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Counter-narrative as method: Researching immigrant teachers differently

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Abstract

This article addresses the ethical question concerning how educational research helps immigrant teachers gain authority and ownership over their self-understanding and self-becoming. By critically examining prior research and analysing the dominant discourse surrounding this specific group, we highlight the limitations and ethical implications of existing findings. We problematise current methodological approaches ito advocate for the necessity of counter-narratives. By empowering immigrant teachers to 'author(w)rite' their own accounts, this form of authorship broadens scholarly discourse, allowing them to pursue self-understanding and assert agency over their narratives. To illustrate our contention, we present our counter-narratives in the form of satirical poetry within boxed texts, highlighting the need to expand and complicate conventional research practices. Through subversive discourse, we emphasise more empowering methodologies in the ethical interpretation and representation of immigrant teacher participants. We suggest that counter-narratives offer an alternative lens through which to examine the lived realities and emotions of immigrant teachers, ultimately enriching scholarly discussions and fostering a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of their humanity.

> *In this article, specific pronouns are used for clarity. The pronoun 'I' represents the first author's voice, an immigrant teacher articulating his inner experience and situated knowledge. The pronouns 'we' or 'us' signify a unified position, underscoring the collaborative intent of this project. Despite the use of gender-neutral pronouns, 'he' or 'his' are used when referring to the first author's*

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experiences. This style of writing, termed 'ventriloquial writing' (Yan et al., 2023), lies in 'democratizing epistemologies that I am feeling my desire is too difficult to tell from despair' (p. 270).

Introduction

In response to the current teacher shortage crisis in recent years, the Australian Government has developed *The National Teacher Workforce Action Plan* (The Department of Education, 2022). One of the recommended actions in the plan is to bring in overseas-qualified teachers, as Australia once did in the 1970s (Collins & Reid, 2012). Furthermore, the Action Plan proposes not only to streamline skills recognition and teacher registration for overseas-qualified teachers, but also to consider how to expedite permanent visas for those international graduate teachers already in Australia. Hearing such encouraging news, some of the Chinese teacher candidates that I encountered in Melbourne were very ecstatic, claiming that 'the Spring of Migration' was soon to come.[1]

The Action Plan suggests that immigrant teachers could serve as a significant resource in addressing the shortage of teachers. Yet several studies conducted in the United Kingdom and elsewhere have reported that migrant teachers often encounter hostility and discrimination, owing to their nationalities, cultural backgrounds, and, seemingly, limited local knowledge (Terhart & Rosen, 2022). As Miller (2018) emphasised, this specific group of teachers seems to be merely surviving rather than thriving. Given this perspective, the journey of becoming a teacher in a transnational context is fraught with numerous significant challenges, which often hinder the realisation and growth of human potential.

In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is anticipated that a new influx of individuals will join the teaching profession in Australia (The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL], 2023). To attract and retain immigrant teachers, the urgency to comprehend their storied experiences and emotions has become more pressing than ever. We are mindful that, as a field, immigrant teacher research remains under-theorised where lived experience is concerned (Yan, 2021). To unsettle some of the established scholarly discourse about this particular group of teachers, we critically examine the previous research findings, underscoring the necessity for counter-narratives that can shed light on the intricate realities unique to this specific group of teaching professionals.

To broaden the understanding of immigrant teachers, we propose that this specific group should include not only overseas qualified teachers (internationally educated teachers), but also prospective international students who are currently pursuing teaching qualifications (international teacher candidates) as well as international teacher graduates (non-local preservice teachers). The term 'overseas-trained teachers' helps identify those transnational migrants who have already received initial

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[1] This notion is a direct translation from the Chinese expression "移民的春天," indicating that the current policy is favourable for migrants.

teaching qualifications from their home countries; they usually have pathways to becoming qualified teachers through re-credentialing (cf. Cruickshank, 2022; Miller, 2019). The notion 'non-local teacher candidates' refers to foreign-born teacher candidates who have enrolled in an initial teacher education (ITE) program in the host country; as such, they are likely to become a teacher in that country after the completion of the program (Nguyen & Sheridan, 2016). By including all these sub-groups, this broadened understanding can also contribute to the discourse on diversity and inclusivity in immigrant teacher research.

Traditionally, in seeking to uncover the lived experience of immigrant teachers, researchers have often taken on the role of interpreting these teachers' stories and many have been transparent in disclosing their positionality (Yip, 2023). In conceptualising counter-narrative on researching immigrant teachers, we are negotiating multiple positionalities—in my writing (as an immigrant teacher), and in their reading, commenting editing, and 'policing' (co-authors as academics). However, this work is vital and deeply personal to me. Naming our positionality can be a harrowing task in this case. As Bettez (2015) cautions:

> For each aspect of our identity that we name, some aspect is excluded or overshadowed. Furthermore, in the act of naming we run the risk of essentializing and reifying, the risk of conjuring up in the others' imaginations related identifiers, perhaps even stereotypes, that do not match who we are, and who we perceive ourselves to be. (p. 934)

In 'How to be Reflective,' Bright et al. (2023) argue that writing is a method of self-reflection, an ongoing process of self-creation. However, as Bettez (2015) cautions, not naming who we are, at least for ourselves, in a consciously self-reflexive way, carries more danger than the potential reification that may occur as a result of positioning. Taking reflexivity and positionality as a transformative intellectual and existential process (Bright et al., 2023), I (as an immigrant teacher) research and write about counter-narratives based on my personal experiences accumulated over a decade of living in Australia and New Zealand. Recognising that research remains an inherently hierarchical process, I have sought opportunities to collaborate with academic scholars (my co-authors), who cater to my intellectual needs and enable me to articulate my emotional truth. In this context, my opinions, values, beliefs, and social background accompany me through the research process, shaping each methodological and analytical decision that I make (Vanner, 2015).

