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Positionality and reflexivity: negotiating insider-outsider positions within and across cultures

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ABSTRACT

This paper draws on my experiences as a doctoral student undertaking a project to examine the professional adaptation of Asian immigrant teachers in Australia. Using a reflexive narrative approach, I examine how my position influenced my access to participants, the understanding of their contexts, and the nature of my relationship and interaction with the participants. The paper discusses the tensions that resulted from my insider-outsider positions and how they shaped my qualitative study's research process and outcomes. I conclude with recommendations for researchers to carefully consider the possible influence of their positionality in any research setting and its implications for informing future research.

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Introduction

The influence of a researcher's positionality on qualitative research is widely acknowledged and discussed. This positionality can influence all aspects of the research process, including the study design, research questions, data collection, and analysis (Wilson *et al.* 2022). Qualitative research frequently involves the dialectic process of interviewing the participants – uncovering specific phenomena, revealing the researchers' identities, and developing their relationship with the participants. This dialectic process can shape the research outcome as well as the trustworthiness of the research (Pezalla *et al.* 2012, Berger 2015). Therefore, the researchers' identities, standpoints, and positions are essential elements that should be disclosed in the research. This paper contributes to the growing literature on researcher positionality by drawing on my reflections as a novice researcher undertaking qualitative research on the professional adaptation experiences of Asian immigrant teachers in Australia. I employed a reflexive narrative approach to examine my positionality as a researcher, how it shaped the research process, and how I employed reflexivity to address its influence. The paper offers insights into the complexity and tension in researchers' fluid insider-outsider positionality when researching within and across cultures. The paper begins by examining the notion of positionality and reflexivity, then anchors the discussion in the context of my doctoral study by examining the issues of positionality and reflexivity through three reflexive narratives. I conclude by discussing the insights gained from my experience and providing suggestions for future research.

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Positionality and reflexivity

Positionality describes a researcher's worldview and standpoint when conducting research (Rowe 2014). It is the broader social and political contexts that affect interpersonal relations and qualitative research processes (Savin-Baden and Major 2013). It also refers to where a researcher stands in relation to their research participants and 'reflects the position that the researcher has chosen to adopt within a given research study' (Savin-Baden and Major 2013, 71). The researcher's position influences what they choose to investigate, how research is conducted, and the results (Rowe 2014). It is also about how the researchers 'view themselves and are viewed by others: as an insider or outsider, someone with power or who feels powerless or coming from a privileged or disadvantaged situation' (Ozano and Khatri 2018, p. 191). Various characteristics, including gender, race, personal experiences, and values and beliefs, shape the researchers' positionality (Bradbury-Jones 2007, Padgett 2008, Hamzeh and Oliver 2010), which then informs their assumptions, access to and interaction with participants, the questions they ask, and interpretation of the data (Patton 2015).

Researchers have long recognized that a binary approach to insider/outsider positionality is overly simplistic and instead suggest that the two positions are not clearly delineated but are fluid and situated within a continuum (Eppley 2006, Katyal and King 2014). Milligan (2016) observes that a researcher is neither fully an insider nor an outsider but takes on different positions depending on their situation. For example, Katyal and King (2014) reflected that when conducting research in Hong Kong, they were 'outsiders' because of cultural and racial differences but were 'insiders' professionally to the participants in the educational institutions they researched. Hellawell (2006) argues that individuals have varying degrees of insiderness and outsidership throughout the research process depending on their changing lives, experiences, and knowledge of the research context. Thomson and Gunter (2010) use the term 'liquid identity' to explain how insider/outsider positionality is fluid, in flux, on a continuum, and context-dependent, and that the researchers cannot shift their positionings actively. Dhillon and Thomas (2019) further put forward that researchers' positionalities are multiple and influenced by the power relations between the researchers and participants.

It is suggested that researchers engage in reflexivity to address their influence on qualitative research. Warin (2011, p. 811) describes reflexivity as a type of 'relational awareness . . . an interdependent awareness of how I as a researcher am influencing my research participants' perceptions and a simultaneous and interdependent awareness of how they are influencing me'. Methodological reflexivity helps to enhance the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings by accounting for the researchers' values, beliefs, knowledge, and biases (Cutcliffe 2003, Buckner 2005). Through reflexivity, the researcher critically 'reflects on the kind of knowledge produced from the research, how that knowledge is generated' (Guillemin and Gillam 2004, p. 274), and in the process, identifies and recognizes the effects of their personal and contextual circumstances on the research process and findings (Bradbury-Jones 2007). In this way, reflexivity helps to maintain the ethics of the relationship between the researcher and the researched by ensuring that while the data are interpreted through the eyes and cultural standards of the researcher, the effects of the latter are monitored and mitigated (Dhillon and Thomas 2019).

