CRITIQUING COMMUNITY IN COMMUNITY COLLEGE:
CRITICAL EVENT NARRATIVE INQUIRY INTO SUBTRACTIVE SCHOOLING &
CULTURE LOSS WITH IMMIGRANT ESL STUDENTS

by

Elisabeth Lai-Wah Chan
A Dissertation
Submitted to the
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of
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Dedication

This is dedicated to my family, friends, mentors, colleagues, and students for their support.

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As part of this long journey, there are many people I would like to acknowledge. I want to thank my committee members for their love, guidance, and support- Dr. Wong, Dr. Call-Cummings, Dr. Lopez Bunyasi, and Dr. Kubota. I have been inspired by each one of you. I also want to thank my critical friends who have been on the phone with me and spent time together discussing my research- Dee, Mat, Asia, Thuy, Talisa, Sara, Joanna, and Diana. You have helped me process my ideas and stay true to my personal and researcher commitments. A thanks also goes to my friends at work who have also supported me and always given me encouragement. And finally, I acknowledge my family who may not know exactly what I've been doing all this time but who supported me anyways.

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Abstract

CRITIQUING COMMUNITY IN COMMUNITY COLLEGE: CRITICAL EVENT NARRATIVE INQUIRY INTO SUBTRACTIVE SCHOOLING AND CULTURE LOSS WITH IMMIGRANT ESL STUDENTS

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The English as a second language (ESL) student population is one of the fastest growing demographics in U.S. public schools (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). ESL students who attend post-secondary schools are more likely to choose community colleges (David & Kanno, 2020). Despite this, a dearth of research on immigrant ESL students in community colleges exists (Bunch et al., 2011; Conway, 2009; David & Kanno, 2020; Park, 2019; Teranishi et al., 2011). Moreover, research suggests a graduation gap exists with ESL college students graduating at lower rates than non-ESL counterparts (Razfar & Simon, 2011).

Community colleges must ensure they can meet the needs of this student population. I conducted a one-year critical event narrative inquiry (Kim, 2016; Webster & Mertova, 2007), which explored seventeen immigrant ESL students' lived experiences with college. I identified eight critical events, representing students' most meaningful and transformative experiences. These included the lack of authentic caring relationships, loss

of being part of a group-oriented supportive community, and challenges and benefits of becoming more individualistic. These findings suggested subtractive schooling (Valenzuela, 1999) and culture loss (Wong Fillmore, 1991) contributed to students' meaningful experiences.

I shared implications in the form of letters, inviting administrators and content faculty to partake in action-oriented discussions to enhance equity and inclusion for immigrant ESL students through examining institutional policies, processes, curriculum, professional development, and support services through culturally relevant and culturally sustaining lenses (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2017). The significance, strengths, and limitations of the study, as well as potential for future studies were also discussed.

Chapter One: Introduction

"I understand a lot of international students have trouble of surviving in America because they are reluctant to change." (Adi, Malaysia)

"Immigrant students are an important because they come from different parts of the world and have different knowledge which we can learn from each other. There should be more opportunities to make us succeed equally not leaving us behind." (Alexa, Mexico)

"But the experiences made me grow up, hardened my heart a little, and gave me more confidence in myself and to be proud of my country. I do not regret coming here. It was a hard and lonely road for 8 years." (Abby, Barbados)

These experiences were shared with me by international and immigrant postsecondary English as a second language (ESL) students in response to questions about their experiences with race, language, and culture in America (Chan, 2016). They have left an impression on me, and in part, have shaped the way I approach my research. I have been an educator for more than fifteen years. I have worked in multiple settings but primarily in postsecondary education. If you had asked me twenty years ago why I

wanted to enter the field of education, I would not have spoken of social justice or transformative practices. I probably would not even have said to make the world a better place. The truth is that it was something I thought I might be good at, and that was enough for me as a young person trying to find her way. In fact, I was a biology major and actually completed my bachelor's degree in biology. I still have an interest in environmental science and justice, ecology, and conservation, but somehow through my interests of studying abroad, learning the Japanese language, and hanging out with international students, I found a stronger pull towards language teaching. This led me away from my home state of Tennessee and to Hawaii, where I earned my master's degree in second language studies. Now, when I reflect on my professional and personal journey, I believe what I was really doing was searching for my identity.

One of the first steps to narrative inquiry is beginning with our own narrative of experience, and by doing so, it helps us situate who we are both in the research field and in our research reports (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Therefore, I begin by posing a set of questions and then sharing the story of how I came to answer them.

- What is the purpose of education? What role should it play in our lives?
- How does schooling affect the way we feel about ourselves? How does it shape us?

How do I answer these questions? I believe one main purpose of education is the promotion of knowledge-seeking and knowledge-creating. It should spark curiosity about the world around us and inside us, as well as foster an eagerness to learn with both openness and criticality. However, I understand that for many others, there is a singular

answer: to get a job. I believed it when I was younger and I hear it all the time now, from students and administrators alike, but I believe the role that education plays in our lives goes beyond the knowledge we find in curricula. For some, the experience with schooling was one in which they felt inspired and validated, but we must recognize that has not been and is not everyone's experience. For some, schooling can be uninspiring and invalidating. For me, it was not until much later in life that I reflected upon my schooling experiences and how they limited me from seeking knowledge about myself or my local ethnic community.

Mine is not a unique story, but one that I have come to understand is common for immigrants and their children. As a fourth-generation (maternal) and second-generation (paternal) Chinese American woman, I grew up disconnected from my family's ethnic heritage. In fact, my schooling experiences made me feel shame about my heritage as if it were something I needed to get as far away from as possible in order to fit in and succeed. When I would be asked at school where I was from, I would say Tennessee. True, but I also knew it was not the "right" answer because they would protest and ask where my parents were from. I would tell them that my mother was born in New Jersey, also true. I absolutely did not want to admit I was Chinese. As a kid, I didn't know why. I guess I just didn't want to be different. I even used to bend the truth and say my father was from Britain because I knew Hong Kong was a British colony. I didn't know anything else about Hong Kong or what it meant to be a colony, but I knew saying it could prevent me from saying China, a place I felt no connection to. I did not identify with being Chinese or Asian and in fact found it extremely difficult, even painful, to say

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aloud "I am Chinese." Now, when I read and hear about the importance of representation in schools, I think back to my schooling experiences. Where did I see myself represented? I can count the memories on one hand.

First, when I was in fourth grade, we were reading a story from our reading text that had a Chinese family. I don't remember what the family was doing. What I remember is one line of dialogue in Chinese and my teacher pausing, looking at me, and I felt dread because I knew she wanted me to pronounce it for everyone. I told her that I didn't speak Chinese. Something that I normally said to distance myself from that part of my identity, normally a positive thing, but in that moment, I felt shame and embarrassment because I had not lived up to my teacher's expectation of me. Later in the story, the girl calls her grandmother "Amah." Now, this was a word I knew! I wanted to redeem myself and say yes, this one I know! Instead, I sat quietly and stewed as it was mispronounced. Second, there was a sports poster on the wall of Michael Chang, the tennis player. That's all I knew about him. He was a famous tennis player, but that's all it was- a picture on the wall. We never talked about him. Third, when I was in third grade, we put on a production of Shel Silverstein's *The Giving Tree*. I adored that story when I was a kid. As the teacher read out who would play what part in the play, I remember her saying "Hawaiian girls." I remember first thinking, there are no Hawaiian girls in the book! What craziness is this? Then I remember praying "not me, not me, not me…" and feeling the relief when she did not call my name. I suppose that eight-year-old me felt Hawaiian was getting too close to Asian. Then came the horror as she read the next part, "Japanese girls" and my name being called. I recall being so upset that I hunched up on

the floor by my desk. Oh, the humiliation of being an Asian character. Didn't Hawaii look much better then? At least Hawaii was part of the United States. Things just got worse from there as I learned my dance routine and wore the robe. I had accepted that I would do this play. Then on the night of the play, the music teacher painted my face white. I had no idea he would do this, but there was nothing I could do about it. I did my bit, but I couldn't get home fast enough afterwards to wash the paint from my face in embarrassment. At the time, I didn't even know the history of Japan and China. I knew they were both Asian, and I didn't want any part of either.

The last memories are not examples of Asian or Chinese representation in schools, but more related to the lack of representation and knowledge. Also in third grade, we were in the classroom and had printed a banner from our dot matrix printer. The characters had been messed up somehow and the words came out as gibberish. One classmate said, maybe this somehow printed out in Chinese. I felt angry because I knew that sign was garbage, so this was a time that I spoke up as if I were a Chinese speaker. I couldn't read or speak Chinese, but I used my Chinese face to give me authority as I strongly told them that sign was not in Chinese, maybe Japanese, but definitely not Chinese. What was going on as I negotiated my self-identity?

How did schooling make me feel, and how did it shape me? The subtle (yet pernicious) lack of Asian representation, the support of color-blind ideology (in the face of clear differential treatment), and the ideal of equality (rather than equity) left me not so much confused, but more inculcated in White dominant norms. One important memory I have related to my identity happened in my U.S. history freshman course. We were

discussing the Civil Rights Movement and segregation. Even though I had studied the

movement multiple times over the years in K-12, this was the first time that I thought

about situating someone like me during that period. When I was a kid, I had visited the

National Civil Rights Museum on a fieldtrip. There was a pair of doorways that you had

to walk through to proceed in the exhibit. One marked White and the other Colored. I

remember not knowing which door I was supposed to walk through. I asked my college

professor, "What about Chinese? Did Chinese use the White or Black water fountains?"

The professor told me that he didn't know, but probably there weren't enough Chinese or

Mexicans to have been written into the law. My family lived in Tennessee during that

time period, but they didn't talk about it. Even now, all I know is my mom went to a

White school, where the White kids asked her if she were Black, and I know my

grandfather was quite tanned and was told to move from the front of the bus to the back,

to which he replied in Chinese and didn't move.

It was not until I lived in Hawaii for two years, where I was not the racial

minority, that I began to realize I needed to come to terms with who I was and began to

actively wrestle with my identity. While I was always a perpetual foreigner in my home

state, I found myself a true foreigner in Hawaii. I was a Southerner. Though I could never

be a Southerner when I was at home in the South, in Hawaii I was a Southerner. How

ironic I thought. I liked the feeling of just fitting in, as long as I didn't open my mouth,

but at the same time, I did not want to be fake. I consciously made efforts not to pick up

local slang and dialect inflections, and I never pretended to be from Hawaii. I wish I

could say my experience there helped me to become more Asian and more accepting of

my Asian-ness, but what it really did was strengthen my Southern identity. Perhaps that is why I experienced a severe reverse-culture shock when I finally returned home to the South. I could not deal with the stares. If I went to the grocery store, stares. If I went to the department store, stares. I had forgotten what it was like to be stared at and how to ignore the stares because in Hawaii, where more people looked like me, there were no stares. I locked myself at home for nearly two weeks until I could deal with being back home.

It really was not until a couple years after returning to the South when I first questioned, "How did my Chinese immigrant great-grandfather end up in the South?" I began where any good scholar would go, to the university library. I found books on a group of Chinese in the South called the Mississippi Chinese. I really had no idea there was a community of families like mine. While I was growing up, there were no other Chinese families around. I was the only Chinese kid in my school besides my siblings. Still, after discovering this I sat on the topic for a few more years, not really delving more into it. Around the time I began my doctoral studies, I was cleaning out my closet and found an old gift card. After finding out there was still money on it, I went looking for a book on Amazon and ended up purchasing the book *Water Tossing Boulders* by Adrienne Berard about a Chinese family who sued to desegregate schools in Mississippi in the 1910's. Who knew that forty years before *Brown v. Board*, a case to desegregate schools had gone all the way to the Supreme Court and lost? Furthermore, who would guess it had been a Chinese family from the South?

In the book, I learned there was a museum at a university in Mississippi, dedicated to the Mississippi Chinese. I emailed the curator of the museum to inquire if I could meet with her during the winter break. I would be visiting my folks in Memphis and could drive down. Amazingly, she offered to open the museum for me and to introduce me to a local board member, a Chinese American who had worked with NASA. He invited me to his home. I brought my parents with me on the trip down to Mississippi. We arrived at his house and were welcomed inside. I met his wife and we sat in the living room. There were pictures on the wall from NASA, but also a family photo on the mantle with many relatives around a giant tractor. He said to me that it is difficult for young people to be interested in the history of our people. They have to reach that point on their own. You cannot force it.

He joined us for lunch before going to the museum because he had some artifacts he wanted to donate, including a big metal office desk and a child's old school desk. Over lunch conversation, it turned out that my parents had some mutual acquaintances, in particular the pastor who had been in Memphis when they were a young couple had come from Mississippi. In the museum the curator showed me artifacts, pictures, and binders of oral histories. The exhibit began with the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, and it had both home life and store life. It had a room for school life and an entire exhibit highlighting Chinese American veterans. She gave me tips about preserving photos and doing oral histories. She also invited several other local Chinese community members to drop by the museum while we were there, and I was glad to meet them. She told me about how she had supported the author of the book by hosting her in her home while she wrote. She

invited me to write a book about the experiences there, one which I plan to do eventually and if I am fortunate enough. Being in the museum was surreal. I had never been anywhere before where I could look around and say, "that is just like what my grandma had." My mom looked at the exhibits on the small grocery stores, where she expressed "We had one of these in our store." My grandparents were successful small business owners and had owned two small groceries in Black neighborhoods in Memphis. My mother had grown up in the back of one of those stores.

On the way driving back to Memphis, my parents told me that the experience of that day had been awesome. Now, I know this plays into some Asian stereotypes, but my parents do not express emotions of awesomeness. I could tell that the way being in the museum had made them feel is what education should do. It should help us feel connected to our communities and our histories. It should instill in us a pride and an intense desire to know more. The museum educates people about the Chinese Exclusion Act and the racism Chinese immigrants faced. It validates, prizes, and honors the experiences of the Mississippi Chinese, my community that I never learned about while I was in school from grade K through the earning of my bachelor's degree at the University of Memphis despite Memphis being within that community.

The museum has inspired an award-winning short film by a Californian Chinese American family who traced their roots to Mississippi. More than inspiring the film, it connected this family to their own family history. The curator recalled seeing the family's name in an artifact in the museum. She also introduced them to a local Chinese American family who had known their family. A few months later, the filmmakers were in

Alexandria, Virginia, doing a film screening, where I was able to meet them and talk about their experience. Also present at the screening was a member of the family who had appeared in their documentary. I met her and we realized that our families knew each other as well. Her brother used to cut my grandparents' lawn.

All this is to say, we must stop and think about the incredible lengths and the journeys that had to take place, the luck, the privileges, the chance encounters, all to connect us to a history, a part of our identities and our shared identities that we have lost. Needless to say, I have a deep investment in the topic of culture loss. To describe it, to uncover it, to prevent it, and to restore what was lost. As an educator myself, I have to make a point to critique the systems within which I operate and to critique my own actions and thoughts about how I approach my pedagogy and relationships with my students. For education to be liberatory and emancipatory, the relationship between teachers and students must be one of respect and love, which allows for respect of cultural knowledges, the questioning of assumptions, and an embrace of different ideologies. Teachers are agents of change who have a role in cultivating critical consciousness in their students (Torres & Van Heertum, 2009). As a researcher, this self-identity, which I am finally embracing, negotiating, and re-negotiating, strongly influences my ontological, epistemological, and ethical commitments. In other words, knowing and accepting myself better helps me answer "What is real?... How do I know what is real?... What part of this reality is worth finding out more about?... What is it ethical to do in order to gain this knowledge, and what will this knowledge be used for?" (Wilson, 2008, pp. 34-35).

My ESL students have come from all around the globe: Western, Northern, Central, and Eastern Africa; the Middle East, Central, South, Southeast, and East Asia; the Caribbean, Central and South America; and Western, Central, and Eastern Europe. Their journeys intersect in my English language classroom. Some have immigrated to the United States in pursuit of new opportunities, some to join family, some as refugees, and some from privileged backgrounds. Some of my students are young, fresh out of high school, including local American high schools. Others are older. Some even attend for free as senior citizens. Some are working part-time, some full-time, and some full-time parents. Their aspirations are varied too. Some want to get an associate degree and others want a bachelors or more eventually. Still, some just want to come to strengthen their English language skills in a formal setting. Despite the diverse reasons that students are in my class, almost every single one will say the primary purpose of going to college is to get a better job. No matter their country of origin, no matter their age, no matter if they are working or not. How is it that postsecondary education came to represent job readiness and that "learning is earning?" (Brown et al., 2010).

Positionality

Being a second/fourth generational Chinese American English-speaking woman from the U.S. South, a Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) professional for over 15 years, and a researcher who is committed to criticality, intersectionality, and relationality, have all shaped me as a critical Asian feminist scholar. Critical theorists are dialectic and reflexive, questioning the political and economic factors of cultural production with a focus on power, oppression, and difference; critical

theorists are also humanistic over positivistic, centering love, collaboration, and interdisciplinarity as means to empower and liberate, thereby alleviating human suffering (Torres & Van Heertum, 2009). I understand criticality as living in a way that acknowledges systems of power and privilege, interrogates related injustices, and strives to improve oneself and one's community with liberatory and equitable goals. As an educator, I relate to Motha (2014), who states

> The heart of criticality in teaching is not to explicitly teach students to resist but to support their agency and position them to make fully informed decisions about their own learning and lives with a complete understanding of the ways their decisions are meaningful within [a global context] (p. 130).

As a researcher, holding a critical lens means I reflect on the power and privilege I hold to interrogate my own assumptions and understandings. I also devote time to increasing my critical consciousness, which involves sociopolitical analysis at individual and institutional level systems for systemic influences in each context (Freire, 1973). It also means I ask the question "knowledge for whom" (Wong, 2006). Academic research is sometimes criticized for being reported and written in language that is accessible only to academics (e.g., Grace, 2020), which should be interrogated because it decreases access to the research, especially for communities whose dominant language is not English and for communities for whom the research advocates. Kim (2016) also states that using vernacular language in a narrative text increases fidelity to our research and makes it more accessible to more readers. To address these critiques and expand on Kim, I choose to write in a less formal academic style with the intention of increasing access to

more audiences. For example, in Chapter 4, I suggest implications for my research in the form of letters addressed to college administrators and content teaching faculty.

I am also committed to principles of intersectionality in my research and practice. Intersectionality comes from Black feminist scholarship (Collins, 2015; Combahee River Collective, 1979; Crenshaw, 1991). In addition to intersections of identity, various types of oppression intersect resulting in unique forms of inequity. The oppression of women differs from the oppression of Asian women or Black women, which differs from the oppression of Asian women whose dominant language is not English. For my research, it is important to consider students' unique confluence of backgrounds, identities, and experiences in understanding their narratives and why they chose those narratives as meaningful.

Relationality means living in a way that recognizes we are bound together with one another and our environment; a relational way of knowing believes in the co-creation of knowledges and in striving for non-hierarchical relationships (Martin & Pirbhai-Illich, 2016; Smith et al., 2018). Regarding race, language, and culture, categories are socially constructed with blurred and shifting boundaries. As an educator, I foster dialogic interactions that recognize students are learning from one another, not just from me as their professor, and I am equally learning from my students at the same time. As a researcher, I take measures to reduce the power differences between me and students and use methods that center students' voices in combination with my experiences and understandings. In addition to this, relationality requires that readers have a deep

understanding of the author (Wilson, 2008). I began Chapter 1 by sharing a deeply personal story about my motivations and connections to my research interests.

Theoretical Perspectives

Kim (2016) explains three levels of theory: macro, meso and micro. The macro level theory is the interpretive paradigm and describes the holistic level of the study. The meso level theory is the methodological paradigm, specific to a particular qualitative methodology. The micro-level theory is the disciplinary paradigm, which is content-area specific to a discipline. My study at the macro level engages in critical race theory (CRT), which strives to (Kim, 2016):

- Understand how White supremacy and its subordination of people of color have been created and maintained in the United States

- Be committed to social justice by working toward eliminating racial oppression as part of the larger goal of eradicating all forms of oppression (p. 43)

Kim (2016) summarizes eight tenets of CRT:

1. CRT recognizes that racism is endemic to American life, deeply ingrained legally, culturally, socially, and psychologically.

2. CRT challenges the dominant ideologies such as White privilege, race neutrality, objectivity, colorblindness, and meritocracy.

3. CRT attends to Derrick Bell's theory of *interest convergence*, which contends that racial equality has been gained only when the interests of people of color promote those of Whites.

4. CRT insists on a contextual/historical analysis of race and racism not in order to dwell on the past, but to move beyond it.

5. CRT appreciates the experiential knowledge of people of color as legitimate, valid, and critical to interrogate race and racism.

6. CRT relies on stories and counter-stories of the lived experiences of people of color as a way to communicate the realities of the oppressed.

7. CRT is inter/trans/cross-disciplinary, drawing upon other disciplines and epistemologies to provide a more complete analysis of racial inequalities.

8. CRT focuses on race and racism for a critical race analysis but includes their intersection with other forms of subordination such as gender and class discrimination. (p. 44)

As a meso level methodological paradigm (Kim, 2016), I engage with critical event narrative inquiry, which relates strongly to the CRT tenet of privileging the lived experiences of people of color by using storytelling and counter-storytelling to illustrate the daily realities of marginalized communities. Community college immigrant ESL students' perspectives are underrepresented in research (Bunch et al., 2011; Conway, 2009; David & Kanno, 2020; Park, 2019; Teranishi et al., 2011). Furthermore, Kubota (2004) called for language education research that deals with cultural differences to be analyzed as both relational and also as a construct that is forged by power and discourses. Combining the aims of exploring the lived experiences of immigrant ESL community college students and analyzing culture both relationally and critically, I chose critical event narrative inquiry. This approach focuses on illuminating the most meaningful and

transformational experiences of storytellers from their perspectives (Webster & Mertova, 2007). Criticality is increased by a dialogic approach and a trusting relationship between the researcher and participants (Torres & Van Heertum, 2009).

With my background in TESOL, I also engage with linguistically focused theories that relate to CRT at Kim's (2016) micro level of disciplinary paradigm. CRT can be used as a frame by TESOL scholars to understand the intersections of language and race (Liggett, 2014). Liggett (2014) states CRT can be applied to TESOL as a framework in three ways: that linguicism is endemic to daily life, that the roots of English language teaching (ELT) in colonialism must be understood, and that counterstories are an important part of ELT pedagogy and practice. Furthermore, raciolinguistics (Alim et al., 2016; Flores & Rosa, 2015) situates the historical co-naturalization of race and language within colonialism and imperialism. Raciolinguistic ideologies describe the racialization of speakers and the accompanying determination that people of color's English is less proper. Finally, Crump (2014) branched out from CRT to coin *LangCrit*, which expands the concept of socially constructed hierarchies based on race to include identity and language. Ultimately, LangCrit provides a lens that combines both the visual and aural aspects of identity. By using raciolinguistics and LangCrit, immigrant ESL students' experiences with language and cultural identity can be linked to the conceptualization of race in the U.S.

Conceptual Framework

My conceptual framework begins by first critiquing neoliberalism and neocolonialism in U.S. education, particularly in community colleges. I argue that these

both contribute to the potential for culture loss (Wong Fillmore, 2014) and subtractive schooling (Valenzuela, 1999) faced by immigrant ESL students. The ESL classroom is a unique place in college where a high concentration of diverse backgrounds intersect, including but not limited to linguistic, racial, ethnic, cultural, religious, gender, and political. By entering college, students face systemic deculturalization through neoliberal systems as they are expected to assimilate into the school culture, which transforms a diverse student body into a monocultural one, that of an employee (Boufoy-Bastick, 2015). Immigrant ESL students are learning the school curriculum as well as a hidden curriculum, which includes how to navigate the U.S. college system and broader U.S. society at the same time. These phenomena should be considered by college faculty and staff while needing to address the identified graduation gap between ESL and non-ESL community college students, wherein ESL students persist at lower rates (Razfar & Simon, 2011). Importantly, accounts of community college ESL students' experiences with culture loss and subtractive schooling are missing from the literature, so my aim in this study is to gain a deeper understanding of these students' meaningful and transformational experiences as they navigate their time in community college, whether they are challenges and/or moments of achievement. Then I examine students' critical events to see if they suggest subtractive schooling and/or culture loss are present and in what forms.

Summary of Research Design, Analysis, and Findings

In Chapter 3, I explain my research goals in regard to my research questions and I elaborate on my research design.

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1. What are the most meaningful/transformational experiences immigrant ESL students have in navigating their community college experiences in their content courses?

2. How may those experiences relate to the concepts of culture loss (Wong Fillmore, 2014) and subtractive schooling (Valenzuela, 1999)?

I conducted my critical narrative inquiry at Southeastern Community College (SCC) with seventeen immigrant ESL students over the course of one academic year. I used unstructured interviews in my commitment to center students' voices and perspectives by allowing them to steer the conversation towards events that have been meaningful for them. We spoke one-on-one in three rounds of online interviews from September 2020 through April 2021. I also maintained researcher memos throughout and a journal for reflections. I followed Webster and Mertova's (2007) framework for a critical event narrative analysis to identify *critical* events in students' stories and corroborating *like* and *other* events. Then I address validity and reliability through alternative methods of access, honesty/verisimilitude/authenticity, familiarity, transferability, and economy. I discuss the negotiation of caring and empowering relationships, followed by risks and reflexivity in the study. Finally, I summarize the process of analysis and interpretation, ending with a note on challenges.

From there I continue into Chapter 4 with analysis, where I share and interpret composite narratives of students' critical events, which are supported with like and other events. I chose these critical events based on how they matched Webster and Mertova's (2007) characteristics of critical events:

- Exist in a particular context, such as formal organizational structures or communities of practice

- Impact on the people involved

- Have life-changing consequences

- Are unplanned

- May reveal patterns of well defined stages

- Are only identified after the event

- Are intensely personal with strong emotional involvement (p. 83)

I focused on those events which resonated with me as a researcher, increasing verisimilitude (Webster & Mertova, 2007) because not all critical events possess every one of these qualities. I gravitated towards stories which expressed a transformational experience and those in which I perceived the student to express strong emotions through their word choices, word stress, and tone of voice. Through my analysis and interpretation, I discuss how these critical events answer my research questions. Though I didn't expect students to directly comment on structural, or macro level, connections to their personal experiences, I propose connections between the interpersonal, institutional, and ideological levels of oppression, which address my first research question. For example, the ways neoliberalism places value on time as a means for production in schooling have strong consequences on students' lives, including family relationships and personal health. Furthermore, neoliberalism's focus on individualism and penalization were difficult adjustments related to schooling, found in many students' stories. In regard to my second research question, because of the findings related to the importance of

personal relationships and interactions, I explain how these critical events highlight the importance of *politically aware, authentic caring* (Valenzuela, 2008). Furthermore, that caring extends beyond the interpersonal level to the community college system. I interrogate the institution's stated responsibilities to its students and community as I connect stories related to belonging and not belonging to the need for systemic changes focused on critical inclusion and representation, such as curriculum policies that infuse culturally sustaining pedagogies (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2017) throughout the community college.