Given the nature of this work, our positionalities depend on 'how we see ourselves, how we are perceived by others, and our experiences', influencing 'how we approach knowledge, what we know, and what we believe we know' (Bettez, 2015, pp. 934–935). While I have found it necessary to be self-reflexive about my positionality when working with academics, I simultaneously wish to trouble conventional notions of positionality, which is paramount to the production and understanding of knowledge. To declare my positionality, and to capture the nuances, emotions, and complexities of this concept, I have presented a poem as follows, serving as 'a disruptive technology designed to interfere with normative practices' (Honan et al., 2018, p. 11).

I have not known from where to speak,
Because I had not been positioned,
I had not positioned myself to speak for so long
I do not even remember how to speak

Speaking from 'positionality' indicates:
The immigrant 'I' has a position and,
To speak at all, it appears that I must occupy a position
In the current political sphere
That I have to *be* either in the left or right

To fit into your world,
I have to either watch ABC news or Sky news,
When, in fact, I live in a system whose positions
I appear not to occupy

Perhaps 'such non-position is my position',
Speaking from that othered place
Outside this inclusive system—
The immigrant 'I', an outsider in academia, peeking in

In this article, we are advancing the idea that counter-narratives can generate situated knowledges (Haraway, 1988) and inner experiences (McClelland, 1975), thereby complicating and disrupting master narratives concerning this specific group of teachers. To support our argument, we will further incorporate three pieces of private thoughts, expressed as satirical poetry. These serve as a counter-narrative to the prevailing practices concerning immigrant teachers [For a more in-depth exploration, you can refer to Yan's (2023) recent work]. In so doing, we co-creatively collaborate to examine our writing methodology(ies) through 'inventive arts-based methods' (Pithouse-Morgan & Samaras, 2022, p. 219).

In the interest of transparency in our collaborative writing, it is important to mention the immigrant teacher (the first author) insists that his personal perspective, emotions, and authentic voice should remain prominent, even within the formal context of scholarly discourse. However, given the constraints of educational research, my co/authors suggest tempering my satirical voice to maintain a clear distinction from academic discourse. The prose poetry, thus, is presented in the form of 'boxed' texts, offering insightful perspectives that stimulate thoughtful discussions on epistemological and methodological issues. The poetic representation, as stated by Denzin (2014), 'opens up to multiple open-ended readings', and 'makes the world visible' in the ways that academic writing 'does not permit' (p. 86).

Our counter-narrative article is not intended to make academic scholars agree with our stance, but rather to open a critical space for reconsidering traditional research on immigrant teachers. This article thus offers some provocations about the methodological practices that might promote research inclusivity. In this regard, the purpose of this article is not to present the counter-narratives from this immigrant teacher, but rather to conceptualise this research practice through collaboration and contention. This article serves as our tentative advocacy to gauge the receptiveness of educational journals towards this line of inquiry. For readers keen on exploring the first-person (counter-)narratives of immigrant teachers, the work of Park (2013) serves as an excellent resource, offering a deep dive into their emotions and experiences.

Through the presentation of satirical poetry, we construct a counter-narrative that challenges established research practice and disrupts conventional discourse within the field. This 'subversive' approach invites critical reflection and opens up space for alternative research practices. From critical and poststructuralist perspectives, recognising 'voice' as multiple, situated, and partial is vital for understanding and utilising counter-narratives (Ladson-Billings, 2019, p. 16). This practice not only provides a more comprehensive understanding of the issues at hand but also helps to disrupt monolithic narratives and challenge essentialist or oversimplified representations (Bryan, 2020; Ender, 2021; Miller et al., 2020).

As Gerrard et al. (2017) have argued, 'so often, research does little to challenge or alter problematic portrayals of victimhood and deficit and the taken-for-granted political and social norms that perpetuate such portrayals' (p. 389). By presenting counter-narratives, this article advocates for a diverse and inclusive dimension to the researching and understanding of immigrant teachers. In this pursuit, counter-narratives serve as an ethical consideration of preserving and encouraging their humanity, shedding light on the intricacies of their doing, being, and becoming.

Through counter-narratives, we advocate a transformative approach, one that involves embracing the act of (un)knowing immigrant subjects and enabling them to speak and think, despite the presence of some degree of censorship (Ceglowski et al., 2011; da Silva, 2021). When we investigate in educational research, as Honan and Bright (2016) candidly pointed out, we have to meet demands of producing new knowledge within the constraints of expectations. To address this dilemma, we expand Fournier's (2021) concept of autotheory to introduce the idea of author(w)riting as an ethical and reflexive praxis, connecting thinking, living, and theorising. The notion of author(w)riting signifies the practice of granting 'authorisation' to the immigrant subject(s) to 'write' their embodied voices into textual narratives.

