

TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS ACROSS CULTURES:
TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF FORMATION, PURPOSE, AND COVID-INDUCED
CHANGE

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Abstract

This dissertation investigates cross-cultural teacher-student relationships by examining the perspectives of secondary teachers of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). Undertaken during the COVID-19 pandemic, this multiple-case ethnography analyzes a series of online interviews with eight secondary ESOL teachers across the state of Virginia and seeks to answer the following question: How do secondary ESOL teachers who self-identify as relationally successful experience and understand cross-cultural relationships with their students? The interviews probed teachers' understandings of the relationships they form with students from differing cultural backgrounds both before and during the pandemic. They are analyzed through an ethnographic lens that considers the intersection of schooling, relation, and culture, as well the fields of care ethics and relational pedagogy. Findings relate to cross-cultural relationship formation and function, as well as their disruption by COVID-19.

Four factors are found to influence the formation of secondary cross-cultural teacher-student relationships. Three of these factors are time, cross-cultural dispositions held by ESOL teachers, and a variety of caring teacher actions that validate students' cultural origins and identities. The fourth is what I have termed "parallel status positioning." Students marginalized due to culture, language, and/or ties to immigration are positioned low in the social hierarchy, and ESOL teachers are positioned low within the school instructional hierarchy. A mutual recognition of low status on the part of

teachers encourages solidarity, which leads to relationship building. Teachers are also found to care for their students in a way that is mindful of difference.

Cross-cultural teacher-student relationships function in a number of ways outside the realm of academics. ESOL teachers perceive their relationships with students as supporting integration into U.S. society (as opposed to assimilation) and as protecting students from unjust and prejudiced treatment. The ways in which they enact these functions, however, serve to maintain broader cultural patterns of White saviorism and assimilation, meaning that these teachers are unintentionally reproducing dominant societal values via their relationships with students. Care is also found to be a function of these relationships, which, at times, can be completely divorced from academic goals and stand alone as a unique function in its own right.

Finally, in the era of COVID-19, the ways in which teachers and students were able to relate to one another were severely curtailed. ESOL teachers reported spending significantly less time with students and that many types of caring teacher actions were no longer possible to enact. With opportunities for relational connection greatly reduced, these teachers began to fear for their students in terms of how the pandemic might affect students' physical, emotional, and educational well-being. They experienced both moral distress and a crisis of identity as their ability to relate to their students was disrupted.

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APPROVAL OF THE DISSERTATION

This dissertation (Teacher-Student Relationships Across Cultures: Teachers' Perceptions of Formation, Purpose, and COVID-Induced Change) has been approved by the Graduate Faculty of the School of Education and Human Development in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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List of Acronyms

CLiM: Culturally, Linguistically, and Immigrationally Marginalized

→ the term used in this dissertation to refer to the students of the participants; see page 11 for a detailed description and rationale

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

→ a term for the teaching of the English language in a context in which English is not the official or dominant language

EL: English Learner

→ an official term used in Virginia to identify a student whose first language is not English and who is receiving specialized English language instruction

ESL: English as a Second Language

→ a term for the teaching of the English language to those who are not yet proficient in a context in which English is the official or dominant language; some find this term limiting as it does not consider the possibility of a learner speaking more than two languages

ESOL: English for Speakers of Other Languages

→ a term for the teaching of the English language to those who are not yet proficient in a context in which English is the official or dominant language; some prefer this term over ESL because it allows the possibility of a learner already speaking multiple languages

K-12: Kindergarten through 12th Grade

SEI: Sheltered English Immersion

→ an instructional approach for English learners in which academic content is presented in English in a comprehensible manner using multiple modalities and in which English language development is pursued alongside grade-level subject area content learning

SGA: Student Government Association

SOL: Standards of Learning

→ the Virginia state learning standards; the acronym is also used to refer to the

standardized tests used by Virginia to track student learning and determine graduation eligibility

TESOL: Teaching English for Speakers of Other Languages
→ a subfield of education

WIDA: World-Class Instruction Design and Assessment
→ a consortium of over 40 state departments of education that designs ESOL learning standards and assessments; Virginia is a member of the consortium and uses WIDA-designed materials

Chapter 1: Introduction

In the spring of 2015, I was invited to an event celebrating the end of the school year hosted by a youth-focused nonprofit organization operating in the city where I was a high school teacher of English as a Second Language (ESL). One of my former students, a young lady from Ethiopia, received an award at the ceremony, and she gave a speech in which she recounted some of the obstacles she had overcome and thanked a few of her teachers for helping to get her to this place. I was one she thanked. My class had been her introduction to the American school system. She remembered me welcoming her into the class, carefully learning her name, and providing her with a pen, a pencil, an eraser, a folder, and a notebook. She looked for me as she recounted this memory, and I waved my arms wildly from the back of the room. She smiled. She found me later in the evening and gave me a hug. I cherish memories like these from my life as a secondary teacher, and sometimes I wonder how I was able to form such connection despite cultural difference.

Brief Musings on Teaching, Relation, and Culture

Teaching is a relational endeavor. Teacher and student come together in the classroom, and they must repeatedly encounter and engage with one another day in and day out over the course of a semester or school year. There are many ways in which they can potentially interact. Each in regard to the other might question, respond, discuss, speak, disagree, laugh, request, smile, yell, touch, interrupt, whisper, gesture, share, wait,

provoke, give, admonish, joke, take, praise, ignore, or engage in any number of other interpersonal actions. These exchanges might pertain to a range of topics from the academic to the personal. They might convey thoughts, feelings, or emotions. The wide variety of interactions and their purposes reveals the deep complexity of what happens between student and teacher. Yet interactions alone do not tell the whole story.

The relationship between a student and a teacher forms through interactions over time, yet it is more profound than a mere summation of those interactions. As teacher and student interact with one another, each forms and re-forms impressions and understandings of the other. These understandings are shaped by prior personal experience as well as the cultural, social, and political contexts in which they come to be, and they, in turn, shape the attitudes and actions that each adopts toward the other. Relationships between student and teacher are, thus, incredibly complex bonds with serious implications for learning, all the more so when student and teacher come from differing cultural backgrounds.

One's culture plays a large role in how a person both interprets the surrounding world and chooses to act within it. Cross-cultural relationships, therefore, are especially complex. A heightened possibility for misunderstanding or misinterpreting the motives and intentions of the other is ever-present. When misunderstanding occurs and remains unidentified, it can snowball. Deleterious effects on the quality of the relationship may grow, which in turn may corrode the quality of teaching and learning taking place.

Recently, the COVID-19 pandemic seriously impacted the manner in which we all were able to interact with and relate to one another. For teachers and students, these changes undoubtedly affected their ability to form relationships with one another as well

as the quality of those relationships. An initial move to online instructional platforms meant trying to relate through a screen, and when schools began to reopen and invite students to attend in-person (even if only for part of the time), masking requirements blocked facial expressions and social distancing requirements altered how they were able to interact physically. During the height of the pandemic, everyone in every corner of society felt the isolation of quarantine orders and were acutely aware of how masking and social distancing changed our interactions with others. Teachers and students were no different.

Current demographics within the U.S. public school system suggest that it is quite common for students and teachers to be paired together across cultural boundaries, rendering the cross-cultural teacher-student relationship an important topic for research. This study seeks to examine how such relationships are formed, how they function in the lives of those involved, and what happened when our collective reaction to the pandemic drastically altered how teachers and students were able to relate to one another.

Statement of Purpose

Teaching in the US is widely considered to be a profession ideal for those who are motivated by relationships and have a desire to positively influence the lives of others. This view has a long and gendered history. As public schooling expanded rapidly in the mid-1800s, teaching became an acceptable profession for women in part because they were believed to be more naturally caring and nurturing than men and such traits were seen as necessary for the job (Neem, 2017; Tyack, 1974). This legacy continues to the present day. The vast majority of public school teachers are women, approximately 77% according to recent statistics (Snyder et al., 2019), and a quick internet search for the

“qualities of a teacher” returns a litany of articles and blog posts delineating traits such as care, empathy, compassion, and the ability to relate as essential for the job (see, for example, Dennison, 2019; Envision, 2015; Foxwell, 2018; Lewis, 2019; Meer, 2018; Orlando, 2013; Peterson-DeLuca, 2016; Tomar, n.d.; Western Governors University, 2020; Zambas, 2018). Additionally, social science research reveals the formation of fulfilling relationships with students to be an integral factor contributing to teachers’ motivation to enter and remain in the teaching profession (Brunetti, 2001; Burke et al., 2013; Wang & Hall, 2019). Dispositions of care and relationality thus appear to be longstanding cultural expectations for teachers in the US.

These expectations underlie much current educational research. Relationships between students and teachers are often mentioned in passing in the introductory or concluding sections of articles exploring other topics (see, for example, Neal-Jackson, 2018; Schultz et al., 2008; Turner & Mangual Figueroa, 2019) or in referencing other scholarship (see, for example, Molloy Elreda, 2019). For example, in their article about how teachers adopt a listening stance in their practice, Schultz et al. (2008) make a direct claim about the connection of this stance to the formation of relationships with students conducive to learning: “teachers managed to learn about their students and personalize their classrooms to build relationships with students that were important and integral to learning” (p. 182). This statement appears in the conclusion and is the only explicit mention of relationships with students in the entire article. In such instances where teacher-student relationships are mentioned in passing, they are used to add weight to the topic being explored or to the researchers’ argument without becoming a true focus of scholars’ own original work.

In addition, rather than a holistic treatment, relationships are also often reduced to component behaviors or practices in the analysis of data (Kibler et al., 2019; Larson et al., 2018) or in creating and evaluating quantitative measures, as Yin et al. (2019) purport to do with a survey scale designed to measure teachers' dispositions toward a "pedagogy of love." Such reduction of complexity, while potentially revealing important analytical insights, can lead to the portrayal of relationships as dehumanized, disembodied concepts of practice. Actions and behaviors are foregrounded, while underlying motivations and human connection are lost. If effort is not made to reintegrate components into a cohesive whole, we do not get portraits of teachers and students as full human beings.

Most often, though, the role teacher-student relationships play in educational experiences or how they are conceptualized by researchers and participants are unstated and/or unexamined assumptions permeating the entire work. Specific terms that suggest relationships are commonly employed, such as "emotional supportiveness" (Molloy Elreda et al, 2019), "nurture," and "encourage" (Neal-Jackson, 2018), while the broader topic of relationships is either largely or completely unbroached. Similarly, themes or topics implying relationality, such as creating community or adapting instruction in response to students, may be pursued without relationships themselves specifically being addressed (see, for example, Parsons et al., 2018; Redding, 2019; Zhai, 2019).

Relationships might be conflated with another topic, as is the case in Vandenbroucke et al. (2018), who use the terms "interaction" and "relationship" interchangeably when referring to exchanges between students and teachers. The teacher-student relationship might also be hypothesized as influential in the phenomenon of study, while remaining unexamined (see, for example, Redding, 2019). Finally, teacher-student relationships are

often portrayed rather simplistically as either positive or negative (see, for example, Cornelius-White, 2007; García-Moya et al., 2019; Masko, 2018; Newberry, 2010; Spilt & Hughes, 2015; Thompson, 2018), without much explanation as to what those designations actually mean. Such work does not recognize the dynamic nature of relationships or how different actors might perceive them in different ways. It also ignores the extent to which culture and context influence how relationships are defined and understood, including what a “positive” or “negative” relationship looks like in a particular context or how a relationship might be both simultaneously.

None of this is to say that the research carried out by scholars in ways outlined above, research that looks at components of relationships or that frames the topic of study in a way that does not center relationality, is not worthwhile. To the contrary, many of the studies cited above provide interesting and valuable insights into the ways in which teachers and students interact and the potential consequences of those interactions. What is often missing, however, is the broader picture: a more holistic, integrated look at the teacher-student relationship and how it functions. Fruja Amthor & Roxas (2016) call for the conceptualization and study of the ways in which impactful cross-cultural relationships between teacher and student are formed. Who knows that better than those involved? Sidorkin (2023) suggests:

If we asked experienced, successful teachers the right kinds of questions, we could create a large body of knowledge, tips and tricks on how to build and maintain relations with and among students, and how to use them to advance learning and well-being. Education scholars almost never get around to asking these questions. (pp. 140–141)

This study aims to ask these questions and portray a more holistic picture of the cross-cultural teacher-student relationship.

Key Definitions: Interaction, Relationship, and Culture

Central to the project are an understanding of what constitutes a relationship between teacher and student, as well as a way to make the determination that a student and a teacher come from different cultural backgrounds. Therefore, the following key terms require further elaboration: interaction, relationship, and culture.

Interaction versus relationship. Relationality—how we understand one another—is very difficult to pin down. It simultaneously functions at many levels, each somehow intertwined with the others. There are discreet interactions between teacher and student as well as the accumulation and compounding of interactions over time. There are various contexts at play: the cultural contexts of each actor, the classroom context, the school context, and the wider socio-political context of the community, state, and country. Power dynamics must be considered as they influence how those in relation interact with one another and perceive the actions of others. Each actor is also an individual with a personal history and a unique way of understanding the world and her place in it. Levinas (1961/1969) argues that, when in relation, an individual constantly strives to understand the other without the possibility of ever reaching a full understanding. For him it is the striving that is necessary, for without it we confine the other to our already limited view. It is in striving to understand that we relate, making relationships dynamic and always evolving. It is all very complicated and complex, which is, perhaps, why the teacher-student relationship is so often an unaddressed,

underlying aspect of research that investigates how individuals engage and interact with one another in schools.

For the purposes of this study, I understand interaction and the relationship to be two distinct, yet intertwined, phenomena. Interactions are behaviors involving at least two individuals. They are surface-level phenomena: momentary, fleeting, and observable. They have no deep meaning in and of themselves; they are, instead, instilled with meaning by individuals in the context of a relationship (Biesta et al., 2004; Jennings, 2018). Relationships are built upon interactions—one must interact with another in order for a relationship to form—yet they are more profound. They have to do with the meanings individuals construct from interactions and ascribe to the nature of their interpersonal association. Relationships, therefore, are interpersonal connections between individuals that influence how they understand and interpret one another (Jennings, 2018; Wilson & Corbett, 2007; Yu et al., 2018). They are reciprocal and multi-directional, as all parties contribute to and draw from a relationship (Sidorkin, 2002; Wilkins, 2014). At the same time, they are understood differently and uniquely by those involved, meaning there is never a definitive interpretation or explanation of the nature of a relationship (Biesta et al., 2004; Sidorkin, 2002). They also exist over time (Jennings, 2018; Yu et al., 2018; Sidorkin, 2002), suggesting that they can shift, change, and evolve as individuals interact more and more with one another. Relationships are, thus, dynamic entities, and when those engaged in a relationship come from different cultural backgrounds, the complexity of the phenomenon becomes heightened.

Culture. A final key concept in this study that must be carefully defined, therefore, is culture. Culture is a contested concept, and it has been noted that there is not

a standard definition on which anthropologists or social scientists agree (Agar, 2006; Anderson-Levitt, 2012; Hoffman, 1999). I am partial to an explanation put forth by George and Louise Spindler (1997a): culture “is expressed in behavior, words, symbols, and in the application of [shared] knowledge to make instrumental activities and social situations ‘work’” (p. 51). The idea that culture is what makes exchanges between individuals “work” gets at the essence of the concept, that it is a shared yet largely unconscious map for accepted behavior within a group, resulting in patterns of activity and interaction that can be observed. Culture is therefore often noticed in dissonant moments, when one does not have the same shared, unconscious understanding as others (Agar, 2006; Green & Skukauskaite, 2012).

To say that culture enables social situations to “work” is not to say that individuals of the same culture live in a perpetual state of utopian harmony, however. Disagreements and misunderstandings certainly occur. Those with a shared culture have a shared understanding of behavioral norms and expectations, even for arguments. They use and understand the same cues and signals, allowing them to adopt a common frame of understanding for communication, negotiate its progress, and repair misunderstandings with relative ease (Gumperz, 1982). Thus, when cultural backgrounds differ between teacher and student there is great room for misunderstanding to occur and remain unidentified (Gumperz, 1982; Heath, 1982; Kirmayer, 2020; Nieto, 2010b). These misunderstandings can compound over time and negatively impact student learning. Culture, therefore, plays a significant role in how we relate to one another.

The Issue

The need for research into cross-cultural teacher-student relationships is clear

when demographics of public-school student and teacher populations are examined. The student population is becoming increasingly diverse, while the teaching population remains largely homogenous. In 2015, the majority of students in public elementary and high schools in the US—51 percent—were students of color; the teaching force, however, was 80 percent White (Snyder et al., 2019). Additionally, nearly 4.9 million students were English learners that year (ED Data Express, n. d.), which works out to 9.6 percent of the entire student population. It is clear from these numbers that in U.S. public schools, students commonly come from different backgrounds than their teachers, making of great consequence the integration of culture into the study of teacher-student relationships.

The secondary English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) context offers an ideal setting for the study of this issue. First, research on teacher-student relationships with adolescent students is lacking (Yu et al., 2018), a gap addressed by the current study. Second, the ESOL context is particularly suited to the study of cross-cultural teacher-student relationships as students generally carry with them different cultural norms and understandings than their teachers. Such difference is often part of the landscape of teaching students who speak different languages and come from other parts of the world. I hope to deepen our knowledge of cross-cultural teacher-student relationships by exploring how secondary ESOL teachers understand the nature of this bond with their students from different cultures and what we learn about how it is understood and experienced through the disruptions to it caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Even when teachers frame the relationship in terms of a positive/negative designation, I aim to move beyond such simplistic labeling to understand what such a designation means to them.

A word on terminology is necessary here. There are myriad terms in circulation used to describe students who do not speak English as their primary language(s). Each term carries various connotations with it, oftentimes harboring deficit attitudes toward this population (García & Kleifgen, 2018; Gutiérrez & Orellana, 2006a; Martínez, 2018; Webster & Lu, 2012). In selecting terms and descriptors for those with whom we engage in research, researchers must be reflective about the meanings embedded in these terms and intentional in our word choice to avoid inadvertent disparagement (Gutiérrez & Orellana, 2006a, 2006b).

While there is no perfect term, I choose to adapt Addy's (2015) phrase *culturally and linguistically marginalized* to describe the students of participants in this study. The term is meant to push back against reifying "the position of White, monolingual, English-speaking students as the norm" (p. 205), while also foregrounding issues of power. While centering the cultural and linguistic differences that mark the population of students taught by the participants in this study, Addy's term is too broad in that it could also be applied to those minoritized by race or by speaking a nondominant English dialect who are generations removed from immigration. The participants in this study work with students who are directly connected to immigration and whose minoritization stems from that connection, at least in part. They may have immigrated on their own, immigrated together with other family members, or be the children of immigrants who were born in the US. There is thus, a subset of culturally and linguistically minoritized students for whom immigration is a salient aspect of that experience. Therefore, I will use the term *culturally, linguistically, and immigrationally minoritized* to refer to students in the ESOL context. I will abbreviate this term as CLiM, the lower case "i" indicating that this

population experiences a specific type of marginalization that is part of a wider phenomenon.

Another term that will appear in the text is *English learner* (EL). This is an official designation codified in the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 and was both encountered in documents and used by participants. I do not intend to change the words used by others and will use *English learner* or *EL* when it appears in the data.

Research Questions

This study aims to complexify our understanding of the secondary cross-cultural teacher-student relationship by illuminating a phenomenon that is part of what Erickson (1986) calls the “invisibility of everyday life” (p. 121). It seeks knowledge about the nature of this relationship, how it is understood and experienced by secondary ESOL teachers who believe themselves to form strong relationships with students from other cultures, how it functions within the school community, and what new perspectives we gain about it from the disruption to relation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The research question and sub-questions that guided the inquiry are as follows:

- How do secondary ESOL teachers who self-identify as relationally successful experience and understand cross-cultural relationships with their students?
 - How do these teachers form and maintain cross-cultural relationships with their students?
 - What is the role of care in these teachers’ experience of these relationships?
 - How do these relationships function within the cultural context of a Virginia secondary school?

- How do cross-cultural relationships with students intersect with the professional and personal identities of ESOL teachers?
- How do these teachers understand cross-cultural relationships with students to intersect with teaching and learning?
- How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the experience of cross-cultural teacher-student relationships for secondary ESOL teachers?

Importantly, what we can learn from this research is dependent upon who takes part. Recruitment methods for this study will be outlined in detail in chapter three, but a note here on who participants are is important as a way to frame the forthcoming analysis. Engaging in multiple, lengthy in-depth interviews for little compensation draws a certain type of participant, one who is sincerely interested in the topic and thinks it to be important. The teachers who participated in this study are committed to crafting what they believe to be strong and supportive relationships with students from other cultures. They view themselves as relationally successful with this population of students. ESOL teachers who view themselves in this way were not deliberately sought out to conduct this research study, but given the extensive participation required, this is the participant pool that emerged. This research study, therefore, is surfacing and analyzing the viewpoints, understandings, and experiences of practitioners who believe cultivating cross-cultural relationships with their students is important and who also believe that they do this well.

Positionality

I have long been fascinated by culture and language. At the age of 15, I participated in a six-week study abroad program in France involving a month-long

homestay and two weeks of language study at the Université de Caen Normandie. In college I was fortunate enough to sing in an a capella group that toured the world for a summer after graduation. Unlike my friends, who preferred the European section of our tour, I most enjoyed the locations that were vastly different from my upbringing in New England, places like Japan, Thailand, Egypt, and Turkey.

I leaned into this interest by entering the Peace Corps and becoming a teacher of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Mozambique, East Africa. I lived and taught for three years in Cumbana, a rural village in the southern region of the country, and learned Portuguese along the way. Importantly for my future work and my current research interests, I personally experienced an acculturation process. I was required to figure out and learn the ways of interacting and communicating, the shared understandings, and the rhythms of life of the people there to fit myself into that cultural system. That experience has allowed me to empathize deeply with immigrants and migrants in the US because I have experienced the exasperation of not being able to make oneself understood, the homesickness, and the deep frustration of living in a very different place when the novelty wore off and how things functioned simply felt wrong. I also experienced being able to push through those difficulties and come out the other side, able to communicate effectively and comfortably while working within a very different kind of system and community than the one in which I had been raised.

These experiences led me to have a deep sense of empathy for my students when I became an ESL teacher in 2007. During my teaching career, I felt I held not just pedagogical responsibilities toward my students to facilitate their acquisition of the English language, but also relational responsibilities to listen and attend to them as

human beings undergoing an immensely stressful and difficult transition. I felt it was my duty to create opportunities for them to be able to reflect on and explore their immigrant journeys and their developing identities (Mish, 2014¹; Saavedra, 2016, 2020, 2023). All of these experiences—traveling and living abroad and teaching adolescents from other parts of the world—drive my interest in studying and trying to understand cross-cultural educational relationships today.

These experiences, particularly my nine-year career as an ESL teacher, give me a keen insider knowledge of my participants' professional worlds. However, my doctoral studies have allowed me to dive much deeper into the scholarship on these topics and have also provided me with research training and practice that allow me to view the educational endeavor through different eyes. I am now a researcher, doing my best to maintain a level of analytic distance as I interview and interact with ESOL teachers. I am no longer a colleague. This type of perspective, however, requires that I bracket my own personal understanding of my experience in order that it not unduly influence the analytic process (Vagle, 2018; van Manen, 1990). I address just how I approached this important intellectual task in chapter three.

Now that the analysis has been completed, I feel that I was successful in this endeavor because the claims I put forward are varied as they related to my own experience as an ESOL teacher. Some of what I discuss are issues of which I was aware and that I thought about at the time, such as the importance of small gestures of affirmation, an empathic outlook, and the need to incorporate opportunities for personal

¹ Mish was my surname prior to marriage. This article from 2014 is my only publication under that name.

reflection into coursework (see chapter five). It is clear that I engaged in some practices only with hindsight, such as the reinscription of harmful societal prejudices (see chapter six) and that I cared for my students in a way that was subtly different from many of my colleagues because it was mindful of difference (see chapter five). I can see now that these things were part of my teaching life, but I was unaware at the time. Finally, some claims bear no resemblance to my own teaching experience, such as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on educational relationships (see chapter seven) and the low status and lack of respect many ESOL teachers encounter (see chapter five). I believe that these results being variably related to my own experience speak to my success in moving beyond a former teacher's perspective into that of a researcher.

Significance

This research contributes to the body of literature on educational relationships and the burgeoning area of relational pedagogy. We know that relationships between teachers and students are highly consequential for learning (Cornelius-White, 2007; Roorda et al., 2011, 2017), yet the knowledge about how teachers can form supportive relationships with students remains elusive. This research answers calls to more fully conceptualize teacher-student relationships (Sidorkin, 2023), particularly those that are cross-cultural in nature (Fruja Amthor & Roxas, 2016). In doing so, it is also in conversation with the field of care ethics. Responding to critiques that ways of caring can be enmeshed with colonial mindsets and result in harm rather than support (Fraser-Burgess, 2020; Quek, 2022), I sketch out an approach to caring that is mindful of difference and that is based on patterns of teacher-student interactions discussed by participants.

In attempting to conceptualize the cross-cultural teacher-student relationship, this research outlines a number of ways in which these relationships function that are completely divorced from academic achievement. We tend to think about educational relationships quite narrowly in terms of the educational enterprise itself, focusing solely on their impact on learning. While they do have that impact, there is much more that they do, as well (Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004; Sidorkin, 2023). This research can help us to see the broad scope of significance that relationships hold in educational spaces and maybe to think differently about how and how much we pay attention to them.

Finally, this research took place during an unprecedented interruption of how we move through the world. Our collective response to COVID-19 affected our daily lives in every possible way down to how comfortable we were standing within six feet of another person. The ways in which we approached schooling were no exception; highly consequential changes were made in the hopes of preserving the physical health of those in schools. This research takes advantage of this accident of history to explore how COVID-19 disrupted the relational foundation of schooling for ESOL teachers and what this disruption reveals about the importance of relationships in educational spaces.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is divided into eight chapters. Chapter one provides an introduction to the topic being explored, defines key terms, and lays out my research questions. Chapter two reviews and synthesizes the relevant social science literature. The intersections of education, relation, and culture are explored, as is the topic of care ethics. Chapter three provides an overview of the study's design, methodology, and methods. Conceived as a multiple-case ethnography, the chapter lays out key principals of this

blended methodology, and it explains the data generation and analysis methods used. Chapter four explains who the participants of the study are, both as a collective and as individuals, and reviews evidence of the quality of the relationships that participants are able to forge with their students. Chapter five outlines four factors that appear important in the formation of supportive cross-cultural teacher-student relationships. These are time, a phenomenon I call “parallel status positioning,” cross-cultural dispositions on the part of teachers, and caring teacher actions. The chapter ends with a brief elaboration of care that is mindful of difference, expanding on the standard interpretation of care ethics to conceptualize how care might be effectively enacted across cultures. Chapter six, after contrasting the ideologies of assimilation and integration, elaborates four nonacademic functions of cross-cultural teacher-student relationships. ESOL teachers feel that they support their students’ integration into their new cultural environment, protect them from unfair treatment, and provide care. Yet they also inadvertently reinforce prevalent prejudicial attitudes. Chapter seven examines how the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted teachers’ ability to relate to their students and the effects of that disruption. Teachers began to fear for the well-being of their students, which, when compounded with stressful changes to their work life and the disconnectedness they felt, turned into moral distress and a crisis of identity. The dissertation concludes with chapter eight, which offers closing thoughts including the study’s limitations and contributions, as well as avenues for future research.

Chapter 2: Background and Literature Review

The cross-cultural teacher-student relationship lies at the nexus of culture, education, and relation. In the following literature review I will examine the interplay of each of these topics with the others. I end with a look at care ethics, as teacher-student relationships are regularly described in terms of care in the literature.

Relation and Education

In 2004, a volume titled *No Education Without Relation*, edited by Charles Bingham and Alexander Sidorkin, issued a call for a relational pedagogy, an approach to teaching and learning that centers relation, not only as a means to improved educational outcomes but as a purpose of the educational enterprise, as well (Biesta et al., 2004). Since then, a more focused scholarly discourse has emerged on the intersection of relation and education. It characterizes learning as inherently relational (Hinsdale, 2016; Sidorkin, 2023) and portrays the educational relationship between teacher and student as one that is unique to the educational context. An educational relation is built on a foundation of safety and trust with the purpose of pushing past that foundation into a zone of discomfort that enables intellectual development, learning, and personal growth (Freire, 1998/2005; McKay & Macomber, 2021; Sidorkin, 2023). A particular tension inheres within this type of relation; it attempts to balance care and affection with the charge to propel growth. This tension is a defining feature of the teacher-student relationship: lean too much toward affection, and it becomes friendship; lean too much

toward driving growth, and it becomes managerial (Saavedra, 2021; Sidorkin, 2023). The educational relation sits between and is pulled by the two extremes.

Philosophies of alterity undergird relational pedagogy. There is always some difference, strangeness, or uniqueness of another person that we cannot fully access, even though we strive to. Furthermore, an ethical obligation exists to strive in this manner (Levinas, 1961/1969), particularly on the part of teachers, who have the ability to set the conditions that center the dignity of students and allow them to open themselves to those who wish to understand them (Freire, 1998/2005; Hinsdale, 2016; Margonis, 2011). Relational pedagogy deems such striving to be important, as learning occurs in the communication across the gap between self and other (Biesta, 2004). In an educational relation, then, teachers must also be learners, often about their students' realities, viewpoints, and where they stand in the sociocultural milieu (Freire, 1998/2005; Hinsdale, 2016; Margonis, 2004). From the perspective of relational pedagogy, therefore, the educational relation itself holds merit separate from learning. It influences the learning process, to be sure, but it also helps students and teachers develop their relational selves and the repertoires of relational engagement that they will carry forward in life and career (Sidorkin, 2023).

Practitioners and researchers alike recognize the educational relation as an important and consequential aspect of the educational environment. They are considered to be foundational to learning (Hinsdale, 2016; Igoa, 1995; McConville, 2013; Saavedra, 2020; Sidorkin, 2002; Thayer-Bacon, 2004) and have the potential to either aid or hinder the educational process (Jiménez & Rose, 2010; Jiménez et al., 2011; McConville, 2013; Nieto, 2010b; Preston et al., 2017). Approaches to teaching that emphasize the

importance of teacher-student relationships, such as “pedagogies of with-ness” (Hogg et al., 2020), are becoming more prominent. A number of meta-analyses have demonstrated a convergence in the educational literature on the importance of relationships for learning. Cornelius-White (2007) found that positive teacher-student relationships strongly correlate with positive student outcomes in terms of learning, behavior, and affect, while Roorda et al. (2011, 2017) found that quality teacher-student relationships resulted in higher academic achievement via increased engagement among students. The many hundreds of studies reviewed in these analyses reveal the deep importance of teacher-student relationships in educational processes.

A growing body of research seeks to analyze and characterize teacher-student relationships. For instance, McHugh et al. (2013) characterize actions taken by teachers as either bridges or barriers to establishing strong teacher-student relationships. Much research runs in this vein to identify discreet actions and behaviors that serve as components of relationships conducive to learning. Such components include recognizing and valuing students’ lived experience (Jaffe-Walter & Lee, 2018; Lester et al., 2019; Masko, 2018; Rodríguez, 2008; Salerno & Kibler, 2018), a personal desire to relate to students (Jaffe-Walter & Lee, 2018; Kibler et al., 2019; Lester et al., 2019; McHugh et al., 2013), a commitment to instructional rigor and pushing students to improve (Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Jiménez & Rose, 2010; Masko, 2018; Saavedra, 2021), and validation of effort and performance (Kibler et al., 2019; Rodríguez, 2008; Saavedra, 2021). Students’ reactions to and perceptions of these behaviors are often used to support findings. Attempts in the literature to view students as active agents in establishing and building relationships with their teachers are quite sparse, though. Lester et al. (2019)

recognize that a desire for a relationship must be present in both parties; Newberry (2010) identifies mutual processes of appraisal, agreement, and testing in relationship building; and Yu et al. (2018) explore student perceptions of their relationships with teachers. However, student agency in constructing relationships with their teachers is largely unexplored.

Another area of investigation concerns the various functions and purposes relationships serve in an educational setting. Caring teachers can nurture both the emotional and academic growth of students (Carter Andrews et al., 2019; hooks, 2003; Igoa, 1995; Saavedra, 2020) via relationships that help bridge a divide between them, be it racial, cultural, or experiential (Milner, 2018). Teachers' recognition of students as individuals signals to them that they are cared for and valued and that teachers desire their success (McHugh et al., 2013; Rodríguez, 2008). Care-filled relationships can serve as a buffer against the sting of societal inequities (Carter Andrews et al., 2019) and also increase student motivation and engagement (Roorda et al., 2011, 2017). Such relationships also build social capital that teachers can leverage to guide students toward learning (Jones & Deutsch, 2011; Saavedra, 2021). Building trust, in particular, can set the stage for the risk-taking mindset required of students in order to learn (McKay & Macomber, 2021). Relationships can have deleterious effects on students' experiences in school as well. Gregory and Weinstein (2008) have found that discipline referrals are largely situation-specific, meaning that a particular student is seen as a discipline problem by a particular teacher and the relationship between the two is a key factor in the actions each takes toward the other. On the other hand, when trusting relationships are

established students are more likely to comply with teacher directives (Gregory & Ripski, 2008; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008).

A small subset of the literature on teacher-student relationships specifically addresses the experience of CLiM students, including those who are immigrants and those learning English. Attention to relationships is thought to be crucial for these students (Jiménez & Rose, 2010; Jiménez et al., 2011; Saavedra, 2020). While findings are generally similar to the wider literature discussed above in terms of relationship components and purposes, scholars argue specifically that students' experiences with migration and with navigating life in a new culture and language be explicitly addressed in relationship building (Jaffe-Walter & Lee, 2018; Saavedra, 2021) and even integrated into the curriculum (Jaffe-Walter & Lee, 2018; Igoa, 1995; Saavedra, 2020). Such an effort requires that teachers attend carefully to students' behaviors, attitudes, and temperament (Igoa, 1995; Saavedra, 2020) to understand students' unexpressed needs. Yet teachers must be careful. When a teacher from a dominant background works with CLiM students, the power imbalances inherent in these differing social positions can complicate the teaching relation (Hinsdale, 2016).

The extensive literature already discussed suggests that we know relationships are deeply important for learning, but we do not seem to prioritize them in a manner that holds with this knowledge. In the practical sphere, the educational system itself can discourage relationships as the attention required to understand and respond to individual students in a caring manner is regularly thwarted by the fast pace of school life (Furman, 2019; Poplin & Weeres, 1992; Raab, 2018). In the research sphere, policy and research priorities often relegate the relational aspects of teaching to a secondary status in

comparison with issues of content knowledge and pedagogical practices. The emotional is subordinated to the rational (García-Moya et al., 2019; hooks, 2003). As a result, interpersonal aspects of educational relationships and the processes involved in forming them remain understudied (Lester et al., 2019; Newberry, 2010). To illustrate this point, one need only to refer to the 31-year-old report on the state of schooling authored by Poplin and Weeres (1992), which reads as if it had been very recently published. The report identifies relationships as one of seven fundamental problems in education. These fundamental problems underlie what are commonly presented as problems in schooling (such as low achievement or high dropout rates) but which the authors argue are actually “consequences of [these] much deeper and more fundamental problems” (p. 11). Poor quality relationships between students and teachers were found to negatively impact students’ self-image, and teachers and students were found to hold different understandings of care, leading each group to characterize the other as uncaring (Poplin & Weeres, 1992). Thirty-one years later, we are still facing a situation in which teacher-student relationships and the consequences they hold for learning are undervalued.

Education and Culture

Nieto (2010b) agrees with many of the scholars cited above that the quality of teacher-student relationships has a great effect on student learning, yet she also reminds us that teachers do not act outside of the wider society and culture of which they are a part. Rogoff (2011, 2014) supports this point in her identification of two quite different modes of facilitating learning that are each bound to a particular cultural context.

“Learning by Observing and Pitching In” occurs within indigenous communities in the Americas and is a collaborative process, with learning happening in community groups

through interaction and relation. In contrast, “Assembly-line Instruction” is practiced in school structures developed by Western societies and emphasizes individuation and control. Cultural proclivities are strong, so it can be quite difficult to learn in a mode that is unfamiliar (Rogoff, 2014). This fact has profound implications for students from non-Western cultural backgrounds. Returning to Spindler and Spindler’s (1997a) definition of culture as that which makes social exchanges work, the degree of difference in the cultural backgrounds of teachers and their students holds major implications for learning. If the interactions between teachers and students do not work, how can quality learning occur?

The field of anthropology of education has a long history of documenting through ethnographic research how unexamined cultural norms can negatively impact student learning in schools. School personnel often hold low expectations for and deficit perspectives of children from nondominant cultures (Adair & Colegrove, 2021; Anyon, 1980; James, 2012; Rosenfeld, 1971; Valenzuela, 1999). Differential treatment for students from different cultures can be enacted via a hidden curriculum (Anyon, 1980) or unknowingly employed in the manner that teachers interact with students (Heath, 1982; James, 2012; Spindler, 1963). Oppositional relationships can develop between students and teachers as a result of cultural difference (Erickson, 1993; Jaffe-Walter, 2016; Ogbu, 1983; Rosenfeld, 1971; Valenzuela, 1999; Wolcott, 1997). Students from a nondominant cultural background might not intuitively understand classroom spaces and tasks. When their performance or behavior does not meet the culturally infused expectations of the teacher, they may be deemed to have failed a task (Delgado-Gaitan, 1987; Erickson,

1993; Heath, 1982; Valenzuela, 1999) or their behavior may be misinterpreted as defiant (Delgado-Gaitan, 1987; Rosenfeld, 1971; Valenzuela, 1999).

Immigrant students regularly face the judgments and actions outlined in the previous paragraph in their schooling experiences. Cultural difference often comes with feelings of superiority on the part of members of the dominant group (Freire, 1998/2005), which can lead to acts meant to subordinate those who are perceived as other. Arzubiaga et al. (2009) argue that the context of education for immigrant children in the US is generally one in which they routinely face xenophobia and deficit perspectives. Problems compound when students' cultural backgrounds are in conflict with approved curriculum, standard pedagogy, and/or the new country's cultural norms (Li & Grineva, 2016; Nieto, 2010a; Rogoff, 2014). Learning under such circumstances becomes quite difficult. There is also much room for misunderstanding and misinterpretation. Acting with good intention might not be perceived by others as such because one's cultural expectations influence one's interpretations of others' behavior (Chamberlain, 2005; Kirmayer, 2004; Li & Grineva, 2016). Misinterpreting others' motivations leads to negative reactions and creates barriers to relationship building and, ultimately, to learning.

While all too common, these experiences are thankfully not universal. The literature also documents teaching from an asset-based perspective, in which the linguistic and cultural knowledge students and families bring with them to U.S. schools are valued (Arzubiaga et al., 2009; Jaffe-Walter & Lee, 2018; Nieto, 2013; Saavedra, 2020). Schooling experiences that respect the heritage cultures of students and families, seeing them as assets on which to build, are more fruitful. According to Gibson and Koyama (2011), CLiM students "often do better in school when the acquisition of school

knowledge and competencies in the ways of the dominant culture are viewed as additional skills to be drawn upon as appropriate rather than as a replacement for their home cultures and identities” (p. 394). Igoa (1995) outlines a particularly sensitive approach to teaching amidst cultural difference that draws on her own experience as an immigrant student. She characterizes immigrant children as culturally uprooted and advocates that teachers recognize this uprootedness by responding to the cultural, psychological, and academic needs of their students. Such a response requires an attunement to students’ actions and a disposition that can recognize unspoken needs (Igoa, 1995; Saavedra, 2016, 2020).

Beyond classroom learning, schools serve as sites of cultural education and reproduction through the modeling and practice of cultural norms. Teachers’ cultural backgrounds affect how they teach and interact with students (Rahmawati & Taylor, 2018). Teaching passes on core cultural beliefs (McConville, 2013) of the dominant culture, which in the US “reflects the European American values of the people who established the major institutions of this county” (Chamberlain, 2005, p. 197).

Socialization and acculturation can occur through formal or informal means. Those with more experience and knowledge transmit their cultural knowledge to others when they interact (Spindler, 1963; Wolcott, 1984). In the context of schooling, teachers’ actions, including pedagogical moves, display dominant cultural norms, and teachers guide students to conform to such behavior (Adair et al., 2012; Tobin et al., 2009). For immigrant students, this means that schools teach them about the society they have entered and in what ways they qualify and do not qualify as members of that society (Doucet, 2017). It is important to remember, however, that these spaces are contested and

co-constructed by all of the actors within them. Students do not blindly absorb dominant cultural norms. Instead, there is a constant push and pull between the structure of culture and the agency of individuals (Hoffman, 1999; Nieto, 2010b, Ortner, 2006).

Culture and Relation

Culture plays a major role in how we relate to one another. Cultural norms define the general expectations we hold of relations between those with specific status designations (i.e., father-son; teacher-student), but particular relations deviate from those norms in unique ways (Sidorkin, 2023). Newberry (2010) asserts, “[w]hen the relationship is natural and easy there is little thought given” to establishing and maintaining it (p. 1702). When we interact with someone from a similar cultural background to ourselves, it feels “natural and easy” because we unconsciously recognize cues and understand unspoken rules and patterns of interaction that are embedded in how we act and speak (Erickson, 1986; Spindler & Spindler, 1997b). These cues are indirect forms of communication that can signal the actor/speaker’s intent and identity as well as an expected manner of response (Gumperz, 1982, 2015; Schiffrin, 1996). When cues are not shared, cultural difference surfaces because those lacking shared knowledge miss the subtle signals being communicated and behave in ways that are unexpected. Cultural difference is, thus, brought into view via relation, albeit relation that has failed to at least some extent (Agar, 2006).

Cultural differences have been found in many forms of communication and interaction, for example, in how adults and children communicate with one another (Heath, 1982), in understandings of what constitutes caring attitudes and behavior (Valenzuela, 1999), and in the appropriateness of professional distance in teacher-student

relationships (García-Moya et al., 2019). Cultural difference has even been found to affect settings we might think of as less social and more scientific, creating different perceptions between doctor and patient regarding what counts as a successful outcome from a course of medical treatment (Kirmayer, 2004). Such differences in how people exist in, understand, and interpret the world around them are grounded in cultural understandings of personhood (Kpanake, 2018; Scheper-Hughes, 1990). They have profound implications for how people relate to one another.

