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Unraveling Universalist Perspectives on Teaching and Caring for Infants and Toddlers:

Finding Authenticity in Diverse Funds of Knowledge

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Child-rearing beliefs and practices vary widely across cultures, yet a dominant discourse on how to teach and care for young children undergirds most early childhood teacher education programs (NAEYC, 2009). As teacher educators working with a growing group of immigrant preservice teachers, we seek a deeper understanding about the ways that new immigrant teachers find authenticity, or a deep connection between personal and professional knowledge (Bowman, 1989; Lee & Shin, 2009), in their practice. Questions such as: How do immigrant teachers integrate their own personal and professional knowledge into their role as teachers? How do they navigate their developing teacher identities as they encounter infants and toddlers in a culturally different professional context? How do they question, complicate, expand on, connect, and/or deny their cultural and personal histories and understandings in the face of new theoretical and practical learning guided by the dominant child development discourse in their US teacher preparation? This study was designed as a vehicle for learning about the tensions that immigrant teachers may face as they prepare for work in the field as a first step toward changing our own practice as their teachers and mentors.

Background and Theoretical Framework

Despite the increasing number of students in the U.S. pursuing degrees in early childhood education (Hinitz, Liebovich, & Anderson, 2016), little is known about how their previous experiences impact the ways they are prepared to become teachers (Hedges, 2012). Creating a space within teacher preparation that allows preservice students to bring their personal histories and dispositions to the process of becoming teachers (Recchia & Loizou, 2002), is especially important for preservice teachers coming from cultures and countries of origin where child-

rearing practices may be quite different from those in the U.S. Preservice teachers' funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992), defined through a sociocultural lens as "historically-accumulated and culturally-developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being" (p. 133), are considered useful resources for enacting students' potential in becoming teachers. However, these diverse knowledges can also become barriers to teacher development when teacher education programs fail to provide space and support for fully integrating them into the teacher preparation experience (Adair, Tobin, & Arzubiaga, 2012; Cho, 2010; Gupta, 2006; Jackson, 2006; Pailliotet, 1997).

Funds of Identity

Using the construct of *funds of identity* (Moll & Esteban-Guitart, 2014) as a framework, we set out to learn more about the beliefs and understandings that immigrant preservice early childhood teachers brought to their infant-toddler practicum experience. *Funds of identity* is a new conceptual tool that is built on the theoretical framework of funds of knowledge (Moll, et al., 1992). Funds of identity extend beyond the culturally based knowledge that guides individuals' functioning to include "life experiences that provide resources that help to define themselves" (Esteban-Guitart, 2016, p. 48).

Funds of identity, created through social interactions among people in a given context, are lived experiences by the self that can include significant others, cultural tools, geographical places, institutions, and activities that people use to express and understand themselves. Through learning practices, individuals create identity artifacts, their funds of identity, that enable them to both expand their knowledge and abilities and to connect learning contexts and experiences (p. 52).

While funds of knowledge focus on familial experiences, funds of identity embody experiences related to “significant people, social institutions, geographical, or psychogeographical elements, and sociocultural practices” (Esteban-Guitart, 2016, p. 107). We are drawn to funds of identity as a theoretical lens, through which learning is viewed as connecting various lived experiences while also transforming experience through the process of reflection to build and rebuild one’s identities. Funds of identity seems particularly useful for understanding immigrant preservice teachers’ ways of encountering new experiences and developing their teacher identities within the context of their infant and toddler practicum, a site which has been shown to be a place for transformative learning in previous studies (Beck, 2013; Recchia and Shin, 2010; Recchia, Lee, and Shin, 2015).

Problematizing the notion of valuing only the official or professional knowledge in teacher education programs, we began our study with the assumption that immigrant preservice teachers have unique stories to tell which can be connected to teaching based on their experiences in both their own cultures as well as the dominant U.S. culture. Knowles (1988) asserts that it is important for teacher education programs to consider the impact of preservice teachers’ life experiences because it is ultimately the interaction of their previous knowledge and new knowledge that brings about authentic teaching and learning. Goodwin (2010) echoes this in her statement: “Prospective teachers’ experiences and auto-biographies become the foundation upon which teaching practice is built” (p. 23). Thus, it is important for teacher education programs to recognize the value of preservice teachers’ lived experiences and acknowledge that teaching is closely connected to teachers’ prior life histories. This is especially true in teaching and caring for young children, as cultures vary in their child-rearing practices and these variations can strongly influence beliefs and practices in early care and education contexts

(Friesen, Hanson, & Martin, 2015; Super & Harkness, 1986). While the infant and toddler practicum is guided by current professional understandings about quality care and education for very young children (Recchia, 2016), it can also provoke preservice teachers to question their previous beliefs and values, particularly when what they are learning or seeing in practice differs from their own experiences of child-rearing in their home cultures. The framework of funds of identity helped us to “dig deep” (Goodwin, Genishi, & Cheruvu, 2008, p. 7) into our participants’ diverse lived experiences in and out of schools, such as childhood experiences and ways of caring for babies in each of their own cultures.

Funds of identity are powerful resources that can be tapped into to connect people, families, and communities in teaching and learning. Moll (2013) affirms that knowledge from lived experiences can provide new conceptual meanings for teaching. In undertaking this study, we hoped to gain a deeper understanding of our immigrant preservice students’ teaching and learning that could be applied to our work as early childhood teacher educators.

Critical Reflection Processes. Reflection has long been viewed as an integral part of the process of becoming a quality teacher (Pedro, 2006). As preservice teachers with diverse backgrounds learn to critically reflect on their funds of knowledge and identity in the face of new pedagogical knowledge, they are better able to conceptualize their teaching practice (Gupta, 2006) to become more authentic teachers (Lee & Shin, 2009).