I end in Chapter 5 by summing up the key takeaways of my critical narrative inquiry, reflecting on the significance of my study, relating the dissertation experience to my growth as a critical scholar activist, and discussing limitations and strengths of my study. I add a look to the future by proposing future projects that stem from my findings. Finally, I conclude with some final thoughts on my research and how it has changed me.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

After ESL students complete their pre/co-requisite ESL programs and are fully in their content courses, we ESL faculty rarely get to see the rest of our students' journeys. In my experience, institutions usually do not track the progress of this specific student group through their majors. As an ESL teacher for over fifteen years, I have always wondered how my students fare in a neocolonial, neoliberal educational system that is not designed to use racial, ethnic, or linguistic differences as resources. ESL college students must persist within an educational system shaped by colonialism, as well as operate within a language rooted in colonialism. In this chapter, I begin by tracing the historical connections between colonialism and English language teaching and learning (Pennycook, 1998; Phillipson, 1992). In addition to the cultural and linguistic dissonance that arise from being in neocolonial postsecondary institutions, immigrant ESL students also face pressures from neoliberal policies, practices, and discourses that commodify the English language and over-promise that a college degree is a guaranteed ticket for upward social mobility and financial success (Brown et al., 2010). The combined inequitable effects of neocolonialism and neoliberalism in postsecondary education contribute to the devaluation of minoritized cultures and languages while producing monocultural, English speaking workers (Boufoy-Bastick, 2015). I, therefore, draw connections between community college environments and subtractive schooling (Valenzuela, 1999), which contributes to students' culture and language loss. The negative effects of culture and language loss of minoritized communities have primarily

been studied within the contexts of Indigenous communities (e.g., Spring, 2007) and immigrant students in the K-12 context (e.g., Wong Fillmore, 2014). In fact, the current body of community college ESL literature focuses on two areas: English language placement tests and the persistence and retention of ESL students. I argue a deep, relational, and critical understanding of how immigrant community college ESL students negotiate their cultural identities as they navigate American postsecondary education is missing. This is why I conducted a critical narrative inquiry on the lived experiences of immigrant ESL community college students through the related lenses of culture loss and subtractive schooling.

TESOL: Colonial Roots of English Language Teaching and Learning

"Global injustice is the product of an unjust neocolonial world order and global English is implicated in entrenching global inequality in complex ways" (Piller, 2016, p. 201). This is largely because the English language holds global status as the international language, or lingua franca. Today in international business and politics, few stop to question why English is the standard medium of communication. The spread of the English language is rooted in colonialism and imperialism, which have institutionalized the superiority of English and Euro-centric knowledge (Abdi, 2012; Pennycook, 1998). In fact, two of colonialism's tenets are the superiority of Europe and the existence of lower races (Pennycook, 1998). Since this is ingrained in both the minds of the colonizer and colonized, we need to engage in reflective practices to see how neocolonialism shapes our current ideologies and institutions in ELT and postsecondary education.

Discourses of Colonialism in ELT

Discourses of colonialism are found throughout the field of English language teaching (ELT) and have become a site of cultural production (Pennycook, 1998). First of all, ELT reproduces the colonial discourses of Self and Other by producing and reproducing the native speaker (Self), non-native speaker (Other) dichotomy. English also takes on the qualities of purity, Anglo-Saxonness, openness to integration, and intelligence. Other forms of English become threats to that purity and by association, immigrants become threats to English, society's way of life, and the government too. In ELT, native speakers (Self) became the unquestioned smarter, more effective teachers whose job was to impart knowledge to "empty" students (Other).

Secondly, colonial discourses contribute to the fixity of images of students and their cultures as unchanging and deficient (Pennycook, 1998). These stereotypes of the Self and Other are reproduced and circulated through all means of discourse, from academic to popular culture, becoming fixed or static. This essentializes cultures and denies the lived experiences of people. By acknowledging Others' cultures in this way, fruitful engagement in differences is prevented and it is easy for ELT to dismiss local practices in favor of Eurocentric, ethnocentric practices (Nguyen et al., 2009).

A third way that discourses of Self and Other are reproduced is through language policies. To illustrate, during British colonialism in Hong Kong, education was used to impart European versions of morality and to create a docile colonized population that would praise the benefits of colonialism (Pennycook, 1998). Contrary to what some may assume, British colonial language policies varied widely from English-only to

bilingualism (Pennycook, 1998), but either way they were designed to promote racist hierarchies that helped create wealthy and poor classes and reproduce colonial realities through tracking. These types of colonial language policies contributed to the discursive construction of Self and Other.

Linguistic Imperialism

Present day imperialism takes the form of *neocolonialism*, which is when former colonizers maintain dominance over former colonies and colonized peoples through political, economic, or other practices (Phillipson, 1992). Motha (2014) elaborated on the distinction of neocolonialism by distinguishing between empire, which is formal, intentional colonization, and Empire, which is a less intentional English occupation of international societies. Capital "E" Empire is controlled more by the economy than the government and thus has no central origin. Thus, there is no singular plotting entity that spreads English around the globe (Phillipson, 1992). Instead, its invisible, flexible ideology that produces English's connection to positive characteristics is enough to maintain its dominance. Phillipson (1992) defined *linguistic imperialism* as "the dominance of English… asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages" (p. 47). This form of imperialism is an example of *linguicism*, which he characterized as "ideologies, structures, and practices which are used to legitimate, effectuate, and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources (both material and immaterial) between groups which are defined on the basis of language" (p. 47).

The powers of English linguistic imperialism can be seen at multiple levels of society from the individual to the institutional. Colonial education has always been a way for colonizers to establish their superiority (Pennycook, 1998), and education supports imperialism in three ways: economic-reproductive, ideological, and repressive (Phillipson, 1992). Phillipson (1992) explains as an economic-reproductive function, the teaching of English grows the economy and bolsters the nation state by affording increased access to English-medium opportunities. Secondly, schools must teach imperialist ideology to its students, which includes English as a cornerstone of both imperialism and capitalism since it is connected to modernism, better education, improved communication, and increased standards of living. In fact, research has been produced in higher education institutes to justify colonial ideologies of the state. Finally, there is no choice but to use English to the exclusion of anything else. Phillipson concludes whether consciously or unconsciously, English language educators are in the business of reproducing linguistic imperialism.

Specifically for ELTs, Phillipson (1992) stated that both the Anglocentricity and professionalism of ELT work to produce and reproduce English linguistic imperialism. The former by devaluing other cultures, and the latter by separating linguistic structure from culture. These discourses of English teaching as simply technical or transactional hide its economic, social, and political ties to imperialism and their ramifications. By doing so, English can be used for inclusion and exclusion through positive associations attached to English. Furthermore, packaging English as simply grammar and syntax, separated from culture, allows neoliberal actions to standardize and place English on the

market like a product for sale. Phillipson (1992) debunked the racist and neocolonial tenets underlying ELT today:

> [1] English is best taught monolingually, [2] the ideal teacher of English is a native speaker, [3] the earlier English is taught, the better the results, [4] the more English is taught, the better the results, 4) if other languages are used much, standards of English will drop." (p. 185)

He criticized the disconnect between language teaching and the political realm, and he asserted that training teachers in technical skills while ignoring cognitive and social aspects of learning was a mistake that makes space for increased linguistic imperialism.

Critiques of Neocolonialism in TESOL

One problem of spreading the belief that English is superior is that it happens in a subtractive, rather than additive sense. It is not enough to learn English on top of a first language, but the goal has been to learn English in place of the first language (Wong Fillmore, 2000). This neocolonial privileging of English and dominant White culture in America can be found throughout education, politics, corporations, and media today. However, some believe in colorblind ideologies (Bonilla-Silva, 2018), and say they do not see race or that race may have been an issue in the past but not anymore. Just because they do not acknowledge the existence and influence of modern racist ideologies in society, does not mean they are absent. Even well-meaning people can unknowingly contribute to the damaging loss of students' home languages and ethnic cultures (Valenzuela, 1999).

Others acknowledge that racial inequalities are a problem but promote forms of equality that may unknowingly perpetuate White supremacy and English superiority. As Valenzuela (1999) wrote:

> I do not believe that most Anglo teachers see themselves as colonizers, and that most do care about the students they work with. At the same time, most Anglo teachers do not view racial and ethnic relations within a political perspective, and take for granted beliefs in the superiority of the U.S. society, predominance of European and Euro-American culture, and the pragmatic utility of fluency in English only. (p. xviii)

Garza and Crawford's (2005) framework of *hegemonic multiculturalism* aptly explains this phenomenon. This form of multiculturalism claims that it values and respects linguistic and cultural differences. Furthermore, it functions within a system that values universalism and equality for all. However, these liberal ideologies privilege the dominant group's definition of diversity and its positioning of diverse identities within the classroom. Garza and Crawford's (2005) study found English language learners were disciplined to internalize and emulate the dominant group's liberal ideologies of equality while their native languages were stifled, leading to a slow loss of languages. The school framed these neocolonial and imperial ideologies as favorable, and even natural, in order for these students to be fully accepted and to become successful with access to equal opportunities.

Historically school has been used for forced assimilation, for example, with Indigenous peoples and Indian boarding schools in the U.S., Canada, and Australia, and

as a result it has been used as a tool to teach children how to be "proper" citizens, as defined by the dominant group in society (Spring, 2007; Srigley, 2015). Thus, although the labor of people of color was valuable to help America grow, their cultures were considered undesirable. This deficit viewpoint, which positioned these students as unable to be educated at home, continues in U.S. public education, where students' home cultures and languages are still devalued through hidden curriculum and excluded from the classroom. When multicultural materials are included, they often merely represent palliated differences, those which are limited but "acceptable." In other cases, non-White characters in classroom materials are assimilated, representing White heteronormative culture (Motha, 2014). This positioning of the Western-minded teacher as knowing what is best for the non-Western students by privileging Western exceptionalism is a violent act, which reproduces neocolonial and neoliberal paternal agendas. It seems likely that the oppressed must adopt the norms of the oppressor for pragmatic advantages or even as a survival mechanism. Abdi (2012) argues that colonialism lives and persists in the human mind, and that colonialism is successful based on the learned beliefs of both the colonizer and the colonized. Not only must the colonizers believe that their subjugation of a people is just and right, the colonized must also be convinced that it's natural for them to reject their traditional identities in favor of the more "enlightened" life of the colonizer. In other words, colonizers come to believe that they are saving these peoples from an abysmal uncivilized existence by imparting their culture, language, and way of life unto the Indigenous communities. This narrative became prevalent throughout the colonizing country through elite academicians who espoused this deficiency view of the

colonized peoples. On the other side, the colonized must also accept this as true. In the minds of the colonized population, they internalize the idea that their traditional culture, language, and epistemology are backwards and vulgar. Thus, they are socialized, in large part through colonial education, to hold the colonizer's culture and language above their own traditions and native languages. Perhaps some of the most extreme repercussions of colonial ideologies are the erasure or death of cultural and linguistic identities. Colonization has caused the death of minoritized languages and cultures. In the case of North American Indigenous populations, the U.S. and Canadian governments stole children and detained them in boarding schools to rid them of their native languages and cultures in exchange for English and Western culture (Hall, 2016; Spring, 2007). Furthermore, designating and reproducing discourses about a country such as the United States as English-speaking hides and erases the large multilingual population that lives there (Phillipson, 2009). Similarly, Gallo et al. (2014) showed that the ideology of English-only at school led to the commodification and erasure of non-English identities. Bilingualism and the entire ideology of learning English was situated within deficit thinking. Labels such as "at risk" and "culturally disadvantaged" erase students' linguistic and cultural strengths, as well as the possibility to be accepted as intelligent (Dyson, 2015). The discourse of language deficiency is insidious and engrained deeply into American education. For instance, Leone-Pizzighella and Rymes (2018) argued that college students' linguistic diversity is overlooked because students must demonstrate high proficiency in English prior to admission, creating a de facto monolingual English environment and erasing students' multilingualism. They maintain that students must

earn access to participate fully in their major courses through the adoption of English, often in isolated courses. This marks students as different, and language differences become conflated with race and nationality, further marking these students. Students' markedness often determines in what spaces they feel belongingness on campus and with whom.

Neoliberalism in TESOL

English is tied to both neocolonialism and neoliberalism (Kabel, 2016). Neocolonial English dominance in English language education is accompanied by restrictive neoliberal forces. The English language itself becomes a product for sale in neoliberal capitalist terms (Phillipson, 2016), which makes English language teaching more of a service industry than an academic educational discipline (Luke, 2008) in several ways. First, corporations have strong control in both popular media and education, where their goal is not to help students become critical thinking citizens but rather placid consumers through multiple methods that maintain inequities in society (Phillipson, 2009). Secondly, as English is commodified, learners of the language become consumers. With the hegemony of global capitalism, language comes to represent cultural capital for consumers that can be transformed into economic capital on the global marketplace (Phillipson, 2016).

In addition to corporate influences in English language teaching and the commodification of English, there is a complex relationship between global higher education and the spread of English as an international language, enmeshed in neoliberal ideology and policies. In higher education, neoliberalism is everywhere, from

marketization to privatization to corporatization, and includes higher student tuition, English language requirements, and curriculum designed to increase human capital (Kubota, 2016a). Colleges are treated more like businesses which sell knowledge like a product than as a site of knowledge production by teachers and students who learn how and why the knowledge is created. Discourses of free trade and choice pervade schools while academic freedoms are eroded under pressure to conform, which means more difficulties in the promotion of linguistic and cultural diversity (Phillipson, 2009).

Critique of Neoliberalism in TESOL

Neoliberal ideologies have been effective in cementing several myths about English and English language teaching. For one, the global language myth of English alleges that everyone everywhere can and will communicate in English, but this has empirically been proven false, and neither has any empirical study been able to prove the myth that English proficiency guarantees a greater income (Kubota & Okuda, 2016). In addition, more education equating to better economic development is also false (Rubdy & Tan, 2008). In fact, when English is sold as a service or product, it combines with increasing globalization in higher education to drive recruitment of international students to Western nations, marginalizing non-English languages and creating economic inequities between nations (Singh & Han, 2008). Furthermore, because neoliberal capitalist globalization values competition, flexibility, mobility, and productivity of workers, workers actually have less job security because the onus of building human capital, including English language learning, is placed solely on the individual (Kubota & Okuda, 2016). In other words, corporations, nation states, and schools have less

responsibility to support people when they are unable to succeed in the workforce under neoliberalism. Furthermore, universities in postcolonial countries that are run in English have shown negative effects on students, including weakening their connection to their cultures and languages, which makes them poor candidates for local jobs because they may not operate in appropriately professional ways (Phillipson, 2009). For instance, they may attempt to apply western style communication strategies or problem-solving techniques to a local context in ways that overlook the context of the localized issue or may appear as a lack of respect to the local community.

Other critiques of neoliberalism in TESOL include negative effects on the profession of TESOL, the learners, and the concepts of diversity and equality in education. First, Kubota (2016b) interrogated the multi/plural turn in applied linguistics, which focuses on "plurality, multiplicity, and hybridity of language and language use to challenge a traditional paradigm of understanding linguistic practices in various contexts" (p. 475). She questioned whether it has become canonized as part of a neoliberal capitalist culture in academia that demands knowledge production and encourages competition for symbolic and economic capital. Kubota (2016a) found the increased status of hybridity and downturn of cultural nationalism mesh with capitalist globalization, as they promote Eurocentrism. Though hybridity has been used to counter the privileging of monolingualism, she, like Lin and Luke (2006), argued it should be interrogated for creating fixed notions of plurality that can advance inequalities, especially when hybridity is sold as superior, creating a new oppressive hierarchy. Furthermore, she problematized the postcolonial and poststructural shifts from group to

individual subjectivity for mirroring colonial actions that introduced and privilege individualism.

Language learners are particularly affected by neoliberalism's focus on the individual. Students are often blamed for their own inability to fit in and succeed in the schooling system, rather than analyzing schooling for inequitable structures (Kubota, 2016a). Piller (2016) argued that schools often mainstream linguistic minority students without the proper support, which works against their academic achievement, causing failure in their subjects but also in their mastery of English. This can also lead to problems behaviorally, economically, and emotionally. Furthermore, students face isolation, discrimination, and microaggressions. In addition, some people believe students' failure to master the English language is the reason for the achievement gap, and that when students learn English, it will solve the achievement gap. However, that claim is unfounded (Kabel, 2016). Learners also get sorted into hierarchical tracks by English language proficiency and socioeconomic status through the overused standardized language tests that are privileged by neoliberalism (Kubota & Okuda, 2016). As neoliberal forces move public education towards higher standardization, the curriculum becomes more dehumanized and increases the silencing of the students' experiences. When students' experiences are devalued, dismissed, or ignored, they are silenced because they learn that their worldviews and perspectives are not important for learning (Burke et al., 2008).

Combined Inequitable Effects of Neocolonialism and Neoliberalism

The commodification of English language education produces direct ties between neocolonialism and neoliberalism that work against valuing a diversity of languages and cultures in education and society (Phillipson, 1992). As Phillipson (2009) described, linguistic imperialism in the global marketplace is becoming neolinguistic imperialism at the same time that neocolonialism transforms into neoliberal empire, wherein language, hegemony, corporations, and nations are intertwined through global capitalism. Because of countries, like China, who have linked English to their education policies, the commercialization of the English language has grown to new heights (Brown et al., 2010). Western governments have provided aid to other countries as a mask for spreading their own ideology and language (Rubdy & Tan, 2008). Intersections of oppression in education occur within a hidden curriculum of socialization that works to reproduce the inequities in society with nationalist agendas (Piller, 2016).

Kubota (2016b) implicated the multi/plural turn in applied linguistics in *neoliberal multiculturalism*, which she described as "individualism, difference-blindness, and elitist cosmopolitanism rather than critical acknowledgement of power" (p. 487). Similar to hegemonic multiculturalism (Garza & Crawford, 2005), neoliberal forms of multiculturalism allow for the uncritical celebration of diversity while people face color-blind, meritocratic policies and practices that reproduce racial, class, and gender inequalities. From a neoliberal standpoint, managing diversity has become an important component of economic success (Kubota, 2016a). How diverse and welcoming a school is has become a factor in assessing how successful it is (Piller, 2016), so institutes of

higher education release statements about how much they value diversity and multiculturalism. Unfortunately, schools can promote diversity while at the same time reproducing social inequities of ethnicity, race, and class (Kabel, 2016). These intersections of oppression combine with linguistic discrimination to disadvantage minoritized groups and individuals (Piller, 2016).

Not only that, but neoliberal multiculturalism focuses on socioeconomic advantages of an individual's intercultural and multilingual abilities. Multiculturalism and diversity become celebrated uncritically to the point where they lose touch with people's real lives and do not work towards transformative goals. The uncritical celebration of diversity completely ignores hegemonic forces of English dominance (Piller, 2016), and this acceptance of English results in hostile devaluation of other languages (Bunce et al., 2016) and the people who use them. Other languages and cultures lose status and power, creating inequitable relationships (Bruthiaux, 2008). For instance, culturally and linguistically different students are commonly spoken of through deficit lenses, wherein they are automatically assumed to have communication challenges. In this way, diversity becomes a codeword for Othering and refers to non-White and non-English speaking people (Piller, 2016). This means that only some people are understood to be diverse, which can lead to further inequity. For instance, narrow policies and practices that value only one way of doing and knowing prevent some people from succeeding (Piller, 2016). We, therefore, must dedicate time to examining postsecondary education for these non-inclusive policies and practices that control what and whose knowledge is valuable and worth sharing.

Community College and ESL

So far, this literature review has critiqued neocolonialism and neoliberalism in education, specifically within TESOL in relation to the hegemony of the English language. Much of this research has been conducted in K-12 and four-year universities, but little is known about the community college experience of immigrant English language learners (ELLs). One consideration here is that some research has explored immigrants in community college, but that may or may not include ELLs or racially minoritized students while other research has explored ELLs in community college, but which may or may not include immigrant students or racially minoritized students. These overlapping identities speak to the complexity of student identities, but also creates an environment of erasure or neglect because the voices of immigrant ESL students blend into the background or are wholly ignored. The following section summarizes a thorough exploration of published research on community college ELLs. This will be followed by literature on subtractive schooling and culture loss, which leads into what is missing from the literature to justify my critical narrative inquiry.

Community College and ESL Research

Although the dearth of knowledge on immigrants and ELLs in community colleges has been noted by several researchers (Bunch et al., 2011; Conway, 2009; David & Kanno, 2020; Park, 2019; Teranishi et al., 2011), the body of literature on ELLs in community colleges includes a variety of topics. The majority of articles focus on two main areas of interest: (1) issues with retention and persistence of ELLs and (2) critiques of placement and assessment practices, especially for Generation 1.5 students who

immigrated to the United States as young children. The third group is an assortment and includes articles about English language program quality (Blumenthal, 2002; Kuo, 1999; Kurzet, 1997; Tichenor, 1994), ELL learning preferences (Lincoln & Rademacher, 2006; Rubenstein, 2006), service learning for ELLs (Elwell & Bean, 2001), and ELLs in college writing courses (Valdés, 1992).

Persistence & Retention

Community college ELLs have different reasons for attending college. For example, some students may only want to attend ESL courses to improve their English language proficiency and do not intend to earn a degree. Not continuing with college after completing English language courses might mean ELLs learned enough English to get a better job. That arguably should count as a success for these students. For reasons like these, retention has been critiqued as a valid measurement of ELLs' success in college (Blumenthal, 2002). Despite this, the first major area of community college research on ELLs is about how to keep them enrolled and ensure they persist to graduation.

One issue related to ELLs persistence is the amount of English language courses and developmental courses they are required to take prior to beginning their major coursework. Although some research has indicated that the length of ESL courses is connected to ELLs' persistence in college (Huerta et al., 2019), others demonstrated that when ELLs placed into lower-level ESL courses, they were at greater risk of losing motivation to persist while students who placed into higher levels of ESL had an increased chance of persisting (Hondara, 2015; Park, 2019). Likewise, when there are a

large number of developmental courses students must take prior to courses for their majors, they are less likely to persist (Hawley & Harris, 2005). Sometimes ELLs need both ESL and developmental coursework. Also, grade inflation in U.S. high schools has been well documented, which has led to students requiring more remedial classes upon entering college (Hansen, 1998), compounding the issue for ELLs who graduate from U.S. high schools.

The waning motivation of ELLs as they move through their prerequisite coursework can also be connected to whether they are passing or repeating their ESL courses (Song, 2006). When students work and have family obligations, they are less likely to pass their ESL writing courses even if they use primarily English at their jobs (Lambert, 2015). Faculty blame the balance of school with work and family as a common reason but also point to students holding negative attitudes, not having motivation, not exerting effort or showing interest, not practicing English enough, and not possessing strong literacy skills in their first languages. While students tend to agree with most of what the professors observe, they are less likely to blame their jobs and more likely to blame themselves (Song, 2006).

Besides needing to pass a number of prerequisite courses before ELLs' declare majors of study, the academic skill requirements of community college curricula can act as an obstacle for ELLs in ways that differ from non-ELLs. Academic literacy can act as a gatekeeper to success in college for ELLs. Many immigrant students have yet to gain the cultural capital necessary to engage with academic writing and reading at the beginning of their U.S. college journey (Curry, 2004). Additional findings indicate that

not only do ELLs who transition from U.S. high schools do so without enough academic skills, but they also tend to maintain an adolescent intellectual maturity as well (Song, 2006). Other research points to English language skills as a primary gatekeeper since attrition in community college has been connected to ELLs' perceptions that English proficiency would be a problem for them in college (Hawley & Harris, 2005).

Finally, students' personal backgrounds also seem to play a part. Being an immigrant versus an international student makes a difference in graduation rates. International students progress to college English courses in higher numbers than immigrant students, perhaps due to the competing work responsibilities of immigrants (Park, 2019). Furthermore, being male or female also appears to influence persistence through college though researchers do not agree in what ways. Female students reach English composition at higher rates than male students even when placed in lower levels of ESL (Park, 2019). However, female immigrant students, some of whom are also ELLs, have a higher risk for dropping out of college (Conway, 2009). In addition, students' personal goal of transferring to another institute is a factor which affects persistence in community college. When students report that they want to transfer before graduating from community college, they often do not persist for more than one year (Hawley & Harris, 2005). However, students' backgrounds are not the only determinants of persistence. Some students could be misplaced during the admission process (Song, 2006). Alternatively, some students place blame on their instructors (Song, 2006), which can be related to the notion that not placing blame on themselves helps ELLs adjust socially and emotionally to community college more easily (Estrada et al., 2005).

Placement and Assessment of ELLs

Although there are challenges in placing ELLs fairly and correctly, assessments are useful and necessary. Community college ESL programs should reassess their current placement and assessment policies and practices to ensure ELLs have a minimum ESL proficiency level necessary to succeed in content courses before attempting them (Kuo, 1999).

Nation-wide data on ESL placement tests in community colleges is difficult to find. David and Kanno (2020) observed that of 227 colleges with ESL programs, just under half specified what test they used and other colleges had outdated information publicly available. In a specific case, the use of ESL placement tests across California's community college system has been found to vary widely from college to college (Llosa & Bunch, 2011). Some ELLs self-identify as ESL or non-ESL and then take the matching placement test. At other schools, they are automatically tracked into ESL or English courses. Although other measures may play a part in placement, commercially available placement tests are the most commonly used to make placement decisions. A major flaw with these tests is that they may be viewed as one size fits all, but in reality, ELL populations are highly varied. For example, groups like international students and Generation 1.5 students may not be assessed accurately since international students develop writing skills more concurrently, but Generation 1.5 students' skills are weak in some areas but strong in others.

As a result, community colleges should critique their placement instruments for their validity for use with Generation 1.5 students (Blumenthal, 2002). In some cases,

placement policies in community college admissions processes could be critiqued as deficit-driven, which could hold back Latino Generation 1.5 students from their studies by relying on standardized high-stakes testing rooted in supremacist ideologies (Salas et al., 2011). There is agreement that English placement tests are not created with ELLs who graduate from U.S. high schools in mind (Bunch & Panayotova, 2008). One way to improve discrete grammar tests would be to frame the assessments around academic English and skills. Also, information from the students' elementary and secondary work may be used to help determine the best path for this population of students (Bunch & Panayotova, 2008; Llosa & Bunch, 2011). Furthermore, alternative methods like student portfolios can be considered (Curry, 2004).

During admissions, the question whether a student identifies as "ESL or English?" contributes to tracking of these students into particular paths, but community colleges might instead consider which set of curricula, ESL or English, will best fit the language and academic needs of the student. To do this, multiple measures, such as considering high school GPA, can be more helpful than placement tests alone (Bunch et al., 2011). However, while U.S. high school GPA was positively correlated to college persistence, it was not true for students who attended foreign high schools (Conway, 2009), so using high school GPA to predict college success and readiness would not work for international students and many immigrant students.

Students often make uninformed choices about which English placement test to take, which results in a form of self-tracking into developmental or ESL English courses (Salas et al., 2011). To mitigate some of these issues, test policies, practices, and

importance need to be clearly explained to students, and there needs to be enough funding to hire counselors that are knowledgeable about ELLs' unique needs (Bunch et al., 2011) to help them understand their placement results and what they mean for their progression through college. It should be the colleges' responsibility to inform and guide these students in this important decision (Bunch & Panayotova, 2008). What knowledge students are expected to have at admissions and what forms of support a school is expected to provide for students are culturally dependent. When differences arise, it is often the students who are expected to conform to the systems of the college, and when it is always only one group, usually a minoritized group, that must change, it can create inequitable situations.

Culture Loss of Community College ESL Students

As shown through the summary of literature on community college ESL students, there has not been a focus on learning about the students from a cultural perspective. Studies that mentioned a respect or consideration for students' cultural backgrounds have not taken on a critical lens, which can still lead to culture and language loss through liberal (Kubota & Lin, 2006), neoliberal (Kubota, 2016a; Phillipson, 2009), and hegemonic (Garza & Crawford, 2005) forms of multiculturalism. Most of the research on subtractive schooling, leading to culture and language loss has been done in the K-12 environment. Thus, the next section will highlight the works of two important scholars: Wong Fillmore (2014), who deals with culture and language loss, and Valenzuela (1999), who deals with subtractive schooling, and include supporting work by other scholars. Afterwards, the effects of language and culture loss, in relation to subtractive schooling,

are discussed briefly. Then the few studies related to adult learners and culture loss are described, but not all of this research is with community college ESL students. Some studies were done in four-year institutes, and some with racially minoritized but not linguistically minoritized students, and vice versa. Others may have included immigrant students, but not all the studies specified.

