Learning to Teach

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Teacher Educators' Stories to Clarify, Empower and Overcome

Edited by

Roseanne Vallice Levy and Leila Rosa

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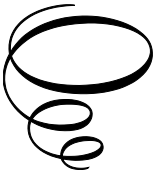

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We dedicate this book to pre-service and in-service teachers who are committed to providing ***ALL*** PK-12 children with safe spaces to learn, grow and thrive.

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INTRODUCTION

ROSEANNE VALLICE LEVY AND LEILA ROSA

The Meaning and Purpose of This Book

Stories build, empower, enlighten, and sustain us. We have chosen to share with others our stories through the tip of a pen. The act of writing our stories gives permanence and allows the space to better reflect on its complexities. These stories have also crushed our apathy towards others, stopped our impulsive judgements of others, dislodged our self-centeredness, and humanized and rehumanized our perspectives. This book is the recognition that what has united us has been the power of stories stitched together by moments in time. The creation of this book stemmed from the need to hear the voices and understand the stories of others.

This book carries in it the streams of stories of eight people. These are adults with different experiences and different backgrounds, professionals with a strong standing in the field of Education. Through the lenses of their circumstances, they have agreed to offer the rest of us a bridge to better understand their experiences as people of color, linguistically diverse, culturally marginalized, and historically scarred due to their beliefs or backgrounds. All aware of the vulnerability that this endeavor carries and still willing to help us run the course, they have been asked to present their stories in ways that allow the rest of us to uncover and lift the veil on ourselves. Each author presents their own stories and, as such, they choose their own flow and channel as they help us navigate into their experiences.

We titled the book, *Learning to Teach: Teacher Educators' Stories to Clarify, Empower and Overcome.* Our purpose is to reach those that teach, want to teach, lead, or hold any position within institutions of learning. We accept the power of adults that work in the PK-12 system in shaping the lives and experiences of children and young adults. Much more than often, adults recall the teachers that have made an impact on them 10, 20, and even 30 years prior due to a kind word, wise advice or simply a gesture that made the statement "you matter". How do we multiply these types of adults? Their preparation must include conscious effort to expand worldviews, chisel the

soul, expand understanding and open hearts with stories that empower, clarify, and help them reflect on the power of human experience.

As former doctoral classmates, and now close friends, we often run towards each other at airports, happy to be reunited. As soon as we enter the car towards a new resort and adventure, we begin recalling moments in time and laughing at a faux pas, or an event misunderstood, thus solidifying our friendship. Our stories are always the same stories. The power that they carry to uncover our imperfections and our humanities unite us. These stories are never forgotten or lessened by time, or space. We have also noticed that as we tell the same stories over and over, the edges are beveled by what truly matters in the story, sometimes a kind gesture, other times a spirited funny comment. As the story takes shape, so does our friendship in the fold of time. This work is quite simply our acknowledgement of the power of the stories. In telling the stories we come to understand ourselves.

We also seek to repair. We understand that when we delve into our stories and give voice to what was left unsaid and unexplained, we elevate the opportunity to mend the broken pieces, and humanize. We hope that telling our stories opens the road to more positive responses, or better moments in time for others, while creating in us a sense that our stories matter, leading to an acceptance that what we went through was meaningful and should be embraced as an opportunity to help others overcome.

Introduction of our Authors

Below we introduce you to our wonderful, talented authors. The introduction is offered in their own voices.

Roseanne reflects on the duality of birth region and physical appearance and reminds us of the impact of these variables on identity formation.

> *"In the very first hours of kindergarten, my first core memory of school was formed. As my classmates and I sat on the colorful mat, my teacher, a White woman with grey-white hair, prompted me, "Roseanne, tell everyone where you are from." I recall saying, "New York," to which she responded with a smile, "No, where you are REALLY from." Nervous and slightly panicked, I feared I would not answer correctly because I didn't understand the question. For a five-year-old whose dominant language is Malayalam, what does "really from" even mean?*

Born in Cabo Verde and immigrant in Portugal, Spain and United states, Leila considers her transnational experiences.

> *"I was raised and lived with a maternal grandmother until I was 17 years old in a country that was not mine. The story and reasons that led my*

parents to abstain from raising me no longer interest me. I have come to realize that I have benefited from the setup. I began understanding the benefits of my transnational upbringing by reflecting on the events that I have been a protagonist in. For example, I recall the deep hurt when at the age of 5, I was told that I was forbidden from speaking Cape Verdean crioulo, upon arriving and while still standing at the airport in Lisbon Portugal. I took another tumble when at 17 I found myself immigrating to the United States and being confronted with the necessity of learning English. This feeling of forced separation from my primary language and country of birth has led me to an irreducible stance about the importance of preserving the primary language and culture. It has also given me a deep appreciation about the impact on identity when we force others to give up their primary language and culture.

