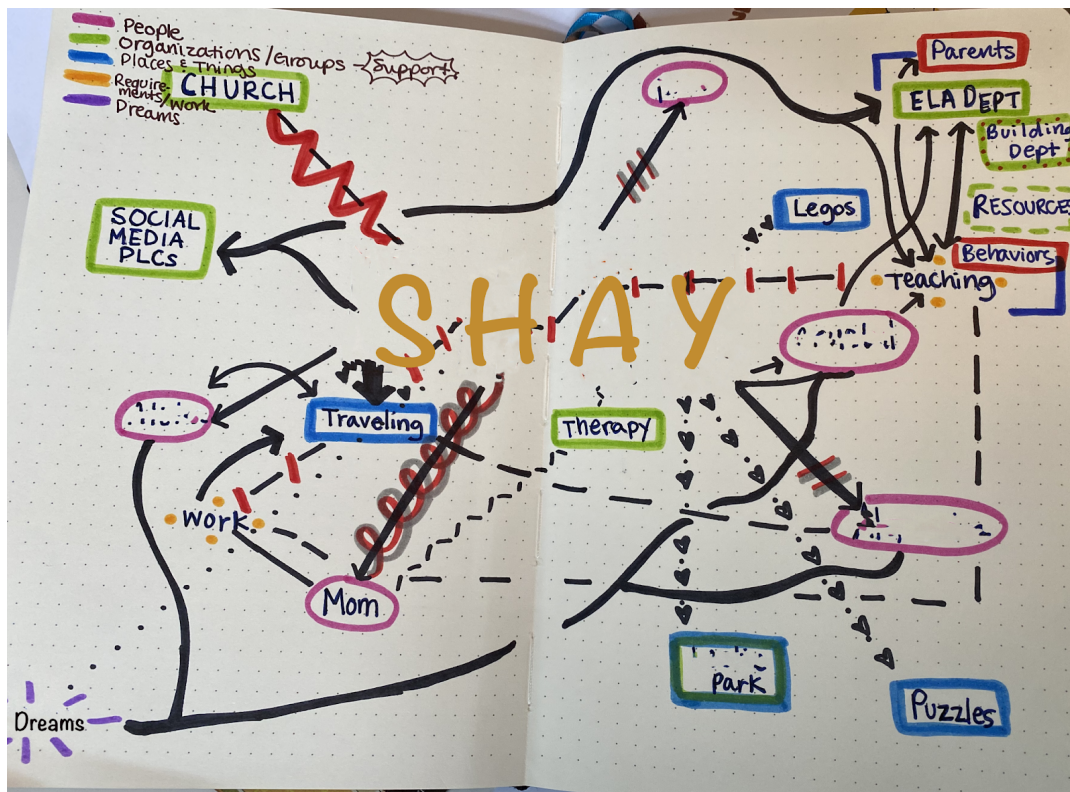
Teachers commented on the different choices they made with their maps to communicate their energy levels, emotions, or intentions. In her ecomap (Figure 25), Shay reflected on the ways she felt poured into and supported by other people. She also considered relationships that have a negative impact on her energy and ability to do her work. Shay was deliberate in her use of color and types of lines, indicating the strength of relationships and the connections between different people, places, organizations. Placing her dreams in the corner of the page, Shay mentioned “these days I’m feeling very disconnected to [my dreams]. I just don’t really know anything anymore. So it’s just like in the corner. My friends do support my dreams, I drew thick lines from my friends to my dreams.” This placement of her dreams is reflective of the ways she views her dreams as isolated, yet still supported by her friends, as indicated by the thick lines which indicate a strong, positive connection. Shay, while sharing her ecomap, also made connections to earlier points made by other teachers:

And then parents, I put in red, because it’s challenging being a Black teacher to white children, because Roxanne you mentioned no matter how many years of service, good ratings on your evaluation, you still know nothing to them.

Shay commented on her use of the color red to represent her frustration. Through her intentional color choice, Shay was able to bring nuance from her own experience and the ways that she felt

perceived by white families as a Black teacher. In the map she created, Shay was able to elaborate on challenges that were particularly salient for her. Her use of color, lines, hearts to emphasize concepts also signified the intensity of her feelings about different relationships relevant to her work. In her survey reflection, Shay wrote, “Using the ecomap, I was able to see more clearly the intersections of my life. Some things I would have never connected in my head, but seeing them laid out opened my eyes to how various elements are interconnected.” The creative aspect of the ecomap provided a conduit for sense-making and supported Shay to see connections between different entities in her life and clarify how they might be connected to one another, in creating tensions or in supporting her. She further reflected on how ecomapping was supportive of understanding not only her direct relationships, but also how different groups interact with one another.

Figure 25. Shay’s Ecomap



The freedom dreaming exercise enabled teachers to turn abstract concepts into concrete ideas that could be shared. Even without an initial plan or vision, making selections about visual elements of their maps helped teachers to spark new insights and make meaning of their thoughts. Shay shared with the group that her map was conceptualized as a galaxy (Figure 10) because, “I was thinking like, Well, what's bigger than a dream, right?” As part of this drawing, Shay also explained, “Oh, and then I also have this little comet, and it just says, “Is it even possible?” Because I just always...when I think about the progression of the years, obviously, we are living out our ancestors wildest dreams, but sometimes I just feel like, why are we still so far? But then also, the goal post is always moving.” For Shay, the imagery of a galaxy and comet illustrated her dreams in an active way. As her dreams sit amongst the stars, she also had a comet in the corner with a question of doubt and wondering. This visual supports the communication of her dreams and the tension she feels about whether those dreams could be achieved. Shay shared in her survey reflection about the freedom dreaming activity that “[Drawing] helped me think of and conceptualize my dreams, hopes and wishes in a more concrete way.” Shay explained how the process of drawing her freedom dream (Figure 16) allowed for a more concrete conceptualization of her dreams, making it tangible and visible. The process illuminated different aspects of her thinking and gave her a way to articulate her ideas.

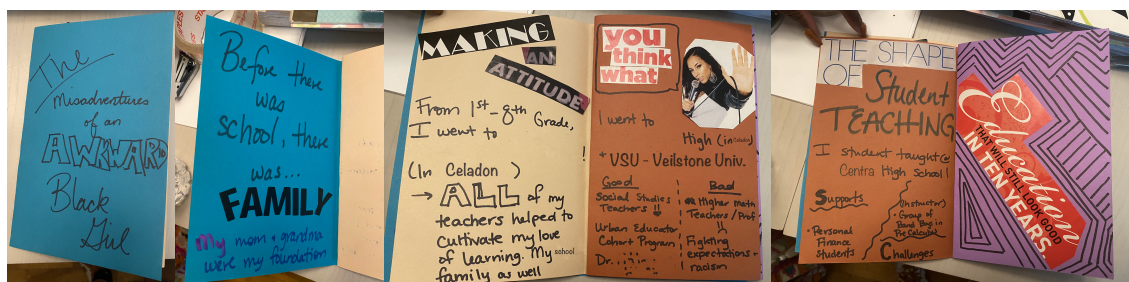
2.2 Using Different Creative Outlets Supported Erika to Communicate Different Aspects of Her Work

Former teachers also explained how the process of mapping supported them with sharing. Erika, a Black woman and high school mathematics teacher who was laid off after teaching for 8 years at the time of the retreat, chose to make a zine (Figure 26) as a way to map her educational journey, which she titled “The Misadventures of an Awkward Black Girl.” Erika explained in a

survey reflection, “I think using drawing, collaging, and writing helped to share my journey because I was able to personalize it and find key phrases, fonts, and colors that best represented me at that time.” The process of collaging and using drawings and writing as part of her zine-making was a personalized process, unique to Erika’s experience and served as a method for depicting who she was at different stages of her life. She also connected the activity to her capacity to share her journey with others and how different aesthetic elements that she selected like fonts, colors, and phrases resonated with her past experiences.

After the first session, Erika wrote in her survey reflection, “I think the most supportive [part] to this reflection was sitting around with everyone and creating our pieces. I also [enjoyed] our sharing out. I really enjoyed hearing about everyone's journey.” Erika commented on the time spent sitting with other former teachers and creating their maps alongside each other as being most supportive of her processing. She also found joy in sharing and listening to the other teachers. This reflection demonstrates how valuable it was for Erika to be in community with other teachers to create her piece and have the opportunity to share and listen.

Figure 26. Erika’s Educational Journey Map - “The Misadventures of an Awkward Black Girl” Zine



The group of former teachers also used imagery and symbols in their ecomaps to represent the relationships in their lives. With her ecomap, Erika, as a former math teacher,

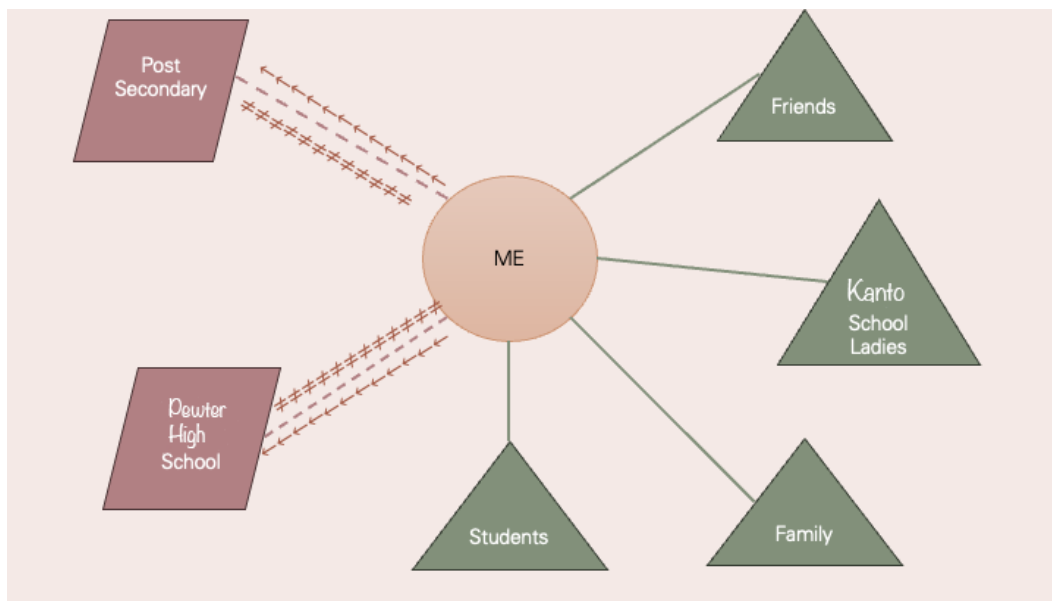
embedded math into her map (Figure 27), drawing on geometric shapes to explain her perspective on different aspects of her life:

So I approached this in a really mathematical way. I don't like geometry, but I felt like it was really fitting here. So triangles are one of the most sturdy shapes. We love them. And so, because I love them, they're like green flags. So my friends, my Kanto school ladies, my family, and my students. They're all my green flags. They are the reason I do what I do, and that I still am chipper. And then there's me in the center. I'm the circle. I love myself. I like the sun. It's yellow. It's supposed to be yellow. And of course, with the circle it doesn't have any edges, it just keeps going and going and going. And that's how I see my journey. Then, we have my post-secondary and my most recent teaching placement at Pewter High School. Those are parallelograms. They're kind of...it's like a rectangle, but slightly off kilter, you know rectangles right? This is supposed to be like sets of parallel lines, they seem cool, but it's slightly errr with that. Both experiences were super, super stressful. Both experiences, I feel like I put more energy into it than they put into me. Because yet again, you have to work twice as hard to get just as much and you don't even get that.