To illustrate this practice, we create a space for counter-narratives from an immigrant teacher to express their innermost feelings and speak for themselves. In doing so, we aim to spark meaningful conversations, and address important issues on current research practice on immigrant teachers, potentially 'contribut[ing] to the decolonizing dialogue through something no technology of methods can provide' (Yan et al., 2023, p. 270). We believe this is necessary as, through this confrontation, in the 'not-so-polite-halting way', new insights and understandings can emerge, disrupting established norms and inviting the readers to engage with counter-stories (Yan et al., 2023, p. 270).

Transnational terrain of immigrant teachers

In an era characterised by heightened mobility, the phenomenon of transnational movement has grown increasingly prevalent and multifaceted, carrying with it profound social, economic, political, and cultural ramifications (Vertovec, 2009; Waldinger, 2013). This escalating complexity of diversity is evident across the globe, albeit with varying degrees of intensity in different countries (Pison, 2019). The trend of increasing transnational movement and the resulting diversity underscores the intricate dynamics of immigration patterns and their implications. Immigrant teacher research is thus situated within this transnational context, encompassing the complex challenges of navigating multiple languages, cultures, and societies. These individuals not only traverse geographical boundaries but also negotiate the intersections of their identities and experiences within their new environments.

In the past two decades, research on the lives and experiences of immigrant teachers has surged in diverse contexts including Australia, Canada, Finland, Ireland, Israel, the United Kingdom, the United States, South Africa, Sweden, and New Zealand. As Bense (2016) pointed out, many studies on immigrant teachers were conducted and published interdisciplinary. Previous research has often drawn on notions of globalisation, migration, and education (Manik, 2014; Sharma, 2012; Weda & de Villiers, 2019). The current state of knowledge indicates that immigrant teachers commonly face integration challenges, encompassing employment and career prospects (Datta Roy & Lavery, 2017; Mc Daid & Nowlan, 2022), linguistic barriers (Schmidt & McDaid, 2015), cultural and pedagogical issues (Liu et al., 2019), as well as their emotionality (Liu, 2016; Yip, 2023).

Immigrant teachers, despite being discussed in various disciplines and from diverse perspectives, often encounter a lack of comprehensive theories in educational research. In many studies, Bense (2016) notes that the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings are not explicitly outlined. The current methodologies employed often overlook or inadequately address the complex dynamics and unique experiences of immigrant teachers. The current state of knowledge lacks a substantial understanding of how immigrant teachers have endeavoured to re-establish a new life and career path in another country (Miller, 2019). Despite the diverse backgrounds of immigrant teachers, existing literature appears to portray their lived experiences as homogeneous.

Educational research pertaining to immigrant teachers often exhibits a tendency towards conventional approaches. As such, the empirical research findings often call for school leadership to embrace diversity by ensuring a positive culture (Yip et al., 2024), providing pathways and pedagogical support (Cruickshank, 2022), as well as opportunities for professional development and mentorship (Mercado & Trumbull, 2018; Yan, 2021). Most interestingly of all, there seems a consistent theme to call for a better understanding and support for immigrant teachers from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Liu et al., 2019; Yip et al., 2024). However, it's rare to read any published work where an immigrant teacher is guided and empowered to tell their story on their own terms (Yan & Poole, 2024).

While these recommendations are important, they often overlook the essential aspects of self-actualisation which are vital to one's doing, being and becoming. Significantly less emphasis has been placed upon how immigrant teachers can achieve their full potential as beings in their personal, social, and professional lives (Putjata, 2019). By only focusing on their professional selves, we have failed to acknowledge that immigrant teachers are first and foremost human beings who embody a range of complex and, often, contradictory identities. While agency and the formation of professional identity provide insights into their lived experiences (Ennerberg & Economou, 2021), we still fall short of fully grasping the intricate nuances of their human encounters.

As Robertson (2019) cautions, this area of research intersects a blurred boundary around multiple identities (e.g., migrant and/or teacher), along with the dualities of temporary or permanent migration. In this light, existing literature assumes that immigrant teachers come to the host country and work as a teacher in linear ways. It is thus important to look at their transitory–permanent process in the host country, giving attention to their personal life experiences. We suggest that nurturing their ongoing quest for self-becoming and self-understanding allows immigrant teachers to flourish, not just as professionals, but also as humans with unique aspirations, passions, and contributions to offer.

We contend that immigrant teachers can be reconceptualised as an ongoing process of spatio-temporal differentiation, as Collins (2018) sees the potential of desire as a conceptual lens to enliven scholarly understandings of their doing, being and belonging. By taking an active role in shaping their own lives, this specific group of teachers are likely able to create meaningful and purposeful existences that reflect their unique values and aspirations (Carling & Collins, 2018). Now an ethical question is raised: To what extent, are we (academic researchers) comfortable, allowing them to delve into the intricate processes: of how the immigrant self evolves and develops, creating aspirations for their educational, professional, and personal becomings?