As a principal component of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1997), critical reflection often comes in response to ideas, practices, environments, and people that do not resonate with preservice teachers’ expectations and preconceived notions about teaching and learning (Dewey, 1998/1933; Kaufman, 1996). Through the process of reflection, students in the infant and toddler practicum are encouraged to examine their assumptions in interaction with their peers, course

instructors, and field supervisors. Recchia and her colleagues (Recchia, Beck, Esposito, & Tarrant, 2009) found that practicum experiences were deepened when preservice teachers engaged in the practice of critical reflection in dialogue journals and seminar discussions, where questions could be raised about the teaching practices they were observing at their placement sites. Additionally, new teachers who had been prepared to integrate critical reflection into their teaching practice came to value this process as a tool for recognizing their feelings, coming up with creative solutions to everyday challenges, and making changes in their practice that led to more thoughtful and intentional teaching (Recchia & Beck, 2014).

Authentic Practice in Third Space

With the understanding that culture makes a difference in teaching and learning, and that personal experiences from different cultures bring valuable perspectives (Ngo, 2010), we zoom in on the theory of *Third Space* (Bhabha, 2004, p. 53) as a place for authentic infant and toddler practice. Third space is a *hybrid* place where professional knowledge and various funds of knowledge are brought in and negotiated to produce new knowledge (Moje et al., 2004). We conceptualize *Third Space* as a framework within which immigrant preservice teachers can examine how their funds of knowledge impact their teaching and caring practices. Bhabha explains third space as a site of emerging, reshaping, and transitioning through which different knowledges are brought into conversation to produce a new knowledge, which can be understood as authentic practice. Thus, third space offers a way of understanding how immigrant preservice teachers might negotiate their emerging teacher identities as their personal knowledge meets new forms of professional knowledge in the context of teacher education, and the infant and toddler practicum, where there are particular expectations for *doing* early childhood education and caring for infants and toddlers.

Research Context

With greater numbers of students with an immigrant background in attendance, the content of our infant and toddler class discussions, assignments, and student journals had begun to reflect new questions about some of the taken for granted theoretical understandings about child development that are integral to the course readings and practices observed at placement sites. The following research questions helped us begin to explore ways to better understand and respond to different notions of teaching and caring for infants and toddlers that our students were bringing to our attention:

- What funds of knowledge do these immigrant preservice teachers bring to the infant and toddler practicum course?
- How do they find ways to negotiate differences between their funds of knowledge and the professional knowledge reflected in their coursework and practicum placements?
- How do their experiences in the infant and toddler practicum influence their emerging teacher identities?

Setting

Our interest in this study emerged within the context of the Infant Development and Practice course, which is required of all Early Childhood Masters students in our teacher preparation program. At some point during their program, students engage in a semester long (15 weeks) practicum spending 12 hours per week in an infant or toddler classroom and attend a weekly seminar designed to bridge theory and practice. As part of their learning in this course, they work closely with a “key” child at their placement, who they observe and follow throughout the semester. The opportunity to develop a special relationship with a key child has been shown to enhance our practicum students’ learning and development as new teachers (Recchia, 2016;

Recchia, Lee, & Shin, 2015). Students engage in a reflective journaling process with their instructor, sharing insights and raising questions about their readings and experiences each week. They conduct a home visit with their key child's family, which provides an opportunity to learn from the family and to observe their ways of caring for their child. They also engage with a peer partner to videotape a session of their classroom practice which is shared with their peers in seminar, and reflected on in a written assignment.

Participants

Thirteen students were enrolled in the infant and toddler practicum course during the semester when this study was done. As described below in detail, all students who take this course are invited to participate in ongoing research that informs program development by sharing their assignments, journals, and summative course evaluations with the faculty. Twelve of the 13 students agreed to share their work. As part of a larger inquiry on authentic practice, when the course was completed we invited the students to participate in individual interviews, which were conducted with nine of the 13 students. Three of the students who are immigrants from different countries and were relatively new to teaching young children were recruited for this exploratory study through a purposeful sampling procedure to access this target population. This group reflected the overall student population in our early childhood teacher education program both in percentage of immigrant students (about 25%) and most frequent countries of origin (China, Korea, and India). All three participants were female students in their mid-20s who had not previously worked with children under 3. The participants were working in three different child care centers, two in infant classrooms with children between the ages of 3 months and 2 years, and one in a toddler classroom with 2-3 year olds. Participants were each assigned a

pseudonym for the purpose of the study. Participant characteristics are described in further detail in Table 1 below.

Participant	Country of Origin	Time in Program/U.S.	Previous Experience
Chai Yenn	China	First semester student/new to US	Some teaching with older children
Shila	India	First semester student/in US for 1 year	Career changer- no previous experience
Eun Mi	Korea	Second year in program/lived in North America for 10 years	Some experience with older children

Procedures and Data Sources

In many preservice teacher education programs, instructors focus in their research on the experiences of their students (Ryan & Gibson, 2016). As supervisors and mentors, teacher educators are uniquely situated to observe their students in process. Gaining new understandings about the ways student teachers learn and engage in practice can serve as a catalyst for making meaningful changes to university preparation programs. As a uniquely designed course for introducing students to working with infants and toddlers, the practicum that served as the context for this study has been a frequent site of program research. All seminar participants are routinely asked for permission to use their work for possible research purposes when the course begins. They are provided with a written request for permission and written and verbal assurance that this is a choice, and their decision will have no impact on their course grades. Care is given to ethical concerns about protecting students' privacy and respecting their choices regarding whether to participate in ongoing research. No student is ever pressured to sign on as a participant, and all participants are assured that efforts will be made to disguise their identities in

any public iterations of the research. Students have the option to withdraw from research studies at their discretion.