Language and Culture Loss

Languages have an interconnected relationship with knowledge, literacy, human development, and the labor market. Thus, as societies form increasing interdependent relationships, economic, personal, political, and cultural relationships are all affected (Rubdy & Tan, 2008). Culture is mainly constructed and shared through language. This is why languages are vital for both collective and individual identities, so when language is lost, it damages individuals' life narratives (Singh & Han, 2008).

The internal desire to fit in and belong motivates humans. For linguistically minoritized children, this can mean rejecting the home culture in order to fit in at school. Parents then become prevented from imparting their ethnic and family culture to them, which can negatively impact familial relationships by risking children not learning either language fluently and resulting in less cultural and social capital (Wong Fillmore, 1991). Adult ELLs also make attempts to fit in at school and work, where they often feel pressure to prioritize English, and by association dominant White cultural norms, including the neoliberal notion that the purpose of college is to get a job. In fact, global education has transformed over the past thirty years into a training ground for employment, so higher education works to funnel diverse cultures into one culture, that

of an employee (Boufoy-Bastick, 2015). These educational and career paths demonstrate that schooling plays an important part in the subtractive process of language and culture loss faced by minoritized students.

Sources of Loss

Culture Loss. Wong Fillmore (2000) remarked that the learning of English, rather than being additive, has instead been a subtractive experience, which has only gained in momentum over the years. Assimilation of immigrant students in school leads to loss of their languages and cultures (Ringelheim, 2013). When immigrant students who learn English replace, rather than add to, their native or heritage language, tension can grow between the generations of a family at home and irreparable damage can be done to the bonds of a family (Gibson, 1998; Wong Fillmore, 2000). Families may choose English because it seems to provide linguistic capital that they feel will benefit them (Phillipson, 2009). In fact, Keh and Stoessel's (2017) case study research found that parents were the important factor in influencing the children's decision to value and maintain the home language. However, if viewed simply as individual choice, this ignores institutions and ideologies that are operating in society to spread English language use (Phillipson, 2009). The way schools view acculturation is the problem because they ignore the complex interactions of students' multiple cultures, identities, statuses, and structural factors (Gibson, 1998).

The family has a curriculum that is distinct from the school, one which only the family can teach to their children, one which is full of values and beliefs of their culture (Wong Fillmore, 2000). However, if parents cannot communicate with their children, that

foundation of socialization does not get established and children may face years of struggle not knowing who they are or where they belong. The native language represents a sense of self-worth, a spiritual connection to one's family, and a sense of self-identity. Students who are forced to use the dominant English language in schools can face bicultural ambivalence, in which they demonstrate hostility to the dominant group while simultaneously feeling ashamed of their own group, based on patterns of segregation and discrimination throughout history (Cummins, 1984). Furthermore, Wong Fillmore (2014) illustrated that both native and immigrant children lose language and identity due to racist and hegemonic schooling policies that provided inadequate preparation for jobs, leading to problems coping with life in cities where they felt as if they belonged nowhere, where they were oppressed and wounded in the process of trying to fit in.

Children, whether in bilingual or English only classrooms, are exposed to symbolic violence in all realms of their lives that devalues their identities through marginalizing their language and culture (Wong Fillmore, 1991). By denying the validity of the language students speak, teachers deny the validity of the children's experiences and their identities. There is no more effective way to turn them off to school than by doing that (Wong Fillmore, 2014). For instance, when they do not see themselves reflected in their curriculum or on television, they face a conundrum of how to fulfill the internal desire to fit in and belong. This often results in a clear decision to learn English at the expense of devaluing their heritage language. Again, parents are prevented from imparting their culture to their children, creating turmoil within the familial relationships.

Children who give up their first language can also risk not becoming fluent in either language, leaving them with less social and cultural capital (Wong Fillmore, 1991).

In addition to effects on individuals and their families, Wong Fillmore (1991) expanded the detrimental effects of subtractive bilingualism beyond the negative costs on a child's family to the society as a whole. Though subtractive bilingualism is not a new concept, it continues to accelerate in the U.S. as claims that immigrants are not assimilating fast enough drive education and social policy to reduce support for bilingual education programs. A national No-Cost study including over 1,000 participants concluded that learning English alters immigrant children's use of language in the home with a positive correlation between earlier age of learning English and greater negative impact on the home language use. To understand why subtractive versus additive bilingualism is more rampant in the U.S. or Canada when compared to some other countries, one need only take a critical look at the false discourse which paints these countries as tolerant and accepting of diversity (Wong Fillmore, 1991). These countries take pride in the diversity of their immigrants' origins, yet they are also conflicted by having such diversity. In order to deal with this conflict, they have pressured immigrants to conform so that the country is uniform in both speech and appearance. For example, anti-bilingualism language policies have had some success in the U.S., but they have also had detrimental effects on non-English languages and contributed to the non-English language loss experienced in younger generations (Zentella, 2009). Wong Fillmore (2014) proposed "the reason we do these things to each other must be because many of us have been deeply wounded in the process of becoming Americans" (p. 445).

Subtractive Schooling. Valenzuela (1999) conducted an extensive ethnographic study, which included both quantitative and qualitative data in Seguin High School. Her study investigated the experiences of immigrant and U.S.-born students of Mexican heritage. Her important conclusions not only discuss important differences between these two groups but refocuses the discussion away from why U.S. born students achieve at lower rates than new immigrants toward how schooling operates in ways that remove access to important resources from these students. She calls this *subtractive schooling*. Subtractive schooling includes but goes beyond subtractive cultural assimilation. It examines the ways that schools choose and organize curriculum that reduce access for minoritized communities. Moreover, it examines how the lack of authentic caring relationships in school can reduce students' social capital. As Sleeter explained in the foreword for Valenzuela's book (1999), subtractive schooling is part of colonialism through education. She said while economic racism deals with violent physical conquest, it necessitates the establishment of the superiority of the colonizer's culture to control the land and people, including violent attacks on language, religion, culture, and the morality of the colonized people. Education systems are utilized as tools to do so by deciding whose beliefs are taught and whose cultural relationships are valid. Keh and Stoessel (2017) found that school policies privileged English, and students faced negative attitudes toward their ethnicity by others at school. The students also faced a moral pressure in school to shift to using English. Similarly, Worthy et al. (2003) found similar challenges for students to maintain their heritage languages. Their ethnographic study identified

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social and peer pressures, negative images of their ethnic cultures, teasing from other students, and the dominant English-only environment at school.

Valenzuela (1999) learned that students were not opposed to learning, but they were opposed to schooling. Their opposition was a response to the Eurocentric, middle class system of schooling that promotes aesthetic forms of caring that went against their home cultures and identities. The school's definition of success prioritizes individualization and blames students for their failures while it ignores the structures of subtractive schooling. Rather than examine the neocolonial structures as sources of inequities, too often individuals are blamed for society's and their own problems. Schools fixate on individual responsibility and use discourses of freedom and choice, which places any failures directly onto students, thus effectively ignoring structural issues within schooling and hegemonic ideas in society that make this victim-blaming dynamic seem normal (Phillipson, 1992). This is despite strong evidence that minoritized students' academic challenges stem from structural issues, like receiving inferior quality of education, facing intercultural miscommunications, and other social factors such as socioeconomic status (Cummins, 1984). Purcell-Gates adds, "[C]hildren come to school with different experiences. The experiences they have as young children are culturally driven… The implications of this stance of cultural difference instead of deficit for educators is profound" (Delpit & Dowdy, 2002, p. 128). Teachers who already view minoritized students as low achievers are more likely to have negative interactions with them (Cummins, 1984).

Valenzuela (1997) asserted that aesthetic caring is tantamount to cultural genocide because it asks students to measure their self-worth by their ability to leave their community as an individual divided from the economic and social concerns of their community. While the schooling structure wanted students to care about school, the students wanted to be cared about first. The uncaring aesthetic form of relationship teachers and administrators had with students was a barrier for students to engage with school, preventing them from demonstrating that they actually cared a lot about learning and education.

Instead, Valenzuela (1997) argued for authentic forms of caring, where students' cultural worlds and their positions within the schooling structures are acknowledged. Authentic caring means that educators center race, power, and differences. These authentic caring relationships must be initiated by teachers, but they also must be received and accepted by the students. The students' desires to be socially responsible community members should become part of the measure of success in an additive paradigm (Valenzuela, 1999). A decade later, Valenzuela (2008) proposed an expansion of authentic caring to "politically aware, authentic caring." She used data from her ethnographic study and considered Ogbu's work on voluntary and involuntary minorities to highlight the political aspect of authentic caring. She urged scholars and educators to incorporate this political element to counter color-blind curricula and resist the notion of a neutral assimilation process. Considering political elements such as linguistic, socio-economic, sociocultural, and systemic barriers reveals a fuller understanding of the condition of U.S.-Mexican students.

Effects of Loss

As Wong Fillmore (2014) stressed, family bonds and children's psychological well-being are jeopardized by schooling that encourages the loss of home languages and cultures. In response to the question of what is lost when you lose your language, Fishman (Delpit & Dowdy, 2002) responded:

> [You pay] the price for it in one way or another- that remaining, fumbling insecurity when you are not quite sure whether you have the metaphor right in the expression that you are going to use and you know the one that comes to mind is not from the language that you are speaking at the moment. (p. 1)

Hegemonic global English has repercussions on people psychologically through feelings of always coming up short in school or work accompanied with feelings of shame about their linguistic proficiency and usage (Phillipson, 2009). Delpit and Dowdy (2002) stated "there is a reason our first language is called our mother tongue" (p. 47). She argued that when schools devalue a student's language, they are telling the student that their mother is unworthy, and they themselves are also unworthy of being in the schooling environment. The subtractive force of a standardized form of English leads to linguistic capital dispossession in homes, schools, and workplaces (Phillipson, 2009). The strong push for English in schools globally has led to students internalizing the superiority of English and its inference of the superiority of western White cultures while viewing their own languages, cultures, and histories as inferior. For example, Motha (2014) shared that her family lost their native language as it was voluntarily replaced by English without them ever leaving their home country of Sri Lanka.

It is not only individuals or families that are affected. Fishman (Delpit & Dowdy, 2002) questioned what those losses mean for society:

> What does the country lose when it loses individuals who are comfortable with themselves, cultures that are authentic to themselves, the capacity to pursue sensitivity and some kind of recognition that one has a purpose in life? What is lost to a country that encourages people to lose their direction in life? (p. 1)

Wynne (Delpit & Dowdy, 2002) expanded on this by pointing out that children of color are not the only ones who lose something valuable by the oppression of non-White children in schools. White children are also hurt when their worldviews are limited because they only come to know a narrow view of their own histories, which prevents them from recognizing their roles to fight injustices collectively.

Culture Loss for Adult ELLs

Three main forms of deculturalization have been explored in postsecondary education. The first area deals with the teaching of English. The focus of certain curricula will be analyzed for their relationship to neoliberal and neocolonial ideologies. This includes ELT, learning as a global institution, and a privileging of certain disciplines that are entwined with the global workforce needs. The second area focuses on the teaching of western academic writing expectations, including academic honesty policies, will be examined as forms of cultural assimilation. Third, the relationship between faculty and students will be critiqued, including the enforcement of policies that focus on penalization of student behavior in the classroom and the lack of intercultural competence.

Curriculum Under Critique

First, it is important to understand the policies surrounding ESL student admission into U.S. postsecondary schools. ELT and the support services for ESL students differ greatly from K-12 to postsecondary education in the United States. In K-12, schools must abide by the 1974 Lau v. Nichols ruling to provide ESL students with meaningful education; in other words, schooling must be done in a language the students can understand. This led to an increase in bilingual education programs and ESL instruction in public education, albeit not without problems (Motha, 2014). Nevertheless, students in postsecondary schools must meet an English language proficiency requirement before they can take college credit courses. Therefore, postsecondary ESL students are not guaranteed education in a language they can understand or language assistance as they progress through college. Instead, they must meet a language proficiency standard before being allowed to enter college courses (Leone-Pizzighella & Rymes, 2018). This stems from the neoliberal view that postsecondary education is an individual privilege, not a social good (Apple, 2004). This disparity in education policies from K-12 to post-secondary levels appears uneven, if not exclusionary.

Guo and Beckett (2007) continued by pointing out that the increase in the use of English as an international language promotes neocolonialism and increases overt and covert forms of racism. The normalized and unquestioned Whiteness of English is reproduced through neoliberalism as schools prefer to hire White native speakers of English to earn more profit because students believe they will receive a superior English language education from a White teacher. This belief in White superiority is problematic

as it extends to the pedagogical methods used to teach students. They found hegemonic western teaching methodologies were privileged and spread through ELT instruction in China with little care for protecting and honoring local cultural knowledges.

Leigh and Davis (2017) also addressed the loss of culture, values, and self-worth that students experience due to dominant White colonialist ideologies in education. They focus on the trauma Black students face. When externalizations of trauma, such as anger, are expressed in class, they are used to support harmful stereotypes of Blackness. Black students' experiences are dehumanized because history and curriculum in schools place White dominant culture at the center of truth. Although healing is necessary, the effects of this White-centered way of thinking means that courses aimed at increasing cultural awareness are often misguided. They focus exclusively on educating the oppressor about the experiences of people of color rather than creating a space for healing traumas for people of color. An effect of this is that people of color are burdened with justifying their existence to White peers and proving that their struggles are real and valid. Black students in the study also internalized the message that in order to succeed in the face of ghetto colonialism, they must cope with hiding their Black identity, endure classroom violence, and assimilate White ideologies.

Writing Styles and Expectations

In addition to the teaching of English, neoliberal and neocolonial policies and processes can also be found in the teaching of postsecondary writing courses, where a lack of intercultural competence and understanding can exacerbate the cultural divide. Manathunga (2011) applied a postcolonial lens to the intercultural communication

between supervisors and international students at an Australian university. Although this study was not conducted at a U.S. community college, the required writing styles follow similar western logics. Through interviews, she found students face assimilation in changing their writing styles to match Western logics of academic papers. Western logic requires students to state their main idea up front, support that idea directly avoiding inferential statements, use proper paraphrasing and citations, and conclude by repeating what they have discussed. This style, however, is far different from other cultural styles. For instance, Cazden (1988) also found that while White students told topic-centered narratives, Black students used episodic non-linear patterns. In topic-centered narratives, the storyteller focuses on a single object or event, usually briefly and succinctly. In episodic narratives, the storyteller always has longer, shifting scenes without a single object or event consistently present throughout. In U.S. education, being topic-centered is considered academic and formal. Students are expected to write with thesis statements that reveal the main idea upfront and to stay on that stated topic throughout the essay. Assimilating to such a direct style of writing can be challenging because it requires a shift in values, discourse, discursive strategies, and ways of thinking. Cazden also stated that while White listeners could not follow the Black students' stories, Black listeners could follow both the White and Black patterns. This supports the notion that the White majority is privileged because their discourse strategies are the dominant norm. They do not need to learn two discourses while minoritized communities must learn to understand the dominant discourse in addition to their own culture and language.

Gorlewski (2016) examined the influence of neoliberal policies on high school writing. Inequitable high-stakes standardized assessments are used to measure student success in public education. These tests privilege one type of writing, which alienated students and reproduced social class differences instead of providing opportunities for resistance and social transformation. Students reported that they gave up and assimilated to the requirements of the standardized test and in doing so, devalued their own creative writing. Some students resisted by writing in their own ways, but they were penalized with low grades.

Another expectation of writing in colleges is that students' work is solely their own, even when they are tasked with incorporating or responding to others' ideas and then are required to cite the sources. Sadler (2011) examined the academic honesty policies in American institutes of higher education and argued that the plagiarism rules are based on White culture and its value of rugged individualism, which makes no space for honoring collaborative work. White cultural values of autonomy, competition, and self-reliance are privileged, but when help is needed from others, students risk violating the plagiarism policies. Academic writing also promotes objective, emotionless arguments, supported by research, which devalues students' reflective or emotion-based personal writing. The writing of students who operate apart from the dominant White norm, particularly students of color from other countries, is deemed illegitimate academic work. The institutionalization of individualism expands neocolonialism and capitalism through these narrow definitions of acceptable academic work which advantage students of the dominant culture. This western form of higher education has spread around the

globe, pushing students from collective cultures to assimilate to individual competitive cultures within their home countries. Light (2015) added that promoting a culture of individualism also opposes transformative education practices.

Furthermore, college students must learn to formally cite other sources in their papers, which requires a set of new cultural knowledge and language skills. Pennycook (1996) made the argument that plagiarism policies are not only inadequate, but arrogant because the issue of textual borrowing is more complex than a simple right or wrong distinction. It involves the concepts of authorship, ownership of texts, language learning, and memory that are culturally and historically relative. For example, some students commented that paraphrasing was disrespectful because they could not say it better than how the author had written it. As English was not their first language, they did not feel they had ownership of the language in order to paraphrase the words. Teachers could also be criticized for being hypocritical as all lectures in classrooms could be interpreted as borrowing others' ideas. Others' comments included that plagiarism could be a form of learning if the knowledge is absorbed and understood. He challenges educators to consider the multitude of reasons and ways that texts can be borrowed without jumping to the conclusion that students are thieves or guilty of some crime.

Faculty and Student Relationships

Finally, an important area of exploration to understand the intercultural miscommunication that contributes to culture loss is the relationship between teachers or other staff members and students from different cultural backgrounds. Manathunga's (2011) research also explored the relationship between academic advisors and their

student advisees. She found that supervisors lacked high levels of intercultural knowledge and assumed that one way works for domestic students and one way, for example hierarchical, works for all international students. In addition, male supervisors also walked a line between advising and treating female students in a neocolonial paternal way. Finally, matching an advisor with students from the same ethnic background failed at increasing intercultural communication because it treated ethnic groups as homogenous, assuming that their ways of thinking would automatically align. Faculty may rely on established policies or practices rather than learn about the students' cultural ways of thinking. It is up to the student to adapt to the policies of the school, even when they are based on the values of neoliberalism or neocolonialism.

Margonis (2015) stated in order to improve society, we must first uncover neocolonial violence and make it visible. He focuses on the systemic form of colonial violence: the *principle of responsibility*, a reductive act where students' actions are understood in isolation and where they are subsequently taught to take responsibility for their actions through zero-tolerance punishments. Margonis argued that educators have a choice: to reproduce the principle of responsibility or to engage with students in exploring their reasons behind their actions through writing assignments. In this way, they can acknowledge resistance while practicing curriculum objectives. However, the principle of responsibility makes the educators blind to this possibility and maintains the social divide. This colonial dance of imposition and resistance plays out repeatedly in schools. Once students are labeled as troublemakers, they receive increased surveillance and punishment, breaking their spirits. Students can either accept it and withdraw, or they

can resist and fight back, but either way they are wounded by education. Although this study was done in the K-12 level, the principle of responsibility is applicable to college environments, perhaps even more so because they are adults and the neoliberal notions of meritocracy and individualization place the burden of success, including following the rules, on the students themselves without questioning the cultural appropriateness. These policies position instructors and staff as enforcers of the policies, rather than as trustworthy, understanding community members.

As one example of the challenges ESL students face, Kim (2014) examined how Black immigrant students' culture, language, and ethnic backgrounds are lost in college culture as they are considered in the same group with African Americans and therefore, face the same negative stereotypes, while also being excluded by African Americans for "acting White" due to their academic achievement (Ogbu, 2004). At other times, permanent immigrants are viewed as temporary international students, further excluding them from tailored support. Black immigrant students had problems socializing due to the English language barrier and preferred family or peer support than institutional support services. The inattention to their unique intersectionality shaped the perceptions of them by students, faculty, and staff, which created greater challenges for them to preserve their culture and language, as well as prevented them from getting the culturally sustaining learning environment they needed to succeed.

Conclusion

In conclusion, English can be used both to do good and to do bad; it can fight capitalism or endorse it; it can increase oppression of people or help liberate them, but

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one must always be cognizant of the national and global institutions that restrict micro and meso level actions (Phillipson, 1992). Through this literature review, I have traced the connections between neocolonialism and neoliberalism with TESOL and postsecondary education. I contend that these relationships produce and reproduce structural inequities in society that contribute to the language and culture loss of ESL students through subtractive schooling practices. However, through building an extensive review of research on ESL students in community college, I have shown that there is a lack of research on culture loss and subtractive schooling conducted with immigrant ESL students in community college, which supports the relevance for my critical narrative inquiry.

In the next chapter, I outline my methodology choice of critical narrative inquiry in answering my research questions:

1. What are the most meaningful/transformational experiences immigrant ESL students have in navigating their community college experiences in their content courses?

2. How may those experiences relate to the concepts of subtractive schooling (Valenzuela, 1999) and culture loss (Wong Fillmore, 2014)?

Then I explain each step of my critical event narrative inquiry, analysis, and interpretation process and address the alternatives to validity and reliability that were used in the analysis: access, honesty/verisimilitude/authenticity, familiarity, transferability, and economy. I also address the negotiation of caring and power relationships, as well as the risks of the study.

Chapter Three: Methodology

The number of ESL students in postsecondary education has increased in the U.S. (David & Kanno, 2020), and a graduation gap has been identified (Razfar & Simon, 2011) showing that ESL students graduate at lower rates than non-ESL students. However, still relatively little is known about immigrant ESL students' experiences in community college (Bunch et al., 2011; Conway, 2009; David & Kanno, 2020; Park, 2019; Teranishi et al., 2011). Supporting these students in equitable ways requires more knowledge of their unique needs so that colleges may provide students with tailored support they need to be more successful. At Southeastern Community College[1] (SCC), there is a large ESL student population. Five of the six campuses offer ESL courses and employ full-time ESL teaching faculty. The number of full-time ESL faculty is the second largest in the college, just behind English composition faculty. Beyond the ESL program coursework, students receive no ESL specific assistance at the college but have access to the same free tutoring that is available to all students. Content teaching faculty at the college are not required to have training in teaching multilingual/multicultural learners.

Summary of Theoretical Perspectives & Epistemological Commitments

As a scholar, I am committed to criticality, intersectionality, and relationality (see Chapter 1). I used critical race theory to guide my methodology. CRT acknowledges racism as endemic to American society and institutions (Kim, 2016), which I expand with

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[1] pseudonym

LangCrit (Crump, 2014) and raciolinguistics (Alim et al., 2016; Flores & Rosa, 2015) to assert that identity and language-based discriminations are entwined with racism. While CRT focuses on race and racism, it recognizes the importance of intersectionality (Collins, 2015; Combahee River Collective, 1979; Crenshaw, 1991), which I apply to highlight the intersections of language and culture. In addition, CRT uses stories and counter-stories of people of color to spotlight and share their experiences with oppression from their perspectives. Furthermore, CRT values and centers the lived experiences of people of color, as I do with my research to center the narratives of students whose native languages and cultures are minoritized in the U.S. college environment. Therefore, I used critical event narrative inquiry as a methodological theory that allows me to attend to these CRT tenets. I intentionally used unstructured interviews to create space for students to guide the direction of their narratives. This dialogic approach helped me as a researcher stay truer to my critical, relational, and intersectional commitments. My researcher reflections engaged with the stories on intrapersonal, interpersonal, institutional, and ideological levels. I have done my best to heed Kim's (2016) warning about "blindly fall[ing] in love with narrative inquiry" (p. 2), and my thoroughness and reflexive practices showed the ways that critical event narrative inquiry has served as "my partner" (p. 2), allowing me to stay true to my epistemological commitments.

Research Questions

My study sought answers to the following questions:

1. What are the most meaningful/transformational experiences immigrant ESL students have in navigating their community college experiences in their content courses?

2. How may those experiences relate to the concepts of subtractive schooling (Valenzuela, 1999) and culture loss (Wong Fillmore, 2014)?

Critical Event Narrative Inquiry

Intersectionality, criticality, and relationality- always coming back to my commitments helps ground me in my research and practice as my experiences and reflections often take winding journeys along the path to try and reach a deeper understanding of the world. The complexity and dynamism of human experience are understood and shaped by critical events. Critical narrative inquiry helps us understand how these critical events shape and reshape our worldviews and behaviors. For instance, when we catch up with friends, we tell stories of choices we have made, results of those choices, our analyses of our experiences, and about things that happened to us. The types of stories we tell and the depth of introspection we incorporate usually correlate to how well we know the person to whom we are talking. Through the sharing of our experiences and the feedback we receive, we process our experiences through different pathways and then reflect, or sometimes don't reflect, on them. Not all stories or events are important or even interesting. How do we know which stories- which things that happened to us- are critical?

Roots of Narrative Inquiry in Education

Narrative inquiry was first used in the field of education by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), who said "narrative inquiry is stories lived and told" (p. 20). It is used to understand experience as experience is the foundation of education. They explained how narrative inquiry builds from Dewey's work highlighting experience, as both individual and social, and continuity, indicating each experience builds on past experiences and leads to future experiences. Narrative inquiry assumes that understanding includes temporality (past, present, future together), people seen as undergoing constant adaptation, action as narrative signs for meaning making, a level of uncertainty but always doing your best, and context (time, space, other people). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggested a three-dimensional research framework for narrative inquiry that incorporates interaction (looking inward and outward of ourselves), continuity (looking backward and forward in time), and situation (place).

Critical Narrative Inquiry

Framing narrative inquiry with critical race theory at the macro level of theory means the narratives of people of color, including racial and linguistic minorities, are valid and act as counter-stories to challenge oppressive ideologies (Kim, 2016), which I do in my study by centering ESL students' narratives as important and valid research data that can help inform potential changes to policies or processes at the college. CRT also stresses the importance of providing context and history in narrative inquiry (Kim, 2016). I critically consider the connections to social, historical, and political systems (Freire, 2000) in understanding students' critical events as I question the influences of neoliberal

and neocolonial systems on the experiences of immigrant ESL community college students.

In addition, another critical element is including strong reflection and reflexive practices (Kim, 2016). As researchers and participants, we enter into each other's storied lives in the middle of us living them. Since we didn't witness the beginning of others' stories, and we often won't see their futures, it is important to recognize the iterative process in narrative inquiry, which requires constant reflection (Phillion, 2002). Approaching my reflections to include micro and macro levels also makes this study critical since critical consciousness is based on the understanding of how macro level systems affect the micro level personal aspects of individuals' lives, particularly in regard to oppression (Freire, 1973). As Kim (2016) mentions, critical narrative inquiry is not only about building the body of academic literature on a topic but about "planting a seed for social justice" (p. 237). Critical narrative inquiry can create space for stories about the lived experiences of human injustices, which are often ignored, hidden, or omitted. It is not enough to give a platform to people's voices. The analysis and interpretation of the narrative stories need to be connected to "historical, political, environmental, personal, and all things that have influenced the story and anyone involved with the story" (Kim, 2016, p. 236) so that social contexts and social processes are interrogated for a fuller understanding of human experience.