While established literature seeks to 'characterise' immigrant teachers, much research has led to representations of a 'reduced Other' (Grimshaw, 2007, p. 300). To a great extent, the voices of this teaching population and their unique life experiences have been marginalised within the literature. As a result, we agree with St. Pierre (2011) that qualitative research 'has become conventional, reductionist, hegemonic, and sometimes oppressive' (p. 613). Further, as Gerrard et al. (2017) admitted, 'research practices and academic institutions have long been bound to problematic knowledge productions' (p. 388). Consequently, the current research practices limit the exploration of alternative frameworks, impeding a comprehensive understanding of the challenges, strengths, and valuable contributions that immigrant teachers bring to their adopted country. Owing to a lack of empowering methodologies, the findings of prior research have not yielded anything that can assist this specific group to pursue self-understanding and self-becoming.

Amidst the tapestry of my existence,
As an immigrant teacher, a profound lamentation stirs within me.
How disheartening it is to encounter the prevailing discourse,
That merely extols the virtues of constructing inclusive policies:

To foster my professional growth and assimilation, and
To cultivate an educational milieu,
That embraces diversity and cultural responsiveness.
Oh, the irony that drips from each word,
This rhetoric lies a hollow echo, a mere semblance of understanding,

While the depths of my experience remain unseen, unacknowledged.
The call for inclusive policies,
It rings hollow, for it has failed to recognize the multifaceted becomings of the human 'I'.
Yet, amidst this desolation, a flicker of hope emerges.

It beckons me to defy the limitations of this discourse,
Transcending the confines of mere recommendation.
I strive not only for policies, but for genuinity,
My counter-narrative pulsates with the vibrant tapestry,

Of personal aspiration, cultural sociology and emotional truth.
For in this pursuit, I can then forge a future of the self,
Where the plight of the immigrant teacher finds solace,
Where their situated knowledge is uttered, their identity revered.

Together, embarking upon this poetic odyssey, (if you allow me to do so),
We are likely to weave a narrative of differing epistemology(ies),
To create a world to come,
Where the transformation of being,
The aspirational self becomes possible …

Counter-narrative

Grounded in critical race theory and approaches to discourse study, counter-narratives 'as a positional category' only make sense 'in relation to something else, that which they are countering', in tension with another category (Bamberg & Andrews, 2004, p. x). As a way of shifting the discourse about and the value of immigrant teachers who historically have not been held equally in regard by native-born groups, counter-narrative allows this specific group to claim a sense of self, articulate inner experience (Wang, 2013) and come to know their self-positionings (Hermans, 2001) and self-knowing agency (O'Brien, 2007), and cultivate the capacity of response-ability (Haraway, 2016). As such, we consider counter-narratives as 'reactive responsiveness' that resonates with Strawson's (2008) account of 'self-reactive attitudes' (p. 18), and the critical role we play in giving an adequate account of moral responsibility to immigrant teachers.

Counter-narrative has recently emerged as a promising tool in educational research, offering the potential to promote educational equity in both pedagogy and research practices (Miller et al., 2020). Through counter-storytelling, Cho

([2010](#)) examined immigrant teacher candidates to bring complexity and richness to the prevailing concept of who can be a teacher in Canada. Similarly, Ostman et al. ([2021](#)) explored the intersection of immigration and pedagogy using narrative form to extend, critique, and challenge assumptions about justice and equity. In their edited work, Shin et al. ([2022](#)) showcased the professional and pedagogical narratives of Asian art educators and researchers in North America. To our knowledge, there appears to be a scarcity of counter-narratives authored by immigrant teachers themselves.

Through the narrative experiment, author(w)riting counter-narrative serves as a prominent methodology that emphasises an ethical stance and approach to researching immigrant teachers. In so doing, we enable this specific group of teachers to articulate their situated knowledge, thereby enhancing their self-understanding and empowerment. Echoing Egido and de Costa ([2022](#)), we advocate that immigrant teachers are 'capable of genuinely participating in investigative studies, and thus doing more than just simply generating data' (p. 1). By 'authorising' diverse vantage points to exist, contradict, and render each other, the discussion of counter-narratives is ultimately a consideration of multiple layers of doing, being and becoming.

In *Representations of the Intellectual*, Said ([1994](#)) insisted that the role of the intellectual is publicly to raise awkward questions, confront dominant discourse, and to be 'on the same side as the weak and the underrepresented' (pp. 22, 27). Counter-narratives thus contribute to 'representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion to' the public discourse (p. 11). By speaking out and advocating for their emotional truth, this specific group is likely to assert their agency and contribute to a more profound understanding of their lived experiences. They cannot be mistaken 'for an anonymous functionary or careful bureaucrat' (Said, [1994](#), p. 13).

As Said ([1994](#)) would contend, the true 'intellectual' is to be 'embarrassing, contrary, even unpleasant' to the powers that be (p. 12). To immigrant teachers, materialising counter-narratives involves both commitment and risk, boldness and vulnerability. It is through their distinctive voices and personal presence that they leave a lasting impact on readers, surpassing the power of their arguments. So, in the end, Said ([1994](#)) reminds us of the significance of the intellectual 'as a representative figure that matters', those who visibly 'represents a standpoint of some kind', and someone who 'makes articulate representations' to their public despite the dominant academic discourse (pp. 12–13).