Similar to how Roxanne drew on poetry and poetic formatting when creating her ecomap, Erika used her knowledge of geometry to conceptualize her map and represent her ideas visually. She also intentionally selected colors that aligned with those shapes and symbols. Like she explained, triangles are strong, sturdy shapes, often used in architectural designs because they can more evenly distribute any weight that is put on them. She made an association between the triangle shape with the concept of green flags and used this to highlight important relationships in her life, including her students, friends, family, and trusted district colleagues. She utilized the shape

of a circle and the symbol of a yellow sun to talk about how she sees herself, affirming her bright personality and ability to keep going. She also spoke about using parallelograms and their slanted appearance to indicate the uncertainty and imbalance of her experiences in college and while teaching at her most recent school. She used 3 different types of lines from the facilitator-provided legend to emphasize her tenuous and stressful connection to those experiences and her outpouring of energy without reciprocity. Drawing on her mathematical knowledge, Erika was able to create a unique ecomap that allowed her to demonstrate emphasis as she communicated the stories of her relationships within her environment. This exemplifies the way that teachers used formatting and artistic discretion and drew on their skills to highlight and describe different aspects of their work.

Figure 27. Erika's Ecomap



During their individual freedom dreaming reflection time, Erika created a poem as a way to communicate her freedom dreams. Although she opened with some hesitation about the rustiness of her writing skills, Erika shared a poem that she wrote with the group (Figure 28). As part of the poem, Erika makes an appeal on behalf of teachers:

What can bring this dream to reality? What can be done to make us stop leaving? Start with giving us our dignity. Pay attention to our sanity. Look at our humanity. Know that we are somebody... We all wanted to be here... see here... live here... but here is not always the safest place. We have all had the baton to run this race, but some of us have passed it on because we have been laid to waste... by a system that gets off on giving chase.... But we still root for those on the next leg, because lord knows they need a friend.

Using sentences in the form of commands, Erika demands that others acknowledge the humanity of teachers. She also communicated the grief of people who have left the profession and “passed the baton” on to others and the hope they still have for the teachers who are still in it or coming up after them. Her words struck a cord with the group and they immediately responded:

Garrett: That was good. Really good.

Erika: Once upon a time, you know?

Anna: You’re a poet and a mathematician.

Erika: And a historian, but whatever. I just be out here in these streets.

Anna: That made me cry.

Garrett: That was awesome.

Erika: Thank you. It's been a minute, but I'm glad that it was decent.

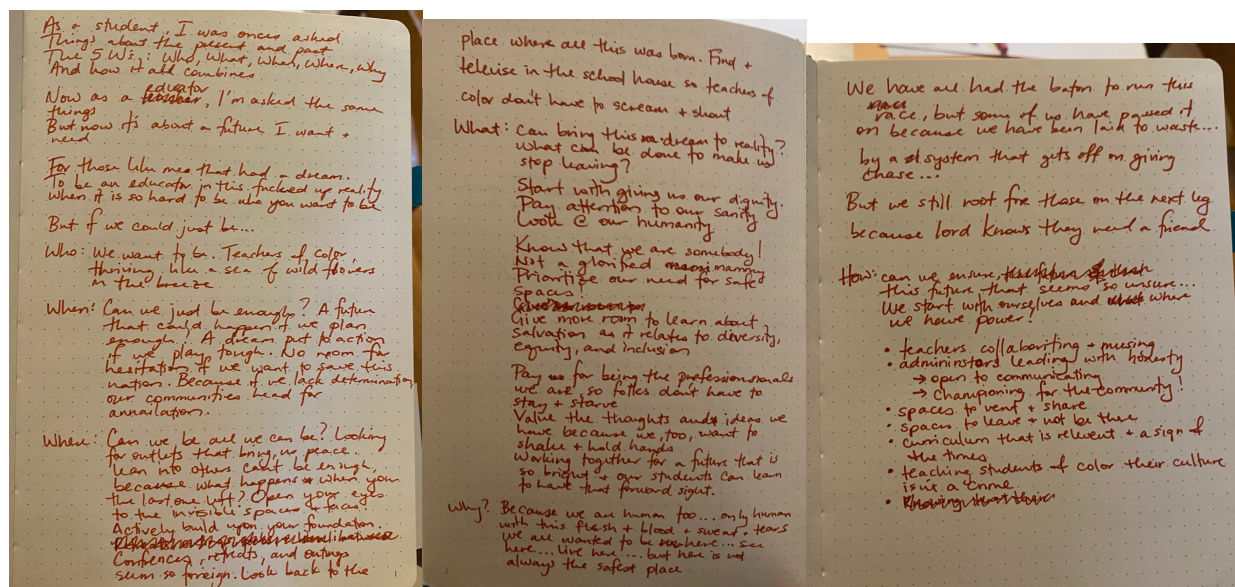
Anna: What resonated with you all? What connections did you make? Any phrases, words, rhymes that moved you?

...

Juliana: I like that we want to stay, you know?... I don't recall what you said. But like passing the baton, wanting to stay, but being forced to really pass it on.

As the group shared affirmations of Erika's poem, its impact and what resonated with them, Erika acknowledged Anna's words that she was a poet and a mathematician and added that she was a historian too. Using her freedom dream poem as an outlet, Erika showcased a different side of herself that she had not tapped into in awhile. Even though Erika did not complete the final survey about the freedom dreaming activity, it was evident in the group conversation that the creativity of the research activities enabled her to communicate her ideas in a way that resonated with the others in the group.

Figure 28. Erika's Freedom Dream Poem



2.3 Retreat Providing Pathways to Channel TOCs' Creativity

The retreat space provided the conditions for TOCs to be creative and joyful. This supported teachers to express themselves more freely through art and play. Teachers engaged in various methods of map-making, visual arts, and poetry, creating maps, collages, posters, slides, and zines. They drew, used personal photographs, magazine cut-outs. We listened to co-created playlists, worked inside and outdoors, and shared stories, challenges, connections, affirmations, and laughter. Through the different sessions, the retreat provided multiple avenues for teachers to

express themselves creatively and in a multiplicity of ways. Their artistic choices within the maps they created helped to convey teachers' feelings and ideas about their schooling environments.

For both groups, TOCs reflected on their capacity to express themselves more fully due to the retreat space and the art-based activities they engaged in. At the end of the first retreat, we held a closing circle where everyone was invited to share their reflections on the retreat and the opportunity to come together and learn from one another. In my field observation notes from the closing circle, I wrote that Savannah shared that the experience "felt like adult summer camp." She later added, "During the school day, we are in charge of so many different, competing priorities. So, that's why the retreat was so valuable because we had a chance to not only exist but also be pampered. The role-reversal was important for my sanity. We're always thinking about how we can help our students, but at the retreat, we thought about how best to help ourselves! The joy I felt on the retreat thus made me feel like I was at an adult summer camp." Savannah's comment tapped into the playful atmosphere at the retreat where teachers engaged with different forms of art and were in a physical location away from their districts. They could immerse themselves in nature by going for walks amongst trees and flowers or going to the beach on the lakefront during their free time. Kai also shared during that closing circle that she "enjoyed the art aspect and letting myself be creative outside of lesson plans." There was a room adjacent to the dining room where Kai often went during independent reflection time to work on her collage. Making the connection to her classroom work, Kai spoke about the opportunity to channel her creativity through another outlet beyond the confines of her classroom and designing lessons for her students. These comments from teachers indicated a potentially limited capacity in their current districts for creativity and expression. The retreat offered a space for teachers to

engage in storytelling through art and communicate their perspectives in creative ways. Across their responses, teachers indicated that art supported them to make meaning of and also concretize and share their experiences and dreams.

Finding 3. Collective Sharing of Maps Supported Pattern Identification and Surfaced New Analyses

When asked to share and respond to each others' maps at the retreat, teachers collectively built on and extended what was shared in their initial maps and 1:1 interviews. Through conversation across their journey maps, ecomaps, and freedom dreams, teachers identified patterns but also unique distinctions across their stories. This sharing enabled teachers to elaborate on ideas initially raised and allowed me to see which themes were most salient for teachers. By discussing their observations and providing additional insights and perspectives, the participating Teachers of Color further contributed to generating knowledge. The content of their collective sharing led me to conclude that retreat not only served as a unique conduit for research, but also functioned as a space of collective meaning-making, theorization, and professional learning amongst TOCs.

Sharing through art became a way for teachers to identify patterns and resonance across their different experiences. In addition to recognizing patterns across their experiences, collectively sharing their maps allowed teachers to build on each other's reflections, offering resonance and deeper analyses of the issues they encountered. After Alejandra shared her educational journey map (Figure 29), the teachers engaged in a conversation about different things that resonated for them, with Savannah writing down something Alejandra said and Kai making a connection about accepting or turning down full ride college scholarships. Shay

elevated a different connection to her own experience and launched the group into a collective reflection on safety in their respective communities:

Shay: The idea of, well not an idea, but the reality of your students being your neighbors.

In my first district, that's how it was for me, and it was really hard working with people who weren't invested in these kids. This is my neighborhood that they're getting shot.

This is my neighborhood where they're doing all types of...the fear...it is our responsibility. I get that it is just a nine to five for you. I need you to put in a little more effort because this is literally the impact of you not caring, playing out in our streets.

Kai: That definitely makes a difference.

Alejandra: That's where the policing in the last three years has felt...like an attack on our community, because I've seen the gunshots from my window. And instead of you doing a school event to have the parents engage, to have the parents heal from what we just saw last night, you're just like, we need to hire another cop. We need to search in your backpacks, and I'm like, what are you [doing]? You're missing the point.

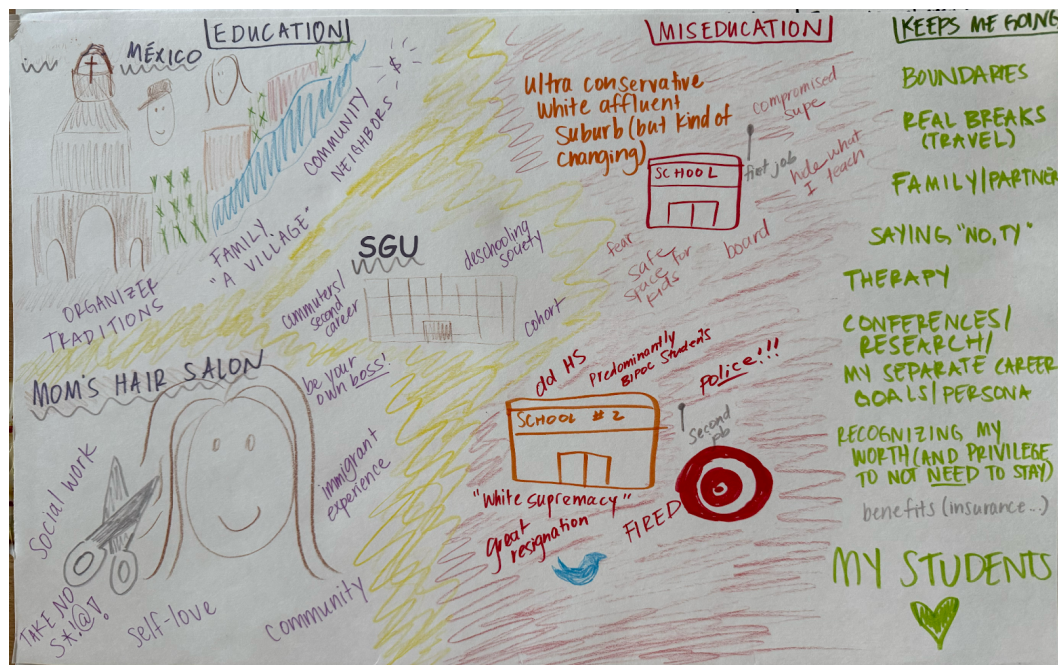
Both Shay and Alejandra shared some frustrations with the approaches their schools have taken with regards to students' well-being and safety. Shay perceived a lack of investment and

Alejandra reflected that her school's response to violence felt misguided or even more harmful.