Kirmayer (2020) argues that an individual's culture manifests in a particular epistemic commitment in how that individual sees the world. This commitment inevitably acts as a blinder toward understanding how an individual from a different cultural background might interpret the same event or interaction. It can lead to the "triumph of ideology over experience" (Kirmayer, 2004, p. 43), which blocks true relation. Via her cultural epistemic commitment, an individual uses her own cultural ideology to explain a phenomenon, which may ignore or be blind to another individual's experience. This way of understanding the world is certainly natural, and we rarely think about it occurring. However, it can be quite consequential as it is nearly always intertwined with issues of power. For example, Rogers and Brooms (2020) found that teachers' cultural ideologies acted as barriers to forming meaningful relationships with students from other backgrounds. When combined with the power differential between teachers and students, the lack of meaningful relationships holds potential real-world consequences for how students are treated. A large difference in students' cultural backgrounds and the cultural norms of the schooling environment may lead to routine misinterpretation of behavior, and a good intent may go unrecognized (Li & Grineva, 2016). Boonstra (2021)

demonstrates that stereotyping discourses prevalent in a teacher's culture, such as racism, ableism, or sexism, influence that teacher's interpretation of student behavior, influencing their construction of some students as "behavior problems" and others as "good kids." In thinking about the interplay of power and cultural difference, Erickson (1993) makes a useful distinction between cultural boundaries and cultural borders. Cultural boundaries are simply the features that indicate the presence of cultural difference. They can be transformed into cultural borders when, "[r]ights and obligations are allocated differently, depending on whether a person is revealed as possessing one kind of cultural knowledge rather than another" (p. 37).

Careful attention to others, an attunement to how reactions and understandings may be different from one's own, is necessary to build strong relationships across cultures. The interplay of absence and presence is fundamental to caring relations (Cubellis, 2020), and in cross-cultural relationships this interplay inescapably includes the absence of behaviors we expect and the presence of those we do not. Hence, there must be explicit attention paid to culture in relating to culturally different others (Igoa, 1995; Saavedra, 2021). In paying attention to culture, one must be aware that one's own model for understanding a phenomenon, one's epistemic commitment, may not apply. This creates a posture of openness and questioning that allows for reformulating thoughts as one learns more (Kirmayer, 2020). For Kirmayer (2020) communication is key to such reformulation. Yet interacting with respect across different cultures requires one to shift between different value systems and habits of behavior, which is not only complex but can also be quite burdensome. One must, therefore develop "a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity" (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 101). Even so, open

communication may not be possible, as issues of power, language, and trust may color interaction. Attending to unspoken signs may be necessary along with reflection on the possible meanings behind others' behavior (Igoa, 1995; Saavedra, 2020). Relating to others in this way is iterative and continual. It never comes to an end (Cubellis, 2020; Levinas, 1961/1969).

Care Ethics

Care is routinely invoked in work on teacher-student relationships (Jiménez & Rose, 2010; Masko, 2018; Nieto, 2010a; Noddings, 2013; Poplin & Weeres, 1992; Saavedra, 2021; Sosa-Provencio, 2019; Thayer-Bacon, 2004; Valenzuela, 1999). Yet discussions of care in practical settings often rely on unstated assumptions of what good care looks like in a particular setting (Hedge & MaKenzie, 2012). Simply stating that one should care for another—that a teacher should care for her students, for instance—is considered sufficient for all to have a common understanding of the topic. Platitudes are often relied upon over nuance. A deeper examination of care is necessary to adequately define the concept and understand how it functions.

A pioneer of care ethics in the early 1980s, Nel Noddings is one of the most cited scholars in the field of education on the topic of care. For Noddings (2013), an understanding of care springs from an examination of what she calls “natural caring” relationships, those arising out of love. She posits that such relationships are most often cultivated via familial connection; the ideal she puts forward is that between mother and child. For her, an ethic of care is the application of the motivations, drivers, and processes of natural caring to those for whom we do not have an innate inclination to care (Noddings, 2013). Within this ethic, relation is considered to be ontologically basic,

meaning that it is not a purely rational ethic. It does not adhere to abstract moral principles or strict rules of conduct. Rather care is grounded in context and is enacted via the interactions of the dyad of the one-caring and the cared-for (Noddings, 2011, 2013). Each situation that calls for care thus needs to be approached on its own terms. Noddings (2011, 2012, 2013) characterizes the one-caring as attentive to others in order to discern their needs, moved by feeling and emotion to respond in an empathetic manner, and critically reflective about how best to meet discerned needs. The cared-for is also indispensable to the relation and must acknowledge the actions of the one-caring in some way for care to be complete (Noddings, 2011, 2012, 2013). Noddings understands care to be a largely feminine endeavor, and while she does not preclude men from the possibility of engaging in care, she argues that such behavior generally falls along gendered lines (Noddings, 2013).

Another major figure in care ethics, though not often cited in educational contexts, Joan Tronto approaches the topic from the field of political philosophy. There is much that is similar between her conceptualization of a care ethic and that of Noddings. Tronto (1993, 1998) outlines four elements for an ethic of care: attentiveness to the needs of others (caring about), acceptance of responsibility for meeting those needs (caring for), competence in meeting needs (caregiving), and the responsiveness of the one being cared for (care receiving). Nuanced consideration of a particular context is essential in putting these elements into effect (Tronto, 1993, 1998). These processes and motivations are very similar to those outlined by Noddings. However, Tronto differs from Noddings in her understanding of how care operates in the larger world. Tronto (1993) does not see care as a gendered phenomenon, pointing to male thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment as

espousing very similar moral arguments to those undergirding modern care ethics.

Tronto's main criticism of Noddings, however, is her lack of attention to institutional and hierarchical systems in which care is inevitably enacted (Tronto, 1993, 2010). As a political philosopher, Tronto pays particular attention to power dynamics, both within the caring relation as well as in how the wider society values care and those who are disposed to care (Tronto, 1993, 1998, 2010). She feels that a focus on care has the potential to shift priorities such that "the activities that legitimate the accretion of power to the existing powerful are less valued, and the activities that might legitimate a sharing of power with outsiders are increased in value" (Tronto, 1993, p. 20).

Others have expressed similar misgivings of a conception of care that does not account for power. They argue that carers must have a deep understanding of the dynamics of power and privilege within society in order to fully comprehend and respond to the needs of those for whom they care (Doucet, 2017; Nieto, 2010a; Sosa-Provencio, 2019). Such a consideration of power is theorized to function at more than one level. Between individuals as they relate to one another, care that accounts for power and position can be protective of the cared-for, insulating them from dehumanizing experiences (Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Sosa-Provencio, 2019). At a community or even societal level, care can also work directly against inequity and oppression (Chatzidakis et al., 2020; Freire, 1970/2000; hooks, 2003; Nieto, 2010a), helping to disrupt invisible, unjust systems by making them known. Indeed, some argue that a care ethic which ignores power actually serves to uphold and reinforce oppressive systems (Hoagland, 1990; Tronto, 1993). A consideration of institutions is important here. If an institution's policies and rules serve to perpetuate societal inequities, the institution itself

is failing to care for those it is purported to serve (Nieto, 2010a, 2010b). Indeed, an institution's policies and structures influence the capacity for individuals to care for one another by placing constraints on our time, our attention, and our modes of action (Furman, 2019; Raab, 2018). According to Tronto (2010), in order for institutions to be caring, they must explicitly address three issues: power within caring relations and the institution itself, how caring relations can remain unique and particularistic within institutional structures, and the purposes for care. The considerations outlined here demonstrate that consideration of power is integral to the study of care.

Another important aspect in the study of care is its conceptualization as a practice enacted rather than as a static state or disposition (Cubellis, 2020; hooks, 2000; Tronto, 1998). For example, Hedge and MacKenzie (2012) argue that habits of emotional recognition must be cultivated in order to develop one's capacity to care. Compassion is particularly important to develop in their view as it is "a complex evaluation of, and reaction to, suffering that one wishes to ameliorate" (p. 200). In this understanding of care, it is something one does rather than a feeling one has. Page (2018) builds on Noddings' framework of care to develop the concept of "professional love" in early childhood educational settings. In this view, becoming emotionally attached to students "is not a pedagogical *failure*, but in actual fact a driver of more effective practice" (p. 131, emphasis in original). Care can also be put into practice as part of a larger project. Paulo Freire (1970/2000) and bell hooks (2000, 2003) call for love as political action. They see love as a necessary motivator in combatting oppression, and care, according to hooks (2000), is a component of love. "To truly love," she states, "we must learn to mix various ingredients" (p. 5), such as affection, responsibility, recognition, knowledge,

respect, commitment, trust, honesty, open communication, and care. As an enacted practice, care is always being developed; it is never finalized (Cubellis, 2020). We never reach an ideal in caring.

What remains undertheorized regarding care is its interplay with culture. In her landmark ethnographic study of a Houston high school, Valenzuela (1999) demonstrated that individuals' understanding of care and caring behavior (and how they interpret the actions of others in this realm) can be tied to their cultural background. The fact that culture can influence how individuals think about care holds profound implications for its study. While scholars such as Noddings and Tronto have put forth important ideas about the elements of care, its processes and motivations, its connection to power structures, and its practice, their frameworks do not directly address cultural difference. Tronto (1993) places her analysis strictly within the Western canon, putting her work in conversation with major Western thinkers such as Aristotle, David Hume, Jürgen Habermas, Immanuel Kant, and Adam Smith, to mention a few of the more widely recognized thinkers she references. She is candid that hers is a Western perspective in the tradition of European thought, even including an extensive index entry entitled "Western political thought" (p. 226). In contrast, Noddings (2013) does not explicitly situate her framework with a Western European tradition, revealing a blind spot toward culture. A close reading of her work reveals that culture resides there nonetheless. Her model of the mother-child relationship is a cultural construct of European, intellectual-class origins, and she reveals at various points throughout the text that her framework relies on this cultural logic. She describes, for instance, a mother talking with a child about feelings and encouraging a child to share observations (p. 121), yet there are many cultures in

which such discussions with a child would be unheard of. One of the participants in Heath's (1982) study illustrates this point simply by stating directly to Heath herself, "We don't talk to our chil'un like you folks do" (p. 117). Noddings also stresses that situational requirements, what she refers to as "the rules of the game" (p. 46), influence how we care in an appropriate and acceptable manner. She presupposes that both the one-caring and the cared-for share the same expectations for behavioral norms, the same cultural lens.

Recent scholarship has roundly critiqued the field of care ethics for its blind spot to cultural difference. Hinsdale (2016) raises critiques of early care ethics as centering White middle-class values and norms to the exclusion of other notions of what caring might look like. Jaffe-Walter (2016, 2017) argues that discourses of care for students from nondominant cultures are often a cover for assimilationist viewpoints and a desire for these students to adopt and adhere to dominant cultural norms. Even when well-intentioned, care that follows Noddings' model can devolve into White saviorism when the teacher is from the dominant White middle-class and the students come from marginalized populations (Quek, 2022). Attempts to care can misfire and ultimately become harmful when teachers do not take into account how their students understand care, how they expect it to be enacted, or when prejudiced and bigoted ideologies are embedded in their thinking about their students and their communities (Fraser-Burgess, 2020; Quek, 2022). Culture is most certainly central to the concept of care, yet just how one cares for another across cultural boundaries has yet to be fully theorized.

The Nexus of Relation, Education, and Culture

"The immigrant students who are most likely to adapt successfully to school seem

to forge meaningful, positive relationships at school. . . . [that] provide a sense of belonging, emotional support, tangible assistance and information, guidance, role modeling, and positive feedback” (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008, p. 43). Relationships seem to be a key piece of the puzzle to provide CLiM students with effective and meaningful learning experiences at school. They are also wide-reaching. academic achievement is not the only thing impacted by the quality of educational relationships; identity development is as well (Gibson & Koyama, 2011). If relationships are so impactful, the question remains: why are they so often relegated to the background in conversations of how to improve schools and deepen student learning?

Jiménez and Rose (2010) argue that relationships receive less attention than they deserve in the field of education because the profession assumes that most teachers will be teaching students of a similar cultural background and that relationships will develop naturally as a result. The demographics of the public schooling system in the US belie this assumption and support scholars’ call for more attention to be paid to relationships in education. In responding to this call, we must recognize that cultural difference is shaping how students and teachers relate to one another to a large extent throughout the country, often in ways that do not support learning. The aim of the research reported here is to broaden our understanding of the interplay among culture, education, and relation in order to improve learning and schooling for all students.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods

A number of interpretivist philosophical assumptions undergird the design of this study. Ontologically, I subscribe to the notion that humans construct their own mental realities. The nature of reality, therefore, is neither fixed nor universal; multiple social realities exist. They are created by individuals who interpret the world around them. These realities can change as individuals accumulate knowledge and experience and also as they interact with and relate to others. Epistemologically, I believe knowledge to be constructed in interaction and subjective in nature. In research, therefore, the researcher and participants create knowledge together over the course of the study. In terms of methodology, it follows from the previous assumptions that naturalistic inquiry in which participants and researcher interact is required. Such research takes a hermeneutical approach that accounts for the multiple perspectives of those involved (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In addition, this research and the assumptions outlined above are colored by the disciplinary lenses of anthropology and philosophy. Woven into these assumptions are beliefs in the power of culture and groupness to robustly pattern human action (Anderson-Levitt, 2012; Geertz, 1973; Hoffman, 1999) as well as the need to critically examine the values undergirding that action, carefully elaborate concepts, and question whether things ought to be the way they are at all (Burbules & Warnick, 2006; Laden, 2013).

To achieve the aims of this project, a methodology that engages in holistic analysis and considers a particular phenomenon in depth is required in order to illuminate the understandings, practices, and beliefs of teachers regarding the relationships they form with students across cultures. The methodology employed is that of multiple-case ethnography, which combines two methodological approaches: case study research and ethnography. Below I outline the general principles of each methodology and how they work in tandem with one another. I then present the study design, which adheres to these principles.

Case Study

Case study is a design framework for conducting in-depth research of a specific and bounded example of a broader phenomenon (Stake, 2004; Thomas, 2011; Yin, 2018). As a design framework it can be (and has been) used with a wide array of methodological approaches. The defining feature of case study research is the “case,” the specific example or instance being examined. The case must be defined and bounded in a way that makes clear exactly what the unit to be studied is and delineates that unit from its context (Dyson, 2004; Stake, 2004; Yin, 2018). The phenomenon of interest can be considered the analytical frame of the study (Rossman & Rallis, 2017; Stake, 2004; Thomas, 2011), which can be thought of as answering the question, “what is this a case of?” (Dyson, 2004; Thomas, 2011). Case study research involves deep engagement with the complexity of the particular, which stems from the situated nature of the case and the intricate web of dynamic and interconnected contexts and influences that surround and affect it (Dyson, 2004; Stake, 2004; Thomas, 2011). As a result, trustworthy

interpretations require rigorous triangulation of data sources and research methods (Stake, 2004; Yin, 2018).

Multiple-case studies examine more than one instance of the same phenomenon, analyzing each case as a whole as well as comparing across cases (Stake, 2004, 2006; Yin, 2018). In multiple case study, Yin (2018) and Stake (2006) advocate that each individual case be maintained and examined as its own entity; within-case patterns can then be compared and contrasted among cases for a more comprehensive synthesis. The literature on multiple case study does not prescribe an optimal number of cases to undertake. Gerring (2011) suggests 12 or fewer cases is best, Yin (2018) between six and ten, and Stake (2006) between four and ten; all acknowledge the determination of case number to be at the discretion of the researcher. Limiting factors in that discretionary process have to do with both research aims and practical considerations. Fewer cases are required for a more in-depth study (Gerring, 2011) and when resources and time are more limited (Yin, 2018).

Ethnography

If there is one essential element of ethnography, it is an orientation toward cultural interpretation (Geertz, 1973; Green et al., 2012; Spindler & Spindler, 1997b; Wolcott, 1990; Wolcott, 2008). This orientation rests upon a number of presuppositions. Ethnography assumes that human behavior is robustly patterned. It is in perceiving these patterns that culture is revealed. The ability to perceive these patterns rests on a deep dive into a particular context, and significant attention must be paid to the context in order to properly discern and interpret patterned behavior (Erickson, 1984; Gay y Blasco & Wardle, 2007; Wolcott, 2008). In addition, these behavior patterns often exist outside of

the conscious awareness of those who perform them (Erickson, 1986; Spindler & Spindler, 1997b). While culture is central to ethnography, it is a construct the researcher creates and attributes to the study participants. It is not an observable, tangible phenomenon but is instead inferred from people's actions (Agar, 2006; Wolcott, 1990; Wolcott, 2008).

Ethnography has a number of attributes that allow the researcher to effectively engage in cultural interpretation. It is inherently comparative in that it relies on a balance of emic and etic perspectives. The researcher aims to put forth the emic, or insider, perspective of what is happening at the site, while at the same time creating an etic, or outsider, interpretation (Erickson, 1984; Gay y Blasco & Wardle, 2007; Spindler & Spindler, 1997a; Spindler & Spindler, 1997b; Wolcott, 2008). In conducting ethnography, researchers must lean into its comparative nature by paying attention to moments of surprise when their expectations are not met or when something happens that they do not fully understand. Green et al. (2012) call such moments "frame clash" while Agar (2006) refers to them as "rich points." These are moments when the researcher's own worldview does not fully match up with the context being researched, indicating that something worth exploring has appeared. Ethnography is, thus, largely an inductive endeavor in that the researcher listens carefully to what the field is communicating and allows that to inform both the research process and the interpretation of data (Erickson, 1984; Hoffman, 2016; Wolcott, 2008).

Traditionally, ethnographic research is understood to require the researcher to become embedded in a community for an extended period (Wolcott, 2008) and use participant observation as the main method of inquiry (Ingold, 2014), although there are

examples that are solely interview-based (see, for example, Jackson, 2013; Rabelo & Sousa, 2003). In such an approach, questions elicit responses that will foreground cultural considerations and contexts, and data analysis employs, at least in part, a cultural lens.

Over the past few decades, the growth of the internet, the development of social media platforms, the ubiquity of cellular phones, the advent of videoconferencing, and the expansion of other avenues of digital communication have expanded the ways in which ethnographic research can be carried out. The internet can now be a tool with which to conduct research, a source of information for research, or the subject of research (Östman & Turtiainen, 2016). Ethnographies using these various connective technologies initially focused on issues such as trying to understand how online communities function, the nature of exchange and communication on the internet, and interactions between online and offline worlds (Haverinen, 2015; Seligmann & Estes, 2020). More recently ethnographers have begun using these tools to study offline contexts from afar using “remote ethnography,” often when events outside of the researcher’s control prevent travel to the field site (Postill, 2016; Walton, 2018). The COVID-19 pandemic became just such an obstacle for everyone, forcing a shift in how ethnographers think about and use online research tools. In-person field work was prohibited, so technological means of accessing field sites and speaking with participants became indispensable (Howlett, 2022; Podjed & Muršič, 2021).

Blending Two Approaches: Multiple-Case Ethnography

The research reported here was subject to these conditions and took advantage of technology to move forward. Relying on remote interviews as the main avenue for generating data, it takes the ethnographic analytic lens and applies it within a multiple-

case study design framework. Each participant is considered to be an example, or case, of a secondary ESOL teacher experiencing cross-cultural relationships with students, who self-identifies as being relationally successful with their students. Each case was analyzed individually prior to a comparative analysis meant to illuminate broader themes regarding the cross-cultural teacher-student relationship. Throughout the data generation and analysis, an ethnographic lens undergirded the inquiry undertaken with the participants. As such, I consider this project to be fundamentally ethnographic and anthropological. Ethnography has been conceived of by researchers as a way of knowing or a logic that the researcher both brings to and constructs while in the field (Green et al., 2012; Wolcott, 2008) and uses to construct meaning from field experiences after the fact during analysis (Ingold, 2014). It is in this spirit that the present study has been designed and carried out via in-depth interviewing of multiple participants, each one a distinct case.

In designing this study, I have made the assumption that relationships between students and teachers can be studied primarily as dyadic relations. I understand, however, that different forms of relationships may also be at play. For example, more diffuse relations among groups, such as among teacher and an entire class, may be functioning within the context under study, as well as outside influences on classroom relationships from parents, coaches, friends, counselors, or other actors. Further, relationships among students may be interconnected with those between teacher and students. While prioritizing dyadic teacher-student relationships, I have been alert to these other possibilities revealing themselves in the interview responses of participants.

Participants

This study required teachers whose cultural backgrounds differ from that of at

least some of their students. Given the understanding of the culture concept outlined in chapter one—the shared symbols, meanings, and understandings that allow social situations to work—cultural difference cannot be readily identified from observable traits and will have to be inferred by other means. Language and place are deeply tied to culture (Gumperz, 1982; Nieto, 2010b; Schiffrin, 1996). Therefore, I opted to use linguistic and geographic information to make the determination of cultural difference. In order to qualify as a participant, both a teacher’s primary language(s) and the region of the world of immediate familial origin must differ from at least one student taught in both the current and prior school year. As interview questions were designed to elicit responses on teachers’ current experiences as well as those prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the criteria for determining cultural difference were required to hold for both school years.

Participants were recruited via two distinct avenues. First, a call for participants was made through a professional organization for ESOL teachers in the state of Virginia. An email describing the study was sent to the organization’s membership, and interested secondary teachers were invited to respond to me with their interest. A brief intake questionnaire was then sent to the interested parties to determine if they met the eligibility criteria. If so, they were notified of their eligibility and sent a consent form informing them of their responsibilities in the study and the risks of participation. They were also informed they would receive a \$30 Amazon gift card in appreciation of their time. Those who chose to continue were enrolled. Five participants were identified through this process. Snowball sampling (Miles et al., 2020; Rossman & Rallis, 2017) was also employed as a recruitment technique. All teachers who initially expressed

interest were encouraged to forward information about the study to colleagues, particularly those who might not be members of the professional organization. The same procedures were used to determine study eligibility. Three more participants were identified through these means, resulting in a total of eight participants. Participants were recruited from across the state of Virginia. This choice was made so as to vary the teaching contexts in which participants worked, while still maintaining some level of cohesion in terms of ESOL program requirements and expectations as all contexts would be subject to the same laws and regulations made at the state level. Pseudonyms have been assigned to all people in the study and to all places that are potentially identifying; other potentially identifying information has either been omitted or altered. These steps were taken to protect the confidentiality of participants.

It is important to note that participants who self-identify as relationally successful with students from different cultures were not actively and purposefully sought out in the recruitment process. Recruitment materials, which can be found in Appendix A, described the study as seeking the perspectives of secondary teachers who work with students from cultural backgrounds different than their own. After participants were recruited, it became apparent during interviews that they perceived themselves as capable of building strong relationships with students of different cultures. I believe that the intensive nature of the study—speaking with a stranger for a total of four and a half hours over three sessions for minimal compensation—attracted participants who were already interested in this topic and who consider building relationships with students of different cultures to be an important aspect of teaching and learning. They are ESOL teachers who

actively think about the relationships they form with students in their practice, and they were willing to talk about this part of their practice extensively.

The number of participants recruited falls within recommendations for multiple-case study outlined above. It also holds with the methodological literature on the number of interviews required to reach saturation, which is the point at which new data no longer yield insights into or necessitates changes to identified categories and themes (Schreier, 2018; Seidman, 2019). Studies by Guest et al. (2006) and Hagaman and Wutich (2017) suggest that inductive development of codes and themes reached saturation at around 12 interviews. Building upon these methodological insights, Hennink et al. (2017) argue that code development is an insufficient standard to determine saturation of information, as code development does not necessarily guarantee that the nuance of each code and connections among codes will be complete. Holding to a more stringent standard of meaning saturation, defined as when an issue is “fully understood” and “no further dimensions, nuances, or insights of issues can be found” (p. 594), they found that between 16 and 24 interviews were required. Given that each participant in this study was interviewed three times, a total of 24 interviews were conducted, at the upper end of Hennink et al.’s (2017) more stringent standard.

Data Generation Methods

Case study research and ethnography are both open to a variety of avenues for generating data.² None of these approaches strictly adhere to a defined set of research

² Following Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2012, pp. 78–82), I choose to eschew the standard research term “data collection” for the more apt “data generation.” *Collecting* or *gathering* data implies the positivist notion that data is already in existence apart from the research project and simply waiting to be stumbled upon. *Generating* data implies that the researcher’s aims work in conjunction with participants’ contributions to bring data into

methods or data sources. More important in determining the methods to use and data sources to pursue in these approaches are the particular research questions being investigated (Green et al, 2012; Stake, 2004; Thomas, 2011; Wolcott, 2008; Yin, 2018). Additionally, both demand flexibility as the research is in process. Concepts and questions may evolve and change in the field. The researcher must, therefore, be adaptable, flexible, and on the lookout for the need for a shift in plan (Erickson, 1984; Stake, 2004; Yin, 2018). The challenge inherent in this investigation of the cross-cultural teacher-student relationship is that the relationship as a construct is not tangible. I needed to pay close attention to participants' descriptions of their experiences and probe them about their thoughts, understandings, and perceptions to make inferences about the nature and quality of their relationships. In this study I used data generation methods compatible with both case study and ethnographic approaches: interviews and document analysis (Spindler & Spindler, 1997b; Wolcott, 2008; Yin, 2018).

Interviews. The primary mode of data generation was semi-structured interviews with secondary ESOL teachers. Semi-structured interviews aim to uncover the perspectives of participants and their interpretations of the phenomenon under study. They follow a pre-determined protocol of themes and questions, while remaining open to asking follow-up questions and pursuing unanticipated avenues of thought surfaced by the interviewee (Kvale, 2007; Seidman, 2019; Wooffitt & Widdicombe, 2006). It is important to remember that interviews are themselves social interactions (Wooffitt & Widdicombe, 2006), into which both actors bring social and cultural assumptions about

being, which I believe is a more appropriate representation of interpretive social science research.

the nature of interviews, the asking and answering of questions more generally, and the norms of communication (Briggs, 1986; Seidman, 2019; Wolcott, 2008; Wooffitt & Widdicombe, 2006). The interviewer must be aware of these realities and take them into account in the planning, conducting, and analyzing phases. The interviewer must also listen on multiple levels—to what is being said and what is not being said—as well as maintain a meta-cognitive awareness of the overall interview process in order to pivot, if necessary, to maintain progress toward generating relevant data for the study (Seidman, 2019).

I followed the interview method put forth by Seidman (2019), which he has termed “in-depth phenomenologically based interviewing” (p. 14). This is a structured method in which participants are interviewed on three separate occasions, building toward deep reflection. The first interview is a focused life history of the participant in relation to the topic of study. The second interview asks the participant to recount current lived experience in detail, without opinion. The final interview builds on the foundation created in the first two by inviting the participant to reflect on the meaning of her lived experience within the context of the life events that have led to her current situation (Seidman, 2019). The interviews are scheduled over a two- to three-week period to allow both the participant and the researcher to ponder what surfaced in each interview, while still keeping them close enough in time to remain fresh in mind (Seidman, 2019). In essence, this method guides the participant through a personal exploration of the issue under study over the course of the three interviews. While the method is developed from and grounded in phenomenology, it can be used with and adapted for other methodologies, as well. Seidman (2019) presents both a phenomenological analytic

approach that develops narratives of participants' experience and the meaning they ascribe to those experiences as well as a thematic analytic approach in which interview material is categorized, analyzed for patterns and connections, and developed into themes. This research relies on a thematic analytic approach conducted through an ethnographic lens.

Interview protocols, which can be viewed in Appendix B, were developed by deeply considering the study's research questions and determining concrete and grounded lines of inquiry that would elicit detailed narratives and descriptions relevant to understanding the underlying abstract concepts. Protocols contained a mix of descriptive, structural, and contrast questions (Spradley, 1979), which were open-ended in order to elicit extended answers from participants (Seidman, 2019). Interviews were scheduled to last 90 minutes and averaged 89 minutes and 32 seconds in length, yielding approximately 36 hours of recordings. Transcripts were created via an online transcription service. As transcripts were received, I cleaned them up by listening to the recordings and editing them for accuracy. During interviews, I also took notes on nonverbal aspects of the participants' demeanor (Rossman & Rallis, 2017; Seidman, 2019). Relevant notes, such as those relating to the participant's body language or facial expressions, were added to the interview transcripts.

Interviews were conducted via the online videoconferencing platform Zoom and were recorded with the permission of participants. In conducting interviews via the internet, attention was paid to building rapport in a virtual setting, noticing facial expressions when body language was obscured, creating a visibly welcoming space, and being knowledgeable about the technology being used (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014; Gray

et al., 2020; Irani, 2019; Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019; Seitz, 2016). As I conducted interviews, I discovered that I occasionally needed to make split-second decisions in response to technological disruptions and glitches in a way that maintained the integrity of data generation, an issue I found to be inadequately addressed in the literature. I began documenting my responses and my rationale for them, developing an approach with three options: 1) ignore the disruption and continue, 2) ask the participant to repeat themselves and continue, and 3) stop the interview and adjust the technology before continuing. Which option I chose depended on the severity disruptions, their frequency, the context of the moment, and a consideration my research questions and goals. I have since documented and published this approach in order to help future researchers consider this problem (Saavedra, 2022).

Documents. Documents served as another important source of data in conjunction with interviews (Wolcott, 2008). Documents provided an understanding of the wider school, division, and state contexts within which teachers are relating to their students, as well as a limited window into CLiM student sentiments regarding their relationships with ESOL teachers. They also revealed contextual and institutional influences on teachers' attitudes and experiences. I collected and analyzed a variety of publicly available documents via school, division, and state websites with content germane to teacher-student relationships. The chosen documents include instructional philosophies, guidelines for working with ESOL students, and the responsibilities of and expectations for teachers in terms of job performance. Participants were also asked if they were in possession of and willing to share relevant documents that shed light on their approach to and beliefs about relationships with students. Documents obtained from

participants were images of notes and cards from students as well as some examples of teacher communications with students and their families. All documents not publicly available were obtained with permission. To maintain participant confidentiality, all identifying information, including the names of people, schools, and divisions have been blacked out or covered over with pseudonyms.

Data Analysis Methods

The character of ethnographic research lies as much in the mind-work of analysis and interpretation as it does in the methods employed to generate data (Green et al., 2012; Ingold, 2014; Wolcott, 2008). Data was analyzed iteratively throughout the study, with cultural interpretation as a guiding principle (Desjarlais & Throop, 2011; Erickson, 1984; Wolcott, 2008). Cases were first analyzed and interpreted separately. Patterns and themes that emerged within individual cases were then compared across cases (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2018).

Lived-experience descriptions. Ethnography requires the researcher to consider and maintain a heightened awareness of her orientation toward and perspectives on the topic of study in order to better interpret what is happening in the field (Emerson et al., 2011; Erickson, 1984). While pure objectivity is certainly not attainable when researcher and research instrument are one and the same, some measure of analytic distance is necessary for reasonable interpretations to be made. A concerted effort is necessary to attain such distance when the researcher has extensive personal experience with the topic of study. Similarly, phenomenology requires the researcher to surface assumptions, beliefs, and preconceived notions about the topic of study in order to “bracket” or “bridle” them, meaning to curb their influence on developing understanding (Dahlberg,

2006; Vagle, 2018; van Manen 1990). In order to engage in critical self-reflection, I used the phenomenological method of lived-experience descriptions (van Manen, 1990), creating accounts of memorable moments, encounters, and people from my own teaching life as a way to surface feelings, inclinations, and reactions that may color my understanding of the topic of cross-cultural relationships between teachers and students.

Prior to pursuing a doctorate and embarking on this research study, I had a nearly decade-long career as a secondary ESOL teacher. In that role, which I have written about elsewhere (Mish, 2014; Saavedra, 2016, 2020, 2023), I believed that relationships with students from other cultures must be grounded in care and empathy. I also felt that part of my responsibility as their teacher was to help these students navigate the immense changes between their old and new lives. In examining the experiences of secondary ESOL teachers relating to students from other cultures, my own involvement in this realm carried the potential to taint the generation of data and its interpretation. This conjunction with my chosen topic of study necessitated that I reflect on and analyze my own personal experience and how it might have been shaping my perceptions and understandings of what I encountered in interviewing participants. Additionally, it brought the danger of conflating my experience with those of my participants. How could I prevent my own past experiences from muddying the waters of what I was attempting to study?

Lived-experience descriptions are detailed recollections only and do not try to explain the reasons behind actions or feelings. Further reflection is necessary once a lived-experience description is created. It is in reflecting on these descriptions and attempting “to detect the overall thematic qualit[ies]” (van Manen, 1990, p. 57) they

harbor that the researcher is able understand her own outlook. Coming to such an understanding allows me to pursue two different avenues in data analysis. On the one hand, my own experience opens avenues of analysis. I can look to see if my experiences are corroborated by the study participants, as my own experience could, potentially, also be the experience of others (van Manen, 1990). On the other hand, avenues of analysis distinct from my own experience become easier to identify and follow. Having come to understand my own outlook, I am more able to deliberately look outside my own experience and ask if something else is happening. This analytic method also proved to be beneficial in conducting an ethnographic study by remote means. Postill (2016) argues that remote ethnography is most effective when the researcher has a previous connection to the community under study. In a way, creating lived-experience descriptions gave me entry to the community of ESOL teachers, helping me build rapport with participants in my recognition of some aspects of their experiences.

Coding and thematic development. Data was examined holistically and inductively for emergent themes. This process involved multiple rounds of coding. In early phases of coding, I created extensive lists of words and phrases to describe potentially important material, often using in vivo codes (Miles et al., 2020) as a way to hear the voices of participants in the analysis. As I gained greater understanding of the participants' lived experiences, similar codes were collapsed into categories. Categories were then examined to interpret how they relate to and interact with one another in order to develop higher order themes (Miles et al., 2020). A constant guide in this analytic process was Frederick Erickson's (1984) question: "Why is this ___ (act, person, status, concept) the way it is and not different?" (p. 9).

The development of codes and themes began organically. In completing the three-interview cycle with each participant, I relistened to the first two interviews in order to prepare relevant participant-specific questions for the third. In addition, the process of reviewing transcripts for accuracy forced me to revisit the entire corpus of interviews. At these times when I revisited interviews, I wrote analytic memos to record thoughts and hunches about possible patterns and commonalities. These ideas led to an initial set of codes. I then went through the data corpus case by case, analyzing each separately by both applying these initial codes and adding codes to the list, many of which were case-specific. After looking carefully at each case, i.e., each individual teacher, and more thoroughly developing codes and themes for each, I conducted a cross-case analysis to illuminate larger patterns behaviors, beliefs, and understandings. As a part of this analysis, I created a spreadsheet containing all 72 initial codes tallied by participant. This organization of the data allowed a bird's-eye view of the entire data corpus, revealing which codes were most prominent overall, as well as the relative prominence of codes for each individual participant. To counter the tendency of coding to heavily parse and somewhat sterilize the data, extended participant narratives and anecdotes were routinely revisited in order to encounter descriptions of lived experience afresh and ponder them holistically.

Each phase of coding requires the researcher to reexamine the data, resulting in codes, categories, and themes being interrogated and refined over time and as new data is incorporated into the interpretation. An important part of coding and theme development was a search for disconfirming evidence that, when found, pushed me to refine my conclusions (Erickson, 1986; Miles et al., 2020; Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012). The

process of integrating new codes, categories, and disconfirming evidence into the analysis served to sharpen and deepen themes, as well as my overall understanding of the cases and their connections to one another.

Trustworthiness. While the trustworthiness of this type of study, which relies so heavily on interviews, cannot be established via triangulation of multiple types of data, other means can be called upon to accomplish this task. The study was conducted to a high standard of systematic rigor, and record keeping was meticulous. I was highly reflective throughout the process by writing analytic and methodological memos to track the development of my thinking, as well as my methodological choices as the research unfolded (Miles et al., 2020; Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012). This reflexivity included a continual search for disconfirming evidence, which was accounted for when found (Erickson, 1986; Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012).

Additionally, Seidman (2019) outlines a number of means related to data generation and analysis that are relevant to establishing trustworthiness. The first is establishing internal consistency within the three interviews of each participant. In engaging with each participant three times over a number of weeks, the information and reflections provided were determined to be logically consistent. Similar information was routinely discussed by participants in different parts of their interview cycle, suggesting that the data generated in the study can be considered trustworthy. In attending to the linguistic flow of each interview (Seidman, 2019)—pauses, rephrases, grasping for words, etc.—participants were determined to be engaging with the interview questions and not providing pre-scripted answers. Nor was I trying to produce guided answers. Much of what participants described and discussed could be connected with the broader

literature and scholarly discourse on the teacher-student relationships and cross-cultural interactions, as well (Seidman, 2019). Additionally, I believe the cross-case comparison contributes to the determination of the study's trustworthiness. To the extent that different participants, most of whom are not connected to one another in any way, have expressed similar aspects of their experience and its meaning, we can trust that the research produced is approaching an understanding of the essential nature of the phenomenon under study.

A Final Note: Conducting Research During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Our worlds were dramatically altered with the emergence of the coronavirus in January 2020 and its recognition as a threat to public health in early March of that year. Across the country, schools, businesses, and houses of worship closed and moved to remote modes of operation. They opened again only to be thwarted by contagious variants. Our modes of interacting with one another were changed. Masking and social distancing, a concept brought to us by the pandemic, changed how we interacted and related to one another in person, and videoconferencing, with each participant's head projected in a tiny box on the screen, ballooned in use. The virus also immensely impacted social science research, which often relies on face-to-face interactions between researchers and participants. Researchers have had to become content with smaller data gathering periods than anticipated, to change planned methods, and to deal with both losses of funding and new IRB restrictions (DeMatthews et al., 2020). This research project is no exception. I had been planning and working toward conducting a more traditional ethnography in an area high school, in which participant observation would have played a major role and both student and teacher perspectives would have been

sought. While preparing my dissertation research proposal in the spring of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Plans needed to be altered rather quickly if I was to be able to maintain steady progress toward completing the dissertation and earning my degree.

There was an enormous amount of uncertainty at that time. Little was known about the virus. There were major shortages of personal protective equipment in hospitals and of toilet paper and cleaning supplies in grocery stores. Schools and universities were closed and shifted instruction to online platforms in a matter of days. Making plans for any kind of return to normalcy was simply not possible, and no guide was available for conducting this type of research under pandemic circumstances. As a result, I felt I needed to redesign the study to eliminate the need for observations as that research method remained implausible, if not impossible, in the ensuing months. Like many other researchers, I felt compelled to transform the study from an in-person ethnography to one using remote methods (Howlett, 2022), so it became largely interview-based and shifted its purpose from searching for a holistic view of cross-cultural teacher-student relationship to focusing on teacher perspectives. With the advent of online videoconferencing platforms such as Skype and Zoom, I reasoned that interviews could be conducted via video chat, if necessary, and I consulted the nascent literature on video interviewing (see for example, Adams-Hutcheson & Longhurst, 2017; Deakin & Wakefield, 2014; Gray et al. 2020; Irani, 2019; Lo Iacono et al., 2016; Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019; Santhiago & Barbosa de Magalhães, 2020; Seitz, 2016; Weller, 2017) to ensure that I was as well informed as possible about working in that medium. Additionally, the pandemic has become a vital part of the context of schooling and education in the current moment. I opted to directly and purposefully consider it during

the course of my research by including a sub-question on this topic, leading to a full chapter examining how the pandemic disrupted cross-cultural teacher-student relationships and what we can learn from that disruption. In the end a shift to remote interviews allowed me to investigate my topic of interest in a feasible manner during the era of COVID-19. The study design choices I made were based on the best information available at the time and were intended to launch the best study possible under the circumstances. No doubt hindsight will reveal shortcomings, from which I hope to learn for future work.

Chapter 4: Introducing the Participants and Establishing Relationship Quality

The Group

In terms of standard demographic categories, such as race/ethnicity and gender, the eight teacher participants in this study do not appear particularly diverse. Seven identify as White and female. They were all born in the US and speak English as their first language. One identifies as a Hispanic male and speaks Spanish as his first language. He is from a country in South America. While largely homogenous, these demographics actually mirror those of the nation at large for public school teachers, 77% of whom are women and 80% of whom are White (Snyder et al., 2019).

Outside of demographics, the participants do bring a diversity of teaching contexts and experiences to the table. Their tenure as teachers ranges from six to 35 years. Some began their careers as ESOL teachers, while others transitioned into that role mid-career. Some teach in small urban centers in schools in which the population of ELs is large enough to warrant specialized content classes like *Writing for Long-Term ELs* or *Biology for ELs*. Others are in suburban areas. Still others teach in rural areas, serving as one of only a few ESOL teachers for an entire school division. Two participants work as a division's sole ESOL teacher and are responsible for all ESOL instruction grades K-12. The participants teach in five of Virginia's eight demographic regions: Central, Hampton Roads, Northern, Southside, and Valley (University of Virginia Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service, n.d.). Some are classroom teachers, some follow pull-out or push-in

models, and for some it is a mix. One participant teaches exclusively at the middle school level, three exclusively at the high school level, and three at both levels. One participant changed positions shifting between levels to high school in the year the study was conducted and discusses both levels in her responses.³ Two participants teach in the communities in which they grew up and at schools they themselves attended, while four are transplants to Virginia from other parts of the country and one from another part of the world. Such situational and contextual diversity among participants can provide rich data allowing for insights into the complexity of the phenomenon under study and fruitful cross-case comparison (Stake, 2006).

What follows are brief participant profiles, which are meant to highlight the unique perspectives and the idiosyncrasies of practice each teacher brings to relations with students of varying cultural backgrounds. Some of what is laid out in these profiles will be discussed in later chapters in light of the particular themes I have identified as important to understanding cross-cultural teacher-student relationships.

Anne Baker

Ms. Baker is an ESOL math teacher at Riverbend High School in Redbud City, the same school that she graduated from. (Another participant, Eve Farmer, works at the same school.) She grew up in New England and moved to Redbud City in the sixth grade. English is her first language; she also speaks some Spanish but doesn't consider herself fluent. At the time she was interviewed, she was in her 14th year of teaching.

She trained to be a teacher as an undergraduate and earned an ESOL endorsement

³ Those participants with recent and/or current responsibilities at the elementary level were asked to concentrate their responses in interviews to the secondary level.

as part of her initial credentials. She started out at the elementary level, teaching third and fourth grade math and science in Redbud City, and, while not officially hired as an ESOL teacher, most of the students designated as EL ended up on her roster. After seven years, she applied for a position as a math teacher at a middle school in the same school division. At that time the division was concerned about the low performance of CLiM students. Because of her ESOL endorsement, the administration decided to create a position of ESOL math for her, and Ms. Baker began teaching CLiM students exclusively. After three years at the middle school, she was moved by the administration to her position at Riverbend High, where she teaches *EL Algebra Readiness* and *Algebra I for ELs*. She is in her fourth year of teaching at the high school level. Most of her students are Spanish speakers from El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, and Guatemala. Some are American citizens who speak Spanish at home. She has also had students from China, Korea, Vietnam, Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Brazil, but the vast majority have roots in Mexico and Central America.

She describes her decision to pursue an ESOL endorsement as “a business decision.” She wanted to make herself more marketable when she began applying for jobs by offering a skillset that was needed for the demographic shifts occurring in the school-age population. And while her initial motivation for pursuing ESOL certification was not due to any particular affinity for this population of students, she has come to feel that they are who she *should* be working with. Of CLiM students, she says, “I love them a little bit more.”

In our interviews, Ms. Baker’s devotion to and fondness for her students comes through in a number of ways. She states that she wants each of her classes to be “not just

a group of students, not just my students” but “to be a family.” She furthers this metaphor by explicitly telling her students that she is their “school mom.” She tells them, “I’m supposed to stand up for you like your mom does outside of school.” Some of the ways in which she enacts this relationship dynamic are by contacting other teachers on behalf of students, accompanying students to meetings with other teachers for moral support, helping students procure nice clothing for school dances, and explaining extenuating circumstances to other teachers that might be contributing to what they perceive as bad behavior.