Once the semester ended, and after grades were given, we collected participating students' weekly journals and course assignments, and invited them to be interviewed. The participating students had all agreed to share their work with the first author, who also served as the course instructor. The second author, an immigrant teacher herself, who had not participated in the course or worked previously with the students, conducted an interview with each participant. Interviews ranged from 45 minutes to over an hour, took place in a mutually agreed upon location to assure participant comfort and meet their needs, and were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Primary data sources included weekly reflective journals, course assignments, and interviews. Reflective journals, which are ungraded and designed to encourage students to share their ideas freely while raising questions about their practice, have been shown in previous studies to be an organic, unfiltered data source that captures students' thoughts and feelings about their experiences in process (Beck, 2013; Recchia & Shin, 2010). The course assignments also included reflections on students' experiences, revealing their beliefs, feelings, and views in a more formal way. Interview questions focused on teachers' funds of knowledge, changes in their practice and philosophy over the course of the practicum, and the influence of their practicum experience on their future teaching. The interview protocol is provided in Appendix A.

Methodology and Data Analysis Process

We chose a qualitative multiple case study methodology as the best fit for the exploratory, process-oriented, and interpretive nature of our study (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009). Once interviews were completed and transcribed, data from all sources were gathered together to

create an individual portfolio for each participant. Having access to the combination of in process reflections through the journals, discussions of theory-practice connections through the assignments, and interpersonal dialogues through the interviews provided a rich body of data for this purpose. Both authors independently reviewed reflective journals, pertinent course assignments, and interview transcripts for each participant, searching for emerging categories in response to our research questions, then came together to share insights. Using an inductive process, we searched for key words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs that spoke to participants' unique funds of knowledge reflecting their personal and cultural experiences. We highlighted places where they questioned practices at their placements, theories presented in class, or their own emerging feelings about their practice. And we noted repeating topics that indicated they were working to make sense of their experiences, including changes in their perspectives over time. Once we agreed on possible codes/categories of meaning, we returned to the data once more to independently code the data, then compared and contrasted our findings. This back and forth, careful and comprehensive process provided trustworthiness to our analysis, which we approached as an interpretive, meaning making process (Marshall & Rossman, 2011) that allowed us to look deeply at the participants' multi-layered experiences. After a process of in-depth discussion and further analysis, we came to consensus on four overarching emergent themes which we agreed best represented the data. These included: Cultural Perspectives, Tensions and Questions, Reflective Process, and Emerging Teacher Identities. We combed through the data once more to find representative quotes and passages that best illustrated the emergent themes (Stake, 2005; Wolcott, 1994).

We worked collaboratively to create an individual case profile for each participant, using our research questions as a guide (Merriam, 1998). This process helped us explore individual

differences between our participants. A further cross case analysis was completed to explore similarities across cases and overarching themes.

Results/Findings

Our interpretive findings are presented here, first for each participant in a preservice teacher profile, and later, across the three cases. For each individual profile, we highlight those areas that particularly stood out in the data for each theme. Using specific areas of practice that were brought to light by the participants in interviews, journal entries, and course assignments, we explored the ways that they navigated the process of developing their emerging teacher identities.

Chai Yenn

Chai Yenn, a first semester student in the early childhood preservice program who had recently arrived from China, emphasized two key areas of difference between her own funds of knowledge and what she was learning in the practicum. These areas were safety and ways of handling food/eating with young children.

Cultural perspectives on safety. Our course readings and the practice observed at practicum sites embraced the dominant discourse on early childhood practices (NAEYC, 2009), supporting even the youngest children to use their own agency to the extent possible in exploring the world (Hammond, 2009). Chai Yenn expressed the ways that expectations were different for babies at home in China: *“They (babies) are really not trusted to do things alone. I constantly hear, you know, my aunts who are grandparents. They tell me, “Oh, that’s not safe, don’t do that, don’t do this, don’t do that” (Interview).* She also shared the ways that Chinese customs were designed to restrict infants’ movement, rather than promote it: *“In China... you put the infant, you know, [in] really tight clothes. They are not trusted. Because it’s not safe” (Interview).*

Tensions/questions. These different ways of seeing quality care for infants made Chai Yenn uncomfortable in the infant room at first. She was nervous about allowing the children to move freely in the classroom, and the teachers felt that her concern created unnecessary anxiety for the infants in her care. She shared her concerns both in the interview and in her journal:

I struggled with safety 'cause from what I observed in my culture, they're really protective. And then when the baby fell and they started to cry, and we're like (pause) it's really funny but they, they will blame the floor, they will blame other things to make the baby feel better (Interview).

I really don't know if I should just let her [baby] to do anything (Journal).

Chai Yenn seemed confused by this conflict in expectations for caring for infants and was unsure how to move forward in her practice.

Reflective process. As Chai Yenn continued to reflect on the differences in perspective that she encountered through her participation in the seminar and practicum, she began to experiment with the ideas she was learning about: “*This week I have decided to give Sandy (key child) more freedom and involvement in her daily routines*” (Journal). Eventually, after observing the ways other caregivers were interacting with her key child and studying the course readings, Chai Yenn became more comfortable allowing her key child to move freely around the infant room and participate more actively in her daily care routines.