Both teachers also happened to be working in districts they attended as children so the stakes were much more apparent for them having gone through their schools as both students and adults. Alejandra and Shay also yearned for their districts to take action in ways that are rooted in taking ownership, caring for students and their families, and healing and grieving as a community. This was an example of how the group of C-TOCs offered reflections after individuals shared, commenting on connections, noting takeaways for their own reflection, and

expressing gratitude for learning. In response to the prompts and seeing each other's maps and having a chance to talk about them, they co-theorized the implications of education and miseducation in their lives.

Figure 29. Alejandra's Educational Journey Map



Additionally, collectively sharing their maps supported participants in recognizing different patterns in or new insights into their experiences. As part of her educational journey mapping, Hope reflected on many of the recent shifts and changes in her district, including the increase of Hispanic or Spanish-speaking students, and the turnover of leadership in her district, including the superintendent and having a new principal and assistant principal coming into her school in the fall. Towards the end of the educational journey mapping session, Hope further commented, “Yes. What was interesting for me, though, I think that what you guys have spoken about is what actually happened in my district right now. It's kind of like you guys have experienced that the last several years, whereas it just seems like it just started to infiltrate my district more. Very interesting.” Here, Hope recognized that what she was witnessing in her current context seemed reminiscent of experiences that other teachers spoke to in different districts. Learning about other teachers' experiences appeared to give Hope new lenses for

reflecting on her own experiences. Understanding this pattern might allow Hope to anticipate what might happen in the upcoming school year and inform how she approaches those changes.

Sharing collective counterstories of their environments in a group setting also surfaced connections and new realizations. Teachers made synthesizing comments across the narratives that were shared and offered useful insights and takeaways. Emilio, for instance, expressed his appreciation for the stories shared at the retreat and spoke about patterns he's witnessed in his educational journey, "First off, as everyone was speaking, I was kind of writing down connections and I think I found connection points in everybody's stories...It's super dope." His comment revealed how the method of mapping and collective sharing allowed for new ideas to unfold, particularly for individual teachers as they reflected on their individual experiences while listening to others. Later, Emilio and Lucia, Alejandra's cousin who was a recent graduate of a counseling program and had some clinical experience, shared some concluding reflections at the end of the ecomapping session:

Emilio: Something that I heard in everyone's story. It's this idea of love...leading with love first. I'm still developing authentic relationships with kids in whatever fashion, you take them to dance class [to Alejandra] or seeing them in an after school program [to Hope], leading the love first. Like also self-love for ourselves as we try to navigate, so that was something I heard from everybody that was really powerful.

Lucia: Yeah, I also heard some tension of including the negativity in our processes or in our maps, but I also heard a lot of support and connection and sharing that and the appreciation of bringing that in the space, even though sometimes it's like we want to focus on the positive, but the negative can take so much from us. Thank you for sharing that.

Through these remarks, Emilio and Lucia affirmed the stories that accompanied teachers' ecomaps. They observed and heard teachers taking a loving approach to their work while also reckoning with the complex tensions of the negativity in educational spaces, highlighting the nuances in the ways teachers navigated their environments. The sharing of maps in a collective space supported participants in being able to identify important patterns across their experiences.

The freedom dreaming session also provided a unique opportunity for teachers to collectively process and make sense of what freedom dreaming might look like. For example, Alejandra shared that she had difficulty with the freedom dreaming prompts. When working on the activity initially, Alejandra explained to the group that was co-working in the dining room, "This one was the toughest one. When you said the question, if the systems of oppression did not exist. I didn't know. Like what does that look like?" During the shareout portion of the session, Alejandra offered to present her freedom dream (Figure 30) next after hearing Savannah and Shay talk about healing and restorative circles:

Savannah: ...Structures for collective healing would be great...

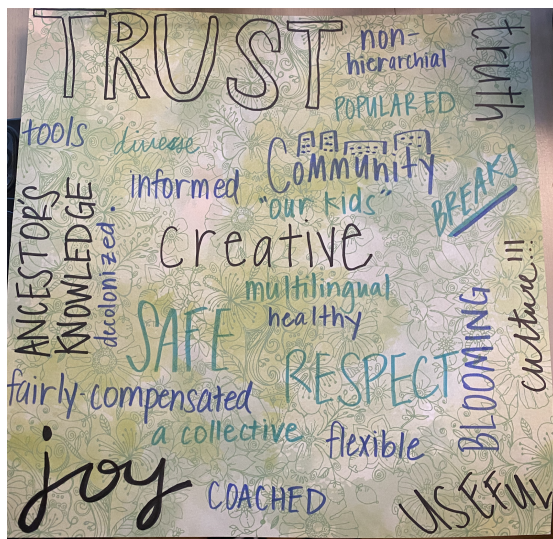
Shay: I like the idea of the collective healing spaces when I taught in alternative school they were very big on like a restorative circle...Those healing spaces are definitely needed.

Alejandra: Can I jump in? 'cause I have something I think that relates to that. That idea of restorative circles, as I've studied it, is our ancestors did that... if we decolonized education, what does that look like? I struggled with this. I was like, I don't know what it looks like, but I just know that that word comes out for me a lot...and just thinking about our elders and how I do circles in my class a lot and I tell them why. I don't just do it. I'm

like, hey,...the elders' perspective is important, but so is the kids'. They all have voices, because we're all interconnected.

Despite her initial struggle with creating her freedom dream map, Alejandra found that she could build on what others had shared in the larger group discussion. In listening to the conversation and hearing Savannah and Shay speak about their freedom dreams, Alejandra was able to find a connection and noted how restorative circles might be a way to connect intergenerationally and tap into ancestral practices and wisdom and what this looks like in her classroom. She still shared some uncertainty for what decolonized education might look like overall, especially as a Spanish educator teaching a language with a heavy colonial history. At the end of the session, Alejandra made a closing comment that appeared indicative of even further clarity, "I feel like a freedom school would be like all of us working together. That would be so sick," to which CJ and Hope agreed would be a dream. As she created her map at the table with other attendees and discussed her ideas with the larger group, Alejandra seemed to find more tangible examples to speak about as the session went on. This shift in her growth and development was indicative of the effect of collective conversation and learning.

Figure 30. Alejandra's Freedom Dream



The former teachers also engaged in collective conversations that expanded on what individual teachers shared. Compared to the group of current Teachers of Color who attended the first retreat, the group of former TOCs saved their comments and questions for the end of the educational journey mapping session so there wasn't as much time to respond to or build on the concepts that other teachers shared. Each teacher was invited to share a closing reflection, connection, or thought that was sitting with them. Dominique began by commenting on Erika's story about standardized testing in 8th grade and how her low exam score limited her options for high school:

What you said about the doors and that there's going to be a lot of doors. You cannot expect what doors you're going to get in life. The only thing that you can control is who you are when you walk in and who you are when you walk out of it. I think that's your responsibility. And it just made me think about you and how you were able to skip [local high school in her neighborhood] and I didn't have that support to skip, so I actually had to experience it. And that experience was taking the test for [the competitive high schools in the city] and our heat in the school being cut off the day before. To the point where they actually had to cancel school because it was too cold to physically be in there. So on the designated day for the city, taking the tests like this, we could see our breath coming out. So only three people passed the exam, but people were just choosing to get out of [there]. It was too cold. But just, you know, just how those supports in these different doors that you have, but we still both ended up at this table.

Through the connection that she made to Erika's story, Dominique provided further analyses of how environments can often shape one's circumstances. She also recognized the significance of an individual's action based on the doors or opportunities they have access to. Dominique built

on the reflection that Erika shared by offering additional reflection, inferring the limitations of standardized tests and how they may be an accurate reflection of students academic performance and capabilities. As she reflected on the session overall, Dominique also shared how listening to others informed her reflection. Similarly to Savannah and Emilio from the first group of teachers, Dominique explained that she added to her map after hearing other teachers share. Dominique wrote in her survey response, “I used words that remind me of stories, people and moments; while giving myself grace and room to add as I [heard] buzz words from other people’s journeys.” Dominique initially created her map by focusing on memories and words associated with those memories. As she listened to the educational journeys being shared in the room, she made additions to her map, building on the ideas of others.

Sharing their ecomaps also further supported former teachers to make meaning of their experiences, which was evident in the ways they would make references to points that other teachers made and build on one another’s ideas. Dominique’s ecomap (Figure 31) was a slide deck showcasing her perspective on the community she grew up in, which she called the block, and how her relationships with others and being in different communities broadened her worldview. Dominique took a different approach to her ecomap and created a presentation that depicted her expanding environment and worldview with each click. She began with “the block” that she grew up on and then spoke about the lessons she learned there and beyond in her neighborhood, city, state, region(s), and the world. Dominique made the choice to use “you” in her reflections, and explained that, “instead of putting just me. I just made more of an experience versus just mine. Of people that come from where I come from. A lot of your information, or your education, or your beginning experiences, all begin on the block that you start on.” She has shared these reflections of the block with students so she was speaking to them as an audience,

speaking to the teachers at the retreat, while also bringing in examples from her experience. Dom's reflection opened up a rich conversation from the group of former teachers. The other former teachers took up what Dominique shared and provided further insights and wonderings about this concept of the block:

Riya: Yeah, that idea of never leaving a block, and you can physically leave a block, but never mentally or emotionally do it and that idea is so powerful.

Juliana: And it's very real too because I feel like when we pursue things, again, all of us sitting at the table, we're in this middle part where people could think that we think we're better than them for going away for school, so I love the visual representation of that.

Dominique: And I think my last part was just starting dark, and then the more you go out, the brighter the experience.

Anna: I'm, too, just thinking about how to hold that without hierarchizing. Like, you know, the block is not inherently bad. No, the block is...

Riya: And some people will never get a chance to leave the block.

Anna: And most people never get a chance to go to the block. Let's be real. And so that's in America, most people don't know what's happening on the block...and don't know all the language, the richness, the culture, the histories...

Juliana: the community, the support.

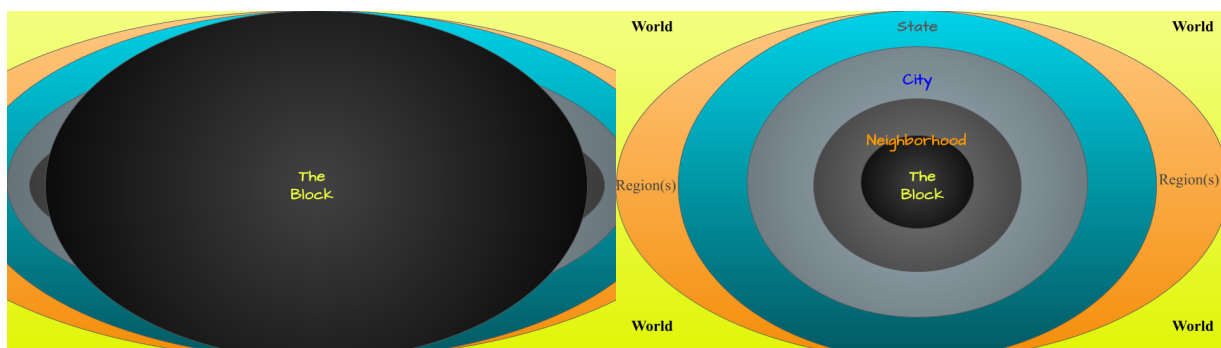
Anna: There's room for both and.