Aki shares the struggles between being and belonging when others "push" us into a choice that is outlined by a geographical boundary.

What does it mean to be American? This is something that I have only recently begun to unpack about my identity. The process has been slow although I admit it took on a bit more urgency once I became a mother of biracial children. I always identified as Japanese – perhaps this is the "obvious" identity, the one that my parents determined for me and my three siblings, or maybe one that was assigned to me by outsiders. "Japanese-American" and the potential embedded in that identity, was not a box that was available to be checked during most of my childhood.

Born in Honduras, Jose discusses the significant challenges he faced when he immigrated to the United States in 1985.

Immigrating to the United States is never easy. One usually must face a series of difficulties, including becoming accustomed to a new environment, culture, system, and, often, language. Young children who immigrate or are brought to this country before adolescence face particular challenges as they are usually caught between two cultures and two or more languages. This was certainly the case for me, an immigrant from Honduras who arrived in Los Angeles, California, in 1985. Little did I know that my immigrant experience would be impacted by a clash over questions surrounding the effectiveness of bilingual education and the "best" approach to educating English language learners.

Rachel reflects on the complexities of parenting bilingual children in an educational system that devalues and hegemonizes English.

When I think about what I would have liked from my children's teachers, it is actually quite simple. Just like a teacher works to incorporate student interests and hobbies into their classroom activities and assignments, some

recognition that other languages are an integral part of student identity can mean a lot. Simple discussions about home lives and languages, as well as appreciation for linguistic skill, communicates that these resources are valuable. I often tell teachers that the monolingual children benefit from these discussions too.

Sudha recalls how her bilingual bicultural parents positively impacted her and how they influenced her teaching practices despite her American teachers missing the opportunity of elevating her family's background.

If I could describe in one to two words the reason why I am the way I am, it is that my parents were and continue to be value leaders. In many ways, my childhood family unit and associated experiences contributed to the making of me not only a teacher, but also a teacher educator. I see that clearly now, as both a parent of three children and as an educator. Being a leader as a parent entails thinking and acting like a leader with regard to how you raise your children and how you live your life. As I reflect on the ways in which my parents were value leaders, I find it remarkable how they accomplished this feat as immigrants from India to Canada in the late 1970s. Parenting leadership involves establishing trust, mobilizing your children toward important goals, and encouraging them to join you in creating a better future. It all begins with developing a compelling vision of a shared future based on basic principles. Effective teachers, I believe, do the same daily in their classroom in a variety of ways.

Aisha shares how her faith helped her navigate the challenges she experienced as an African American child in the Philadelphia school system.

The family dynamics of my community were often very complicated. Many of my classmates walked home to a family with a single parent while others went home to grandparent(s). The household inhabitants and dynamics were complex as the culture of the inner city changed to accommodate the effects of crack cocaine on the community. During walks to and from school, the air was often scented with crack, and I was careful not to step on the empty crack vials that littered the sidewalks. I was also careful not to make eye contact with known and perceived drug dealers and drug users. To arrive at school and home each day was a miracle, as the community was plagued with violence. Psalm 23:4 "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." I memorized this scripture at a very young age. It guided me safely when my safety was always at risk.

Ricardo finds his academic voice to extract his experiences from his home country while reflecting on his life in America.

I am an immigrant living a transnational existence who finds that the most difficult question that can be posed is "where is home?" I am at home with my family, a space of greater freedom to be and in organizing communities (that is with activists who enjoy crafting and acting on a long-term vision of human liberation of all forms). Schooling did not facilitate my political awakening. On the contrary, I found American school dull, spiritless, and unable to register let alone engage my experiences. School wanted me to embrace and affirm an alien and dominant experience as if it was my ticket to somewhere special. There was nothing appropriate about where I came from. This was my entry point into a hidden U.S. educational curriculum that sought to teach me that I had to stop existing to exist.

As you read these accounts, reflect on the students that you teach, or you plan to teach. They may be the authors of our follow up book.

Contextualizing the Work

Current Times

In 2024, it seems as if we have stepped back in time. Our news feeds are filled with teachers and students sharing their feelings of grief over the banning of diverse books. Further, on March 28, 2022, the Governor of Florida signed Senate House Bill No. 1557, which includes the prohibition of classroom discussions regarding sexual orientation or gender identity. In Ohio, the state's Senate Bill No. 3 is currently being reviewed by the Senate Committee. One of the tenets of this bill is to prevent the awarding of state-funds to those private institutions who offer Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) courses or training to their students, faculty and staff.