Emerging teacher identity. By the end of the semester, Chai Yenn seemed to re-examine her initial ideas about protecting babies and could see the benefits of some of the practices she was observing in the infant room. Regarding her key child, Chai Yenn wrote, “*I gave her time and space to try things first; when I sense that it may not be safe for her to play anymore, I give her another similar age-appropriate toy to play with*” (Reflection on video observation).

Cultural/familial perspectives on food. In another example of differences in cultural expectations, Chai Yenn expressed her familial perspectives on food, which she remembered clearly from her own early experience with her mother: *“My mom keeps yelling at me when I [was] grow[ing] up until today, like you can’t waste things, like water, food, and electricity and everything” (Interview)*. The philosophy at Chai Yenn’s practicum site was to allow the babies to participate in their own feeding, offering finger foods and opportunities to practice their developing skills with utensils. The resulting frequent spills and food dropping were considered part of the children’s learning.

Tensions/questions. When Chai Yenn saw that babies were trying to eat by themselves and they were dropping food, it didn’t sit well with her. She was unsure about the purpose of allowing infants to waste food in this way: *“It was confusing sometimes whether they wanted to play with food and utensils or they wanted to eat by themselves” (Journal)*. As she worked with her key child, Sandy, she tried to negotiate this practice with her:

This week, the biggest problem will be snack time and lunch time... There was also food-dropping. And it usually happened a lot of times. I told her, “Sandy, I know that maybe you want to try and eat by yourself but I don’t want you to drop all your food so can we eat now?” (Journal)

Reflective process. Although issues around feeding continued to be challenging for Chai Yenn, she began to realize that her way of controlling the process was giving a message to her key child that was inconsistent with the infant room philosophy:

I understand that it is about how infants handle objects and control their body, but when I push away the bowl in front of Sandy, even kept telling her, “I’m sorry I know you want to get food by yourself but I don’t want you to throw it on the floor” or “let me help you,” I had the feeling that it wasn’t really showing her that I trust her (Journal).

Her reflections on Sandy's response to her ways of interacting around feeding allowed her to consider an alternative point of view. However, Chai Yenn still struggled to come to terms with this conflict before finding a more comfortable solution to the feeding dilemma.

Emerging teacher identity. Eventually, Chai Yenn was able to see that although the infants might be wasting a lot of their food, this was a part of their learning. She finds a comfortable compromise by doling out only small amounts of food to Sandy at a time, to avoid too much waste:

Gradually, I learned that (teachers) would see the situation and give (children) certain kind of freedom 'cause they don't want them to throw all the food on the floor, but they ... will give them a small amount and then give them something to use, to try, and then I can, I can see my key child trying to manipulate the utensils and getting food, which is really interesting because I didn't know that this is also a big part of learning for them (Interview).

Although she had not worked with children under 3 before, Chai Yenn brought her own funds of knowledge to her initial practice with infants. Ideas from her culturally grounded experience about what babies need to grow and learn positioned her at odds with some of the dominant theories and practices she encountered in the infant/toddler course and practicum site. Through her own reflective process, supported by the structure of the course, these encounters helped her find ways to think more deeply about her identity as an emergent early childhood teacher. Her insights into Sandy's feelings reflect the ways that Chai Yenn was beginning to see how giving Sandy choices is not just about helping her learn through physical experiences; there is also a deep emotional component to working in this way that creates the context in which authentic teaching and learning takes place.

Shila

Although Shila had been in the U.S. for over a year before starting in the early childhood program, she was a career changer with very little previous experience with young children.

What stood out most in her profile was her ongoing struggle throughout the practicum to gain a better sense of her role as a teacher.

Cultural/familial perspectives on a teacher's role. Shila described her childhood as being surrounded by caring adults who gave her freedom to explore and discover things on her own. She grew up in India in a large extended family, living with her parents, grandparents, and sibling and in close proximity to other relatives.

..it's always been a very supportive environment that I had in my family from both my mom and dad and my grandparents and everybody else around me...I think I see that coming out when I am with children. I like to support them in whatever activities they're engaging in (Interview).

Shila's ideas about how to be with young children were very influenced by the ways that her parents raised her, which she articulated in a course reflection paper on influences from her early life:

We were allowed to make mistakes, we were understood, we were asked to play and were encouraged to come up with our own ideas and interpretations of games, we were taught the importance of family, we were given just about the right amount of freedom and most importantly we were allowed to be ourselves. (Reflection on readings)

Tensions/questions. At first Shila had a hard time understanding why the toddler teachers at her practicum site talked to the children as they did or had certain classroom rules. Throughout the first half of the semester, she raised many questions in her journal about the role of the teacher. She commented on the "Western" style of her cooperating teacher (CT) in the toddler room that served as her practicum site, and was particularly aware of the ways that the teachers talked to the children, which seemed different than what she was used to:

...if a child falls down...just let them stand up and move on. ...most of the teachers over there, any small thing that would happen, like "Oh! Are you okay?" .. for me it was like you scraped your knee, that's fine—just clean it and it's fine, like you don't have to cry and make a big deal about it. So again, it's something

that comes back from how it was for me as I grew up...I think it just makes you stronger (Interview)

Shila shared in her journal that she was feeling that her behavior in the classroom was being shaped by her CT, particularly with regard to her CT's suggestion that she use more positive words with the children:

I have been making a conscious effort to frame my sentences more positively but there are times when the "don't" comes out naturally. And there are other times when I am trying to think of a more positive sentence but the moment passes and I don't need to say it anymore...(Journal)

Shila's key child was a member of an immigrant family, and she was aware of some of the differences between the ways his teachers and his family members responded to him. She described his family's style in her Home Visit Report assignment:

I could see the flexibility and the encouragement showed by the parents. Without making any fuss about Roberto's changing moods, they participated and contributed to his play very enthusiastically... Roberto's mother was calm and understanding of Roberto's feelings. I have often seen him get angry or cranky in the classroom when a teacher wants him to do something and is firm with him. At home, his parents often framed their request in a form of a question and offered him a reason for their request. I feel this approach helped him understand their request and made it easier for him to follow directions (Home Visit Report).