Dominique: By having more time to work on it, what I put in each circle could also reflect that, because it's not all negative. It's like my foundation is the block, and I feel like sometimes when people transition to other levels, they cut [themselves] off from returning because they feel that they've got all they need to get or I don't need to go back

there. I'm the type of person that likes to move throughout all the circles at all times, which is why I'm saying, I'm not playing a game. So Dominique is Dominique in every room I'm in, I act the exact same way.

The ideas that Dominique initially offered launched the group into fruitful discussion about the complexities of the block. They spoke about not wanting to inherently assign negativity to the block. They were able to further describe how the block might be perceived and considered both the material realities and cultural wealth of the block. They considered the richness of the block and the ability to leave and return to the block. Dominique also reflected on how, if given time, she could further add to her map and acknowledged the block as foundational to her journey. She also saw herself as moving throughout the circles of the block, neighborhood, city, state, region(s), and world and being able to return to the block and transition across each of those circles. In this discussion, teachers reflected collectively on holding the tensions of the block, the negative and the positive, together rather than categorizing it as solely one or the other. As they pushed each other to reframe this concept of “the block” with nuance and intentionality, the teachers’ discussion of the block was indicative of teachers' collective sensemaking.

Figure 31. Selection of Dominique’s Ecomap



Freedom dreaming revealed tensions in perspectives, but also led to generative conversations, with teachers taking contrasting approaches to the prompt. Several teachers

questioned the concept and the seemingly passiveness of imagining, knowing the material realities of systemic injustice. Similarly to Roxanne, Shay, and Alejandra, who commented on the challenge of freedom dreaming, the group of former teachers initially had questions and reflections about the concept of freedom dreaming. As mentioned earlier, even before they began to independently reflect and create individual maps of their freedom dreams, the former teachers surfaced wonderings of what it meant to dream of freedom. Tiaga initially shared some hesitancy with the concept, particularly the passive action of dreaming as well as the luxury of being able to dream which many students of Color are not afforded. Riya made connections to a few short stories and also asked poignant questions as part of the framing. In doing so, both former teachers contributed new insights and added thought-provoking questions that framed the group's experience going into individual reflection time. With Dominique's poem "Dream, Imagine, Envision" (Figure 32), she elevated the conflicts of dreaming with reality even further. These tensions continued to sit with Riya, who wrote in their final survey reflection:

Our schools will never meet the needs of our kids and communities if they don't respond to the immediacy of their lives (thinking about Jeff Duncan-Andrade and Gloria Ladson-Billings). Some people say that our ancestors have survived similar or worse times in history, but I think we have a unique set of circumstances (a global battle for democracy and self-determination, irreversible climate change, threats of mutually assured destruction, and AI technology that can blur the lines of reality). I wonder what the future for education can look like.

In this reflection, Riya pointed to the urgency of this moment and the need to directly respond to the needs of our students and communities, invoking the scholarship of Duncan-Andrade and Ladson-Billings and culturally relevant and culturally responsive pedagogies. The conversations

continued at the kitchen counter, throughout and after dinner, and through the next day as some were leaving. For the group of former teachers, freedom dreaming together at the retreat offered unique professional learning space to grapple with ideas of importance to education that appeared to be in such contrast with each other.

Figure 32. Dominique's Freedom Dream Poem

Dream, Imagine, envision
 They said we should dream, imagine, envision
 Dream- a series of thoughts, images, and sensations that occur when sleeping.
 Imagine- a series of thoughts, images, and sensations that occur when woke.
 Envision- a series of thoughts, images, and sensations that could occur in the future.
 Dream, Imagine, envision- they said
 And I said... Wake the fuck up!
 This is a trap,
 The only way to truly fight back is to act!
 I love being a teacher and the kids I miss
 But I'm tired of sitting down and writing this same damn list
 Our teachers use to go on strike but they would come right back
 But our generation is just straight leaving because we don't play like that
 King dreamed, imagined and envisioned while marching on Bloody Sundays just to look out for me.
 Shook hands with the President, making back door deals just to end up shot hanging off that balcony.
 They put him to sleep (dream) because we became woke (Imagine) to a future (envision)
 Where teachers were not underpaid, undervalued and overworked.
 What do I want?
 It's more like deserving
 Money shouldn't even be a question when your entire career is built on serving
 A wise woman once said we can build a world of liberation but we can't eliminate choice
 We can liberate the good but the bad will also have a voice.
 Dream, Imagine, envision is like pulling a card from a scammer with a trick deck.
 I was never meant to win, so fuck this game and like Falcon said- cut the check!

Finding 4. Mapping Tools in Combination with the Retreat Provided Insight into Affirming Teacher of Color Labor and Well-Being Through Research

The retreat, in combination with the mapping reflections, also gave insight into how both the educational spaces that teachers work in and educational research could better support and be more responsive to TOC well-being in terms of honoring their labor and expertise. From its conception, the retreat was designed to be affirming of teachers' experiences and center their well-being. In fruition, the attendees confirmed that the retreat had positive impacts on not just their work and practice, but also on their well-being. Both current and former Teachers of Color commented on the connections they were able to form with other Educators of Color and the

retreat as healing and inspiring of their future work. As an educational researcher, I saw the value of facilitating multiple mapping sessions with TOCs in a retreat context. Not only did TOCs feel affirmed and supported by the research process, but also the methods were generative in learning more deeply about TOC retention and the supports that would allow TOCs to stay in the profession.

4.1 Retreat as Supportive of Teachers' Experience

The space enabled teachers to process, reflect, hold space for one another, and feel cared for. Artifacts from the retreat highlight the ways the retreat was set-up to support people's well-being. At the retreat, several reflected on the experience with an appreciation for the opportunity to meet one another and the intentional care behind the overall experience. They spoke about the retreat with gratitude, sharing appreciation for the retreat team, one another, the opportunity to be brought together, and the intentional nourishment and times for rest built in throughout the week.

Teachers' comments from the retreat reflected gratitude for the space, especially the opportunity to come together to individually and collectively process their experiences. For example, teachers shared at lunch that they appreciated the mileage reimbursements and the provision of food as examples of the ways they felt cared for. At the end of the freedom dreaming session, some teachers shared appreciation for the retreat team:

Hope: Well kudos to you guys, you guys brought us together, so you have to take some credit you brought us together. Don't know how we were the chosen ones.

Savannah: And you guys really took care of us.

Shay: Yes.

Kai: What we don't get. Yes.

Multiple teachers chimed in to affirm and echo Hope's message of gratitude. Savannah added that she felt they were taken care of, and Kai mentioned that they as teachers typically don't get this type of care in their environments. Kai also brought up a moment where Anna and I came to the rescue to fix a chirping smoke alarm as part of her affirmation of the attentiveness of the retreat team. This brief exchange was indicative of the effectiveness of the retreat planning in making sure that teachers were felt nourished and at ease, not only so they could feel comfortable with sharing, but also because we wanted teachers to be cared for in the ways that they deserve, especially when they are so often disregarded and undervalued by society.

On the final morning before we had to check out, we gathered as a group to share our final reflections. This conversation was not audio recorded, but we captured a photo (Figure 33) and I took some field notes immediately following the session and tried to capture lines or moments that I remembered. For example, Lucia invited the group to collectively breathe together, which helped to regroup and center us after several sessions of sharing many emotional and vulnerable insights. Testimonies from the final session circle reflection included: "I'm really grateful," "thank you for taking care of us," "thank you for bringing us together," "I connected with people I otherwise wouldn't have met," "this was validation and affirmation." While I did not capture who said which quotes, all around teachers were affirming of the experience and found it positively contributed to their well-being.

Figure 33. Photo of Closing Circle Reflection



There were two reflections in that final conversation that stood out to me from Shay and Emilio that I remember more vividly. Shay spoke about taking time to herself to watch movies in her room when others went out for walks or into town. She shared with the group that “rest looked different for me once I got here...My body thanks you.” Hearing Shay share these words, I could see the ways she leaned into rest and being present for herself. In a time where you are connecting with many people, most of whom you never met, it can be challenging to find moments of refuge and time to yourself. Shay listened to her body and was able to be present for herself in a way that she did not initially anticipate. To me, this was reflective of an embodied practice when Shay was tuning into and developing an awareness of her needs and allowed herself to rest in a way that seemed restorative for her. Another specific attribution that I remember was a moment where Emilio joked that we should look into buying the vacation rental property, because it was currently on the market. The others agreed that it would be nice to have

permanent spaces for retreat and specifically dedicated to TOC healing and professional development. Although there was humor in Emilio's comment, knowing that many of us were not in position to buy a property of that size, there was some seriousness to the desire to have continued spaces for retreat and opportunities for Teachers of Color to come together to reflect and heal and also learn and grow in community.

At the retreat with the group of former teachers, there were also examples of attendees experiencing intentionality and care throughout the retreat, but in some ways this looked different than with the group of current teachers. I have fewer artifacts capturing what teachers experienced at the retreat, so conclusions about former teachers' retreat experiences are tentative. What stood out in the data from the retreat with the former teachers with regards to the implications for Teacher of Color well-being was how a shared norm of "holding space for grief as former educators" carried throughout the retreat (Figure 18). Like with the current teachers, the retreat for former teachers was foregrounded in co-developing a set of shared community norms during the pre-retreat conversation. With the group of former teachers, many of them had challenging experiences which led to their exit from the classroom and so they wanted to acknowledge the grief that they were bringing into the space from their teaching experiences.

During the sessions, it seemed that the retreat supported former teachers with healing and moving through their education-related grief. Tiaga spoke about the process of making an educational journey map, "it was really just very cleansing to do it and made me think of a lot of things." The opportunity to reflect on her experiences through mapping seemed to have a healing and cathartic effect for her. Reflecting on their collective educational journey maps, Erika shared an encouragement of self-gratitude with the group, "Two quotes. One is from Miss Nicey Nash. I want to thank myself. I think everybody should thank themselves because we've all been on our

own journey. And like you [Garrett] said, we made it here, right? And so we still have miles to walk and many other doors to pick and choose or even if a door closes, there will be a window, right? And so thank yourself.” Her words highlight the value of teachers reflecting together and how through that, she came to a place of gratitude for herself. She also shared that each attendee should thank themselves, acknowledging how far they have come in their personal growth.

During their free time, most participants found ways to connect with each other and engage in joyful activities. Some former teachers spent time in the downtown area, exploring shops and grabbing food and drinks. Some teachers spent time with one another and had conversations on the porch, the patio, or out by the water. This flexible time for rest and community allowed teachers to reflect even further. Erika before sharing her final freedom dream poem, she told the group, “Okay. So yet, again, I’m not quite done, but I think I got most of it. I decided to write, so we’re going to see how this goes, because I haven’t actually sat down and wrote something for real, for real in a hot minute. But that rest from last night got me going.” Erika’s introduction to her poem emphasized the role that rest contributed to her reflection and counterstorytelling. Grief and its juxtaposition with healing seemed to be consistently present throughout the retreat, which really underscored the retreat as a space that provided insights and implications for former Teachers of Color and their well-being in addition to current TOCs.

4.2 Retreat Continued to Positively Impact Teachers’ Experience Beyond the Space

The retreat provided the opportunity for Teachers of Color to learn alongside other Teachers of Color and had a lasting and valuable impact for those who attended. As part of the follow up survey, one of the optional questions was to share any additional reflections from participating in the research project and any impacts it has had on your work. Teachers of Color

across both groups spoke to the significance of the space and opportunity to share their experiences with one another and how it supported their well-being and shaped their work.