Regarding immigrant teachers, although discussed in different disciplines and from different perspectives, the current educational research tends to be lacking novel, empowering and inclusive approaches. There is a tendency towards narrow-minded thinking in terms of methodologies and philosophical explorations. In studying individuals positioned on the margins, like immigrant teachers, researchers must embrace a heightened awareness of innovation and experiment rather than the authoritatively given methodologies. Said ([1994](#)) defies the 'logic of the conventional' but to the 'audacity of daring,' and to representing silenced voices, 'to imagine and investigate in spite of barriers, and always to move away from the centralizing authorities towards the margins' (pp. 63–64).

In so doing, we might 'see things that are usually lost on minds that have never travelled beyond the conventional and the comfortable' (Said, 1994, p. 63).

By exploring the life and writings of an immigrant teacher, we come to know how their lived experience can be perceived as both an actual condition and a metaphorical state of existing outside the realms of a specific culture's influence. As a result, we learn to see the world through a 'double perspective,' as Said (1994) put it, 'an idea or experience is always counterposed with another, therefore making them both appear in a sometimes new and unpredictable light' (p. 60). To this end, our counter-narrative displays a concern with totality and unity in researching this specific group, with systematising all experience into an absolute vision of becoming a teacher of immigrant background. In response to this concern, our endeavour lies in integrating the historical dimension of experience and embodied knowing into our intellectual and theoretical understanding of human life. To corporealise theory itself, we have to admit into it, or at least become aware of, what it usually suppresses and excludes in our educational research.

But have we stopped them at the storytelling?

The current research practices in education have inadvertently disempowered marginalised groups, preventing them from effectively sharing their knowledge and contributions. The unequal representation of diverse voices in academia becomes evident when we observe the opportunities available to prominent scholars, such as Wei (2021), to share personal reflections on the intricate nuances of Chineseness in a high-impact journal, while immigrant teachers often face limited chances to narrate their own experiences. As an immigrant teacher in Australia, I feel that there are insufficient platforms within the academic community for me to share my personal experiences. Furthermore, for most immigrant teachers who lack doctoral training, it can be challenging to disseminate their personal experiences as research outputs.

Why are immigrant teachers often denied the opportunity to share their own experiences in academia? While academic scholars may disagree, it's worth considering whether they have hindered immigrant teachers in the process of (counter)storytelling. In the fields of educational research, what is labelled qualitative research is in fact 'not qualitative enough' (cf. Johansson, 2016, p. 451). To what extent, were they given enough space to narrate their 'desired-becoming' (Nigar et al., 2023)? Is it the way they want to tell their stories?

Oh, the folly of immigrant teachers, daring to believe:
They possess the agency and intellect to articulate their own narratives.
Who needs their messy, subjective accounts when we are the authority of research,

To neatly package their experiences into sanitised, scholarly papers?
Why should we grant immigrant teachers the platform,
To share their own truths when we can dismiss their lived realities as mere anecdotes?
We must pause and reflect on the audacity of their desire to speak for themselves.

Surely, it is the duty of others, the enlightened ones,
To speak on their behalf and interpret their stories through the lens of detached objectivity.

Their expressions often tend to be exaggerated, & their emotions can be disturbing to readers,
After all, it is only through the theoretical lens that their stories can truly be understood,

Pushing the boundary of knowledge production.
It is thereby far more critical for us to speak on their behalf,
To mould their experiences into our own predetermined narratives.
For in the realm of academic discourse, it is our voices that matter,

While theirs are but a mere background noise,
Drowned out by the symphony of established knowledge.
Oh, immigrant teachers, how fortunate you are to have us,
The benevolent scholars, to enlighten and interpret your experiences,

To call for equity and social justice on your behalf,
To provide further development for your needs!
Without us, who would validate your existence?
It is only through our scholarly words that your lives can truly be understood.

In the end, dear immigrant teachers, remember—
Your non-scholarly voices are but whispers in the cacophony of academia.
Embrace your role as passive subjects, forever indebted to our

enlightened interpretations.
For it is in your silence that we find our solace, firmly anchored in the
production of knowledge. That your stories are best told by those who know better than you.

One particular area where this issue is evident is in data collection and analysis. It is undeniable that a power dynamic exists between the researcher(s) and researched (Motulsky, 2021; Oyinloye, 2022). When immigrant teachers are given the permission to articulate their knowing and inner thoughts, the conventional methods of the research process are likely to fall apart. Complying with the requirements of educational research practice, as Macfarlane (2022) notices, the writing of research methodology has become 'methodolatry' (p. 145), resulting in the oversimplified findings and implications. As St. Pierre (2021) explains, a pre-existing qualitative methodology pre-determines results and closes off the possibility of what might be produced. The practice of counter-narratives necessitates a transformative lens through which to critically examine and reconsider conventional approaches for immigrant teacher research.

The dire consequences of conventional research practices, which prioritise implications in areas such as identity and agency (Yip et al., 2024), professional development (Abramova, 2013), socio-cultural integration (Niyubahwe et al., 2013), and policy implications (Cruickshank, 2022), can be limiting and reductive. This approach often fails to capture the complex desires and multifaceted becomings of immigrant teachers. By portraying them as passive subjects reliant on external assistance, their agency and aspirations are diminished, perpetuating a narrative of dependency and reinforcing power imbalances. If the voice of immigrant teachers continues to speak in the voice of dominant discourse, this marginalised group may 'be so crippled by fear in the intimate recesses of [their] being' that they are unable to move forward (Godrej, 2011, p. 129).