Shila seemed to make a positive connection with her key child's family, and felt comfortable with their easy style of interacting with him, which was more in line with her own images of appropriate practice with toddlers.

Shila continued to raise questions in her reflective journal regarding the practices she was seeing and how they conflicted with her ideas about responding to young children. These ideas re-emerged in her interview responses:

There was one instance when a child was just crying and he did not want to put his coat on to go outside, and the teachers are like, "No, just force the coat on him because you need to go outside." I thought the other thing we could have done was not put his coat on, take him outside, and he would know how cold it was (Interview).

Reflective process. As Shila continued to reflect on her experiences, she also increased her level of responsibility in her work with the children at her site. Her ways of thinking about her practice began to change slightly as she looked more carefully at the ways the children were responding to her:

...the video made me wonder if my behavior was more child-like than teacher-like. When around children, I tend to feel and be like a child myself because I feel this helps me better able to relate to them and helps them better able to relate to me. I am not sure to what extent can teachers take on this kind of a role and it made me wonder if I am better suited to work with individual or small groups of children or to work with an entire classroom full of students (Video Reflection).

This process seemed to push Shila to redefine her sense of herself as a teacher in light of some of the realities experienced in her practice.

Emerging teacher identity. Although Shila's funds of knowledge positioned her to be at odds at times with her CT, over the course of the semester, she began to feel that she needed to change some of her thinking about the role of the teacher, especially with regard to setting limits for the children in her classroom:

...before this practicum, for me, kids used to be like, "Oh, so cute!" (laughs) ... I would want them to like me ... But after being at the practicum for four months, I realized that ... a fine line needs to be drawn there. You may set some rules so that they don't take advantage of you ... there needs to be a line where you're nice and where you're ... strict. So all of that used to be a really big problem for me. ... I would always be just nice, nice, nice, but now I've come to learn that ... they need to come to respect whoever the teacher is in the class, so I'm trying, I'm starting to understand how to draw that line there that I can be nice and yet I can make sure that they know who the authority in the class is ... you need to be able to let them know that ...there are some rules which need to be followed (Interview).

Shila entered the infant/toddler practicum with very little hands on experience with young children. However, she brought strong ideas about the ways that adults best help young children grow and learn from her own cultural and family life. Shila felt uncomfortable at first with the structures that her cooperating teacher imposed on the children and did not always agree with her

ways of managing their behavior. Over time, as she began to take on more responsibility in her practicum classroom, Shila began to think a little differently about her role. Although she held on to her sense of herself as a supportive playmate to the children, and continued to believe that the teachers were too controlling, she also realized that part of her role as a teacher was to let the children know that there were classroom expectations that needed to be met.

Eun Mi

Eun Mi, a second year student from South Korea, had lived in North America for over ten years. Although she studied early childhood education as an undergraduate, she had not previously worked with very young children. The issues which emerged in her profile centered on working with families and making emotional connections with children and families.

Cultural perspectives on working with families. Eun Mi described her Korean culture as a place where she experienced social hierarchy regarding age differences. She mentioned that her experiences with older Korean adults influenced the ways she interacted with people who are in general older than her. She said, *“I do have a very difficult time connecting with the people who are older, you know, cause I’m from a culture where there is a hierarchy, a social hierarchy”* (Interview). She further explained,

So, in terms of Korean parents, I think I probably feel more comfortable, but with non-Korean parents, I kind of have a difficult time forming a kind of intimate relationship because with Korean parents, I don’t have to form intimate relationships. It’s more formal; it’s okay to be formal. It’s okay to have some room between us (Interview).

Within Eun Mi’s cultural experience, Korean parents did not expect close relationships with teachers and she felt it was appropriate to maintain a more distanced, formal relationship with them. However, she became very aware that the teachers at her infant placement site related to the families in less formal, friendlier ways.

Tensions/Questions. Eun Mi felt that parents in the US seemed to want more in their relationships with teachers. Given the cultural differences in forming relationships in this context, especially with people who were older and/or authority figures, she had a hard time connecting with both the parents and the cooperating teacher at her practicum site, who was older than Eun Mi. She stated,

I think I do have some difficulty in forming relationships with them, yeah. Especially when they're not of Korean descent ... there is the language piece so the cultural familiarity ... It's hard to kind of be friends with adults, especially parents or my CT, so I kind of leave some, you know, space between my relationship with my CT or my relationship with the parents (Interview).

The policy at her practicum site was that communication with families should be done by the head teacher, and student teachers were discouraged from talking directly with parents. Already struggling with forming close relationships with adults, Eun Mi was further inhibited by this policy from developing such skills. Eun Mi explained, “*I mean I already have this difficulty to build my relationship with parents, but on top of that, there was a restriction put down on me, so I did not develop [relationships with them]... ” (Interview).*

Reflective process. As the parents of the children in the practicum site approached Eun Mi with questions and after her home visit assignment, Eun Mi began to think more deeply about communicating and collaborating with families because she realized that such relationships would enhance her teaching and caring practice with children. She wrote,

Sometimes, measures to prevent possible damage can restrict good practices as well. Nonetheless, this inner conflict will be a food for my future teaching practice as I learned the importance of cooperating with the families to enhance my practice and relationships with children (Journal).