Of utmost importance to her is getting to know her students, their backgrounds, and the circumstances and events in their lives that are likely to impact their school performance. She speaks repeatedly of the importance of getting to know “their stories” in order to teach and relate to them effectively, and she demonstrated that she does, in fact, get to know her students on this level by detailing significant events, circumstances, and traumas in the lives of specific students. She often visits students’ homes to drop off work during extended absences or personal items forgotten in the classroom, and seeing their homelife firsthand gives her insights into her students’ lives, as well. Her knowledge of students’ stories impacts her interactions and relationships with them. She reports that she listens to them when they want to talk about something difficult. She lets them be when they don’t. She adjusts academic expectations when responsibilities and pressures get in the way of their completion of coursework. She locates resources for them. She advocates on their behalf with other teachers.

Ms. Baker also wants students to feel good about themselves, to feel cared for, and to feel like they belong. She states that she sends students new to her class a

personalized welcome letter, and all students receive birthday cards. She sends get well cards to students with extended illnesses. When a student of hers meets the requirements to exit the ESOL program, she sends a letter of congratulations that also reaffirms her continuing support if it is ever required. She makes attempts to speak Spanish with her Latinx students and allows all students to use their primary language(s) with each other. If a break is needed, she'll even let them listen and dance to Latin music. In these small ways she lets students know that she values their heritage culture and accepts that part of their identity in ways that others may not.

Finally, she is concerned that her students fit into the fabric of the school community, both academically and socially. In her classroom, she says that she works to get students comfortable with asking questions, saying they don't understand, or telling her she made a mistake, implying that she hopes students will use these strategies in other classes. Outside of the classroom, she encourages students to attend school events, like dances, and models for them how to navigate protocols and conventions that might be unfamiliar. When she buys candy-grams for each and every one of her students in the fall, a type of fund-raiser that is repeated throughout the year, she says, "I'm showing them I care about them, but then I'm also showing them how something at our school works."

Bernardo Cabrera

Mr. Cabrera is part of a trend in the educational system of the US that began to be identified over 20 years ago: he is an experienced international teacher hired to fill a teaching post for which qualified candidates cannot be found (Hutchison & Jazzar, 2007). In his home country in South America, he taught EFL and English literature for nine

years, six of those after having earned a teaching degree. (He states that it is common there to begin teaching while in the midst of completing one's studies.) At the time of our interviews, he was in his fifth year teaching in Maple County, Virginia, having obtained the job there through a recruiting company. He was hired to teach both seventh- and eighth-grade Spanish and ESOL in K-12, which he did for the first four years of his contract. Due to a rising enrollment of ESOL students, the administration created a full-time ESOL position, which Mr. Cabrera expressed interest in and was assigned to fulfill for the fifth and final year of his contract. For his entire time working in this school division, he has been the sole ESOL teacher for Maple County School Division, working with all ELs K-12 in the county. Most of his CLiM students are from Latin America: Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador. He has also had a few students from China, Vietnam, Korea, Italy, Zimbabwe, and India. Mr. Cabrera's first language is Spanish, and he speaks English fluently, as well.

His approach to teaching is quite humanistic. He consistently reported his consideration for the well-being of his students, speaking often of the importance of caring for others and the tone that sets for any academic goals one may be aiming to achieve. He thinks teachers "need to care for the student as a human. . . feelings, emotions, understand that they come to school with many issues in their hearts, in their minds." His insistence on attending to his students' humanity first is a way for him to counteract and work against an educational system he feels treats everyone in it—students and teachers alike—as "machines."

Mr. Cabrera's experience as an international teacher is unique among the participants of this study. A number of participants have spent extensive time abroad and

recounted how experiences of cultural adjustment in their past influence their current approaches teaching and relating to ELs. Yet Mr. Cabrera was adjusting to a new environment both culturally and linguistically at the same time that he was on the job and in the same community and climate to which his students must adjust themselves. He states that he uses this experience to guide students through their own acculturation processes, telling them how he adapted to unfamiliar ways of doing things and sharing his view that the onus to adapt will be on them as new entrants into the community. He explains knowledge that is common and shared among Americans about which CLiM students from other parts of the world might be unaware, such as the concept of personal space or the deep offense of the “N” word and raising your middle finger. In acting as a kind of cultural broker in this way for his students, he is careful to emphasize that cultural difference does not make others mean or bad people. It simply means that they are accustomed to behaving in a particular way and that the students, as outsiders, must learn to adjust to this way of being.

Importantly, early in his tenure as a Latinx international teacher in Maple County, Mr. Cabrera experienced the schools there as unwelcoming and even antagonistic towards him at times, what Monreal (2022) calls “hostile spaces.” He explains that his greetings to other staff members in the hallway would be ignored. His attempts to facilitate communicative activities with students in Spanish classes would be met with dismissive comments and demands for worksheets to complete. In his most hostile encounter, he was accused of inappropriate physical contact by some students in his Spanish classes, resulting in his placement on administrative leave and an investigation by the local sheriff’s office into his conduct. (Many students and families spoke up for

him, and no wrongdoing was found.) He describes the situation as humiliating and the worst experience of his life because he was alone without the support of family or friends. He later discovered that his accusers, middle school students, had orchestrated it all purposefully to get him in trouble.

His approach toward his CLiM students stands in stark contrast to the hostility he experienced and is likely influenced by it. Certainly, his attempts to guide his students through their adjustment to a new cultural milieu can be seen as a way to ease their path. When conducting pull-out sessions, he recounts that he is very conscious about creating a learning environment in which students can feel free to be themselves. He also serves as a bridge between families, particularly Latinx families, and the school division, so that they can better understand and navigate the system and support their children in doing so.

Eve Farmer

Ms. Farmer began her teaching career in South Korea straight out of college. She got a position teaching English in after school programs there, where she worked for two years, and earned a certificate in Teaching English for Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) through a professional organization during that time. That experience prompted her to pursue teaching ESOL as a career. She found an online Master's degree program and returned to South Korea for another two years to teach elementary and middle school EFL in a public school while simultaneously completing her degree. She currently teaches at Riverbend High School in Redbud City, alongside Ms. Baker, where she teaches science for CLiM students. She co-teaches science classes in which CLiM students are enrolled, and she also teaches two stand-alone courses: *Biology for ELs* and *EL Integrated Science*, a basic science class designed for newcomers. She feels that her

current position is a good blend of her undergraduate degree in zoology with her interest in teaching English that grew out of her time in South Korea. At the time of her participation, she was in her 11th year of teaching—four in Korea and seven in Virginia with a K-12 ESOL license. Her students' countries of origin mirror those of Ms. Baker. English is her first language, and she states that she understands some Korean, Japanese, and Italian but only considers herself fluent in English.

Ms. Farmer has quite a bit of experience navigating situations as a newcomer or outsider. As a child her family moved around a lot, as her father served in the U.S. Navy. She lived up and down the East Coast and was regularly the new student on the first day of school. Her family eventually settled in the Elm Forest region of Virginia, which is where she completed high school. She cites these childhood experiences of moving and figuring out new places as easing her mind when moving to South Korea. When asked directly about the challenges of living in a different country and culture, she discusses her transition in practical rather than cultural or personal terms: figuring out how to best to communicate with family, making sure her electronics had adaptors for different outlets, being surprised by the price of peanut butter. Yet in recounting specific experiences in South Korea, she reveals knowledge gained about local customs and social hierarchies and that she learned to navigate these realities. She feels her own experience adapting to a different way of life helps her, as a teacher of CLiM students, to be sensitive to the fact that her students are navigating a new cultural space. There are times in which she must explain or point out cultural differences to students. And there are times in which she takes a step back to ask why something is happening and if an academic problem for a student really has a nonacademic origin. As a teacher, she connects with students who are

a little bit different or a little bit odd. She tends to like the students who get on other teachers' nerves, who are high energy or quirky. "These crazy kids," she says, "I love as the kids that they are."

While students' academic success is a major driving factor for Ms. Farmer, she says that her "first responsibility is to let them know that I am a safe person to go to. I am there for them and that I will advocate for them." She believes that she holds students to what she characterizes as high standards, yet she is also willing to help students meet these standards and to be flexible with requirements when personal circumstances are impeding academic progress. She routinely offers one-on-one attention to students who need it. She monitors students' grades not just in her class, but in all of their classes, and, if she notices a students' grades have begun to falter, she checks in to see if something in their personal life has shifted and begun impacting their school work. She then helps the student to troubleshoot the situation. She also uses "Prime Time," an extended homeroom period that lasts for 30 minutes, to her students' advantage because many of them work to help support their families and can't stay after school. She requests that students who need extra attention be sent to her during Prime Time, and her students request to go see her as well. She explains assignments, helps with organization, and sits by students' sides to help them with assignments for her and other classes.

Being there for students is particularly important in her co-taught classes. She relays that CLiM students are often more comfortable with her than the content teacher and that some content teachers hold negative attitudes toward these students. In order to facilitate learning and minimize unhelpful or demeaning interactions with the content teacher, she attempts to "play interference." That is, she tries to survey the room and be

the first teacher to get to the desks of CLiM students to offer help or check in on their progress. At times, emotional support may be all she has to offer, as she has had experiences with co-teachers who don't respect her expertise and who fail to provide her with class materials and plans far enough in advance to be able to differentiate materials and determine necessary language supports. In navigating these situations, she is both supportive and protective of her students, and she ultimately hopes to help her students to think in new ways.

Lilly Miller

Ms. Miller grew up in a small town in New York. She is the daughter of an elementary school librarian and remembers playing school frequently as a child, even when playing by herself. So it was, perhaps, inevitable that she become a teacher. She holds an undergraduate degree in TESOL and went abroad to the U.K. for a Master's degree in linguistics. She is in her sixth year of teaching and has spent her entire career thus far in Spruce County, Virginia. She taught various grade levels at a K-5 school for the first five years of her career and moved to a high school position in the same school division in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. She was, thus, in her first year as a high school teacher at the time of her participation in this study. In her work as a fifth grade ESOL teacher she used both push-in and pull-out models of instruction. She shared a classroom with two other ESOL teachers for pull-out services. In her current position as a high school teacher, she teaches an ESOL class and co-teaches Algebra, Geometry, and Government. Most of her students are from Latin American countries like El Salvador, Bolivia, Mexico, and Argentina. She has also taught students from Vietnam, Thailand,

Afghanistan, and India. English is her first language, and she also speaks some Spanish but doesn't consider herself fluent.

Ms. Miller's personal philosophy of teaching is highly relational. She prioritizes getting to know students at the beginning of the year and building relationships with students over weeks and months, an approach which was fostered by the leadership at her K-5 school. In her new position at the high school, she has been surprised by what she calls the "business-like" attitude of her co-teachers, who immediately dive into content and assign work without spending time to get to know the students in the class. For Ms. Miller, her relationships with students act as a motivator, leading, she believes, to deeper engagement and learning. She thinks that building trust allows students to be vulnerable and ask for help. A supportive, trusting relationship also spurs learning out of a sense of connectedness and a desire to please because when students "really like you, they want to make you happy. . . as an adult. . . in their life." Her relationships with students are important for her as well, giving her work a deeper sense of meaning and purpose.

Ms. Miller is acutely aware that her students may face challenging situations with teachers who do not understand the difficulties of cultural adjustment and language barriers and also do not use their imaginations to empathize. She feels that her numerous experiences abroad—Morocco for an international youth summit in high school, a semester abroad in Spain in college, a summer in Hong Kong as a youth program leader, obtaining a Master's degree in the U.K.—give her insight into the struggles and anxieties her students face. As a result, she is very protective of them, particularly when they have an unforgiving content teacher. She checks in with students regarding their well-being and uses her time with them to allow them to vent their frustrations, communicating with

them as best she can in their primary language(s), if necessary, and searching for ways to validate or accommodate behaviors that are stigmatized by the content teacher. This approach results in what she perceives as strong, supportive relationships with students who may not be finding such relationships with other adults in the school.

When discussing the work she does to relate to students and facilitate their academic achievement, at times the language she uses edges into what could be interpreted as White saviorism. Ms. Miller is not the only participant to do this, but in her case this tendency is a bit more pronounced. According to Cammarota (2011), White saviorism occurs when a person in a position of influence benevolently offers help to someone of a lower status and understands any progress made not as the result of any capacity or fortitude on the part of the one being helped, but as the result of only their benevolent act. On occasion, Ms. Miller's language implies this type of exchange. In one instance, she states that she has "the need to help people" and frames her career as a teacher in terms of helping rather than learning. In other utterances she frames immigrant families as being ignorant of how to advocate for themselves and suggests that her students often don't have an academic role model at home, each time implying that her intervention is necessary for students and their families to succeed. While this language is by no means ubiquitous in her interviews, it does suggest internalized views of CLiM students and their families as less capable to a certain extent.

Finally, Ms. Miller perceives that her students are somewhat self-conscious of their official EL status. She reports hearing students comment that they wish they didn't have an accent or an EL designation, markers that have an othering effect on them, differentiating them from native English-speaking students into an inferior status. She

attempts to counter this viewpoint by encouraging students to maintain their primary language(s) and view their emerging multilingualism an asset.

Olivia Potter

Ms. Potter is in her 35th year of teaching. She holds a doctorate and has had a number of different roles over the course of her career. She started as a sixth grade science teacher, became a school counselor, returned to the classroom as a middle school English teacher and reading specialist, and finally became an ESOL teacher about six years prior to her participation in this study. She currently teaches high school in Beechville, VA. It is her third year in the state, having moved from Connecticut. She teaches ninth and 10th grade ESOL and provides push-in support for various content areas. It is her first year teaching at her current school, Beachside High. She was transferred to this school in the middle of COVID remote teaching protocols after two years at Valley High, another high school in the Beechville School Division. Her students are nearly all Spanish-speaking. Most are from El Salvador, but she also has students from Honduras, Guatemala, Venezuela, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Vietnam, and Italy. English is her first language, and she has a very basic command of Spanish.

Ms. Potter has moved to new places quite a bit in her life, with some notable experiences living and traveling in different parts of the world. During her childhood, her father worked for the government and was transferred regularly. She remembers having attended 18 schools by the time she graduated from the 12th grade in Oklahoma. She particularly remembered her sixth grade and seventh grade years in Puerto Rico with fondness, so much so that she returned there after graduating from high school, staying for two years before enrolling in college. She sees her time in Puerto Rico as important in

her personal growth and understanding of the world and influential in how she perceives her students today. She has traveled extensively in Asia and she lived in Japan for six months in her mid-30s to study the Japanese educational system.

In explaining her motivation to become an ESOL teacher, Ms. Potter recounts how the demographics of her school system in Connecticut began to shift. The district, which didn't have an ESOL teacher, began placing students who had "a foreign-sounding name, or [who] spoke another language" into her specialized reading class. She soon realized that these students didn't need reading instruction and that she didn't have the pedagogical training to work with them or to effectively advocate for them to the administration. As a result, she returned to school to get her ESOL teaching certification. She credits her work with CLiM students for shifting her teaching approach and philosophy. She frames this shift in Freirean terms, stating that she used to be more of a "banking teacher" (Freire, 1970/2000), "filling a cup" for students, whereas now she approaches teaching as more of a mutual process of discovery and growth. She feels her relationships with her students are a central part of this shift in philosophy in that language and cultural barriers demand that they learn from each other and figure out how best to move forward together.

She characterizes her relationships with students as mutually respectful and caring, and she understands trust to be absolutely essential in establishing strong relationships with her students. While she thinks of each of her classes as "a family" and encourages her students to decide what that means, Ms. Potter also understands her relationships with students to be fundamentally educational. She feels that she has a distinct responsibility to help her students learn, so she keeps her relationships with them

within that realm. She sets strong boundaries and is very careful about what she shares with students about herself, saying that anything personal she shares “has to serve a purpose.”

An educational purpose is broader than academics for Ms. Potter. She is keen for her students and their families to become part of the school and local community because she sees a mutual benefit if that happens. She thinks CLiM students and their families can begin to have a voice in how the community functions, and the community, in turn, can see they add value to what is already there. She encourages students to attend school sporting events and guides them to join clubs she thinks they will like. She always nominates CLiM students for “student of the month” and other school-wide recognition. She wants her students to “become integrated with the school population as a whole [because] it just makes life easier for them.” She also identifies one or two students every year with leadership potential and makes them her “project,” encouraging them to take on leadership roles in clubs, to help other students, or to be a kind of liaison with families at school-sponsored events.

Ms. Potter also feels it is important for students to share and think through their personal stories, so she creates assignments and coursework for her ESOL classes through which students can explore their identities. She allows students to have a fair amount of choice in writing projects, which often leads to this type of self-exploration. Every year she also assigns a narrative project. Students choose what pieces of their life they want to think and write about and to present to the class. She feels she learns a lot about her students from this work, which feeds into the strength of the relationships she is able to build with them.

Rachel Shoemaker

Ms. Shoemaker is originally from upstate New York. She grew up in a rural community there and now teaches in Poplar County, a rural community in Virginia. She was a mental health counselor for many years, a job she found fulfilling, but she changed careers while her children were young in order to maintain a schedule more conducive to parenting. At the time of her participation in the study, she had been teaching for 16 years as a special educator and a deaf and hard of hearing educator. She has a life-long fascination with language and cultural difference, so when her school division sent out an all-staff email outlining an ESOL certification program paid for by the state, she replied to indicate her interest. She was selected as the division's candidate and has been the sole ESOL teacher for the Poplar County Public Schools for three years. A Spanish teacher at the high school has recently become certified in ESOL and holds a study hall for the high school CLiM students, but Ms. Shoemaker is still responsible for all ESOL instruction. She has continued teaching in her other two specialty areas, as well. Her first language is English. She is also fluent in American Sign Language.

In all three of her roles, she provides push-in and pull-out services. At the secondary level, she mostly does pull-out. She has a room off of the library she can use in the middle school and a small classroom to work with students in the high school. All of her students are of Mexican origin with the exception of one student from Mongolia.

Ms. Shoemaker is one of only two participants in the study who don't have extensive experience living or traveling abroad. She has vacationed in places like Mexico, Germany, France, and Israel, but did not describe any of these experiences as particularly insightful in terms of cross-cultural understanding. Yet she does demonstrate

curiosity and openness to learning about difference. She and her family hosted three foreign exchange students from Vietnam over the course of two and a half years: a girl for one semester, a boy for two semesters, and another boy for a full year. She and her husband also played a large role in hosting and socially engaging with two different groups of teachers from China who were participating in a six-month program at a local university. She enthusiastically described her enjoyment of these experiences getting to know “people from other cultures and languages,” characterizing them as both “fun” and “fascinating.” This openness to difference is present in her discussion of her work with CLiM students, as well.

Despite being unable to relate to students through a personal experience of long-term cultural adjustment, as many other participants are able to do, Ms. Shoemaker does understand her students’ status as outsiders. She tearfully recounted her childhood memories of “not having any real friends” and being left to work alone when teachers instructed students to find a partner. She shares these memories with students, as well as how things turned around for her when her sixth grade teacher encouraged a pair to invite her to be part of a trio, which improved her attitude toward school for the better. She wants her students to connect with and support each other and to know that she believes in them and their ability to succeed. She also feels her experience helps her to be “sensitive to their struggles” and inclined to seek underlying reasons for those struggles.

In building relationships with her students, Ms. Shoemaker sees time as a very important factor in two distinct ways. As the lone ESOL teacher for the entire school division, she works with students year after year until they place out of the program. Certainly not the norm in the U.S. educational system, she feels that working with

students for multiple years allows her to get to know them quite well and to establish a strong rapport with them, which leads to a more comfortable relationship with her than with their other teachers. Additionally, because she mostly uses a pull-out model to teach secondary students, her teaching time with them is quite intensive. She works with them individually or in very small groups, rarely larger than three, so she is able to provide her students with extensive individual attention. As a result, she feels that she has a very deep understanding of their academic and linguistic skills. She also feels this more intimate setting, along with the rapport built up over years of working together, leads students who don't speak up in their content classes to both ask her for the academic help they need and to share personal struggles for which they seek advice.

Yet the deep knowledge Ms. Shoemaker has developed of her students' academic skills and personal lives is often devalued or ignored by others in the school division. Her recommendations for additional supports for her students have been dismissed by administrators and content teachers alike. Child study meetings (meetings with the purpose of determining whether a student should go through the process to receive special education services) have been held for her students on days when she is unable to attend and take part in the conversation. Her expertise on language acquisition is ignored if students are "getting good grades." Some teachers are resistant to her providing ESOL services at all—they don't want her pushing-in to the classroom, nor pulling students out. When asked directly if she could describe a time when her advocacy for a student was successful, she replied, "I can think of some that haven't been successful, but, um, successfully advocating? Not very much." She finds this disregard for her expertise

disheartening, but she still tries to do the best she can for her students under the constraints placed on her by the school system.

Silvia Tanner

Ms. Tanner teaches middle school in Magnolia County, and she had been involved in education in various capacities for around 25 years at the time of her participation. She started her career as a museum educator, working with teachers to create online exhibits and opportunities for project-based learning. She then earned her doctorate in curriculum and instruction and was hired in Magnolia County as a “curriculum technology integration partner” to collaborate with teachers in the development and implementation of technology-based projects and learning scenarios. She stayed in that role for five years and then pursued an opportunity to become a certified ESOL teacher on the school division’s dime in order to work directly in the classroom with her own group of students. After earning her ESOL certification, Ms. Tanner taught at the elementary level for five years. She moved to the Summit Middle School seven years ago. Her students are largely from central America—El Salvador and Honduras, specifically—and also Mexico, Syria, Iraq, Venezuela, Afghanistan, and Thailand. English is her first language, and she also speaks French, Spanish, and some Mandarin Chinese. She teaches *Newcomer ESOL*, *Advanced ESOL* and *EL Science*.

Ms. Tanner grew up in Manhattan and developed a healthy respect for cultural difference from her time in a city filled with people from all over the world. She remembers traveling with her family as a child to places like England, Italy, and Yugoslavia, and in early adulthood she lived abroad for four years. She studied in France for one year and stayed for a second by working as a fille au pair and living with a French

family. After graduating from college, she got a position teaching English at a university in Taiwan, which she did for two years. She sees these extended experiences abroad in which she learned new languages and adjusted to different cultural dynamics as directly impacting how she understands and tries to relate to her CLiM students. She remembers “how overwhelming it was” to be “completely. . . enveloped by this other culture” and feels “a deep level of sympathy” for her students who are going through a similar experience, especially because she knows that, as children, they did not choose this for themselves. Yet beyond sympathy or empathy, her experiences abroad also give her great confidence that her students will succeed. She states, “I did it. I learned Chinese, you know. I learned how to do it, and they will, too, and they can.”

Ms. Tanner understands her role as a teacher as one of empowerment. She strives to give her students what they need to become successful and move up in the world in some way from their current situation. She feels that education is empowering because once something is learned and internalized, “no one can take it away from you.” In teaching her students English, she believes she is helping them develop a skill that will be advantageous for their future job prospects and for integration into society as a whole. She perceives that her aim of empowerment helps to build strong relationships with students because their work together means something. Her desire to empower them means that she truly listens to her students’ goals, hopes, and dreams and incorporates that knowledge into her interactions with them, building trust and rapport.

While she strives for empowerment, Ms. Tanner also recognizes that her relationships with students are not hers to direct. She does her best to be impactful in a way that she believes is beneficial, but she also understands that she does not ultimately

have control over how students react or what they take from her. She describes students as on their own “path” or “life’s journey” and views her own influence as merely “a small part to play” in the larger context of their lives.

This is not to say that Ms. Tanner feels her influence is negligible. She plans coursework that builds students’ academic skillsets while simultaneously allowing them to reflect on their paths and journeys, as well as their identities. She explains that she, “is really interested in them expressing their voice.” In her advanced ESOL class, she has designed units around themes like identity and self-expression. She believes it is important for students to be able to reflect on who they are and who they want to become so that they can begin to see the potential they hold for their futures. And she thinks that middle school is an ideal context for such work because students can intellectually handle more complex content, while at the same time they are beginning to reflect on personal experiences and the meanings they hold.

Vicky Weaver

Ms. Weaver grew up and now teaches in rural Dogwood County, Virginia. She is a career changer, having initially worked in information technology. When her employer shut its doors, she decided to pursue teaching. She began as an elementary teacher, became a reading specialist, then an instructional technology coach, and finally an ESOL specialist. In her early teaching career, she felt she bonded best with students whose primary language was not English and formed a club for them called *Los Campiones* (The Champions). Eventually, after her reading specialist and then instructional technology coach positions were cut from the budget, she was offered the choice of a job in the gifted & talented program or in the ESOL program. She chose ESOL because of

her affinity for those students and the encouragement of the retiring ESOL teacher, who “kind of knew I had a heart for it.” The state of Virginia paid for her to get certified, and she took over as the sole ESOL teacher for the school division. At the time of her participation in this study, she was in her 18th year as an educator and her seventh as an ESOL specialist. English is her first language, and she also speaks some Spanish.

Ms. Weaver is now one of three ESOL teachers in her school division. She teaches at the high school four days per week and at an elementary on the other day. All of her work with students uses a pull-out model. There are 15 CLiM students at the high school. She works with them individually or in small groups of four or fewer. Many of her students are from Mexico, and she has also taught students from Guatemala, Honduras, Costa Rica, Colombia, Brazil, Thailand, China, India, and Yemen.

Ms. Weaver understands her role to be much broader than language teaching. In her words she is “looking out for them on lots of levels.” Students have her personal cell phone number and use it to ask her for help with any number of issues. These range from benign inquiries about school-related information and announcements to more consequential issues such as finding a job to help support their family or searching for a new place to live. She often plays an advisor role for her students. She directs them to sign-ups and try-outs for school sports teams, which she sees as one way for CLiM students to integrate into the school community. For a student who was planning to transfer to a new school division to live with another parent, she organized a tour of the new school and took the student there. She feels that she often “needs to start the ball rolling” because CLiM students and their families don’t have access to or don’t understand the traditional avenues through which this type of information is

disseminated. Ms. Weaver looks out for her students in her interactions with other teachers and school personnel, as well. She is an advocate for them and tries her best to inform other teachers about the types of supports CLiM students need. She also encourages other teachers to change their perspective of CLiM students, to come to see them as smart students who are capable but struggling with language.

Ms. Weaver reports she is very involved with her students outside of the classroom and tries to provide them with whatever support they indicate that they need. At times, her support comes in situations that are quite fraught. When a student's father was being deported, she took that student and her mother to visit him in the detention center one last time. When a student began counseling sessions with her mother, she attended at the student's request. Her students' personal and emotional well-being is a high priority in her mind, which is recognized by students and their families. She has been invited to many important cultural and family celebrations. Among the events she has attended are cumpleaños (birthday parties), christenings, a parent's anniversary party, the wedding of a student's sister, and a baby shower. She is nearly always the only teacher in attendance. Similar to Ms. Shoemaker, she sees time as a major factor in her acceptance by CLiM families. She states that her students tend to come from families with whom she has worked and built relationships over years.

Doing what is necessary to promote students' success is always at the forefront of Ms. Weaver's teaching. When she perceives that a student is having difficulty grasping a concept, she reports that she assumes her approach as the teacher is must what be changed. She searches for the reasons that may be behind student behaviors that are impeding learning. This might entail setting assignments aside and having conversations

about what students are struggling with in their personal lives. Promoting success might also involve bending the rules a bit. She thinks of herself as “focus[ing] on what the students need versus what the guidelines say.” For example, during COVID, when her school was virtual, her students were still required to come in to the school for state testing. When they had finished the test, she would bring them to her room and work with them individually for a time, while masked and socially distanced, before calling their ride to come pick them up. Giving students a bit of human contact and individual attention was more important to her than strictly following mandated protocols.

The Group Revisited: The Quality of Participants’ Cross-cultural Relationships with Students

In some ways the group of ESOL teachers who opted to participate in this study is self-selecting. One needs to be deeply engaged with and by one’s work as an ESOL teacher to want to discuss it with a complete stranger for four and a half hours over a couple weeks for very little compensation. Throughout the interview process these eight teachers revealed themselves to be highly dedicated to their profession and to their students. All believed that the relationships they build with their students are crucial to the educational process. Prior to analyzing these cross-cultural educational relationships in terms of how they are formed, how they function, and how they were disrupted by COVID-19, it is important to establish how the participants understand the quality of their relationships with students. The anecdotes, narratives, and, in some cases, documents they shared strongly suggest that they do indeed build strong relationships with students from other cultures and that the students are invested in these relationships as well. At the very least, the study participants believe this to be the case.

Perhaps the strongest evidence that these eight teachers effectively build cross-cultural relationships with their students and that the students value these relationships, as well, are the reports from every single participant of moments in which students choose to confide in them parts of their lives that are intensely personal, sensitive, or even painful. Multiple teachers reported that students choose to disclose to them their undocumented status, a relative's death, or traumatic experiences during their border crossing journeys. Some of Ms. Potter's students choose write about traumatic experiences in a personal narrative assignment she uses every year. Mr. Cabrera and Ms. Tanner have both consoled upset and crying students in their classrooms at times when they were not teaching a class. As mentioned above, Ms. Weaver attended counseling sessions with a student at the student's request, and she drove a child and her mother to a detention center to see the child's father one last time before he was deported. These are incredibly personal life events that students are inviting their ESOL teachers to share, which suggests that these teachers and their students have built up a lot of trust. Their relationships go beyond the academic into much more personal and vulnerable territory.

Participants state that such information is often shared *only* with ESOL teachers. When a student confided in Ms. Miller that she had been feeling depressed, Ms. Miller reported this information to the school counselors. She said, "the counselors had no idea. . . so I feel like I knew first." At Riverbend High School, a student confided in Ms. Farmer and Ms. Baker, who work together, about her mental health struggles and their connection to the death of her two cousins, who had been hit by a car the previous year. She specifically requested they not tell her other teachers. Ms. Farmer explained, "she doesn't want me telling my co-teacher in science what's going on. She doesn't want that

person knowing, in terms of details. But I can say, ‘there’s other stuff going on, you need to be lenient.’” These ESOL teachers are trusted in a way that the content teachers and other school personnel are not, suggesting a true depth of relation that CLiM students and ESOL teachers are able to achieve. Ms. Weaver states it clearly: “you know things about them on the level that the classroom teacher just won’t get to.”

The participants report that the strength of their relationships with students shines through in more mundane ways, as well. Many participants state that students will ask them for help in other academic subjects rather than asking the teachers of those classes themselves. Teachers who work with the pull-out model report that students who don’t participate much in their content classes are much more engaged when they are working with their ESOL teacher. For example, Ms. Shoemaker states that pulling an ESOL student out of class is the “situation where the student feels more comfortable asking questions.” Mr. Cabrera suggests students are more comfortable when working with him in the pull-out model because “they’re becoming themselves again.” These quotes reveal, at least from participants’ perspectives, that the students are much more comfortable with their ESOL teachers than with the content teachers, again suggesting a deeper level of trust and a stronger relationship.

Finally, students’ own words reveal that they feel their relationships with the participant teachers have depth and are very meaningful. Three participants—Ms. Baker, Ms. Miller, and Ms. Tanner—shared notes, texts, and letters with me that students have given them. A few examples from each teacher should serve to illustrate the affection students feel for them and the strength of the relationships they are able to build with students across cultural difference. See Appendix C for images of these notes, which

have been transcribed here verbatim. Image descriptions are in regular text within brackets. Translations directly follow a word or phrase in a language other than English and are in italics within brackets.

For Ms. Baker. From Antonia. In this little detail I want to thank for every little time you take for me thanks for every hug and every smile that forms everyday in us I know it is not the best detail or the best way to say thank you but I want you to know that I am immense I'm grateful to you for everything you always do....I LOVE YOU.

Happy Mother's Day Ms. Baker. Yes I know you are not a mom yet but for us your students at school you have covered in a whole your support effort love and courage is winning that position of love [heart emoji] La quiero mucho [*I love you very much*]

I did it [heart emoji, mortarboard emoji] today was the day I waited so long Thank God it was fulfilled [heart emoji] I have to thank many people for [heart emoji, wide-eyed emoji] without them I would not have made it Thelma Rogers, Anne Baker Thanks for everything I will never forget my second family [heart emoji, wide-eyed emoji, thankful hands emoji]

Thanks for everything Ms. Miller for teaching me thank you for being my teacher thank you for helping me when I needed it thanks for every moment we spent together I will miss you very much thank you for everything. THANKS. You are the best teacher.

Dear Ms. Miller, I hope you feel more better. I love you like a BFF. I want to say you are so kind to us thank you for coming back Love, Manuela

Ms. Miller, Gracias por ayudarme aprender ingles este año i el otro año y por no regañar me cuando me portaba mal y cuando nosabiaser algo meayubaba. Emilio. Love [*Ms. Miller, Thank you for helping me to learn English this year and the other year and for not punishing me when I behaved badly and when I didn't know something you helped me. Emilio. Love*]

To Ms. Tanner, Without you, I wouldn't be such a student. You have leaded me, step by step, to get used to all of the unfamiliar things, and helped me learn new

stuff. I think you are just like the star light in the night, guiding me to the way of success. Thank you, for all of the kindness that you give me. From Zaida.

Thank's for showing me that there are people like you in this world the Best teacher and the Best friend in this world. I love you. Happy Mothers day [heart]

I'm really thank you for everything you did for me and everything you taught me You are one of the best teacher I know and I'm really glad I met. You have helped me a lot and everything I know is because of you. You taught me how to be responsible, kind, and respectful and that is why I'm really thank you. Sincerely, Estefany Gonzales

These communications from students reveal, in their own words, a genuine affection felt for these teachers. They feel supported, cared for, and appreciated. They use evocative words like “love,” “kindness,” and “second family,” to show the strength of the bond they feel with these teachers. Emilio, who wrote his note completely in Spanish, includes one English word at the end—“love”—emphasizing that feeling and showing the strength of the bond he was able to create with Ms. Miller in the very language she was tasked with teaching him. That the teachers in this study seem to be able to build such strong, quality relationships with students from different cultural backgrounds is remarkable. Given the importance of teacher-student relationships in the learning process, which has been established over decades of empirical research (Nieto, 2010b; Poplin & Weeres, 1992; Preston et al., 2017; Roorda et al., 2017; Sidorkin, 2002), and the increasing diversity of the U.S. public school student population (Snyder et al., 2019), developing a greater understanding of cross-cultural teacher-student relationships holds great potential for improving educational outcomes.

In this chapter I have introduced the study participants as individuals and argued that they believe themselves to form strong and supportive cross-cultural relationships

with their students. In the following chapters I will analyze collective patterns that emerged in how they think about, experience, and understand their cross-cultural relationships with students. Chapter five will probe salient factors in the formation of these relationships. Chapter six will examine the ways in which these relationships function in the school community beyond supporting academic achievement. Finally, chapter seven will explore how these relationships were disrupted by the changes to schooling precipitated by the COVID-19 pandemic and what this disruption reveals about the relational nature of schools and learning.

Chapter 5: The Formation of Supportive Cross-Cultural Teacher-Student

Relationships

So, really, it's an art to have quality relationships as a teacher with EL kids. It's an art, and I don't think it's teachable.
– Olivia Potter

Cross-cultural interactions are prone to misunderstanding due to misinterpretation of both overt and subtle behavioral cues. Yet despite this potential hurdle, the teachers in this study seem to be able to forge strong, substantive relationships with students from different cultures, as described in chapter four. Just how are they able to do this? What factors are at play that set the conditions for such relationships to flourish? What actions do these teachers take that help them to develop such relationships? This chapter attempts to answer these questions.

In the epigraph to this chapter, Ms. Potter states that forming high quality relationships with students across cultures is “an art” that is not “teachable.” In this description, she suggests that teacher attitudes and actions play a large role in cross-cultural relationship formation, yet her description of this art as unteachable also suggests that factors beyond teachers’ control and awareness may be at play, as well. My analysis of the data suggests that this is indeed the case. I argue that there are four factors working in tandem that allow these teachers to develop relationships of care with their students that are mindful of difference. Some of these factors are outside and some are within teachers’ control. The four factors are: 1) time, 2) parallel status positioning of CLiM

students and ESOL teachers, 3) teacher dispositions derived from transformational personal experiences, and 4) caring teacher actions. I first examine each factor individually. I then conclude the chapter with an examination of the interconnectedness of these four factors, which points to a care ethic mindful of difference.

Time

There are two ways that the time ESOL teachers spend with EL students creates conditions for the formation of strong relationships. First, they have more time together than most secondary teachers and students, often building relationships over years rather than semesters. Second, the teachers characterize the time they spend with their students as more personal and meaningful than what happens in non-ESOL classrooms because they offer more individual attention.

Extended timeframe of contact. In the US, teachers and students at the secondary level are generally affiliated with one another for the length of one academic course. Depending on the scheduling system used, the duration of an academic course is typically either one semester or one academic year. Enrollment in a new course ordinarily moves a student onto a different teacher's roster, ending one teacher-student relationship and starting another. This pattern often does not apply to ESOL teachers and CLiM students.

All of the participants in this study discuss students with whom they have had extended relationships longer than the typical single course. Ms. Shoemaker has worked with most of her students, "for several years now." Ms. Tanner states, "Oftentimes I'll teach these children all three years" of their middle school experience. Ms. Farmer discussed a particular student who she taught in *Biology for ELs* and worked with again

in co-taught *Earth Science*. Ms. Baker regularly teaches students for multiple years. Such details were commonly brought up by all participants. For those participants in rural school districts with few or only one ESOL teacher, these relationships could be quite extended. Mr. Cabrera was the only ESOL teacher in his district for five years, so any ESOL students who did not place out of the program were his for that entire stretch of time. When he taught middle school Spanish, he taught students for two years in a row. Ms. Weaver, who started out as the sole ESOL teacher in her district and is now one of three, stated the extent of her connection to her students quite plainly:

See I follow these kids. Once they're in EL in elementary, they're my EL from third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, 10th, 11th, 12th grade. I know them, and I've already had their older sister, so I already know the parents. I already know where they live. I already know what the daddy does. . . . I'm not just there for one semester or one year. I met everybody. I hope you like me 'cause I'm here.

In addition to working together year after year, ESOL teachers who are responsible for multiple subjects can have the same students in multiple classes simultaneously. Ms. Miller teaches many of the same students in an ESOL class and a co-taught math class. Ms. Tanner discussed a student who one year “wound up with me first block, second, and then I had her for fourth block for science.” Clearly, ESOL teachers are able build relationships with their students over an extended time frame as compared with other secondary teachers.

A number of teachers credit this extended timeframe as contributing to deeper levels of trust with students. Ms. Baker states, “now I've had some [students] or been around some for almost four years. So, I'm a regular thing they see. So, I must be trustworthy if I've been here for four years.” When students returned to him for a second year of Spanish, Mr. Cabrera recounts, “what happened was that, they started trusting me

more. So, the rapport between them and me improved a lot. . . they [came] more open to talk. They were more collaborative with me.” Ms. Farmer, on the other hand, explains the association between time and trust from the opposite vantage point. When she has a student in her class for only one semester, she believes, “it’s harder to build that ongoing or that strong relationship, to be that true sounding board.” These teachers see greater trust and a deeper connection to students as the benefits of the extended amount of time they generally are able to spend together. Once again, Ms. Weaver’s explanation is quite eloquent. When asked directly about the importance an extended timeframe in working with ELs, she says:

it puts it in a whole new realm. . . . [T]hat focus is one-on-one. So, you get that individual focus with these kids. You figure out things. You know more about them than the classroom teacher's going to know about them. You talk to their parents. You know where every one of your students' parents work and what hours they work and who else is in the home. You know things about them on the level that the classroom teacher just probably won't get to.

Time leads to a deeper knowledge of CLiM students’ lives and connection with them and their extended networks.

More time one-on-one. Ms. Weaver’s statement also points to another aspect of time that sets the conditions for quality relationships with students. In addition to the amount of time that ESOL teachers are generally able to spend with their students, she highlights that this time is often focused on individual interactions. The quality of the time with students is also important.

One-on-one or small group time with students is the norm for teachers working with the pull-out model, in which CLiM students are taken out of a class by the ESOL teacher for English language instruction. This format provides students with extensive individual attention. Ms. Shoemaker illustrates this point:

. . . when there were 20 students in the class, [the content teachers] didn't have the time to help her as much as when it was just her and I, one-on-one. I could help her so much more. . . . So, it just made sense to walk down the hallway, a few doors to my room, so that she and I could just work together.

In terms of getting to know students and build relationships, Ms. Miller states, “for the pull-out, I would say it’s so much easier just 'cause it's just you and the students and that table and you have that time.” Ms. Weaver highlights the personal nature of interactions in pull-out sessions, stating, “you get to reach out on that one-on-one level. . . . Even if you have five in the room, you're probably working one-on-one with each, among individual goals and assignments. So, everything is so personal.” Descriptions of the pull-out model similar to these were common.

Not all the study participants teach in schools or contexts using the pull-out model, however. Those who don’t, still recognize the power of individualized attention for CLiM students and do what they can to maximize that type of interaction. Even though she is a teacher with a class size of around 15 to 20 students, Ms. Tanner routinely creates opportunities for one-on-one time with students and organizes that time to make sure she is connecting with each and every student, even if that happens over a few days. Ms. Farmer’s school has a 30-minute advisory period mentioned in chapter four called “Prime Time,” during which she often offers individual and small group help to her students, many of whom request to be sent to work with her during that time.

The time that teachers spend with students one-on-one is conducive to building relationships largely because the teachers view its value to be greater than the achievement of academic goals. Personal conversations are more likely to happen in an individual or small group setting. Ms. Tanner allows some time for her students “just to share aspects of their life,” adding, “it’s not just about work.” Of her one-on-one time

with students, Ms. Shoemaker notes, “They're asking so many more questions, and they share personal situations too, where they wouldn't in the classroom. In the classroom they're very quiet.” Teachers feel this time simply allows them to get to know students better and vice versa. It can also have more profound effects. When Mr. Cabrera pulls students out of a class to work with them individually, he states that sees in their demeanor and behavior that they are able to let their guard down because “they’re becoming themselves again.” He perceives that because their time together is safe, CLiM students can temporarily let go of the stress of fitting into a new culture and the struggle of communicating with those whose primary language is English. Ms. Potter reports that she helped a student to develop a more positive sense of self through their one-on-one time together. Carmen arrived in Ms. Potter’s classroom at the age of 17 without any prior schooling, so they worked together on the alphabet, numbers, and basic math, among other things. Of this experience, she shares “It was just pure joy to see somebody be so, just, blissfully happy when she learned something. . . . [and] then she would go home and teach [her two younger sisters]. So, it made her feel grown-up.” When a teacher is able to share such deep emotional excitement and personal growth with a student, it can only strengthen the relational bond between them. The time ESOL teachers are able to spend with their students, both in its extent and quality, helps set the stage for strong relationships to form.