Additionally, attacks on people of diverse backgrounds are continuously increasing. Anxieties are running high as politicians and well-known figures overtly support policies and make statements that run counter to the idea of "freedom and justice for all". For example, antisemitic incidents are reported to be on the rise, and it was not long ago that a former President of the United States purposefully referred to the COVID-19 virus as the "China virus" resulting in increases in anti-Asian hate crimes. Also, the images of the border wall are frequently paraded in conservative media outlets as a form of instilling fear of a pending invasion of migrants. These are only a few examples of the current climate we live in.

This atmosphere has a direct impact on our school systems. It is essential for all educational stakeholders to be prepared to work in these critical times to best meet the needs of a very diverse student population.

The School System

The makeup of the student population in comparison to the teaching population in America has not been lost on us. The student population in America is quickly diversifying due to a number of reasons. For one, The United States has experienced a significant increase in the number of immigrants and refugees over the past several decades, which has contributed to a more diverse population. In addition, birth rates among diverse populations have been higher than those of the dominant population.

Another reason for the diversification of the student population is the result of efforts to increase access to education for traditionally marginalized groups, such as low-income students, students with disabilities, and students from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups. This has led to a greater diversity of backgrounds and experiences among students in American schools and universities. Furthermore, the changing global economy has increased the demand for workers with diverse cultural backgrounds and language skills, making it increasingly important for students to gain exposure to diverse perspectives and experiences.

Overall, the diversification of the student population in America is the result of a combination of demographic shifts, efforts to increase access to education, and the changing demands of the global economy. It is important for educators to recognize and embrace this diversity in order to provide a welcoming and inclusive learning environment for all students. On the other hand, the racial composition of the American teaching population does not currently reflect the diversity of the student population. While students of color now make up much of the public-school students in America, the teaching workforce remains overwhelmingly white. This lack of diversity among teachers can have negative consequences for students of color, who may struggle to connect with teachers who do not share their cultural backgrounds or experiences. It is also important to note that even when efforts are made to recruit and retain a more diverse teaching workforce that better reflects the student population, it is essential to prepare ***all teachers,*** white and of color alike, to reflect and understand the experiences of students of color in order to provide ***all*** students with the support and resources they need to succeed.

We hope our work is used to inform and inspire school personnel in establishing more equitable and just institutions of learning. We see this work as a tool for teacher preparation and the professional development of school personnel. Narratives, or stories, can be a powerful tool in preparing schoolteachers because they provide a way for teachers to understand the complex and diverse experiences of their students. Narratives can help build

empathy and understanding for the challenges students may face in their daily lives, such as cultural differences, trauma, poverty, and linguistic barriers.

CHAPTER 1

TRYING TO FIT A SQUARE PEG INTO A ROUND HOLE: BEING INDIAN AMERICAN IN THE USA

ROSEANNE VALLICE LEVY

The Student

I remember waking up very early, as it was still dark outside. My mother seemed very excited and nervous when she shouted, "Kintergarten adhia devassam!" [First day of kindergarten!] in Malayalam. My father slowly guided me to the bathroom and helped me to brush my teeth while she vigorously brushed and parted my hair, adding a headband as the final touch. She dressed me in a flowy green top and matching bell-bottom pants, which she thought looked beautiful against my caramel-toned skin and pitch-black hair, cut by my father precisely every six months in the middle of our kitchen. I recall feeling that something important was happening, but I wasn't sure why the day was special. I remember holding my father's hand as my parents and I left our apartment building. The day was crisp and bright, as expected for a September day in New York.

My parents dropped me off at a door with many other children who were walking into the classroom. Feeling panicked and uneasy about the number of children, I remember hiding behind my father's leg, my large, mahogany brown eyes suspiciously surveying the environment and the situation. When another adult took my hand, and my parents snuck out the door, a feeling of homesickness settled inside me. Little did I know that this would be the first day that I would be told I "was not from around here," even though "here" is all that I knew.

In the very first hours of kindergarten, my first core memory of school was formed. As my classmates and I sat on the colorful mat, my teacher, a White woman with grey-white hair, prompted me, "Roseanne, tell everyone where you are from." I recall saying, "New York," to which she responded

with a smile, "No, where you are REALLY from." Nervous and slightly panicked, I feared I would not answer correctly because I didn't understand the question. For a five-year-old whose dominant language is Malayalam, what does "really from" even mean?