Five of the eight current teachers opted-in to responding to this question about the impacts of the retreat and the research. All five shared positively about their experience and what it has meant for them. Savannah, who shared that she continued to work at the same school she was teaching at previously, explained, “It was healing to have a place where we could envision what education could be like on OUR terms, and also to be in a space where others also valued educators. Seriously, what an amazing retreat you put together for us teachers.” Emilio, who shared the update that he went back to school and is still teaching but now at the high school he attended as a student and in their multilingual education department, also wrote, “I think the research project revitalized staying with teaching, especially having the chance to learn from so many folks that had been in education for a long time. Felt like I could do it as well. Your research also encouraged me to go back to school to continue to learn and grow as an individual to become a better educator. You rock!” Both Savannah and Emilio spoke about being in community with other educators with Savannah commenting on the value of collectively envisioning the future of education and Emilio highlighting the opportunity to learn from and be inspired by Teachers of Color who have been in education. Savannah spoke about the experience as healing to be in a space with other educators and shared gratitude for the retreat that was put together. Emilio also said that the project “revitalized staying with teaching,” that he felt like he could see himself teaching for a long time, and also that he returned to school to develop and grow in his learning. Their testimonies underscore the value of retreat spaces in bringing Teachers of Color together to learn from each other and also supporting their work, well-being, and retention in the field.

Two of the six former teachers provided a reflection on how the research project and retreat impacted their work. Tiaga provided the update that her federal grant on immigrant families was terminated in April 2025 which eliminated funding for her BIPOC student research assistants and substantially cut funding for the heritage language community program she leads. Despite this unfortunate news, Tiaga also shared gratitude for the research project and retreat:

First, I was inspired by simply being connected with so many dedicated and talented young educators of Color...Secondly, I have become more active in [district] policies on immigrant families and bilingual children - in large part based on the conversations [at the retreat] about the disconnect between classroom teachers and the challenges for administrators. Thank you, Sarah Day, for allowing me to participate—the project is an experience that keeps on giving!

While Emilio reflected on being able to learn from more experienced educators, Tiaga reflected on the opportunity to learn from and be inspired by young Educators of Color. Tiaga's words also offered a powerful contrast to the material challenges she was facing. Even as her research funding was being cut and resources were being taken away, she referred to the project as an experience that "keeps on giving" and highlighted a tangible example of one way the retreat, and specifically a conversation about the disconnect between teachers, administrators, immigrant families, and bilingual students inspired her to take action in her local community.

The retreat also supported a former teacher with returning to the classroom. After being let go from her previous school the summer of the retreat, Erika shared that she returned to the classroom full time as a high school math teacher at a new school in a different district. In response to the question about the impact of the project, she wrote, "I think that last summer's research project put me in a better mental space for the school year. I was more hopeful, more

patient with myself and students. Last summer fixed something in me so that I could go out into the world and I appreciated the opportunity to share and grow with everyone.” At the retreat, Erika was processing the loss of her job as a teacher. She shared examples of the grief and pain that she had experienced in her work and the lack of support for her well-being despite the hours she put into creating culturally responsive math curriculum and connecting with many of her Students of Color. Erika shared gratitude for the project and retreat as a space of healing that allowed and supported her to show up to her new school and classroom with hope and patience. Echoing the sentiments of Savannah, Emilio, and Tiaga, Erika also appreciated sharing and growing in community with the other attendees.

Discussion

This research explores the offerings and constraints of critical qualitative mapping tools (educational journey mapping, ecomapping, freedom dreaming) as tools used within a retreat as a space for learning about Teachers of Color and their perspectives on what supports and sustains them in their well-being and work. In combination, the mapping tools and retreat space allowed for a more nuanced understanding of how both current and former Teachers of Color critically reflected on their past and current experiences while also considering possibilities for transformational shifts in education and futures that are supportive and sustaining of their work and well-being. Through this research, I found that: 1) Educational journey mapping, ecomapping, and freedom dreaming with former and current Teachers of Color in the context of a retreat space expanded on what could be learned about teachers and their experiences in an interview and focus group setting. The retreat allowed for multiple opportunities for reflection on different aspects of their experiences and each mapping tool provided new layers of meaning making. 2) Each mapping session at the retreat also provided an opportunity to learn about

Teachers of Color through art and creative expression. The visual and written artifacts were supportive tools for Teachers of Color to communicate their experiences and ideas. 3) The mapping tools and retreat also provided a structure for Teachers of Color to share and collectively reflect on their experiences. With each session, teachers' responses to one another's maps elevated salient themes and highlighted new considerations over the course of the retreat. Mapping in the context of a retreat enabled collective meaning-making, theorization, and professional learning amongst TOC retreat attendees. 4) Educational journey mapping, ecomapping, and freedom dreaming with TOCs at the retreat provided insights into pathways and opportunities for educational spaces and research to better support and be more responsive to TOC well-being.

The freedom dreaming session highlighted a particularly stark contrast between the case of current teachers and the case of former teachers. For former teachers, their departure from the profession informed the maps they created and the discussions they had as a collective. Their professional geographies spanned different career paths and some were in a transition period in their careers, which surfaced both uncertainty and a different lens for thinking about the capacity of schools as places for transformative change. At the same time, Anna reflected that the group of former teachers were not necessarily using words like "abolition" or "indigenous practices" in their ecomaps and freedom dreams, though Riya's restructuring of an environment and sustainability focused structure to schooling might be an exception. The group's more immediate calls were for structural changes and respect for the profession to be reflected in the resources and supports provided to teachers. This pattern may be something to further examine with former and current teachers.

Ultimately, this research offers a more responsive, multimodal approach to learning from TOCs about their work and well-being through the design of a retreat space and the use of critical qualitative mapping tools. It extends the scholarship on using critical qualitative mapping and freedom dreaming to learn about the experiences of Teachers of Color (Marx et al. 2023; Monreal, 2022; Ramirez et al., 2025; Sealey-Ruiz & Christensen, 2024) by showcasing how multiple mapping methods can be used in combination to affirm and bring nuances to TOCs' counterstories. This also further contributes to the growing use of arts-based (Coles & Player, 2024; Player & George, 2025; Player & Thakurta, 2024) approaches and methods to learn from and with Communities of Color in educational research.

When asked to share, teachers responded to one another's creations with questions and connections. They moved with attention to relationality and resourcefulness, offering solace and strategies in support of one another. I observed how teachers were theorizing at the dining table and throughout the retreat, which showcased different forms of meaning-making that were happening within both groups. From teachers' collective analyses, they offered generative insights and approaches for addressing issues of retention for Teachers of Color in the profession. Building on scholarship regarding critical professional development for Teachers of Color (Kohli, 2019; Kohli, et al. 2015; 2021; 2022; Quince et al., 2024; Sacramento, 2019), this study advocates for continued spaces for Teachers of Color to come together to re-member their experiences within education and imagine new possibilities for educational spaces.

Critical reflection retreat spaces, where TOCs can build authentic connections and engage in professional learning, are unique sites of deliberate disruption and intentional care that are well-positioned to directly respond to the challenge of retaining diverse educators in K-12. This builds on the work of scholars who have theorized about the grief of Teachers of Color who left

the classroom (Cariaga, 2022; Marx et al., 2023; Philips et al., 2016; Hernández-Johnson et al., 2021) and the necessity for addressing healing amongst educators (Garcia, 2019; Hannegan-Martinez, 2023a; Harmon & Horn, 2021; Kohli, 2025). This also surfaced the need for grieving and healing as an ongoing, collective practice. Accounting for the mental and physical well-being of Teachers of Color and cultivating spaces for collective learning and healing can further support learning about what it takes to sustain them.

Limitations

Although there was promise in what collective mapping and a retreat could offer, there were several constraints to note. For example, this research was a multiple embedded case study of 8 C-TOCs and 6 F-TOCs, and while it allowed for very detailed insights into the individual perspectives of participants, this study and TOCs' reflections on using the mapping tools in the context of a retreat cannot be generalized to apply to all TOCs. At the same time, this research offers one promising approach for using multiple methodological tools in combination as a way to learn about TOC retention. There is opportunity to test these tools further with TOCs working in different contexts, over time at different points in their career, and with larger sample sizes. Additionally, the use of a retreat where participants could create their maps alongside one another and discuss the maps they created together could possibly mask individual differences between the participating TOCs, especially considering that the majority of the participants knew at least one other participant going into the retreat. At the same time, the value in having a retreat as a humanizing space where collective discussion could be used as a way to dig deeper into participants' maps and their ideas about retention outweighed this consideration.

Conclusion and Implications

This paper offers reflections on a research design and process that honors the labor and commitments of TOCs and also centers their well-being. Extending on the growing use of arts-based and healing-centered approaches and methods in educational research, this research offers an approach grounded in using multiple mapping tools and retreat to learn from current and former TOCs about their work and well-being. This paper highlights the important takeaways for retention that can emerge when we allow for TOCs to reflect deeply, be creative through art, and share in community with other educators. Educational journey mapping, ecomapping, and freedom dreaming with current and former TOCs allowed for a more thorough picture of their experiences with retention because they could reflect multiple times across different formats, leverage their creativity, analyze their maps collectively, and experience supportive conditions that allowed them to create and reflect freely. TOCs and their stories enhanced, overwhelmed, and exceeded the initial prompts provided, and contributed to building theory. The critical reflection retreat also provided time, space, and tools for participants to remember, dream, and learn from one another, illuminating and attending to their grief and well-being. This resulted in a rich and in-depth way of knowing and learning about TOCs and their experiences, taking a departure from traditional methods of data collection within the landscape of Teacher of Color retention research that don't always allow TOCs to fully express who they are or share what matters most to them. It elevated not just the content of *what* counterstories of retention were shared, but also the process and *how* those counternarratives were shared. The kitchen table and retreat became sites for community building and professional advancement amongst current and former Teachers of Color, which provides a direct response and approach to the challenge of retaining diverse educators in K-12. The maps created by TOCs at the retreat and the collective

kitchen table conversations are a reminder and invitation to look beyond structures of schooling or traditional feedback tools for solutions.

I see this paper as having important implications for educational research, retention, and professional learning with historically minoritized communities and educators by offering an approach for working with TOCs that is also grounded in sustaining and uplifting their work. Given the promise of critical mapping tools and retreats in this study, there's opportunity to further explore how Teachers of Color in other contexts respond to tools of mapping, collective counterstorytelling, and retreat. There is also potential in researching how these methodological tools for gaining insight into TOCs' experiences with retention in the classroom and education might contribute to more consistent and sustainable structures for retaining K-12 Teachers of Color in the profession. Recognizing how the arts-based and healing-centered methods allowed for a deeper understanding of Teachers of Color and their values, commitments, and community knowledge in this study, tapping into these forms of learning might open new possibilities for approaches to research as well as staffing and retaining K-12 educators. Using arts-based reflection and freedom dreaming might allow for a more meaningful uptake of teacher feedback and understanding of their work and well-being needs. This can serve as a guide for school-wide and district-wide retention plans, policymakers, and educational researchers seeking to learn from Teachers of Color.

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Chapter 5 Conclusion

Goals of the Dissertation

In this project, I sought to both center and complicate what it would mean for K-12 Teachers of Color to survive and thrive in schools. I aimed to do this through research questions that explored: 1) TOCs' conceptualizations of staying in the profession, 2) the resources TOCs draw on and identify as critical for supporting their work and well-being, and 3) how critical mapping tools and retreat spaces might be powerful and humanizing tools for learning about TOCs and their experiences with staying.

Overview of Findings, Contributions, and Considerations for Each Chapter

Conceptualizations of Staying

The first study examines how 25 TOCs conceptualize what it means to survive versus thrive in the teaching profession. Through my analysis of pre-retreat interview data, I provide insights into TOC counterstories and their conceptualizations of staying in the classroom as important indicators to better understand and support the retention of a racially diverse teaching profession. One key finding was that Teachers of Color did not interpret the words stay, persist, and endure as neutral terms, and instead associated these words with a negative connotation. The language choices Teachers of Color made in their definitions and conceptualizations revealed different insights into this phenomenon of teacher retention, emphasizing the negative emotions and struggles associated with staying and insisting that the onus should not be on individual teachers to stay.