Parallel Status Positioning

The US has a long history of derision and discrimination against individuals and populations who fall outside the dominant cultural and linguistic norms of White America. The nation’s public education system is wrapped up in this history and plays a

prominent role in efforts to maintain the power and influence of the dominant group and maintain nondominant groups in low status positions. Such educational history is abundant. A few prominent examples include: segregated schooling and its legacy (Erickson, 2016; Tyack, 1974), Indian boarding schools that sought to strip Native Americans of their languages and cultures (Adams, 1995), the English only movement spearheaded by Ron Unz that succeeded in making bilingual education illegal in California, Arizona, and Massachusetts (Crawford, 2004; Ijalba et al., 2019), and the processes and structures designed to corrode and erase the cultural and linguistic resources of CLiM students that Valenzuela (1999) calls “subtractive schooling.” Such treatment of nondominant groups continues today.

Issues of status regularly surfaced in participant interviews regarding both students and teachers. Given the history outlined above, CLiM students and their families are unsurprisingly positioned at a low status within U.S. society at large, and schools operate in ways that enforce this social stratification. Interestingly, interviews revealed that ESOL teachers, themselves, are also positioned at a low status, theirs being within the teaching profession. Mr. Cabrera was unique among study participants in experiencing low status in both arenas. In schools, the low status of teachers and students coincide. Their parallel positioning encourages ESOL teachers to identify and feel solidarity with their students, even if such a mindset is not consciously recognized.

Low status of CLiM persons in schools. Deficit perspectives, xenophobia, assimilationist rhetoric, linguistic discrimination, and outright hostility are some of the ways that schools usher CLiM students (Arzubiaga et al., 2009; Doucet, 2017; Olsen, 2008) and teachers (Monreal, 2022) into low status and remind them of it. Study

participants are aware of this dynamic. In their schools, they have witnessed deficit mindsets, under-resourcing, and outright prejudice toward their students. One participant, Mr. Cabrera, experienced such offenses himself.

Deficiency mindsets. Participants discussed incidents in their schools in which the actions and words of others teachers or administrators reveal an underlying deficit view of CLiM students. Ms. Shoemaker recalls being at loggerheads over a struggling student with his content teacher. She remembers, “it was a yearlong struggle in which the teacher was saying, ‘He can do the work; he’s just not trying. He can do the work; he’s just not putting in the effort.’” In effect, the teacher blames the student for his lack of success, ascribing a character flaw to him rather than considering that specialized language instruction or cross-cultural sensitivity might be required. Ms. Baker has worked under an administrator who scheduled students for classes that they had previously passed based solely on their WIDA⁴ scores. Their language skills were, thus, seen as determinant of their math abilities, as well, despite prior performance directly contradicting such a view.

Ms. Miller hears content teachers talking about and focusing on what CLiM students lack, which teachers then act on by reducing their opportunities to learn. She says, “We always hear about teachers or classroom teachers, or whoever, talking about our English learners and all the things that they *can't* do. ‘They can't sit still. They can't

⁴ WIDA stands for “World-class Instruction Design and Assessment” and is an organization that has developed a detailed set of learning standards for the field of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), as well as assessments tied to those standards for listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Originating in 2003 with a federal grant to Wisconsin, Delaware, and Arkansas, WIDA is currently a consortium of 36 states, Washington DC, the US Virgin Islands, the Bureau of Indian Education, the Northern Mariana Islands, and the Department of Defense. Virginia is a member of the WIDA Consortium, using both its learning standards and assessments.

do their work. They can't focus.” She has witnessed teachers act on these views by removing students from learning contexts. She remembers that the teachers of a fifth grade boy from Afghanistan routinely separated him from the rest of the class. The teachers, she says, “were just annoyed by him. . . . They just put him on a little island. A lot of times I’d walk in and he’d be on an island by himself.” She had also witnessed her students placed out in the hallway, receiving the explanation that these students “were just in the way.” When content teachers believe that CLiM students aren’t capable, they don’t feel they are worthy of the effort to get them to learn, which reinscribes their low status.

Under-resourcing. The low status of CLiM students and families is revealed through the various ways in which the programs designed for them are under-resourced. Ms. Farmer teaches science classes specifically designed to integrate language learning into the science content, but she does not have her own classroom. Instead, she must use the rooms of other science teachers when they have a break in their schedules. She is not able to leave anything up on the walls and must even ask permission to use a classroom’s whiteboard while teaching. Implied in this setup is that her students don’t merit a designated science classroom just for them, one in which the entire room—wall displays, diagrams, models, etc.—could be used to advance her students’ learning of both science *and* language.

Both Ms. Potter and Mr. Cabrera identify translation services for families as quite lacking. Ms. Potter’s district employs one Spanish translator for all students and families. She calls it “an impossible job for 600 [Spanish-speaking] kids.” Mr. Cabrera’s district provided no translation services prior to his arrival. He took it upon himself to translate

communications from schools and the division into Spanish for Spanish-speaking families, for which they have been incredibly grateful. After the first phone call went out to families in Spanish, he started receiving text messages expressing gratitude: “These people texting me saying, ‘Thank you very much. I’ve been in this school for 10 years, and this is the first time I got a voicemail in Spanish.’” Translation services are known to be beneficial in facilitating communication between CLiM families and schools and can be part of a larger strategy for building trust and working partnerships that allow families to better understand and be involved in their children’s education (Housel, 2020; Rodríguez-Castro et al., 2018). Yet prior to Mr. Cabrera taking the task of translation upon himself, the school division had the capacity to do this work: Spanish teachers. These employees could have been hired to help with translating important communications, but the school division simply never took the initiative, viewing translation as a less-than-worthwhile expense. As a result of the low status of CLiM families, it appears those who might benefit the most from such resources don’t merit consideration by the administration.

Prejudice. The study participants are very aware that their students encounter prejudiced behavior and sentiments from school personnel. Prior to becoming certified as an ESOL teacher, Ms. Potter’s district in Connecticut would place every “new student with a foreign-sounding name” in her special education reading class without considering that such instruction was not pedagogically sound for students learning a new language. Ms. Baker is very careful with what she shares about a student’s personal circumstances with other teachers because of potential issues of discrimination. She says, “some people have very harsh opinions on people crossing the border and doing it the right way or the

wrong way. I don't want to tell them something that's going to taint their opinion of the student." Working in the same school as Ms. Baker, Ms. Farmer states, "there were some teachers in my building that I know say they don't want the ELs. . . because they don't understand their accent or they think they're lazy." She has also had students describe the actions of other teachers to her, "that make me think racist, prejudice, like that type of impression is what the student gets." Ms. Tanner recognizes her students' marginalization and says that she must "defend them from other teachers that I work with who will say biased, insensitive things." These examples clearly demonstrate ESOL teachers' knowledge that CLiM students routinely face prejudice in schools, further reflecting and cementing their low status with the school social structure.

CLiM teachers face such prejudice as well. Mr. Cabrera relates a very difficult experience within his first year of teaching in the Maple County School Division. At that time, he taught seventh- and eighth-grade Spanish to the division's general population as part of his responsibilities. He recounts that he would touch students on the shoulder to get their attention and that he saw other teachers making physical contact with students in the exact same manner. Yet students from his Spanish class reported him to the school administration for touching them "inappropriately." He was put on administrative leave for a week while an investigation was conducted. He was exonerated after a number of parents called the school on his behalf because their children explained to them what was happening. His authority at the school was completely undermined upon his return because students would threaten to report him if he tried to enforce rules. "Years later," he says, "I learned that the students did it on purpose." His reflections on this incident reveal his complete demoralization. He says,

I felt like a criminal. I felt devastated. I felt really bad. . . . So, after going through that hard moment, that's been the hardest moment in my life. Because I had a brother, and he died 14 years ago. It was really hard, but when he died, many people were with me, you know? But right here I was by myself.

So, there he was in Maple County, a Latinx teacher from South America completely at the mercy of local middle school students. While he doesn't directly point to racial or ethnic prejudice as a cause of this incident, he was treated quite differently than the teachers from the community who used the same shoulder-tapping technique. He works in a Virginia county with a well-documented history of racial discrimination in schools both prior to and following the United State Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* mandating school desegregation. He is known to be from a foreign country and speaks English with a discernible accent. His low status within the school community had been clearly and forcefully communicated to him by the students who accused him and an administration that failed to explain why *his* touching of students on the shoulder was "inappropriate," while it was not for other teachers.

Low status of ESOL teachers in schools. Within the teaching profession, ESOL teachers' status parallels that of CLiM students in the wider society. ESOL teachers have long been afforded a low status relative to their colleagues (Jaffe-Walter, 2018; Montero-Sieburth & Perez, 1987; Olsen, 2008), who teach what is often referred to as the *standard curriculum* within the *mainstream classroom*. Even the common school terminology of *standard* and *mainstream* suggests a lower status for those who teach ESOL because they are perceived as outside the norm. The study participants recount having experienced both de-professionalization and a disregard for their expertise.

De-professionalization. When teachers experience de-professionalization, their authority is undermined, and they are viewed or treated as somehow less than a teacher.

The example of Ms. Farmer's lack of a science classroom, used above to illustrate the under-resourcing of CLiM students, also contains an element of ESOL teacher de-professionalization. She notes that she must ask the teacher whose room she is using if she may write on the whiteboard while she teaches. In other words, she must obtain permission from another teacher in order to use standard instructional tools to teach her own students. Her autonomy as an educator is essentially taken away and subordinated to another teacher, one who is not responsible for the learning of Ms. Farmer's students.

Both Ms. Shoemaker and Ms. Miller identify elements of co-teaching that de-professionalize ESOL teachers. Ms. Shoemaker states that she is not authorized to issue grades. This situation means that her work with students does not earn them credit toward promotion or graduation and can, therefore, be seen as less important or less consequential. Ms. Miller recounts that she is often not viewed as an equal by other teachers and is relegated to carrying out menial tasks. She states, "there are so many dynamics of co-teaching, where you're the aide or the person passing out papers because people don't really understand what you're supposed to be doing." In a later interview she says, "I think we fight for that equality of teachers, and we're just as much teachers as the classroom teacher." In actuality, ESOL teachers in the state of Virginia must complete a specialized teacher training program that is just as rigorous as those for content teachers. A teacher with an existing license might also add an ESL endorsement to their license by demonstrating their knowledge of English language acquisition through the Praxis English to Speaker of Other Languages Test or by undertaking extensive additional training (Virginia Department of Education, 2022a, 2022b). Despite

holding equal or even more credentials than a teacher licensed in a single area, ESOL teachers are often de-professionalized and perceived as less capable.

Disregard for expertise. As stated above, ESOL teachers must successfully complete specialized training to be licensed to teach ESL in the state of Virginia. This training includes coursework in linguistics, second language acquisition, discipline specific methods, and cross-cultural education, among other requirements (Virginia Department of Education, 2022a). These teachers have a high level of expertise in the area of language acquisition; some also have additional expertise in particular content areas, as well. Yet this expertise is often ignored, at times willfully, by content teachers and administrative leaders alike.

In working with content teachers around WIDA standards, Ms. Miller states, “it’s me kind of coaching the teacher and sometimes the teacher just not listening at all.” Ms. Shoemaker’s expertise was obviated when a team meeting about a ninth grade student referred for a special education evaluation was scheduled on a day she could not attend. She explains the outcome:

The child study team decided that he was fine. He just needed more EL support from me. . . that it was just a language barrier, and it *isn't*. I'm just like, it's clearly not the case because, I mean, he was born and raised in Poplar County. So, he has been exposed to English all of his life in coming to school every day. And he has siblings who speak English as well. You know?

The need for a language expert’s input was ignored, and the determination was made by those who are not language experts that the child’s difficulty was with language. Yet Ms. Shoemaker cites solid evidence that the student’s English language development was much slower than what is typically expected. A child who enters kindergarten in the US needing to learn English typically achieves language proficiency in just under four years

(Greenberg Motamedi, 2015). Ms. Shoemaker's student, however, is still struggling with English in his 10th year of schooling, and he has siblings who achieved proficiency in much less time. Ms. Shoemaker understands these facts to mean that he requires special education services in addition to ESOL, but she is ignored.

Beyond disregarding expertise, Ms. Weaver suggests that schools simply don't value the contributions that ESOL teachers make to their students. She summarizes an ESOL teacher's worth in this way:

Another thing that's hard to note, you will never be teacher of the year. You will not. . . . You can't look to your school system to pat you on the back too much. You got to find your own value in that. . . . It takes a lot of confidence in yourself to not need the pat on the back and the 'good job' and accolades that you might get as a classroom teacher that you're not going to get as an EL teacher.

This statement by Ms. Weaver that ESOL teachers must find their own worth in the work they do with their students unveils the low status these teachers occupy in the teaching profession. They must find their own worth because others will not recognize it.

Instances of simultaneous parallel status positioning with ESOL teachers and CLiM students. As described above, both CLiM students and ESOL teachers are positioned in a low status within schools in particular and somewhat divergent ways. Yet there are inevitably instances in which both experience this positioning at the same time. All participants recounted experiences in which one could interpret this to be the case. A few examples will serve to illustrate such simultaneous parallel status positioning.

Ms. Baker recounts a particular year in which 17 out of 20 students in her *Algebra I for ELs* class passed the state exam for that subject, the best result out of all of the Algebra I teachers in her school. Yet rather than receiving praise, she remembers being questioned: "some of the other algebra teachers asked me, as did my principal and even

my superintendent, ‘How did you do it? What did you do?’ And I’m like, I did the same thing I always do.” There are two assumptions behind such questioning. The first is a deficit view of CLiM students that assumes they are incapable of such an accomplishment. The second is a disregard for the expertise of the ESOL teacher, who is viewed as not skilled enough to have produced such a result. The achievement, rather than being celebrated, needs to be justified to others at all levels of the school system. The assumptions tied to the low status positioning of both Ms. Baker and her students cause others in the school district to be surprised at and to question their success.

In a less overt fashion, attitudes about who has low status can permeate the educational system and be reflected in mundane, behind-the-scenes decisions like budgeting. Ms. Potter sees funding as an issue in which such attitudes can be revealed. She explains that fundings for ESOL educational materials is often lacking because she feels that administrators “forget that there are EL kids” who have unique educational needs. In this instance the low status of CLiM students and ESOL teachers is embedded within the bureaucracy of the school system. The students are overlooked, and, as result under-resourced. The teacher is also de-professionalized, as she is not provided with specialized teaching materials that she feels would improve students’ learning outcomes.

It is rare for someone to say outright that CLiM students are not worthy of a quality education or that ESOL teachers shouldn’t be regarded as full members of the teaching profession. The positioning of these students and teachers in a low-status is often an unstated attitude hidden in the background of school functioning. It can come to the surface in moments of duress, however. Ms. Tanner recounts a math teacher’s reaction when some of her CLiM students are not performing well in his class; it

devalues both the students and her. In this quote, she vacillates between her perception of math teachers in general [“they”] and the reaction of this particular teacher [“he”]:

They get really freaked out because the kids are not doing well in their classes, but they feel responsible. And then at a certain point they start feeling angry at the kid, you know, like blame the kid, blame the victim. So, he was all bent out of shape. He didn't know what to do. . . .[Ms. Tanner speeds up her pace of speech and adopts a more aggressive tone to imitate this teacher speaking] ‘They're not learning. I shouldn't be teaching them. You should be teaching. You should come up with a curriculum that, you know, the everyday math, and someone else can be delivering this curriculum to them.’ Right. They don't want to teach them or, uh, [the students] should just be on this computer program the whole time, which will give them math at their level.’ And that's ridiculous. You're going to isolate a kid. You're not going to make them part of your class. You're going to make them feel isolated.

Ms. Tanner recalls the math teacher saying that he “shouldn’t be teaching” students currently in the ESOL program and that Ms. Tanner should develop a basic, “everyday math” curriculum for them. In her portrayal of this exchange, the math teacher’s reaction belittles both the CLiM students and the ESOL teacher. To him, the students are not worth his efforts. They should either be removed from his class to a more rudimentary environment or sit at a computer without human instruction. There is an unarticulated prejudice in this attitude: CLiM students are beneath this teacher. Further, in his insistence that Ms. Tanner be teaching them and designing “everyday” curriculum for them, he positions her at a lower status as well. He disregards her expertise and the complexity of what she does in the classroom, recasting her purview as mundane, unsophisticated, and simple. Yet there is a flaw in logic that belies this teacher’s motivations as prejudicial. If working with CLiM students is so basic and simple, why is he unable to do so effectively? When confronted with the stressful reality that these students are not finding success with his standard methods, he resorts to status sorting as

a way to protect his self-image as an effective teacher rather than reflecting and working toward changing his approach in a way that will better reach them.

Identification and solidarity with CLiM students. Throughout their interviews, study participants indicated a strong identification with their CLiM students, which at times rose to the level solidarity. They feel a close bond with their students and, at times, a sense of shared purpose that are evident in both how they speak of their students and actions they take on their students' behalf. I understand this identification to stem from the parallel low status the teachers and their students experience within the school. While such a connection is not necessarily consciously recognized by the participants—they at least did not make any direct statements recognizing it—I interpret status positioning and identification to be linked given the teachers' tendency to express identification and solidarity with their students within contexts where the lower status of one or both actors is at play.

Language. In a general sense, teachers' identification with their students is revealed through their language use. They routinely use the word *love* and the metaphor of *family* when talking about their students. All participants engaged in one of these usages; a few engaged in both. The following table displays a number of brief examples to illustrate this language use (see Table 5.1).

Table 5.1: Examples of Teachers' Language Use Evoking Love and Family

	Use of <i>love</i>	Use of words evoking <i>family</i>
Anne Baker	"I really love any kid that walks in my classroom, but the EL kids kind of do hit my sweet spot. I love them a little bit more."	"I am your school mom. I'm supposed to stand up for you like your mom does outside of school."
Bernardo Cabrera	"In the Spanish class I got, well, I had a group. I loved that group."	
Eve Farmer	". . . these crazy kids, I love as the kids that they are."	
Lilly Miller	"I was thinking of another student who I just love and we had a great connection."	
Olivia Potter		"I tell them that I'm on their side and I want them to come to me if they get confused in another class. . . I'm like their school mom."
Rachel Shoemaker	"I really love my students and I think they can sense that right away. I want them to know that they're very special and that I have unconditional love for them."	"I'm getting really like a protective mom about this, because my feeling is that she should be in school for both A and B week."
Silvia Tanner	"I feel like I did connect with him. I love the child."	"I started calling her <i>mi hija</i> [my daughter], you know, and joking with her and lots of hugs. She would stop by on her way to another class and give me a hug."
Vicky Weaver		"If you've taught long enough, your students become your extended family."

The routine use of such language suggests that the teachers identify with their students via an emotional connection or association. When directly asked to reflect on this language use, teachers expressed concern for students' well-being, care about them as individuals, and a desire to help them be successful. Ms. Tanner discussed the concept of potential and her desire for students to be aware that she sees their potential. Ms. Potter said that she wants her classes to engender a sense of mutual interest in one another and maintain a level of care for everyone in the room. Ms. Shoemaker brought up notions of acceptance, trust, enjoyment of one another, and being non-judgmental. In a wide-ranging response, Ms. Weaver explains the wide-ranging paths that identification with one's students opens up beyond the teaching of a particular subject:

What I mean is that I am interested in what happens in their home. I am interested in the fact that they don't have any transportation. I do want to know whatever parts of their background they want to share with me. I'm not there *just* to help them learn language. I'm there to help them with any kind of barriers they come up against. I'm concerned that they develop friends. I'm concerned that they figure out if they can make the soccer team or not. So, I want them to feel like I'm somebody they can trust and can feel free to ask for help and to know that I'm looking out for them on lots of levels.

The routine appearance of words like *love*, *family*, and *school mom* in the speech of participants is not accidental. It reflects the connection that these teachers feel with their CLiM students. It also reveals a particularly American sense of identity on the part of teachers both in terms of how they understand their role and in how they validate themselves with positive self-regard. This issue will be further explored in chapter seven.

Actions. The teachers' identification with students goes well beyond the use of vocabulary suggesting a tight-knit bond. Teachers also report that they act in ways that reveal their identification with students. At times these actions imply a connection that is a step beyond identification and moving into solidarity in that they seek to shield students

from negative experiences tied to their low status positioning or prepare them to confront such experiences. While identification is represented in the everyday connection ESOL teachers feel with their CLiM students, solidarity emerges in situations that are more high-stakes. In both cases, the low-status positioning of one or both parties is an important part of the context.

Identification is found in Ms. Miller's tendency to check in twice per day with a particular student of hers. He was a newcomer from El Salvador in the fifth grade with interrupted schooling who liked to move around a lot. She reports that his classroom teachers viewed him as "defiant" for this behavior and often sent him out of the room. In response to the deficit lens through which his classroom teachers saw him, Ms. Miller would go to his classroom at both the beginning and end of the day to talk with him for a couple minutes. She allowed him to use Spanish to express himself and communicated back in that language as best she could. Her motivation was simple: she was concerned for him and wanted to ensure he started and ended the day with a supportive interaction. Identification is also found in the trust Ms. Baker places in her relationships with her students. When her mother expressed concern that she was driving in potentially dangerous neighborhoods at night to drop off materials at students' homes, Ms. Baker said she was not nervous doing so. She explained to her mother, "Mom, I have taught enough of these kids and I feel like they love me enough that if I screamed help, they would come help me. I feel pretty safe." When her students are subjected to prejudice and labeled as dangerous, she rejects that notion, stating that she believes the opposite.

When a teacher's actions move beyond identification to indicate solidarity with their students, there is a specific aim to prevent harm to students as a result of low status

positioning. The action places ESOL teachers on the side of their students and, sometimes, in opposition to other school personnel. Solidarity can be seen in Mr. Cabrera explaining to newcomers how he adjusted to life and school in Maple County and the types of behaviors they might expect to encounter from native-born students and teachers. In doing so, he aligns himself with his students to support them in their transition to a new culture and to prepare them for how others might perceive them, in some ways potentially based on prejudicial outlooks. Solidarity can also be seen in how Ms. Farmer looks out for her CLiM students in co-taught classes. She explains her strategy this way:

I try to play interference. I've seen where the teacher's headed and I will get there before them to avoid the student having another negative interaction with that other teacher. . . I go over and I'm like, 'Hey, you need help with this?' to avoid the other teacher having to be the person that they are forced to seek help from.

Ms. Farmer uses this strategy specifically when she is working with a teacher she perceives as prejudiced or biased against her students. She shields her students to prevent them from being treated poorly or unfairly by someone who holds them in low regard.

Solidarity with students can also lead to direct confrontation with colleagues. For Ms. Shoemaker this happened in the fall of 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, when she administered a social studies test to Mariana, a middle school student from Mexico, and realized Mariana didn't understand the key words of nearly every question. At the time, Poplar County School Division was operating a hybrid learning model, in which students were able to come to school for in-person instruction every other week in order to maintain small class sizes with social distancing. She understood, though, that the families of students designated as EL or special education could opt to send their children to school in person every week, an understanding supported by guidance issued by the

state (Virginia Department of Education, 2020). After speaking with the student and her family, Ms. Shoemaker arranged with the guidance counselor for Mariana to come every week in the hope that double exposure to the material would help improve her understanding. However, the content teacher insisted that Mariana was performing well and had the guidance counselor cancel the schedule change. In response, Ms. Shoemaker states:

So, giving her that extra time, they may argue that she's just really not gonna benefit from it anyway. But I would argue that she deserves to have that opportunity. . . . I've got to gather up a lot of evidence and then talk with these teachers individually and maybe call a meeting with the principal and the teachers together to discuss this. The parent wants her to come in both weeks; she wants to come in both weeks. She is by far needing it.

In this situation Ms. Shoemaker aligns herself with her student, while at the same time placing herself in opposition to the classroom teacher and guidance counselor. Both she and the student are positioned in a low status by the final decision: the student is denied the resource of extra in-person instruction and Ms. Shoemaker's expertise is disregarded. It is this type of parallel status positioning that can encourage teachers to identify and even feel solidarity with their students. Such feelings of association and unity with students lay the groundwork on which supportive cross-cultural relationships can be built.

Transformational Experiences and Cross-Cultural Teacher Dispositions

All but one of the ESOL teachers in this study identify significant personal experiences as highly influential in their approach to teaching students from different cultural backgrounds. Many of these experiences are of cultural difference, either through travel or living abroad. A couple participants also recounted memorable experiences of feeling like an outsider. These experiences of cultural and social difference are remembered and recounted by participants as important touchstones in their lives that

have impacted their current worldview and which they directly connect to their approaches to teaching CLiM students. In this section I illustrate the different types of personal experiences teachers indicate to be influential in their teaching and how they feel such experiences help them to understand and relate to their students. These transformational experiences remain important to these teachers even when they are years or decades removed from the events. I will argue that these teachers appear to hold particular dispositions—an orientation toward accepting difference, an empathic outlook, and a refusal to view students as deficient—that either stem from or are strengthened by these transformational experiences and that aid in forming strong cross-cultural relationships. Finally, via participant Anne Baker, I will show that while transformational experiences appear to enhance and strengthen such dispositions for many, they are not absolutely necessary for an individual to hold these dispositions that predispose them to relate well cross-culturally.

Transformational experiences. Certain experiences can have a long-lasting impact on an individual's outlook and in the ways they choose to interact with the larger world. Such experiences can initiate a process of “transformative learning” through which one's existing frame of reference and worldview are brought into question and ultimately changed upon reflection (Dirkx et al., 2006). This change shifts how we exist within and understand the world around us. After an initial disorientation, we become able to see and enact new possibilities for action in and response to the world around us in ways that engage our reformed perspective (Dirkx et al., 2006; Levitt et al., 2004). Many of us can pinpoint a particularly meaningful experience we have had and how it changed our thinking. Experiences abroad in which one is confronted with alternative

perspectives and views on the world can have such an effect (Chiocca, 2021; Liang et al., 2015; Mitchell & Paras, 2018; Rottenburg, 2006). This was a relatively common experience of the participants. A few also cited memories of feeling like or being identified as an outsider as being particularly meaningful and contributing to a shift in their perspective.

Experiences abroad. Perhaps unsurprisingly for a group of teachers who have chosen to work with students from cultures different than their own, most participants in this study relay details of significant experience abroad. Many lived abroad or, in the case of Bernardo Cabrera, were in the midst of living abroad for extended periods of time (see Table 5.2 for a summary). Mr. Cabrera, a native of South America, was in his fifth year living in Virginia. Ms. Farmer lived in South Korea for a total of four years in separate two-year stints. Ms. Miller spent a semester abroad in Spain, summers abroad in Morocco and Hong Kong, and lived in England for a year to earn a Master's degree. Ms. Potter lived and attended school in Puerto Rico during the sixth and seventh grades and then returned to live there on her own for two years prior to attending college. She also lived and studied in Japan for six months during her professional life. Ms. Tanner completed a study abroad year in France during college and lived there for another year working as a *fille au pair*. She also lived in Taiwan for two years while teaching English at a university. Ms. Weaver, while not having spent extensive time abroad, does describe a formative and lasting relationship with someone she met on a trip to Mexico that resulted in multiple visits back and forth staying with each other's families.

Table 5.2: Participants' Extended and Impactful Experiences Abroad

	Place	Amount of Time Spent
Anne Baker	—	—
Bernardo Cabrera	United States	four and a half years
Eve Farmer	South Korea	four years (two occasions, two years each)
Lilly Miller	Morocco	one summer
	Hong Kong	one summer
	Spain	one semester
	England	one year
Olivia Potter	Puerto Rico	four years (two years as a child in the sixth and seventh grades; two years between high school and college)
	Japan	six months
Rachel Shoemaker	—	—
Silvia Tanner	France	two years
	Taiwan	two years
Vicky Weaver	Mexico	multiple short trips of a few weeks; connection made on an early trip led to repeated visits back and forth with members of a particular family

Though mere exposure to a different culture is not sufficient to change one's worldview (Majewska, 2022; Vande Berg, 2009), these participants all seem to have had a deep experience that they view as influencing their outlook long term. They reveal that their time abroad has impacted how they understand cultural difference and how they move through the world with that understanding. A few examples serve to illustrate this point. While attending an international youth conference in Morocco, Ms. Miller was enthralled by meeting and communicating with people from different cultures, and she credits the experience with inspiring her to become an ESOL teacher. Speaking of her experiences abroad more holistically, she states that they made her more open and curious and that "probably all those experiences built it that way for me to be flexible," attributing a lasting personality trait to her experiences abroad. Mr. Cabrera describes his experience in a Virginia school as "adapting myself to the [US educational] system" and "making me change my personality somehow." In becoming accustomed to different ways of interacting with students and colleagues and different pedagogical approaches, he also experienced a personal shift within himself. Finally, after moving from Puerto Rico to West Palm Beach, Florida with her family as an adolescent, Ms. Potter had an epiphany of sorts about the nature of culture itself. She describes living in an area with a large Cuban population:

I remember it being very interesting because there were a lot of Spanish speakers, but from Cuban descent. It was a different experience than having just lived in Puerto Rico, the community. So that's when I first remember realizing that just because someone's a Spanish speaker, their background and their culture and all can be very different. Because the Cuban population, it's much different than the Puerto Rico population that I just came from. . . . There was a learning curve there.

Ms. Potter is expressing here a sense of the groupness of culture that she came to understand at a young age and that stayed with her throughout her life. She learned that despite certain similarities, such as language, cultural groups can still remain distinct from one another in tangible ways. She gained a more nuanced view of the connections and distinctions between differing cultural groups.

These examples illustrate how meaningful experiences abroad can have a lasting impact on one's perspective and worldview. It is in this sense that I describe these experiences as transformational: they lead to changed understandings that are carried forward (Dirkx et al., 2006). Among the participants of this study, such impacts were common. As will be explained below, these impacts are understood by these teachers as directly tied to their relations with students from different cultures.

Experiences of being an outsider. Both Ms. Potter and Ms. Shoemaker discussed experiences of feeling like an outsider during childhood that they have carried with them. They still think about these experiences in their lives today and state that these experiences color how they view and relate to their students. For Ms. Potter, this experience of being an outsider occurred within the context of her experience of cultural difference in Puerto Rico. She remembers that her parents deliberately chose to live away from other Americans in a local neighborhood populated by Puerto Rican citizens. In thinking about her time there she states, "I was definitely a minority other," and, "it made an impact for me to be other, to be different." She remembers a particular incident in which a store clerk placed her change on the counter rather than into her outstretched hand, an act she interpreted at the time as the clerk not wanting to touch her. This event suggests that beyond recognizing herself as different, others recognized it, as well, and

treated her differently. She explains that being thought of as part of an out-group is something that has stayed with her, and she is “conscious of that with kids who come from other countries.” This experience from her childhood literally shapes how she interacts with and understands people from different cultures decades later. She uses her experience as a way to grasp how her students might be feeling, to understand them as much as possible from their own perspective.

Ms. Shoemaker’s experience of being an outsider occurred as she was growing up in her hometown, a rural community in upstate New York. She remembers not liking school and “not having any real friends” while growing up. She has vivid memories that whenever a teacher organized pair work and instructed students to find a partner, she would look quickly to see if anyone was absent. In a class with an odd number of students, if no one was absent, she would always be the one left alone without a partner. In her sixth grade year, her teacher assigned two girls to work with her in a group of three, and she credits that teacher’s action with changing her attitude toward school. She became friends with the girls, started to want to come to school, and began studying so that she would do well. That teacher’s small decision to place her in a trio rather than leaving her to work alone was a turning point for her. She states:

That made the entire difference in my life because I would have been like my brother and sister to have struggled through school and barely graduating and, you know, just finishing with B's and C's probably and without a friend, you know. Just glad to be out of school. The teacher turned my life around by asking these two girls to be my friend.

This experience is quite emotional for Ms. Shoemaker to this day: she cried while recounting this story in her second interview. It shapes her understanding of schooling and education. She not only thinks about it while interacting with students, she puts

herself on the lookout for students who may be disengaged with school and even tells her students this story.

Cross-cultural dispositions and classroom practice. In discussing the transformational experiences they have had across cultural and social difference, participants indicate that their perspectives and outlooks were changed in lasting ways. They became more conscious of difference, more open to and curious about different ways of being, and more likely to strive to understand others on their own terms. These perspectives carry into their teaching lives and have helped to cultivate certain dispositions. Participants' relational and pedagogical approaches toward students from different cultural backgrounds grow out of these dispositions, allowing them to build what they perceive as supportive, meaningful relationships with students across cultural difference. These dispositions are: 1) an orientation toward accepting difference, 2) an empathic outlook, and 3) a refusal to view students as deficient.

I see a direct link between teachers' transformational experiences and the dispositions they hold in their work with students. At times, participants articulate a view that a transformational experience has directly impacted their approach to teaching culturally diverse students, such as when Ms. Tanner explains that her experience in Taiwan helps her understand how overwhelming it can be for her students to move to a new culture and not speak the language (see below). Often, however, the connection is not articulated directly, yet it is still implied. The consciousness of difference and the openness to it that these teachers gained from transformational personal experiences undergird the dispositions they hold in the classroom.

Orientation toward accepting difference. It is not hard to see a connection between the transformational experiences of this study's participants and a disposition that is accepting of difference. All participants expressed in one way or another that they are open to difference. Their experiences sparked their curiosity about it. Some are very vocally curious about and intrigued by cultural difference. When asked how her experiences abroad impact her work with EL students, Ms. Miller says that they help her to be:

open to other students and what they bring to the classroom and how that's a strength for them to teach you as well and. . . just the curiosity, too, of other people and kind of where they're coming from and more about them.

Ms. Shoemaker describes cultural and linguistic difference as “just something that I get excited about, and I find it very intriguing.” Ms. Potter repeatedly uses the word “fascinating” to describe her experience learning about schooling in Japan. These teachers are simply interested by and curious about the cultural differences they encounter. Their default response to difference is not to judge or to reject, but to wonder.

Mr. Cabrera's curiosity about cultural difference led him to search for teaching jobs in the US via an international teacher placement company. In addition to being curious himself, Mr. Cabrera tries to impart a stance of curiosity about difference to his students, as well. He urges them not to judge the culture they find themselves in, but to learn from it:

I tell them, ‘Hey guys, this [culture] is completely different. And the idea is that we need to adapt.’ Because the idea is not, ‘Oh, my culture is better than this one.’ No. Why don't you get a little bit more open, and you learn something?

His disposition to accept difference is, thus, directly communicated to students in a way that encourages them to hold a similar outlook. Students can see this disposition in their teachers' actions and words.

Moving beyond curiosity, Ms. Tanner explains how she attempts to remain aware of cultural difference in her work with EL students. She looks out for different culturally based assumptions that students and she may hold in order to respond appropriately to students' expectations:

They're acting under a set of cultural, what would the word be, influences that extend to how we view humor, how we view intimacy, how we view our elders, you know, how we view all of these layers and layers of culture. And then I'm operating from mine. So that leaves lots of room for miscommunication. . . . You really have to be careful not to offend. . . . I try to really be sensitive to what I feel is being signaled.

She fully understands that she and her students may understand and respond to the same situation differently due to their cultural upbringings and viewpoints. She accepts that these differences will occur and tries her best to mitigate them to avoid offense.

Teachers' orientation toward accepting difference importantly extends beyond culture. It extends to their work with students and the different approaches they adopt to meet various students' needs. On a couple of occasions, Ms. Farmer details nearly opposite approaches for two students, Louis and Antonia, whom she uses to demonstrate the range of her pedagogical options. Louis is a student whom she allows to work very independently with occasional check-ins on his progress and understanding. On the other hand, she often works individually with Antonia to coach her through assignments. The approach she takes is based on her knowledge of students' personalities, academic and skill levels, as well as difficulties they may be having in their personal lives that may interfere with concentration or motivation to complete schoolwork. She is perfectly

comfortable taking such different approaches and doesn't hesitate to do so. Ms. Weaver understands that expectations for CLiM students' demonstration of learning must differ from other students, and she tries to impart this view to non-ESOL teachers. When speaking with them about CLiM students, she acknowledges they have "a certain set of expectations" for their students. Then she pushes by asking, "And then there's the kid who can't speak the language, and how do you adapt those expectations for that student too?" She tries to get teachers to understand that differences in linguistic skill, if attended to, do not have to impede learning. Accepting and working with difference are central to the participants' work in the classroom with CLiM students. It is a disposition that undergirds their approaches to relating with and teaching their students.

While the teacher-participants in this study showed some understanding of culture and cultural difference, it was often not very nuanced and sometimes even conflated with differences among individuals. Yet what appears to be important in this disposition is not a deep knowledge of culture, but simply an attunement to difference. Even if a cultural difference is misattributed to personality or individual preference, it is still noticed, accepted and taken into account in how these teachers relate to their students.

Empathic outlook. Participants all hold a disposition toward viewing their students with empathy. They report that they are attentive to their students' struggles and challenges and that they strive to understand and be sensitive to their students' feelings and experiences. This type of receptive attentiveness and where it leads us in our relations with others—feeling along with them and an engrossment in their outlook and experience—are central aspects of care ethics as outlined by Noddings (2011, 2013). Such identification with others is more elusive across cultural difference, yet participants'

transformational experiences help them to maintain an empathic outlook for their culturally diverse students. In experiencing and becoming open to difference, they are better able understand and appreciate the perspectives of cultural others and to enter into their frame of mind.

This ability to empathize across difference is especially strong for those participants who have had transformative experiences abroad. They have experienced being a cultural other themselves, often with limited ability to communicate in the local language, which mirrors in important ways the experiences of their students in Virginia. Ms. Tanner explains how her experience adjusting to life in Taiwan helps her to understand and feel with her students:

I didn't speak the language prior to going. And knowing how overwhelming it was, how completely you're enveloped by this other culture and this other language and what that means to not have the language and have to acquire the language. . . . I think it gives me a deep level of sympathy for them.

She is able to directly connect her personal experience to those of her students for a deep understanding of their mental and emotional state. Ms. Weaver, Ms. Potter, and Ms. Miller all made similar connections to their own experiences abroad. Mr. Cabrera is even closer to the experiences of his students, having adjusted to the very town and school to which his students must also adjust. He explains, “So based on my personal experience. . . I understand in a very good level what students go through when they get into the school. So, I usually tell them what they might face.” For Mr. Cabrera, his own personal experience not only lets him understand and empathize with his students, he’s also able to give them very practical advice about what they might experience in order to help them adjust.

Some teachers' empathic outlook involves looking out for students who are outsiders. This awareness is certainly true for Ms. Shoemaker and Ms. Potter, both of whom identify transformational experiences in which they felt like outsiders as children as affecting their current work with students. Ms. Shoemaker says she is "certainly sensitive to the students who are loners." Ms. Potter remains "conscious" of her personal experience in her relations with students. She further states, "I also am aware of adults that aren't accepting. And there's still, I guess, that kid inside me that knows that hurt of: 'Why were they mean to me? Why don't they like me?'" Both of these teachers report using their personal experience to be attentive to and support students who might feel the same way.

Ms. Farmer identifies with students who might not connect with other teachers. She explains,

. . . these crazy kids, I love as the kids that they are. As students getting work done and stuff, they drive me crazy. . . but I love [that student] as a person. . . Those are the kids that [are] high energy, the ones that most other teachers are like, 'I don't want that kid.'

Her acceptance of the students who most other teachers "don't want" allows her to build relationships of mutual respect with them. She explains that they accede to her occasional and strategic requests for calmer behavior because of the fact that she generally accepts and enjoys their high energy.

An empathic disposition also involves getting to know students' personal stories to better understand where they are coming from and any trauma they might be dealing with in their personal lives. All participants demonstrated deep knowledge of their students' stories through their ability to discuss individual students' circumstances in depth. They also articulated their perceptions of the importance of students being able to

share their stories, both for the students and for themselves as teachers and caregivers.

Ms. Potter incorporates a narrative writing project into her curriculum, for which students are able to write and think about an aspect of their own lives. She explains, “I think that’s important for them to get their story out. . . . [The narrative] is anything that means something to them. But that gives you a lot of insight into them, I feel.” Ms. Potter perceives this assignment as meaningful for both student and teacher. The student gets an opportunity to process an important personal experience, and the teacher learns more about the student and the experiences they’ve had that are meaningful and consequential.

Ms. Farmer explains how learning students’ stories can be beneficial to the team of teachers working with them:

With our ELs, especially our ELs, when one member of our team becomes aware of a situation. . . we do make sure that within our team we know. . . . Miss Rogers, Miss Baker, and I, are typically the three who know exactly who's going through stuff and what it is. And it's, the student wants the three of us to know because they know we're trying to help them, we're there for them.

Learning about the situations students are dealing with allows the ESOL teachers to coordinate an appropriate supportive response based on an understanding of and sensitivity to students’ perspectives. This approach builds trust between teachers and students.

Getting to know students and learning about their lives and experiences is certainly not the exclusive domain of ESOL teachers. What ESOL teachers bring to their empathic disposition is a unique lens about difference and the particular struggles and challenges faced by students who are adjusting to a new culture and language. This perspective results in a high degree of compassion for these students and their circumstances. Ms. Weaver recognizes some of the personal difficulties many of her

CLiM students face, saying, “there's still lots of things about moving here or transitioning here. They have family members who are far away. . . and they live with having relations that have been torn.” Ms. Tanner expresses an understanding of a major difference between her own experience and that of her students: “I chose to go to Taiwan and I chose to have that experience, whereas my students have not chosen to come to this country.” There is a tacit acknowledgement in this statement that students’ lack of agency likely makes their transition more difficult, which Ms. Tanner considers in her relations with them. Ms. Miller expresses frustration with what she sees as many content teachers’ “lack of understanding” of the worlds of CLiM students. She explains:

I feel like people are like, ‘Well, they're in this school now; they should speak English.’ And I think they don't understand, first of all, what it's like to not understand the language at all. Second of all to have a totally different schooling system where they don't do any of the same things. . . in a day. . . . I just feel like there's just not that understanding at all. There's no patience from some of the teachers I've seen. They're like, ‘well, they’re just not listening’ or ‘they're just not doing what I tell them.’ I do feel like the teachers obviously want to build a relationship with the students, but there's definitely, like, that disconnect. And I think [the disconnect] is just that understanding or putting themselves in [the student’s] position.

Where content teachers have a disconnect, these ESOL teachers seem to find a connection. Their empathic outlook purposefully considers the challenges of being a cultural other in a new environment. This disposition allows them to understand and sympathize with students around difficulties and challenges specific to cross-cultural adjustment and transition.

Refusal to view students as deficient. Deficit thinking, the belief that failure in school is the result of a student’s own internal deficiencies or lack of “what it takes” to succeed, has long been recognized as operating with schooling systems (Valencia, 2010). Such thinking is frequently applied to immigrant students in U.S. public schools

(Arzubiaga et al., 2009), which can have no other effect but to hamper their learning and create barriers to their social advancement. The ESOL teachers in this study, however, demonstrate a disposition toward their students that actively combats deficit thinking. The link between this disposition and transformational experience is potentially a bit opaque and difficult to see. The openness to difference gained from cross-cultural experience can enhance one's level of tolerance for ambiguity (Ogden, 2006; Liang et al., 2015), which, in turn, allows teachers to work against deficit perspectives. When a student does not perform as expected, these teachers do not simply accept that performance as reflective of a student's inherent capabilities. They report instead that they question the circumstances surrounding a subpar performance and seek out barriers to success that may have been overlooked, including within their own pedagogy. This tendency to question allows them to maintain high expectations. Different teachers draw upon this disposition in different ways, but they all strive to avoid thinking of their students as deficient.