This deficit-focused lens overlooks their inherent capabilities, aspirations, and potential for self-determination. As Gerrard et al. (2017) critique, research that solely focuses on the perceived disadvantages of marginalised groups can lead us astray by creating an illusion of 'objectivity' in reporting 'the lives of Others' and the 'structural oppression' they face (p. 389). It is imperative to interrogate our current research practices and critically analyse how they may unintentionally reinforce oppressive structures. While direct quotes from immigrant teachers may have provided valuable insights, they are not sufficient on their own to fully capture the complexity and richness of their lived experiences. We therefore contend that within the counter-narrative space between seemingly opposing onto-epistemologies, profound understanding might be attained.

To rectify this situation, it is crucial to recognise the value of alternative forms of data analysis and knowledge production. Deleuze (1994) cautions that we must treat the thoughts and practices 'every time as something which has not always existed, but begins, forced and under constraint' (p. 136). As MacLure (2013) explains, data are not 'inert and indifferent mass waiting to be in/formed and calibrated by our analytic acumen or our coding systems' (p. 660). This stance may make academic researchers uncomfortable for this inherently questions the authority of the researcher and their epistemic commitments, hence 'the authority of their research.'

In our view, embracing post qualitative practices and allowing marginalised individuals to tell their stories through their own voices can provide a more comprehensive and authentic understanding of their experiences. By shifting the research paradigm to one that 'creatively entangle[s] data,' and accommodates 'a thinking-making-doing,' (Springgay & Truman, 2018, p. 205), we can become cautious of existing power dynamics and create a more equitable research environment. By embracing diverse epistemologies, we then attend to data 'that defies representation, data that commands attention precisely because it cannot be explained' (Somerville, 2016, p. 1163).

In recent years, there has been an emergence of innovative methodologies. For instance, Kim-Bossard (2022) utilised arts-based autoethnography to amplify under-represented Asian-American voices in teacher education, challenging the prevailing silence. Vellanki and Prince's (2018) duoethnography sheds light on the experiences of transnational migrants as they navigated the need to translate their cultural practices and conform to host country norms. These examples highlight the value of diverse methodologies in capturing the nuanced experiences of marginalised groups. Here, we assert that our advocacy extends beyond the scope of autoethnography or duoethnographic research alone.

It is crucial to recognise that certain individuals within this group may not have access to resources required for such research (Yan, 2024b). This is particularly evident for those who lack affiliation with research institutions, resulting in limited access to journal articles and other scholarly materials. As researchers, we have the opportunity to provide guidance and support to these individuals who want to write their-first-voice story. Meanwhile, it is essential to reflect on our willingness to assume a supporting role, even if it means relinquishing the position of first authorship. Echoing Poole and Xu (2022), we understand that academic publication has evolved into a game-like system that resonates with scholars in terms of academic

performance and promotion. In the current neoliberal context, it is necessary for academic researchers to honestly assess our preparedness to embrace a supportive role.

Further, the robust critique of representation, as St. Pierre (2021) emphasises, is crucial in post qualitative inquiry and 'so much effort in pre-existing social science research methodologies focuses on how to represent the real, authentic lived experiences' (p. 5). By adhering to conventional methodologies, such research practices on immigrant teachers often overlook the critical aspect of immanence. By recognising immanence as a vital component, we can realise our monolithic narratives and, instead, engage in a more inclusive understanding of immigrant teachers' experiences. To do so, we need experimentation and the creation of the new, enabling a deeper exploration of their inherent potential, hidden perspectives, and untapped contributions.

In the realm of academia,
Immigrant teachers find themselves relegated to a position of voicelessness and dependency.
Their audacity to speak for themselves is often dismissed,

As their lived experiences serve as mere data, and
Their contributions are deemed insignificant for recognition.
Researchers and scholars, positioned as the gatekeepers of knowledge,
Take it upon themselves to interpret and speak on their behalf.
(At the end, you mine the data out of my existence.)

Now their storied experiences are distilled into sterile academic papers,
Detached from the messy reality of lived experiences.
I want to tell you this:
Immigrant teachers are denied the agency to articulate their own narratives, and

Their voices are silenced in favour of the privileged perspective.
(You only selected a few words from what I told you, as a gesture to amplify my voice.)

The power dynamics inherent in academia perpetuate this hierarchy,
Dismissing the importance of authentic, first-hand accounts.
This systemic silencing denies the richness and diversity of their lived experiences,

Only reinforcing the dominance of established discourse.
Immigrant teachers now challenge and disrupt this status quo,
Demanding an intellectual platform that allows them to share their own truths, and

Fostering inclusivity while respecting their unique perspectives.
(Do I think I have asked too much?)
Only by dismantling the existing power structures, can we truly embrace—
The transformative potential of their voices in shaping educational discourse.