I was born and raised in a suburb in Westchester County, New York, the oldest child of Indian immigrants who came from Kerala to the United States in the early 1970s to seek the "American Dream" for themselves and their future family. My parents came to this country because they believed that the opportunity for a better life and financial security were possible for all, regardless of one's background or circumstances. Until the age of six, my primary language was Malayalam; English was secondary. By age four, I had failed two Montessori school interviews because I refused to answer the headmistresses' questions, remaining utterly silent. I spoke little English at that age, though I understood spoken English very well, having learned from my parents and TV shows such as *What's Happening*, *The Jeffersons*, *Happy Days*, and *Laverne & Shirley*. During these two interviews, I vividly remember my parents being asked to speak louder and to repeat themselves often because the headmistresses could not understand their Indian accents.

As I reflect on this experience, my choice in not saying a word was not because I did not understand what was being communicated; rather, it was due to the fear of responding incorrectly or inappropriately and, as a result, embarrassing myself and my parents. Looking back now, I see that I "failed" those interviews because the schools expected me to fit in a certain box; a box which held standards and expectations that had little to no regard for race, ethnicity, and culture.

Thankfully, my parents were patient with me, and we three (it was a real family effort) were finally accepted into our neighborhood YWCA's nursery program. I was painfully shy, and my nursery schoolteacher told my parents at the start of the school year that she believed I had mutism. My mother told the teacher she was talking about the wrong child because at home, I was like a feral cat: wild, temperamental, energetic, bossy, and talkative. I was a chatterbox with my family and family friends, but at school I was the quietest student. Even though I spoke fractured English, I understood every word—which meant I understood everything my teachers were saying about me. My expressive skills in English were broken and somewhat dysfluent due to the lack of experience speaking the language. My anxieties about speaking were precisely due to my awareness that I did not sound like my peers, and my self-confidence and fears about sounding different, or of fully recalling specific vocabulary, impacted the perceptions others had of me. To my teachers I was disabled, unable, incapable, and needed to be fixed.

These experiences can be framed using Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1986). This hypothesis posits that emotional factors, such as motivation, anxiety, and self-confidence, can influence the success of language acquisition. A high affective filter, due to anxiety or lack of motivation, can impede language learning, while a low affective filter facilitates it. As a I reflect on my first days of school, it is evident that many of my teachers did not understand the bilingual and bicultural experience, and most did not even consider me "American." What they failed to recognize was that I was a four-year-old child who had lived in a bilingual home, cognitively had developed two languages in a simultaneous way, and was exposed to a bicultural environment. What they did not understand was that my experiences were vastly different from their own and, instead of admiring and nurturing the richness, they opted to label such experiences as abnormal and in need of repair.

Further, since English was not my first language, my teachers viewed this from a deficit-based perspective. Deficit thinking, also known as deficit model or deficit perspective, refers to the view that individuals or groups are lacking in some way compared to a perceived norm, often focusing on weaknesses rather than strengths. In the context of bilingualism, deficit thinking can manifest as the belief that being bilingual or multilingual is a disadvantage rather than an asset (Garcia, 2014). My teachers did not understand the dynamics of receptive and expressive acquisition and performance in second language acquisition. According to Leslie Duhaylongsod (2023), it is critical for educators "to disrupt the deficit language, deficit-based perspectives and deficit-based narratives about preK-12 students with marginalized identities." (p. 56). Duhaylongsod adds that this ideology is common in schools, institutions of higher education, and within communities.

However, for my two Montessori school headmistresses and kindergarten teacher, my Indian parents and I signaled to them a racial component that was immediate, visible, and indicative of difference. This mindset can be linked to the raciolinguistic ideology which explores the ways in which language is entangled with race and examines how linguistic features and practices are used to construct and reinforce racial distinctions (Garivaldo & Fabiano-Smith, 2023; Flores, 2020; Flores et.al., 2015). Raciolinguistic ideologies are embedded in social structures, historical contexts, and power dynamics, shaping perceptions about the relationships between language, race, and identity (Flores et.al., 2015; Flores, 2020; Garivaldo & Fabiano-Smith, 2023). According to Flores (2020),

> Raciolinguistic ideologies were foundational to European colonialism and continue to be used to justify the continued maintenance of white supremacy

> by suggesting that the roots of racial inequalities lie in the linguistic deficiencies of racialized communities and that the solution to these racial inequalities is to modify their language practices. (p. 24)

These ideologies assert that the linguistic shortcomings of racialized communities are at the core of racial inequalities and propose that the remedy for these disparities lies in altering their language behaviors (Flores, 2020). As a result, many educators assume that speaking English is what is expected and desirable, and other linguistic repertoires are relegated to less than and even inferior positions.