Framework for Critical Event Narrative Inquiry

I followed the framework laid out by Webster and Mertova (2007) for critical event narrative inquiry (see Figure 1).
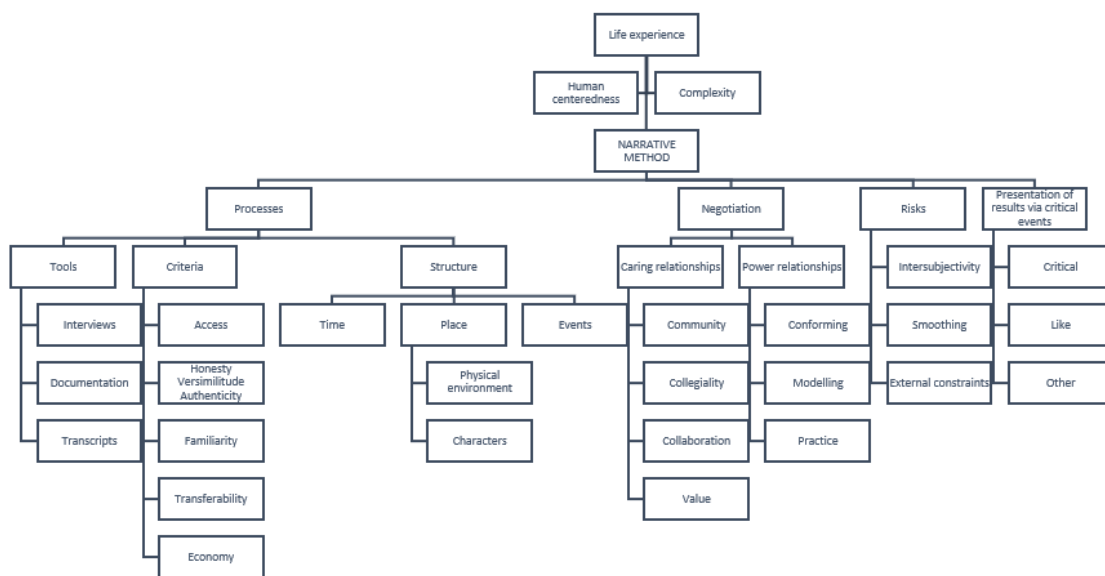
Figure 1 Framework for Critical Event Narrative Inquiry

Note. Recreated from Webster and Mertova (2007, p. 105)

Processes

Tools

During the collection of students' stories, Webster and Mertova (2007) say that both time and experience must be integrated into the inquiry and trust must be built between those engaged in the storytelling and the researcher. In this way, the stories that are shared are more likely to contain critical events and an explanation of how the storyteller understands those events. The choice of tools can help achieve these goals. In my study, I used unstructured, informal interviews. I told students that I was interested in their general experiences in college, especially those they had after graduating from the ESL program. There were three rounds of interviews over the course of one academic year from 2020-2021 and each lasted between 30-60 minutes. I also asked students to

share some meaningful photos as a prompt for storytelling in the second round of interviews. The reason for this approach was to allow students to guide their own narratives, thus revealing from their perspectives what was most meaningful to them in their community college experiences. This helped avoid leading questions that might incorporate my biased assumptions about what experiences were important for them or force them toward stories that would support my own hypotheses about subtractive schooling and culture loss in college. However, I created a set of back-up questions in case a lull in the interview happened (see Appendix A), which I shaped around the suggestions by Webster and Mertova (2007, p. 86).

Due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, I conducted every interview through Zoom. All interviews were recorded in Zoom using its built-in recording function for video, audio, transcript, and screen-sharing. I used the audio recordings to fix the transcriptions. I acknowledge that some researchers believe transcribing each word yourself as the researcher is a vital way to understand and engage in your research (e.g., Tilley, 2003); however, due to the availability of the Zoom transcript, I used it to save time because I had forty-three interviews. I did relisten to every word of the recordings to check the Zoom transcripts though I did not have to type every word, so I feel that I spent a significant amount of time getting familiar with the transcripts.

I reviewed and reflected on students' narratives both during the academic year and after completion of all interviews. During each interview, I kept a field journal by hand in a small notebook of stories that seemed important to students, ideas that came to my mind, and questions about their stories and about my methods. After each interview, I

reviewed my notes and added missing or half-written thoughts, comments, and questions. I circled and highlighted potential critical events in their narratives by looking for the impact the events had on them.

In addition to the field notes, I kept a researcher journal for reflections. Most of the time I wrote these in a separate small journal by hand but twice I voice-to-text recorded my thoughts in a Google document when I didn't have my journal with me. In this journal, I reflected after an interview with any thoughts that came to mind. At other times, I was thinking about my research in conjunction with an article I was reading, a podcast I was listening to, or while talking about my research with critical friends. These gave me a new perspective, question, or comment to add to my journal as reflections on both the critical events, their meanings, and my methods.

Criteria

Webster and Mertova (2007) draw upon multiple authors to make the case for using alternative measurements to demonstrate validity and reliability in narrative inquiry. For instance, they describe reliability as the trustworthiness of a researcher's notes and transcriptions. They go on to use Huberman's (1995) measures of "access, honesty, verisimilitude, authenticity, familiarity, transferability and economy" (p. 94).

The first alternative criterion is access (Webster & Mertova, 2007). Readers must have access to the study's context, processes, and ways that knowledge was constructed. For this reason, I use rich detailed descriptions of the participants (see Chapter 3), community culture, time, place, and the events to aid readers in understanding the stories. Tools, methods, and all steps used in data collection are explained clearly. Another type

of access that must be addressed is access to the data. Readers should easily be able to

find specific parts of the data. This can be achieved by using a clear organizational

system, including file names and time stamps (see Appendix B). Zoom created both a

video, audio, and transcript file for each interview. I had 43 student interviews, which I

initially saved on my hard drive and then created back-up copies on the Microsoft cloud.

I made both password-protected and did not share the password information with anyone.

I named the folders by the date of the interview and the students' pseudonyms, and I used

the timestamps that had been generated by Zoom. These strategies provided a consistent

and clear organizational system. Furthermore, access was increased through the use of a

less formal writing style in reporting the data, such as using letters for the implications,

and by using composite narratives (Willis, 2019).

Secondly, honesty, or trustworthiness, in narrative inquiry comes down to

whether the storytellers confirm that their stories have been shared accurately (Webster &

Mertova, 2007). Once I completed the draft of my study, I requested feedback from

students by emailing the passages relevant to each student who participated. I explained

to them what a composite narrative was, how it provided increased anonymity, and then

asked them to let me know if there was anything they wanted removed or if anything felt

inaccurate to them about the stories they were a part of.

The third criterion is verisimilitude, or truthfulness, which is characterized by

critical events resonating with the researcher and the reports being believable (Webster &

Mertova, 2007). The careful selection of critical events is vital to maintaining

verisimilitude. Webster and Mertova (2007) propose that nearly all critical events change

the storyteller in meaningful ways, either positively, negatively, or somewhere in between. No event is ever predictable and, therefore, is only ever understood to be critical after the fact. Due to this understanding, it makes sense that the more time that has passed since the event, the more time one has had to reflect on the event. It is even likely that the story of the event has been told and retold multiple times to different acquaintances. Through this distillation process, the least important details drop away until what remains can be considered the most meaningful to the storyteller because of their staying power.

In addition to its persistence over time, an event can be assessed as critical based on how it challenged the storyteller's worldview and shaped their behaviors (Webster & Mertova, 2007). Did the experience of the event and the processing of that experience change the person? Events that cause cognitive dissonance, forcing us to question our beliefs, have especially great capacity to be critical events because they create conflict and struggle, which precipitate changes to our thinking, knowing, belief systems, decision making processes, or actions in order to quell the dissonance. We often feel much safer when we can put ourselves on autopilot and go about our days without challenges. However, when we shift our worldviews in the face of these challenges, the resulting epistemological changes are evidence for the event's importance. In general, critical events meet some of the following characteristics (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 83):

- Exist in a particular context, such as formal organizational structures or communities of practice
- Impact on the people involved

- Have life-changing consequences

- Are unplanned

- May reveal patterns of well defined stages

- Are only identified after the event

- Are intensely personal with strong emotional involvement

Choosing Critical Events. Of Webster and Mertova's characteristics of critical events, I gravitated towards stories of life-changing events and stories that appeared to be intensely personal with strong emotional involvement. Examples of life-changing events ranged from Akila's decision to change majors to Kushanneh's self-described personal transformation into being a somebody. Instances of strongly emotional critical events included stories like Zoey being told she couldn't succeed academically due to her age and Darya's experience with an uncaring professor. Critical events like these resonated with me based on my perceptions of the students' emotional labor expended and the conveyance of a self-transformation by the student.

Once a critical event is identified, other stories can be compared to it for similarities in resources, method, and context (Webster & Mertova, 2007). These like events are experiences that are the same as identified critical events, but they happened to other people. These add to the believability of the stories, increasing verisimilitude. For example, Ramineh's experience with her math professor was a like event to Darya's story about her construction professor, providing increased believability in the stories because a similar type of care or lack of care was experienced by different people within the same context of the school.

Critical events happen within communities and thus, are subject to the constraints of the community's dominant systems, institutions, and ideologies. This includes "governance, discipline processes, authority, operational procedures, and performance expectations" (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 83), yet critical events always simultaneously have relations to something outside those structures. As Strauss (1959) notes, members are forced in/out of temporary identities based on interactions with group norms and that even small or repeated experiences accrue into potentially large effects (as cited in Webster & Mertova, 2007). Thus, one's identity is not static; it can be lost and gained all the time. This relational understanding of critical events is especially relevant for this study on immigrant ESL students in community college. Not only are they navigating American culture from their unique perspectives in everyday life, but they are also making adjustments based on the culture of American postsecondary schooling. Furthermore, the researcher, who is part of the community and the one who considers if an experience is a critical event, is also an important source for like and other events that can support the critical events. I use both my researcher identity and educator identity in the course of this study to provide context and make respectful decisions during the re-storying of students' narratives.

Lastly, though some believe that critical events follow specific stages, Webster and Mertova (2007) question this because critical events are naturally tumultuous, unplanned, and unanticipated. This characteristic is why narrative inquiry is adept at reaching these critical events that other approaches often miss. To sum up, critical events

are identified by reflecting on the critical events and finding support through the affirmation of like and other events.

Moreover, verisimilitude is tied to authenticity (Webster & Mertova, 2007). I strengthened the authenticity by telling the stories with rich details and maintaining strong narrative coherence. To bolster the authenticity, I provided richer context with like and other events. I followed a system to match up like and other events with critical events. As I reviewed each student's interviews, I copied and pasted excerpts of their transcripts into a table in Microsoft Word. I used this just for organization purposes to keep ideas clear for me. To search for like events to support critical events, I began cutting and pasting similar stories together in the table. I used the first column for the critical events and then pasted all supporting like events into the second column. For example, Darya's story about an uncaring professor went in column one. In the second column, I added like events such as Ramineh's experience with an uncaring math professor.

Other events are more anecdotal and do not have the life-changing or strong emotional traits, but they can provide a richer context to their matching critical and like events (Webster & Mertova, 2007). This richer context helps increase verisimilitude and authenticity. I created a third column for other events. I did not have very many other events. I believe this is due to the nature of the online interviews and the students' stories not happening at the same time or place as other students' stories. I was rarely present during any of the stories that the students shared, but the researcher co-creates the narratives with students. As an ESL professor who is familiar with the college context, I

relied on my knowledge from field notes, researcher journal, and lived experiences to help provide more context to students' narratives.

Furthermore, familiarity can be problematic because it causes people to do things without thinking about what they're doing (Webster & Mertova, 2007). We operate in society and go about our routines without stopping to recognize why we're doing it or why we're doing it in this particular way. Narrative inquiries should "make the familiar strange," so by using critical events to highlight students' experiences, my study can help reveal challenges that may have gone unseen by others in the community. As an example of this, I recall one of my early "aha" moments from a previous research study on ESL colleges students' perceptions of discrimination based on race, language, and culture (Chan, 2016). One of the students mentioned that his professor had not invited him into the office, so he had to stand at the door to talk to him. The student perceived this as a slight but from my perspective as an American professor, I realized my expectation was totally different. I would expect students to just come into the office if the door was open. This for me was an example of making the familiar strange and was a formative moment for me in understanding the experiences of my students from a new perspective.

The richness of storytelling and access provided also help my study achieve transferability, which means the research study can be compared to other contexts, similar to external validity (Webster & Mertova, 2007). Generalizability is not a goal of this study. However, because of the depth of detail, it allows others to see how they could apply a similar study in their own context to gain a richer understanding of their students' experiences. As part of my commitment to access, the implications of my study have

been reported in the form of letters to administrators and content professors. Though these are specific to the context in which my study was done, a similar approach could be taken by others, who might choose to use these letters as a starting point to open discussions with their administration or teaching faculty.

Finally, economy helps make sure that while handling the large amounts of qualitative data, the researcher doesn't compromise the integrity of the study (Webster & Mertova, 2007). I used critical events, which helps avoid large numbers of categorizations or convoluted themes. Critical events assisted me in pointing directly to the most important findings of the study. As described earlier, I organized the critical, like, and other events in a table. This narrowed down my data into eight manageable critical events, each with a varying number of like and other events.

In conjunction with these measures, the researcher must always consider ethics, including informed consent, honesty and trust, intervention and advocacy, harm and risk, and privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity (Webster & Mertova, 2007). I gave each student who shared their stories in my study the IRB approved informed consent form (see Appendix C) from my institute electronically and gave them the opportunity to ask questions for clarification. I have done my best to convey the students' experiences as honestly as possible without changing their linguistic choices or correcting grammatical errors that did not interfere with clarity during smoothing. Fortunately, no incident arose with students that required intervention. I have also continually considered both the harm and the risks. The main potential harm comes from having to recall and tell a difficult story, which required a great deal of emotional labor. It's possible that students did not

convey to me potential emotional consequences after the fact but kept replaying certain events in their minds after the interviews- re-living and re-exposing them to that event. Also, I used pseudonyms and composite narratives (Willis, 2019) to increase anonymity and protect the identities of those involved in all stories. There were times that students shared stories about their class work that professors are not usually privy to, such as how Farjaad coped with a large amount of homework and quizzes by taking turns with his friends to finish a quiz online first and then share questions with peers. He put his trust in me, and I am responsible for maintaining his privacy and for avoiding harm or risk to him. Furthermore, Kim (2016) urges critical narrative inquirers to develop and use phronesis, or ethical judgment, by practicing reflexivity, which she defines as reflecting on one's reflections during each stage of research. Rossman and Rallis (2010) state to be ethical, a researcher must combine reflexive practice with honoring the relationship with participants in a form of caring reflexivity (as cited in Kim, 2016). In this way, I not only questioned my ethical choices as mentioned above, but I also considered how I approached the relationships with my former students in respectful ways and worked to maintain their integrity in the telling of their stories.

Structure

Structure relays the setting to readers, including the place and time of events and the characters involved (Webster & Mertova, 2007). I conducted my study from the fall semester of 2020 through the end of spring semester 2021. Though all our interviews were virtual on Zoom, students shared stories related to college that took place both on and off campus, as well as online. However, the stories students shared were a mix of

experiences they were facing at the present moment and those that they recalled from before. Though the general topic was about their experiences in community college, the intersectionality of their lived experiences came through in stories that discussed work, co-workers, family, friends, previous schooling, general experiences in society, and their immigration experiences. The relationships between times and places, as well as people, are so interwoven that it's not possible to just talk about school when focusing on important, critical moments and experiences because those have repercussions on all sectors of their lives. For example, Sandy, Senalat, and Shen spoke about regretting choices made in high school to not focus on their English language studies as a major factor for their placement into ESL in college. Akila and Victoria spoke about how people at their work encouraged them in school and the effects they had on their English language proficiency and other schoolwork.

When

The students were in different years of their academic journeys. Some were in their first year of content courses, having completed the ESL program just before. Other students had been in their content courses for a while. Some had graduated with their associate degree and transferred to a four-year university while others had decided to take a break from classes and weren't enrolled at any school at the time. Their stories, therefore, ranged from 2013 up to the same day as our interviews in 2020-2021. It is also important to mention that my study began during the first year of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Students were adjusting, as we all were, to the challenging times we have been facing.

Where

Though students' critical events happened in different places and at different times, they have centered around the college, so maybe the best way to describe the physical space of the college is to share my first impressions. The first time I visited the campus, I had some time to kill and decided to take a walk around to get a feel for the building and the people there. Since I had been used to university campuses, I remember feeling how small the main building was. In fact, I hadn't even realized at the time that there were other buildings on the campus. I entered on the second floor. The floors were standard white linoleum with specks in them that hide the dirt. The walls were a familiar neutral off-white color. The furniture was old, well-worn with wooden benches in the halls and cushioned seating areas with tables, where students were resting or studying. While walking through the building, it was clear where the original building ended and the add-on began- the walls no longer off-white, but purple. Classrooms lined the hallways. A peek inside showed they were pretty standard, desks in rows facing chalkboards and whiteboards. On the walls beside the offices, there were big old-school bulletin boards with thumb tacks and staples, flyers and large boards with degree requirements. It reminded me of my younger years when we had those types of bulletin boards in the classroom. There was something very comfortable about them that I liked seeing there. Going downstairs, I came upon the cafeteria and decided to buy a cup of coffee. The entrance to the cafeteria was a little awkward, as you had to enter the main seating area and then go into another little room on the right. It was small and seemed only half-used. It had sandwiches, chips, pizza, and lots of grab and go items, kind of like

a corner convenience store. I bought a cup of coffee and walked out of the register area back into the main dining hall. I exited the cafeteria and strolled through the hallway. There were more bulletin boards, and these were clearly dedicated to student clubs. It was a way to see a bit of student life through the photos and flyers. At the end of the short hall, I exited the building and found seating that wrapped around the cafeteria. I took a seat there to sip my coffee. The building was surrounded by a forested area with many large old-growth trees. It was really a cozier feeling than I had at large four-year institutions.

Southeastern Community College is a large community college with six campuses. In the fall of 2016 50,835 students were enrolled in the college. The median age for the college was 21.3 years old. Race broke down as 50% White, 16% Black, 17% Asian, 15% Hispanic, and 2% other. Most students were part-time at 65% versus 35% full-time.

The college-preparatory ESL program has courses on five of the campuses. In the fall of 2016, there were just over 2,300 students enrolled in the college's ESL program. Age distribution was reported as 0.7% under 18, 27.2% 18-21, 16.4% 22-24, 19.3% 25-29, 28.6% 30-44, 6.7% 45-59, 1.0% 60+. Distribution by race was reported as 21% White, 21% Black, 39% Asian, 17% Latino, 1% other, and 1% preferred not to say. An additional important note is that the true number of students whose dominant language is something other than English is unknown but much larger than the 2,300 enrolled in the program during one semester. This is because former ESL program graduates are taking classes throughout all the college disciplines and some ESL students place directly into

their discipline content courses because their English proficiency is deemed high enough to succeed without ESL coursework.

In a 2018 student survey done in the college's ESL program two years later with 968 students, the proportions were similar in students' self-reported race: 19% White, 19% Black, 40% Asian, 14% Latino, 4% other, and 4% preferred not to answer. In the same student survey, over 28 native languages were reported with the top five being: Arabic, Amharic, Bengali, Chinese, and Dari. Most students were also working while in school with 73% working, 13.5% searching for employment, and the other 13.5% not looking for a job. Students were mostly enrolled full-time with 12.3% taking 11-12 credits, 40.6% taking 13-15 credits, and 3.7% taking 15+. Regarding students' family situations, 21% were in the U.S. without family, 30% lived with parents or siblings, 5.6% lived with extended family, 14.9% lived with a spouse or partner, and 28.3% were married with children.

Participants

My position as an ESL educator in the institution provided me with a unique perspective and understanding of the local context. For my study, I used purposive sampling (Johnson & Christensen, 2014) by limiting the study to my former ESL students who had completed the ESL program. I invited 27 ESL students by email prior to the start of the fall 2020 semester, and I received IRB approval from both George Mason University and Southeastern Community College before inviting students (see Appendix D). I selected from my former students those who had an established rapport with me. I also only chose students who had completed the ESL program to eliminate the situation

where they would be my future student again. I also selected students who continued taking courses at Southeastern Community College. The students who participated were of varying ages, sexes, linguistic and cultural backgrounds, majors, and years in college, but these were not requirements for participating in my study. Seventeen students agreed to participate in my study. Over the course of one academic year, two students were able to participate in only one of three interviews and four students participated in two of the three interviews. Eleven students participated in all three interviews (see Appendix E).

To provide more context, I am including brief statements about each of the participants below. All names are pseudonyms. Ages refer to students' age during the 2020-2021 academic year. Not all students participated in all three rounds of interviews.

Akila. Akila is a young, twenty-something woman from Egypt. She immigrated to the U.S. with her family, including stepfather, mother, and brother. Her dominant language is Arabic. Though she began as a biology major interested in the medical field, she switched her major to information technology. She worked full-time during school at a grocery store and then later at an elementary school. She was in her final year of college during the study and has since graduated with her associate degree.

Alana. Alana is a thirty-something Brazilian woman, who immigrated to the U.S. with her husband after their marriage. She self-describes as a shy person. She speaks Portuguese with her husband, which is his second language, but this means she does not practice English at home as much as she would like. After finishing the ESL program, she completed one semester of content courses, including English composition and has since taken a break from college coursework, but plans to return. She works as a beauty

and make-up consultant. She has changed her major several times but was most recently interested in dental hygiene.

Angela. Angela is in her twenties. Her native language is Twi. Her father immigrated to the U.S. first and later brought her and her sister from Ghana after high school. She shared that she was nervous to come to the U.S. during high school because she had seen in movies how people of African descent were treated poorly. She was glad that she came after high school and also remembered feeling more at ease when she noticed other people from Africa on the college campus. She is a very outgoing person and teaches young children in a local school. She had already graduated from Southeastern Community College at the time of the study and was in her first year at a local four-year institution, completing her degree in childhood education. She has since applied to graduate school, making plans for after her upcoming graduation.

Aster. Aster is in her thirties and immigrated to the U.S. through a visa lottery from Ethiopia. Her native language is Amharic. She is a mother of two young children and her husband helps her manage family life with her work and school. She began the ESL program at a low-intermediate proficiency level and repeated the writing course. After taking some time off, she came back to college, completed the ESL program and all prerequisite courses for entering the college's competitive nursing program, and was in her first year of the nursing program during this study. She attributes her ability to persist and confidence to both write academically and to help her kids with their schoolwork to the lessons she learned in the ESL program.

Charya. Charya is a Cambodian immigrant in his twenties. Khmer is his native language, and he quickly improved his English proficiency during his time working and going to college. At the time of this study, he had completed one year of courses after the ESL program but was taking a break from college to focus on work and family obligations. He had worked part-time at a local elementary school but was searching for a new job. His college major had been in information technology. He was unavailable to complete the second or third interviews.

Darya. Darya immigrated to the U.S. alone from Iran. She is working full-time as she completes her major in interior design. Her native language is Farsi. She was in her thirties, and she referred to her age several times in relation to her opinion of classmates' interactions and behaviors. She commented that other students were not respectful of professors or did not participate in discussions because they may not have been mature enough. She was a straight A student prior to the difficulties with a professor, which she described in her interview. She is a very self-aware person, who often reflects on others' perspectives. She had one more year of coursework to graduate.

Farjaad. Farjaad is a young, twenty-something who immigrated to the U.S. with family from Afghanistan. His native language is Dari. He had recently graduated from Southeastern Community College and was attending his first year at an in-state four-year institution to complete his engineering degree. He lamented the loss due to COVID-19 of the on-campus college experiences he was looking forward to having.

Kushanneh. Kushanneh is a mother in her thirties with two children. She immigrated with her husband and children from Afghanistan. She speaks both Dari and

Pashto. Originally, she attended college to learn more English, but in her interviews described how she came to major in early childhood education and now aspires for her bachelor's degree. She is a socially conscious person, who often thinks about how she can give back to her community and help other women from Afghanistan. She is creative and industrious. To practice her English, she created her own YouTube cooking channel and got over 800 subscribers. She says education helps her to be somebody, not just a woman who sits at home.

Marcel. Marcel is a French speaker from Senegal in his thirties. He immigrated to the U.S. alone. Though his interests are in history, he decided to pursue an education or English major. He spoke about his aspirations of being a writer and using his education to make social changes in Senegal by teaching the younger generations to be self-sufficient and break a chain of reliance on former colonizing nations. He recognizes the high status and privileges that come with his opportunity to study in the U.S. but wishes that it hadn't changed the relationship he had with his friends and family in Senegal. He wishes they would still see him as the "right" Marcel. After he completed the ESL program, he decided to transfer to a nearby university. At the time of this study, he was waiting on transcripts from his college in Senegal but was working and saving money in the meantime.

Ramineh. Ramineh is a mother of two children. She immigrated to the U.S. with her husband and children from Afghanistan. Her closest relatives immigrated to Europe. Her native languages include Dari and Pashto. She explained that her life in Afghanistan was good. Her husband had a good job and they had a house, but they gave it up to

ensure their kids would have the opportunity for a better education. Her oldest son remembers that he was hit in school in Afghanistan and never wants to go back there. After immigrating, she learned she required heart surgery. After recovering from six months of bedrest, the first two things on her mind were to pass her driver's license test and to take the English language placement test at Southeastern Community College. She is pursuing a degree in information technology.

Sandy. Sandy is a new mother of a baby boy. She gave birth just prior to our second interview. She completed her school semester online from her hospital room. She is a twenty-something immigrant from El Salvador, who speaks Spanish as her dominant language. Her mother came to the U.S. first and worked for ten years before she could bring Sandy and her brother. During that time, Sandy lived in an orphanage. She first came to Illinois at a high school age, where she met her future husband. She credits his family for encouraging her to pursue her education seriously. She did not complete her associate degree since her husband was stationed in Germany and she had to move, but she was making plans to pursue and complete her degree elsewhere. She wants to teach her son to take every opportunity available and be serious about school.

Senalat. Senalat is a young Ethiopian Amharic-dominant speaking immigrant in her twenties. She is pursuing a degree in information technology and works full-time. She is a self-described procrastinator, but she has been successful in school. She lamented the lack of opportunities for her to make friends with single people her own age since most of her school friends have been older and married. She is very close with her mother and would always put her family before herself and her school responsibilities.

Shen. Shen is a young immigrant from China, whose dominant language is Chinese. He is in his twenties but immigrated during high school. He described the challenge of learning English while in high school and said it took him two years before he felt he could effectively function in English. He felt some regrets about immigrating to the U.S. because he wanted to become a professional soccer player, and just before moving here had received an offer to join a team. He says he was not a good student, but he has done well in college. He was very active and joined a lot of student clubs. After completing the ESL program, he graduated with his associate degree but was sad that he could not have a real graduation ceremony due to COVID-19. He was in his first year at an in-state university at the time of this study and was already on the student council.

Shireen. Shireen immigrated to the U.S. from Afghanistan. She is a mother in her thirties who balances school with work. Her husband is often away from home for long periods for work. Her dominant language is Dari. She had just completed the ESL program the semester before this study and was in her first year of content courses in the college. Her major was business administration because she had experience with finance. Her mother and brother had large influences on encouraging her to pursue higher education.

Victoria. Victoria is a twenty-something woman from the Philippines and speaks Tagalog as her dominant language. She immigrated to the U.S. with her parents. She worked full-time as she attended college. She graduated at the end of the academic year and is transferring to an in-state university to pursue a bachelor's degree in business administration. She said she felt a disconnect from her friends back home who did not

understand that life is actually hard in the U.S. because it is uncommon for students to also work in the Philippines. Her boss, who was also an immigrant, often gave her encouragement in her studies.

Yana. Yana already had a college degree from El Salvador. Her dominant language is Spanish. She immigrated to the U.S. and attended Southeastern Community College with her sister. They both had on-campus jobs. She was pursuing her degree in construction management and graduated after the end of this study. She had a positive experience in college but was not sure she would pursue more college after graduation. She participated in a study group, including some other Latino/as. She talked about how she exchanged knowledge she gained in El Salvador with classmates whose experience was U.S. based, which helped them all to succeed in class projects.