By granting immigrant teachers the ownership of their knowledge, including their contributions to data analysis processes, research practice becomes more inclusive and yields valuable insights that may have otherwise been overlooked. In doing so, their counter-narrative becomes 'theory [that] should be unsettling, disruptive, confusing, and perhaps that's why we resist it' (St. Pierre, 2021, p. 7). Although theory itself is often assumed to be abstract, Ahmed (2017) aptly put it that 'the personal is theoretical […] To abstract is to drag away, detach, pull away, or divert' (p. 10). Ahmed (2015) offers an explanation that '[b]ringing the personal into the theoretical does not make experience into a foundation'; on the contrary, it is 'to write from experience' that aims 'to shatter the foundation' (p. 10). If we claim to research

immigrant teachers ethically, we might then have to drag theory back, to bring theory back to their life.

In this regard, counter-narrative functions as autotheory (Fournier, 2021) that challenges dominant approaches to researching immigrant teacher subjects, enabling a new way for immigrant teachers themselves to reflect on their own lives and becomingness. Exploring the entanglement of personal epistemologies and emotions in their thinking, relationality enables us to question the dynamic interactions of various communication partners. This 'public aspect of reclamation,' through the support of dialogue partners (their co-authors and perhaps, reviewers), 'functions as a check on the tendencies of one's private consciousness to wander far afield from the realities of one's life in fashioning a new self-understanding' (Godrej, 2011, p. 129).

Echoing St. Pierre (2021), we share the belief that theorists can offer us concepts and ideas reshaping the world as we know it, and even ushering in a new world altogether. A reading of counter-narratives 'with theoretical concepts (and/or multiple theoretical concepts)', we actively spread thought and meaning in unpredictable and productive emergences (Mazzei, 2014, p. 743). By disrupting the comfort and complacency that may have arisen from our research on immigrant teachers, we are confronted with multiple texts and voices, which destabilise what we know, resulting in multiplicity, ambiguity, and incoherent subjectivity. Thus, we are likely to foster a critical and transformative approach to knowledge production.

To embark on this endeavor, this requires us to 'write differently and think philosophically' (Yan et al., 2023, p. 265). By doing so, we can transcend conventional approaches, delving into creative-relational methodologies of social science research. Then, how can we determine the quality or validity of counter-narratives? When it comes to counter-narratives, it is important to recognise that traditional notions of validity may not fully capture their transformative potential. We argue that validity cannot be solely determined by methodological rigor. Instead, the evaluation of counter-narratives should consider their ability to challenge dominant narratives, provide alternative perspectives, and promote critical reflection.

We have to recognise that social science research that is always personal and subjective rather than scientific and objective. More to the point, immigrant teacher research should empower this specific group to thrive and shape their own future, rather than simply generating knowledge about what they have already known and prescribing scientific 'prescriptions' as if they were a remedy or treatment. Hence, it is essential to reconsider and expand our understanding of validity, embracing a broader conception that encompasses the critical and transformative nature of counter-narratives. Engaging in dialogue, embracing diverse epistemologies, and giving voice to marginalised individuals can enrich our understanding and contribute to a more comprehensive and authentic knowledge production. This allows us to delve deeper into the socio-cultural, political, and historical dimensions that shape counter-narratives.

To ensure the validity of counter-narratives, it is crucial to mobilise 'as much theory' as we can to complicate our inquiry, rather than 'rely[ing] on methodology to make it easy' (St. Pierre, 2021, pp. 6–7). In so doing, we can navigate the complexities of counter-narratives, explore their multiple layers of meaning, and uncover the

transformative potential within them. The multifaceted nature of counter-narratives fosters connections between personal experiences and broader social contexts. By empowering these individuals to share their perspectives and demonstrate rigor in their 'analysis', we can create a more balanced and representative body of research that better serves the needs of marginalised communities.

Now it is the time to actively involve and centre marginalised voices in research, ensuring that their expertise and lived experiences are given the recognition and authority they deserve. When you apply empowering methodologies to research about immigrant teachers, the positive value and impact lie in the fact that their stories 'that are considered most compelling, considered most authentic in social science research' do not have to be 'stories of pain and humiliation' (Tuck & Yang, 2014, p. 812). Counter-narrative is not just a refusal to what is produced, but a generative stance, situated in a critical understanding of self-becoming. Such refusal to dominant discourse is an active and creative position, capable of generating new perspectives, ideas, and alternative ways of thinking.

By refusing to conform to dominant research practices, we are likely to foster innovative and transformative thinking, opening up possibilities for change and generating fresh insights into the becomings of immigrant teachers and their desires of being (Yan, 2024a, 2024b). To challenge dominant narratives of positional thinking, it is crucial to engage in acts of refusal, as Tuck and Yang (2014) cautioned, 'images arising (becoming claims) in social science research' can diminish personhood but amplify otherness or re-humiliate when circulated (p. 811).

This article emphasises the importance of giving agency and authorship to immigrant teachers, allowing them to shape the scholarly discourse and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of their beings. We argue that 'author(w)riting' plays a dual role of both authoring their own narratives and the process of rewriting or reframing existing narratives to challenge dominant perspectives. Author(w)riting provides ways to negotiate how we as social science researchers can learn from their counter-narrative. As Tuck and Yang (2014) contend, we cannot do enough to ensure that 'social science research is deeply ethical, meaningful, or useful for the individual or community being researched' (p. 812). This is the least we can do.

