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Learning to know, be, do, and live together with in the cross-cultural experiences of immigrant teacher educators

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Immigrant teacher educators' learned to know, do, be and live together with.
- They learned to know and do via observations, reflection, awareness, the passing of time.
- They learned to be and live together with via observations, reflection, awareness, student feedback.
- Their learning led to 'knowledge beyond practice' as they adopted a continuous stance to learning.

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ABSTRACT

This study examined three Afro-Caribbean immigrant teacher educators whose learning based on reflections about their experiences with teachers in the United States revealed how they developed knowledge beyond practice in their learning to *know, do, be* and *live together with* others. The educators' learning reflected the processes of observation, reflection, awareness, requesting student feedback in the moment, and the passing of time that resulted in adjustment to their body language, changes in their expectations of students, a modification in their communication, code-switching and sensitivity. Implications based on the study for the new kind of teacher educator are subsequently addressed.

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1. Introduction

The increased movement of bodies, knowledge, goods, services, and ideas across nations, coupled with the inescapable progression towards similarity across cultures (i.e., globalization) has resulted in a shift, sometimes coupled with indifference, to attitudes and awareness that acknowledge, address and advocate for diversity in international education (Apple, 2017; Banks, 2017; Kerkhoff, 2017; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2017). Teacher educators who acknowledge this shift and the corresponding indifference it sometimes creates, understand why it is important to model to prospective teachers (e.g., Christian & Zippay, 2012; Diaz, Whitacre, Esquierdo, & Ruiz-Escalante, 2013; Lemon & Weller, 2015; Solomon, Singer, Campbell, Allen, & Portelli, 2011) and to practicing teachers (e.g., Flores & Smith, 2009; Godley, Carpenter, & Werner, 2007; Hardin et al., 2010; Smith, Warrican, & Williams, 2017a) how they can critically engage with the needs of diverse and international populations in K-12 schools. This is especially true for educators who are often tasked with addressing diversity where significant differences exist among teacher educators, teachers and K-12 learners in countries such as the United States, where the teacher educator workforce is predominantly White and monolingual and tasked with preparing teachers for an overwhelmingly diverse K-12 student population (Cochran-Smith, 1995; Sleeter, 2017; U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

But the acknowledgment of this shift is also critical for

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educators who grapple with preparing teachers in locales different from their own (Gay, 2015; Lai, Li, & Gong, 2016; Larsen & Searle, 2017; Larsen, 2016; Stornaiuolo, 2016). Such is the case of immigrant teacher educators who work in countries such as the United States within teacher preparation programs and in an academic context that is new to them as they prepare teachers that are often very different from themselves. With the steady influx of educators and diverse populations to the United States, teacher educators, both immigrant and U.S. born, can no longer continue to rely only on knowledge obtained "for" practice gained from sources such as doctoral programs in teacher education, or from the tacit knowledge obtained "in" practice that is generally constructed by faculty through their practice and experience preparing prospective and practicing teachers. Rather, educators must be prepared to move beyond a knowledge "of" practice that makes problematic their teaching (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999) to obtain what I have termed, 'knowledge beyond practice' (Smith, 2013a): learning that positions them as continuously desirous of engaging with the opposing perspectives, languages, and cultures of teachers and others in novel contexts.

While research has explored extensively the experiences of *teachers* in study abroad and exchange programs, field-experiences and contexts different from their own (see Peeler & Jane, 2006; Schmidt & Schneider, 2016; Schmidt, 2010), fewer studies have examined the learning acquired by *teacher educators* who prepare these teachers when they migrate to novel contexts (e.g., Han, 2016; Smith, Warrican, & Kumi-Yeboah, 2016). Yet, such examinations hold significant potential for understanding how educators come to respond to diversity. This is especially the case in the United States where we know little about how *immigrant teacher educators* attain the learning required to prepare teachers for diversity in K-12 schools.