Some teachers actively think in terms of students' strengths and assets. Mr. Cabrera states, "[students] come to the classroom with many things that we teachers sometimes ignore, but they bring to the classroom meaningful things that we can use." He sees the value in what students bring to their education, stating in another instance that teachers "need to bring all the things that they [the students] have [into] school." Both Ms. Miller and Ms. Weaver see a need to counter the deficit perspectives their students regularly face elsewhere in the school. A fuller version of Ms. Miller's quote above about the deficiency mindsets other teachers can hold reveals how she tries to work against them. She states:

We always hear about teachers or classroom teachers, or whoever, talking about our English learners and all the things that they *can't* do. 'They can't sit still. They can't do their work. They can't focus.' Um, so I kind of look at the other side of that and always am like, 'Okay, well what are their strengths? What are they good at?'

She feels it is important to main an asset-based viewpoint in her own practice so that students encounter a teacher who sees and starts with their strengths. Ms. Weaver tries to convince content teachers to do the same:

Do [CLiM students] understand what they see? Yes. They just don't have the words to explain it. It doesn't mean they don't understand it, what happened. So. . . what you have to help your teachers figure out, you know, what can this kid show you that he understands and how?

These teachers communicate that they are operating from a place that considers and centers their students' abilities, while still acknowledging that they have room from improvement, growth, and learning.

Some teachers discuss the importance of setting high expectations for students and holding students to those expectations. Ms. Farmer states, "I do try to set the bar high because I want them to grow. I want them to succeed." In recounting a conversation with a student whose effort and attendance had been waning, Ms. Tanner states that she told the student something akin to the following, "I expect you to come [to class]. I expect you to do your work. I expect you to do your homework. I expect you to be excellent." In setting and communicating such expectations, these teachers are demonstrating to students that they have confidence their abilities and that success is attainable. Ms. Tanner and Ms. Shoemaker actually tie their disposition to their own transformational experiences. In thinking of the difficulties of learning a foreign language in Taiwan, Ms. Tanner says, "I also know, like, I did it. I learned Chinese, you know. I learned how to do it and they will too. And they can." When Ms. Shoemaker tells her students the story of

being an outsider in middle school, she states her purpose this way: “I guess I want the students to really take from my personal experience that I believe in them and that I know that they can do better than they even believe in themselves.”

While focusing on student assets and holding high expectations for them sets the stage for meaningful learning, equally as important is how teachers respond when expectations are not met. Ms. Shoemaker clearly states the attitude that all study participants possess, “. . .when students are not doing well, I feel like there’s a reason behind it.” These teachers look for reasons to explain students’ struggles. When she encounters a student who has “shut down” by laying down on the desk, Ms. Tanner’s reaction is to question. She asks, “What caused the shutdown? You know? Is it something that happened in class? Did some kids say something? Is it something that's happening at home?” She talks with the student to get at the reason behind the behavior in order to offer useful help or advice.

The knowledge of student’s stories and personal lives, discussed above, can help in this process of searching for reasons behind behavior, and, in the case of Ms. Miller, can reveal how her disposition to avoid deficit explanations contrasts with that of her colleague and co-teacher. When discussing her frustration with teachers who lack empathy and understanding for her EL students, Ms. Miller brought up the example of a particular fifth grade boy from El Salvador whose performance the content teacher was writing off as bad behavior and a refusal to listen. She was able to list a number of outside factors that were likely contributing to this situation that the content teacher dismissed, despite a number of attempts to get the teacher to acknowledge these factors. The student’s family was divided with a parent remaining in El Salvador; he had

interrupted schooling, having not attended elementary school for three years; his beginning English level was a barrier to communication with both the content teacher and his peers. Ms. Miller was able to ascertain various reasons why this particular student struggled academically and behaved in unexpected ways. The content teacher, she states, refused to see them.

The search for reasons behind student struggles sometimes requires teachers to look inward. At times, these teachers made the determination that a change in their own approach was necessary. This type of pedagogical reevaluation occurs in both subtle and major ways. Ms. Weaver states, “sometimes there are kids who seem like they know a lot of English, and then you take a paragraph and there's two or three very common words that they don't know, and so they lose the meaning.” In such an instance, she explains that she takes a step back to teach the necessary vocabulary, which then allows students to be successful. While seemingly a minor adjustment, such an approach requires that the teacher both assume the student is capable and reflect on her pedagogy to determine how to move forward differently. Ms. Potter offers an example that is much more profound, linking her decision to pursue the training to become an ESOL teacher to a situation in which she realized her pedagogical knowledge was insufficient.

I was teaching reading, and it just seemed that every time someone came to school with a foreign-sounding name, or they spoke another language, [the administration] automatically put them in reading assuming that it was a reading issue. They thought if you use special ed reading methods they would pick it up and be ready to go into classes. That just wasn't the case because many of them were great readers, just not in English. But in their home language they were very good readers and writers. I didn't have the knowledge to explain that and to tease it out to share with people. I said, ‘I've got to figure this out.’

As the demographics of the district in which she was teaching changed, Ms. Potter was witness to a problematic, and likely unarticulated, policy to place students from other

cultures and countries in special education classes not designed to meet their needs. Indeed, the disproportionate representation of CLiM students in special education is a widely recognized problem in the field (Counts et al., 2018). When she recognized this dynamic in her own classroom, Ms. Potter found and enrolled in an ESOL certification program to become an ESOL teacher. Her refusal to view her CLiM students as deficient in language and reading skills caused her to pursue the training necessary to teach them in the way they needed. This disposition against deficit thinking, along with an openness to accept difference and an empathic outlook, is central to how the participants of this study relate to and teach their students.

Cross-cultural dispositions without transformation: The case of Anne Baker.

While transformative experiences of difference can certainly encourage dispositions that are particularly useful for building cross-cultural relationships, Anne Baker shows that it is possible to hold these dispositions without such experiences. In our conversations, Ms. Baker did not identify a particular transformational experience that impacted her worldview. She has traveled abroad on a number of occasions to Mexico and Europe on vacation, and she moved from Connecticut to Virginia in the sixth grade. She remembers these experiences well and at times draws on them in relating to her students, but nothing she recounts about these experiences indicates the kind of perspective shift that is a defining feature of insight gained from transformative learning (Dirkx et al., 2006; Levitt et al., 2004). Yet despite not appearing to have undergone the type of transformational experience that helped the other participants to develop dispositions that facilitate cross-cultural connection, Ms. Baker holds these dispositions nonetheless.

In terms of accepting difference, she starts her classes with an activity called “which one doesn’t belong” in which students are presented with four images. They must make a determination about which of the four doesn’t belong and justify their answer. The images are purposefully chosen so that any one of the four can be reasoned not to belong depending on the criteria used. After they write down their thoughts, she facilitates a brief discussion during which students can share their reasoning. She explains her purpose for this activity by stating, “it really teaches the kids that you may see something different from someone else, but it doesn’t mean you’re wrong.” A major aspect of her pedagogical philosophy, thus, appears to be to encourage the acceptance of differing opinions and viewpoints.

Similar to the other teachers in the study, Ms. Baker views her students with empathy, striving to understand them from their own point of view. She draws on her experience moving to Virginia in the sixth grade to do so. When she remembers her experience starting in a new school without knowing a single person, she believes, “it gives me some perspective when it comes to the kids, a little piece of what they’ve got. Definitely nowhere near the magnitude of what they’ve faced, but even that little bit of perspective helps.” Importantly, she recognizes the limits of her own experience and that her students might be living through much more disruptive experiences. Therefore, she is adamant that learning students’ stories is also important for the perspective they provide on students’ experiences and struggles.

Finally, Ms. Baker does not view her students as deficient. She actually views student failure as more of a commentary on her own pedagogical performance than a reflection on the student. When her students ask her if she gets any satisfaction out of

giving a student a failing grade, she explains, “I don’t want to give an F. . . because it means I’m not doing my job.” She has also on occasion offered a failing student the opportunity to switch to another class with a different teacher when her teaching style seemed to be part of the problem. Despite feelings of guilt and inadequacy about not being able to reach particular students, she puts aside her own ego to find a situation that will increase a student’s chance for success. In her own words, it’s about “the student being successful. It’s not my feelings that matter.”

Ms. Baker shows us that what is important for teachers of culturally diverse students is the disposition itself, not how the disposition is acquired. An orientation toward accepting difference, an empathic outlook, and a refusal to view students as deficient are dispositions that open possibilities for cross-cultural connection. They allow for a consciousness around difference that creates the potential for bridging that difference and striving to understand others’ experiences and perspectives. While transformational experiences often help individuals develop and deepen such dispositions, they are not absolutely necessary.

Caring Teacher Actions

Caring teacher actions are the specific ways in which teachers choose to interact with and teach their students that open the door for the formation of cross-cultural relationships with them. Participants’ actions tend to reveal a level of understanding and empathy held for their students and a level of respect for students’ cultural identities and the process of acculturation in which they find themselves. Interviews revealed a wide array of caring teacher actions that participants routinely perform. These ESOL teachers

incorporate many of these actions into their pedagogy, not just one or two. I provide below brief descriptions and examples of each caring action.

Being involved outside of the classroom. To varying degrees, all participants offer students support and engage with them as individuals beyond their assigned teaching duties. In doing so, they communicate to students an interest in their lives and a genuine desire for their success. Such involvement can take many forms. Many teachers offer help to students in other classes. Ms. Farmer states that she often has former students return to ask her for help in their new science classes, for instance, and Ms. Miller helps students with courses as diverse as economics and oceanography. Prior to the pandemic, Ms. Shoemaker organized an after-school language class to help new arrivals catch up to their peers, and Ms. Potter helped students to start an international club, becoming the club advisor herself. Ms. Baker and Mr. Cabrera have attended students' sporting events, and Ms. Potter invites her students to attend school games with her. Both Ms. Baker and Ms. Weaver have attended family functions at the invitation of students—a baptism, an anniversary party, a wedding, a quinceañera, and others. Ms. Weaver has helped students and their families find housing and has even accompanied a student to counseling by request. Quoted above in the section on identification with CLiM students, Ms. Weaver's belief about her responsibilities toward her students bears repeating here, "I'm not there *just* to help them learn language. I'm there to help them with any kind of barriers they come up against." This involvement with students beyond the classroom signals to them that they are important and worthy of extra attention, promoting the formation of cross-cultural relationships.

Minimizing power relations. The teacher-student relationship is imbalanced in terms of power. The teacher is in control of the learning activities in which the student will engage and holds disciplinary authority over the student. When exercised, a teacher's authority has the potential to put the teacher-student relationship on an antagonistic footing (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008). The ESOL teachers in this study generally work toward building relationships with their students by attempting to minimize the power differential between them. One way they do this is by physically adjusting themselves to be at students' height when they are at their desks by sitting, kneeling, or crouching.

When asked what this simple action does for learning, Ms. Miller states:

I think it forms that closer bond. . . I think it kind of paints a picture of you just being a part of their life and their learning. . . really just being on that same team and not like you're not against them. We're just doing this together.

Adjusting one's physical stature is understood to reduce authoritative distance and create a sense of collaboration.

Participants indicate that they disrupt traditional notions of teacher power and authority in other ways, as well. When a student doesn't understand something, Ms. Weaver makes a concerted effort to act happy rather than being judgmental. She feels this builds trust over time and encourages students to raise areas of confusion rather than feel embarrassment. Mr. Cabrera reminds his students that he is also a learner of English. He positions them as holders of knowledge when he asks them to explain a word or phrase that they have used and that he does not know. Ms. Baker never tells a student they are wrong. Instead, she decides to ask other students if they agree or disagree, an approach noticed by and pointed out to her by an evaluator. She also encourages students to catch any mistakes she might make by giving out candy when they correct her. She, thus,

allows students to hold her accountable. Approaches such as these serve to reduce the power imbalance found in the teacher-student relationship and encourage collaboration and student agency in learning.

Offering small gestures of affirmation. Participants routinely interact with their students in ways that are supportive, kind, and affirming of their cultural identity. Quite often these interactions are brief and seemingly insignificant. Yet the consistency with which these teachers offer such small gestures of goodwill to CLiM students causes them to build on one another, creating an atmosphere of support and care. The different gestures teachers make are innumerable. These include: smiling; learning words and phrases from students' primary language(s); asking students what name they prefer to be called; encouraging students with hugs, high fives, fist bumps, and pats on the shoulder or back; allowing students to communicate in their primary language(s); learning the correct pronunciation of students' names; expressing happiness or excitement when seeing students; crouching, kneeling, or sitting next to students when providing individual attention; giving new students a tour of the school; pointing out academic progress to individuals by comparing current to previous work; expressing pride in student achievements; offering pencils or other materials to students without reprimand; displaying the flags of students' countries of origin; checking-in with students about their general well-being; sending birthday cards to students; providing snacks; and many more possibilities.

The teachers understand these small gestures as helping to create an environment of trust and respect. Regarding her attempts to speak Spanish with students and their families, Ms. Weaver says, "I know that I butcher the language. . . . And I know that they

know I'm butchering it. . . . and yet I can see in their eyes, they don't care. They appreciate that you reach out to that." These small ways of building connections with students truly mean something, and they can contribute to students' academic effort and performance. Ms. Farmer states that small gestures of affirmation help to create a comfortable atmosphere that makes students "more willing to listen and interact for that teacher." Ms. Baker sees a direct connection between such gestures and student motivation, as well, stating, "a lot of times it transforms into them being a better student. 'Ms. Baker sent me a birthday card. Well, I need to do my homework for her. . . .' They want to do well for me. They want to please me." When small gestures of affirmation are consistently offered to CLiM students, they feel comfortable and supported, which encourages them to invest in their relationship with that teacher. Additionally, the wide array of caring gestures in which teachers engage makes the care much more likely to be felt by students who come from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Listening to students. Many participants discussed the importance of listening to students as integral to building relationships with them. When students feel listened to it builds trust and helps develop a feeling of closeness. It can be a powerful act that demonstrates the value one individual sees in another. Importantly, the content of what is being discussed need not be profound. When Mr. Cabrera, a newcomer to Virginia and Maple County, began taking the advice of students in his Spanish classes on things to do in the area, he says "that helped a lot to break the huge wall" he felt between them. He directly correlates listening to students' suggestions with a noticeable easing in his ability to relate to students. Similarly, when Ms. Potter listened to her students and brought in a particular type of orange they like, they acknowledged her effort. She explains the

importance of listening in this way by saying, “that builds a trust ‘cause you’ve heard them and you took action along with hearing. . . . It’s a genuine thing.” For both Mr. Cabrera and Ms. Potter, it is merely the act of genuine listening that moves cross-cultural relationships forward between teachers and students, even when the information listened to is quite mundane.

Teachers also describe as important those acts of listening that carry more depth and weight. Ms. Tanner states,

I do listen. . . . I try to give them opportunities to tell me what their goals and dreams are. . . and then reflect that back. I think they feel heard by me, which I think leads to a close, good feeling.

The discussion above regarding an empathic disposition is relevant here, too. When Ms. Weaver states that her students often “have family members who are far away. . . and they live with having relations that have been torn,” she goes on extoll the momentous import of listening. She explains, “they need some outlets. They need to talk. They need to tell you where they’re coming from. It really validates you when somebody listens to you.” By listening to students and demonstrating that they have taken what has been said to heart, teachers feel they can work to bridge cultural divides.

Bending the rules for perceived student benefit. All participants, to some extent, discussed ways in which they push against norms or bend and ignore rules when they feel such an action would be beneficial to their students. Such actions place student needs at the center of the teacher-student relationship, making those needs more important than any particular ethos, guideline or regulation. They also suggest that these teachers have a strong and clear sense that their ethical responsibility lies with the student and not the institution. Often, students are aware of the teacher’s choice to go against

expectations and of any potential risk on the part of the teacher, making any rule bending action a potential point of relational connection between students and teachers.

Some of what teachers do in this regard can be understood as bending cultural rules and expectations. Both Ms. Potter and Ms. Shoemaker are able to convince others to allow opportunities for students that might not normally be afforded to them. Ms. Potter persuaded her principal to allow a student who is not performing well to miss class in order to help with a technology information session for families. He specifically raised concerns that ““she doesn’t do all her work,”” suggesting a mindset that missing class should be a privilege for strong performance, but Ms. Potter is able to convince him that entrusting the student with this responsibility has the potential to increase her engagement. Ms. Shoemaker has convinced teachers to allow students to retake tests or to demonstrate what they have learned in other formats, things that content teachers are often reluctant to do. In cases such as these, ESOL teachers are able to afford opportunities to students outside of the norm in ways that can potentially help their learning and performance, and they are able to do so publicly by convincing others to make exceptions.

Many times, teachers either feel they are acting beyond rules and norms in ways that would be disapproved of by others, or they know they are breaking specific rules. It is in these situations that teachers may be more secretive, potentially making students aware of the risk taken by the teacher, or at least aware that the teacher is treating them substantially differently than others do. When Mr. Cabrera allowed an extremely upset student to use his personal cell phone to call her mother, he cautioned her not to tell anyone. In making this decision, he deliberately wants to keep his action secret as

colleagues or administrators might not approve, yet he still chooses to act in a way that will help the student. In another example, during the COVID-19 pandemic when social distancing was required, Ms. Tanner started giving a daily hug to a student who was struggling emotionally because her mother and other close family members were still living back in her home country. Both would have known they were breaking distancing protocols, but Ms. Tanner chose to do so for the student's emotional well-being. Ms.

Weaver describes making these types of choices in this way:

I try to be aware of the rules, but there's times when your common sense and your focus, you know what's needed to be done. You might know it's against the rules, so you have to make a decision of what you are going to do. And I try not to break the rules, but, uh, sometimes I just don't think about them.

When rules or cultural conventions turn into barriers to students' needs, teachers often decide to act in ways that prioritize the students.

Creating opportunities for students to explore their identities and immigrant journeys in coursework. One final caring action performed by teachers is the inclusion of opportunities for students to explore their identities and process their experiences of immigration, including cultural shifts encountered and personal traumas endured. This approach was taken by teachers with a fair amount of flexibility over the content of their instruction. The only two participants without evidence of this caring action were Ms. Baker and Ms. Farmer, who teach math and science for CLiM students, courses in which such identity work may be much more difficult to incorporate.

The issue of identity for adolescent CLiM students is observed by participants to be particularly fraught, given the cultural learning and adjusting they are in the midst of. Here is how Ms. Weaver explains her understanding of this issue:

I've had several kids who have such a problem with identity. They don't fit in here. They don't know who they can become, and so they try on all these different personas. . . . They're surrounded all day by these popular looking kids who are comfortable and confident and excelling in school. . . . Their culture isn't lost, but all day long, they're trying to fit in a different culture, and they are minority. They look different; they act different; they talk different. So that's really hard for any kids. I'd say harder for middle and high school. . . . There's a hard time that they just got to get through until they feel comfortable, and when you're a teenager, that's even worse.

She witnesses her students trying to work within a culture that is not completely familiar to them, while at the same time comparing themselves to the cultural natives who they regard as navigating the school with ease, both socially and academically. She sees that they are perceived as different, and that they recognize they are perceived in this way. These experiences present a unique challenge to CLiM secondary students as they grow, develop, and self-form.

Believing that their students need space and time to reflect on their identities given the pressures of acculturation, the teachers in this study try to provide that in their classroom. Identity work can be integrated directly into the curriculum. Ms. Tanner creates units like *Who Am I?* and *Finding My Voice*, her purpose being to allow students to think about these issues while learning English and covering required language skills. Ms. Miller's fifth-grade students completed a journaling assignment that allowed them to express "who they are [and] what's important to them." For Mr. Cabrera, allowing students to explore their identities is more ubiquitous and underlies his pedagogical approach as a whole. He states,

Within my teaching philosophy, the center of the class is the student. . . . I think that when you let the student create an identity in your class, I think that the student feels more confident. . . . The main purpose is that the student feel themselves, that they feel comfortable, that they laugh, they express their personalities, that they express their human dimension within my class.

He understands his purpose as a teacher to be helping students develop and understand who they are, so the theme of identity is an ever-present undercurrent in his teaching. Teachers believe that providing the space for students to explore and reflect on their identities is beneficial for them at a transition time in their lives that can be quite challenging, and literature on effective teaching practices for CLiM students supports this belief (Jaffe-Walter & Miranda, 2020; Martin & Suárez-Orozco, 2018; Mendenhall & Bartlett, 2018).

Similarly, teachers also provide space for immigrant CLiM students to process leaving behind their prior home and entering into a new culture. Ms. Shoemaker recounted an experience in which an academic discussion of a story about friendship with two students became a mediated reflection session on the loss friendships from the students' home countries and the differing nature of friendship in the US. Ms. Potter designs a major narrative writing assignment that allows students "to get their story out." Students decide what they will write about and many choose to create narratives relating to their prior home or their immigration journey. Some find this work so meaningful that they do much more than required and create two full narratives, one to share with the class and another just for Ms. Potter's eyes. Allowing students to explore these experiences and reflect on their identities in the classroom validates their challenges, joys, and lives, and it elevates them to a level of importance that likely does not happen anywhere else in the school. This regard for students and their experiences encourages strong relationships to develop.

Care That Is Mindful of Difference

The four factors outlined above—time, parallel status positioning, cross-cultural

teacher dispositions, and caring actions—are interconnected and woven into one another in the day-to-day of ESOL teachers’ experiences with their CLiM students. All four work in tandem as teachers develop what they perceive to be strong, supportive cross-cultural relationships with their students. Time is a neutral factor, setting the stage for relationship building by providing greater opportunity for teachers and students to forge relationships of any quality with one another, be they strong or weak, supportive or adversarial. The other three factors move relationship formation toward care. Parallel status positioning orients teachers and students favorably toward one another, providing common ground in the time they spend together. Teachers’ cross-cultural dispositions encourage goodwill as ESOL teachers’ tendencies to accept difference, empathize, and reject deficit reasoning can be markedly different from what students might experience elsewhere in their school and community. Finally, teachers’ caring actions move relations with students into the reciprocal nature of a caring relationship, building trust and deepening bonds. Teachers position themselves as ones-caring and students as the cared-for, whose responses to teachers’ caring actions guide future attempts to relate. Together these four factors result in the enactment of a manifestation of care that is mindful of difference.

One might reasonably ask how the care exhibited by these ESOL teachers for their CLiM students differs from the traditional vision of care ethics outlined in chapter two. According to Noddings (2011, 2012, 2013) and Tronto (1993, 1998), the one-caring attends to the needs of another, feels empathy for that other, takes on the responsibility of meeting the other’s needs, reflects on how best to meet the other’s needs, and does so in the most competent manner. The cared-for then acknowledges having received care in some way. These aspects of care are evident in the four factors of cross-cultural

relationship formation between teachers and students described in this chapter. The teachers in this study recount that they listen to their students, learn their stories, and pay attention to how they are and are not coping, extrapolating student needs in the process. They perceive themselves to hold empathic dispositions and take responsibility for meeting students' needs and easing their burdens, which they do through caring actions. Their examples of students' responses—notes of thanks, seeking out help, sharing their personal stories, etc.—reveal their perceptions that care has been acknowledged and appreciated. What exactly, then, is different in caring for a culturally different other than in the traditional construction of care discussed here?

The traditional conception of care ethics has been critiqued for the possibility that, when enacted, care can become warped and ultimately harmful when issues like cultural, racial, and ethnic difference are not scrutinized (Fraser-Burgess, 2020; Quek, 2022). If, as Fraser-Burgess asserts, “ways of caring are heterogenous and can be culturally-situated” (p. 459), then an ignorance of or blindness to cultural difference in attempts to care for others may lead to interactions that dominate or oppress rather than support and uplift. What one believes to be a caring act may, in fact, cause harm. Caring cross-culturally, therefore, requires that in addition to the traditional components of care ethics, the one-caring possess an awareness of difference, a capacity to notice difference, and an inclination to pay attention to and accommodate it rather than to judge or condemn it.

The ESOL teacher-participants in this study suggest that such care is, indeed, possible. They are highly sensitive to difference, as they work daily with students from cultures different than their own and often with multiple cultural backgrounds in the same room. That they are aware of difference and determined to work across it is supported by

the evidence and arguments outlined in this chapter. They hold cross-cultural dispositions that influence how they relate to students. They attest that transformative experiences from the past impact their classroom practice today, allowing them to truly empathize with their students. They identify and express solidarity with their students. They learn students' stories, gaining insight into different ways of living and being more generally as well as into the identities of specific students and what they may need. They create spaces of comfort by attempting to reduce traditional teacher-student power disparities. They look for hidden reasons and reflect on potential shortcomings of their own practice if a student is not performing well. In these ways and more, these eight teachers are mindful of differences between themselves and the larger school environment on one side and their CLiM students on the other, and they attempt to create connections across these differences that will support students and encourage their scholastic success.

In detailed ethnographies of school life for CLiM students, Valenzuela (1999) and Jaffe-Walter (2016) reveal that these students quite often feel misunderstood or ignored by teachers who use their own cultural lens to determine student needs, which in turn breeds tension and animosity. When teachers either don't notice or choose to overlook reactions that reveal displeasure at or disagreement with their needs assessment, care breaks down or becomes warped. This situation is the result of the breakdown of one of the key elements of an ethic of care—attunement to students' responses to actions the teacher intends to be caring (Noddings, 2011, 2012, 2013; Tronto, 1993, 1998).

How do the teachers in this study avoid the pitfalls illuminated by Valenzuela and Jaffe-Walter when they enact care? They bring to the table a mindfulness about difference that guides how they interact with students. This awareness that difference is

likely to surface in the caring relation provokes a drive to attune themselves to their students, to determine how students see their own needs. To reiterate and expand on Ms. Tanner's sentiment, quoted above in the section on cross-cultural teaching dispositions, teachers understand that they and their students are both "acting under" their own "set of cultural. . . influences," so they "try to really be sensitive to what. . . is being signaled." Even if the nature of the cultural difference at play remains hidden or is misinterpreted as individual rather than cultural, ESOL teachers are still mindful that they must be on the lookout for it.

In Mr. Cabrera's estimation, "If we care about people, I think things flow." In their endeavor to attune to their students, these teachers strive to find the flow in which students' responses to care indicate they have accepted it. When teachers have the flow, they can be reasonably confident that they are providing students with what they need. When they don't have it, they reflect, questioning and probing their practice and trying to learn more about students' circumstances to keep searching for students' true needs. This idea of *finding the flow* is quite subjective, to be sure. Yet, it compels these teachers to continue the cycle of care by reading student responses and using that information better respond. These teachers understand that they must deeply engage with the fourth pillar of care ethics—the response of the cared-for. Rather than be put off by a negative response, they realize that they must reflect on it and determine in what way they may have misinterpreted a student's need or misguidedly provided help. There is a tendency on the part of teachers to ascribe failed care to their own misinterpretation of the situation rather than to a character flaw of the student. Their mindfulness toward difference drives them to fully engage with the response of the cared-for and make adjustments to their

processes of attunement when that response indicates some level of rejection of the caring act. And they understand they must go through this process repeatedly, if necessary.

This chapter has explained a particular understanding of how ESOL teachers are able to form what they believe to be strong cross-cultural relationships with their CLiM students. I outlined and explained four key factors that work in tandem in the formation of these relationships: time, parallel low-status positioning, cross-cultural teaching dispositions often bolstered by transformational experiences, and caring teacher actions. Finally, I described how these factors together lead to an enactment of care mindful of difference, in which an awareness of difference and a willingness to work across it help teachers continually adjust their approach to the ways in which students respond to acts of care. Their persistence in this regard avoids the oppressive and harmful results of intended, yet misapplied, care that can happen across cultures when the response of the cared-for is not fully understood and becomes neglected. In chapter six I will examine the various ways in which the cross-cultural relationships formed between teachers and students function beyond the realm of academics.

Chapter 6: Nonacademic Functions of Cross-Cultural Teacher-Student

Relationships

I'm not there *just* to help them learn language.
– Vicky Weaver

We often think of the teacher-student relationship through the lens of learning and academics: how does this relationship help students achieve success in school? While academic achievement is certainly an important dimension to consider when thinking about educational relationships, it is only one dimension. Ms. Weaver hints that there are many others, and a broader view is necessary in order to appreciate the full complexity of these relationships and the multitude of ways in which they function. This is particularly true for cross-cultural educational relationships, as cultural difference and exchange require these relationships to function in unique ways. This chapter offers an analysis of the various ways in which, beyond supporting academic achievement, ESOL teachers perceive their relationships with CLiM students to function, along with a critique of these perceptions.

While acknowledging that the relationships they form with students are beneficial for learning, the teacher-participants in this study indicate these relationships serve a multitude of other functions, as well. In large part, these perceived functions are in line with aspects of relationship formation outlined in chapter five, such as solidarity, an empathic outlook, and a caring motivation, that seek to connect with and understand

those from different cultural backgrounds. Teachers understand these functions to be beneficial to students' academic and emotional well-being, which develops their own personal sense of worth and purpose as teachers of a minoritized population. Yet there is also evidence that these relationships can reinforce prejudicial attitudes present within the culture at large. They operate within a climate that strongly favors assimilation for CLiM students, and ESOL teachers can be influenced by this climate and other dominant ideologies outside of their overt perception. While they contest assimilationism in favor of integration in some ways, it can be argued that they are actually spinning the gears of the assimilation engine in many others without realizing it.

Assimilation Versus Integration: Two Views of Acculturation in Schools

A wide variety of terms is used in the literature to describe differing forms of acculturation, which is the process of adapting to a different culture. Often the word *assimilation* is modified by different adjectives—segmented, cultural, coercive, forced, structural, subtractive—which can make an explanation or analysis of the topic quite confusing, particularly when a granular, detailed framing is not required. According to Lee (2019), both an embrace and a rejection of immigrants are simultaneously part of the fabric of the US. For the purposes of my analysis, this broad view will suffice, and I will use Berry's (2012) terminology of *assimilation* and *integration* to distinguish between these two opposing views of acculturation that are found in U.S. society at large (Berry, 2012; Portes & Rumbaut, 2014; Rong & Preissle, 1998). Those who favor assimilation believe that immigrants should fully abandon their own cultural heritage and completely adopt dominant U.S. norms and values. On the other hand, those who favor integration think that these students should take up some aspects of U.S. cultural norms while still

maintaining significant aspects of their own cultural heritage. As Olsen (2008) states, “It is a struggle between those who view the answer to diversity as conformity to a single cultural model and to a single language, and those who view the survival of a multicultural community as relying on embracing the differences and rectifying inequities between groups” (p. 152).

Assimilation. Schools have long been understood to be sites of assimilation in the US and have been used in that in this country. The proliferation of public schools in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was due at least in part to the desire to maintain the dominance of Anglo-Protestant values in the face of large-scale immigration from places like Ireland and eastern Europe (Spring, 2008). In this time period, public schooling was also used to attempt to eradicate Native American (Adams, 1995) and Puerto Rican cultures (Spring, 2004, 2008) and to assimilate Mexican children in the southwest (Gonzalez, 2014). Prominent and influential educational scholars of the time, like Ellwood Cubberley, Dean of the Stanford School of Education, promulgated colonial notions of racial and cultural superiority, characterizing immigrants as intellectually and culturally inferior and advocating schools as having a mission to assimilate them for their own good (Cubberley, 1919). Embedded in this history is the foundational view that assimilation is a positive process, the belief that it is an objective good for those who undergo it. The demand that immigrants and other CLiM people conform to dominant, White, middle-class cultural norms rests on a mythic narrative that assimilation is a straightforward process inevitably resulting in progress via social and economic advancement (Alba & Nee, 2003; Suárez-Orozco, 2000). The power and longevity of this notion still lead many teachers to feel as if supporting and encouraging assimilation is

part of their professional role (Jaffe-Walter, 2016, 2017). Indeed, participants in this study universally spoke of colleagues who held assimilationist viewpoints.

While assimilation is imagined as a wholesale public good that is a positive experience for immigrants, it does not often function in this way. As a process, it works via the strands of individual choice, social and cultural pressure, and institutional rules and expectations (Alba & Nee, 2003; Berry, 2012; Sam et al., 2006). The social, cultural, and institutional components can be coercive in nature (Jaffe-Walter, 2016; Olsen, 2008), pressuring and compelling people to change rather than enticing or convincing them. And when all is said and done, assimilation can demand more of immigrants than it provides. For example, while insisting they adopt dominant cultural norms, it simultaneously requires them to accept their place in American racial hierarchies (Beaman, 2016; Olsen, 2008; Shirazi, 2018). In essence, they are still marked as “other” and are not afforded the full benefits of social and cultural belonging (Beaman, 2016; Lee, 2019; Olsen, 2008; Reed-Danahay, 2008; Rong & Preissle, 1998; Shirazi, 2018; Tun, 2023). Further, assimilation both reduces belief in the power of education to influence social mobility (Portes, & Rumbaut, 2014; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008) and is associated with poorer school outcomes (Sam et al., 2006).

Integration. Some believe that schools should not be in the business of assimilation. They believe that integration should be the goal, a mode of acculturation in which change is much less one-sided. When immigrants integrate into a new society, they adapt and adjust by keeping some heritage cultural traits, modifying others, and adopting some cultural traits from the host society (Portes & Rumbaut, 2014; Zhou, 1997). This mode of acculturation requires change on both sides, as immigrant and CLiM populations

must accept the basic values of the new society and members of the dominant social group must be willing to modify institutional norms to accommodate the needs of newcomers (Berry, 2012). Some teachers of CLiM students see their professional role in these terms: respecting students' heritage culture and encouraging its maintenance while also preparing students to function in U.S. schools and society. This approach to their work is often carried out discreetly in classrooms and via personal interactions with students in schools where assimilationist discourse is strong (Jaffe-Walter, 2016).

In recent years, schools and programs for immigrant youth have been designed with an underlying integrative philosophy. They approach the education of CLiM students in ways that are culturally additive, allowing students to hold on to their heritage culture while simultaneously being exposed to new ways of thinking and being typical of the US (Fine et al., 2014). These schools and programs make a number of pedagogical choices that seek to allow students to effectively integrate. They incorporate students' personal experiences with immigration, racialization, and cultural adjustment into the curriculum, allowing reflection on and exploration of these topics; they allow use of primary language(s) for learning; they support parents in their cultural transition and adjustment; they create a sense of community and belonging among students; and they provide extracurricular opportunities for students to practice heritage cultural traditions (Jaffe-Walter & Miranda, 2020; Martin & Suárez-Orozco, 2018; Mendenhall & Bartlett, 2018). This orientation toward integration leads to better school performance for CLiM students (Gibson & Koyama, 2011; Jaffe-Walter & Miranda, 2020; Sam et al., 2006), and it is the approach to acculturation preferred by adolescents (Phinney et al., 2006). In discussing their relationships with students, the teacher-participants in this study revealed

a professed orientation toward integration that was often contrary to an orientation toward assimilation that they perceived to be held by many of their colleagues. Much of the support they felt they were offering students was thus undertaken in ways that could fly under the radar without raising the ire of colleagues or administrators who might object that their actions would slow the adoption of U.S. norms.

Supporting CLiM Students' Integration

As outlined above, integration is a model of acculturation in which those entering into a new culture and society retain some traits from their culture of origin and adopt some from the culture in which they have come to live. The ESOL teachers in this study understand their work with students to be in support of both of these processes. At times they are nurturing the maintenance of students' culture of origin. At others they are preparing students to function within and effectively navigate U.S. schools and systems.

Nurturing maintenance of heritage culture and respect for students' origins.

The most obvious and most common way in which ESOL teachers encourage students to maintain their cultural selves is through their use of and attitudes toward students' primary language(s). Language has long been recognized as deeply tied to culture (Gumperz, 1982; Schiffrin, 1996), so teachers demonstrate respect for their students' and families' origins via their respect for primary language(s). A number of teachers recounted asking students to teach them words or phrases in their primary language(s). Even Mr. Cabrera, a native Spanish-speaker, asks his students from other Spanish-speaking countries to teach him their local vocabulary and slang, using it with them at times. Ms. Tanner recounted welcoming a new student from Thailand with a traditional greeting, saying "swasḍīkha" while placing her hands together in front of her chest with

fingers pointing up and bowing slightly. Ms. Farmer translates important vocabulary into Spanish and Korean, the two languages she knows, and encourages other students to write notes in their primary language(s). Ms. Miller, Ms. Tanner, and Ms. Weaver, all of whom have some conversational ability in Spanish, report communicating with both students and families in Spanish as best they can. Ms. Shoemaker has used translation apps and websites to send letters home to families in their primary language(s). Ms. Miller tells her students that “being bilingual is like their superpower” as a way to encourage them to maintain their primary language(s). Through these many ways that teachers acknowledge and use the primary language(s) of their students, they believe they are conveying respect for CLiM students’ origins and subtly encouraging them to keep up their language skills.

While encouraging the use of students’ primary language(s) appeared frequently through the interviews, other manners of supporting cultural maintenance appeared as well. Some teachers engaged with students and families via cultural traditions like food and events. When a student arrived late to virtual office hours because she was making pupusas for her younger brother, Ms. Miller’s reaction was to ask the student to teach her how to make them. In a year when many of her students were from El Salvador, Ms. Baker found a recipe for Salvadoran pineapple cookies, baked them, and brought them to school for a party. She recounts, “the kids were so excited that it was something that reminded them of home.” Ms. Tanner loves to see pictures of events of cultural significance, encouraging students to bring them to show her, and both Ms. Baker and Ms. Weaver have been guests of their students at such events, like a quinceañera, a

baptism, and a wedding. These gestures on the part teachers signify an acceptance of students' cultural heritage and encouragement to continue these traditions.

Teachers also incorporate cultural maintenance into school projects and classroom spaces. Mr. Cabrera, Ms. Potter, and Ms. Tanner all describe projects for which students must research and explain one or more aspects of their heritage culture. "I think it's important to always keep the home country piece alive for them," says Ms. Potter. In terms of classroom decor, Ms. Weaver and Ms. Potter each keep a map on their classroom wall with students' home countries marked, and Ms. Potter also hangs students' home country flags. Others simply note that their classroom space is one in which they want students to feel comfortable in their cultural identities and expressing themselves. Ms. Miller thinks having her own space to work with students she pulls out of other classes is important because students get a break from being scrutinized, stating: "it was their space. . . and no one could judge them and they can speak freely." Ms. Baker recounts that Latinx students will, at times, dance in her classroom as a bit of a break. She specifically notes that the boys are comfortable dancing with each other, something common and acceptable where they are from but that would mark them as homosexual if they did so elsewhere in the school or at a school dance. Mr. Cabrera notices a distinct change in his CLiM students when he pulls them out of another to class to work with him:

we sat down in our classroom and they're, I don't know, they're becoming themselves again. . . . I spend almost 10 minutes. . . [on] a very informal conversation, but it's a way for them to express their culture and they feel a little bit more safe in their places, in my places. And then I start teaching.

In the hands of ESOL teachers, the classroom can thus become a place that encourages students to maintain and express aspects of their cultural identities.

While some of these examples undoubtedly seem to be minor events or celebrations of surface aspects of culture, they nevertheless carry real and profound meaning for students. When students are policed for using their primary language(s) in school spaces, as Ms. Tanner recounts when a teacher in the cafeteria wants her to punish a student for a perceived insult spoken in Spanish that she knows to be benign, how relieving it must be to enter a classroom in which the teacher welcomes one's primary language(s). The fact that students feel more comfortable in the spaces created by their ESOL teachers—to be themselves, to ask questions, to share personal and sometimes traumatic stories—and the fact that Ms. Weaver notes she is the only teacher to be invited by students to cultural events speak volumes about the impact of cultural recognition and respect, even on a small scale, particularly when assimilative pressures abound in the rest of the school environment. It suggests that students feel seen and that they understand the relationships they forge with their ESOL teachers to be, at least to a certain degree, culturally affirming. Teachers construct a sense of their self-worth out these dynamics important to their construction of their own professional identity.

Preparing students to navigate U.S. cultural systems and institutions. While encouraging their CLiM students to maintain aspects of their heritage culture, ESOL teachers also believe that students need to be guided to navigate the cultural landscape in which they find themselves. Often this outlook leads to direct discussions around particular issues. Sometimes it's small stuff. Ms. Potter needed to explain the concept of a doctor's note to her students so that they wouldn't be penalized for absences. Ms. Miller worked on classroom norms, like hand raising, with some students, so they would

face less displeasure from other teachers. ESOL teachers feel that such guidance helps students interact with others in the school environment.

Sometimes these teachers feel that helping students to navigate the school space involves initiating them into events or activities without prior explanation. Ms. Baker talks about events like *spirit week* and *pajama day* with her students before they occur, but she models how to participate in her school's student government association (SGA) candy-gram fundraisers by simply sending one to each of her students the first time it happens in the school year. She explains,

So, at Halloween time, they do Spook-o-Grams or something like that. And it's a little piece of candy with some really kitschy saying on it that matches whatever candy it is. And I will grab whatever SGA member I find, and I'm like, 'I need 40 of these.' And they're like, '40?' And I'm like, yes. . . . I send every one of my kids a Spook-o-Gram, and they're always so cute when they come and they're like, 'you sent me one.' Well, then they're not the kids sitting in that homeroom class that didn't get one. Everyone at least got one. . . . I send them to my kids, and it also shows them how something works. So, I'm showing them I care about them, but then I'm also showing them how something at our school works.

When it comes time for the next fundraiser, she notices that her students send candy-grams to each other.

Not all topics that teachers discuss and help their students to understand are so light-hearted. Both Ms. Farmer and Ms. Baker have felt the need to explain U.S. dating norms and the concept of statutory rape to students and their families, which Ms. Baker describes as quite uncomfortable and "almost disrespectful" in the judgment they convey regarding a different set of cultural norms. Yet because of the legal ramifications in the US, they believe these conversations must be had. There are, it seems, quite a broad range of topics that teachers discuss with students that are perceived as helping them traverse a new cultural landscape.

Teachers also feel they should encourage their students' participation in school sports, events, and clubs as a way for them to become part of the community. Mr. Cabrera goes to watch his students' sporting events and speaks with them about it the next day so that they know he was there. Ms. Weaver pushes her students to try out for sports teams because it can help them to make friends with local students and "to acclimate to the social settings of being amongst their peers who are of a different culture." Ms. Baker encourages her students to attend school dances and helps them get fancy clothes and tickets through an anonymous sponsorship at her school if that is what they need. Finally, Ms. Potter routinely sponsors an International Club at the schools at which she has worked because she wants her students to mix with American students, but on their terms for a change. She explains:

I've always started an International Club at any school I've ever been at. I try to start it out just for EL kids, but then I want it to be for any kid. I start it out with EL kids because I want them to have the ownership of it. I want them to have something that's theirs. Then, when non-EL kids want to join, they're having somebody come into their world because they've all had to go into other people's worlds.