Emerging teacher identity. Later in the semester, Eun Mi had a chance to participate in a parent-teacher conference and learned from her CT how to approach the parents in more friendly and meaningful ways. Eun Mi wrote about how her CT used many anecdotes to describe how the

child had been doing and to “*convey the amount of care and respect the teacher had for the child, which is pivotal in affirming trusting relationships with the parents*” (Journal). Eun Mi also mentioned that she was deeply impressed by the ways the teacher communicated with the parents and wrote,

The use of effective figures of speech during the [parent teacher conference] conversation, including analogy, anecdotes, and humor seemed to have a very powerful impact on the parents, and this is definitely something I should employ in my future career (Journal).

In her journal, she mentioned that she learned the importance of working in collaboration with parents, although at first she had a hard time imagining forming those kinds of relationships with families. Participating in a parent-teacher conference taught her effective ways to engage in conversations with parents and helped her realize the importance of building partnerships with them. Eun Mi wrote, “*I learned the value of communicating with the family, implementing their knowledge of the child in the classroom and collaborating with them as a team*” (Journal).

Cultural/familial perspectives on emotions. During the interview, after Eun Mi talked about her difficulty forming close relationships with other adults, she shared memories of her early relationship with her mother and how this shaped her emotions. She said, “*I have some fear when I actually have to get into the relationship and I think like I mentioned, my relationship with my mom when I was young that really played a huge effect on me*” (Interview). In fact, Eun Mi shared in her reflective paper assignment that her relationship with her mother was strained. She learned much later about some painful experiences her mother was enduring at that time that she did not know about as a young child. Her reading of “*Angels in the Nursery*” (Lieberman, Paron, Van Horn, & Harris, 2005) helped her reflect on the connections between her early experiences and her practice with infants. Eun Mi wrote, “*My mom’s vulnerable emotional state*

remains as a ghost in my childhood. However, the warm moments I remember with her also exists as an angel” (Foundation Reading).

Tensions/Questions. Eun Mi discussed an experience she had at her site when a baby’s father just handed her his infant who she did not yet know as he prepared to leave the center. She was surprised by her own emotional response to the situation and to the baby:

I held him in my arms with his face facing towards my chest. He grabbed my hair with his tiny hands and smiled. He put his head down on my shoulder and rested as I supported his butt with my arms. Although this first encounter with Henry was beautiful, it was so unexpected and abrupt. Henry stayed with me for a while until I put him down on the floor.... My body was soaked in sweat, and I could feel the heat that captured my whole body. (Journal)

This experience made her question the ways that in many of her previous encounters with older children she went through the motions of being empathic without really sharing or authentically validating children’s feelings.

I was just trying to empathize with them verbally to calm them down without really sharing the emotions with them. Experiencing the abrupt encounter with Henry this week, I rethink about the many empty words I told children without truly engaging my emotions and thoughts. Mustn’t true empathy come from going beyond my level of understanding and experiences and the willingness to co-experience the pain the other person is feeling? (Journal).

Eun Mi began to become increasingly aware of the ways her interactions with the infants were different from her previous interactions with older children. She was pleasantly surprised by “*the different relationships that are unfolding*” (Journal) in her practicum site very quickly and deeply, with a feeling of closeness that was vastly different from her memories of her relationship with her mother in the early years. She wrote,

This experience [with infants] is so new to me, and thus very interesting to notice. Is it because of the young age of this group of children that enables changes to happen more quickly and more palpably? Or is it something about this classroom that make such changes and evolution of culture more visible? Of course, I don’t have the answer to this question yet, but this is something to continue to observe and think about over time (Journal).

Reflective process. Eun Mi recalled her relationship with her key child, Liam, as she continued to reflect on the relationships she was forming with babies in the classroom. She wrote,

This careful and intentional listening and observation of Liam seemed to help me connect with him much easier. But, it is also interesting how this relationship with Liam burgeoned so quickly ... I wonder if such intimacy is the nature of infant care because my relationship with Liam was or had to be intimate from the beginning. In fact, from the second time I saw Liam I was already putting my arms around his body, shushing by his ears, rubbing his back, and cleaning his naked body. Such intimacy would not happen between two adults from the second day. Nevertheless, in the infant classroom, this happens from the first day teachers meet the infants. This is not something to take for granted, but really appreciate and enjoy! I am loving this intimate relationship I'm forming with Liam as well as with other children in the classroom (Journal).

Eun Mi continued to gain joy and confidence in her relationship with Liam,

As I counted and celebrated his bouncing, he responded with big smile. After bouncing several times, he sat down, and repeated the process of crawling on my chest, standing with my assistance, and bouncing up and down. I felt as if this also became another form of social play. In this moment, although I was the only one speaking words, Liam and I shared the will to communicate with each other and experienced the joy of exchanging meaningful interactions with each other (Journal).

Eun Mi explained how this practicum experience was a contrast to her own childhood memories with her mother, “I remember that my mom was, you know, on the edge and I was like careful around her. So my caregiving like receiving caregiving experience, it wasn’t warm, it wasn’t, you know, responsive necessarily” (Interview).

Emerging teacher identity. As she allowed herself to become attached to the babies, Eun Mi realized how much she had been missing an emotional connection to teaching. She connected the dots between her early *care-receiving* experience and her current *care-giving* experience and wrote, “Experiencing fear and anxiety from emotionally negative responses I received from my mom as well as experiencing the importance of warmth and care also are related to the patience

I have for young children” (Foundation Reading). She rediscovered her passion and joy in her relationships with this age group. She said, “Through this practicum, I didn’t intend to recover that passion or the joy, the emotional piece of teaching, but it just naturally came to me” (Interview).