In this qualitative study, therefore, I examine how teacher educators can obtain 'knowledge beyond practice' (Smith, 2013a) based on their learning from a practitioner inquiry that required reflection on their cross-cultural teaching and personal experiences with prospective teachers. Specifically, this interpretive study focused on three Afro-Caribbean (i.e., Black Caribbean) immigrant nationals living and working as teacher educators in the United States. The purpose of the study was to describe educators' learning about cultural difference as they coped with this difference based on their reflections on experience in a country different from their own. In-depth interviews and a focus group based on teachers' reflections on experience during the course of their practice with predominantly White monolingual prospective teachers provided insights into the learning developed by the educators in their process of practitioner inquiry in the United States. A portrait of the teacher educators' learning as they responded to cultural difference in the new country will help to enlighten participants about their own learning and give voice to this often-voiceless population of teacher educators. By extension, insights obtained from the study will inform prospective teachers about how to recognize and understand differences that sometimes created tensions between them and their immigrant educators. In turn, university administrators and teacher educators within teacher preparation programs in the United States will benefit from insights about how the educators in this study transcended difference in their interactions with prospective teachers.

1.1. Teacher educators and cultural difference

The literature concerned with teacher educators' cultural difference has examined their cultural and cross-cultural responsiveness (e.g., Merryfield, 2000, 2014), reaction to race, the effects of grappling with Whiteness in practice (e.g., Galman, Pica-Smith, & Rosenberger, 2010), linguistic proficiency, and expertise and knowledge in relation to cultural responsiveness (Costa, McPhail, Smith, & Brisk, 2005; Harper & de Jong, 2004; Pang & Park, 2011; Roy-Campbell, 2013). Findings from these studies revealed that teacher educators remained unsure of how to generate critical discussions with prospective teachers about changing demographics in schools. This literature also shows that educators were rarely able to address their own beliefs and predispositions to race, power, and inequality in ways that challenged teachers to be culturally competent in schools. Some teacher educators in these studies showed significantly limited exposure to the concerns, coursework, and expertise that addresses the needs of diverse populations and in other cases, identified no significant difference in pedagogical approaches for these learners. Based on these studies, teacher educators often have limited understandings of how to respond to certain differences in language and culture (Gay, 2014) based on their knowledge 'in', 'of' and 'for' practice that prevents them addressing cultural difference in their teaching. However, emerging research suggests that teacher educators do come to understand these differences given time, space, practice, boundary-crossing, transformational learning, openness to change and the development of cultural and language awareness (de los Ríos & Souto-Manning, 2015; D'Haem & Griswold, 2017; Han, 2016; Howe & Xu, 2013; Merryfield, 2014; Smith et al., 2016; Williams & Berry, 2016).

1.2. Immigrant educators and cultural difference

The population of over 100,000 higher education professionals who constitute immigrant educators, otherwise known as foreign-born or international faculty, struggle to adjust to the novel context of the United States (Kim, Twombly, & Wolf-Wendel, 2012; Open Doors 2008, 2008), experience challenges between their cultural values and that of those in the United States, instances of discrimination, and difficulty in their socialization and interaction with colleagues, administrators, and students (Skachkova, 2007; Thomas & Johnson, 2004). These educators are perceived by many students as "foreign", "less credible", "less intelligible" and even "less intelligent," primarily because they are perceived as 'non-native' speakers of English (Manrique & Manrique, 1999; McCalman, 2007).

1.3. Afro-Caribbean immigrants

The population of over 4,000,000 Black or Afro-Caribbean immigrants in the United States (Zong & Batalova, 2016), a number that surpasses the total number of Black immigrants from other world regions (Thomas, 2012), accounts for 9% of America's 42.4 million immigrants (Zong & Batalova, 2016). As descendants of slavery in the Caribbean, Afro-Caribbean immigrants voluntarily migrated to the United States, bringing their aspirations for financially and socially better lives than that experienced in their home countries (Hilaire, 2006). Most Afro-Caribbean immigrants originate from English-speaking Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, French-speaking Haiti, and from Spanish-speaking Cuba and the Dominican Republic. Those from English-speaking countries reflect strong English language skills (Zong & Batalova, 2016).

1.4. Afro-Caribbean immigrants' cultural and language difference

Afro-Caribbean immigrants wrestle primarily with stereotyping based on racial, cultural and linguistic challenges that have been known to result in invisibility as they develop a new identity in the United States. They face challenges with racism and discrimination that stem from perceptions and sterotypes of the dominant culture