If academic researchers continue to 'describe, measure, define, categorise, and explain sociological and cultural "difference"' (Gerrard et al., 2017, p. 389), we urge them not to simply write immigrant teacher subjects into a vulnerable group without voice. We need to support and allow them to challenge or alter problematic portrayals of their personhood. This particular group of individuals, although identified as teachers, may possess untapped ambitions and aspirations, yearning to venture into uncharted territories, unlock their full potential, and make meaningful contributions in realms beyond the boundaries of what we define who they are.

To this end, we claim that counter-narratives provide a fertile ground for gaining deeper insights into the complexities of how immigrant teachers make sense of their doing, being and belonging, specifically in relation to concepts such as authenticity, legitimacy, and ownership. In so doing, we are likely shifting the terms of debate over the increasingly diverse teacher population from a deficit model to one of strengths-focused research practices. In years to come, these 'counter-narratives'

will have emerged as powerful data sources to present the marginalised voices of teachers in their adopted country.

To be continued

Whereas writing 'articulates an act that is constantly a beginning' (de Certeau, 1988, p. 327), our counter-narrative resists the conventional practice of a conclusion, for it suggests an end to the ongoing dialogue. We propose that this article serves as a starting point, a catalyst for further exploration and engagement. We invite readers to reflect on the extent to which our arguments align with their own epistemic positions and engage in discussion and debate with us. Bringing into play very different regimes of knowing, Deleuze and Guattari (1987/2004) aver that it 'has neither beginning nor end, but always a milieu, from which it grows and which it overspills' that can be laid out on 'a plane of consistency' (pp. 23, 78). By recognising the perpetual nature of knowledge production, we open ourselves to new possibilities, paving the way for continued scholarly discourse.

Our counter-narrative brings out how important it is for an immigrant teacher to situate the type of writing, highlighting 'the incommensurable distance that separates him [sic] from their ideal of depth or perfection' (Bensmaïa, 1986, p. xiv). Writing against the current discourse, we are likely to pave a new path 'where reading and writing open up new perspectives, break ground for new avenues of thought, and, above all, wipe out the tracks of an old topography of mind and thought' (p. xiv). Counter-stories can offer a powerful means of disrupting dominant narratives and they serve as minor literature (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986) that affords us yet another avenue of expanding the scope of knowledge.

Through their lived experiences and unique perspectives, these narratives can challenge prevailing notions, shed light on marginalised voices, and provide a space for socio-cultural, linguistic, and historical explorations that shape identity-becomings of immigrant teachers. In the realm of Deleuzian philosophy, these counter-stories resonate with the idea of the 'minoritarian,' where the voices of those on the periphery gain agency and visibility. They become acts of resistance, opening up possibilities for self-becoming by reclaiming agency, affirming their immigrant self, and inspiring others to challenge the limitations imposed by dominant discourses.

Throughout the course of this article, the counter-narrative crafted by an immigrant teacher, emerges as a transformative force with far-reaching implications. These narratives not only challenge prevailing norms of conventional practice on immigrant teachers, but also serve as catalysts for empowerment, resilience, and the cultivation of diverse narratives in the fabric of minor literature. Through the power of counter-narrative, we collaborate to foster a more inclusive and dynamic fabric of literature, where different voices intertwined contribute to a richer tapestry of (un) knowing our immigrant teacher subjects.

While there is a growing body of literature that explores the experiences of immigrant teachers, in most cases, immigrant teachers are often presented as a monolithic group, with their emotional experiences overlooked (Nigar et al., 2023). Moreover,

the representation of immigrants in literature often tends to be simplistic or stereo-typical, which can contribute to the perception of immigrant teachers as anonymous or non-operative (cf. Yip, 2023). This can be the result of conventional qualitative research methodologies. Why do we study immigrant teachers in the way that under-mines their ability to speak for themselves in an academic sphere? Their situation reminds us of Spivak's (1988) critiques in her influential essay, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?'. Concerning '[t]he authority of research and researchers,' Gerrard et al. (2017) urges us to 'to engage with ethical questions that centre on the purpose—and politics—of research in the context of neoliberal and global social inequalities' (p. 391). Concurring with MacLure (2013), we do need to rethink what research is, and the knowledge it creates for immigrant teachers.

We agree that there is methodological value in 'identifying and explicating the connections that enable understandings always to be more expansive' (Bhambra, 2014, p. 156). Resonating with Gerrard et al.'s (2017) concern, we also recognise the risk that these scholarly accounts may further 'marginalise' and 'trivialise' immigrant teachers by centring the researcher's 'questions, concerns, and research objects' (p. 391), rather than the lived experiences and perspectives of those being studied. The important point we advocate is not to turn away from these accounts but to create counter-narratives to resist, revise and create researchers' portrayals of immigrant teachers' personhood.

Without explicit attention to the process of knowledge production, our counter-narratives reveal the limitations of conventional methodologies on researching immigrant teachers. By acknowledging the power dynamics inherent in research and embracing alternative approaches, we can strive to create more inclusive and ethi-cally responsible scholarship that amplifies the voices and experiences of immigrant teachers. Echoing Gerrard et al.'s (2017) caution, the (non)representational logics of conventional methodologies may exclude the authentic experiences of immigrant teachers, and risk operating 'more as processes of closure and erasure' (p. 393). As a result, our scholarly works might be 'closed-off from the worlds and people being researched, whose histories and voices are obfuscated, displaced, and, at worst, erased' (p. 393).

Declarations

Competing interests The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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