These teachers presume that the extracurricular activities in which they encourage their students to be involved will help them adjust and adapt to a different cultural setting.

They encourage participation because they perceive participation to be helpful in students' adjustment to their new environs.

Finally, teachers encourage their CLiM students to participate in their classes in distinctly American ways. At times Ms. Weaver conducts push-in sessions with her students to see just what is expected of them by another teacher, which guides her work with them in future pull-out sessions. Ms. Shoemaker provides her students with what she refers to as "mascot money" in exchange for good work. It is a school-wide reward

system. When students accumulate enough mascot money, they can exchange it for fun opportunities like watching a movie or having a class party. In distributing mascot money to her students, she feels she is providing them with an opportunity to participate in the school reward system, which she sees as beneficial to their sense of belonging. Mr. Cabrera explains to his students the American focus on individual achievement which results in a very different schooling experience than his students might be used to. He tries to prepare them for this experience, saying:

‘So guys, we are in another society,’ and I teach them that the American society, it's an individual society in which people are more focused on their personal achievements, than the community or collective achievements. And so, and I tell them, ‘You see in a class everyone is focused on their paper, and from time to time, depends on the teacher, or the teacher's style so they work in groups.’ . . . But those kinds of things, I explain them explicitly. Explicitly.

In this way, he actively prepares his students to approach their classroom experiences and learning in ways that line up with the cultural expectations of the school. Thus, in his view, he is helping them to navigate those expectations outside of his classroom.

Both Ms. Farmer and Ms. Baker encourage students to question them as teachers, a behavior they believe is generally expected of students by teachers in their school. Ms. Farmer will “sometimes intentionally make mistakes” as she teaches and then act confused as a way to get students to correct her or to ask a question. Ms. Baker has a standing prize of a piece of candy whenever one of her students identifies a mistake she has made while teaching. She also encourages general participation by asking students if they agree or disagree with a solution to a math problem rather than telling them if it is right or wrong. In these ways, they push students to perform what might feel to them like a very uncomfortable act of questioning a teacher to acclimate them to a behavior that is expected in the broader school context. They believe that they are preparing students for

successful learning experiences with other teachers. At the same time, Ms. Baker tries to reduce other teachers' expectations for this type of questioning by her students by explaining that many of them come from cultures where teachers simply are not questioned. Thus, she simultaneously encourages her students to adopt a new culturally expected behavior and asks teachers to dial back a culturally rooted expectation.

In addition to respecting students' cultural origins and encouraging them to maintain core aspects of their cultural identities, an integrationist viewpoint also requires that teachers encourage students to adapt and acculturate to their new surroundings in some ways. Teachers believe that they are encouraging adaptation through discussions, fostering participation in school life, and classroom interactions that move students toward adopting some of the norms of American schooling. In doing so they display their concern that students be prepared to navigate the space in which they now live and find success in a new school system and culture, and they develop their own sense of self-worth in accomplishing what they believe to be laudable aims.

Protecting CLiM Students from Unfair Treatment

While encouraging students to integrate into school life and the culture in which they find themselves, teachers still recognize that students are not always welcomed. Elsewhere in the school, students encounter assimilationist attitudes and expectations that they completely abandon their heritage culture. Racist and prejudiced attitudes toward immigrants abound. Students may also be harmed by experiences with those who may not hold animus toward them yet simply don't understand the extra struggles and burdens they deal with as adolescents undergoing an acculturation experience. ESOL teachers use the relationships formed with their CLiM students as a protective shield in this aspect of

their experience. Teachers may offer a space of understanding for students. They may step in to prevent or lessen a potentially prejudicial encounter. They may also advocate for their students to improve their baseline experience in the school. A major function of the cross-cultural teacher-student relationship is, therefore, protective. This function occurs in ways that face inwards, meaning they are internal to the relationship and involve only teacher and student, and in ways that are outwardly facing via interactions with others on behalf of students.

Inwardly facing protection. The most common way in which ESOL teachers feel they provide a protective atmosphere for their CLiM students is in consciously creating a space in which students feel safe and supported and free to be themselves. Each teacher does this in her or his own way. Mr. Cabrera tries to make students new to the school feel comfortable by speaking with them about his own difficulty transitioning into the school and the culture in which it operates. He believes sharing his experience is important for students' well-being, stating "it's all so important because they feel identified with; they don't think that, 'Oh this thing only happens to me.'" Ms. Potter has an open-door policy for her students and encourages each class to think of itself like a family that supports each other and is "decent to each other." Ms. Weaver emphasizes listening to students as important, at times prioritizing it over academic work, because she believes that students who feel listened to also feel validated. In teachers' estimation, supportive spaces serve as a respite from the difficulties and struggles students might be facing elsewhere and as a source of renewal, protecting them from being worn down by the challenges of acculturation. How such a space is created is idiosyncratic to each individual teacher.

Teachers also try to create protective bubbles for their students when they are in someone else's classroom. Ms. Farmer discusses what she calls "playing interference" when she is co-teaching with someone who is usually antagonistic toward her students. Essentially, she tries to always be the first reach her CLiM students. She will step in and quietly ask a student to comply with a rule before the co-teacher notices and exacts punishment. This is also true of checking student work or offering help. She states,

I've seen where the teacher's headed, and I will get there before them to avoid the student having another negative interaction with that other teacher. . . . I'm like, 'Hey, you need help with this?' to avoid the other teacher having to be the person that they are forced to seek help from.

She decides to create what she sees as a protective space for her students within a hostile classroom atmosphere by keeping an eye on the other teacher's movements and positioning herself to be the first to interact. When it became apparent to Ms. Miller that the classroom teacher was routinely frustrated by one of her students, she opted to strategically pull that student out of class at the beginning of every day for a brief check-in so that his start to the day was pleasant with her rather than confrontational with the classroom teacher. In this instance she is trying to protect her student from future negative interactions by helping him start his day in a good mood and reminding him that he has her support. When they can, teachers feel it is important to protect their students from potential unpleasant interactions with others.

ESOL teachers offer broad support to their students beyond the confines of their academic classes as a way of nurturing their well-being, giving them strength in difficult times, and ensuring their overall academic success in school. As Ms. Shoemaker tells her students, "I believe in them, and I know that they can do it. [And] I'm there to support them in any way." Ms. Farmer, Ms. Miller, and Ms. Weaver all offer their students help

in other subjects when content teachers prove unhelpful, which they understand as protecting their students' overall academic careers and moving them toward graduation. Ms. Miller even tackles subjects with which she has no familiarity, like economics and oceanography, telling her students that she will learn the material alongside them to help them succeed. Ms. Baker sends a letter to students who transition out of the ESOL program to remind them "that we're always here for them; even though they've tested out of the program, it doesn't mean we stop helping them." It is an attempt to prevent them from feeling isolated once they are no longer in classes with her and other ESOL teachers. The protective impulse and the belief that protection is part of their role both go beyond the ESOL classroom door.

Teachers also offer support beyond academics, protecting students from becoming overwhelmed by personal problems or feeling dismissed by teachers who don't understand the pressures and challenges of acculturation. A poignant example of this type of support comes in a quotation from Ms. Weaver that was used in chapter five to support my claims that ESOL teachers have an empathic disposition and enact care for their students by listening to them. It is worth revisiting here in a more extended form. When asked to explain why she sometimes chooses to forgo academic work with students to "let them talk," she states:

Because you can't push a rope. As soon as you realize that you're arm wrestling with a student over an assignment, you might as well give up. You're going to lose. . . . You just need to figure out why we can't talk about this math right now. You could try another subject and sometimes that might be okay, but generally the things that my kids bring to the table are gigantic things or personal things. . . . Even in the best of situations, when I have students whose families have a legal presence here and have jobs, there's still lots of things about moving here or transitioning here. They have family members who are far away. . . and they live with having relations that have been torn. . . . They need some outlets. They need

to talk. They need to tell you where they're coming from. It really validates you when somebody listens to you.

The protective action here is not in preventing pain, but in making students feel safe and supported. Teachers want students to feel as if they have someone to turn to for help in difficult moments. This inwardly facing protection, between teacher and student only, is presumed to be an important support for CLiM students as they integrate into a new culture and navigate an identity development process that attempts to merge old and new cultural influences. Teachers suppose that such protection offers these students refuge from challenges they face elsewhere and a chance to collect themselves and recenter. Viewing these acts as protective also feeds into teachers' own sense of self as good people and good teachers who are looking out for those students who are often overlooked or even discriminated against. This idea of teachers' conception of self will be further discussed in chapter seven.

Outwardly facing protection. Teachers are also protective of their students when they interact with administrators and other teachers at their school. They want their students to be set up for success and afforded the academic supports they may need to achieve. They also want to minimize any prejudice students might experience outside their classroom walls. This inclination toward protectiveness is born out through direct advocacy for their students' needs as well as through intervention when they feel some sort of injustice has occurred or is in process, findings that align with previous research on the advocacy of ESOL teachers (Linville, 2016, 2020).

Advocacy. Nearly every teacher in this study discussed advocating for their students by informing other teachers of the unique instructional needs of CLiM students and suggesting that they adjust their expectations for student performance and behavior.

Some of these adjustments have to do with cultural norms. As mentioned above, Ms. Baker explains to teachers not to expect many questions from her students as it is not common for many students to question a teacher in their heritage cultures. Ms. Weaver does the same, stating, “if I can get the teachers onboard with that, to give up on the hand-raising part and just know chances are he needs to hear that again. . . that's part of the battle.” Other adjustments advocated for by ESOL teachers are instructional. Ms. Farmer requests that teachers exempt some assignments on behalf of students who are overwhelmed with academics and carry significant family responsibilities outside school. Ms. Miller discusses the “I can” statements from the WIDA framework with teachers to help them understand what types of language students at various levels of language development can be reasonably expected to produce. In making these suggestions and requests of their colleagues, ESOL teachers attempt to ensure that their students receive a quality educational experience in which their needs are met and they are appropriately challenged with skills, content, and language. They believe this advocacy with other teachers to be an important part of their role as ESOL teachers and that it can help students in the long run. As discussed below, however, while this goal is attempted, it is not always achieved.

There are many other ways in which ESOL teachers advocate for their students. Ms. Weaver tries to stay on good terms with the guidance counselors so she can convince them to make changes to students’ schedules that will allow her to maximize her time with them. Ms. Potter acquired MiFi devices, portable routers that allow internet access, for her students without internet access at home. Ms. Tanner shares high quality student work with other teachers so that they can learn a bit about students’ lives and see their

capabilities firsthand. Mr. Cabrera petitioned an administrator to translate automated phone calls from the school and district into Spanish for families who use Spanish as a primary language. In these ways, teachers perceive themselves to be looking out for students' whole educational experiences and trying to protect them from being overlooked or subjected to subpar learning environments.

Intervention. At times, teachers feel they must step in and directly counter an unjust situation on behalf of students, protecting them from unfairness or mistreatment. Ms. Baker, Ms. Potter, and Ms. Shoemaker refer to themselves as “school moms,” a phenomenon mentioned in chapter five, and understand protecting students via intervention to be a necessary part of their role. Ms. Baker tells her students: “I, as your case manager, I am your school mom. I’m supposed to stand up for you like your mom does outside of school.” She recounts several examples of this behavior, one of which follows here. When the school secretaries were giving one of her students a hard time for frequently being late to school, she informed them that he routinely worked until 2:00 or 3:00 a.m. to send money home to his mother, which shifted their perspective and led to kinder treatment of him. She reports, “those secretaries never said a word to him again, but ‘have a good day’ or ‘make sure you get a lunch’ [or] ‘did you need breakfast?’” Ms. Potter, hoping the décor might be changed, points out to her principal that the posters of the school’s sports teams at the entrance to the school showcase only White students. Her students “don’t see themselves here,” she tells him. When Ms. Shoemaker’s student is denied the opportunity to come to school every week instead of every other week during COVID, what she had been told was a division-wide policy for students designated as

EL,⁵ she gathers evidence of the student's need for this opportunity with a plan to meet with the administration. When teachers see themselves as, in the words of Ms. Shoemaker, "a protective mom" to their students, they step in and try to rectify a situation these see as unjust. It is important to note here that teachers understand this protective impulse as a major purpose of the relationships they form with CLiM students. Ms. Baker states that this type of action is something she is "supposed" to do, suggesting that it is part of her own sense her profession identity as an ESOL teacher.

Even without taking on a mother-figure role, teachers intervene when they perceive there to be need. According to Supreme Court case *Plyler v. Doe* (1982), it is a legal requirement that public schools enroll all children regardless of citizenship or immigration status. Ms. Weaver had to push the guidance department in her division to enroll a child who had been arrested while crossing the border. She did not believe her colleagues were acting with malice but that they were unsure of what to do, so she took it upon herself to inform them of the division's legal obligation to enroll the student. Sometimes, though, a situation deemed to require intervention is the result of deliberate action or vocalized prejudice. Ms. Tanner states, "Sometimes I feel like I have to defend [CLiM students] from other teachers that I work with who will say biased, insensitive things." In one instance, a math teacher became frustrated by the poor performance of a few of her students in his class and began to make statements to the effect that he shouldn't have to teach them and that there should be an "everyday math" curriculum that can be taught to them separately, a situation discussed in terms of parallel status

⁵ This policy was also part of official guidance to school divisions from the state of Virginia (see Virginia Department of Education, 2020).

positioning in chapter five. Ms. Tanner had a frank discussion with this teacher to explain the educational benefit for students' involvement in his class. She reports what she told him:

[The students] are not necessarily going to master seventh grade math curriculum, but you're giving them a language experience. . . . They're being bathed in English during your class. And they're hearing all of these words that they're learning in my class or in other contexts. And they're starting to put things together. . . . You are part of this experience.

Ms. Tanner understands that her students shouldn't be isolated or segregated, and she stands up for them with sound pedagogical reasoning when others suggest otherwise. In doing so, she is looking out for the bigger picture of the child's education, rather than success in a particular class, and she believes this to be part of her role as a teacher of CLiM students. She reports that the teacher acknowledged her reasoning, if a bit begrudgingly. When intervening with others—staff, teachers, and administrators—ESOL teachers are attempting to protect their students by pushing for quality educational and personal experiences, and this role of protector is an important part of how they construct their sense of identity as ESOL teachers.

Limits of outwardly facing protection. While Ms. Tanner was able to gain an acknowledgment from her colleague that benefits for her CLiM students in his class went beyond mathematics content, Ms. Weaver successfully enrolled her student, and Ms. Baker helped to change the attitudes of the school secretaries, many participants highlighted the often limited effectiveness of advocacy and intervention. Ms. Potter points to the ignorance of her colleagues about the laws and requirements for teaching students officially designated as ELs and their lack of awareness for reasons behind these requirements as a major challenge in her teaching life. Others agree. When Ms. Farmer

approaches teachers on behalf of students to encourage them to adjust their practices, she is not always listened to. Often, she states, “the teacher acts like the student’s making up excuses.” In discussing the WIDA “I can” statements with her colleagues, one way mentioned above that Ms. Miller advocates for students, she explains that “it’s me usually coaching the teacher and sometimes the teacher just not listening at all.” There is a clear sense from these ESOL teachers that their advocacy for CLiM students is often ignored.

Ms. Shoemaker’s response when asked directly about examples of successful advocacy is quite telling: “[4-second pause followed by a sigh then a 5-second pause] That’s a tough question. I can think of some that haven’t been successful, but successfully advocating [5-second pause] not very much.” She then went on to recount her unsuccessful advocacy for a schedule change from a combined English/History class to separate classes for a particular student over the course of two years. The student failed the class twice, with the teacher blaming the student for lack of effort and laziness. She finished this anecdote by saying, “the answer is no, I haven’t been successful advocating for my students because I haven’t been listened to.” Ms. Shoemaker reveals a sense of defeat in her answer. The long pauses she takes and the story of her repeated calls for a schedule change being overlooked and overruled speak to a sense of frustration she feels in this part of her work with CLiM students. The de-professionalization of and disregard for the expertise of ESOL teachers, discussed in chapter five, are obstacles to successful advocacy and intervention because their concerns and their reasoning are afforded less heft than those of their colleagues. Prejudiced tropes of lazy CLiM students who don’t have a desire to learn win out over reasoned pedagogical arguments that language support

is what is needed. ESOL teachers' advocacy, therefore, is often shoved aside. The results are colleagues who don't listen to information about the WIDA Framework, colleagues who refuse to adjust their teaching practices to accommodate CLiM students, and colleagues who ignore calls for change even when a student's repeated failure screams that change is necessary. Nevertheless, ESOL teachers continue to advocate for and engage in what they see as protective acts for their students because it is an important part of how they see themselves: standing up for a minoritized population.

In the end, however, even though outwardly facing protection can be limited in its ultimate success, it may serve to strengthen the relationship between ESOL teachers and CLiM students. In the instances where advocacy and intervention are successful—Ms. Baker's intervention with the secretaries, Ms. Potter's acquisition of MiFi devices, Ms. Weaver's change of a student's schedule, Ms. Shoemaker's persuasion of a teacher to allow a test retake—the students involved are able to see that someone is on their side and is successful in obtaining educational improvements for them. Even in unsuccessful instances, students may still be aware of a teacher's effort on their behalf. As a result, teachers and students can identify and feel solidarity with one another, aspects of relationship formation discussed in chapter five. The functions of the cross-cultural teacher-student relationship can, thus, feed into the formation of the relationship and vice versa.

Cross Purposes: Maintaining Cultural Patterns That Conflict with Professed Aims

Until this point, I have argued that ESOL teachers act in ways that they see as beneficial to the well-being of their CLiM students and as being in line with an integrationist approach. In their view, they listen to students and empathize with them.

They try to avoid deficit thinking. They respect students' cultural origins and urge them to maintain at least some aspects of their cultural heritage while acculturating to the US and Virginia. They attempt to prepare students to successfully navigate U.S. institutions. They create opportunities for students to explore their developing identities in coursework. They attempt to protect students from prejudiced interactions and intervene on their behalf when necessary. They believe that all of these actions are undertaken for the benefit of their students, and this belief undergirds their sense of self as ESOL teachers who support and uplift CLiM students. Yet these teachers are also inevitably influenced, as are we all, by notions in the wider culture that disparage and seek to dominate minoritized others. This influence is revealed in some of the ways the study's teacher-participants discuss their role, revealing some tendencies that run counter to stated aims, goals, and beliefs tied to an integrationist approach and even counter to their sense of themselves as being compassionate supporters of their students.

The fields of anthropology and psychology have both investigated how people can unknowingly act in ways that contradict deeply held beliefs, albeit from different vantage points. In psychology, inquiry into this phenomenon has focused on the workings of the mind. It grew out of research on memory in the 1970s in which it was demonstrated that individuals with a certain form of amnesia could improve their performance on various tasks via practice sessions, even though they had no recollection of the occurrence of these sessions. Conceptualized as "indirect" or "implicit" cognition, the idea was taken up by the field of social psychology in the 1990s (Greenwald & Banaji, 2017). The term "implicit bias" was introduced at that time to refer to the tendency of people to acquire and harbor stereotypical views of which they may not be

aware or may even “explicitly disavow” (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995, p. 15; Gullo et al., 2019). In the decades since, the concept of implicit bias has been widely accepted as a cognitive mechanism that influences behavior and can function in direct opposition to one’s sincerely held values.

An anthropological view focuses more on the wider social sphere as a driver of such behavior. Since its inception, the anthropology of education has been interested in “culture and social structure writ large” in relation to learning and has interrogated how communities “create, maintain, and enforce the categories and situations” tied to inequities in our society (McDermott & Raley, 2011, p. 42). These larger societal forces have often been found to manifest in teachers and other school personnel whose actions are at cross purposes with their stated aims. A particularly illustrative case of the anthropological approach was put forth by George Spindler in a study based on careful ethnographic observations that were undertaken in an elementary school classroom in 1951 and has been an exemplar in the field ever since (Finnan, 2013). The teacher was thought of quite highly by his colleagues and believed himself to be fair-minded. However, Spindler (1963) found that he treated his students unfairly largely based on patterns of similarity between teacher and student in class status and achievement ideology. To be clear, Spindler (1963) blamed cultural expectations and conditioning for the situation, not the individual teacher. In fact, the teacher was open to criticism and help from Spindler in order to become more like the teacher he thought he was and wanted to be. His treatment of his students was interpreted largely as “in contradiction to his own professed aims, and even to his own beliefs about what he actually did in the classroom. . . . He was wearing cultural blinders that limited his perceptions” (p. 165).

The anthropological view, therefore looks to the culture at large as the driving force behind a mismatch between belief and action.

Both the psychological and anthropological views have merit and get at a particular piece of puzzle. The process of unknowingly acting against one's stated beliefs has a deep social and cultural origin, but it is also the result of an individual agent making particular choices. Despite the ways in which the teacher-participants in this study do act in accordance with their drive to support and uplift students, they also fall prey to replicating and perpetuating certain detrimental societal attitudes. They do support their students and try to shelter them as best they can from the prevailing harmful attitudes regarding CLiM students, such as assimilation, deficit thinking, and low social status. Yet they also exhibit attitudes that can be characterized as White saviorism, as well as some assimilationist tendencies themselves. One function of cross-cultural educational relationships, then, seems to be to reproduce and perpetuate some societal stereotypes and prejudices.

White saviorism. White saviorism has a long history that can be traced back to the imperialism of the 18th and 19th centuries and earlier. A widely known exemplar of the idea is Rudyard Kipling's 1899 poem, "The White Man's Burden," which exhorts White people to civilize and uplift those with a darker skin tone. Today, White saviorism is understood as an ideology in which a benevolent, well-intentioned White person, who is placed relatively high in the social order, seeks encounters with marginalized people of color in order to help them better their lives and overcome obstacles. These attempts are always on an individual level. Thus, while it stems from an urge for equity and justice, White saviorism fails to see or respond to any larger, systemic issues that underlie

oppression or their intricacy and complexity (Aronson, 2017; Cammarota, 2011; Cole, 2012; Maurantonio, 2017). As Cole (2012) puts it, White saviorism is about not being able “to think constellationally” (para. 9)—to see only need and not see broader patterns of power and domination.

Teachers in the US hold this mindset and school systems often embrace it. Within schools, White saviorism manifests in a number of ways. School personnel might hold deficit views of students, as well as their families and communities from whose negative influence they must be rescued; they might desire that students assimilate into the dominant, middle-class, White culture and abandon all aspects of their heritage culture; they might hold a self-image as the most (or perhaps only) stable influence in a child’s life; and they might believe that students and families hold the wrong values to achieve success (Aronson, 2017; Cammarota, 2011). According to Picower (2009), “White teachers are often entering the profession with a lifetime of hegemonic reinforcement to see students of color and their communities as dangerous and at fault for the educational challenges they face” (p. 211). Teachers can use “tools of whiteness” (p. 204), such as remaining silent about injustice and viewing themselves as on higher ground to extend help to those beneath them, to maintain current cultural and racial hierarchies. To be an ally rather than a savior, Cammarota (2011) argues that White teachers must be listeners to understand oppression from the perspective of the oppressed, must understand their privilege, and must strive to undermine the systems that mark them as having a higher status in ways that may diminish their own standing in the eyes of those who subscribe to the dominant culture.

In their discussion of CLiM students and the processes of being in relation with them, at times ESOL teachers expressed views and used phrases that are indicative of White saviorism. Some teachers characterize themselves as benevolently offering help or opportunities to their students, often while also characterizing students or their families as deficient or unable to help themselves. A number of examples can illustrate this point. Ms. Miller ends a lengthy description of her reasons for becoming an ESOL teacher with the following statement: “I just want to be there for the students and the families who don't know how to ask, or how to advocate.” Ms. Shoemaker explains one of her reasons for sharing a personal story from her own schooling experience with her students by saying, “I just feel it's something, a gift that I could give them to believe in themselves and that it is worth putting the effort in to doing better.” Ms. Tanner states, “The families that I work with need someone to be a voice. . . they need somebody who can be a liaison.” The students and families are made to seem helpless. Ms. Shoemaker’s students wouldn’t believe in themselves if not for her. Ms. Tanner’s families can’t speak for themselves, and Ms. Miller’s families need her to step in because they don’t even know *how to ask* for help. These statements position CLiM students and families as incapable of meeting their own needs, while simultaneously placing the teachers in a socially higher position, selflessly extending a hand down to help.

Teachers also sometimes position themselves as a positive influence on their students that is somehow making up for a homelife lacking in support. In explaining why she sits down next to students to work with them, Ms. Miller offers various sound pedagogical reasons, yet she also states, “They may not have a family figure at home doing work with them, too, to really sit down and have that, so I just think it's important

in school, especially for me.” Ms. Potter contrasts teaching with nursing, stating that when a nurse leaves work at the end of the day, there is another nurse to step in and continue treatment. Of teaching, she says, “When I leave, there's nobody that steps in. They're on their own. And until they see me the next day.” In these instances, teachers rely on prejudiced tropes of uncaring or absentee families of CLiM students to elevate the importance of their presence and influence on students’ lived experience. There is an implied moral high ground on which they stand in their work with CLiM students.

The language of White saviorism did not dominate the interviews in this study. For those who used it, this language was scattered sparingly throughout hundreds of pages of text. Yet it surfaced enough to be an identifiable pattern with the individuals quoted in this section. Particularly when speaking in generalities, these ideas surfaced in participants’ speech organically and off the cuff. I believe participants were not aware of any broader implications of such speech. Nevertheless, they were reinforcing prejudiced viewpoints common in the larger society and culture that they themselves would disavow and say were antithetical to their own value systems.

Assimilationism. Despite my argument above that ESOL teachers understand one of the functions of the cross-cultural teacher-student relationship to be helping students integrate their heritage cultures with the culture they encounter in Virginia schools, clear assimilationist tendencies still appear at times. They arose in the data in three ways. First, some families of CLiM students have a view of special education services that are often at odds with school personnel, yet this is a cultural perspective that is not encouraged to be maintained. Second, teachers frame much of what they want for students in individualistic terms. Finally, teachers perceive that students *want* to change and become

more American. Yet they overlook the assimilative atmosphere outside their classroom walls with which students are unceasingly confronted, quite possibly misinterpreting coercion to change as desire for change. In these ways, they promote assimilation rather than integration.

Special education. Both Ms. Baker and Ms. Miller recount in detail experiences of meeting with families to discuss the possibility of special education testing for their children, and both describe that experience as difficult and uncomfortable. The families understand special education to be stigmatizing and demeaning, while the teachers believe it to be a helpful instructional method that is needed by the students. Common to both accounts is an implied undercurrent that the families' culturally influenced beliefs about special education are wrong. Looking at extended quotations is instructive here.

First, Ms. Miller:

they refused because it was a cultural, um, because of culture. They didn't really want that stigma of special education. . . . They were very against having that in his file. . . . They just did not want the service. They did not want the label. And they didn't want the help for [the student]. . . . That was definitely a sad day for the assistant principals and me have been talking about it for years at this point already, like I said. So, we were disappointed. I mean, we respected it. That's what they believe, but we were definitely sad for [the student] to not be getting the services. . . . Dad was just like, 'The men are the strong ones in our family, and I don't want him having that label.' So that was hard.

And Ms. Baker:

trying to explain to an ESOL family that I would like to put their son or daughter up for child study, and they're looking at me like, 'There is no disability; they have all of their limbs, they're fine.' But explaining that a disability can be a mental or learning disability. And they really don't want that label. . . . I think trying to break that understanding they've lived with their entire life is exceedingly difficult, and it really feels almost disrespectful to say what you believe is wrong, because this is how it's done here in the United States. . . . And a lot of times they do deny, you know: 'We won't sign the request; we won't do this.' And yet then months later, I'll have a parent-teacher conference, and I have mom and dad in tears because they're failing. They're not moving on to the next

grade level. So, I've already told you; your child is disabled, but not really. . . .
And I have no way to fix it because I can see something, and I need help.

While both state in one way or another that they respect the viewpoint of these families, there is much they say that strongly implies they also believe these families are simply wrong. They understand themselves to be upholding a respect for cultural difference, yet their words belie a clear distaste for what these families believe.

In addition to stating that the family of her student didn't want the "stigma" and the "label" of special education services, Ms. Miller also states that, "they didn't want the help for him." She then recounts her disappointment and sadness and that of her colleagues because the student would "not be getting the services." She implies that the parents are refusing to help their own child and places blame at their feet for any future learning difficulties the child may have. Ms. Baker speaks of the need to "break that understanding" held by CLiM families regarding special education, implying that their viewpoint has no merit; it simply needs to be done away with. She also places blame for future academic difficulties at the feet of the parents, describing a hypothetical parent-teacher conference where the child is failing due to a lack of special education services. There is an accusatory statement: "I've already told you; your child is disabled." The disability is a foregone conclusion, a fact in Ms. Baker's estimation, even though no official testing would have been done without the parents' consent. Because the family has not accepted this so-called fact, their child's failure in school becomes their fault. The parents in both situations are being seen as failing to act in the best interests of their own children, when, in fact, they simply have a different understanding about what those best interests are.

Outside of their awareness, the assimilationist perspective permeates these teachers' comments on the topic of special education. The students and families need to change their idea to fall in line with American schooling expectations. They want the families to change, but they do not examine their own ideas for flaws or problematic constructs. As a result, they communicate to students and families that conformity to American standards is expected in this circumstance, and failure to conform marks them as an other and outside the norm.

Individualism. While this study does not involve student testimonials that can reveal the cultural pressures students face to change their outlook, Mr. Cabrera's experience illustrates the pervasiveness of individualistic messaging in U.S. schools. He, himself, felt and eventually bent to this assimilative push to embrace an understanding of schooling focused on individual effort and accountability for students. Of his adjustment to this mindset, he states:

It was a matter of adapting myself to the system. . . . My culture is a very collective one, so we care a lot how we are as a group, how you do as a group. So, creating a good environment in a classroom is really important because if the group works, everyone is okay. But right here, if you are not doing good, it's okay, it's your problem. That's what I perceived. And trying to adapt [to] that . . . was really hard.

This sense of individual achievement and working independently was so strong, he felt it from the students themselves in the Spanish classes he was teaching. They pressured him to change his teaching methods. There was great resistance to communicative activities because students expected to complete exercises from the textbook and worksheets individually. Eventually he acquiesced, realizing "that was the way that they work in class. . . . It was a matter of filling papers out, and getting a grade." The expectation of individualistic thinking in U.S. schools is clearly very strong and very deeply engrained,

so much so that, as described above, Mr. Cabrera feels obligated to explain this expectation to his CLiM students.

ESOL teachers, despite a greater openness to difference and a respect for and interest in different ways of being than is shared by their colleagues, do not operate outside their own culture. Many espouse notions of success and of learning that are quite individualistic in nature. When thinking of goals for their students (a theme explored in more depth in chapter seven), they speak of building confidence and self-esteem, getting students to believe in themselves and their abilities, having voice, developing self-expression, and becoming willing to question their teachers. All of these concepts involve a strong element of individual effort and responsibility, and they pervade the American school system.

Beyond speaking in generalities, these teachers also relay anecdotes in which their proclivity for individualism is revealed. When a student is excited about passing the Virginia Standard of Learning (SOL) test for algebra, Ms. Baker recounts that, “she just hugged me, cried and was like, ‘I passed for you. I did it, I did it.’ And I was like, ‘But you didn’t pass for me, honey. You passed for you.’” In her response to the student, Ms. Baker reframes the communal sense of accomplishment expressed by the student into an individualistic sense, thus reinforcing an individualistic ideal. Ms. Potter identifies a couple students each year who she sees as potential leaders and makes them her “project,” encouraging them to take on individual responsibilities. Ms. Farmer is very direct in expressing her hopes to help students “find their Americanized voice” that can question a teacher or stop a teacher to say they don’t understand something. She explains that “you just have to chip away” at cultural proclivities that might value respect for

authority or place importance on avoiding statements that may bring public shame on others, indicating a direct attempt on her part to shift students toward individualistic ways of thinking. Through their interactions with CLiM students and their beliefs about what schooling should do and how, ESOL teachers participate unwittingly, at least in part, in a wider atmosphere of assimilation in U.S. schools to uphold and promote individualistic ideals.

Potentially misinterpreting students' desires. American ESOL teachers perceive that their CLiM students want to fit in with American students and have a desire to change in order to do that. Ms. Tanner speaks of the mannerisms and slang that a new Afghan student who speaks little English is quickly picking up, pointing to these things as evidence that he is “figuring out how to fit in and be liked.” Both Ms. Miller and Ms. Shoemaker interpret students not wanting their help when they push into a class as a sign that they don’t want to be different than everybody else. Ms. Weaver says that many of her students, “don’t fit in here. . . and so they try on all these different personas. They try on the goth and they try on the whatever.” She suggests that students actively want to change themselves to fit in. Ms. Baker says of her students, “they really want to be American. . . . They want to blend in; they don't want to be noticed.” These teachers see their students changing how they act in order to better fit in to the culture that surrounds them, and they interpret that this change is desired by the students.

Education inevitably changes people, and acculturation is certainly an educational process. In finding oneself in an unfamiliar culture, one must learn how to navigate it by coming to understand the communal and hidden symbolic meanings that allow people to interpret each other’s intentions. In coming to understand these symbols and beginning to

use them with others, one's way of being in the world changes. I don't question that teachers are witnessing changes in their students' behaviors and attitudes. What I think must be questioned is the ascription of the impulse behind such changes to a *desire* to become more American. It is certainly possible that students might want to change in this way, but it is not the only possibility for what might be behind that impetus. Jaffe-Walter (2016) argues convincingly that the dominant culture can coerce change, as well; this possibility must be considered.

Mr. Cabrera's experience as an international teacher adjusting to American norms, discussed in the directly preceding section, suggests that the atmosphere of U.S. schools can be marked by coercive assimilation. Such an atmosphere would also impact students, and the interview data from this study suggest that it does. A number of participants mentioned incidents in which a content teacher isolated their CLiM students from the rest of the class because of behavior the content teacher interpreted as abnormal or inappropriate. Any changes in behavior on the part of students resulting from such ostracism would be hard to characterize as stemming from desire. One of Ms. Weaver's seventh grade students, when asked by an American student if he sold drugs, began pretending to be a drug dealer. When confronted, he attributed that decision to media portrayals of Mexicans as such. As a way to explain this behavior, Ms. Weaver states that the student was "looking for a way to be somebody, and when [pretending to deal drugs] got him some attention, he decided that's somebody he'd be." This student essentially chooses to act out a negative stereotype in order to meet others' expectations, which are influenced by the media. Again, a genuine desire to change in this way within this context does not seem likely.

Even assessment systems have an assimilative influence on CLiM students. Ms. Shoemaker describes her work with a shy and reserved student who performed poorly on the WIDA speaking assessment, which is conducted orally by an evaluator asking scripted questions of an individual student and then scoring the responses:

she didn't talk enough. . . . So, there was a confidence issue. There was an assertive issue. . . . And so, we directly worked on how to respond to questions: giving more detail, giving more information, and speaking with more enthusiasm. Because I just wanted her to just put her heart into it so that it would come across to the evaluators.

Student success, in this instance, is at least partially predicated on assimilation, in that the student is helped by confidence, assertiveness, and enthusiasm—aspects, not of language, but of an individualistic persona. These behavioral changes are being pushed by the teacher so that the student may be successful on the assessment, not driven by an innate desire on the part of the student.

Outside pressures of assimilation are very likely influencing changes in student behaviors, which teachers are then interpreting as a desire for change. This is an incredibly complex process. There is likely some desire and some coercion happening simultaneously and in different proportions for different students. There may be other influences as well. There is a danger, however, that teachers may push students to change more than they would otherwise because of their perception that students actually *desire* to change and become more American.

Reproduction of dominant values. Despite a general orientation toward the values of integration and of respecting cultural differences, cross-cultural relationships between teachers and students do maintain a function, to a certain extent, of the reproduction of dominant cultural values. Whether ascribed to implicit bias, “culture and

social structure writ large” (McDermott & Raley, 2011, p. 42), or something in between, ESOL teachers are capable of unknowingly acting in ways that contradict their sincerely held values. When this happens, the ways in which they relate to students reinforce and reinscribe harmful societal views of CLiM students and families via White saviorism and assimilationism.

Revisiting the Functions of Integration and Protection: Undercurrents of Assimilation and White Saviorism

Given that some tendencies toward White saviorism and assimilation surfaced in participants’ comments, it is worth taking a second look at the functions of integration and protection, discussed earlier in this chapter. Participants felt that their actions in these areas were undertaken for the benefit of their students, and it is certainly possible that students understood their actions in that light. Yet is it possible that saviorism and assimilationism are at work here, too?

Integration: Support for maintenance of heritage culture. Teachers allowed and encouraged students to use their primary language(s) in school both as an avenue for learning English and also because they perceived students’ primary language(s) to have inherent value. They participated in students’ cultural celebrations and shared food from their homelands with them. They incorporated into their curricula opportunities for students to process and reflect on their cultural journeys and identities. These actions are clear evidence of an integrationist outlook that teachers are trying to enact. Their efforts regarding language and curriculum have been identified as pedagogical practices that support cultural integration (Jaffe-Walter & Miranda, 2020; Martin & Suárez-Orozco,

2018; Mendenhall & Bartlett, 2018). On this front, then, teachers' efforts appear to be authentic.

Integration: Preparing students to navigate U.S. culture. Teachers believed themselves to be acting as guides to the norms of schooling in America for their students in order to help them better adjust and understand expectations being placed on them by other teachers. They attempted to do this through discussions, by encouraging students to take part in school activities, and by pushing students to adopt learning behaviors that American teachers might expect to see. Some topics of discussion, such as the need to provide a doctor's note for a medical absence, seem to me to be innocuous. They inform students about a particular expectation in U.S. schools and allow students to avoid negative consequences by adopting a behavior that has little consequence in terms of their overall cultural outlook or sense of identity. Other discussion topics, however, may hold a more assimilationist motive. The discussions held about statutory rape seem more coercive and are pushing for a larger change in how students and families think of romantic relationships and what constitutes appropriate behavior.

Similarly, teachers' encouragement that students join school sports teams and clubs and that they attend school events may, at times, have a bit of an assimilationist goal. In joining groups and participating in events, students will inevitably need to adapt their behavior if they want to avoid sticking out or being singled out in these spaces by those from the dominant culture. Ms. Potter's attempt to start a club only with CLiM students before inviting other students to join seems to be an attempt to mitigate such a purpose. If encouragement to participate is undertaken without such a considered approach, however, the end result is likely to involve students feeling pressure to

assimilate from American students, coaches, and teachers connected to these teams and clubs.

In their quest to help students navigate the U.S. school system, the behavior that holds the strongest undertones of assimilation is teachers' attempt to change student learning behaviors in order to more closely resemble American expectations. The strongest examples come from Ms. Baker and Ms. Farmer who actively encourage students into stopping the teacher from speaking in order to ask a question or point out a mistake. They use rewards (i.e., candy), trickery (i.e., purposefully making a mistake for students to catch), and coercion (i.e., requiring students to explain whether they agree or disagree as part of a standard lesson structure) in order to induce the desired behavior. Even if their intention is to improve student learning and success in other classes by preparing them to exhibit behaviors those teachers will be expecting, their drive to change student learning behaviors to conform with American expectations can be viewed as an act of assimilation.

The complexity of the phenomenon can be seen in this example. Ms. Baker's use of candy and requiring students to agree or disagree, was used in chapter five to support the idea that minimizing power differences serves to aid cross-cultural relationship formation. Ms. Baker perceives these acts as preparing students for American expectations from other teachers. Here I argue that these techniques can be perceived as coercive to produce assimilation. I believe all three permutations are true. Ms. Baker reports that over time students become enthusiastic about participating in her class in this way. They call out when they think she has made a mistake, and they come to enthusiastically defend their opinions. As their approach to learning is changed, they

become more likely to participate in other classes in ways that content teachers expect, and their relationship with Ms. Baker develops. In the end, students may appreciate Ms. Baker's efforts to get them to learn in a new way. The process is still assimilative, though, because the burden to change falls completely on the student.

Protection. The desire of ESOL teachers to protect their students from harmful interactions and from practices that could be detrimental to their education no doubt originates with an intent to promote equitable treatment for their students. Yet often, they are focused on discreet incidents rather than larger systemic issues that may need to be addressed. Such an approach to protection follows quite closely the definition of White saviorism explained above in which a well-meaning person in a position of privilege attempts to alleviate individual harms inflicted on the marginalized while leaving untouched broader patterns of domination (Aronson, 2017; Cammarota, 2011; Cole, 2012; Maurantonio, 2017). One example is Ms. Farmer's tendency to "play interference." She is focused solely on shielding a student from a negative interaction, without attempting to change the unjust dynamic that exists in the classroom between the content teacher and CLiM students. Another example is Ms. Shoemaker's attempt to gain approval for a student to come to school every week during the pandemic in accordance with state guidance. While working for the benefit of that particular student, she leaves unaddressed the issue of state or division policy that should be enforced equitably for all. White saviorism, then, can be entwined with the protective actions teachers take on behalf of their students.

Reconsiderations. Some of the functions of the cross-cultural teacher-student relationship are a bit messier than they appeared at first glance. In some ways, teachers

are truly acting to help students integrate and hold on to pieces of their heritage culture. In other ways, teachers seem to be unknowingly encouraging assimilation, while believing themselves to be pursuing integration. As noted by Berry (2012), true integration requires adaptation on both sides. The dominant culture must be willing to make some accommodations for those who are entering it. But the demand for change here seems to be very one-sided. Despite a few efforts here and there, such as Ms. Baker's and Ms. Weaver's attempts to modify content teachers' expectations regarding hand-raising, it is the CLiM students who nearly always must alter how they walk through world in order to fit into local expectations. Assimilation, therefore, is happening through some actions teachers perceive as promoting integration. Saviorism also appears to be at play to a certain degree in the function of protection. When teachers engage in protective acts for individual students without attempting to address wider inequities, these acts are perpetuating White saviorism. This is particularly true when teachers connect their attempts to protect students with their own sense of purpose and self-worth as educators.

ESOL teachers' ability to push back against oppressive systems may be limited, however, given the de-professionalization and disregard for their expertise that they regularly face. Perhaps aiding an individual student in a way that looks like saviorism may sometimes be the best course of action. The design of this study, with no observational data and no student input, makes such determinations difficult. What does seem clear is that an unrecognized purpose of the cross-cultural teacher-student relationship is the perpetuation of the wider dominant culture's desire to assimilate outsiders.

Yet the overall picture is still a bit muddy. ESOL teachers may be more assimilationist than they realize or intend, but they are also more integrationist than their colleagues. This is something students seem to notice and appreciate given the reports of how ESOL teachers' approach to language, food, celebrations, and incorporating cultural reflection into the curriculum impact the quality of their relationships with students. Teachers' protective instincts may not always be pushing back very strongly against the inequitable systems that harm their students, thereby falling into saviorism, yet they are still able to gain the allegiance of students whom they purport to protect. These students then seek these teachers out for help with other subjects or to confide personal difficulties, further engaging in ways that bolster their relationships. The experience these teachers have in relating to students of different cultures appears to run counter to important examples in the literature that document relational breakdown when the way teachers care for students is not the way in which students wish to be cared for (Jaffe-Walter, 2016; Poplin & Weeres, 1992; Valenzuela, 1999). These teachers, whatever shortcomings and blind spots they may have, are doing something right.