Resources TOCs Draw on or Identify as Critical to Sustaining their Work

The second is an empirical study examining the individual and external resources of TOCs. The paper considers not just the reasons why TOCs stay, but also the mechanisms for *how* they sustain their work, in other words, the resources that enable and support them and the ways they are navigating their school environments. I draw on two frameworks, Kohli and colleagues' (2022) healthy racial climate and Yosso's (2002) community cultural wealth model. Five findings emerged from this work that TOCs drew on or identified: 1) their values of justice or demonstrated their commitments to justice, 2) their positionality and criticality to think systemically about their environments, 3) intergenerational knowledge and resources for building community, 4) resources to purposefully engage in racially literate practices, and 5) resources to attend to their holistic well-being and protect themselves, their communities, and students. The findings highlight the internal dispositions, emotions, and resources as well as the external supports, environments, structures, and networks that TOCs name as critical for sustaining their work.

Mapping and Retreat as Critical Methods to Support Learning About TOCs

The third study aims to support researchers in understanding critical qualitative methods of mapping and retreat as powerful and humanizing tools for learning about TOCs and their experiences with staying. Through an analysis of TOCs' maps and their reflections about the mapping and retreat, I found that retreat not only served as a unique conduit for research but also as a space for collective theorization and professional learning among TOCs, providing new insights into retaining TOCs in K-12. Methodologically, I offer a more responsive, multimodal way to learn from TOCs about their well-being and work through the design of a retreat space and use of critical qualitative mapping tools.

Impact of the Research on Teachers' Professional Development and Practice

In the updates, teachers shared how this research project has influenced their current work. Several teachers reported doing freedom dreaming with their students, with Alejandra writing, “I incorporated some of your activities into my curriculum this year (dream freedom school). :)” A group of teachers worked together to bring mapping to their district and respective schools, with one sharing: “We were excited to do the "Freedom Dreaming" assignment in our own classes this past school year. You and your work inspired us beyond explanation. We tried to remember all the steps so we could present it to our kiddos. I am going to share the assignment and some of our student's work. Let me know what you think.” Another also added that their work was accepted at a renowned national teaching and education conference, “Freedom Dreaming inspired a [conference] proposal. [Three of us] will be presenting this [fall] in Denver, Colorado.” All three teachers highlighted the ways that the freedom dreaming exercise at the retreat continued to have a lasting impact on their work, because they were able to adapt the activity for their classrooms and also present a workshop for English educators across the country (Taylor, Whitehorn, & Wright, 2025). They even shared their session “Freedom Dreaming in the ELA Classroom,” and a few example student assignments with me which included poetry and a drawing with an artist statement.

Limitations of This Study

There are several limitations of this study which have implications for future research. Given my choice to do a multiple-embedded case study, I cannot claim generalizability of my findings to Teachers of Color in other contexts. I intentionally worked with a smaller sample size of 25 Teachers of Color (11 C-TOCs and 14 F-TOCs), which allowed for a deeper understanding of the methods and individual teachers' experiences with retention. Additionally, there was

limited data that I collected that would allow me to understand teachers' schooling contexts outside of what teachers reported themselves or the articles, web pages, photos, and videos they shared with me. I was able to visit some schools prior to the retreat and did a classroom observation with one teacher, but I did not collect artifacts from those experiences, and this data collection happened primarily in May-August 2024. I did not collect data from administrators, colleagues, students, or teachers' curriculum and everyday classroom practices. I also did not dive into their schools' organizational structures or official demographic data. Having access to additional data from these sources and throughout the school year might offer alternative explanations and further context for what they shared. These additional data sources also might offer insights into more of the systemic and environmental features of the contexts teachers were working in and allow for more analyses of their racial climates (Kohli et al., 2022).

The choice to collect data via focus groups also has its limitations and strengths, especially with some participants knowing one another and recommending each other to participate in the project. With this in mind, there might have been possible issues with groupthink and people voicing that they agree with someone else when they might not agree. In focus groups, certain voices might be more prominent than others and group dynamics can shape what individuals share or how they position themselves in relation to other participants in the space. As a way to counter these limitations, the surveys following each focus group session, individual reflections, and maps and art-pieces that teachers created before they shared with the group offered further insight into teachers' thinking.

Finally, my experience as a former TOC and role as a facilitator made it challenging to distance myself from the conversations, especially when teachers invited me to share my thoughts. This served as a strength because I was able to build trust with participants, but at the

same time, I strove to keep my subjectivities in check and reflect on ways to do so. For example, a fellow former teacher and research team member, Anna, stepped up to facilitate the focus group discussions which allowed me to spend more time capturing field notes as teachers were sharing.

Further Considerations for Research and Next Steps

There are many implications and further considerations from this study, some of which I discussed in the individual papers:

- Paper 1 - One major takeaway of this work for educational research is the need to expand our definitions of retention in the profession and further consider how educators are existing and resisting beyond traditional schooling structures.
- Paper 2 - Further studies are needed to examine more than just the reasons *why* teachers stay or exit the field, but the processes and resources for *how* they can thrive and be sustained in their work as educators from teacher preparation and throughout their careers. Just as importantly, we must look towards tangible examples of how TOCs are navigating and resisting within and beyond the profession. Additional studies might explore systems-level analyses of the climates TOCs are working in, both for veteran educators and places with higher turnover, to be able to speak to the racial climate framework more fully.
- Paper 3 - In terms of methods, further studies that take up creative and healing approaches to research with TOCs are needed. I would like to see mapping tools further explored with TOCs working in different contexts, over time at different points in their career, and with larger sample sizes. This research elevated some notable differences in the cases between C-TOCs and F-TOCs, especially with

regards to freedom dreaming, which might be something to further tease out. I would also like to see mapping and retreats examined with TOCs as a form of critical professional development for educators and an innovative way to approach qualitative inquiry within teacher education.

From this work, I would also like to offer some additional implications for practitioners, teacher educators, school and district leaders, and policymakers. As education stakeholders strive to recruit and retain a diverse workforce, school and district leaders and teacher education programs must center and follow in the lead of TOCs. To do so, we must honor and recognize the brilliance of teachers. The punitive, carceral, and surveillant systems of evaluation and professional development that reiterate to teachers they need to be doing more need to stop. There is opportunity to reimagine how teacher education and professional learning have been operationalized in a way that harms TOCs. Instead, teacher preparation and professional development could be an opportunity to honor teachers' experiences and support them with navigating their grief and healing. This research also has further implications for designing teacher retention structures, retreats, curriculum, professional development, and research protocols that support educators with critical reflection while attuning to their well-being. The next paper that will emerge from this study will explicitly examine the education histories of participating veteran Teachers of Color, particularly their reflections on teacher education. Learning from their experiences with schooling and teacher preparation, especially years into their career, can provide us with specific insights into building more just and informed teacher education programs and professional learning experiences that are responsive to the needs of both Students and Teachers of Color.

Future work might explore how arts-based approaches and mapping tools work in tandem with pedagogical practice to enhance teachers' work in the classroom. One next step might be through research-practice partnerships to examine the leadership and pedagogical practices of TOCs in collaborative co-teaching settings like Learning Labs (Kazemi et al., 2024; Kazemi et al., 2018) with in-service teachers and teacher education programs. Retreats aimed at supporting teachers' collaborative planning, healing, and holistic well-being would be done alongside site-embedded professional development, or Learning Labs, throughout the school year. This structure for professional learning could support historically marginalized educators and colleagues across a school or district with sharpening their tools for critical reflection, collective well-being, and racial justice in the context of schools. This approach to professional learning and retention could also support educators in building pedagogical practice to be able to navigate politically hostile teaching environments. In a teacher education context, these co-teaching practices and professional learning communities between teacher candidates and mentor teachers might carry beyond candidates' time in the program, supporting and sustaining their learning into their careers so they might better support their students and communities of educators that follow them.

At the same time, I still have questions about what collaborations and partnerships might allow for more opportunities for this work? I also understand that retreats that are physically away from a teacher's school and community might not always be possible with limited resources. Teachers don't necessarily need to leave their community in order to grow, so I also wonder how might the ethos of a retreat be brought to or manifested within a local community? What other ways of being and connecting might support TOCs with their fugitive and resistant practices, creativity, and healing?

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Appendix A: Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

- 1) Did you have Teachers of Color when you were a student?
 - a) (When you were a student, when and where did you have your first Teacher of Color?)
(What about HS, College)
 - b) (Did you see People of Color in administration/leadership?)
 - c) What schools have you attended and what were their demographics?
 - d) How much of the curriculum/literature was about or written by People of Color?
 - e) What was that experience like? What was the curriculum like?
- 2) Did you see Teachers of Color/Teacher Educators of Color in your college experience and teacher preparation?
 - a) How much of the curriculum/literature was about or written by People of Color?
 - b) (What was that experience like? What was the curriculum like? Where did you do your teacher prep? What was your experience with financing your teacher preparation program?)
- 3) Now I'm going to ask you for geographic info. I'm doing this intentionally because I'm curious about how place/space/context/geography informs your experience. What school(s) have you attended and worked in and for how long?
 - a) (Could you please share the names of the schools/district that you've attended, worked at, as well as the names of any educational spaces or geographic locations that are important for you?)
- 4) Now I'm going to ask about the schools you've taught at and your teaching history. How many years have you been teaching in the classroom? What grades and subjects have you taught?
- 5) Please explain or describe the student/district demographics and school context where you work.
 - a) What are the student demographics? Your classroom demographics?
 - b) What are the demographics of the teachers/faculty?
 - c) What are the demographics of the administrators?
 - d) How do these demographics influence the school culture? (Was there any tracking?)
- 6) What is your race and/or ethnicity? How do you think about your racial/ethnic identity?
 - a) (Black, Indigenous, Latinx/é, Xicanx, Asian, Pacific Islander, Desi, Multiracial, etc.)
- 7) How does your identity as a ____ (response from #6) teacher or a Teacher of Color come up for you in work as a teacher?
 - a) (What does being a ____ (response from #6) teacher or Teacher of Color mean to you?)
 - b) (What does being a ____ (response from #6) teacher or Teacher of Color look like for you?)
- 8) Please share anything you would like to about other salient identities that inform or shape your teaching experience.
 - a) (gender, sexuality, socioeconomic status, ability, nationality, first-generation, immigration/documentation status, religion, parent, child, member of x community, age)