Zoey. Zoey originally attended Southeastern Community College just for the ESL courses to improve her English proficiency. Spanish is her dominant language. She is a mother of two daughters and immigrated with her husband more than a decade ago from Bolivia. Due to a bad experience with a professor, she made a big change and pursued her associate degree to show her daughters that you can do anything you put your mind to. She graduated in the middle of this study and discussed how her education transformed her and changed how she was treated at work. Her plan was to transfer to a nearby university and continue with a bachelor's degree.

Negotiation

Caring Relationships

These relationships may include collegiality, collaboration, community, or whatever relationships storytellers believe are important (Webster & Mertova, 2007). As relationality is one of my epistemological commitments, this aspect of critical narrative event inquiry is especially important to me. Kim (2016) strongly conveyed the importance of trust and rapport between the interviewer and the interviewees. This condition determines the depth of stories that are shared. Being open with interviewees as the interviewer will help lessen the distance and increase trust and rapport. My selection of former students was intended to begin the interviews with an established relationship. My teaching style has evolved for the many years that I've been a teacher. I believe the most important part of being a good teacher is that students know that you care that they actually learn, that you care about them as a whole person and not just their identities as students. However, for authentic caring to happen, students have to accept that care as well (Valenzuela, 1999). For some of my former students, it had been years since they were in my class, and we still had an easy rapport when we reconnected through the interviews. I had known Zoey the longest, and it had been about six years since she was in my class. I see this as evidence of our mutual caring relationships. I still have students who email me to update me on how they're doing, like Victoria who sent me pictures of her posing in her graduation cap and gown. It's always rewarding to know they thought about me as I hold a genuine care, respect, and interest for and in my students.

Empowering Relationships

Considering these relationships is to consider power dynamics. This includes

relationships that empower and disempower as well (Webster & Mertova, 2007). It is

common in educational systems that the professor is hierarchically above the student.

What that actually means for interactions differs culturally and individually. However, it

is impossible for me to eliminate the power differences between me and former students.

I attempted to mitigate that in a few ways. I made sure each student had completed the

ESL program so that there was no possibility of them being my student in the future. I

started the interview by reminding them they could stop the interview at any time, decline

to answer any question, and that they could talk about whatever they thought was

important or relevant. I also maintained a very informal conversation with students and

shared personal things from my own life. For instance, during the second round of

interviews, I shared a video with students that included my own photos and stories of

both positive and negative critical events in my undergraduate experiences (see Appendix

F).

The other aspect mentioned regarding empowering relationships was modelling,

which is when the researcher shapes their study to paint the institution in a positive light

(Webster & Mertova, 2007). My general attitude toward postsecondary education is that

it provides opportunities for many students to gain new knowledge, skills, and experience

that can help them in other parts of their lives, not just in getting a job. However, I also

strongly believe neoliberal and neocolonial systems that shape schooling can be deeply

hurtful and wound students, especially racially, linguistically, and culturally minoritized

students (see Chapter 2). If anything, I have been cautious to not paint the school in too negative of a light. I have re-read my writing to check for any unfair positive and negative portrayals of the school or students in the way I represented students' stories. I have also asked critical friends to read drafts of my writing and provide me with feedback specifically to avoid modelling.

Risks

Intersubjectivity

The report also must address limitations, like issues of intersubjectivity, which Webster and Mertova (2007) define as writing the report in a way that focuses on a master narrative in relation to the researcher and neglects important nuances or counternarratives. I used critical, like, and other events to help lessen intersubjectivity problems. By centering the students' stories and drawing the critical events from their stories, I help avoid the situation in which I construct my own narrative and attempt to fit their stories into mine. While addressing familiarity, which I discussed earlier, I also used reflective practices to think deeply about different aspects and perspectives in students' stories that could have been overlooked. By doing so, I attempt to construct the narrative analysis and interpretations from what is important to the students.

Smoothing

Another concern is the report has to be carefully reviewed to avoid omitting negative findings in favor of painting a rosy picture while smoothing (Webster & Mertova, 2007). Related to this, narrative smoothing can help polish a story to increase clarity, but it can be a double-edged sword because it could lead to selective reporting,

making something look better or worse, or even omit important context from a story (Kim, 2016). I was cautious in erring too much toward the negative findings because I feel that the challenging information creates opportunities for growth. They allow us to critique the current systems and consider changes that can bring about the more positive environments and experiences we seek. However, a focus from this perspective has potential to exclude important positive events, experiences, or influences. I attempted to mitigate this through ongoing, cyclical reflexive habits. As I mentioned, I have read my writing again, looking for any positively and negatively biased portrayals of the college or students in how I conveyed students' narratives. I also shared my drafts with critical friends and asked them to read for potential smoothing.

External Constraints

When working with immigrant ESL students, especially former students, there are many ethical questions. In addition to following Institutional Review Board guidelines, Kim (2016) pointed to the American Educational Research Association's standards of ethics: informed consent, respect for people's perspectives, acknowledgement to conflicts of interest and researcher influence, description of the steps from data to interpretations of that data in conclusions, and acknowledgement of funding. All students in my study gave informed consent. I have no conflicts of interest and received no funding. The description of each step is outlined in this paper.

I made every effort to be respectful of students' perspectives during all stages of the study and reporting. Critical event narrative analysis allowed me to respect students' perspectives by minimizing reductiveness to people's narratives, which can commonly

occur when using themes and during the reporting of data. I struggle using the word "data" to describe this collection of stories because in my mind it somehow sterilizes the image of their collective voices and dehumanizes these shared lived experiences. When I refer to the collection of lived experiences, which students have so graciously shared with me, I hope that the human connection is not lost.

The main constraint on students was time, so this was another area I paid extra attention to respecting. I extended my initial one-month window for each interview round by up to three weeks to meet students at times that worked with their schedules. I also used the calendly.com app to give the students carte blanche access to any unscheduled time in my calendar on any day of the week. Sometimes that meant we met in the early morning or late at night, sometimes on weekdays and sometimes on the weekend. I did have some attrition due to time constraints. Two students did not continue after the first round of interviews and four others were only able to complete two of the three rounds.

Reflexivity

Kim (2016) also said that trust, including the trust in privacy, are at the center of researcher ethics. In fact, she asserted that ethics, ethical judgment, reflexivity, and caring interact with one another in ways that help the narrative inquirer maintain ethical standards. Reflexivity happens at every stage of research. As Kim (2016) describes, if reflecting is taking one step back, reflexiveness is taking two steps back so that researchers are also interrogating ourselves, our thoughts and actions. It helps us to see and to interrogate our "subjective social, political views, research interests, our choice of research design, theoretical framework, research participants, and interpretations,

including all the biases, prejudices, and assumptions we possess that might influence the shaping of our research" (Kim, 2016, p. 250). Guillemin and Gillam (2004) say we can understand better what type of knowledge we generate and how we generate this knowledge (as cited in Kim, 2016).

Researcher reflexivity can also uncover dominant discourses and systems of power (McCabe & Holmes, 2009). Reflexivity goes beyond reflection about one's own biases, positionality, and the effects on research to include a focus on how one's research strives toward emancipatory goals. Reflexivity can act as a means to achieve emancipation through increasing awareness. In relational research, the rigid hierarchy between participants and researchers is blurred and the co-creation of knowledge is privileged (Martin & Pirbhai-Illich, 2016). Some may argue that this, along with the alternative validity and reliability reduce rigor, and therefore validity, as outlined by Webster and Mertova (2007), but reflexivity has been used to counter this criticism. Combining reflexivity with ethical judgment increases rigor in our studies and maintains integrity of our participants (Kim, 2016). Kim (2016) further describes reflexivity through Foucault's reflexive askesis, in which researchers heed memory, meditation, and method as they engage in self-care, which allows us to better know ourselves at the same time as caring for others.

My reflexive habits have included revisiting students' narratives at different times throughout the year and processing them for myself in different ways. For instance, I re-read my researcher memos in my handwritten journal and made additional notes and connections. After interviews or after re-reading transcriptions, I used the voice-to-text

feature on Google docs to record my thoughts in a stream of consciousness format, saying what came to mind. I had a second handwritten journal, where I kept most of my reflections. When I spoke about my research to critical friends, it helped me to put into words what appeared to be the most meaningful and transformative events for students and to push my thinking by helping me see the same stories from different angles. Beyond reflecting on the stories of students, I took reflexive measures to question myself, my role, my approach during interviews, my choice of critical events, and my analyses and interpretations. I questioned my own experiences with subtractive schooling and explored the bicultural aspects of my own identity.

Critical Event Narrative Analysis and Interpretation

Using critical events in the analysis connects to the description of action as opportunities for meaning making (Webster & Mertova, 2007). In fact, using critical event narrative analysis helps avoid issues with coding data, such as decontextualization of data, loss of complexity in meanings, and distancing the researcher from the data (St. John & Johnson, 2000). Narrative data analysis helps us understand how our participants' storytelling gives meanings to their lived experiences, their identities, and their surroundings (Kim, 2016). The goal here is to find narrative meaning, which Polkinghorne (1988) says is "a cognitive process that organizes human experiences into temporally meaningful episodes" (as cited in Kim, 2016, p. 1). In finding narrative meaning, researchers interpret not only what participants say but also explain those interpretations with evidence, which creates a framework to understand our past and plan

our future. I used critical event narrative analysis, which begins by identifying critical events. Each event could be considered a temporally meaningful episode.

Researchers may approach interpreting stories from two perspectives: interpretation of faith or interpretation of suspicion (Kim, 2016). Going on faith means we take the participants' stories at face value. With this, we can use the approach of interpretation of suspicion, which means researchers look for hidden meanings in the stories that might be overlooked from a pure interpretation of faith. It is important for our trust and caring relationships to use an interpretation of faith, but in a critical narrative inquiry with a social justice goal, it is important to use both. I used interpretation of faith to choose critical events by taking students' stories at face value and accepting what they indicated as meaningful to them. In addition to this, I analyze the critical events for hidden meanings, especially connections to historical, contextual, and political influences that come from the systems of schooling, which themselves are influenced by neoliberal and neocolonial forces (see Chapter 2).

Polkinghorne (1995) proposed two modes of analysis of narratives: paradigmatic mode of analysis and narrative mode of analysis (as cited in Kim, 2016). Paradigmatic modes of analysis consider that concepts come from the researcher applying theory to the data, come from the data itself inductively, or come from preset ideas based on the study's topic (Kim, 2016). These paradigmatic modes help uncover commonalities across data sources but also lessen parts of the stories that are unique. On the other hand, narrative mode of analysis considers concepts coming from happenings, actions, and events, which create coherent stories as the product of analysis. Stories are connected

with a through-line, and smoothing is used to fill in any gaps. This mode "maintains that narrative analysis is not merely a transcription of the data but is a means of showing the significance of the lived experience in a final story" (Kim, 2016, p. 197). It uncovers hidden meaning from the data and creates a rich story. Using critical event narrative analysis to identify critical events, I used the narrative mode of analysis to re-story students' stories into eight composite narratives.

Challenges

Interpreting and Representing Findings

After I organized all the critical, like, and other events in a table, I counted how many critical events had like events to support them. I found eight critical events from the table and began to write them into Chapter 4 in a conventional way: critical event one, matching like events, my analysis with supporting research. I felt that the format did not match my researcher commitments well, so I attempted another style by keeping the students' stories whole and separating my analysis into another chapter. After constructive feedback, I realized that it was problematic. First, the length of the students' stories was too long. Second, in trying to honor students' voices by letting them stand alone, I was separating myself from the stories, which upon more reflexive practices I realized goes against my relational commitment. I was not really co-creating these stories as a critical narrative researcher should do (Kim, 2016). I returned to Kim (2016), this time reading with a new perspective. I then used composite narratives to represent the findings along with my analysis in a truer co-created story, while heeding the importance of fidelity to students' original stories. Composite narratives can help emphasize the

relationality and interconnectedness among the researcher and participants and can portray a more comprehensive and whole representation of a lived experience (Wertz et al., 2011).

Conclusion

In the next chapter, I share critical events in the form of composite narratives so that readers can make their own meanings and personal connections to students' experiences (Webster & Mertova, 2007). I incorporate my thoughts and experiences to co-create a narrative that explains my analysis of the data and discusses how I believe they answer my research questions.

Chapter Four: Results and Analysis

In the analysis and interpretation of my results, I refer to my theoretical framework of critical race theory and my conceptual framework that critiques the neoliberal and neocolonial influences in postsecondary education for their roles in systematically contributing to subtractive schooling (Valenzuela, 1999) and culture loss (Wong Fillmore, 2014). Subtractive schooling operates systematically by dismissing other cultures' ways of knowing and understandings of how education should operate, as well as employing policies and practices that dispossess students of their native languages and cultures (Valenzuela, 1999).

As I examined my results for critical events, I aspired to find what have been the most meaningful and transformational experiences of my immigrant ESL students during their postsecondary experiences in the U.S. to answer my research questions.

1. What are the most meaningful/transformational experiences immigrant ESL students have in navigating their community college experiences in their content courses?

2. How may those experiences relate to the concepts of subtractive schooling (Valenzuela, 1999) and culture loss (Wong Fillmore, 2014)?

I distilled their stories down to eight critical events, which had supporting like and other events. Using the stories of the students and my own knowledge of the contexts, I crafted eight composite narratives to spotlight the eight critical events. I share those composite narratives, each followed by my analysis. CRT acknowledges that racist systems are

woven throughout our society and institutions (Kim, 2016), so in my analyses, I examined the eight critical events for the presence of oppressive forces, whether based on race, culture, language, or other aspects of students' lived experiences. CRT privileges the lived experiences of people of color for their stories' and counterstories' abilities to illustrate oppressive forces from their unique perspectives (Kim, 2016), so I looked for evidence of subtractive schooling (Valenzuela, 1999) and culture loss (Wong Fillmore, 2014). When and if they were present, I drew connections to neoliberal and neocolonial influences, such as paternalism, meritocracy, and individualism. CRT also challenges such oppressive forces, so I penned two letters with the implications of my results for community college administrators and content faculty, respectively, as a way to increase access to my findings and advocate for action-based next steps.

Composite Narratives and Analysis

Composite Narrative One - #notforus #representationmatters

Before I immigrated to the U.S., my father came first. I was in high school at the time and had seen American movies about high school. I was worried about being treated differently because of my skin color. When it was time for me to come, I was relieved that I had finished high school. When I started at college, it was hard adapting to the new environment because I didn't know the resources or who is the person to talk to. My first time to the student services, the staff person was so rude, and it made me feel like I didn't belong here. Then I learned I had to take a placement test for my English. In the testing center, I noticed some other students from Africa and Asia, and it felt welcoming, like I could be myself and express myself. I became less self-conscious about my skin color.

I started in the second level of the ESL classes. The other students were very nice, but I remember having a hard time to make friends my age. Even my best friend in those classes was married and had kids. I wanted to try and find someone who I could relate to, you know? I wanted to talk about things more that I like. After ESL, I tried to participate more in class with the American students, but sometimes I can't because of the lack of language or the American students are not friendly. They ignored me in group work like what I say is not good, so most of my friends are still other immigrants. It's hard because I'm the type of person that just needs friends in class.

Do you know, there is a board near the cafeteria? It has all student groups there. I remember standing there and looking for something that could match my interest, but I didn't see anything. It was really disappointing because I would like to know other cultures and share my culture too. Like, we wrote about topics of my culture in ESL, but in major classes, no. The professors do not have us introduce ourselves to each other, and I never talk about my country in those classes, but I want to show the beauty of my culture to other people. I feel really good to do it.

Eventually I got a job working on campus. One day my friend who is also works in the school, she asked me to go to the cafeteria because there was a big event there. I didn't know what the school was celebrating, but there was lots of free food and games there. The food was kind of weird, some sweet thing like candy. I told my friend, let's go because this is not for us. Then I saw my country's name on a table, and a woman in a hijab was working there. I asked where she was from. We started talking in our language. She shared with me foods from back home and there was music playing too. I was so

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happy that I started dancing. I felt I found my country again, that they value our culture. When she told me she was an education major, I asked why she would want to teach U.S. kids; they are not our kids. After she explained how she wants to help others, I realized it means we are part of this country too. That day really changed my educational journey from ESL to early childhood education and I really feel excited about what I am doing. I am learning so much and my confidence grew. I got a new job at a daycare that is near my home, so I can use what I am learning. Now I want to go to the university after I graduate from the college, so I can keep improving.

Composite: Angela, Alana, Senalat, Shen, Yana, Kushanneh, Victoria, Ramineh

Analysis and Interpretation

This story speaks to the feelings of belonging or lack of belonging that immigrant ESL students can feel on campus. Though the need to fit in at school is not unique to immigrant ESL students, the reasons they may struggle can vary from non-immigrant non-ESL students. Neocolonial influences in U.S. postsecondary education contribute to the prominence and privileging of White, English-speaking norms (Motha, 2014), through which policies and practices can divest students of their native languages and cultures (Bunce et al., 2016). One of the strategies to assimilate communities into the dominant, White ways of knowing and being have been through the absence of other ways of knowing and being (Spring, 2007).

As we see in this story, representation matters for students. Not only did the student come in with worries about being overtly discriminated against for her skin color, but she also expressed feeling excluded at the school due to the lack of clubs with her

interests and the school event's choices of foods and games. The lack of representation here may contribute to subtractive schooling since repetitive exposure to an environment which does not reflect your own culture can lead to culture loss through pressure to assimilate in order to fit in (Wong Fillmore, 2014).

Students' feelings of belongingness are important for persistence in school (Walton & Cohen, 2007), but it was not until the student saw herself represented, both racially, linguistically, and culturally at the testing center and in the cafeteria that she had transformational moments that increased her feelings of belongingness and shifted her ideas about herself and her relationship to the U.S.

Composite Narrative Two - #onyourown #stopfighting

When I first came here, I was afraid of how people would be with me. Back home, we share with everyone, even a stranger you pass on the street. We will offer whatever food we have in our hand to them. My husband told me not to do that here because Americans won't like that. It's different here. Like back home, we are very close with other students. We kind of grow up with the same people and go through the school years together. I remember a time when a boy was making funny sound every time the teacher turned around. We all was laughing. Now I feel kind of sorry for the teacher, but he thought it was one of us girls because the sound was high sound. He said tell him who it was but we wouldn't, so he sent all the girls to stand in the hallway for punishment. We still wouldn't tell who did it. It makes us very close and very loyal. I mean, we like to be individuals too, but we do things together.

So I thought it would be easy to make lots of friends in the class. I saw lots of movies that make Americans look very friendly. I found that is not the way it is. Everything is on your own. American students come to class, they sit, and they listen lecture, but then they leave at the end. No one stay around and talk unless they know each other already. Maybe they are not comfortable around other country's people? It feels kind of lonely, you know? But at least I have my husband and kids here.

Like in ESL, we working together all the time in group work. That's good because it makes it easy to ask questions and everyone want to help each other. We all are the same because we came here. Americans is not like that. In the other classes, is not like that. You really can get in trouble to work together. I was shocked how they explain the plagiarism. I don't want to get accuse me of that, so I never ask other students for help. But it's hard to ask the professor all the time about what you don't understand too. Lots of times they don't answer or they can answer you after the assignment was due. In one class, I saw two of my classmates have to repeat a whole course because they helped each other in the homework. The bad grade stays on the transcript. Why would the school do that to us?

We need the more help actually but I even had one professor who was not native English like me, but she said like I did it so you have to do it. I'm not gonna give you like special treatment, so what am I gonna do then? I can't complain to anyone, so I just can't ask for help. You are totally on your own here. You have to stop fighting it. I just accepted the culture here. Maybe it's because I'm older. If I was 18 or 19 years old, maybe I would have a harder time.

Composite: Aster, Shen, Victoria, Senalat, Marcel, Ramineh, Farjaad, Angela, Akila

Analysis and Interpretation

Neoliberalism and neocolonialism laud individualism (Kubota, 2016b) to an extreme degree. For students who immigrate from a predominantly collectivist culture to the U.S. with its principally individualistic culture, part of their culture loss is losing an automatic support system: their community. Whereas back home even a stranger on the street would be a resource to them, now they have experiences in which they reported feeling peers and professors are not reliable resources for them. Many immigrant students have been socialized for most of their lives to expect their community to be a supportive resource as part of their deep culture, but in the U.S. college environment, where individualism is prized and promoted (Kubota, 2016b), they reported often feeling alone. In fact, Sandy said that as students, you think your professors don't care and it is surprising to discover when one does. Though immigrant students from collectivist backgrounds still value their individuality as Aster said, the system of individualism in the U.S. and in college has been a striking aspect of adapting to life here that has been a through-line in students' stories of their academic journeys. The loss of community has connections to feelings of belongingness and well-being, which in turn can affect students' persistence and success in school (Walton & Cohen, 2007). Furthermore, language learners are affected by this focus on individualism, often being blamed for not fitting in or succeeding within the schooling system rather than for examining the schooling structures that are inequitable for this student population (Kubota, 2016b).

Meritocracy is another oppressive force of neoliberalism and neocolonialism (Kubota, 2016b). This combines with a focus on being punitive (Margonis, 2015) to show students the importance of being individual and earning everything you get by yourself, which can be also illustrated through plagiarism policies (Pennycook, 1996) and can contribute to subtractive schooling by excluding other cultures' understandings of ownership over language and writing. In addition, it prevents students from accessing resources that they need. In this story, students express the fact that the policy intimidates them. They feel it is harsh but they also do not always know where the line is between getting help and doing the work on their own. To avoid being accused of cheating, they avoid asking for help from anyone, including from their professors. The realization and feeling of being totally individual- totally alone- must be a profound experience. Cultural differences need to be acknowledged to help clarify the intentions and implementations of these policies in ways that help students access resources.

Composite Narrative Three - #hardtobehere #itsnoteasy

I keep this photo on my desktop. It is a picture from the last day of our ESL speaking class. Do you know why I always looking at this photo? It makes me remember when I started. I studied English in my back home country many years in school, so I thought I was ready for the college here. Actually, the English was not like it is here, and now I think I should have taken it more seriously when I was younger. When I took the placement test, I thought maybe I need a little ESL classes. I did not expect to be in the second level, so I did not think I needed to be in your class.

Being at Southeastern Community College was a real turning point for me, even in my first ESL class. I remember the first week, I did not understand in the class. You were not speaking fast but still I couldn't catch it all. In the speaking class, when you said we would give a speech in front of everyone, I was so scared. I asked my husband about it and he said just follow the professor what she say. I was nervous for my speech and some other girls in the class were saying like my speech was bad. I missed some homeworks too, so at the end of the class, I was on the borderline. When you said I passed, it felt like a gift. I was so happy. It made me get serious about my English and about college.

The same year, I took the ESL writing class too. You remember what was my writing look like at that time. Not good, right? I did not pass that class, but I learned patience. If it was not for ESL, I would not be here 100%. Sometimes there is like a culture in ESL, that you just kind of pass through it fast to get to your classes, but that is completely wrong. You have to be patient and not give up. Now I am confident about my writing. I can write three, four, five pages. It is one of my proudest moments in college. I even have confidence to help my kids with their homework. I have the patience to read the big textbooks in the nursing program. The nursing program is not easy. I saw native speakers drop the classes, and I thought about dropping and changing my major too. But I sacrificed so much to be here, so I stayed in the classes. Now that I am finishing the first year, I am more used to it and it is getting better. I wish for all the ESL students to know to not rush. They need to be serious and learn everything they can in their ESL classes. "It's hard to be here. It's not easy."

Analysis and Interpretation

ESL classes teach more than just grammar. Our goal is to prepare students to be successful in their content courses. That means they need knowledge and tools related to the use of academic English, but they also need directions for navigating the culture of U.S. postsecondary schooling and society while maintaining their native languages and cultures. Many of the policies and practices that students need to navigate in postsecondary education are shaped by neoliberalism and neocolonialism, which are conducive to linguistic and cultural assimilation (Bunce et al., 2016).

As an ESL professor, I have a responsibility to help students understand these policies and practices, but as a critical scholar and activist educator, I have a responsibility to resist and challenge them as well. Schwartz et al. (2013) found that immigrant college students' well-being was positively correlated to holding individualistic, as opposed to collectivist, values and stated this is most likely due to the individualistic context they had to navigate. This can be interpreted as immigrant students who do not adopt more individualistic values would have a harder time maintaining their well-being and would have a rougher time navigating the neoliberal and neocolonial systems in college, which privilege individualism. This suggests there are benefits for students who assimilate, but what do they lose at the same time?

Composite Narrative Four - #imanadult #teachersdontcare

ESL is different from the regular courses. They help you more. You know, in the oral communications class, I saw the speech and told the professor, I did like this before

in ESL. She told me that's right. They teach us more how to do things in ESL, but she can't do that because we are in the college class. I felt comfortable because I learned with you how to do the speech, exactly like we did with you in ESL even though she didn't teach it to us. So the regular courses are harder.

Do you know what else happened to me? I got my final grade of 89.9 in my math class. Oh, it's too bad for me. You know, I respect the professor and she teach us professionally. I know my midterm and final grades were not so good, but I spent hours in the math lab redoing my homework to improve. So just my homework scores were high because of that. Something else was not fair too. At the midterm, she grade us poorly. Some things were right and she count it wrong. I emailed her many times to check my score. After five or six emails, she replied that she would give me partial credit on some questions, but then she never changed my score.

At the end of the class, I spoke to the professor to ask could I do anything to earn one point and get an A, but she said B is a good score. She said she will not give me the point because if she give to me one point, I get used to that. Then I would expect that in my other classes. I am not agree the way she treat me. You know, she don't care about the students. I am not a high school student! I am not lazy! I am an adult and I know what I do. I work hard and I don't ask her for nothing. I said what extra work could I do to get the point. It's not fair. You know if she give me the chance, then it will make me want to work more harder in my classes because I would get the confidence.

You don't think the teacher care about you, and you feel surprised to learn when they do. You know, I have a history professor and he knows this is not my country. I

don't know much about this country's history. He told me if I need a couple points, he will help me out and so don't worry. This makes me want to learn more about U.S. history because I get a confidence.

Now, I feel at least I know that I learned and this is not about my score, but this is about the professor and what she chose to do to me. Now, I learned from the other student about the website to rate your professor and I have to check it out before I get another class because it is not about math. I can do math. It is about the professor who care about their students. Some professor is going to help you, like email you and remind you about due dates. Some professor even will help you know about how to get a job.

Composite Narrative: Ramineh, Darya, Shen, Sandy, Kushanneh, Farjaad

Analysis and Interpretation

Neocolonial influences can be observed in the paternalistic actions of the math professor who stated, "if I give you this point, you will get used to it… That's why I'm giving you a B so that you work more hard." This approach to grades focuses on aspects of meritocracy to the exclusion of students' perspectives and backgrounds. The student expressed that this was not so much about the grade but more about the relationship that she thought existed or should exist between professors and students. This exemplifies subtractive schooling (Valenzuela, 1999) wherein alternative meanings of education, in this case grading, to the dominant norms are dismissed. Rather than a relational understanding of how grading is a part of education, the professor's actions perpetuate the meritocratic, individualistic notion of earning grades. In contrast, the actions of the history professor were perceived as caring. Students feel a greater belonging to campus

when they are able to take part in academic programs and when faculty show care and interest in their academic growth (Maestas et al., 2007).

Moreover, subtractive schooling contributes here to culture loss due to the lack of authentic caring relationships. Since this event was more about the relationship or lack of relationship than the grade itself, what the student learned was to be careful about who she picks as a professor in the future. She also learns that the professor is not a resource for her, and it reinforces that she is on her own. These repeated individualistic operations faced by students may lead to replacing group-oriented ways of being and knowing with more individualistic ones because students could more easily navigate college by adapting to the individualist norms (Schwartz et al., 2013).