Providing Care and Support

ESOL teachers are not immune to society's prejudices, but neither do such prejudices constitute the totality of their educational relations with students. As outlined above, these teachers help CLiM students to acculturate via integration to a certain degree, encouraging them to hold on to important aspects of their cultures and identities while also helping them adjust to new surroundings. They attempt to protect their students as best they can from harmful interactions. They create welcoming spaces where students feel comfortable, advocate for students' needs and rights, and intervene when

they witness unfair treatment. A caring motivation can be felt behind the supportive functions of the cross-cultural teacher-student relationship, as they center the student's well-being.

Care can also be a function of the relationship in and of itself. Teachers speak about their relationships in ways that prioritize care and support over academics. They also describe situations in which caring for students is their main purpose. In both word and deed, therefore, the study's teacher-participants understand the relationships they form with their students to hold a caring function.

Words. The epigraph to this chapter from Ms. Weaver implies that the relationships teachers form with students function on more than an academic level. Already cited in chapter five as evidence of ESOL teachers' identification with their CLiM students, when this quotation is extended, we see that she believes one function of the cross-cultural teacher-student relationship is care.

What I mean is that I am interested in what happens in their home. I am interested in the fact that they don't have any transportation. I do want to know whatever parts of their background they want to share with me. I'm not there *just* to help them learn language. I'm there to help them with any kind of barriers they come up against. I'm concerned that they develop friends. I'm concerned that they figure out if they can make the soccer team or not. So, I want them to feel like I'm somebody they can trust and can feel free to ask for help and to know that I'm looking out for them on lots of levels.

The three responsibilities of Noddings' (2013) one-caring are all there. Ms. Weaver is attentive regarding students' lives and needs in terms of what they are willing to share and what she notices. Deep interest in their lives moves her to respond to those needs. She is prepared to help students meet whatever needs they have and overcome "any kind of barrier" they may face.

The other seven teachers also speak of their relationships with students in ways that center and prioritize care. Mr. Cabrera identifies the sentiment behind his teaching career in the following way: “It is because I care for people, how are people feeling, my students, my colleagues.” For him, care is at the center of teaching, which suggests that, at times, it takes precedence over academic and other purposes. Ms. Farmer and Ms. Miller both designate building meaningful relationships with students as an issue of primary importance, ranking it higher than academics, and Ms. Shoemaker believes that students are happy to see her because she nurtures and cares for them. Finally, Ms. Potter believes that a disposition to care is a necessary quality for an ESOL teacher, stating: “I don't think you can teach English learners unless you have some opening in yourself for caring and empathy for others.” She goes on to explain that care and empathy are necessary qualities to teach this population of students because the language barrier might inhibit them from expressing their needs.

Through this sampling of participants' statements about teaching and relationships, a clear pattern emerges. In explaining how they understand their role as teachers of CLiM students, the participants in this study see care as essential. Some state that viewpoint directly, while others imply it. It is important in that it suggests that caring for students can be a function of the cross-cultural educational relation itself, not simply a means to academic ends.

Deeds. The ESOL teachers in this study don't merely talk about the importance and centrality of care in their work with students, they also act in ways that demonstrate care to be a function of the teacher-student relationship completely aside from learning and academic progress. Caring for students and meeting their nonacademic needs came

up repeatedly in small ways. All discussed the importance of listening to students and attending to their lives beyond the classroom. Many recounted forgoing academic work in order to listen to students and allow them to talk about difficulties they were facing. At times teachers even took on an advisor role to offer suggestions about how they might meet those challenges. All gave examples of bending or breaking rules in order to care for students and meet their needs. These and other types of caring actions that center student needs (see chapter five), be they academic or not, were ubiquitous in the data. All participants provided examples of times when caring for students was the primary or sole purpose of their actions. A few in-depth anecdotes will help to demonstrate how care serves as an independent function of the cross-cultural teacher-student relationship.

Ms. Baker describes a situation in which a student sent her an email requesting to be taken out of another class because the student was in distress and couldn't "do this anymore today." Ms. Baker happened to be on her planning period at that time, so she stopped what she was doing, went to the classroom, and "lied out my teeth," saying the student was needed in the office. She then took the student back to her classroom to have a discussion to figure out the problem and how she might be able to help. Her sole concern in this instance is the emotional well-being of the student. She even breaks school protocols and lies to the other teacher in order to meet the immediate needs of this particular student. She empathizes, acts on the student's need to leave class, and also tries to understand the wider problem so that she can help with that, as well. In essence, she provides care.

Mr. Cabrera shared a similar story about his American student, Tondra Samuels. In a free period when he was not teaching a class, he found Tondra in the hallway crying,

so he brought her back to his classroom. When he asked what was the matter, Tondra didn't want to tell him, so he gave her some space. When she didn't stop crying, he allowed her to use his personal cell phone to call her mother, asking her to please not tell anyone that he did so. After a 10-minute phone call, she calmed down and Mr. Cabrera escorted her back to class. He stopped to let her drink some water and wash her face in the bathroom, and when Tondra was concerned that she didn't have a hall pass, he replied: "No, problem. I'll tell the teacher that you were with me." Again, the teacher's sole concern is the emotional well-being of his student. His purpose in this moment is to care for his student, and he bends the rules a bit in order to do so by allowing the student to use his phone and by covering for the student's absence from her other class. The student also truly appreciated his efforts. She told her mother what he had done, and Tondra's mother called him the next day to express her gratitude.

Both of these examples occur when teachers are not engaged with an entire class of students and are able to provide extended personal attention. Care also manifests within the classroom. Ms. Tanner noticed a large shift in mood in one of her students. She described Nicole as "vibrant" one day and not wanting to talk the next. She learned that Nicole was living with her father while her mother and other family members remained in Honduras, and the student was having a hard time missing everyone she had left behind. After coming to understand Nicole's situation, Ms. Tanner explains,

I started giving Nicole a hug every day when she would come to class and when she would leave. . . . Sometimes it's listening, acknowledging the reality of what they're living at. Not trying to say, 'Oh, you know, you'll be fine,' but being like, 'that's huge. That's really hard. You don't have your mom.' And then just being affectionate. And then the other kids like that because they knew that she was hurt and was hurting. And then they see me being affectionate and her happier, and it makes them feel safe.

Ms. Tanner provides some comfort to a student she can tell is suffering, and she does so in a classroom while other students are present. Her offering of care and affection to that one student also impacts the other students in the class who witness it, she believes. Even though care is not directed at them, Ms. Tanner feels that they see it and that they understand their relationships with her can also be caring and that she will prioritize care in moments of personal difficulty and struggle. Her decision to hug Nicole is also significant because she made it during the COVID-19 pandemic, when masking and social distancing protocols were in place for those students and teachers going to school in person. She chose to risk breaking those protocols because she felt her student's need for affection was too great.

COVID-19 truly brought the caring function of the cross-cultural teacher-student relationship to fore. Mr. Cabrera puts it this way: "I think it's really important that we care for people. And I think this pandemic is teaching the world that we have forgotten what is important: humanity." Ms. Tanner was able to find a way to care for her student in this particular instance despite the many restrictions limiting contact and interaction during that time. It was a unique achievement at this time for a teacher to feel as if they were able to successfully care for students. Interviews revealed great frustration from all participants that the protocols established to combat the disease largely prevented teachers from caring for students in the ways that were needed. This issue will be taken up in more depth in the following chapter.

This chapter has outlined a variety of ways in which cross-cultural teacher-student relationships function beyond the delivery of academic content. I presented two contrasting viewpoints on acculturation—assimilation and integration—and argued that

ESOL teachers believe themselves to be encouraging integration. They demonstrate respect for students' cultural origins and encourage them to hold on their heritage culture, while at the same time they purport to encourage students to participate in and successfully navigate the institutions and systems they will encounter in the US. These relationships also serve a protective function in the eyes of ESOL teachers. They try to protect CLiM students from injustices and prejudices they may experience in the wider school and community by creating safe and supportive classroom spaces, advocating for students, and intervening when they witness an injustice. Despite a healthy respect for difference held by ESOL teachers that is much deeper than many of their colleagues, these relationships also serve to reproduce and reinscribe some harmful values from the dominant culture via instances of White saviorism and certain assimilationist attitudes. These tendencies can be seen even in some actions teachers take that they believe are furthering integration. Finally, these relationships serve a caring function, allowing students to feel valued and supported. In chapter seven, I will examine how the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted cross-cultural relationships between teachers and students.

Chapter 7: The COVID-19 Pandemic and the Disruption of Cross-Cultural

Teacher-Student Relationships

...not being able to even see their face or their expressions or their body language. I cried for the first month because I was like, ‘I don't even know, is anyone even there? Is anyone listening?’

– Lilly Miller

Teaching is a relational endeavor imbued with deep ethical and moral dimensions as adults outside the family structure assume the responsibility of guiding students’ intellectual and emotional development. When COVID-19 forced schools to move instruction online, teacher-student relationships were completely disrupted, and the nature of these relationships was fundamentally altered. Not only were routines upended, but our consciousness and ways of being in the world were, as well (Torres, 2022). The “sacredness of the people” necessary for belonging and community (Turner, 2012) disappeared as students and teachers projected digital headshots into a mosaic of tiny boxes on a screen—an impoverished approximation of togetherness, particularly when many of those boxes were simply empty black squares. As Ms. Miller suggests in the epigraph to this chapter, building and maintaining cross-cultural educational relationships became infinitely more difficult.

The disruption to daily life brought about by COVID-19 deeply impacted the moral sensibilities of the study’s participants. Gestures that had once seemed insignificant—the offer of a pencil, a pat on the shoulder, a genuine smile—were now, in

their absence, understood to be indispensable in establishing relations of trust and care that are perceived to be central for learning in schools. A shift in ESOL teachers' connection to their students occurred. Teachers could no longer rely on the connection and reciprocity that caring for another entails. They could no longer *care for* their students; they could only *care about* their students from afar (Noddings, 2013). In the end, this type of relation proved to be deeply unsatisfying for them and led to profound shifts in how they understood their students and their work life. These changes also deeply impacted ESOL teachers' sense of self. A concept hinted at in the previous chapter and explicated further here, teachers' professional identities rely on a culturally mediated construction of the self through which they interpret their relationships with CLiM students as primarily beneficial and themselves as consequential agents working to do good in the lives of marginalized students. Disruptions to the possible ways of relating to others that were induced by the pandemic shook the foundations of this self-conceived identity.

Self and Identity as Culturally Mediated Constructs

Issues of self and identity have to do with how I, as an individual person, understand and perceive myself. They are fundamentally about how one *defines* oneself to oneself (Olson, 2019). In the fields of anthropology and cultural psychology, the evolution of the self and of identity is understood to be the result of social and cultural processes. The self is socially situated (Markus & Kitayama, 2010), so our subjectivity develops through exposure to and participation in the social and cultural norms of our environment (Heine, 2007; Markus & Kitayama, 2010; Ortner, 2006). Enculturation, therefore, plays a very large role in shaping one's values, beliefs, and sense of self, which

suggests that there are cultural norms for how the self and identity are conceived and structured. Such norms would include issues such as how one defines success, how one might measure one's sense of efficacy in a chosen profession, how one conceives of a sense of purpose, and the relative importance placed on individual performance versus group cohesion. A culturally mediated conception of self shapes discourse and the ways in which we discuss ourselves and our identity (Hoffman, 1996; Ruskin & Varenne, 1983) and can, thus, be analyzed via speech and writing about experiences that individuals deem to be of personal importance. The extent to which culture mediates the formation of the self is debated as is the level of agency an individual truly has to impact her environs (Ortner, 2006; Zahavi, 2022), but the influence of culture in constituting the self and identity is widely recognized.

Much research on the links between self and culture, particularly in the field of cultural psychology, has relied on comparative studies between middle-class North American and East Asian contexts (Heine, 2007; Markus & Kitayama, 2010), resulting in a fairly robust characterization of tendencies for self-conception in each context in this field. Germane to this research study is, of course, the North American context, and findings from cultural psychology by and large line up with those from anthropology. It is important to note that these findings indicate cultural patterns in self-conception, not absolute definitions. They are tendencies only; individuals can overlap with or depart from them in any number of ways and to varying degrees. That said, in a typical North American conception of self and identity, individual concerns take precedence over the group. There is a tendency for people to “see their identity as ultimately grounded in their individual qualities” (Heine, 2007, p. 727), resulting in a focus on the distinctiveness of

individuals. There is a strong need to view oneself in a positive light, so there is often much focus on issues such as self-esteem, self-expression, happiness, and uniqueness; there can also be a drive to achieve and to have a sense of being in control, as well (Heine, 2007; Markus & Kitayama, 2010; Ruskin & Varenne, 1983; Tobin et al., 2009).

These individualistic notions of identity and self are reinforced and reflected in schools. North American educators tend to promote and actively try to develop high self-esteem among students (Heine, 2007). Even in a preschool setting with very young children, the cultural mediation of the developing self is at work. For example, Tobin et al. (2009) find that creating a sense of individual importance and allowing self-expression and choice are implicit goals in the U.S. preschool classroom. Finally, as Hoffman (1996) notes, multicultural education in the US, a discipline supposedly attuned to the nuances of cultural difference, “often simply assume[s] the universality of what are, in fact, very individualistic, Western-centric models of self,” a finding that is particularly important for the current study.

Participants’ construction of their professional identity. In thinking about how the participants in this study conceive of their professional identities as ESOL teachers, there are many similarities to the above discussion of the North American conception of self and identity. Tacitly suggested in chapters five and six and explored in the current chapter, much of how they discuss their role and what they believe to be important about that role is tied up with notions of a positive self-view, uniqueness, self-expression, prioritizing the individual, and promoting the uptake of these attributes by their students. They seem to be wrapped up in the cultural patterns outlined in the preceding section. Revisiting a number of examples discussed in previous chapters should suffice to

demonstrate that the teacher-participants in this study conceive of their professional identity in individualistic terms that include a sense of positive self-regard.

Ms. Farmer talks about liking and identifying with “those crazy kids” who she says other teachers don’t want on their roster. She values uniqueness and holds that as part of her teacher identity. She is the teacher that likes students who are different, the ones who annoy other teachers. Implied is that her identification with students who are rejected by other teachers helps to build her own positive self-view: she feels she is connecting with those whom others reject.

In her teaching, Ms. Tanner is “really interested in students expressing their voice.” As mentioned in chapter five, she even has designed an instructional unit with that title: *Finding My Voice*. The importance of self-expression is clear in this language, as is the desire for students to take up this task. It also suggests that value is placed on the uniqueness and individuality of each student. (Ms. Miller’s journaling assignment function in a similar manner. She states its purpose as allowing students to express “who they are.”) Ms. Tanner also repeatedly discusses her teaching role as one of “empowerment” for students. Both terms—voice and empowerment—carry a strong individualist outlook and allow Ms. Tanner to view herself positively because the ways in which she is teaching students align with her own values.

The school moms (Ms. Baker, Ms. Potter, and Ms. Shoemaker) define their teaching role, at least in part, through an allusion to family. When they use this term, it is in the context of advocacy, support, and protection. Viewing their role in this way, these teachers are able to feel good about themselves because they feel they are standing up for students who might not have another advocate within the school.

Ms. Weaver sees her role as an ESOL teacher as going far beyond the classroom walls. She alerts students of sports try-outs. She listens to their problems. She helps them find jobs and even, once, an apartment. She has attended a therapy session at the request of a student. She has even invited a student to live in her home for a number of months in order to avoid that student transferring schools in the final months of her senior year when her parents moved. All that she does for her students beyond teaching them English provides her with a healthy sense of self-regard.

Even Mr. Cabrera, who is not North American, encourages his students to be open to a more individualist way of thinking. I would characterize Mr. Cabrera's conception of self as more communal than that of the other teachers. His interviews are imbued with a very humanistic view of teaching and relating to others. He has a general concern for the well-being of everyone, not only students but also their families and his colleagues, and speaks of all of these groups in a way that suggests a sense of with-ness and togetherness. Even so, he discusses his own acculturation as needing to "adapt" to the American system and move toward a more individualist mindset, which he feels he did over a couple of years, and he encourages his students to do the same. He explains the individualistic nature of the American education system to his students and places the responsibility for change on them, saying, "Hey guys, this [culture] is completely different. And the idea is that we need to adapt."

To be clear, I am not suggesting that the actions taken by these teachers are in any way negative, harmful, or unappreciated by their students. It is quite possible that CLiM students are thankful and gratified for all that their teachers do for them both in and out of the classroom. The evidence of connection that these teachers forge with many of their

students indeed suggests this is the case. My purpose here is simply to point out that the teacher-participants of this study adhere to a cultural pattern of selfhood, which influences how they relate to students. This pattern is highly individualistic and involves a fair amount of self-esteem. It is evident both in how these ESOL teachers view themselves and in the ways they interact with their students. These teachers entered the COVID-19 pandemic with this sense of professional identity.

The Effects of COVID-19 on Teaching and Teachers: What the Early Literature Says

In early spring 2020, alarm grew about the spread of the coronavirus that causes COVID-19. Starting in March, schools across the country and around the world were shut down, first temporarily then long term (Kamenetz, 2022). In places with the technological capacity, schools transitioned to online formats. In Virginia, an initial two-week closure of all schools in the state was announced by the Governor on March 13; on March 23 the Governor issued an executive order closing all K-12 schools in the state and moving instruction online for the remainder of the school year.⁶ Within weeks or even days, often with little preparation or training, teachers were expected to learn how to use new online platforms, transition their classes fully online, and deliver instruction to their students virtually, all while feeling the same uncertainty, anxiety, and fear brought on by the pandemic as everyone else (Kamenetz, 2022). All of the participants in this study experienced this abrupt transition to online teaching formats.

⁶ News releases about executive orders issued by the Governor of Virginia were retrieved on November 10, 2021 from the following websites: <https://www.governor.virginia.gov/newsroom/all-releases/2020/march/headline-854442-en.html>; <https://www.governor.virginia.gov/newsroom/all-releases/2020/march/headline-855292-en.html>

Needless to say, the nature of teaching changed quickly and drastically. Teachers faced increased demands on their time and worked longer hours as they learned new technologies and figured out how to best deliver instruction through this novel medium (Chrisler, 2021, Gicheva, 2022, Jones & Kessler, 2020). They also deeply felt the absence of collegial support and collaboration that often occurs informally in schools, particularly on occasions when new systems are implemented and must be learned by all. For many teachers, what had always felt like a communal profession became one that was lonely and isolating (Spicksley et al., 2021). Just as connections with colleagues faltered, so too did connections with students. Teachers found engaging students in online learning to be a struggle (Conner et al., 2022), as the virtual schooling environment proved to be quite alienating to students and teachers alike (Chrisler, 2021). Teacher-student relationships suffered as interaction and connection were impeded by virtual learning platforms, particularly for populations without access to high quality internet infrastructure. Teachers were merely able to attempt to care for their students, as the full interaction and relation required for true care were impossible. The pandemic essentially diminished the relational rewards of teaching and replaced them with stress, anxiety about student well-being, and increased demands on teachers' time and effort (Jones & Kessler, 2020).

These changes have had a profound impact on teachers' mental states. A number of studies have directly linked a decline in the mental health and well-being of teachers to the COVID-19 pandemic (Gutentag & Asterhan, 2022; Kim et al., 2022). In addition to anxiety about contracting the disease felt by many in the population at large, teachers were also anxious about increased workload demands, inadequate administrative support,

the competing demands of work and family, and communicating with parents, some of whom had begun to confront or criticize them about school-related decisions over which they had no control (Chrisler, 2021; Gutentag & Asterhan, 2022; Kim et al., 2022; Pressley, 2021). All of these stressors have led to higher reports of teacher burnout than existed before the pandemic (Gutentag & Asterhan, 2022). The anxiety, stress, and altered nature of the profession that resulted from COVID-19 also impacted teachers' sense of their professional identity. Many teachers lost their sense of purpose and could no longer see themselves making a tangible impact on students' lives. Instead, they felt inadequate and unsure of how to support their students in such unprecedented times (Jones & Kessler, 2020).

Fear for the Other and Moral Distress

As noted above, scholars have begun documenting how the pandemic has affected teachers both psychologically and emotionally. These important first steps in our understanding of the disruption caused to education and schooling by this catastrophic global event open the door for and encourage deeper and more nuanced explorations of the pandemic's effect on the human experience. In making sense of participants' narratives regarding how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted their relations with CLiM students and their own sense of themselves as ESOL teachers, I rely on two concepts: *fear for the other* and *moral distress*. A brief treatment of each concept follows.

Fear for the other. In a recent paper, Yan and Slattery (2021) use the fear felt by students and teachers in the pandemic as a jumping off point to analyze Emmanuel Levinas' treatment of a particular type of fear. In this state of fear, one is afraid, not for oneself, but for another with whom one is in relation. The authors refer to this type of

fear as “fear for the other.” In contrast to standard conceptions of fear as stemming from a desire for self-preservation or concern for one’s own well-being, fear for the other is conceived as pro-social and is wrapped up in the love or affection one feels for another person. It transcends the ego and places concern for the other at the center of one’s attention (Yan & Slattery, 2021).

Fear for the other is an ethical state. It stems not from mere anxiety, but from the responsibility felt for another person with whom one is in relation. Because of the bonds of care and responsibility, one feels afraid for that person because of what may befall her. Simply put, “Fear for the other is the moment where an individual cares for other people’s welfare in a direct, simple, immediate, overwhelming way” (p. 90). This type of fear reveals our capacity to be profoundly touched by our relationships with others. Importantly for the current analysis, Yan and Slattery (2021) believe fear for the other to be a common ethical experience that routinely goes unacknowledged or even unnoticed in schools. As will be argued below, the participants in this study feared for their students, worrying about their well-being and agonizing over the potential long-term negative effects the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic would have on them and their futures.

Moral distress. Moral distress is a concept that originated in the field of nursing ethics and was first introduced by Jameton in 1984. Contrasting this idea with the concepts of moral uncertainty and moral dilemma, he defines moral distress as a particular feeling that comes to be, “when one knows the right thing to do, but institutional constraints make it nearly impossible to pursue the right course of action” (p.

6). Since its introduction, the concept has been picked up and expanded upon by countless scholars, largely in the field of nursing ethics and the wider healthcare sphere.

In situations of moral distress, the difficulty being faced is not actually moral or ethical in nature because the ethical path forward has already been identified. The difficulty is actually social or institutional because there is a barrier or constraint preventing ethical action, which has been created by another person or an organization (Epstein & Delgado, 2010; Schluter et al., 2008; Thomas & McCullough, 2015). These constraints may either be internal to the person experiencing distress, such as a fear of being fired, or external, such as administrative regulations (Epstein & Delgado, 2010; Walsh, 2018). Relieving the distress is, therefore, contingent on somehow attempting to overcome or get around the constraints placed on ethical behavior. Jameton (2013), argues that moral distress is overcome only by speaking up about what one believes to be the right and ethical course of action.

Moral distress has a strong affective dimension and is often felt most acutely by those who perform emotional labor in caring for others (Jameton, 2013). This may be because it threatens one's moral integrity. Being forced or coerced to act in a manner inconsistent with deeply held values and beliefs can cause a strong emotional reaction. As a result, feelings of powerlessness, frustration, and anger often grow out of experiences of moral distress (Epstein & Delgado, 2010). Importantly, these experiences can be conceived of in gradations. Challenges to one's moral sensibilities may weaken one's ability to act in a way that maintains moral integrity; more intense threats may undermine one's ability to do so; and violations may destroy that ability completely (Thomas & McCullough, 2015), resulting in varied intensities of emotional reaction.

Walsh (2018) interprets moral distress through the lens of care ethics. The concept, he argues, can be “understood as a *psychological product of an agent’s knowledge that she is unable to live up to one of her caring commitments*” (p. 620, italics in original). Walsh (2018) argues that moral distress often arises in the context of a caring relationship when a carer realizes she has been prevented from meeting the needs of a cared-for, resulting in a relationship that has become at least partially fractured. He calls for fields beyond nursing and healthcare to take up the concept of moral distress, suggesting that linking the concept to care ethics could be quite useful in doing so. He specifically mentions education as a potential field in which moral distress might be applied due to the centrality of caring relationships in this realm. (Walsh, 2018). I take up this call with the following analysis. I shall argue that the pandemic itself, rather than institutional regulations, acted as an insurmountable barrier to teachers’ sense of ethical practice because it prevented them from relating to students in familiar ways that conveyed care and concern and from teaching in ways that they knew to be most effective. This situation led to the experience of moral distress and the breakdown of teachers’ sense of self and professional identity. To my knowledge, this analysis is the first to take up Jameton’s (1984) concept in the field of education.

COVID-Induced Change in Educational Spaces That Impacted Relationship Development

I conducted interviews with participants in November 2020 through January 2021. By that time, many schools in Virginia had begun to open back up, at least partially, as students officially designated as ELs receiving special education services were granted special status by the state to have access to in-person instruction if their

parents or guardians desired it (Virginia Department of Education, 2020). The implementation of that guidance was not uniform and varied by school division across the state. At the time they were interviewed, Ms. Miller, Ms. Potter, and Ms. Weaver were still completely virtual and teaching solely via online platforms. Ms. Baker and Ms. Farmer were teaching in a hybrid set-up, in which students were rotating between in-person and virtual learning, so that classrooms were only half-populated to allow for social distancing. Mr. Cabrera, Ms. Shoemaker, and Ms. Tanner were teaching full-time in person with more than half of their students, while still expected to teach other students remotely or in a hybrid format. During this period, masks were required for anyone to participate in school in-person.

When asked to compare their pandemic experiences interacting with and relating to their CLiM students to the pre-COVID era, teachers described stark differences regardless of their instructional medium—online, hybrid, or in-person. Their explanations reveal that two of the four factors central to the development of cross-cultural relationships, outlined in chapter five, were severely impeded by the pandemic. Due to the constraints of pandemic teaching protocols, both the time teachers spent with their students and some caring teacher actions were sharply curtailed. In addition, participants described feeling a distinct lack of connection with students that they directly tied to the ways in which our society's attempt to slow the spread of COVID-19 changed modes of interaction and instruction. While not all participants experienced the disruption caused by the pandemic in the same way, all reported a perception that it did cause their relationships with CLiM students to suffer.

Time. In official pandemic guidance, the State of Virginia suggested that school divisions reserve one day per week for teachers to hold office hours, communicate individually with students and families, and to plan instruction for new and unfamiliar technological platforms (Virginia Department of Education, 2020). All participants worked in school divisions that followed this guidance. They saw their instructional time with students reduced from five to four days per week. Right off the bat, they were working with students for at least 20% less time. Ms. Shoemaker noted that her division shortened the school day by one hour, further lessening her time with students.

For teachers with a hybrid schedule, time with students was cut even more drastically. For example, students of both Ms. Baker and Ms. Farmer attended school only two days per week, either on a schedule of Monday/Thursday or Tuesday/Friday. On the days when one cohort of students was not in school, these teachers were working in person with the other cohort, so they could not interact online. All they could do was assign work for students to complete independently on days they remained at home. As a result, Ms. Baker states, “I think that [the connection between myself and the students] definitely is not as strong. I think that's really due to the two days a week. I mean, I'm seeing them only 40% of the time.” She directly attributes a sense of diminished connection with her students to the significantly truncated class time she has with them.

Time with students was also highly fragmented for those on a hybrid schedule. According to the schedule followed by Ms. Baker and Ms. Farmer, there were two-day or three-day gaps between each class meeting. Ms. Shoemaker’s school divided class meetings by week. She explains,

Some students only come B week. And most of the students, if they don't come both weeks, only come A week. . . . They leave on Thursday at two o'clock and

then we don't see them again for 10 days until they come back. That's a lot of time lost that we don't see the students.

In these schedules with regular gaps, building or even maintaining relationships with students was difficult. Ms. Baker, interviewed in December, described her relationships with students she had not taught previously as “September relationships,” meaning that they had not progressed beyond highly formal interactions focused around the course subject matter. By December, she explains, students typically feel free enough with her to goof around, laugh, and ask her questions about her life outside school. None of that was happening, and it was very noticeable to her. Teachers perceived a lack of momentum or sense of continuity in their relationships with students, and they felt personal connections were not being forged.

Caring teacher actions. As outlined in chapter five, caring teacher actions are the ways in which teachers interact and communicate with their students that build rapport and connection. Pandemic protocols of social distancing and masking as well as the constraints of online teaching interrupted and prevented teachers from carrying out a number of these types of actions, hampering their ability to bond with students.

Offering small gestures of affirmation. Many small gestures of affirmation, meant to be supportive and kind, are dependent on physical proximity to help build rapport and trust. In the era of COVID-19, such gestures were no longer possible. Smiles could not be seen behind masks. Touching students was forbidden—no fist bumps, no pats on the back, no high-fives, no hugs. Social distancing requirements prevented teachers from sitting, kneeling, or crouching down next to students to provide help. Quickly offering a pencil or a pen was no longer possible, as one had to stop to use hand sanitizer and to clean the object with a disinfectant wipe. And forget about providing

snacks, a sure-fire way to build rapport pre-COVID, particularly with students who might be food insecure at home. The small, meaningful ways of forging connections and building trust that were a large part of teachers' relationship building and maintenance repertoire were simply taken away by pandemic protocols, with nothing left to replace them, and teachers took notice of their absence.

Virtual spaces precluded the possibility of connecting with students via these types of small gestures, as well, as they require the teacher and the student to be in the same physical space. One simply can't pat someone on the back or offer a pencil through a computer screen. Additionally, body language that might indicate a welcoming and friendly demeanor on the part of the teacher is often lost onscreen because the computer camera only captures the head, neck, and shoulders. Ms. Potter notes what was lost in the following way,

Even patting somebody on the shoulder, like, 'Hey, great job. I like that.' Or the handwritten, I like to write notes or I draw pictures on their work. That's not happening. I get to type a comment, but that's not the same.

Virtual spaces simply did not fare any better than physical spaces in allowing teachers to establish and build a rapport with their students via small everyday gestures of togetherness.

Creating opportunities for students to explore their identities and immigrant journeys in coursework. A trusting classroom environment is thought to be necessary for students, particularly those who are marginalized in some way, to feel comfortable exploring their identities. Teachers want their students to feel supported and be free to express themselves. The pandemic environment severely impeded teachers' ability to foster such an environment.

As explained in chapter five, Mr. Cabrera strove for his classroom to be a place where students could “create an identity,” “express their personalities,” and “express their human dimension.” Incorporating student identity development and reflection into his practice is a key aspect of his pedagogical approach. He found that masking requirements made this work much more difficult. Masks often muffled speech, and when students were asked to repeat themselves, they interpreted that request as suggesting they had said something wrong. As a result, they would stop participating. Masks also prevented students from seeing the teacher’s face and reading their supportive facial cues. According to Ms. Baker, “they say something and they're not sure how you took it because they can't see your facial expression. So, it's safer in their mind to not say anything.” Instead of a trusting atmosphere, teacher felt that masking encouraged an atmosphere of trepidation.

Participants with long-used meaningful projects that allowed students to explore their identities and process their experiences discussed how the medium of online instruction was not conducive to the type of interactions required for such projects’ success. Ms. Potter, who has incorporated a narrative writing assignment into her work with her CLiM students for years, states, “to do these narratives online is hard, I think, because it's such a personal thing to write your story. And even when you're in a breakout room, there's still this separation, which I think makes it tough.” Ms. Tanner delayed her major writing projects and was unsure if she would even move forward with them at all. She wasn’t sure she would have enough time for students to complete the projects and get something out them, both because of the reduced instructional week and because the pace of teaching is slowed on a virtual platform. She explains,

It's too hard in Zoom. One kid can suck me in the entire time. Whereas if I was in the class and that kid's really struggling, I can pop over and be like, 'Okay, just work on this one sentence.' And then I would go help a whole bunch of other people, and then I could come back. But now, not only are they struggling maybe to write, but maybe they're also struggling with technology. So, nothing's fast. I can't just help them and then go help somebody else.

Virtual instruction changed the modes of interaction with students so much that teachers began to question how they might complete in-depth projects or if doing so was even possible. When abandoned or completed without the same depth, students lost what teachers believed to be an important opportunity to reflect on who they are and what they've experienced. This loss impeded relationship development, as it meant students also lost the experience of witnessing their teachers value and validate them as whole people whose stories are important.

Being involved outside of the classroom. While teachers were still able and willing to help students with work from other classes, most other avenues to be involved with students and share a part of their lives outside the classroom completely disappeared. There were no longer any school sporting events to attend. There were no musical or theater performances. Clubs were not allowed to meet. Family events like quinceañeras to which teachers might have been invited were cancelled or severely cut back to very close contacts. Opportunities to support students in their personal endeavors simply dried up, removing another way in which teachers felt they were able to build rapport and connection with students.

Yet teachers still strove to connect. During the pandemic, Ms. Baker, Ms. Potter, and Ms. Tanner conducted socially distanced home visits to drop off work and check in on students. Ms. Weaver did the same in order to walk students through the online learning platform so that they could access assignments and sign in to virtual class

meetings. Mr. Cabrera provided families with needed supplies and groceries, dropping them off on doorsteps and sending texts to alert families to go outside to find an offering. While participants report that these encounters were very much appreciated, they also believe such meetings did not have the same impact on relationship development. Interpersonal contact was often minimal, and many of these visits were connected to the academic world, rather than allowing teacher and student to connect in ways that are more personal, which teachers identified as important for relationship-building.

Lack of connection. In addition to disrupting specific factors that support teacher-student relationship development, pandemic protocols led the teachers in this study to feel a general lack of connection with their students. Even though remote learning did offer some opportunities for teachers to catch glimpses of the home lives of their students and to bond over that, such as when Ms. Miller learned her student had just been making pupusas for a younger sibling and asked to be taught to make that dish, these instances were few and far between. Remote instruction, masking, and social distancing were all largely seen as separating teachers and students from each other. Relationship development and maintenance were perceived to suffer as a result.

In virtual classrooms, participants reported that students often did not turn on their cameras or their microphones, leaving teachers looking at and attempting to communicate with a screen filled mostly with black boxes. Even though understanding of the potential reasons why students would make such a choice—wanting to keep their living situation private or trying minimize noisy distractions from others in the household, for example—teachers felt this reality distanced them greatly from students. Ms. Miller lamented, “I don't even know who some of those kids are because their screens are blank. I don't have

even the knowledge, some of them, of who exactly they are, because I can't see them.” Ms. Farmer noted that “it’s, in general, hard to make the connections when you are not face-to-face,” while Ms. Potter mused, “You know, trying to get trust through a computer screen is tough.” Teachers felt virtual instruction distanced them from their students, not only physically but on a personal level well. This distance could be vast enough to make teachers feel as if they didn’t know their own students.

Technology was distancing for Ms. Tanner even for students she was teaching in person. Her school expected her to simultaneously teach remote students together with those who were coming in person. She broadcast a Zoom meeting on a screen to allow all of the students to see each other. But when addressing the whole class, her in-person students would not look at or engage with her directly; they would watch her on the screen. She explains, “when I’m talking to everybody, I’m now talking on the screen. And they’re looking at me [Ms. Tanner points upward, indicating the screen]. They’re not looking at *me* [Ms. Tanner points to herself], they’re looking at me up on the screen.” Even when in the same physical space with some students, the virtual instructional technology had the effect of disconnecting students and teachers. Students engaged with the screen and not with the teacher.

For Ms. Weaver, whose school division uses a pull-out model of ESOL instruction, remote instruction could be particularly separating and isolating. Many of her students wouldn’t respond to her attempts to get in touch. She describes her experience in the following way,

the whole time, what I’m doing is, I’m fishing. I’m fishing. Who will answer me today? . . . That’s what the job is now. . . . I’ve been at work from 8:00 to 3:00. What did I get done? 'Cause some days, I haven't Zoomed with anybody, haven't

connected with anybody. Some days. You know, so what did I do all day? I was fishing.

She emailed students. She called. She texted. Some of them simply wouldn't respond to any of her overtures. She used words like "frustrating," "discouraging," and "disheartening" to describe her situation. The fact was that she felt a great deal of disconnection.

Masking and social distancing also led to a sense of separation for those who were teaching students in person. For Ms. Baker, smiling at students is an important way to let them know that she's happy to see them. Masking prevented even that simple way to connect. As Mr. Cabrera puts it, "we are missing something that makes the world a little bit better: seeing people smile. We're missing that, and it's a shame." For Ms. Farmer, social distancing has changed her practice in the classroom. The requirement to stay six feet away from others prevents hugs, high-fives, and other ways of connecting with students physically. She also circulates among students less and spends less time helping them to prevent reaching the 15-minute threshold considered to increase the risk of viral transmission. She states:

Because I look at, okay, if they come to me in three days and they ask, "In the course of the class, was I around the student for 15 minutes," if I'm constantly bouncing. . . [and] moving on, and I'm not staying there, I'm probably not reaching that 15 minute guideline that they have. Where in the past I might have sat side by side with the student for five plus minutes to help them get through something, or I'd pull together a small group to do it. That's not happening this year.

Even while teaching in person, participants felt their ability to relate to students and attempt to connect with them to be impoverished. Masks covered facial expressions and social distancing requirements discouraged connection.

The result: relational separation. All of these changes in educational spaces had the effect of being alienating and dehumanizing. They reduced the ability of teachers and students to connect with one another. They all had the effect of separation. According to Ms. Potter, in these physical and virtual spaces dominated by disconnection, “there's a part of your personality that's not available.” Teachers were simply not able to reach out to students, attempt to connect, or forge relationships. In being prevented from reaching out in familiar ways perceived to be meaningful, it was as if a very part of themselves was missing, as if the pandemic caused their very sense of self to become fragmented, an idea explored in subsequent sections.

Ms. Baker sees this lack of connection as quite problematic, both relationally and pedagogically:

This change, it's really made me see how important the relationship is and the trust that I can bring you back [from giving up]. . . . Without that relationship, they're not going to come to me for academic help, and it just literally falls apart at the seams.

Some teachers felt this change quite deeply. Pre-pandemic, Ms. Miller thrived on close contact with her students, often sitting next to them or crouching down beside them.

When she was forced to teach virtually, she reports that most students did not turn on their camera. Her epigraph says the rest: “not being able to even see their face or their expressions or their body language. I cried for the first month because I was like, ‘I don't even know, is anyone even there? Is anyone listening?’” Despite the desire to connect with students and build supportive relationships, despite repeated and earnest attempts to connect within the constraints of pandemic protocols and online instruction, teachers were unable to do so. The pandemic created a relational chasm that teachers, despite their best efforts, were unable to bridge. Two of the four aspects of cross-cultural relationship

building on which they had relied to forge connections with their students had essentially been taken out by the pandemic. This reality had profound effects on how teachers thought about both their students and about their profession, as well as about themselves and their identities as ESOL teachers.

Thinking About Students: Shifting Goals and Fear for the Other

Most participants described a profound shift in their goals for students pre-COVID and in the midst of the pandemic. Pre-COVID goals were filled with optimism and hope for what students could accomplish and what they might become in their adopted society. They focused on promise and potential. These goals also supported teachers' sense of their professional identity. They play into teachers' self-regard as doing good for others. After COVID hit, these goals devolved into simply making it through, into survival, and with that shift, teachers' sense of self devolved as well. They could no longer view themselves in the same positive light that they had prior to the pandemic because their sense of doing good for and being good people to their students was disrupted. The following table compiles participants' expressions of pre-COVID and pandemic era goals for their students (See Table 7.1). Ms. Tanner is the only participant not represented in this table. She was the first participant interviewed, and the topic of goals did not surface. It was raised with a subsequent participant and the contrast was so striking, I made sure to discuss this topic with all other participants.

Table 7.1: Teachers' Pre-COVID and Pandemic Era Goals for CLiM Students

	Pre-COVID goals	Pandemic era goals
Anne Baker	“I’d love for them to pass my class, but as a human, I just want them to grow in confidence. . . . And grow in their own self-esteem.”	“Oh, that goal has changed so much. I just want them to survive. . . . At this point I just want them to survive and come out on the other side healthy. Because these kids, it’s like watching zombies. . . . I really worry about their mental and emotional well-being.”
Bernardo Cabrera	“Pre-COVID, my goal was [for] students to learn English, to develop their skills, to be successful in their classes.”	“My main goal is their well-being, that they are okay. That their attitude, it’s up. That they feel good because we are going through a very hard moment.”
Eve Farmer	“It’s always about, you know, do you have a basic understanding of science? But more than that, are you willing to ask for help?”	“This year, as much as I want them to ask for help, it’s also I want them to survive. . . . Tell us what’s going on, so we can help and so that you can survive.”
Lilly Miller	“I just want them to be confident in themselves. . . . I mean academics is important, but just being who they are is so much more important, too. And believing in themselves and knowing where they come from and being proud of that.”	“Now I feel like we’re just surviving. . . . I wouldn’t say it’s confidence just because I feel like we’re just trying to make it through.”
Olivia Potter	“Graduate. Walk across the stage, and I always used to use that as bait, you know? Like, ‘I can’t wait to see you guys walking across that stage. I’m going to be there.’”	“To not drop out. Stay with us, stay with us. . . . I cannot say this to them, but I don’t want them to disappear. I don’t want that to happen. And so, I don’t want them to drop out. I want them to hang in there. . . . I don’t want to lose them. I just don’t want to lose them. I don’t want them to be underground.”

Rachel Shoemaker “...for them to believe in their own ability to learn and to set goals and achieve them.” “I don’t want any of these students to drop out.”

Silvia Tanner — —

Vicky Weaver “I wanted them to be confident that they could communicate, and I wanted them to look at opportunities beyond high school. . . . Enough knowledge and a degree that would open some doors, and enough knowledge to kind of be able to explore to different things on their own.” —

[Asked on two different occasions to describe her pandemic era goal for her students, Ms. Weaver wasn’t able to do so. She mostly just questioned whether many of her students would be able to graduate. My interpretation of her responses is that her pre-COVID goal had been lost, but she had not been able to replace it with anything, which lead to an existential floundering in terms of her sense of professional identity.]