In reflecting on what felt like her most authentic learning in the practicum, Eun-mi shared how the actual process of developing an emotional relationship with her key child re-invigorated her passion for EC teaching. She wrote,

My day is so full of hugs and snuggles that I feel so warm and soothed when the day is over. Feeling their soft and warm body against mine alone feels great, but exchanging affection and sharing the moment is what I love the most ... I shared so many emotions with them through the hugs, and I feel as if they did the same with me. As I got to know each child more closely, spent time together, and changed many emotions with them, the sense of caring and responsibility I had for them grew abundantly (Journal).

Eun Mi further stated,

So that emotional piece was ... what I got and that confirmed, reaffirmed the importance of relationships in teaching, and you know, knowing it by knowledge and really experiencing it was what this practicum offers me, and ... that’s a huge gain (Interview).

Discussion

Through our cross-case data analysis, we saw more clearly how the participating preservice teachers’ diverse cultural perspectives were informed by their funds of knowledge and funds of identity. When their culturally grounded knowledge met with what was being taught and observed during their US practicum, some internal conflicts emerged. Tensions and questions arose when the preservice teachers’ knowledge and experiences did not fit with what they were seeing and learning in the practicum course (Dewey, 1998/1933). These tensions were continuously being negotiated through their reflective teaching and learning process. Through their course assignments and journals, immigrant preservice teachers were encouraged to think

critically about those conflicts, to take time to consider how their own knowledge and beliefs influenced their ways of seeing and understanding what happened in the classroom, and ultimately to integrate and practice new teaching strategies and ways of being with infants and toddlers, bringing their changing identities and new funds of knowledge together in the place Bhabha (2004) calls third space. In third space, what seem to be oppositional knowledges at first, can eventually inform each other in the generation of new knowledge.

As teacher educators determined to support diverse teacher identities in our program, we learned that we also needed to practice in a hybrid space (Garavuso, 2016). Creating a supportive and safe learning environment where immigrant preservice students can negotiate conflicts while being open to new learning required that we clearly recognize their cultural knowledge and expertise, and take a capacity view (Gupta, 2006) of their intellectual and emotional engagement in practice. Acknowledging the value of their funds of knowledge and funds of identity as integral to their learning was an essential first step in supporting their journey to becoming authentic practitioners. Through the lens of funds of identity, authentic practice is viewed not as a static destination, but as a process that is dynamic and continually evolving (Bhabha, 2004; Knowles, 1988; Moll & Esteban-Guitart, 2014). Engaging in hands-on practice with infants and toddlers over the course of the semester-long practicum was a critical part of the process, as the students could try out different ways of acting on their new knowledge as it was being constructed.

Although Adair, et al. (2012) warn us about the tendency for immigrant teachers to discard their own beliefs to appear more “professional,” our participants seemed to emerge from the practicum having broadened their previous perspectives by reconsidering rather than discarding their basic beliefs. Reported in their own voices, the participants’ changing identities

reflected a blending of cognitive and affective insights about both the children in their care and themselves as teachers. As described by Hedges (2012) and as integral to a sociocultural perspective, in our study “cognitive and affective elements of human lives and learning were viewed as inseparable” (p. 12).

Chai Yenn, for example, became more open to the idea of creating a safe environment where young children have more freedom to move and explore in part due to her ability to see the world affectively through her key child’s eyes. She also found a middle ground between her funds of knowledge and professional knowledge by providing a small amount of food so her key child could explore the process of developing self-feeding skills while not excessively wasting food. Shila learned to balance being playful with her young students while also setting limits for them to follow. Although she maintained her perspective on being less controlling with young children, she also began to see the importance of responsibility and accountability as components of a teacher’s role, resulting in part from her own feelings about being taken advantage of by the children. Eun Mi recognized her own cultural stance on ways of relating to her elders, but she also learned something new about working with parents through participating with her mentor teacher in a formal meeting which included friendly conversations centering on the child. Eun Mi’s emotional connections to the children at her practicum site were fostered by making sense of her early childhood memories and her relationship with her mother.

As they worked closely with infants and toddlers developing deeper relationships particularly with their key children, our participants experienced how their beliefs about teaching and caring played out in practice. Within the supportive context of the course/practicum framework, their previous knowledge was respected as they were encouraged to reflectively

explore the tensions that emerged between what they knew and what they were now learning to find new understandings in third space (Bhabba, 2004).

“Authentic” practice has been described as the deep connection between personal and professional knowledge (Bowman, 1989; Lee & Shin, 2009). These three immigrant preservice teachers’ brought their diverse funds of knowledge/identity to a new set of experiences within their US professional preparation program. Working with infants, as informed by their US practicum sites and course requirements, was met with some initial discomfort, as it called into question firmly held familial and cultural beliefs and practices. Rather than expecting them to change their beliefs, students were encouraged to reflect on their previous knowledge within the context of this new learning (Gupta, 2006). This process allowed them to reexamine their own beliefs, values, and experiences in line with what they were seeing, thinking, and feeling as they cared for and developed deeper relationships with infants and toddlers. This reflective process helped them redefine who they were becoming as early childhood teachers and caregivers and catalyzed a way to integrate what they knew intuitively and how they brought that knowledge to the place where a dominant knowledge already exists.