Composite Narrative Five - #justfourhours #freedomishard

Most of people immigrate are looking for better opportunities for education and for jobs. My family had a good life back home. My father had a good job and we had a house. The only thing why we moved here was for the education opportunity. The school here is not like back home. It's much better and safer here, but all my friends and other relatives are still back home. They think it's great we are here and they think our life is like perfect or something. They don't understand that it is hard to be here. We have bills to pay, you know? I work full-time and try and go to school too. It takes a lot of time because you know, we are not a native English. If it takes an American one hour to read the book, it gonna take me two or three because I need to read again and translate to understand.

Seriously, on the day I'm not working, I stay in my bedroom all day. I start studying at 8am and I don't leave the room until 11pm. Sometimes I don't even eat. I don't have time to do laundry or take my dog outside or talk with my family. One day I couldn't concentrate. I needed a break, so I decided to go to the grocery store. I was out for four hours in the afternoon. When I got back, I could not finish all my work before the midnight when the homework was due online. I couldn't do it! Just four hours!

There was a one time my grandmother was very sick. She lives back in our country, so my parents was going back to see her. I had to help them plan and help talk to my mom's work for her to explain the situation. I was planning to go too because I had the spring break, so just fly there and stay a week. I felt so much pressure because I knew I could not finish my studies. When my parents arrived to my country, they called me and said she was doing better. My mother told me don't come. You can come after the semester and then stay longer time. I felt relieved! Well, because my grandmother was better but also I felt relieved because I had time for me. I turned off my phone and told everyone not to call me. I just studied. I didn't leave my front door for five days.

Sometimes I see my friends and family back home on the social media. They post a picture of them playing outside and I feel like I wish I could do that. They have so much freedom. In the U.S., we don't have a freedom here… well, we have a freedom, but it's hard.

Composite: Victoria, Darya, Shen, Ramineh, Akila

Analysis and Interpretation

Time as a construct differs culturally, and neoliberal values encourage people to equate time with money (Sugarman & Thrift, 2020). This notion permeates U.S. society and college as well, where college is run more like a business (Brown et al., 2010; Phillipson, 2009). Subtractive schooling is present here in the reduced access to resources that immigrant ESL students need for their studies, including time to read and understand materials for their courses. Their investment in their education goes beyond the money and time since the expectation that students take time for their studies, and for themselves in an individualistic act. This individualistic way of being and thinking goes against group-oriented ways of being and knowing. This can contribute to culture loss of students because they are forced to shift their values about caring for family when their study time conflicts with family time.

In college, twelve credit hours constitutes a full-time load for students. This is because including homework time, a twelve-credit hour load requires nearly forty hours of time reserved for school. However, the concept of full-time used in school policy does not seem to accurately capture, recognize, or honor the actual number of hours immigrant ESL students must dedicate to their studies. This demonstrates a privileging of native English speakers and those who already possess American cultural ways of knowing and being. Limitations on the time students are afforded in class and for homework, as well as the lack of scaffolded linguistic and cultural support for ESL students throughout their college journey are examples of a lack of resources, which is a characteristic of subtractive schooling (Valenzuela, 1999).

Composite Narrative Six - #westerneducation #therealmarcel

You asked me to choose a photo that shows an important experience for me in college, so this is my photo. I chose this picture of Africa to show my motivation for being in college. This photo shows the colonized nations. Sometimes I feel angry with my ancestors because how could they let this happen to us. I want to teach the young generations in my country, to be strong and independent from the other countries. We don't need the aid of the countries who colonized us before. Even I say this, I know I need the western education. With the western education, you know they gonna take me a lot more serious in my country. I want to be a writer to teach the young kids there. We have to change the minds first to make changes in the country.

In my country, it seems everyone wants to come to the U.S. When I got the opportunity, everyone was very happy for me. And yes, I know I have a good opportunity here to get a western education, but it's like as soon as you get on the airplane, you become a different person. Everyone back home all treat you different now that you are in an American college. They don't even know anything about the school, if it's good or if it's bad. When I go back home, they all want to ask me to bring them things, like iPhone and everything. They just think you are an elite now, a socialite, but I know that's not true.

So anybody get the opportunity to come here, they're going to take it. The other problem is that it means all our people who is more educated left the country. There is like a lack of the educated people in the country now because people leave to get the education but they don't go back. Even I don't know if I can go back permanently now.

Everything is changed. I didn't feel like I changed, but they changed me. I mean, even my friends I used to spend hours in our dorms debating politics and talking about the society, they don't want to debate with me anymore. They just think because I am in a western university, that now I know better than them. But I want them to see me as the real Marcel.

Composite: Marcel, Victoria, Aster, Shen

Analysis and Interpretation

Neocolonialism connects American and other western education with positive concepts, like modernism, success, and prestige (Motha, 2014). In this story, Marcel clearly conveys his frustrations with the effects of that widely held belief among his family and friends back home. Whether he has or has not adopted American culture, he is perceived to be a new person by his family and friends. He expresses a distancing and loss of closeness with his relatives and friends back home. Changing the family dynamics and losing connections with the family is an established effect of culture loss (Wong Fillmore, 2014).

Furthermore, this event can be interrogated for what the situation means for the student's sense of self-identity and the pressures to conform or resist the imposed identity by others. At the intersection of CRT and TESOL, Liggett (2014) points out that identity is not fixed but rather depends on context and a multitude of factors, both symbolic and material. Identity construction of an individual, therefore, must be understood as a relational event, shaped by systemic forces that mold what is possible for the individual.

Over time it is possible for these neocolonial forces to steer students' identity development toward one of conformity to the dominant norms.

Composite Narrative Seven - #iamsomebody #respect

I moved to the U.S. with my husband and kids. The kids started school and my husband went to work. I just stayed home and took care of the home. When I realized that I couldn't help my family, like I couldn't help my children with their homework, I knew I needed more skills. I asked my husband so that I could take the ESL placement test at Southeastern Community College, but I did not do well. I got below the level to enter the college ESL program. I was very disappointed.

Soon after that I learned that I had a heart problem and I needed a surgery. The doctor said I had to stay in bed for six months to recover. I remember the day I was ready. It was a cold day in the wintertime. I woke up and told my husband, I am ready to get my driver's license and to take the placement test again. He said are you sure you're going to pass it? You haven't had chance to study. Anyways, I did these two things and I got in the ESL class.

You know, my husband used to treat me like I didn't know anything so even he would ask my son but not me, even simple questions. I will not try to be above my husband, but I told him that this is not our country and I can help him. He is not alone. I started to show that I can do things as I passed my classes. College English really changed myself. Now, I feel like I am somebody because I can help my family. I don't want to just sit and do nothing.

While I was in school, I got a small part-time job at a school so I could help earn a little money too. I used to watch the kids in the cafeteria and stuff like that, but you know, the teachers and the staff there look at you like you aren't somebody good. They don't respect you. After I graduated, I went back to that school and I got a better administrative job. I help out the students in the classrooms. You know I love being with the kids. Now the teachers see me. They actually fight to have me help them in their classrooms. Finishing college changed me a lot. I can feel proud of my work and now I have the respect of the teachers at the school.

Composite: Kushanneh, Ramineh, Zoey, Charya

Analysis and Interpretation

Cultural assimilation to dominant norms in the U.S. can have benefits for students (Schwartz et al., 2013). One of the changes in the student's cultural ways of thinking and being that was expressed in this critical event is connected to gender roles. In the U.S., it is common for women to work outside the home. Some do so because they want to, but neoliberalism has also increased the pressure for women to take on work outside the home to support their families (LeBaron, 2010). The student expressed that she wanted to help her family, which meant going to college, increasing her English proficiency, and earning an income. These required an increased sense of individualism in the student, who thought of it as changing into "a somebody." Even with this shift in her positionality as a mother and wife, she still mentions that she will not be above her husband and that is not her goal or intention.

Western education and earning money as measures of success are ideas influenced by neocolonial and neoliberal notions of prestige (Brown et al., 2010; Motha, 2014). In this story, the student reported using her educational achievements to leverage respect from colleagues at her workplace, where she transformed from someone seen as not good to someone who is proud of herself. Drawing upon CRT, we can consider the intersection of her race, ethnicity, language background, and job position to explore and challenge why her colleagues may have treated her with less respect before but seemingly did a 180 degree turn after she earned her associate degree, keeping in mind systemic level forces of ideology and policy.

Composite Narrative Eight - #detachedfromfamily #nothappyjuststressed

In this photo, you can see my two beautiful daughters. What a smile! I am so close with my daughters. They teach me a lot of English words too. In this photo, we are at the aquarium. My husband bought a membership and we used to go there every weekend. The girls loved it so much. So this is my happy picture but also my sad picture.

Six years ago, when I first came to Southeastern Community College, I came just to learn English. I needed to get better English so I could get a better job. I didn't plan to take a degree, but you remember I had a bad experience with that professor. She said something bad to me that really hurt me, about my age. Instead of making me sad though, it sparked me to prove she was wrong. My age will not stop me from learning. I was motivated to start my degree in business administration, and now I have it. I do this for my girls, so they know you can do anything if you work hard and to not let another person to put you down.

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It wasn't easy. I felt really lost in the school sometimes, especially I remember in biology lab. I didn't know what I was doing and I thought about quitting. One group of classmates saw me and I think they felt sorry for me, so they invited me to join their group. They really helped me a lot. Without them, I maybe quit. But there was so much stress all the time. Many times I didn't sleep or I didn't eat. Still I somehow gained weight, and so much time on the computer really hurt my eyes. I have to wear glasses now! My doctor told me not to look at a screen for two weeks. I told my professor that, but he did not give me an extension on my assignments. During school, I really felt like I was never happy. I just felt stress all the time.

And all this time I spent in the school, I couldn't spend with my family. It strained my relationships. One night, I was studying and crying before a big test. Eventually my husband forced me to sleep three hours. As for my girls, I couldn't take them to the aquarium every weekend. We stopped going out every week. In this other photo, you can see we are in the park near my house. That's because I still tried to take them out, but we couldn't really go far or for a long time. It was really hard for them and for me. School really detached me from my family.

Composite: Zoey, Aster, Darya, Ramineh, Shen, Charya

Analysis and Interpretation

As mentioned previously, neoliberalism equates the construct of time with money (Sugarman & Thrift, 2020), which can be found throughout U.S. society and its institutes of higher education. Again, we see the expectation that students take time for themselves. Taking the time to study is an individualistic act because it replaces time spent with

family with an action that only that student can do for herself. As Wong Fillmore (2014) reported, one of the most deleterious effects of culture loss related to schooling was the harm done to family structures. In this story, the student expresses sadness over the lack of time she was able to give her kids because of school. For this student, coming from a group-oriented culture where family is prioritized, the necessary change to her way of being in order to succeed in school has hurt her relationship with her kids, which she described as a detachment.

The other shared experience found in this critical event is the toll that education takes upon students' mental, physical, and emotional health. Nearly every student expressed high levels of stress but reported only receiving care for this from family, friends, or co-workers. None said that they received care from the school or professors, and in some cases stated that after telling a professor, they received no help for it. Ideologies and institutions of neoliberalism position "citizens as individual entrepreneurs and consumers whose moral autonomy is measured by their capacity for 'self-care'- their ability to provide for their own needs and service their own ambitions" (Godrej, 2017, p. 907). The focus on neoliberal individualism is connected to healthism, where an individual's choices are viewed as the only factors affecting one's health, ignoring systemic inequities (Godrej, 2017). Not receiving help from school faculty or staff reflects subtractive schooling because it removes access to needed resources and demonstrates a lack of authentic caring for the students (Valenzuela, 1999).

Implications

Neoliberalism and neocolonialism privilege individualism in education, which is founded on White settler ideology in the U.S. (Grande & Anderson, 2017; Spring, 2007). Neoliberal education idealizes and rewards individualism and meritocracy- pulling oneself up by their own bootstraps, ignoring the existence of systemic inequalities (Kubota, 2016b). Furthermore, neoliberal ideals of punitive rules, which hardly consider cultural differences or worse view cultural differences as deficits and deviances, permeate the ideologies that guide policy and process decisions in education (Margonis, 2015). Because the political is personal and the personal is political, it should also be acknowledged that for students, professors' choices and interactions with them are very personal, whether the professor intends them to be or not. As a postsecondary educational institute, and more importantly, as a community, it is important for us to take steps beyond simple intercultural communication, mere acknowledgment, celebration, or tolerance of differences, and basic cultural competency toward increasing educators' critical consciousness and fostering politically aware, authentic caring (Valenzuela, 2008). To this end, I turn next to the implications of my findings which answer:

- How can ESL students' experiences inform community college faculty and staff's awareness in implementing better support for ESL students throughout their educational journeys?

To answer this question, I have penned letters to two member groups at the community college: administrators and content professors. There has always been a special place in my heart for letter-writing. When I was a child, I was encouraged to write

letters to my friends through the mail after the army shipped my family to a new base. I maintained pen pals through the mail even after the internet and email began to grow in popularity and reach. I have found that letter writing has certain advantages. Crafting the letter and addressing it to specific people make the letter more personal because it is specifically created for those people. There is also an automatically understood social norm that a letter requires a response. That's why we have a reply button on our emails, rather than just a compose button. It is in this dialogic spirit that I craft these letters now. I understand that this is not a conventional or traditional way of writing about implications. However, I believe that this is more true to my methodology and my commitments as a critical scholar and activist educator. I argue that this format increases access to the implications of my findings by producing an easier read for administrators and professors in the form of letters, as well as increasing the potential for my research to initiate more immediate changes by starting the discussions and moving toward transformative actions. The increased access and potential for transformative actions are in alignment with my critical and relational commitments.

Letter to College Administrators

Dear Administrators,

I hope this letter finds you and yours well. Thank you for taking the time to consider the findings of my research. I hope that you will be open to engaging in further discussion regarding short-term and long-term changes and enhancements the college can pursue to extend its stated commitments to diversity, inclusion, and equity for students. There are changes that the college should consider to increase inclusivity and equity for

English as a second language (ESL) students who have immigrated to the U.S. To be clear, this student population is distinct from international students, who are attending on student visas and plan on returning to their home countries. Our immigrant population includes students who have moved to the U.S. as children, teenagers, and adults to live and work here. For some of these students, English is an additional language for them, and these are the student voices that are represented in my research. Keep in mind that ESL students are everyone's students. They don't major in ESL. They are nursing students, business students, IT students, and so on. The ESL program supports students in all programs across the college, so everyone in the college is a stakeholder in enhancing the support of our immigrant ESL student population.

I have over fifteen years of experience in postsecondary teaching, but I also have experience in postsecondary administration. I know how thankless administration roles can be at times and that it often feels like people only come to you when there is a fire to put out. I do not wish to approach this from that mindset and only discuss problem areas. The experiences of students are like complex paintings with dynamic light and shade that can change depending on your perspective. My intent is to share with you the rich, immersive stories of immigrant ESL students' experiences and provide a starting place for fruitful discussions on diversity, equity, and inclusion that will help the college achieve its mission of student success. As stated on its website (Southeastern Community College, 2021a), the college's:

Office of Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion is committed to advancing Inclusive

Excellence for improving the well-being and success of all Southeastern

Community College students, Southeastern Community College faculty, Southeastern Community College staff, and Southeastern Community College community members. The Office of Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion works in collaboration with all facets of Southeastern Community College to elevate the acceptance of different ideas, values, beliefs intersectionalities, abilities, and perspectives while also advancing equity as aligned with the College's Mission and Strategic Plan, and help create and sustain a more inclusive and accepting college community.

The college defines its use of DEI related terms as:

- Inclusive Excellence is the process of establishing a welcoming and productive community that engages all its diversity in the service to an organization for internal and external stakeholders. It includes organizational improvements in access/success, climate/culture, education/training, infrastructure/accountability, and community engagement.

- Diversity is defined as all of the characteristics that make individuals unique. It describes the various combinations of group/social differences including race, ethnicity, class, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, country of origin, ability, age, as well as cultural, political, and religious affiliations.

- Equity is the existence of an environment in which policies, practices, and beliefs are grounded in the principle of fairness and acknowledge structural racism, gender disparities, and systemic poverty, while honoring the diversity of

humanity. Equity prioritizes the success of all students and employees to ensure that they have the necessary resources to fulfill their college and career goals.

- Inclusion is the active, intentional, and ongoing engagement with diverse people, practices, and communities that fosters a sense of belonging and respect for the differences and uniqueness that all individuals bring to the learning environment and college community.

I will refer to these specific usages throughout my letter so that we can build upon a shared understanding of these terms.

My dissertation study with immigrant ESL students weaves a multi-layered narrative of their experiences, which have illuminated ways the institute can further its stated mission, values, and education goals to their fullest potential, particularly for our immigrant ESL student community, which is exposed to a larger degree of intersectional marginalization. This deep empirical, qualitative data serve as a complement to SCC's stated focus on quantitative numbers as metrics for the measurement of DEI success (Southeastern Community College, 2021b). If we are to more fully "honor the diversity of humanity" as the equity definition states, then including and valuing qualitative data can help humanize our DEI commitments.

I will include student voices in their own words and pose research-based discussion questions for enhancing systemic support and accountability. Keep in mind that all students' names are pseudonyms. Students shared their experiences with admissions, the ESL program, their degree programs (grades, majors, academic writing, course content, peers), and how school affected other parts of their lives. The through-

line of students' stories has been the importance of personal relationships and belongingness to the college community. The DEI office stated part of its mission is to "elevate the acceptance of different ideas, values, beliefs, intersectionalities, abilities, and perspectives." In alignment with this statement, to better understand the experiences these students have shared, it is important to see it through a lens of collectivist, or group-oriented, cultures in contrast to the more common individualist culture of the U.S. As one student, Aster, explained, "In Ethiopia, the lifestyle is completely different. We all know each other but here it's more individual. We still have rights as individuals in Ethiopia, but we do things as a community/group." As someone who grew up in an individualistic culture, it's difficult sometimes for me to imagine how navigating college would be for someone from a collectivist culture. Another student, Ramineh, gave insight into how a collectivist culture has built-in relationships and support with everyone in the community. In other words, everyone is a resource to you and you are never alone. "My husband was telling me just be careful. They are different from us, so you have to behave completely differently. Because in [Afghanistan], even we're a stranger, if we see each other in the road or street, so we offer them food, whatever we have in our hands. So my husband was telling me never do it here. They don't like." As we learn from students' experiences, we can elevate the acceptance of their perspectives by trying to understand from their points of view and by reflecting on the ways in which our own cultural understandings shape our interpretations or reactions to students' stories of challenges with school and suggestions for how it could be different. In each section, I pose some discussion questions (DQ) for us to consider as a community in future conversations around

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increasing equity and inclusion for ESL immigrant students at Southeastern Community College.

DQ1. How can we provide more language and digital literacy support during the admissions process?

Students' experiences with the admissions process described the college's lack of clarity and efforts to help students whose dominant language is not English. Alana from Brazil shared, "I went to ask about my transcripts and they are not clear, and I come back home frustrated and confusing. I don't want to come back here. I don't wanna study anymore because I feel so confused, like I don't belong here because I don't understand. I don't get the information that I want, so it's not okay for immigrant students who are learning English." If students' first interactions with the college are not with staff, then their first exposure is usually the college website. However, this assumes students have a certain level of digital literacy and access to the internet. Kushanneh explained, "For example, one woman come from Afghanistan, she'd never saw computer in her whole life... Since she don't know how to use computer, since she don't know the language, and she cannot look at here or there [look to the left and right to see what others are doing]... so it is not possible most of the time. I'm not saying that for the majority, but a minority." It is a stark reminder of one's privilege that not all students have had the opportunity to practice their computer literacy. This is especially salient as the college, and society more broadly, move toward more computer-based and self-serve interactions.

The other relevant area during admissions is the ESL language placement test. This is a vital tool for learning what students' English language needs are so that we can

meet those needs equitably (Kuo, 1999). It is part of a larger needs analysis that supports

the college's equity goal: "to ensure that [students] have the necessary resources to fulfill

their college and career goals." ESL students' only comments on the use of the placement

test were about the need for increased advising during admissions. Angela from Ghana

explained, "Like when you enter the room, they have to let you know if you don't pass,

this is where you go... like the paper they gave you, it has to be there for them to read the

thing, like what you have to do inside the testing room… like me, I wasn't thinking, I was

just putting A B A B A B True or False… I said, whatever score I get, they just have to

put me, but if I knew… so yes, they have to alert the students about it before." It may be

useful to re-examine the language and digital literacy support provided around this

important tool to help ensure students get into the courses with all the necessary resources

for their success. The placement is the important foundation of a system that the ESL

program uses to ensure students are always in the best place for their success. In Angela's

case, she entered the ESL program at a low intermediate level but skipped several courses

throughout the program as she learned quickly. It is, therefore, also important to add that

the entire ESL program is built to support students' success, and students' ability to move

through the program is not solely dependent on this one assessment tool.

DQ2. How can we ensure appropriate English language support, as well as socio-

emotional support, is provided to ESL students for their success in college?

Many students also spoke about the importance of ESL courses in helping them

be successful in their content courses, but that they did not know how important until

later. Aster, who recently completed her first year of the nursing program, began in the

low intermediate ESL class. Her message was "Of course, without ESL class I wouldn't be here, that's hundred percent. Now I'm confident to write even page, you know the first time that I wrote my paper you know that, what looks like. It's much better now. I'm confident. There is this culture, when we come here... ESL class is not that much, you know? Just finish it and then go over, and then you know, start another classes. That's completely **wrong**. ESL students, first they have to know the ESL classes, they should take it as a serious class. It's not like just to come in, then write something and just to pass. Really to understand the how to write page, how to... especially the grammar, the reading, pushing that books that when we read, that helps a lot. Now that gives me, I think the patience to read Pearson. So ESL teach a lot of patience, so I want them to take it as serious classes… then understanding without ESL classes, it's hard to be here. This is not easy." Sandy, from El Salvador, also had similar advice for fellow students, "to not be silly and just take the opportunities that present you when they are there because once I was in high school, I didn't take English seriously and then, well, thank God, the college offers ESL classes and I got better, but then that's one thing I would be like, well do it. It is it gonna be something good for you."

The ESL program is the college's primary system for providing English language support to its students. In recent years, there have been changes to admissions, including multiple measures and direct enrollment. Despite neither these nor the Southeastern Community College policy, as posted on their website, including changes around the ESL placement policy or process, the college has proceeded to make changes that reduce the ability of enforcing its ESL placement process, such as changing the test from mandatory

to strongly suggested. When the college reduces the use of tools to gather data on ESL students' needs, it cannot ensure equity according to its own definition: "to ensure that they have the necessary resources to fulfill their college and career goals." Without data, we cannot define what the necessary resources are. In this case, we cannot determine students' language needs and therefore, what language resources the college must provide each student to achieve an equitable environment. By replacing a measurement with which the college can increase equity, with increased student choice, the college reduces its accountability in ensuring equity. In fact, many factors beyond linguistic proficiency can affect ESL students' performance on placements, and ESL students have difficulty in self-assessing their own language proficiency (Coombe, 1992; Krausert, 1991; Shvidko, 2016; Strong-Krause, 2000), and no student in my study expressed a desire to get rid of the placement. Knowing this, if students self-place in a class without a high enough English language proficiency level to succeed, the accountability and responsibility for that students' success should lie with the college, not solely with the student or professor. Placing ESL students into content courses without the proper linguistic and cultural support hurts academic achievement, English learning, and can cause behavioral, economic, and emotional problems (Piller, 2016).

An alternative could be paying for mandatory professional development so that every content professor could earn a certification in TESOL. Then they would have the skills, ability, and knowledge to accurately assess students' language proficiency and provide a variety of appropriate scaffolding for each ESL student in their courses so that they could understand the coursework. While this may not be feasible, ESL students do

not stop being ESL when they enter their content courses. They still require linguistic and cultural support from content faculty, but a workshop here and there for faculty is not enough (Garrison-Fletcher, 2019).

As part of this discussion, we can examine ways to create more inclusive policies around language diversity. Leone-Pizzighella and Rymes (2018) argue that there is a de facto English only environment in postsecondary education. Students are expected to operate in English without accommodations. In U.S. K-12 education, federal law (*Lau v. Nichols*) states that students must be instructed in a language they can understand. However, that is not true in college. While a similar policy may not be viewed as feasible, we can reflect on current policies. For instance, the college's definition of diversity specifies "race, ethnicity, class, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, country of origin, ability, age, as well as cultural, political, and religious affiliations." However, "language(s)" and "dialect(s)" are noticeably missing from this list. By including these in the definition, the college can be more inclusive and honor the linguistic diversity of its community. Another argument can be made for revising the words to "including but not limited to" in order to show openness to more forms of diversity. While listing specific identities can help increase the accountability of the college in its DEI endeavors, creating an exclusive list can lead to a reduction in inclusivity.

DQ3. How can we address some of the challenges that ESL students face in their degree programs?

Some of the challenges students reported during their degree program were in relation to grades, course content, and peers. Though these are common aspects of just being a student, when you grew up in a different culture with a different system, school policies and interactions with faculty or classmates may not always be understood in the same way. As Shen, a graduate of Southeastern Community College, phrased in response to a grading policy he viewed as unfair, "Why would the school do that to us? So I feel so badly." In American culture, there is a phrase "it's not personal," which is commonly used when following rules or policies but for many of our immigrant ESL students, especially those from a collectivist culture, having caring relationships (Valenzuela, 1999) is more important than the grades.

Let's start with a discussion on grading policies. I also went through some pretty tumultuous years in my undergraduate experience connected to grades, so I empathize with students. While the school may not equate grades to students' worth, it can be felt that way by the students. Shen's biggest advice was to consider alternative assessments over time that could reduce the high stakes pressure of exams and perhaps give a better picture of students' real abilities. "Off the top of my mind, not just for ESL, for every courses in college in the U.S. will remove all exams from the syllabus, no exam. Okay, no exam because why? So we should only do homework and take quizzes and writing essays, do presentations, but no exam because exam gives the student too much pressure and you're not taking only one class. You have to study for all those classes and exam's

like one time thing. The student can fail or pass, it doesn't say anything about the student." We must use assessments to know if we are successful in helping students meet the student learning outcomes of a course. The use of more formative assessments that check how students are learning throughout a lesson, rather than summative assessments that check what a student learned afterwards, could be a policy worth exploring in further discussion. A focus on how students are learning allows for adjustments to lessons to be made more immediately and can increase equitable support for students.

As part of this discussion, let's also examine policies and processes around curriculum in relation to Southeastern Community College's definition of inclusion. "Inclusion is the active, intentional, and ongoing engagement with diverse people, practices, and communities that fosters a sense of belonging and respect for the differences and uniqueness that all individuals bring to the learning environment and college community." How inclusive is the school curriculum? For example, students' main choices to fulfill general education history requirements are Western civilization, world history, or U.S. history. Two of the three main choices are western-centric. Ramineh commented on her history class, "It's about American history 121. Professor's so nice, even though I'm not good because I don't know much about American history." In recent years, where "representation matters" is seen and heard frequently throughout our communities on and offline, let's have a conversation about how inclusivity in our curriculum can be increased (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Paris & Alim, 2017). When students have the opportunity to share and learn more about each other's histories and backgrounds, it opens a new door for critical thinking and empathetic learning, which can

"foster a sense of belonging and respect for the differences and uniqueness" of our immigrant ESL students. Ramineh says it well, "It's good when you start talking about your story, about your culture. I really feel good. Like, I feel I'm trying to explain it for others. I wanted to show my beautiness of my cultures to other people. So whenever it happens with me, I really feel good to explain it with other people and share my cultures and when I share, so most other people know what's going on in this culture. So it's good experience for me. I feel good." A large and ever-growing body of literature expounds upon the importance of culturally sustaining pedagogy for students in minoritized communities (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2017). This would be another great related topic we could explore together in reflecting on our curriculum choices.