Prior to the pandemic, in more normal times, these ESOL teachers saw potential in their students. They wanted these young people to develop into confident, successful individuals able to navigate the new culture in which they found themselves. They spoke of students developing confidence, believing in themselves, finding academic success, graduating, achieving goals, and being prepared to navigate their futures. These goals reveal a great deal about how these teachers perceived their professional role before the pandemic hit in March 2020, as well as how they regarded themselves to be successful in this role. The goals are split between two aspects of the individualist self. Some revolve around the notions of developing confidence and self-esteem and use those very words to do so. Others focus on achievement, like graduating or being successful in classes, and control, such as asking for help. In striving for these goals with students, teachers were, thus, aiming to cultivate in their students a more individualistic, American attitude. Since they, themselves, hold this attitude and conception of the self, they find a sense of purpose and feel as if they are being good teachers in assimilating students into an American identity that promotes both the individual and a positive self-regard. They reaffirm themselves and their identities at the same time that they work to change their students' outlook. None of this happens consciously. As I argue in chapter six, this is an inadvertent assimilation. The participants might even contest that they are performing an assimilative act because the individualistic American cultural self feels, and indeed *is*, so natural for them.⁷

⁷ I do not mean to suggest that these teachers are harming their students by tacitly working to inculcate in them an American identity. They are simply participating in one of the long-held purposes of schooling in the US: assimilation (Spring, 2008). They are well-meaning people who, I believe, genuinely care about their students and who want the best for them. The students themselves seem to see this genuine affection and, by the

The pandemic disrupts this cycle. Teachers' stated goals for students during COVID-19 become much bleaker. Simply staying in school, surviving, and making it through to the other side are the most they can imagine for their students. Hope disappears, and in its place rises anxiety and fear surrounding what might happen to these students if they are unable to stay connected to their school and their education. In the place of achievement and control, teachers simply want students to avoid failure, to not drop out. In the place of confidence and self-esteem, traits that teachers take to signal that students are thriving based on their individualistic sense of identity, survival becomes the goal. When COVID-19 shuts down society, instilling an American conception of self and identity seems too far out of reach. This change severely disrupts teachers' own self-conception, as well.

The responsibility and affection the teachers feel toward their students, as stewards of their learning and personal growth, results in substantial fear for them in terms of how the changes of the pandemic might affect them and their futures (Yan & Slattery, 2021). Teachers fear for their students' survival, a term independently used by three separate participants. This concept can be interpreted in many ways. They fear the effects of isolation and want their students to maintain their mental and emotional well-being—mental survival. They fear the virus and the vast amount of death and severe illness it has caused; they hope their students will not become its victims—physical survival. They fear that students may give up on their education, and they want them to

account we get from the teachers, appreciate and reciprocate it. Assimilation, at least a partial assimilation, may even be inevitable for one who doesn't simply sojourn in a new culture, but moves to it and lives there permanently. ESOL teachers' ability to be mindful of difference in their care for CLiM students may actually ease this process for them and improve their experience, leading to the forging of strong relationships.

stay in the game, to not drop out, to remain students—educational survival. Teachers likely felt all fear for their students in all of these permutations.

Feeling such fear reveals an intense relational drive in the participants' work with their students. The deep concern held for another can envelop a teacher's attention, centering the other over the self, as when the participants express concerns for their students' futures. Attending to the other in this way is an indication that the participants understand their relationships with students to be imbued with care. It is reminiscent of Noddings' (2013) notion of "motivational displacement," in which the motivation for action of one who cares for another shifts from an outcome focused on the self to an outcome focused on the other. For Noddings, motivational displacement is an essential component of a caring relation. True care must center the other. In response to the pandemic, the fear teachers feel for their students can be understood as a manifestation of care. While taking whatever action possible to attempt to meet students' needs, they also recognize that much of what their students face during COVID-19 is beyond what they can attempt to address.

In feeling fear for their students, teachers are not driven by pedagogy nor job satisfaction nor monetary compensation. They are driven by relation. These teachers truly care for their students and want the best for them. With the pandemic both changing the rules of the education game and creating barriers to meaningful action on behalf of others, they are left with a deep concern—a fear—for their students' well-being and futures. Yet this fear also harbors a personal fear of the dissolution of the self. Who will ESOL teachers be if their students don't survive? What will they become without a purpose?

Thinking About the Profession: Changing Demands, Absent Rewards, and Moral Distress

At the same time that the hopes held for students were becoming vastly diminished and fears were mounting in their place, teachers' daily experience of their profession drastically changed. Their methods of instruction required modification. Projects and activities needed to be adapted to new media or abandoned. The ways in which they related to and interacted with their students completely shifted. Instructional schedules were revised, and the amount of time spent with students diminished substantially. In short, their professional lives were completely upended.

These changes inevitably meant an increased workload (Gicheva, 2022), as teachers needed to transition their work to a new medium. The intensity of this workload is described vividly by Ms. Potter, a veteran teacher in her 35th year in the profession at the time of her interviews.

I've never, ever worked so hard in all my life to plan lessons. Ever. I've never given so much time to trying to figure out how to present a lesson, a topic, because it's just, it's like trying to unprogram 30 years of thinking. . . . [To] unthink 30 years of practice that you've honed [to fit] into a new medium, and a new medium that schools do not invest in mightily. So, the technology often sucks. So even when you feel like you have something and you're going to go about it in a really good way, and it's gonna be cool, you know, the computers crash.

She goes on to describe a day in which the videoconferencing software, Zoom, didn't work nationwide with the online instructional platform that her school happened to use. It is clear from her words how stressful the transition to online instruction was for teachers. They often were prevented from teaching in ways they knew to be effective, particularly when technology itself caused problems. As discussed above, projects needed to be

adjusted for online learning, often in ways that were less effective, or abandoned altogether. Teachers' attitudes in these instances were of resignation.

The immense efforts put into trying to maintain instructional standards and quality under very different instructional conditions could not be maintained indefinitely. Eventually the obstacles to teaching erected by COVID-19 led to attitude shifts about the nature of the job during the pandemic. Ms. Baker mused, "It just kind of keeps going and spiraling out of control, so I almost feel like school isn't school. School is just hang on." For Ms. Tanner, her conception of her responsibilities to her students shifted. She compares what she did with students pre-COVID to what she was able to do during the pandemic:

The other thing that's missing is that normally when I'm with them, I'm really able to help them develop their English, their sentence structures, their vocabulary use. And I'm just not able to do that [during the pandemic]. I'm accepting work now that in the past I would have always helped a child correct and ameliorate. . . . They need a lot. They need more than I can give them when they're virtual. I just can't do that. It's too time consuming.

She places limits on what she is able to do for her students, limits that would not exist if she were able to teach everyone fully in person. As a result, she has needed to lower her standards in order to simply keep working. These experiences mirror broader patterns around the country. A staggering 88% of teachers reported that they had covered less material than usual for the spring 2020 semester, and two-thirds were not giving out grades (Kamenetz, 2022). That participants felt their teaching efforts were less effective during the pandemic is not out of the ordinary, but it did have consequences.

For Ms. Weaver, who at the time of our interviews was still only teaching virtually, the disconnection that had grown between her and some of her students made her question her obligations to them and even the value of an education itself. Her

professional identity was being dismantled by the pandemic, as maintaining that identity requires her to interact with students in ways that she no longer can toward goals that she no longer holds. She explains,

Pre-COVID, I'd walk down the hall and find them. . . and so they don't fall off the wagon because I'm there as soon as they start to be falling. But with COVID, you know their phone number; you call; they don't answer. You text; they don't answer. You instant message; they don't answer. You get on WhatsApp and try to get them; they don't answer. You knock on the door; they don't answer. And you do the whole thing again the next week, for the same student, and the next week for the same student, and it's very discouraging. . . . It is frustrating. And I keep telling myself, 'You can't give up on them,' but then you're like, 'I can't help it. I can't get to you. I cannot go find you.' . . . I can't [fully] give you what you need, so why do I keep trying to give you just a little bit? It's just not enough for that student, or for some others. . . . Even Javier. . . . It's disheartening. And that's why I'm at the point where I don't know if he really needs to graduate. I don't know what good it's going to do him. . . . And I would never have said that in non-COVID.

She feels so disheartened, so demoralized by her inability to even get in touch with some of her students that she's ready to throw in the towel. She revisits her moral code of not giving up on a student because the circumstances created by the pandemic make her question it. She doesn't have a way to get through to students who choose not to respond. The silence of the cared-for leaves the caring cycle unfinished (Noddings, 2013; Tronto, 1993), and she is left feeling isolated and as if her efforts don't matter. Every option available to her falls flat, leaving her deeply unsatisfied and feeling as if trying is pointless because the fundamental human reward of teaching—strong healthy relationships between teachers and their students—is missing. This missing part of her work life tears a hole in her professional identity and her sense of who she is as a teacher and in her students' lives. She understands herself to be an ESOL teacher who goes above and beyond for her students, helping them in myriad ways beyond the classroom. Her positive self-regard relies on this part of her job, and the pandemic took it away, causing

her to question if the identity she has harbored and nurtured for so long even existed in a pandemic-affected world.

The stresses and demands of the changed teaching landscape during COVID-19, combined with the fears teachers held for their students, allowed for the development of moral distress. Yet rather than institutional constraints preventing teachers from interacting with and relating to students and providing them with needed guidance and supports, the pandemic itself was the barrier. Teachers were forced to change their pedagogy in ways they could see and feel were subpar. In essence, they had no choice but to engage in poor-quality practice, which made them feel terribly uneasy (Schluter et al., 2008). They felt powerless, frustrated, and angry at their situation, with some even questioning what had been deeply held values (Epstein & Delgado, 2010), suggesting a crisis of identity brought on by the conditions of the pandemic. And perhaps most difficult, the feeling of distress caused by the pandemic found no relief. In a situation of moral distress caused by people or by institutional rules, one can attempt to ease the burden by confronting decision makers and advocating for what one believes is right (Jameton, 2013). The pandemic, though, was not able to be confronted, only endured. This situation took a deep toll on teachers' mental states.

On top of the professional compromises the pandemic forced teachers to make, the relational rewards of teaching were also severely curtailed during the pandemic, deepening the moral distress felt by teachers. In her exploration of the anthropological concept of *communitas*, the joy we find in togetherness, Edith Turner (2012) demonstrates how a shared purpose and a common bond—an “us”—are tied to moments of deep satisfaction from being together and even working together. The pandemic

ruptured the “us” that teachers and students forge in their work together, leaving only separation and lack of connection, as outlined above. The connection and relationships that fuel ESOL teachers’ drive to educate their students essentially disappeared.

Without that connection, teachers could not care for their students, and this impacted their understanding of their professional identity as ESOL teachers. The caring impulse central to their relationships with students often went unfulfilled because of a breakdown in one of the central components of care. At times this breakdown was a lack of response from the cared-for. When students didn’t respond to teachers’ attempts to get in touch, didn’t log on to virtual class meetings, or didn’t come to in-person school days, teachers were left feeling abandoned. Their efforts to support their students went unacknowledged, making their efforts to care feel worthless. At other times, the breakdown in care stemmed from the teachers’ inability to competently meet student needs, both pedagogical and emotional. Virtual instruction forced ESOL teachers to change their practice in ways they knew to be subpar. Relational connection over the internet was exceedingly difficult, while, in person, hugging or physically comforting an upset student in any way was forbidden and masks covered up reassuring facial expressions. These pandemic-induced changes caused ESOL teachers to question their efficacy, and made them lose a sense of purpose. In a society in which one’s conception of self is so closely connected with individual achievement and regarding oneself as somehow “good” in a particular role, these teachers were achieving much less with their students, in some cases even achieving nothing. Students learned less and learned more slowly. Many weren’t connecting with their teachers or responding to outreach. Teachers felt as if they were no good at what they do, damaging their self-image. This shift can

largely be traced to the removal of their standard forms of relation, as teachers credit their distress to the inability to perform caring actions and general lack of connection.

Teachers knew that they were failing to meet their obligations to students, yet the aspect of care that remained was their sense of responsibility to do so. Feeling responsible for students and being unable to meet those responsibilities, particularly when ESOL teachers' parallel status positioning with their CLiM students makes them aware of the difficulties and prejudices they face, severely impacted their professional identities. Participants' responsibility to care, coupled with the incomplete care that was the best they were able to provide, compounded their moral distress (Walsh, 2018). Their identities as carers for their students were also disrupted by the pandemic. Cycles of care could not be completed, removing both a sense of accomplishment and of control from their conception of self.

This chapter has outlined disruptions to schooling caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and their effects on relationships between ESOL teachers and CLiM students as well as ESOL teachers' conception of their professional identity. I explained how changes in schooling impacted relational factors between the participants and their students. The amount of time they spent with students was significantly reduced, and they were prevented from performing a number of caring teacher actions. Furthermore, they noted a distinct lack of connection with students. These changes resulted in relational separation that led teachers to fear for their students' well-being and futures and ultimately to experience moral distress at the power of the pandemic to render them unable to effectively address students' learning and emotional needs. This chapter takes up calls to recognize the concepts of fear for the other and moral distress in the field of

education in order to better understand the experiences of actors in this context. In doing so, I hope to illuminate the deep power that teacher-student relationships have in shaping schooling experiences for students and teachers alike.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

Supportive teacher-student relationships are essential in successfully schooling children. This is particularly true for students who hail from foreign cultures and who, in addition to schooling, have the added burdens of navigating a new cultural space, learning a new language, and processing and coming to accept the immense changes that have happened in their lives. In assessing the quality of the educational experience in a particular school or district, the role supportive teacher-student relationships play in the educational process of schools is nearly always overlooked. When these relationships were disrupted by COVID-19, we could see just how vital they are to students' education and learning and to teachers' sense of purpose and identity. Sidorkin (2023) invites "all educators to remove the shackles of a professional discourse that is focused solely on learning outcomes defined mainly by the results of standardized tests of a particular kind" (p. 137). This research has been my attempt to accept this invitation, looking deeply at teachers' experiences of cross-cultural teacher-student relationships to more fully conceptualize their formation and function. It is my hope that the knowledge generated with this study's teacher-participants can be used to improve schooling experiences for minoritized youth.

Limitations

No research study is perfect. No research design is able to generate everything there is to know about a particular topic. It is important, therefore, to outline a study's

limitations in order that its findings be appropriately interpreted. First, generalizability is considered weak in studies with small numbers of participants. The limited number of cases studied cannot be sufficiently representative of a larger population, statistically speaking, to generalize beyond the setting. Findings cannot be widely applied. This is not to say, however, that findings will not have a broader use. Stake (2004) argues for what he calls naturalistic generalization, in which readers decide which findings and interpretations presented by the researcher are relevant for their own context. Additionally, the findings of this in-depth multiple-case ethnography can be taken up by other researchers and examined across wider populations with more participants.

The impossibility for replication is another limitation. This research is highly context dependent. It took place at a specific time (a time markedly different than any other due to the global COVID-19 pandemic) with specific individuals. This combination of factors cannot be reproduced. The interpretations produced are that of a single researcher with a singular perspective. I inevitably focus on the aspects of the data that interest me and strike me as noteworthy, no matter how much analytic distance I am able to achieve. Such is the way of ethnographic research, for better or worse.

A third limitation is the modest discussion by teachers of relationships that they found difficult to forge or students who they were unable to connect with, leaving the discussion of teacher-student relationships in these pages a bit one-sided. I did ask participants for examples of failed attempts to relate. A couple participants could not think of an answer. Others did share examples, but their discussion of the students they had difficulty connecting with did not make up a large part of the data corpus. There

simply wasn't enough in the data for me to notice any discernible cultural patterns on this front.

Finally, a major limitation of this research about cross-cultural teacher-student relationships is that it only tells one side of the story. My original research plan had been to conduct a traditional school ethnography by embedding myself in a classroom over the course of a school year, which would have allowed me to observe and speak with both teachers and students regarding the relationships they form with one another. The pandemic forced my hand, and I redesigned the study to become an ethnography in which I interviewed teachers via videoconferencing software. We gain an in-depth look at how teachers understand and enact cross-cultural relationships with students through this design, but we do not get the viewpoints of students. The findings are, thus, not a complete view of the cross-cultural teacher-student relationship. Further, one of the benefits of participant observation is that it can often reveal discrepancies between what people say (and even believe) is happening and the reality of what is happening. As an interview-based study, this research was likely not able to surface such discrepancies to same degree as a study employing participant observation.

Contributions

Despite these limitations, this research makes a number of important contributions, in my view. It brings to the fore the relational aspect of schooling, which is often very personally important for teachers and students but is under-appreciated and not given its due attention by the profession. It does so by examining teacher-student relationships that have generally been understudied: those at the secondary level (Yu et al., 2018) and those in which there is a difference in cultural background between teacher

and student (Fruja Amthor & Roxas, 2016; Jiménez et al., 2011). In analyzing the factors that influence the formation of secondary cross-cultural teacher-student relationships, I argue that ESOL teachers who consider themselves to be successful in building supportive relationships with CLiM students care for them in a way that is mindful of difference. In attempting to attune themselves to their students' needs, they are aware that difference may cause them to misinterpret students' actions. As a result, they reflect on their relationships with students, particularly on reactions from students that might indicate that a teacher's intended caring act may not have been received as such, and make adjustments. Deep connection *can* be made across cultures. In beginning to illuminate how that is done in schools, we can open up possibilities for strengthening educational relations not only in an ESOL context, but for any teacher who has students from different backgrounds. Given that the public school student population is much more diverse than the teaching force (Snyder et al., 2019) being able to relate across difference is extremely important.

Another important contribution of this research is the elaboration of a number of functions of the secondary cross-cultural teacher-student relationship that go beyond instruction and academic achievement. Schools do much more than educate. In describing some of these functions, we can understand a lot more of what is happening in schools and decide if we want our schools to be doing those things or not. In small ways, ESOL teachers support their students' cultural integration into U.S. society, but those actions are counteracted in other ways that uphold assimilation and White saviorism, reproducing prejudices and stereotypes that exist in the wider culture. Uncovering how teachers interact with students in ways that contradict their stated beliefs and values is

important for the possibility of change and improvement. In understanding the problem, we can work toward solving it.

While not a major focus of this dissertation, this research has already produced a contribution in the area of qualitative research methods, briefly mentioned in chapter three. While conducting remote interviews via the videoconferencing platform, Zoom, there were times when the technology would glitch, interrupting the interview. In consulting the literature, I didn't find a satisfactory treatment of how to best approach that situation. So, I wrote one. I carefully considered my options as a researcher and created a protocol for myself to follow that considered the severity and frequency of technological glitches, my research goals, and what was happening at the moment of the disruption. I published an article in *The Qualitative Report* outlining the protocol (Saavedra, 2022), which, at the time of my dissertation defense, had been downloaded over 300 times.

Finally, this research looks in depth at impacts the COVID-19 pandemic had on the educational enterprise in Virginia schools. In analyzing how educational relationships were disrupted by the ways in which we tried to keep ourselves safe from the virus, we learn more about their power. Cross-cultural teacher-student relationships are not only important for academic learning, they are a crucial part of ESOL teachers' conception of self. In an era of teacher shortages and high rates of teacher turnover, this is an important finding. If we want to recruit and retain dedicated teachers, we need to lean into the relational aspects of teaching. Strong relationships are craved by teachers and students alike. Strong relationships are what keep them in the game, and a more thorough understanding of educational relationships and what happens when they falter might help

us to place them at the center of our conversations about schooling. The relational rewards of teaching should be taken up in conversations around teacher burnout and teacher retention. The application of the concept of moral distress to the field of education can help in this regard. Widely employed in the nursing and medical fields, this concept might help us to better understand why teaching can be such a challenging profession.

Implications for Practice

What in these 241 pages is of import for teachers who have students in front of them from differing cultural backgrounds? A few ideas seem salient for practitioners based on how the teacher-participants in this study spoke about the importance of them and my own recollections from my years in the ESL and SEI classroom. First, whatever steps that can be taken to encourage the maintenance of heritage culture seem to be important in forging connections with CLiM students. In this study such steps included encouraging students to use their primary language(s) and embracing the outward trappings of culture like food and clothing. Small and surface-level as such things may seem, they can carry great importance for students who experience the rejection of these aspects of their culture for most of the day.

Second, listening to students (and proving to them that you have done so) can do a lot to help build a relationship. Teachers should try to remember things that students have told them and follow up on these issues. The topics need not be profound. If a student mentions they are going to see a particular movie, teachers can ask them about it the next week. Proving that one listens to the small things can build trust and potentially lead to learning more about students' lives and stories, ultimately building a stronger bond.

Third, incorporating opportunities for students to reflect on their immigrant experiences and their developing identities can help forge bonds. It signals to students that their experiences are validated and important. It also gives them an opportunity to process a difficult transition period and potentially traumatic experiences. A writing project I did with high school CLiM students based on Sandra Cisneros' novel *The House on Mango Street* was in this vein (see Mish, 2014), and it proved to be one that most students were incredibly enthusiastic about, much like Ms. Potter's students. Many chose to write about difficult personal experiences, which I interpreted then, and still do now, as students attempting to heal. Such work can be very powerful.

Lastly, the cross-cultural dispositions outlined in chapter five—an orientation toward accepting difference, an empathic outlook, and a rejection of deficit thinking about students and their families—should be sought after traits in the hiring process for public schools serving a diverse student body. It is these mindsets, I believe, that most help ESOL teachers to relate to CLiM students because they help teachers remain open and reflective. The caring relationships they seem to be able to develop appear to hinge on a mindfulness about difference. These teachers understand that difference may surface at any time, and when it does, they believe it should be questioned, probed, and reflected upon instead of merely reacted to.

Avenues for Future Research and Scholarship

More research is needed to understand how supportive relationships are formed when teacher and student are from differing cultural backgrounds (Fruja Amthor & Roxas, 2016). In conducting future research on this topic, researchers must, first and foremost, seek out the perspectives of both teachers *and* students. The onset of the

pandemic prevented me from doing so, but the student perspective is crucial to getting a fuller picture of the phenomenon. To be effective in ascertaining the student perspective, research teams must be multi-lingual in order to speak with students who may be early in the process of learning English or who can more clearly express themselves on the topic in their primary language(s). The student perspective will likely provide us with new aspects of relationship formation and function not uncovered here. It will also allow us to see if students and teachers think about their relationships with one another in complementary ways and if students are aware of the various functions their relationships with teachers hold beyond academics.

The topic of how to care across cultural difference is another important research path to pursue. When those acting as carers misunderstand those they are caring for or enact care in ways that cultural others find problematic, great harm can be done even if the carer believes the opposite to be true (Fraser-Burgess, 2020; Jaffe-Walter, 2016; Valenzuela, 1999). I have sketched some ideas in this dissertation about how ESOL teachers, who are generally more aware of cultural difference than their colleagues, may manage to do this to a certain extent. Future research might seek out those who are able to forge connections across difference and delve into how they do it. Ethnographic work in this area could yield rich results, particularly work that is more expansive than this study was able to be and that employs the important ethnographic method of participant observation.

Lastly, Jameton's (1984) concept of moral distress is one that I believe has great relevance in the field of education. Teachers are acutely aware of the ethical obligations they hold toward students and their families. They often discuss their profession in ways

that have moral and ethical undertones and convey a sense of deep personal meaning and purpose in the work they do. Teaching is also not an easy job. Attrition rates are high and contribute to the national teacher shortage the US currently faces. Each year approximately only one-third of teachers who leave the profession are retiring. The rest are simply leaving (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Sutchter et al., 2019). As mentioned above, moral distress might be an avenue into better understanding this phenomenon, particularly when viewed in concert with the relational dimensions of teaching and how that motivator may be getting corrupted by schooling systems and institutions pursuing ever more uniform curricula, pedagogy, and assessment. Policy makers and educational reformers tend not to consider the relational and emotional dimensions of teaching when proposing reforms or strategies to bolster the teaching workforce (see, for example, this recent report: Robinson et al., 2023), which, to me, seems like an opportunity missed.

Final Thoughts

In 2020 I submitted a paper to the American Educational Research Association's Annual Conference that was my first scholarly exploration of the cross-cultural teacher-student relationship. It was based on a research project completed as a course requirement for EDLF 8440: *Advanced Qualitative Analysis*. Reviewer number three opened their comments with the following sentences: "There is little here that should shock us. Caring relations between teacher and student cannot be argued against." While the reviewer went on to offer constructive feedback to a novice scholar about how to better approach and frame the topic, these first two sentences stayed with me. I found that they belied a common attitude that can be dismissive of paying serious attention to relationships in

educational spaces. Caring educational relations are argued against when they are “treated as a less-respected, folksy form of knowledge, not as an important matter for serious scholarship” (Sidorkin, 2023). They are argued against when their importance is dismissed or overlooked. They are argued against when it is assumed that they will just work themselves out, particularly when this assumption is born out of gender stereotypes in a profession historically perceived to be within a feminine purview. Relationships are consequential to learning, to students, and to teachers. I hope this research serves as an example of why we need to pay attention to them and place them at the center of our conversations around schools and the quality of the educational experience they provide to different groups of students.

This work would not have come to be if not for the many scholars that have come before me and influenced my thinking in so many ways. From my studies to earn a Master’s degree in Teaching English as a Second Language, Cristina Igoa stayed with me for her writing on the challenges faced by immigrant students around developing and accepting their cultural identities, as did Sonia Nieto for her insightful work on the social, cultural, and political factors that impact the education of minoritized students. My doctoral studies introduced me Emmanuel Levinas’ approach to alterity and the responsibility we hold toward another person when in relation and to Simone Weil’s conception of an open, reflective attention that can be turned to the needs of others. They presented me with Angela Valenzuela’s conceptions of culturally subtractive schooling and the problems that can arise when teachers and students hold different understandings of what it means to care. They reintroduced me to Paulo Freire’s ideas of banking and problem-posing education, the praxis necessary to work against oppression, and the love

that undergirds such anti-oppressive work. I have been inspired by bell hooks' notion that teaching can be an act of freedom, Nel Noddings' care ethics, and Alexander Sidorkin's elaboration of relational pedagogy. Finally, educational anthropologists like George and Louise Spindler, Ray McDermott, Shirley Brice Heath, Frederick Erickson, Harry Wolcott, Nancy Scheper-Hughes, Stephanie Keys Adair, and Reva Jaffe-Walter have convinced me of the power of ethnography and cultural interpretation to reveal deep truths about what it means to teach and to learn while wrapped up in the messiness of being human. I have synthesized what I have learned from these scholars and have now taken my first steps forward into the world of original research. I hope it is able to push conversations forward around the intersections of relation, culture, care, and schooling.

Of course, none of this would have been possible without the eight teachers across the state of Virginia who opted to participate in this research. They are all dedicated educators who hold a healthy respect for cultural difference, and I have the utmost regard for what they do in their classrooms and beyond to relate to and support students who are marginalized and otherized by the larger society. They recognize the cruelty of such treatment and do their best to counter it. Like the rest of us, they are not perfect and may, at times, act in ways that reinforce and reproduce harmful dominant viewpoints. By and large, however, they strive to support and nurture. They play an important role in encouraging students to develop a healthy self-identity that incorporates and holds onto their cultural origins, which I find to be a truly laudable goal.

What we learn from their experiences and reflections is important because relationships are important. Relationships are important for education, and relationships are important in and of themselves. The interpretation and analysis I present in these

pages is only possible because of the generosity of the study's participants. I am forever indebted to them—Anne Baker, Bernardo Cabrera, Eve Farmer, Lilly Miller, Olivia Potter, Rachel Shoemaker, Silvia Tanner, and Vicky Weaver—for sharing with me their knowledge, their convictions, their vulnerabilities, their uncertainties, their expertise, their reasoning, and their passion.

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Appendix A

Recruitment Email

Dear Virginia ESOL Teacher,

My name is David Saavedra and I am a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Virginia School of Education and Human Development. My background is as an ESOL teacher and instructional coach, and I have 13 years of experience in that role. I am currently recruiting participants for a research study.

The purpose of the study is to investigate the often-overlooked relational nature of teaching and learning, particularly as it pertains to secondary teachers and students who come from different cultural backgrounds. This research will examine how secondary teachers experience and understand the relationships they form with students who come from cultural backgrounds different than their own. Findings have the potential to influence how practitioners in the field approach their work.

The study is qualitative in nature. Data will be collected through a series of three interviews. The first interview is a focused life history of how you came to be an ESOL teacher. The second interview elicits detailed examples and stories of your relationships with students from other cultures. The final interview asks you to reflect on the meaning of these relationships for you, for students, and for their learning. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, interviews will be conducted online via the application Zoom. Each interview is expected to last between 60 and 90 minutes, and the three interviews will be conducted over the course of three weeks. Interviews will be scheduled outside of work hours and during your personal time at junctures that are mutually convenient for both you and the researcher. Participants will be compensated for their time.

This study has undergone and been approved by an institutional review board process. It has been assigned the following identification number: UVA IRB-SBS Protocol #3795. If interested in participating or simply learning more about this study, please contact me at the email address below.

Sincerely,
David Saavedra
drs9qa@virginia.edu
(617) 780-8096

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David R. M. Saavedra
Ph.D. Candidate • Social Foundations of Education • School of Education and Human
Development • University of Virginia

Intake Questionnaire

Dear _____,

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study on the nature of relationships between secondary students and teachers of different cultural backgrounds. Please respond to the questions below, which are designed to provide information about your background and determine your eligibility to participate. Please feel free to contact me with any questions before you respond. I will be in touch with next steps once I receive your responses.

Sincerely,
David Saavedra
drs9qa@virginia.edu
(617) 780-8096

UVA IRB-SBS Protocol Number: 3795, Student-Teacher Relationships Across Cultures: A Multiple-Case Phenomenological Ethnography

1. What is your name?
2. Where do you teach (city/county & school name)?
3. What subject(s)...
...do you currently teach?
...did you teach during the last school year?
4. What grade level(s)...
...do you currently teach?
...did you teach during the last school year?
5. How long have you been a teacher?
6. What is your native language?
7. Where did you grow up?
8. What are the native languages of...
...your current students?
...your students last year?
9. From where are...
...your current students?
...your students of last year?

Appendix B

Interview Protocols

Interview #1—Focused Life History

Biographical Info.

- What languages do you speak? What is your native language?
- Where are you from originally? Where did you grow up?
- How long have you been teaching?
- What subject(s) do you teach?
- How do you identify in terms of race/ethnicity? Gender?
- What kinds of cross-cultural or international experiences have you had?
Please tell me more about _____.

Entry into the profession of teaching

- Think back to your decision to pursue the qualifications necessary to become an ESOL teacher. Explain that decision process.
- Tell me about important educational or personal experiences in your life that led you to become an ESOL teacher. What motivated you to follow this path?
- Why ESOL and not _____ [name a couple subjects the participant does not teach]?
- Have you had a mentor in your teaching career? How has that person influenced your teaching?

Experiences of education as a student

- What teacher from [elementary/middle/high/college] do you remember most? Why does this person stick out in your memory? What do you remember about how they taught?
- Did you ever have a teacher/mentor who seemed very different from you in some way? What was the difference? What do you remember about that person? What do you remember about how that person worked with you?
- Tell me about a particularly good teacher/mentor (in school or otherwise). What made that teacher/mentor good?
- Tell me about a teacher/mentor (in school or otherwise) with whom you did not have a good experience. How did this person behave with you? What made your experience with this person a poor one?

Prior experiences as an educator

- Briefly describe any professional training you have related to diversity or cultural sensitivity. Did you find this training valuable? Why or why not?
- Thinking back on your career as an ESOL teacher, where have your students been from? Which nationalities stand out the most to you? Why?
 - Which groups, if any, have been easier to get along with or communicate with in your experience? Why is that?
- Briefly describe the make-up of a “typical” ESOL class for you. Walk me through a typical lesson with an ESOL class. How do you...
 - greet students?
 - get the lesson started?
 - move the lesson along & engage with students?
 - end the lesson?

Interview #2—Comparative Lived Experience: Detailed Account, Pre- & Post-COVID-19

Pre-COVID Recollections

- COVID-19 has greatly impacted school structures. Please describe your instructional set-up **last year**, pre-COVID. How was the classroom arranged? How did you typically interact with students? Please describe in detail specific moments you remember.
- What did you do to get to know students as the school year began? As it progressed?
- How did you allow students to get to know you? How much did you allow them to know?
- How did you show students you cared about them?
- How did students show you that they cared about you?
- Think of a **former** ESOL student whom you taught **in person**. Where was this student from and what is their native language? Describe what you did when working with this student. How did you interact with them? How did you connect with them? How did this student interact with you?
- Think of another former ESOL student from a different cultural background than the one you just discussed. Where was this student from and what is their native language? Describe what you did when working with that student.
- *[Use this question if prior two questions about specific students yield anecdotes only about working well together or not. Ask about the type of working relationship that has not been mentioned.]*
Tell me about a former ESOL student with whom you worked/did not work particularly well. How did you interact with this student? How did this student interact with you?
 - Can you provide an example of what you mean?

Current Experience during COVID-19

- Now describe your instructional set-up this year. How did you begin the year with students? How are you delivering instruction to students right now?
- Think of a recent class meeting with your ESOL students. Walk me through what you did and said with the class and how students reacted.
- What differences do you see in your interactions with students pre-COVID-19 and now? In your sense of connection to students? Please give an example of...
- How has getting to know students changed? What do you do differently now to get to know your students?
- What do you do differently now to allow students to get to know you? What, if anything, has changed in terms of what you allow them to know?
- How do you show students that you care about them in your current teaching set-up?
- How do students show you that they care about you?
- Think of a **current** ESOL student. Where is this student from and what is their native language? Describe what you do when working with this student. How do

you interact with them? How do you connect with them? How does this student interact with you?

- Think of another current ESOL student from a different cultural background than the one you just discussed. Where is this student from and what is their native language? Describe what you do when working with that student.
- [*Use this question if prior two questions about specific students yield anecdotes only about working well together or not. Ask about the type of working relationship that has not been mentioned.*]

Tell me about a current ESOL student with whom you work/do not work particularly well. How do you interact with this student? How does this student interact with you?

- Can you provide an example of what you mean?
- What is your ultimate goal for your ESOL students?

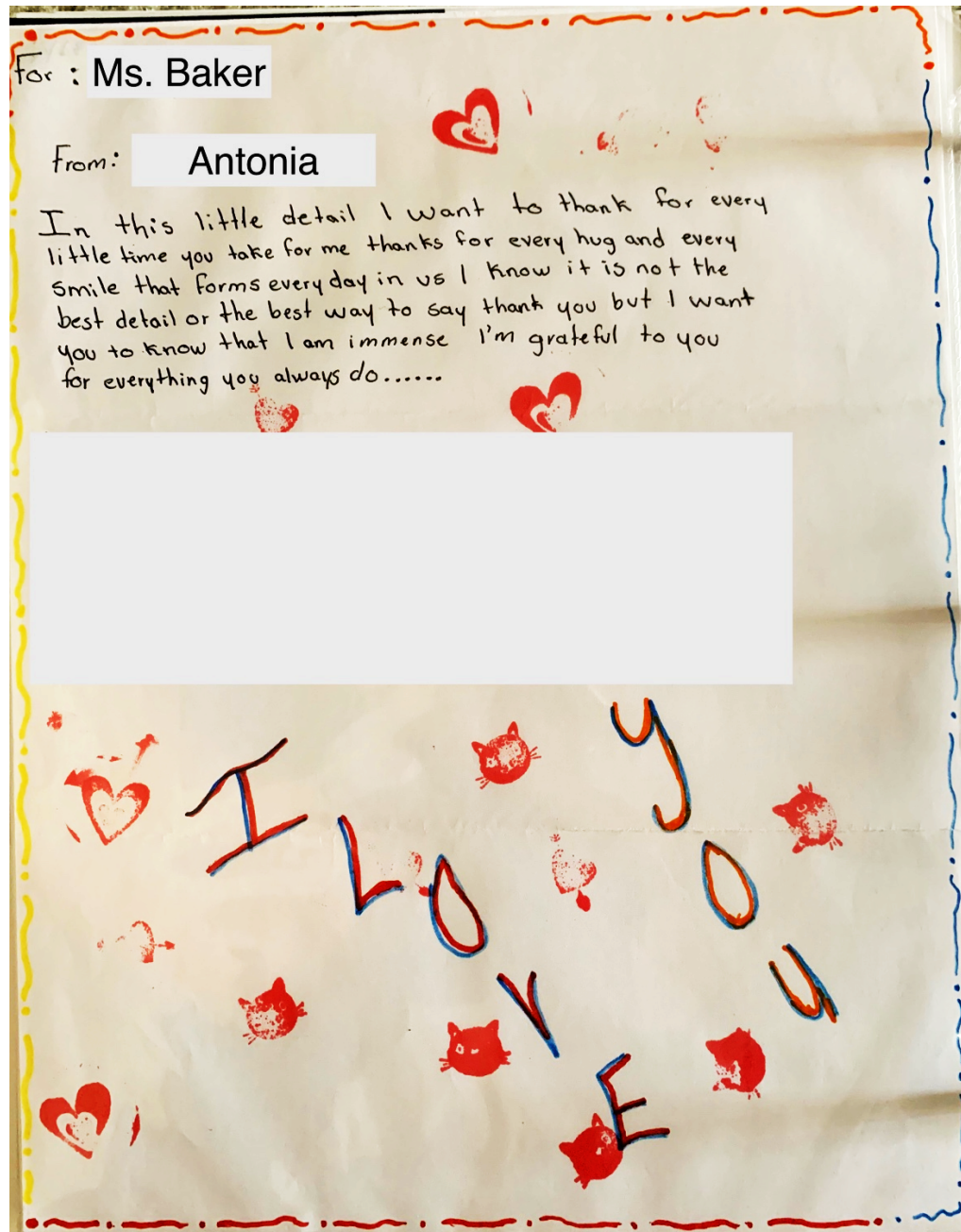
Interview #3—Lived Experience: Reflection on Meaning

In our first two interviews we have discussed your personal history with educational relationships and teaching students from other cultures as well as details of your current and past experiences with ESOL students. Building on what you have already said...

- In what ways have you found teaching ESOL to be rewarding?
- In what ways have you found teaching ESOL to be difficult/challenging?
- How do you understand the role of the teacher-student relationship in teaching students from other cultures? How important are your relationships with ESOL students in your own teaching?
- What is difficult about creating relationships with students from a different cultural background than your own? What is rewarding?
- What do you value about teaching? How do your relationships with students relate to these values?
- What tensions exist in your role as a teacher in building relationships with your students?
- What are the elements of a teacher-student relationship? What makes it distinct from types of relationships (i.e., relationships with friends, family, colleagues, etc.)?
- How do you feel cultural differences shape the relationships you are able to form with your students?
- How important is care in your teaching of ESOL students? Why is that?
- What does it mean educationally when you form a mutually caring relationship with a student from another culture? What does it mean to you personally?
 - How does it affect you when you are unable to form a caring relationship with a student?
- What do caring relationships mean to your students? How do you know?
- How has COVID-19 affected your ability to interact with and connect to your students?
- How has COVID-19 impacted the quality of your relationships with students?
- What has COVID-19 made salient about the importance of teacher-student relationships for ESOL students?
- What, if anything, do you prefer about teaching students face-to-face? What, if anything do you prefer about virtual teaching? Why?
- In an earlier interview, you stated, “_____”.
 - Please expand on this statement. What does it mean for you as a teacher? Personally?
- What seems important to you about relationships with students from other cultures that we haven’t discussed?

Appendix C

Notes From Students



Happy Mother's Day Miss **Baker**
yes I know you are not a mom yet
but for us your students at school
you have covered in a whole your
support effort love and courage is
winning that position of love ❤️ La
quiero mucho ❤️

I did it ❤️🎓 today was the day I waited so long Thank
God it was fulfilled ❤️ I have to thank many people for ❤️
🥺 without them I would not have made it [Thelma Rogers](#)
[Anne Baker](#) Thanks for everything I will never forget
my second family ❤️🥺🙏

Thanks for everything Ms. Miller for teaching me thank you for being my teacher thank you for helping me when I needed it thanks for every moment we spent together I will miss you very much thank you for everything.

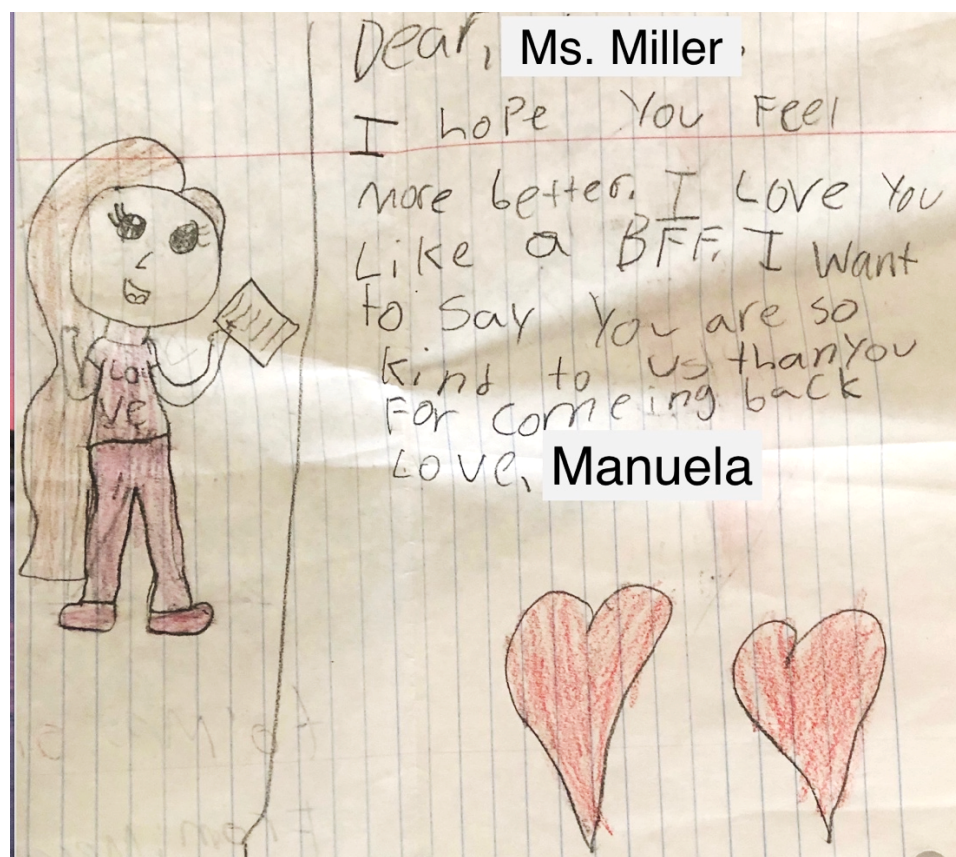
Thanks.

you are the Best teacher.

Dear, Ms. Miller,

I hope you feel more better. I love you like a BFF. I want to say you are so kind to us than you for coming back

Love, Manuela



Ms

Miller

Gracias por
ayudarme aprendiendo
ingles este año
i el otro año y por
no regañarme cuando
me portaba mal y
cuando no sabia ser
algo me ayudaba.

Emilio

Love

To Ms. Tanner,

Without you, I wouldn't be
such a student. You have
leaded me, step by step, to
get used to all of the
unfamiliar thing: helped
me learn new stuff. I think
you are just like the star
light in the night, guiding
me to the way of success.
Thankyou, for all of the kindness
that you give me. From Zaida



Thank's for showing
me that there
are people like you
in this world the
Best teacher and
the Best friend in
this world. Happy Mother's
I love you. day♥



I'm really thank you for
everything you do for me
and everything you taught me
You are one of the best teacher

I know and I'm really glad
I met. You have helped me a
lot and everything I know is
because of you. You taught me
how to be responsible, kind, and
respectful and that is why
I'm really thank you

Sincerely,

Estefany Gonzales