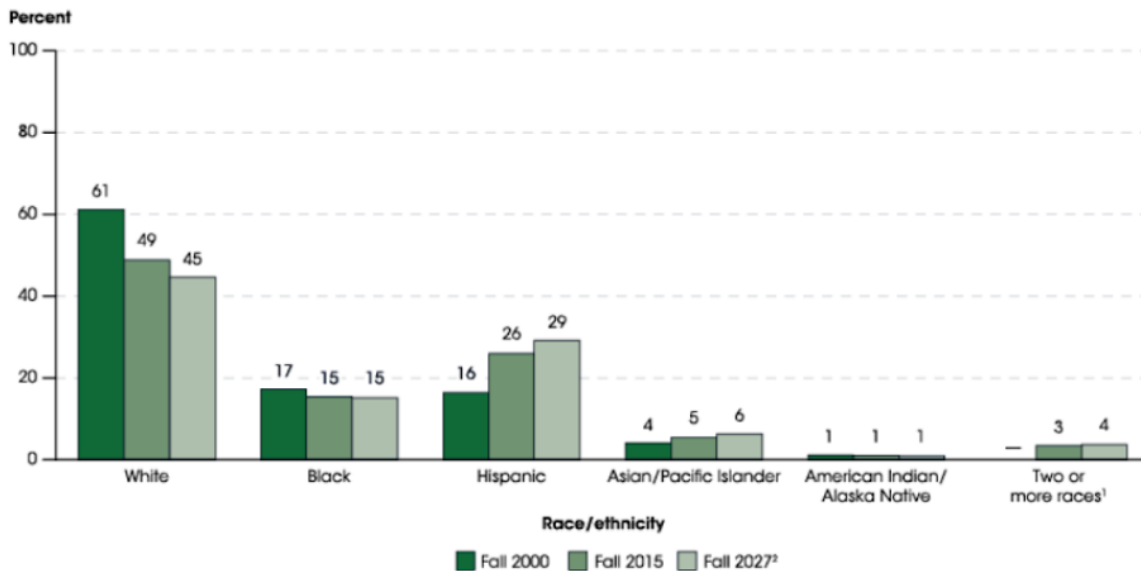
- b) How do these identities come up for you in work as a teacher?
 - c) (How did your experience as a ____ be different/unique compare to white women? men of color?)
- 9) I'm going to transition to asking you a set of more conceptual questions. I'll ask you a similar question but using different words. I'm trying to understand how you think about the meaning of these words and what they mean to you.
- a) The first words are: **Stay/Staying**. What does it mean to stay? What does staying look like as a teacher? Share an example from your experience or what you've observed in other people's experiences that captures the meaning.
 - b) The next words are: **Persist/Persisting/Persistence**. What does it mean to persist? What does persisting or persistence look like as a teacher? Share an example from your experience or what you've observed in other people's experiences that captures the meaning.
 - c) The next words are: **Endure/Enduring/Endurance**. What does it mean to endure? What does enduring or endurance look like as a teacher? Share an example from your experience or what you've observed in other people's experiences that captures the meaning.
 - d) The next words are: **Thrive/Thriving**. What does it mean to thrive? What does thriving look like as a teacher? Share an example from your experience or what you've observed in other people's experiences that captures the meaning.
 - e) The next words are: **Sustain/Being Sustained/Sustaining Oneself**. What does it mean to sustain? What does being sustained or sustaining oneself look like as a teacher? Share an example from your experience or what you've observed in other people's experiences that captures the meaning.
 - f) Now that you've heard the full list. What differences do you see between these words? Similarities?
- 10) Which of those words best describes your experience now? Which best describes your experiences at different points in your career? You may select more than one. Please share why. (Can you give examples or think about events/experiences in your life that speak to this?)
- a) Stay/Staying
 - b) Persist/Persisting/Persistence
 - c) Endure/Enduring/Endurance
 - d) Thrive/Thriving
 - e) Sustain/Being Sustained/Sustaining Oneself
- 11) Are there other words or phrases that you would use to describe your experience? Please share why. (Can you give examples or think about events/experiences in your life that speak to this?) Depending on response to Q2, go to Q12 or Q13.
- 12) Why do you stay in teaching (and in the classroom)?
- a) (What are some of the things that allow you or support you to keep doing the work that you do in spite of the challenges?)
 - b) Have you ever considered leaving teaching? What has supported you to stay?
 - c) (What does it take to stay? What types of educational spaces or non school spaces make it possible to stay or could make it possible to stay?)
 - d) Are there any costs to staying in teaching? What are some of the challenges you've faced?

- 13) Why did you leave teaching (or the classroom)?
 - a) Was there a particular breaking point or line that was crossed or was there more so an accumulation of things? Please explain.
 - b) What were some of the things that allowed you or supported you to keep doing the work as long as you did in spite of the challenges?
 - c) Was there anything that would have kept you in the classroom? If so, what?
 - d) (What would it have taken for you to stay? What types of educational spaces or non school spaces make it possible to stay or could make it possible to stay?)
- 14) What are some ways that schools might prioritize the well-being of Teachers of Color?
 - a) (Are there things your school(s) is/are doing or have done to prioritize the well-being of Teachers of Color?)
 - b) (Are there things your school(s) should/could be doing to prioritize the well-being of Teachers of Color?)
- 15) What networks/communities are you involved in if any that support you as a Teacher of Color?
 - a) (Consider spaces in school or beyond the classroom)
 - b) What opportunities do you have to connect with other Teachers of Color if any?
 - c) What opportunities do you have to connect with Students of Color if any?
- 16) If you brought photos of your teaching/experiences in education, can you please share them? (If we are physically located in the school, can we get a tour of the classroom/school?)
 - a) What do these photos mean to you?
- 17) Could you share a resource (book, article, video, online materials, organization) that has been particularly helpful for you as a teacher, particularly as a Teacher of Color?
 - a) (This could be from your teacher preparation, PD, or another resource you've found useful for your teaching experience)
- 18) Part of my responsibility as a researcher is to protect your identity so when I write or talk I won't use your real name unless you want me to. What name would you like me to use?
- 19) Do you have any questions about the research project or the retreat? Please share any suggestions or concerns about the project, the retreat, focus group sessions and scheduling.

Appendix B: Educational Journey Mapping Prompt

- 1) Community Norms & Introductions: Nameplates (Pronouns) + Person/Place that made you
 - a) Community Norms:
 - i) Current Teachers
 - (1) Honoring quiet time/space (designating a space in the house, quiet/no tech, unplug room)
 - (2) Being supportive and making people feel heard
 - (3) Dedicating time to joy
 - (4) Rest is resistance
 - (5) Step up, step back
 - (6) Pause & assume good intentions - ask questions
 - (7) Actively Listening - listening to understand and not necessarily respond
 - (8) Being present
 - (9) Listen to your body, take care of yourself and one another
 - ii) Former Teachers
 - (1) Understanding without necessarily needing to agree
 - (2) Holding space for grief as former educators
 - (3) Respect one another's experiences
 - (4) conscious communication (expressing our feelings and needs, and making requests to meet those needs)
 - (5) Mindfulness and presence
 - (6) Take care of ourselves and each other
 - (7) Once an educator/learner, always an educator/learner
 - b) Are there additional norms we would like to hold ourselves accountable to as we engage in conversation together about our experiences as BIPOC educators?
- 2) Group Discussion: What do we notice? Does this resonate with you? What are the problems/opportunities?

Figure 6.1. Percentage distribution of public school students enrolled in prekindergarten through 12th grade, by race/ethnicity: Fall 2000, fall 2015, and fall 2027



— Not available.

¹ In 2000, data on students of Two or more races were not collected.

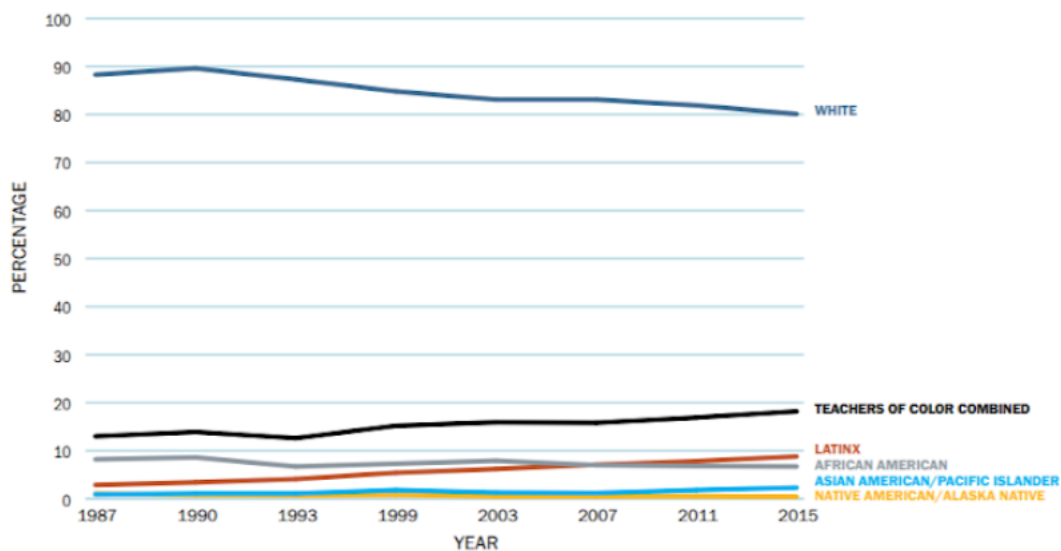
² Projected.

NOTE: Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded estimates. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "State Nonfiscal Survey of Public Elementary and Secondary Education," 2000–01 and 2015–16; and National Elementary and Secondary Enrollment Projection Model, 1972 through 2027. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, [table 203.50](#).

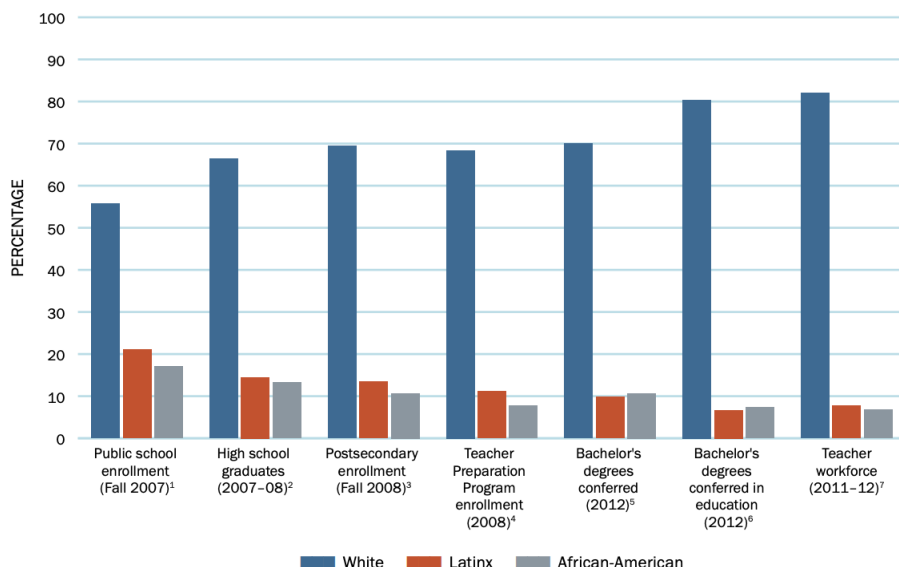
Figure 1

The Share of Teachers of Color in the Teacher Workforce 1987–2015



Note: Analysis by Learning Policy Institute. See the appendix for full source information.

Figure 2
The Pool of Potential Black and Latinx Teachers Dwindles Along the Teacher Pipeline



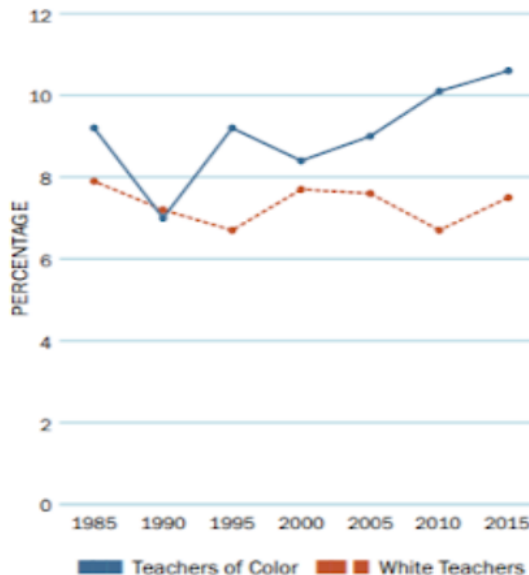
Note: Analysis by Learning Policy Institute. See the appendix for full source information.