DQ4. How can we support ESL students at school to increase support for their socio-emotional health and reduce negative effects in other parts of their lives?

Southeastern Community College's Office of DEI also states that part of its commitment is "improving the well-being and success of all Southeastern Community College students". Increasingly, college and well-being do not go hand in hand. In the midst of the COVID-19 global pandemic, many institutions, including Southeastern Community College, have increased their use of the terms "self-care" and "well-being" by telling all of us how important it is. However, in my personal experience it has felt more like lip service, wherein I've been told "self-care is so important, but…" and fill in the blank with your choice of task: be at that meeting, send me that report, do x, y, z after work. Our life at Southeastern Community College and at home are interconnected. We are whole people all of the time. Self-care cannot happen only during our time off.

The amount of investment that immigrant ESL students put into their work is astronomical. English is an additional language for them, so the amount of time they spend on any given assignment can be as much as twice the amount of time compared to a non-ESL student. It also means they may need more time during an exam to understand questions and check their written answers. Darya, who immigrated to the U.S. from Iran by herself, paints a vivid picture that immigrant ESL students commonly face. "I start at eight o'clock in the morning and I get out of my room from 11:30 at night. So I'm telling you. I'm not joking, like I just go upstairs to have lunch, sometimes my friend bring lunch for me here, like fruit or something, because I'm sitting here and just working… I can not move. I have 4 classes and three of them is architecture technology, related to my major. One of them is math and oh my God, I have like nine hours homework, like it's a lot. Yeah, so I just, I cannot move. Like in one week, I was like so lazy and say oh my God I'm tired. I get tired so, okay I'm going to grocery today, so for three hours or four hours, I wasn't home. I was gone. I couldn't finish my homework to submit it, like exactly like Sunday 11:59, like just for four hours. It's that busy." What is the toll on students' well-being? Shen shared, "I don't feel happy. You know, I feel tired. I know I will get a good education. I will find a good job, but I don't feel happy. I feel tired every day."

The resulting health issues from the stress that students face are concerning. I'm very happy that the college has included well-being in connection to its definitions of DEI because healthcare and related civil rights areas, like access to healthy foods, can impact students' abilities to concentrate and succeed in school. One of the largest cultural adjustments for immigrant students is with food, and most students comment on their

weight gain due to the larger portion sizes, the higher prices for healthful foods, and the higher amount of processed and fast foods found in the U.S. diet compared to the food cultures found in their native countries. Other serious health issues have also resulted from the long amount of time spent on daily schoolwork, like Ramineh, who developed a problem with her eyes from all the time on the computer with Zoom classes, Canvas work, and homework. Her eye doctor told her that she could not use the computer for a week. Missing a week due to medical issues can put any student behind and can have exponentially adverse effects for ESL students as it could take double the time to catch up. We could discuss the access to healthful foods on our campuses but also curricular changes and other types of support that could help support immigrant ESL students' overall well-being.

As I end this letter, I hope you will be open to continuing action-oriented discussions around these questions. Working together to increase equity and inclusion for immigrant ESL students is one area the college can focus on, which is an important piece of our mission to help all students succeed by providing them the necessary resources. I look forward to scheduling a meeting with you and others in the college to begin pooling our data, multiple and diverse perspectives, lived experiences, and resources to help us become a leader in the space of closing the graduation gap for ESL community college students (Razfar & Simon, 2011).

Kind regards,

Elisabeth

Letter to Content Faculty

Dear Professors,

Thank you for lending me your ear and listening with an open mind. Though you are not English as a Second Language (ESL) professors, you are undoubtedly professors of ESL students. That's because even though they are ESL students, they are first and foremost business students, nursing students, IT students, and so on. The ESL program plays a supporting role to all major programs across the college. What I hope can come from this letter is a series of constructive discussions and opportunities to work together so that we may learn from one another, grow mutually as educators, and improve our relationships with ESL students toward our shared institutional goals and commitments. In this letter, I pose some research-based discussion questions (DQ), which can help provide a starting place and a frame to begin our conversations.

I wish to share a little background relevant to teaching ESL students from my perspective and experience as an ESL educator of over 15 years. Every student, regardless of English language proficiency, learns differently and has individual strengths and weaknesses. When English is not your dominant language and you are immersed in an academic English environment, it can be mentally taxing because the brain must work overtime. More than the spoken or written word, the brain is also taking in nonverbal communications, like body language, gestures, intonation and stress on words, which also must be translated. For example, if a professor uses the intonation and stress of their voice to infer that certain parts of a lecture are more important, these are cues that an ESL student may not catch even if their vocabulary and grammar are strong. Beyond the

verbal and nonverbal communication, there are also differences in culture at a deep level, which can influence interactions between ESL students and their professors, as well as classmates. There are a lot of unspoken rules in the classroom, which are usually learned by growing up in the U.S. education system from childhood. They are usually never explicitly taught to immigrant students because they are so ingrained in Americans that we follow these rules without having to think about them. I want to focus this letter around three areas of critical events that came out of my dissertation research. I will include students' experiences in their words (using pseudonyms) and pose discussion questions that I hope we can use in future action-oriented discussions together as we reflect on ways to jointly enhance our pedagogy and relationships with students.

DQ1. What is the intended lesson versus what is learned?

One finding from my research focuses on students' expectations of their professors and classmates in terms of relationship building. This is influenced by the fact that a majority of our immigrant ESL students come from strongly group-oriented cultures while the U.S. culture more often operates as an individualist culture. This creates many opportunities for intercultural miscommunication to happen, so even when students might say they understand, it doesn't guarantee they really understand and vice versa. We may think that we were super clear or that our reasoning makes logical sense, but that might not be the case, sometimes for language or cultural differences. I would like to briefly define the concept of *authentic caring* (Valenzuela, 1999) and connect it to my research findings. In Valenzuela's research with high school students from a group-oriented culture, there are two important points. First, there is a difference between

schooling and learning: the former being the system or institution while the latter being the act of gaining new knowledge. Secondly, she found a misunderstanding between teachers who felt students did not care about their education and students who expected the school and teachers to show care for them first. The students cared about learning but were hesitant to show care for schooling when the school did not seem to care about them. When students felt that the school and teachers cared about them, they were more engaged and successful in school.

Keep this relationship in mind as you hear Ramineh's story about what she felt as a punitive action by her professor. Ramineh's final course average was 89.9, so she asked her professor if she could earn one tenth of a point but was told, "if I give you this point, you will get used to it… That's why I'm giving you a B so that you work more hard." Think about this from the professor's point of view, and then think about it from Ramineh's. She was taught math by a completely different method in Afghanistan. She had to learn new math methods, as well as math-specific English. She invested countless extra hours in the math lab during the semester reworking every assignment, time away from her family and children. She said, "I'm not a teenager in high school, that I would expect more and I get lazy, you know? I'm an adult, so the reason she gave me was not a good reason for me." From her perspective, she had worked tirelessly and the professor thought she was lazy. The lesson she learned after this experience was, in her words, "about the professors because I know it's not a problem with math. It was with the professor because I did my work in math, but the professor whatever she did with me, it was her choice." For Ramineh, it seems that this was not so much about the grade but

more about the relationship that she thought existed or should exist between professors and students. To contrast her experience with math, she also shared her experience with a history professor. Ramineh said, "he's so nice, even though I'm not good because I don't know much about American history. I'm not that much good but he's always helping me, like when it comes one or two points, he say don't worry. You just do your work, if you needed one or two points, maybe five points I can help you. So now I'm getting more interested in reading history. I like it. He is making me more confident about it." For most degree plans, students take either U.S. history or western civilization to fulfill their credits. For people like me who grew up with U.S. history every year of K-12, I had more background knowledge and understanding of the social context of the U.S. when I took these courses years ago in undergrad. From Ramineh's story, it seems her professor recognized that she did not have that same starting place going into the course and he offered to work with her. Rather than viewing this as free points, it helped engage Ramineh, making her more interested in the topic and encouraged her to work harder in the course. It wasn't about the points, but about the relationship and understanding she felt from her professor.

My intention is to open a dialogue here, not to prescriptively tell colleagues what to do. I believe the questions "what was the intended lesson, and what was the lesson learned?" deserve thoughtful discussion through an intercultural lens. These questions also remind us to think about our craft and our materials from others' perspectives in ways that could lead to higher student achievement and persistence.

DQ2. What are teaching faculty's roles in building community at the community college?

Some cultures tend to be more group-oriented while other cultures are often more focused on personal choices and individual achievements (Konsky et al., 2000). It's not the case that dominant collectivist cultures don't appreciate individuality, but they are more socialized to think from a group perspective, and vice versa for more individualistic cultures. Individualism means people expect to take care of themselves and their immediate families, but collectivism means people feel they are part of a group and therefore, expect to loyally care for the group and be cared for by the group (Konsky et al., 2000). Students in my study repeatedly commented on the lack of community they felt, especially when compared to what they had expected to find. They often used the words "alone," "by myself," and "on my own" to describe how they felt in their degree program courses.

One immigrant ESL student, Victoria, remembered that "after I'm done with the ESL, it's just different for me because I thought all the classmate will say 'Oh, yeah. What is your culture? Where were you from?' They will not talk about 'What's your experience of being here? You know, like what's in your thoughts of why you're coming in here?" Some students mentioned feeling like their American classmates or professors seemed unfriendly because they came to class, took the lecture, and then left, only speaking to people they perhaps knew from outside the class. Other students wondered if it was because native born Americans may be uncomfortable around immigrant students, who had different cultures. I encourage us educators to discuss the salience of these

thoughts and how they relate to students' overall class experience, well-being, and academic achievement, especially because I didn't ask them directly about friendly relationships during my interviews. In fact, when I asked, "Can you tell me about a fun or positive experience you've had in your classes?" Yana, who had one more semester left to graduate, said, "Not yet because… well, I didn't know if that is because the kind of major that I taking is more focused on man. Okay, well, all the professor are men. I didn't receive any class by women in that field and they are so direct. Well, I was so accustomed to share some presentations, introduction each other, for example, in ESL classes like that you can say your major. But when I get the first class for my major, he said, "well, you know, you will know each other during the semester and saying we start the class blah, blah, blah. And that, that's it. We don't do any presentation or something about self-presentation. Was so direct. That's it." She associated positive experiences in class with building relationships and getting to know each other.

What is the teaching faculty's role in fostering relationships among and with students in the classroom? The college's faculty handbook does not address this question. This is an important discussion we can have that can help us work together towards the college's mission of increasing student success. We know there is a connection between feelings of belonging and students' persistence in college (Walton & Cohen, 2007). When it comes to creating community at college, what do students believe is our responsibility as the professors? What do we as professors believe is the students' responsibility? These are important discussions we can have to communicate more clearly our expectations of one another, to discover where those opinions come from,

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what cultural expectations we hold, and to question whether there is a better way we can engage with one another that can help students succeed in college.

DQ3. How can teaching faculty increase positive representation of students' identities throughout the college curriculum to increase student engagement and success?

In ESL courses, we often ask students to write or talk about their lived experiences, especially about their rich cultures. They are encouraged to use critical thinking skills to draw connections between their experiences and the materials in the class. I asked every student in my study whether they had had any opportunities to incorporate their family's culture into their work in the courses of their degree programs. They overwhelmingly said "no" or "not yet." It hasn't been because they don't want to. In fact, they recognize it as a positive experience that they wish they could have, as Ramineh shared, "It's good when you start talking about your story about your culture for me. I really feel good. Like, I feel I'm trying to explain it for others. I wanted to show my like beautiness of my cultures to other people. So whenever it happens with me, I really feel good to explain it with other people and share my cultures and when I share, so most like other people know what's going on in this culture. So it's good experience for me." Akila also shared that she told her history professor she was from Egypt when the course got to the part about her country, but the professor didn't ask her to share anything in class about her culture. When immigrant students' lived experiences are not represented and utilized in the classroom, they learn that their worldviews and perspectives are not important for learning (Burke et al., 2008), but their funds of knowledge, which are their knowledges rooted in their families' cultural practices and everyday experiences, can be

invaluable to the learning environment and for everybody in the classroom (González et al., 2006).

In other cases, students chose to talk about issues from their native cultures when they had the ability to choose whatever topic they wanted for a project. Unfortunately though, it seemed that in each of these cases, it was in the context of a problem-solution project. This means that the only time they were able to share something about their culture was to discuss the problems that existed, rather than be able to make more positive connections between their culture and the class topics. It also meant that in the case of oral communication courses, their classmates only heard presentations about these other cultures through a lens of problems, which in itself could be problematic if this is one of their few firsthand exposures to these cultures because it could lead to unconscious negative associations with these cultures and peoples. In my personal experience, growing up as a fourth-generation Chinese-American in the U.S. South, I went to public school and learned U.S. history every year, but never about Chinese-American history, and I never realized the disservice I received because of it until I was an adult. It contributed to my internalized shame for looking Asian and the rejection of my family heritage because no one who looked like me was ever included as having an important role in society or history (Chan, 2016). Though acknowledgement that representation matters has been increasing in society, we often see both positive and negative messaging on the news when it comes to immigrants. As educators, we have a privileged place in society to teach about past and current examples of immigrants' contributions to our respective fields and to society.

As part of the college's DEI plan, faculty are being encouraged to learn about culturally responsive teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1995). This includes increasing representation of students' identities in our class materials because representation matters, but it is more than that. It is about shifting one's philosophy of teaching so that students' and our own cultural references are important at all levels of planning, teaching, assessing, advising, and so on. We educators must clearly explain our high expectations of students, and at the same time ensure that our expectations are reasonable, taking into consideration students' whole selves, not just their student identities. A great place for us to start discussions could be with common scenarios we encounter with students and then reflecting together on how we interpret them, why we interpret them that way through our cultural lenses, and how to better teach and communicate with students from diverse backgrounds. In these discussions, we can also discuss what it means to teach and learn within the context of culture and what we could achieve in terms of student success by shifting to a culturally responsive model (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2017) where teaching becomes less lecture or teacher-centered and more student-centered, where students are encouraged to take ownership of their learning while teachers become facilitators, rather than holders or givers, of that learning. These are certainly non-traditional perspectives of what schooling should look like, but when data consistently indicate the existence of an opportunity gap and graduation gap (Razfar & Simon, 2011) between students from different ethnic, racial, cultural, or linguistic backgrounds, then we can't keep doing the same traditional things and expect different results.

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Immigrant students understand that they have to make adjustments to live in a new country and attend a college here, but if it is always the one group, especially the group with less social and academic capital, who is always the one accommodating and changing, there is something inherently one-sided, or biased, in that scenario. In our nation, so defined by immigrants and the imagery of melting pots, we must acknowledge that part of our and our students' identities and then reflect on what that means for the ways we relate, communicate, teach, and learn with and from one another. As Darya put it, "the main thing is students to be happy." The findings of my research indicate that this statement doesn't mean make the classes easy and give students A's for mediocre work, but rather highlights the importance of building caring relationships with one another as a community- a community that will welcome us, accept us, and recognize us as full human beings with diverse backgrounds and complex lives that affect and are affected by what happens in school. That goes for students and us as educators. I look forward to engaging with those of you who are interested in learning more about our students' experiences and discussing actions we can take to expand the meaning of *community* in community college.

Warmest wishes and be well,

Elisabeth

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have addressed both of my research questions. In my analysis related to my research questions, I explored both subtractive schooling (Valenzuela, 1999) and culture loss (Wong Fillmore, 2014) in students' critical events. I found a

through-line of culture loss in relation to the dominance of individualism, which students have adopted to navigate the systems of the community college, which are influenced by neoliberalism and neocolonialism. In addition to this, students have experienced the effects of subtractive schooling, such as the loss of access to important resources in the college and a lack of authentic caring relationships with faculty and peers. I used letter writing to respond to my second research question about how college faculty and administration can use the findings of my critical narrative inquiry. In the letters, I have invited both to a series of ongoing, action-oriented discussion groups in order to co-create action steps and implement them to help make the college environment more equitable for immigrant ESL students. In my final chapter, I will summarize my study, discuss the significance, limitations, and strengths of my study, and then propose future research topics.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

I started this dissertation by making the case that we should ask how education makes us feel. Education should help us understand how society works and help us explore our relationships within it. It has the potential to be transformative but in both positive and negative ways. Thus, my critical narrative inquiry asked two research questions:

1. What are the most meaningful/transformational experiences immigrant ESL students have in navigating their community college experiences in their content courses?

2. How may those experiences relate to the concepts of subtractive schooling (Valenzuela, 1999) and culture loss (Wong Fillmore, 2014)?

Significance of Study

As I discussed in Chapter 2, a critical examination of postsecondary U.S. educational institutes has identified the strong influence of neoliberal and neocolonial systems (Apple, 2004; Motha, 2014; Rhoades & Slaughter, 1997; Saunders, 2007). These systems are the norms, the status quo; they often go unquestioned because they are accepted as what education is and should look like. However, when data repeatedly show an opportunity gap and a graduation gap (Razfar & Simon, 2011) across time and contexts, we have to look at broader, macro-level, systemic causes, not micro-level finger-pointing that places the blame on individuals for not having grit. These neoliberal and neocolonial notions are interwoven into aspects of American culture and the

American education system in ways that privilege dominant White middle-class norms (Mirza, 2009; Spring, 2007). Critical race theory, which can be used to challenge these ideologies, is appropriate for exploring how to transform education. My study expands the use of CRT in the field of TESOL, where the body of research on race and TESOL has essentially been growing since 2006 (e.g., Chan & Coney, 2020; Curtis & Romney, 2006; Kubota & Lin, 2006; Liggett, 2014; Motha, 2014).

These norms affect how immigrant ESL students adapt to the educational system as they navigate within it, learning what is considered successful behaviors and mindsets. At the primary and secondary levels of education, the educational systems can act as subtractive forces (Valenzuela, 1999), contributing to culture loss (Wong Fillmore, 2014). This loss can create problems for immigrant students and their relationships to their families and communities when the students choose to or are forced to reject or replace their family's cultural norms, values, or beliefs. However, the body of research on subtractive schooling and culture loss has been concentrated at the primary and secondary levels of education. Therefore, my study which focuses on community college students brings a new perspective by exploring how subtractive schooling and culture loss can look in adult populations. The systemic pressures in postsecondary schooling can lead to culture loss in the form of a devaluation and loss of collectivist ways of being and knowing, replaced by strongly neoliberal or neocolonial individualist ways of being and knowing. This opens the door to an additional perspective on diversity, equity, and inclusion, which college faculty and staff should consider in both policy and practice.

Not much research is specific to immigrant ESL community college students. Most ESL community college studies are not disaggregated by immigrant status, and likewise, most research studies about immigrant ESL students were done in primary or secondary school levels. In fact, ESL community college students have been under-represented and under-researched in the current body of academic literature (Bunch et al., 2011; Conway, 2009; David & Kanno, 2020; Park, 2019; Teranishi et al., 2011). Since community colleges in the U.S. enroll high numbers of immigrant ESL students (David & Kanno, 2020), this student population's needs must be better understood. My study provides a deep dive into the lived experiences of immigrant ESL students in community colleges, expanding this area of research.

Summary of Methods

During my critical narrative inquiry, I conducted a series of unstructured interviews with immigrant students who were former ESL students at the same community college. The students ranged in age, native language(s), native country, ethnicity, race, sex, gender, marital status, how long they had lived in the U.S., and how long it had been since they completed the college's ESL program. In all seventeen students agreed to participate in the study, but not every student was able to participate in all rounds of interviews. Three rounds of interviews were conducted over Zoom during the 2020-2021 academic school year: one in September, one in November, and one in March. In the second round of interviews, students participated in a photo prompt activity, in which they shared photos that represented meaningful experiences from their time in college and then told the stories they associated with those photos. All the

interviews were conducted over Zoom due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Zoom recording tool and auto-transcript tool were used to record the interviews. I then used the audio recordings to go through the auto-generated transcripts in order to make corrections to the transcripts. These transcripts were used with my researcher journal, memos, and reflections to revisit students' stories and to explore the answers to my research questions.

To better understand what students' narratives mean for my research questions, I used critical event narrative analysis (Webster & Mertova, 2007) to identify critical events. One reason for choosing this form of analysis was to avoid coding and retrieval approaches, which could decontextualize data, lose complexity of meanings, and distance the researcher from the data (St. John & Johnson, 2000). Critical events change the storyteller in meaningful ways, usually by challenging one's beliefs or behaviors, and thus the story of the critical event persists over time, maintaining the most important parts of the story. These critical events were then supported by identifying like events and other events. Not all critical events contain the same defining markers, but generally can be identified with some of the following characteristics (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 83):

- Exist in a particular context, such as formal organizational structures or communities of practice
- Impact on the people involved
- Have life-changing consequences
- Are unplanned

- May reveal patterns of well defined stages

- Are only identified after the event

- Are intensely personal with strong emotional involvement

The like events possess the same characteristics of critical events, but they are experienced by others, thus supporting the importance and relevance of the critical events. Other events are not critical events but happen at the same time as the critical event and within the same context. They lend support and understanding to the critical event, sometimes taking the form of anecdotes.

Regarding validity and reliability, I used Webster and Mertova's (2007) alternative criteria, which they developed from Huberman's (1995) measures of "access, honesty, verisimilitude, authenticity, familiarity, transferability and economy" (p. 94). I increased access by using rich descriptions, a consistent filing system for storing data, and a less formal writing style and approach to reporting my data. I addressed honesty by checking with students whether their stories were shared accurately. I used critical event narrative analysis to strengthen verisimilitude, authenticity, and economy. I used reflexive practices to reduce issues with familiarity. I also used the rich descriptions to increase transferability.

Additionally, I considered ethics at each stage of my critical narrative inquiry and analysis. This included informed consent, honesty and trust, intervention and advocacy, harm and risk, and privacy, confidentiality and anonymity (Webster & Mertova, 2007). Before the interviews, students gave their consent per the IRB forms. I had an established, trusting relationship with the students because we had been in class together

before. I was open with students about the study and shared my own personal experiences. No interventions were required and no harm was reported though harm and risks were considered, and I reminded students they could opt out at any time. I increased privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity through the use of pseudonyms and composite narratives.

Summary of Findings and Implications

What have I learned about how immigrant ESL students feel in college through my critical narrative inquiry? On one hand, they feel tired, stressed, and alone, coping with the loss of having a community who proactively supports its members. Having to rewire themselves to operate in a primarily individualistic society and college environment, they spend time wondering why it is often difficult to build bonds with peers and professors. They notice the changes in themselves as they "stop fighting" or "have to accept" the way things are. With an inflexible, individualistic system, there is a necessity for them to change themselves. On the other hand, it makes it easier for them to navigate within the system if they match the system (Schwartz et al., 2013). As they take on more individualistic characteristics, like carving out time for their studies, they must negotiate their identity within their family and friend relationships too. For some, this has meant feeling pride as they come into "being their own person," more independent and feeling more capable. For others, it has created divisions that they feel sad about.

What can we do about it, as college administrators and educators? As they say, it takes a village. We all have a role and can help make the college environment more inclusive for students and colleagues (Garrison-Fletcher, 2019). For immigrant ESL

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students, we can begin by committing to a series of action-oriented discussions with dedicated resources to back up the outcome of those discussions. The discussions should have broad representation, so students should absolutely be invited to the discussions. For each discussion, we should co-create a set of conversation norms so that we can create consistency and more openness to difficult conversations. Reflection steps should be built in so that each conversation is not a bubble in itself. I suggested discussion questions each for administrators and for content professors. As I hope for this project to be co-created with shared responsibility and accountability, these questions, based on my research, are intended to jumpstart discussions and actions, not limit them. As the series continues, the community can and should expand the discussions while keeping in mind that students' experiences should be centered, intercultural lenses should be applied, and inclusivity should be our shared goal.

Limitations

Narrative inquiry requires a long time commitment, which increases the chance for attrition. My study was conducted over the course of one academic year, and of the seventeen who originally agreed to participate, two students withdrew after the first interview round due to time commitments and three students were only able to participate in two rounds of interviews. I invited students from various ethnicities, languages, countries of origin, age, sex, gender, marital status, parental status, and stages of their college journey. If I had more students participate, especially with other cultural and linguistic backgrounds, additional perspectives could have been included. For example, if some students from more individualistic oriented cultures had participated, I wonder how

those students' experiences would compare and contrast to the ones included. Additionally, students had the choice to share what they wanted and to hold back anything they did not want to share. This means we can only understand parts of their rich experiences.

Narrative inquiries are sometimes critiqued for their susceptibility to interpretations (Kim, 2016). In fact, "narratives are interpretative, and in turn, require interpretation" (Riessman, 1993, p. 22). The use of critical event narrative analysis with its use of like and other events to support critical events helps to address this critique. Moreover, narrative inquiry can also be critiqued for having findings that are not generalizable, in large part because academia often privileges positivist, generalizable data (Kim, 2016). However, data collected through narrative inquiry can be a source of deep understanding. For example, knowing how and why students may interpret a school's message or policy in different ways can help decision makers get to the root of misunderstandings, especially based on linguistic or cultural differences.

Originally, I played with the idea of having classroom observations, which could have been a source of other events that supported students' critical events, or which may have opened alternative interpretations of students' narratives. However, because of COVID-19 that became an unlikely option. Conducting all interviews over Zoom had some advantages, like automatic recording and auto-generated transcripts, but at the same time, there is a difference in communication when you are physically in the room with somebody. Observation of body language, for example, becomes more limited in the Zoom environment, and non-existent when students could not use their webcams.

I wrestled with the definition of culture, since it was such a central piece to my study, findings, and analysis. In the middle of my PhD journey, I had the amazing opportunity to present at and attend the National Women's Studies Association convention in San Francisco with friends from my women and gender studies course, where I focused on critical and feminist theories in relation to TESOL. The atmosphere of the conference and association were very different from ones I had attended in the past. People felt more approachable and proactively offered help to one another. In most presentations, the chairs were set in a circle with the presenters sitting among participants. At the end of one presentation, the presenter asked me about my research. I said my interests were in examining the intersection of language, race, and culture-based discrimination. She asked me how I defined *culture* because it could be many things. I remember not having a really clear answer to the question but coming away from the experience knowing that I needed to know the answer to that question. One of the first ways I learned to think about culture was the metaphor of the iceberg, where the culture we can see, like food, dress, and holidays, is just the tip of the iceberg (SOPTV, 2017). The majority of what constitutes culture is deep culture, present beneath the surface, harder to define, and often only visible when we break a cultural norm. These hidden aspects can further be categorized into unspoken rules, such as concepts of time and attitudes toward elders, and unconscious rules, like the concept of the self or patterns of group decision making. The more I reflected on deep culture, for example, within the culture of schooling, what it meant to me personally and for my research, I came upon my own definition in the form of a question: "What is culture if not your relationships?"

Meaning is negotiated through relationships, so culture is learned through socialization and self-introspection. It is dynamic and fluid though it has traditions and customs. The culture of schooling then is determined by the relationships we experience at school. The definition of culture is fluid and depends on context as much as it does on the teller and listener of each story. My final choice of defining culture as our relationships to one another at a deep cultural level could be critiqued for its unconventionality and derivation.

A glaring limitation of my study is that the entire study was conducted in English. This was mainly due to my own limitations as an English dominant language user. Speaking in one's native language versus an additional language is different. Speakers' personalities can change based on the language they are using (Luna et al., 2008). There are words that do not translate perfectly from one language to the next, so it has the potential to limit students' ability to fully express themselves and to convey their full lived experiences to me. This also opens the possibility that misunderstandings due to language or culture occurred during my research.