To practice reflexivity, researchers are encouraged to reflect on their culture, environment, and social and personal history to heighten their awareness of their sense of self in the research process (Rapley 2012). Charmaz (2014) recommends that researchers write memos to capture their observations and reflections on a situation and to document the reasons for their decisions in the data analysis process. While reflexivity is widely used in qualitative research, it is not necessarily used in the same way by different researchers. For example, some researchers use reflexivity as self-disclosure to discuss their 'positional validity' (Macbeth 2001, p. 38), while others analyse their own experiences reflexively as a part of fieldwork (Williams 1990). Pillow (2003, p. 181) suggests that reflexivity should be used in qualitative research as a 'recognition of self, as recognition of others, reflexivity as truth, and reflexivity as transcendence'. In this way, reflexivity can help

researchers move beyond their subjectivity and cultural context and avoid misrepresentation. The following sections draw on my experiences and reflection on my doctoral research to contextualize the discussion on researcher positionality and illustrate how my positionality affected different aspects of the research process.

Methods

Context of research

Using reflexive narratives, this paper considers the fluidity of my insider/outsider positionality when gaining access to my research participants, understanding my participants' context, and managing the researcher – researched relationship. The data from this paper came from my doctoral research project that was conducted between 2019 and 2021 at a large university in Australia. Set against the growing trend of teacher mobility, the project aimed to examine the professional adaptation of immigrant teachers by exploring the insights and experiences of ten teachers who migrated from Asia to Australia. The research question was, 'What are the enablers and inhibitors of optimizing the professional adaptation of Asian Australian immigrant teachers?' The participants were recruited through purposive sampling to identify individuals with experiences that related to the phenomenon being researched and who were deemed able to share their insights reflectively and articulately (Morse 2012). The resulting sample consisted of nine females and one male teacher. Eight teachers live and work in Victoria, one lives and works in New South Wales, and one lives and works in the Northern Territory. Out of the ten teachers, eight teachers were teaching in schools in urban areas and two teachers were teaching in rural schools. These teachers came from different countries in Asia: four from Singapore, one from Malaysia, two from India, two from Japan, and one from Sri Lanka. The teachers' ages ranged from the early 30s to mid-50s. They had been teaching for four to 25 years and had resided in Australia for between one and 15 years at the time of the study.

In seeking to uncover the lived experience of my participants, I first needed to acknowledge my positionality as a researcher and its influence on my methodology and methods (Kara 2017, Coemans *et al.* 2019). My adjustment challenges as an immigrant teacher provided the background that enabled me to listen empathetically to my participants' stories. I imagined that, just like me, my participants would have suffered some setbacks in their day-to-day interactions with the people, society, and culture in which they live and work. I believed that they each had their unique experiences and stories to tell. These beliefs influenced my decision to draw on the constructivist grounded theory methodological approach (Charmaz 2014) that would allow participants to tell their stories and enable the organic development of a substantive theory grounded in their experiences. I was also drawn to the reflexive stance in constructivist grounded theory, which advocates that researchers be aware of their presuppositions and consider how their preconceived ideas and assumptions may affect their research (Charmaz 2014).

The data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews with ten participants. The participants were asked about their reasons for migrating to Australia, their teaching experiences in their home countries, and their experiences of interacting with colleagues, students, and students' parents in their new teaching context in Australia. The interviews were audio-recorded, and pseudonyms were used. Memos were written to document each stage of the research process, aid reflexivity, and improve research practices (Rapley 2012). For example, I recorded the participant recruitment process, my thoughts on the interviews, and my interactions with participants. I also documented the data analysis process to keep track of emerging themes, relationships, and potential biases to guard against assumptions and increase the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings (Charmaz 2014).

Examining my positionality and reflexivity in context

This act of examining the research process in the context of my positionality can be described, at least in part, as a practise of reflexivity, as it involves me making a conscious effort to reflect on

my positionality and how it played out in the research process, and recognizing and acknowledging its effect on the findings. Creswell (2013) advises qualitative researchers to disclose the 'cultural, social, gender, class, and personal politics' (215) they bring to a study, to discuss their 'experiences with the phenomenon being explored' (216), and to reflect on how these experiences may have shaped their understanding of the topic, noting that the understanding of the data stems from the shared experiences and relationships with participants. To this end, the following section describes my social position and personal experiences.

I am a teacher who migrated from Singapore to Australia a year before I started my doctoral research on Asian immigrant teachers in Australia. My career in Singapore spanned 15 years in education, including stints as a classroom teacher and vice-principal in a large public school. This is my fifth year in Australia. I have since completed my doctoral study and work as an academic at an Australian university. In exercising self-disclosure, I acknowledge my role and influence in the research to help readers understand the context. Charmaz (2014, p. 13) explains that 'if we start with the assumption that social reality is multiple, processual, and constructed, then we must take the researcher's position, privileges, perspective, and interactions into account as an inherent part of the research reality. It, too, is a construction'.