The study of raciolinguistic ideology also investigates how language is employed to signify and perpetuate racial hierarchies and stereotypes. It explores the lived experiences of individuals and communities whose language practices may be subject to racialization (Flores et.al., 2015; Flores, 2020; Garivaldo & Fabiano-Smith, 2023). Understanding raciolinguistic ideology is essential for addressing issues of linguistic discrimination, promoting equity, and fostering inclusive language practices all of which would have been beneficial if applied during my early years of schooling. For example, having access to an adult that spoke Malayalam during the first year of Pre-K would have immediately clarified my verbal abilities. Additionally, in the absence of such an adult, teachers could have asked my parents to record me at home, rather than assuming and accepting the presence of a disability such as mutism.

During this critical stage of learning and schooling, translanguaging would have aided me as a young bilingual and bicultural learner. *Translanguaging* is an approach to language education that challenges traditional notions of strict language separation. This approach recognizes that individuals naturally draw on their entire linguistic repertoire, including their primary and secondary languages, to communicate effectively (Garcia & Wei, 2014). Unlike conventional language teaching methods that emphasize language compartmentalization, translanguaging acknowledges the fluidity and interconnectedness of languages in the learning process. In a translanguaging classroom, students are encouraged to seamlessly move between languages, utilizing their multilingual capabilities to enhance comprehension, express complex ideas, and deepen their understanding of subject matter (Garcia, 2014; Hornberger & Link, 2012). This approach empowers students to leverage their linguistic diversity as an asset rather than viewing it as a potential hindrance.

By recognizing and embracing the linguistic diversity present in classrooms, educators can create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment. This approach is not only applicable in language-focused classes but can also be integrated across subjects, contributing to a more

holistic and effective educational experience for students from diverse linguistic backgrounds. As educators increasingly explore innovative language teaching methods, translanguaging stands out as a promising framework that acknowledges the linguistic richness of students and encourages a more inclusive and effective approach to education. Students who learn in such an environment have a stronger sense of belonging and identity (Garcia, 2014; Garcia & Wei, 2014; Lee & Suarez, 2009).

Going back on the anecdote that opened this article, I slowly began to realize when I started elementary school what "*Roseanne, tell everyone where you are really from*" really meant. For my teachers and classmates, the expected response was, "I'm _____. (list ethnicity here)." During those critical schooling years, I unconsciously identified myself as The Outsider everywhere I went. In the United States, I was Indian first and American second because I felt secondary as an American. However, when my family and I would travel to India to visit relatives, I identified as American because I wasn't considered Indian in India. I was The Outsider: a square peg that could not fit in the round hole.

The years that followed were heavily sprinkled with questions and confusion specific to my identity and many moments of wondering where I fit. I was most comfortable with myself and my identity when I was with my family and our family friends. My family friends and I shared the same background as first-generation Indian Americans who were trying to strike the right balance of being Indian and being American. We grew up being called "dothead" and frequently received shouts of "Go home, you Gandhis!" in various neighborhood playgrounds from our White neighbors and peers. I remember telling my parents in the third grade, "What does that even mean? We don't even look like him—he's old!" I recall not having a sense of belonging, the constant struggle of trying to fit in. Though New York and the United States were the only homes I knew, I was constantly unsettled by the idea that others did not see me as a New Yorker and American.

As a result of these experiences, I did not enjoy going to school. Friday was my favorite day of the week and Sunday was the worst. The sound of the secondhand ticking on CBS's *60 Minutes* on Sunday evenings would trigger anxiety that would spin into a tornado. I now look back and realize that I had severe anxiety disorder as a child, which manifested in ways such as vomiting before school, faking illnesses, and incredible timidity. I was certainly not an active participant in the classroom but maintained good grades, and as a result was regarded as a well-behaved student. I was the child who would not reach out to my teachers for help if I didn't understand the material because it was a way to avoid feeling devalued by my teachers.

My tremendous dislike in attending school was a result of my racialized experiences with teachers, which led to my mistrust of teachers who, during my early years of school, spoke negatively about me not knowing that I understood English.

I feel as if I survived my P-12 schooling experiences and consider it more of an endurance experience rather than a successful educational experience. Throughout those years, I struggled with my identity and finding my voice, especially because others attempted to reconstruct my identity according to their own values and beliefs. They shook my core and destabilized my feelings about school and learning, which added to my anxieties about my abilities. I finally began to uncover my identity in the last half of my senior year in high school. Perhaps it was because the end of high school was near and college was so close—or because I found a diverse group of friends who also felt like Outsiders in their own ways, friends who celebrated diversity and were discovering their own identities.