Limitations

Findings from this study, which focused on a small number of immigrant preservice teachers within a particular context, cannot be generalized on a larger scale. Rather, our aim in this qualitative exploration was to gain insight into a phenomenon that is underrepresented in the literature. Despite its small sample size, the participants in the study were carefully and intentionally selected through purposeful sampling to adequately answer the research questions (Given, 2015). Our findings emerge from the authentic experiences of immigrant pre-service teachers bringing diverse funds of knowledge to their first encounters with infant/toddler care

and education, and provide preliminary insight to teacher educators preparing immigrant students for early childhood teaching. Further study is needed to explore the ways a broader sample of immigrant preservice teachers experience and think about their preparation and practice in a US context, and how teacher education programs can better support their development.

Conclusion

Immigrant preservice teachers are a diverse group of people who possess dynamic funds of knowledge that they bring to their teaching. Thus, the process of developing and transforming their funds of identity will vary from one teacher to another. We saw in our study how each immigrant preservice teacher “filtered” (Hedges, 2012, p.11) her new learning of the practicum’s dominant discourse through her funds of knowledge, often finding points of initial resistance. As Gupta (2006) suggests, we acknowledged and honored our students’ diverse funds of knowledge, and respected their unique ways of integrating their personal and professional knowledge to find their emerging teacher identities.

When questions and conflicts arose in their practicum, students were encouraged to “dig deep” (Goodwin, Genishi, & Cheruvu, 2008, p. 7) in their problem-solving process through a synthesis of critical reflection, interactive dialogue, and continued hands-on practice. As they observed the children more carefully, and developed more meaningful relationships with infants and toddlers, their mentor teachers, their fellow students, and the course instructor, they became more comfortable exploring diverse ways of seeing, and diverse ways of being with the children. For these immigrant preservice teachers, the process of finding authenticity required that their practice become “real” to the teachers themselves as they engaged in “life experiences that provide resources that help to define themselves” (Esteban-Guitart, 2016, p. 48).

Implications

Hedges (2012) argues that greater attention must be paid to the role of teachers' personal knowledge in their pedagogical decision-making, and encourages research that documents the ways that this personal knowledge might change in response to new forms of evidence. Just as our participants were drawn to or challenged by particular aspects of practice based on their funds of knowledge, the teachers in Hedges' study made choices influenced by their own informal knowledge and life experiences. This led Hedges to conclude that "...funds of knowledge are a primary source of personal/professional knowledge and decision-making and act as a filter for teachers' consideration of research evidence in their practice." (p. 9). As described by Esteban-Guitart (2016), funds of identity build on and extend beyond funds of knowledge, as exposure to new knowledge and experience creates opportunities for rebuilding or transforming identities.

Examining closely the funds of knowledge and funds of identity of immigrant student teachers became a "thinking tool" (Moen, 2006, p. 55) not only for them, but also for us. It helped us as teacher educators to consider more thoughtfully what our immigrant preservice students brought to the course, and pushed us to think more deeply about the limitations of our own teaching. Valuing and incorporating different ideas into the practicum experience provided richer dialogue, teaching, and learning for all involved. These dialogues became a tool for better understanding each other's beliefs, values, traditions, cultures, and personal histories (Ngo, 2010). By being open to their funds of knowledge within the course structure, we were able to create a third space for the preservice teachers to rethink, negotiate, and come to a new understanding of who they are as early childhood teachers and caregivers (Gupta, 2006). Instead of pushing for a universalist perspective of teaching and caring for young children, we gave the

students space, time, and support to explore their own ways of practicing educating and caring for young children using their funds of knowledge. As they continued to be guided by course readings and activities, models of practice by mentor teachers, and ongoing reflections on their own practice, they found ways to bring their funds of knowledge into a hybrid space where new teaching identities could emerge, moving them closer to authentic practice.

As the children and families being served in early childhood education settings become increasingly diverse, preparing immigrant early childhood teachers to tune in to this diversity using their own funds of knowledge takes on greater significance (Garavuso, 2016). Guided by the constructs of funds of identity (Moll & Esteban-Guitart, 2014) and third space (Bhabha, 2004), early childhood teacher educators can demonstrate through their own teaching practices ways of finding hybrid spaces for teaching and learning.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

Thank you for participating in this study. Today's interview will be approximately 45 minutes to an hour and with your permission I would like to record it. (Author) and I will refer to you and your experiences with a pseudonym in any written or oral discussion with others. For this interview, we are interested in examining your experiences as an immigrant preservice teacher in our infant and toddler practicum course.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Teachers and their funds of knowledge

- Who are they? (Identity)
 - What was it like to be growing up in _____ (their country/culture)?
 - Who were your caregivers? What are the things you do similarly or differently than your caregivers when you care for a child? In what ways have your ideas been influenced by what you learned within your own culture/family?
- What do you bring to your teaching practice from your own culture/childhood experiences? Can you give an example?
- Are there any instances when you drew on your cultural background in reacting to a particular situation or in a specific way? Can you give an example?
- What do you see as your strengths and weaknesses that you bring to your role of early childhood/infant-toddler teacher?

Changes in practice and philosophy

- What were some of your initial impressions when you started your infant-toddler practicum?
- Were there any clashes between your ethos and the philosophy of the infant or toddler room? If so, what were they? What was it like to practice teaching while having this internal clash?
- How were you able to negotiate your different perspectives? Were you able to resolve the clash? Did your perspectives change? In what way? Give an example.
- What do you think most contributed to the change, if there was a change?
- What are the pieces of your own personal identity that you want to hold on to (something that is non-negotiable)? Why do you want to bring it with you to your own practice?

Influence of I/T experience on future teaching

- Are there things you have learned through this practicum that you will carry forward into your future teaching?
- How do you see your cultural/personal funds of knowledge influencing your practice in the future?
- In what ways have you felt that your I/T practice was most authentic? Least authentic?
- What is the biggest "takeaway" for you from this practicum experience?