Having a shared immigration experience with the participants somewhat positioned me as an insider due to our shared background as Asians, educators, and migrants in Australia. I had assumed that this would offer certain advantages in the research, such as an early familiarity with the phenomenon, easier access to participants, and a better understanding of my participants' experiences, as they may be in many ways like mine (Kacen and Chaitin 2006, Padgett 2008). I expected my research to be relatively uncomplicated as I was an insider researching people with similar experiences. Therefore, I did not anticipate the challenges and undercurrents that became increasingly evident in the research process. First, I did not expect the difficulties that I encountered in recruiting participants. Having known many immigrant teachers like me, I thought the process would be straightforward, but it was not so. Then, at times, I struggled to bypass my participants' discomfort to elicit deeper responses. Lastly, I realized that I needed to be mindful not to impose my experiences on my participants' words when interpreting the data.

Berger (2015) observes that the positions of the researcher can affect their access to the 'field' because respondents may be more willing to share their experiences with a researcher they perceive as being sympathetic to their situation. This shapes the nature of the researcher – researched relationship and affects the information that participants are willing to share. The researcher's worldview may shape the findings and conclusions as it affects how they construct the world, use language, pose questions, and the lens through which the data are interpreted. Drawing on the reflexive narratives (*in italics*) in my reflection memos, the following section considers my positionality and the methodological challenges faced in the research process. Etherington (2004) says that narratives are powerful ways of conveying the narrator's meaning-making processes, as they position the researchers in the research and give them a voice. The first reflection examines how I gained access to the participants and how this seemingly straightforward task is characterized by subtlety and sensitivity. The second reflection illustrates the risk of imposing my assumptions and frame of reference on the data. The last reflection focuses on the interview process. It reflects on moments when I felt closer to my participants and could access their innermost thoughts and moments when I felt my participants were less forthcoming.

Reflection 1: gaining access to participants

A researcher's positionality can affect their access to the participants, as the latter may be more willing to share information with researchers whom they consider to be sympathetic and knowledgeable of their circumstances. Therefore, perceived homogeneity can create community and enhance trust and openness throughout the research process (Merriam 2001). Katyal and King (2014) observe that a shared cultural identity may be more helpful in gaining access to the

community than a professional identity, as when the researcher and the researched come from different social-cultural backgrounds, cross-cultural communication issues may arise due to communication nuances and cultural factors.

My doctoral research required a sample of Asian Australian immigrant teachers. I had initially planned to recruit a sample of 20 teachers who had migrated from Asia to teach in Australia. After obtaining approval from the university's human research ethics committee, invitations for participants were posted on social media platforms, including professional and social network groups for immigrant teachers.

The recruitment process was more challenging than I thought. The online recruitment effort yielded only eight leads. This was eventually reduced to three after eliminating those not meeting the selection criteria. Besides the three participants I recruited online, I also recruited two from my network and five through mutual acquaintances with varying degrees of connection. I had assumed that my Asian identity would facilitate my access to Asian participants; however, my experiences proved otherwise. For instance, my initial lead consisted of a few Chinese teachers who later withdrew from participating, citing issues of sensitivity and discomfort. Another said that she did not have much to contribute.

The prioritization of collective experience over personal experience in some Asian cultures may mean that the autonomous self is de-emphasized, and individuals may not be comfortable with talking about themselves (Triandis 2015). Additionally, the risk of 'losing face' or being embarrassed, particularly when talking about experiences that negatively affect one's public image, could have implications for participants' willingness to talk about themselves (Han 2016). Some scholars also claim that *guanxi* (connections) is critical when recruiting research participants among Chinese communities (Kriz et al. 2014). Strong *guanxi* allows the researcher access to participants by establishing themselves as credible and legitimate or through existing interpersonal relationships. My lack of established *guanxi* within the Chinese communities could have meant that the Chinese teachers considered me a distant social relation (Thomas and Yuan 2010, Hwang 2012), so they refrained from sharing personal information and opinions with me (Limkakeng et al. 2013).

My outreach to other Asian immigrant teacher groups, including Vietnamese and Filipino teachers, yielded no favourable response. I noticed that the Asian immigrant teachers I approached were polite but distant. While they said my research project was interesting, they declined to participate. My intuition told me they were uncomfortable sharing their experiences and struggles with me. It could be because they have yet to trust me or because they perceived it as a source of embarrassment or a loss of 'face' to be seen struggling.