Intersubjectivity and smoothing are also possible limitations (Webster & Mertova, 2007) because as a listener, and as a participant in constructing these narratives with students, I have my own blind spots that could come into play and lead to cherry picking information that favors my own biases. My biases may unconsciously make certain stories or incidents appear more important or critical, as well as mean that I may overlook something that was very meaningful to a student. As an ESL educator of over fifteen years, I also have an established way of understanding the U.S. postsecondary

institutions. Though I am open to new understandings and constant reflection, it still means that a bias of mine about the workings of education could have led to misinterpreting some students' experiences. My cultural lens and lived experiences as an Asian American woman with a higher education and parents with higher education degrees also affect how I attempt to understand students' perspectives. Through this study, I came to accept that I and my nuclear family are more bicultural than I had previously realized. In my reflections, I realize my more dominant individualistic culture struggles to fully understand what it means to think, feel, and behave from a group-oriented perspective.

Furthermore, a potential limitation is with empowering relationships. My positionality as a professor creates an unequal, hierarchical power dynamic between me and students. I tried to mitigate this by only including students who had completed their ESL courses entirely so that there was a zero possibility of them ever being my student again in the future. I also reflected on the ways a reader could interpret the institution, whether unjustly more positive or negative, based on the way I described it. Just as students have both positive and negative critical events, I believe that I included both fairly to provide an appropriate representation.

I have attempted to deal with limitations through cycles of reflective and reflexive work, journaling, discussing, and thinking. My own understanding or analysis of this study may be different in the future. We have to remember that these findings are not meant to be generalizable. The purpose is to understand these students' experiences more deeply. The findings and their implications must be understood within the current context

and as only one part of the bigger picture of immigrant ESL community college students' full lived experiences.

Strengths of the Study

Narrative inquiry is stronger when close relationships exist between the researcher and study participants. This is partly related to the fact that narrative analysis involves equally both the researcher and participants in telling the stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). One strength of my study was that I had established relationships with each student, the longest being six years. I took the fact that a student from six years ago would remember me and agree to participate in my study as a sign that the bond we had formed in and out of the classroom was significant. Every interview was truly a joy for me to reconnect with former students, learn about what they did after completing their ESL coursework, see their accomplishments, empathize with their struggles, and to be able to tell them how proud I am of them.

This critical narrative inquiry is firmly grounded. It aligns with critical race theory, which states the stories and counterstories of people of color should be both valued and acknowledged for their unique perspectives that shine light on their lived experiences and how they navigate oppressive forces in their societies (Kim, 2016). The narrative form of this study allowed students to convey their stories in their own words. As my findings indicated a lack of opportunities for them to do so throughout their academic journeys, this study provided an outlet and a space for them to express themselves in new ways.

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Another strength of my study was my professional background and experience. I have been a TESOL educator for over fifteen years. Most of my experience has been in postsecondary education. I have spent nearly half of those years in a community college environment with students from primarily immigrant backgrounds. With my inside knowledge of the education system and the context and environment of many of the students' stories, I was well positioned to understand the references and context of their narratives.

Future Studies

Like with most research, I gain more questions than answers. There are a number of different areas I have thought about exploring more as I have reflected and continue reflecting on students' experiences. Students' critical events often involved their surrounding peers. I was surprised how often this idea came up about friends at school. I don't believe that during my undergraduate experiences that I ever thought about my school friends as part of my education or learning experiences. I think there was a clear division in my mind. Teachers, classwork and lectures, homework, and so on were part of education. I also had friends at school, but they weren't part of my education. We may have studied together sometimes, but having friends was adjacent to schooling and education for me. I did not expect to have a learning community in every class that I went to. I expected not to talk to others in class, and to just attend and leave, like many of the students in my study described American students doing. This is perhaps a strong indication of my individualist culture. As a graduate student, learning about second language acquisition and communicative language learning, we did a lot of group work in

class and it was more than just learning the content, but we were learning how to teach in a communicative language approach though we were not learning language. We learned how to teach through building small communities in our classes because that was the key to communicative language teaching. Somehow as I was learning in this way, I compartmentalized that in my mind as part of ESL teaching, but now I see that it can be beneficial for students, period. I had a cultural anthropology teacher twenty or so years ago in undergrad who was one of the few professors that really engaged students in the material and with each other. Her class is so memorable because of the relationships she had us build in the class and the fact that she planned lessons in which we participated in the concepts she was teaching us, rather than just listening to lectures. As Garrison-Fletcher (2019) stated, it is the responsibility of the whole community college to support ESL students, but a couple workshops are not enough. I would love to do an action research study that takes professional development a step further and builds upon this study.

I would also like to explore the aspect of needing permission that appeared in some critical events. As students had to transform into more individualistic ways of being and knowing, they seemed to seek a form of permission from a mother or a husband. I wonder what was it about the granter of the permission that made them think to give the permission? What are the students feeling about needing that permission or maybe they don't even recognize it in that way? Maybe they feel something akin to shame or guilt because they do not feel okay taking time for themselves. I would like to see if other students had these experiences but didn't share it in the same way that Ramineh, Senalat,

and Kushanneh did. On top of this question, it also shows the potential influence of sex and gender roles on the students' interactions at school and with their families, especially in these three students' stories related to permission. The males in my study, like Shen or Marcel, did not have similar stories about seeking or receiving permission to take time for themselves.

Aside from focusing on the students' perspectives, I also hope to engage in a series of dialogs with administration and content teaching faculty around the discussion questions posed and other items that they feel are important to bring up. I hope it is a longitudinal project that can be co-created as a participatory action research study with colleagues that can shift the culture of the school environment to be more inclusive, especially at a deep cultural level. This opens an opportunity for a participatory action research project to explore and document how to make systemic changes for greater equity and inclusion of immigrant ESL students in community college.

Final Thoughts

Though nothing is ever really final, and I hope that this study is just one step in the direction for enhancing immigrant ESL students' experiences in community college, there is a point where you have to stop writing and turn it in, saying to yourself, "This is the best writing that I can do, at this time." Credit goes to my former professor Dr. Graham Crookes from my master's program for this piece of wisdom, which has been a guiding principle of my writing process. Kim (2016) also states that there should not be an end all, be all finality at the end of a narrative inquiry. There is always further

reflection and reflexivity that can extend and reshape the concepts and lessons, especially as they are applied to future endeavors.

In the end, I am reflecting on what an introspective journey and process this dissertation adventure has been. I feel that narrative inquiry as "my partner" (Kim, 2016) has allowed me to engage in three dimensions of narrative inquiry: the looking inward and outward of ourselves, the looking backward and forward in time, and place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), which I have done through my own critical lens. In looking inward and backward, I have grown as a scholar, educator, and person. I have been able to better define my own theoretical moorings, anchored by commitments to criticality, relationality, and intersectionality. In exploring the concepts of subtractive schooling and culture loss, I have reflected more on my own schooling and family dynamics than I ever have before. I have realized how bicultural my nuclear family has always been and better understand some of the intercultural tensions that have been common in the relationships of my family. For example, in my family, my mother, siblings and I as American-born Chinese have always had an easier time understanding and communicating with each other than with my Hong Kong-born father, who immigrated to the U.S. for college. Through the course of this critical narrative inquiry, as I have reflected on immigrant ESL students' experiences and interpretations of those experiences, I have re-examined my own deep culture of individualism and questioned what it must have been like for my father all these years to have come to the U.S. from a collectivist culture and then be outnumbered in his own family by stubborn, strong-headed individualistic children. In countless instances, my father would say "because

everyone knows" or "you should just know without me having to tell you." Looking at it through a lens of individualist versus collectivist communication styles, it makes much more sense to me now. It also helps me understand why there is a dynamic I've always found strange in my family, in which my father tells my mom to tell us kids anything that he wants to tell us. His English has never been a problem, but I believe he learned quickly that his American-born Chinese children received the same message differently if it came from his American-born Chinese wife. Better understanding the bicultural environment of my own family has led to new ways of communicating and understanding my parents' love languages.

The years that I spent trying to be accepted as an unhyphenated American, the years of rejecting my Chinese heritage and identity, which should have been sources of strength and not shame, the distance that not knowing the culture, history, or language placed between me and my parents and grandparents... these are all part of my personal experience with culture loss. Schooling was not the only contributing factor, but it played a large role in my socialization and shaped what I thought was normal. In 2022, my family, including all four siblings, returned to Memphis for the holidays. We had not been together as a family like that since 2013 at my grandma's funeral. I lost my last living grandparent, my other grandmother, in 2022. As a family, we visited all four grandparents' gravesites though it was not the time for the grave cleaning day. As a child, we would always visit my great-grandfathers' graves at Easter. I would take my grandma to Wal-Mart, and she would pick out some pink plastic flowers. We went to the graves and planted those flowers at the gravesites. My grandma would say "Happy Easter." I

always thought everyone did that at Easter, and it wasn't until I was an adult that I learned there was a Chinese holiday for grave cleaning. This was another reflection on the bicultural nature of my family. I wanted to expand our ceremony this year. Each grandmother had taught me how to make a Chinese bun or dumpling, which I helped the family make. I brewed jasmine tea and filled a thermos. When we went to the cemeteries, we shared these with my grandparents for the first time. I kept thinking about all the stories they had to tell that I will never hear. I spent so many years not knowing how important the culture was and that it was a part of me. These reflections help drive me to consider the experiences of my immigrant ESL students and their children.

In looking outward and forward, I have gained a better understanding of what my students expect from their college experience, how they make their decisions, and how much relationships affect their access to resources in college. For example, this past semester when I introduced myself to the class on the first day, I reframed my introduction as "these are things you need to know about me." I talked a little about my own ethnic and linguistic backgrounds because students always wonder about those. My English proficiency and ability to teach English have been questioned by students before based on my physical appearance as an East-Asian woman. I also talked about my own experiences of balancing school, work, and family obligations since many of them are also balancing the same elements, except doing so with different cultural, linguistic, and academic capital. I usually share these things about me, but this time I stressed an open invitation to them to come and talk to me one-on-one for any reason, whether it is about school or something outside school, whether it is to clarify an assignment or to just say

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I'm overwhelmed and can't finish all my work. I said this is what you need to know about me because we, as students, worry about new professors. We don't know them. They don't know us. We don't know if we will like them or if they will like us. I took more time to acknowledge concerns about relationships that students are probably already worried about. I was thinking about my study's critical events around relationships with professors and could hear Ramineh's voice saying that her number one fear was how people would be with her. This is just one step toward centering the relationality more in my teaching practice.

Furthermore, as I continued to think about the importance of relationships in determining culture, I realized the importance of community. Since my research focuses on community college, then I must also wonder what the *community* in community college means. I find that the term, the concept, and the doing of community is entangled in communication and culture. Being part of a community doesn't necessarily mean we share the same culture or that we automatically love and support one another. Am I part of the Asian American community because I am Asian American? When I spent so many years of my young life rejecting my Asian-ness, is it right that I can simply claim my membership now? Do I have to constantly be earning my membership? Sometimes evoking community is a way of establishing boundaries of insider and outsider to solidify our social identity in order to create a shared history. When we identify with a group, our insider community shares a certain set of values, which can provide a level of security, a level of validation and a sense of belonging (Korostelina, 2007). However, what would it mean for us to understand not only *culture*, but *community* as a verb? What if community

is not the group but it is our actions and the cultivation of our relationships that constitute community?

The lessons learned throughout this whole dissertation experience have helped me evolve my own teaching philosophy and provide new perspectives on what equity and inclusion can mean in the community college as we, faculty and administrators, redefine *community* into one that is more inclusive. To answer, "How does schooling affect the way we feel about ourselves?" Darya's sentiment is particularly fitting, "the main thing is students to be happy." To be happy, educational systems must have the time, space, and caring support for students to be their full authentic selves.

Backup Interview Questions

Round 1
Cultural values around college education in native country
1. Can you tell me an experience or memory that would help me understand your experience in school back home? Something that stands out as being kind of typical?
2. What is the typical process of going to college back home like? Do most people back home aspire to go to college?
3. Was there a teacher or other person at school that you felt helped you a lot? Can you talk about one of the times they helped you? Would you say this was typical of most teachers?
4. Is there someone in your family who has supported you going to college? Can you tell me who that person is and about one of the times they supported you with school?
5. Can you tell me about how and why you decided to move to the U.S.?
6. Expectations of college education in America
7. What is one major motivation for you getting a college degree here in America?
8. Do you remember when you decided to enroll at NOVA? Can you tell me what went into that decision? How did you feel about the decision at the time?
9. What do you remember about the process of enrolling and starting at NOVA? What was easy/challenging about it?
10. How easy/hard did you think college would be? Why do you think you felt that way?
11. Can you tell me one of the expectations you had about what NOVA professors would be like? Why do you think you felt that way? What's an example of how your experience has been/hasn't been like that?
12. Can you tell me one of the expectations you had about what NOVA classwork would be like? Why do you think you felt that way? What's an example of how your experience has been/hasn't been like that?

Round 2
Experiences of college education in America
1. Can you walk me through a typical day that you have class, from getting up to going to bed?
2. What was your first class after finishing ESL? Can you tell me about one thing you remember about that class?

3. Can you tell me a bit about an experience with a non-ESL class that stands out to you as difficult? How did you deal with it? How do you think it affected the way you approached other classes after that?
4. How about an experience with a non-ESL class that you remember as positive? What's a day where you had a lot of fun in class? Tell me about the class and the professor and what you were doing.
5. Can you tell me about a particular assignment for a non-ESL course that you really enjoyed? What do you think made it enjoyable?
6. How about one that you remember as being challenging? How did you deal with it? How do you think it affected the way you approached other classes after that?
7. Tell me about a professor who you felt has really supported you. Can you tell me about a professor who you didn't seem to get along with?
8. In our ESL classes especially the reading classes we often use stories and talk about our immigrant experiences. Can you talk about a class that you've had outside of ESL where you were able to talk about your immigrant experience or your culture back home? What was the context? Was that positive or negative for you?
9. Thinking about your content courses but not the material inside them, what is one thing you found to be really challenging?
10. Can you share an example of one thing/skill you learned in ESL that you found yourself using a lot in your content courses?

Photo Follow-up Discussion
1. Tell me about these photos you chose. What do they mean to you? How do they help express <your college experience>?

Round 3

How did cultural values, expectations, and experiences differ from one another

1. If you were giving advice to someone from back home about attending an American college, what is one thing that is pretty common here but you think they would be surprised to know about?
2. Can you tell me about a time that you discussed your native country or culture in a non-ESL class? What prompted the discussion? What did other people add to the discussion?
3. Can you tell me about a time in a non-ESL class that your English language skills were commented on by a professor? What was the context? What did you do about it?
4. Can you talk about a policy either of the college or a class that you thought was unfair? What was the context? What did you do about it? How was it different from policies back home?

5. What would you say is the biggest difference between being a college student back home and here in an American college?
6. Can you tell me about a time when you wish you had known more about how something at the college was supposed to be done? Like someone expected you to already know something that you didn't know but they felt was obvious/everyone knows already.
7. Can you talk about a time that a professor asked you to do something in a specific way that was different from how you would do it? How did you approach completing that task? How do you think that shaped your interaction in other classes?
8. Is there something specific that you started doing so that you could fit in better at school? What was the context?
9. Was there a particular event or day where you felt like you didn't belong at NOVA? Maybe even felt like quitting? Tell me about it.
10. Can you talk about a time when an interaction between a professor and an American student was surprising for you? Did that change how you interacted with your professors or with other students?
11. Thinking about your non-ESL courses, do you remember a particularly stressful period? How would you say it has influenced you? What role did others play in this event? If there was one thing you would say about that event, what would it be? How would you describe its influence or long-lasting effects on you?
12. In what ways has college education in America been a transformative experience (positively or negatively)
13. If you could go back in time and give yourself advice before your started NOVA about getting to where you are now (having completed ESL and doing content courses), what would that piece of advice be?
14. College can be very demanding on time as you know, so how have you balanced schoolwork with other parts of your life like work and family? Has your college experience shaped the way you interact with your family? In what way do you think that would be different if you weren't in school?
15. Do you sometimes feel like you are a different person at home/with family than you are when you're at school? Can you tell me an example of a time you felt that way?
16. Can you talk about an event at work or outside of school that you used your experiences or knowledge from school?
17. After I've been away from my hometown for a while, people from back home say that I am different than I used to be. They can tell that I have been away. Have you had similar experiences when you visit your hometown? Can you talk about one of those experiences? What do people say is different?
18. Can you tell me about a school or study habit that you changed since you began school at NOVA?

19. Have you developed any habits in your life outside of school because of school?
20. If you could change one thing about the current way American college operates for students who begin in ESL, what would you change?

Appendix B

Sample Interview Transcript

Filename (Date-Time_Name): GMT20210318-213117_Senalat.transcript

696

01:12:41.670 --> 01:12:51.360
Senalat: yeah even like, I remember me like, going like you know, on you know uh, students club there's like a board, you know

697
01:12:51.810 --> 01:12:53.730
Senalat: next to cafeteria

698
01:12:54.360 --> 01:13:06.210
Senalat: So that's where like you see what kind of clubs like the NOVA organization have. I remember me standing there like looking for a specific, you know, groups (laugh) which can feel like my interest

699
01:13:06.300 --> 01:13:08.070
Senalat: and then there was nothing.

700
01:13:09.510 --> 01:13:09.960
Chan, Elisabeth: Okay.

701
01:13:10.530 --> 01:13:10.920
Chan, Elisabeth: yeah.

702
01:13:13.140 --> 01:13:17.250
Senalat: So that's what I could, I can say about my college experience like,

703
01:13:18.390 --> 01:13:28.440
Senalat: I wish I could say more about like you know, the experience I have like, the about the experience you know, after you know I start my major

Appendix C

IRB Consent Form

Narrative Inquiry with Immigrant ESL Community College Students

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

RESEARCH PROCEDURES
This research is being conducted to learn more about immigrant English as a second language (ESL) students' lived experiences as they navigate community college so that faculty and staff can implement enhanced support services and structures. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in three informal interviews (August 2020, November 2020, March 2021), which will take approximately 30-60 minutes each. Afterwards, a transcript of the interview will be shared with you so that you can check it for accurate representation. In the photo project, I will ask you to create a collection of a few photos that support and expand on any experiences that you share in the interview. The photos will be of your choice and represent whatever is meaningful for you, related to your experiences. They can be abstract or literal. Throughout the study, I may also use as data, emails, learning management system communications, school assignments, or course syllabi, if they are relevant to the experiences you choose to share. Throughout the study, I may also use as data, emails, learning management system communications, school assignments, or course syllabi, if they are relevant to the experiences you choose to share.

RISKS
There are no foreseeable risks for participating in this research.

BENEFITS
There are no benefits to you as a participant other than to further research in how best to support community college ESL students.

CONFIDENTIALITY
The data in this study will be confidential. Names and other identifiers will not be placed on research data. Pseudonyms will be used. Access to the pseudonym key will only be possessed by the co-investigator of the study.

The de-identified data could be used for future research without additional consent from participants.

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) committee that monitors research on human subjects may inspect study records during internal auditing procedures and are required to keep all information confidential.

ONLINE PRIVACY

Participants may review Zoom's website for information about their privacy statement. https://zoom.us/privacy. While it is understood that no computer transmission can be perfectly secure, reasonable efforts will be made to protect the confidentiality of your transmission.

AUDIO/VIDEO RECORDINGS

The recording will take place during interviews. The recordings will not be shared with anyone other than the co-investigator. The purpose of the recordings is for transcription and data analysis. The recordings will be kept secure as password protected files. The recordings will be destroyed following transcription and data analysis.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason. If you decide not to participate or if you withdraw from the study, there is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. There are no costs to you or any other party.

The study is open to community college immigrant ESL students who have completed all College ESL coursework.

CONTACT

This research is being conducted by Elisabeth Chan in the College of Education and Human Development at George Mason University. She may be reached at 703-845-6562 or echan5@masonlive.gmu.edu for questions or to report a research-related problem. Her faculty advisor's contact information is: Dr. Shelley Wong, 703- 993-3513, swong1@gmu.edu. You may contact the George Mason University Institutional Review Board office at 703-993-4121 or IRB@gmu.edu if you have questions or comments regarding your rights as a participant in the research.

This research has been reviewed according to George Mason University procedures governing your participation in this research.

CONSENT

I have read this form, all of my questions have been answered by the research staff, and by replying to the email invitation, I agree to participate in this study and to audio and video recording of interviews.

IRB: For Official Use Only

GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY
Institutional Review Board

Project Number: 1611289-1

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Appendix D

IRB Approval Letters

GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY | Office of Research Integrity and Assurance

Research Hall, 4400 University Drive, MS 6D5, Fairfax, Virginia 22030
Phone: 703-993-5445; Fax: 703-993-9590

DATE:	June 8, 2020
TO:	Shelley Wong
FROM:	George Mason University IRB
Project Title:	[1611289-1] Narrative Inquiry with Immigrant ESL Community College Students
SUBMISSION TYPE:	New Project
ACTION:	APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE:	June 8, 2020
REVIEW TYPE:	Expedited Review
REVIEW TYPE:	Expedited review categories #5 & 7

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The George Mason University IRB has APPROVED your submission. This submission has received Expedited Review based on applicable federal regulations.

Please remember that all research must be conducted as described in the submitted materials.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form unless the IRB has waived the requirement for a signature on the consent form or has waived the requirement for a consent process. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by the IRB prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to the IRB office. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed (if applicable).

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to the IRB.

This study does not have an expiration date but you will receive an annual reminder regarding future requirements.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of five years, or as described in your submission, after the completion of the project.

Please note that department or other approvals may be required to conduct your research in addition to IRB approval.

If you have any questions, please contact Kim Paul at (703) 993-4208 or kpaul4@gmu.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

GMU IRB Standard Operating Procedures can be found here: https://rdia.gmu.edu/topics-of-interest/human-or-animal-subjects/human-subjects/human-subjects-sops/

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within George Mason University IRB's records.

June 30, 2020

Ms. Elisabeth Chan
Associate Professor of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences
Northern Virginia Community College
AL-AA-252
5000 Dawes Avenue
Alexandria, Virginia 22311

Dear Ms. Chan,

Your proposal to research immigrant English as a second language (ESL) students' lived experiences as they navigate community college has been approved. Participation in any research project is purely voluntary. Please make sure the participants are aware of their options. You agreed to provide us research findings once complete. Any future research connected to this or other research will need to be submitted to us for approval.

Please feel free to give me a call if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

George Gabriel, Ph.D.
Vice President
Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Student Success
Northern Virginia Community College
4001 Wakefield Chapel Road
Annandale, VA 22003
(703) 323-3129

Cc: Dr. Annette Haggray
    Dr. Jimmie McClellan

Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Student Success
4001 Wakefield Chapel Road, Annandale, VA 22003-3796
Phone: 703-323-3129 | fax: 703-323-3755
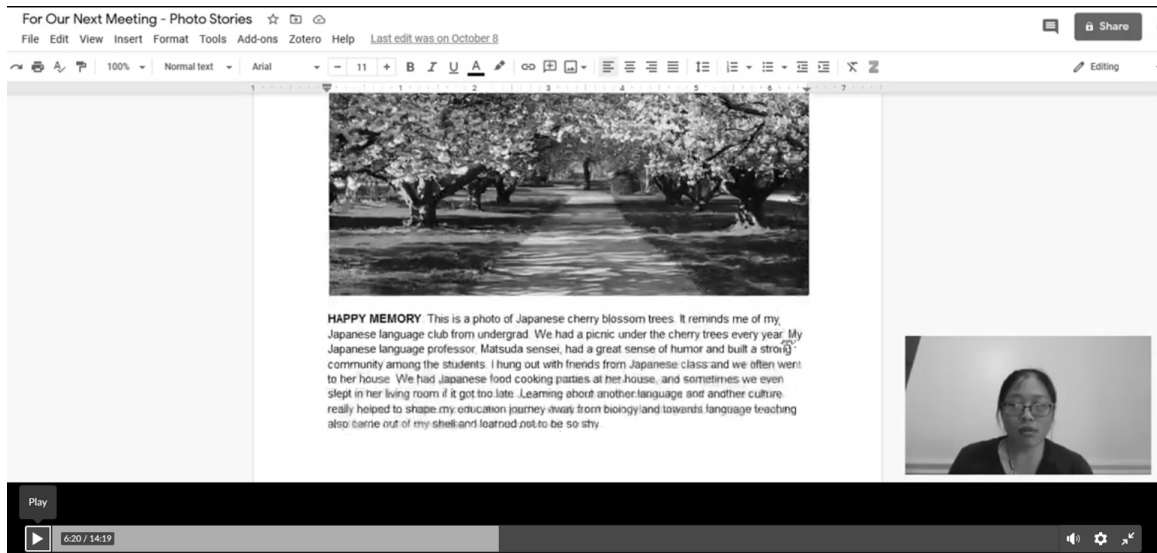
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Appendix E

Student Backgrounds

Pseudonym	Native Country	Native Language	Male/ Female	Age Range	School Status	Participated in Interview Round		
						1	2	3
Akila	Egypt	Arabic	F	20s	Final year at SCC	✔	✔	✔
Alana	Brazil	Portuguese	F	30s	Paused after 1 semester post-ESL program	✔	✔	✔
Angela	Ghana	Twi	F	20s	First year at 4-year university	✔	✔	✔
Aster	Ethiopia	Amharic	F	30s	First year of SCC nursing program	✔		✔
Charya	Cambodia	Khmer	M	20s	Paused after 1 year post-ESL program	✔		
Darya	Iran	Farsi	F	30s	Final year at SCC	✔	✔	✔
Farjaad	Afghanistan	Dari	M	20s	First year at 4-year university	✔	✔	

Kushanneh	Afghanistan	Dari	F	30s	Final year at SCC	✔	✔	✔
Marcel	Senegal	French	M	30s	Paused after completing ESL program	✔	✔	✔
Ramineh	Afghanistan	Dari	F	30s	Final year at SCC	✔		✔
Sandy	El Salvador	Spanish	F	20s	Paused in middle of final year at SCC	✔	✔	✔
Senalat	Ethiopia	Amharic	F	20s	First year post-ESL program at SCC	✔		✔
Shen	China	Mandarin	M	20s	First year at 4-year university	✔	✔	✔
Shireen	Afghanistan	Dari	F	30s	First year post-ESL at SCC	✔		
Victoria	Philippines	Filipino	F	20s	Graduated from SCC at end of study	✔	✔	✔
Yana	El Salvador	Spanish	F	30s	Graduated from SCC at end of study	✔	✔	✔
Zoey	Bolivia	Spanish	F	40s	Graduated from SCC in middle of study	✔	✔	✔

						17	12	14

Appendix F

Still from Photo Stories Video Directions Before Second Interviews

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Biography

Elisabeth Lai-Wah Chan is a critical scholar and activist educator with over 15 years of experience as an English language educator, working with adult English learners in post-secondary institutes. She currently works as an associate professor of ESL on the Alexandria campus of Northern Virginia Community College. She has presented, researched, and published on social justice and diversity, equity, and inclusion in TESOL, where she draws upon her lived experiences as a second/fourth-generation Chinese American from the U.S. South. Her recent publications include co-authoring Counter-storytelling: Toward a critical race praxis for participatory action research in the *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* and Moving TESOL forward: Increasing educators' critical consciousness through a racial lens in *TESOL Journal*. She is also a strong advocate against anti-Asian hate and violence and has presented and facilitated workshops on understanding its roots and anti-bullying both in the U.S. and internationally. She earned her MA in Second Language Studies from the University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa. Her PhD in Education from George Mason University specializes in Multilingual/Multicultural Education and secondarily in Interdisciplinary Critical Perspectives and Social Policy. She has served the International TESOL Association in various roles, including as a member of the Board of Directors and chair of the Nominating Committee, the TESOL Diversity Collaborative Professional Learning Network, and Social Responsibility Interest Section, as well as serving on a number of other committees and task forces for the association.