I was also extremely fortunate to have parents who were fully involved with my education and who supported me when my anxiety was unmanageable. My parents came from a culture and generation that expected them to move onward and upward despite any obstacles or challenges that got in their way. Though I have maintained that mindset myself, it is necessary to be mindful that it is not a one-size-fits-all philosophy. School should not be a place where students try merely to survive, rather teachers should be focused on ensuring that all of their students thrive.

Furthermore, it is important for teachers to consider student identity because it plays a crucial role in shaping students' experiences, perspectives, and learning outcomes. Student identity encompasses various aspects, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, culture, language, and abilities. As Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1986) posits, by acknowledging and valuing student identity, a more inclusive learning environment where all students feel welcomed, respected, and affirmed can be developed. When students see their identities reflected and acknowledged in the classroom, it fosters a sense of belonging, which is crucial for their overall well-being and academic success.

Recognizing student identity also allows teachers to incorporate diverse perspectives, histories, and experiences into their curriculum. By including culturally relevant materials, examples, and discussions, teachers can make learning more meaningful and relatable to students from diverse backgrounds. This approach enhances student engagement, motivation, and retention of knowledge. Moreover, student identity influences how individuals learn and process information. Teachers who understand their students' identities can tailor their instruction to accommodate diverse learning styles, strengths,

and needs. By incorporating different instructional strategies, adapting content, and providing appropriate support, teachers can help each student flourish academically.

Additionally, it is paramount to identify implicit biases and stereotypes that inadvertently influence how teachers perceive and interact with their students. Awareness of student identities helps educators recognize their own biases and work towards addressing them. By challenging stereotypes and treating each student as an individual, teachers can ensure fair and equitable treatment for all. This is critical to strengthening students' social-emotional development, as student identity is closely tied to socio-emotional development (Kim, 2023).

Identity and the sense of belonging are two critical factors teachers should consider when working with students. My identity came alive upon entering New York University in the fall of 1993. NYU was my first safe place. It was the place where I came out of my shell, a place where I truly felt I belonged. My roommate was my best friend whom I have known since the age of two. She, too, is a first-generation Indian-American and knowing she would be with me for the next four years provided me with a sense of comfort and self-confidence. Moreover, the initial joy in seeing classmates who looked like me and who came from very similar backgrounds was indescribable. The vast majority of my friends were first-generation Indian Americans who were having the same lived experiences as me. We were all trying to find our places in this white-dominated, Eurocentric society, but the need to fit into a specific box was slowly unraveling. Additionally, many of my professors came from diverse backgrounds, and it was amazing to learn from their culturally rich and diverse perspectives.

Attaining this sense of belonging and fully embracing my identity allowed me to be comfortable with who I am. My shyness dissipated as I branched out and became an active member of our South Asian student organization, something I would never have considered earlier in life. Had my educational experience not transformed from mere survival into the diverse, supported experience that it did, my confidence and sense of belonging would have remained stifled. It is only with my confidence and my feeling of being supported that I made the choices and pursued the paths that brought me to where I am today.

The Teacher

The student who hated school became a teacher; a paradoxical journey that unfolded during the pursuit of a master's degree in Secondary Education, with a focus on social studies and special education. The

revelation of my identity, which I believed had been unveiled during my time at NYU, was surpassed by the transformative experience that awaited me upon embarking on my teaching career. In the culminating year of my graduate studies, while immersed as a full-time student, an unforeseen opportunity presented itself—an offer to assume a teaching position as a special educator at an urban high school in Connecticut. This unexpected development, occurring a mere two days before the commencement of the academic year, immersed me in a realm of palpable anxiety and a sense of unreadiness. The challenge was compounded when my department chair, shortly before the school year's onset, entrusted me with the responsibility of teaching both social studies and biology. A subject matter last encountered in my freshman year of high school, biology demanded intensive commitment, prompting evenings and weekends dedicated to exhaustive lesson planning and copious reading. The beginning months of the academic year included incredibly early mornings at my desk, consumed by the endeavor of refining daily lesson plans and contemplating the well-being of my students. Persistent thoughts regarding the optimization of classroom engagement and pedagogical clarity permeated my consciousness.

Within the second month of my first year of teaching, I realized that a significant proportion of students in my self-contained special education classes were Black males, some who were seemingly misplaced and better suited for integration into general education settings. Drawing from firsthand experiences as a former Outsider within the educational system, I could recognize and empathize with the plight of my marginalized students. One such student, identified as "James," stood out within the initial weeks of the academic year. His reading and language proficiencies were certainly at grade level, perhaps even higher. I spoke with James, his mother, and my colleagues and, collectively, we decided to have him reevaluated. It was unclear why James had demonstrated low performance on his previous test administration, or what factors had affected his performance, but his results on the reevaluation strongly supported my initial belief that he would be best served in a general education social studies classroom.