Figure 3
Teacher Leaver Rates
 1988-89 to 2012-13



Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of National Center for Education Statistics School and Staffing Survey, 2011-12, and Teacher Follow-up Survey, 2012-13

Figure 4
Teacher Mover Rates
 1988-89 to 2012-13



Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of National Center for Education Statistics School and Staffing Survey, 2011-12, and Teacher Follow-up Survey, 2012-13

- 3) Educational Journey Mapping Prompt: Please map your educational journeys from wherever or whenever you'd like to start to this moment. Where have you experienced education? Where have you experienced miseducation? Who/what makes it challenging to stay in educational spaces? Who/what has supported you to stay and kept you going when

things are challenging? Include any significant **people, places, systems, obstacles, and opportunities**. You can use images, photos, symbols like lines or arrows, words, different colors. Be as creative as you would like and if you don't want to draw, you can make more of a chart, write a poem/story, use your own photos, images from google, or platforms like Padlet, Canva, or Jamboard. Whatever is helpful for you in reflecting.

- 4) Group Discussion:
 - a) Connections?
 - b) Questions?
 - c) Comments?
 - d) Affirmations? Validations?
 - e) Concerns?
 - f) Theories?
 - g) And, and, and...

Appendix C: Ecomapping Prompts

- 1) Community Norms:
 - a) Current Teachers
 - i) Honoring quiet time/space (designating a space in the house, quiet/no tech, unplug room)
 - ii) Being supportive and making people feel heard
 - iii) Dedicating time to joy
 - iv) Rest is resistance
 - v) Step up, step back
 - vi) Pause & assume good intentions - ask questions
 - vii) Actively Listening - listening to understand and not necessarily respond
 - viii) Being present
 - ix) Listen to your body, take care of yourself and one another
 - b) Former Teachers
 - i) Understanding without necessarily needing to agree
 - ii) Holding space for grief as former educators
 - iii) Respect one another's experiences
 - iv) conscious communication (expressing our feelings and needs, and making requests to meet those needs)
 - v) Mindfulness and presence
 - vi) Take care of ourselves and each other
 - vii) Once an educator/learner, always an educator/learner
- 2) Group Discussion: What are maps? Why do we use them? What are some examples of maps that you use and when do you use them? What perspectives do they carry?
- 3) How to make an ecomap: First, you create a circle in the center with your name/image. Then, you draw circles to identify the different individuals, groups, systems, and resources in your life. You can use lines or some other notation to show the flow of energy/resources and the status of relationships you have. Feel free to use the available supplies or create a digital version for yourself (some premade templates on Canva)!

	a solid or thick line represents an important, strong or positive connection
	a broken line represents a tenuous or weak connection
	lines with crosses through them indicate a stressful relationship
	arrows along the line point towards the direction or flow of resources, energy or interest.

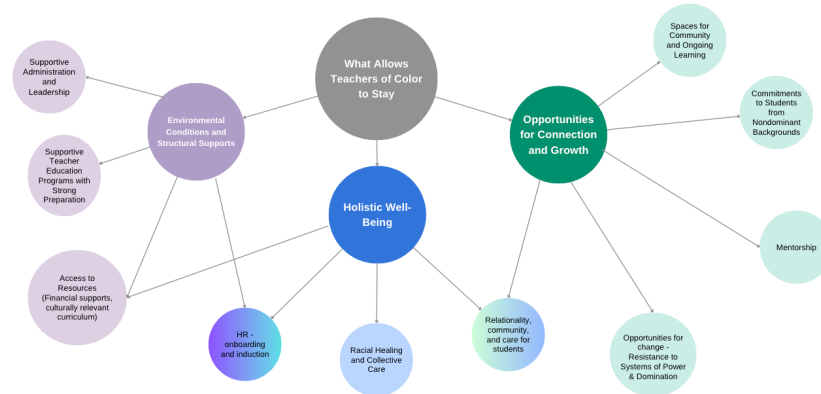
(a)

- 4) Prompt for Ecomap:
 - a) What does your community and environment look like? How do you define your community(ies)?
 - b) What people/resources/conditions are supportive of your work as an educator?
 - c) What people/resources/conditions make it difficult for your work as an educator?
 - i) *Here we will focus on your most recent educational space as a teacher*
- 5) Additional Questions to Consider:
 - a) How do you feel about the neighborhood you are living in and the neighborhood you work in?
 - b) What are the language resources? Cultural resources? And other community resources around you?
 - c) Where do you receive support and does the support meet your needs?
 - d) How is the communication between you and the different things you drew?
 - e) Do you have the opportunity to meet people from your own cultural background? Are your values appreciated or in conflict with the surrounding environment?
 - f) Do you engage in any activities outside school or work or belong to any groups?
 - g) What is the quality of health, food, transportation, etc.? How accessible are those things?
 - h) Are there areas of need that are not being met and is there capacity to access needed support within the local community?
- 6) Sharing our Ecomaps
 - a) What came up for you?
 - b) Connections?
 - c) Questions?
 - d) Comments?
 - e) Affirmations? Validations?
 - f) Concerns?
 - g) Theories?
 - h) And, and, and...

Appendix D: Freedom Dream Prompts

- 1) Community Norms:
 - a) Current Teachers
 - i) Honoring quiet time/space (designating a space in the house, quiet/no tech, unplug room)
 - ii) Being supportive and making people feel heard
 - iii) Dedicating time to joy
 - iv) Rest is resistance
 - v) Step up, step back
 - vi) Pause & assume good intentions - ask questions
 - vii) Actively Listening - listening to understand and not necessarily respond
 - viii) Being present
 - ix) Listen to your body, take care of yourself and one another
 - b) Former Teachers
 - i) Understanding without necessarily needing to agree
 - ii) Holding space for grief as former educators
 - iii) Respect one another's experiences
 - iv) conscious communication (expressing our feelings and needs, and making requests to meet those needs)
 - v) Mindfulness and presence
 - vi) Take care of ourselves and each other
 - vii) Once an educator/learner, always an educator/learner
 - c) Others?
- 2) Initial Reflections:
 - a) What does it mean to sustain Teachers of Color in and beyond schools?
 - b) Is it possible to sustain Teachers of Color in schools today?
 - c) Is it possible for Teachers of Color to not just "survive but thrive" in schools?
 - d) What would educational spaces look like if Teachers of Color were thriving and felt sustained in their work?
 - e) Sarah Day's Conceptual Framework of the Literature on Retention, what would you change/add?

What Allows Teachers of Color to Stay



- (a)
- 3) Freedom Dream Prompt: Imagine a sustainable and abundant future for Teachers of Color. What are your dreams? What are the possibilities? What resources and supports would be available? What would school look like? What about connecting with students? administrators? Families? Communities? What types of places/spaces are the types of places/spaces you could see yourself living in, being in, working in, thriving in, and loving in?

Appendix E: Educational Journey Map Post-Session Survey

- 1) Email
- 2) Name
- 3) What media did you engage with when creating and reflecting on your educational journey?
(Select all that apply)
 - a) Personal Photographs
 - b) Drawing
 - c) Images from Online
 - d) Videos
 - e) Social Media
 - f) Collaging
 - g) Mapping
 - h) Poetry
 - i) Writing
 - j) Storytelling
 - k) Other:
- 4) Filling in the blank with the media you selected above. What does using _____ help you do when sharing your educational journey?
- 5) What parts of the process were most supportive for you?
- 6) What parts of the process were challenging?
- 7) Do you have any suggestions to improve this session/retreat experience for others?
- 8) Is there anything else you would like to share with me or do you have other reflections you'd like to share on this topic that aren't captured in your map?

Appendix F: Ecomapping Post-Session Survey

- 1) Email
- 2) Name
- 3) What media did you engage with when creating and reflecting on your community & ecomap? (Select all that apply)
 - a) Personal Photographs
 - b) Drawing
 - c) Images from Online
 - d) Videos
 - e) Social Media
 - f) Collaging
 - g) Mapping
 - h) Poetry
 - i) Writing
 - j) Storytelling
 - k) Other:
- 4) Filling in the blank with the media you selected above. What does using _____ help you do when sharing your ecomap?
- 5) What parts of the process were most supportive for you?
- 6) What parts of the process were challenging?
- 7) Do you have any suggestions to improve this session/retreat experience for others?
- 8) Is there anything else you would like to share with me or do you have other reflections you'd like to share on this topic that aren't captured in your map?

Appendix G: Freedom Dream Post-Session Survey

- 1) Email
- 2) Name
- 3) What media did you engage with as you were freedom dreaming and reflecting on what sustains Teachers of Color? (Select all that apply)
 - a) Personal Photographs
 - b) Drawing
 - c) Images from Online
 - d) Videos
 - e) Social Media
 - f) Collaging
 - g) Mapping
 - h) Poetry
 - i) Writing
 - j) Storytelling
 - k) Other:
- 4) Filling in the blank with the media you selected above. What does using _____ help you do when sharing your dreams and reflections?
- 5) What parts of the process were most supportive for you?
- 6) What parts of the process were challenging?
- 7) Do you have any suggestions to improve this session/retreat experience for others?
- 8) Is there anything else you would like to share with me or do you have other reflections you'd like to share on this topic that aren't captured in your map?

Appendix H: One Year Follow Up Survey

- 1) Email*
- 2) Name
- 3) Which type of feedback session would work for you? Please select all that apply and feel free to make another suggestion.*
 - a) In-person gathering in Chicago
 - b) In-person gathering in Ann Arbor
 - c) Meeting via zoom
 - d) Communicate asynchronously (leave comments on a document)
 - e) Other:
- 4) Of the options, do you have a preference for the feedback session? If you would like to, please share why.
- 5) I also want to hear about what you've been up to since we last talked! Were you teaching in the classroom this past school year (2024-2025)?*
 - a) Yes (Go to question 6)
 - b) No (Go to question 10)
- 6) Current Teachers
- 7) Please share what you taught (grade/subject) and any other job responsibilities.
- 8) If you were teaching, please share what school you taught at, what city, and if you plan to be there in 2025-2026. If you have different plans for next year, please feel free to share those too.
- 9) Any other updates you'd like to share with me?
- 10) If you would like, please share any additional reflections from participating in this research project last year and any impacts it has had on your work.
- 11) Former Teachers
- 12) Please share what you currently do for work and what company/organization you work for if any (or if you've retired) and location.
- 13) If you left the classroom within the past year since we last talked and would be willing to share why, feel free to share.
- 14) Any other updates you'd like to share with me?
- 15) If you would like, please share any additional reflections from participating in this research project last year and any impacts it has had on your work.

Appendix I: Member Check Prompts

- 1) Name
- 2) Which sections were you able to read?
 - a) Paper 1 Canva Slides (p. 3-48)
 - b) Paper 2 Canva Slides (p. 49-144)
 - c) Paper 3 Canva Slides (p. 145-208) - only applicable to those who attended the retreat
 - d) Other:
- 3) Are my findings fair and reasonable interpretations of what you shared? Please explain why or why not. Please include page numbers if possible.
- 4) Do the findings or quotes in any of the papers resonate with you in particular? If so, please explain. Please include page numbers if possible.
- 5) I used pseudonyms for all people/schools/geographic locations. If you attended a retreat, I individually sent you a de-identified version of each map you created with pseudonyms and sections blurred out. Please let me know if you would like me to make further changes regarding anonymity.
- 6) If you attended the retreat, are you willing to have your maps be included in a public virtual gallery?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
 - c) Did not attend the retreat
 - d) Other:
- 7) Please select which maps you are okay with me displaying.
 - a) Map 1: Educational Journey Map
 - b) Map 2: Ecomap
 - c) Map 3: Freedom Dreams
- 8) Which feedback session are you planning to attend if any?
 - a) March 31st
 - b) April 1st
 - c) April 2nd
 - d) I cannot attend any of the sessions.
 - e) Check this box if you would like a google calendar invitation to the session(s) you checked.
 - f) Other:
- 9) Any additional questions, concerns, comments, reflections, suggestions, dreams?