Leveraging the relationships and friendships established with special education and general education content teachers, a strategic placement was orchestrated, aligning James with a colleague renowned for a robust classroom management style. The subsequent success of James and my other students transitioning from self-contained settings underscored the efficacy of the chosen colleagues, whose classrooms were characterized by culturally responsive pedagogy and instruction. The environments they cultivated proved to be highly engaging, interactive, and conducive to the academic flourishing of students within a framework of safety and comfort.

Crucial to this success was the inclusion of James's mother as an integral member of the team, reinforcing the notion that familial involvement is tantamount to academic success. Establishing and nurturing trust with families are paramount, considering the prevalent skepticism many parents harbor toward educators, stemming from prior negative experiences. Overcoming this initial barrier is imperative, as trust forms the bedrock upon which constructive partnerships between teachers and families can be built. Once trust is established, and parents are reassured that educators are genuinely invested in the children's well-being, communication channels open, paving the way for positive outcomes. This collaborative approach not only benefits the student but also contributes to the holistic development of family members and enhances the overall effectiveness of the school community.

While engaging in discourse and collaboration with families, I also acquired insights into their approaches to parenting and behavior management. This knowledge was subsequently integrated into my pedagogical practices, encompassing diverse styles, to facilitate a seamless transition for students moving from the home to school environment. It was imperative to exercise caution against the propensity for stereotyping and constructing unwarranted assumptions and recognizing the uniqueness of each familial dynamic.

The adoption of varied behavior management styles aimed at accommodating the diverse parenting approaches observed among my students' families played a pivotal role in fostering a more harmonious integration between the home and school settings. Further, essential to this paradigm shift is the distinction between talking *with* parents as opposed to talking *to* them and emphasizing the importance of genuine dialogue over unilateral communication. This shift in perspective acknowledges parents as active participants in their children's educational journeys rather than passive recipients of information. Reflecting on my own formative years, I recognize the potential benefits that could have accrued had such communication been prioritized.

While engaging in communication and collaboration with the families of my students, I systematically assessed their distinctive approaches to averting and addressing challenging behaviors. This process facilitated the incorporation of culturally responsive strategies into my pedagogical framework, thereby contributing to the creation of a culturally sensitive and inclusive classroom environment. One of the strategies my selected colleagues and I used was culturally influenced oral interactions (Delpit, 1988). In particular we used demand-requests rather than question-requests in our classrooms. For example, I was raised in a demand-request environment. My parents did not ask me questions to remind me of chores.

They told me to do my chores. I was never asked, "Do you think it's time for you to clean your room?" Rather, I was told, "Go clean your room." As a student, I responded well to demand-requests because that was how I was raised.

I vividly remember an encounter I had with my second-grade teacher. During a change in subjects, my teacher mistakenly thought I still had the previous subject's book out. At that time, book covers were required and popular. My books were covered with pages from my father's favorite magazine, *National Geographic*, which he used to wrap them, and many of the covers were filled with scenes of mountains and lakes. As my teacher began the new subject, she asked me, "Do you think that's the book you should have out?" Knowing that I had the correct book out, but confused as to why she would ask, I responded, "I don't know. Is it?" Unfortunately, my teacher took this as disrespect, and my parents received a phone call home. When it came to education, my parents were heavily involved despite their hectic work schedules. After hearing my version of the story, they were in the principal's office the next day explaining what had occurred and, thankfully, the misunderstanding was cleared up.

That incident occurred because I was a demand-request student with a question-request teacher. Thankfully, I had parents who were able to advocate for me; otherwise, the situation would have remained a misunderstanding, and my future responses would have continued to be considered impertinent. The reason that my former students transitioned well from a self-contained setting to general education was because of their teachers' culturally responsive pedagogy and behavior management styles, which mirrored how my students were being raised by their families, as well as frequent communication and collaboration with my students' families. Through collaborative endeavors with numerous families and colleagues, a collective effort was undertaken to cultivate a sense of community aimed at bolstering the support infrastructure for our students. Most importantly, my students' identities and cultures were considered assets, not deficits.

Who Am I?

"Roseanne, tell everyone where you are from." Now, as a teacher educator serving proudly at a Minority Serving Institution, I can answer this question confidently. I am an Indian American, born and raised in New York by Indian parents who emigrated to the United States and are U.S. citizens. I am also an Overseas Citizen of India, which means I have a life-long visa to travel to and from my family's homeland.

For the most part, my educational experiences from PK-12 lacked the culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy, social-emotional learning, and sense of belonging that I so needed. Remarkably, prior to enrolling in my doctoral program and encountering Lisa Delpit's (1988) insightful article delineating culturally influenced oral interactions as a strategic pedagogical approach, I had already implemented such practices within my classroom. The revelation of this alignment with established pedagogical strategies occurred during my inaugural doctoral class, under the guidance of Dr. Jim Paul from the University of South Florida. The ensuing discourse within a diverse cohort of doctoral classmates fostered an environment where literature was critically examined, resonating with our varied backgrounds, and drawing connections to our formative P-12 learning and teaching experiences. Scholars such as Geneva Gay, Gloria Ladson-Billings, Lisa Delpit, Carl Banks, Deirdre Cobb-Roberts, and many more left indelible marks on me. It was during my first two years of doctoral studies that I began to completely unpack my identity and these discussions illuminated the systemic shortcomings within the educational paradigm and continue to inform my role as a teacher educator. It was during this process that I realized the importance of disseminating this information to pre-service and in-service teachers, because there are so many children in schools who feel like The Outsider and who do not feel a sense of belonging.

As a teacher educator, my classroom serves as a sanctuary where community and relationships are cultivated and prioritized. Understanding the pivotal role a teacher plays in setting the tone, I dedicate five minutes before each class to a moment of reflection. During this time, I consider how, as a younger learner, I would have thrived with an educator who nurtured positive self-confidence and cultivated an environment of respect, accountability, safety, mutual support, and open expression. I then begin each class with hope; having faith that I am preparing future teachers who will one day be the greatest allies for those who feel like outsiders.

Conclusion

It has been recently noted that, “[t]he percentage of public school students in the United States who were Els [English Learners] increased overall between fall 2010 (9.2 percent, or 4.5 million students) and fall 2020 (10.3 percent, or 5.0 million students)” (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). Furthermore, “78.3% of bilingual students come from racially minoritized communities. Therefore, race, ethnicity, and bilingualism are inextricably linked.” (Garivaldo & Fabiano-Smith, 2023, p. 766). Whereas dual and multiple languages should be celebrated, my bilingualism was

considered a detriment in my early schooling years. The Outsider who began to speak English fluently by the middle of kindergarten, I lost the spoken fluency of my native language, Malayalam, by the end of that school year.

Presently, I am gratified to preside over a close-knit and diverse community at my metaphorical kitchen table, akin to Michelle Obama's reference to her circle of friends (Obama, 2023). This diverse assemblage, hailing from varied walks of life, imparts invaluable insights and contributes to my continual growth as an individual. While remnants of "The Outsider" sentiments persist in certain contexts, the impact of such situations has diminished, owing to the coping mechanisms cultivated within the supportive community that envelops me. Reflecting upon my journey, I would convey to my four-year-old self a message of assurance—urging faith and belief in the unfolding path ahead. Additionally, it is important to note that teachers leave enduring and indelible marks on their students, and it is crucial for them to understand the power they have. Every single student has their own rich narrative, life experiences, and identity which should be explored, celebrated and shared within the classroom.

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CHAPTER 2

PARENT POWER AND THE KRYPTONITE HIDDEN IN THE AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

LEILA ROSA

Me, As An Immigrant

First and foremost, I am a parent and an immigrant. However, accepting that I am an immigrant took time. Thirty years ago, I would have resisted this label. The struggle began as soon as I arrived in the United States in 1985. I quickly took in the message that being an immigrant in the USA meant being an outsider. It also meant being less human, being devalued, and having limited rights. In America, the shame of being an immigrant is deeply buried into the value of being human. I did not come with this shame from my home country. I earned it upon arriving in the USA. I heard how immigrants are described in the media. I also felt the dislike for immigrants in newspaper articles, and often confronted at the colleges I attended through the comments of others around me. The following five years were a continual hustle. I worked to hide my accent, sound more American, and dress similarly in an attempt to be like American youth. My identity was being eviscerated in subtle ways, and I simply internalized the attack and worked hard to prevent it by slowly cancelling myself. This process has impacted my ability to parent and ultimately it has also marked my children.

In a crisp October afternoon in 1991, as I walked out of the government building, holding my citizenship & naturalization certificate, I realized that I had made a choice. I felt that I had betrayed my childhood memories, and that I had distanced myself from myself by simply making a choice. I recall that I briefly wondered who my children would be, and I quickly shelved my thoughts by telling myself "Now I am an American". But I soon realized that other than a document nothing else had changed. The next day, while