During our interview, a participant from Bangladesh (Renuka) reminded me that people in different parts of Asia consider themselves culturally diverse and may embrace different beliefs and values. While I had assumed that my participants would consider me an insider due to my Asian identity, my conversation with Renuka revealed that this was not necessarily true. Renuka also said that she was unsure of her suitability to participate in the research as she is not Chinese Asian like me, which highlighted that although we are both Asians, she considers herself different from me. Renuka's words hit me hard. It made me realize that I was not considered an insider by some of my participants. While I defined Asia based on its geographical boundaries, my participants defined it based on social-cultural backgrounds. Asia is a vast continent populated with people with different social, ethnic, and racial identities and embracing different values. Scholars researching Asia speak of Asians as a vast identifier associated with substantial complexity and nuance in culture, ethnic, and racial dimensions and holding a wide range of worldviews (Okamoto 2014, Lee and Ramakrishnan 2020). Therefore, there are substantial within-group differences among Asians, and what I gleaned from my participants' experiences cannot be generalized to all Asian Australian immigrant teachers.

Another setback was my limited success with snowball sampling to recruit what I considered 'hard-to-reach' participants (Biernacki and Waldorf 1981, Goodman 2011). I had assumed that by tapping into the existing network of my participants, I could reach out to other teachers who shared similar immigrant backgrounds. However, this was not the case.

To recruit more participants through snowball sampling, at the end of each interview I asked my participants if they could identify other Asian Australian immigrant teachers in their network. However, this approach did not work well. Most participants either did not know other Asian teachers or that they were not close to other Asian teacher colleagues and hence were not comfortable approaching them.

Noy (2008, p. 329) observes that the process of snowball sampling reveals 'the dynamics of natural and organic social networks' of the population being sampled. My participants' inability to connect me with other Asian teachers could mean they have limited social networks in their newly adopted host country. Their reluctance to connect me with other Asian teachers in the school could also be because they did not want others to know about their participation in this study for fear of jeopardizing their jobs. One participant, Angela, did in fact ask me several times if her participation would be known to her principal. This fear is understandable as most participants were recent immigrants who had encountered significant challenges landing their current job. Hence, while snowball sampling is a popular tool in research, it yielded limited success in my project.

Reflection 2: understanding participants' contexts

As research findings are interpretive and shaped by the researchers' culture, knowledge, past experiences, and interactions with participants (Kacen and Chaitin 2006, Charmaz 2014), the researchers need to position themselves within the research by acknowledging the relevant experiences, values, and beliefs (Altheide and Johnson 2011). This aspect was particularly relevant in my interview with Marilyn.

The interview with Marilyn started well. She was friendly and spoke animatedly about her teaching preparatory course and her early years as a teacher in a village school. I attempted several clarifications throughout our conversation, but she seemed slightly irritated at the interruptions. Finally, I had to tell her I had no idea about the education system. Hearing that, she patiently explained the education system and the teacher qualification process. This background information enabled me to appreciate better Marilyn's circumstances and subsequent decision to migrate to Australia.

This information proved helpful later when I interviewed other participants from the same country as Marilyn, as it facilitated stronger rapport building. Marilyn also hinted that as I come from a more developed country, I may not empathize with her circumstances: 'Maybe it is hard for you to understand since your country is more modern and developed'. Marilyn then explained her daily ordeal of cramming into the packed village bus every morning together with her students to go to school. To illustrate her point about the stressful morning commute, she searched online to show me images of the village bus.

In another case, I assumed that participants had undergone some level of struggle in their professional transition and would be keen to talk about it. However, this assumption was proved wrong in Kai Meng's interview.

My interview with Kai Meng, the only male participant in the study, seemed one of the hardest and comprised superficial answers. When I asked about his adjustment to the new teaching environment and challenges related to migrating, his immediate answer was: 'No, there were no issues at all; there is not much to share'. I could sense that Kai Meng did not want to talk about his interaction with people in the school. Instead, he talked about his achievement and contributions to the school. I wonder if Kai Meng's refusal to talk about his struggle was because he is uncomfortable discussing his emotion with me, a female researcher woman, or if it could be that he had a smooth transition, and I had unfairly imposed my assumptions on him.

The interviews with Marilyn and Kai Meng heightened my awareness about developing a contextualized understanding of participants' historical and social settings. While I am a migrant teacher from Asia, just like my participants, my experiences and emotions do not necessarily reflect theirs. Blaikie (2009) encourages the researcher to adopt a learner's stance, suspend preconceived notions, and actively seek to understand participants' contexts. Mauthner and Doucet (2003) note that 'situating ourselves socially and emotionally in relation to respondents is an important

element of reflexivity' (419). 'Knowing an experience requires more than simply having it; knowing implies being able to identify, describe, and explain' (Fay 1996, p. 20). Instead of being enmeshed in their own experience, an outsider might provide the adequate distance to understand and conceptualize the experience, provide a clear, objective, and unbiased view to see through the complexity, and provide a broader perspective on an experience than a person who is personally and emotionally entrenched in it (Fay 1996). Therefore, there are both positives and negatives of insider and outsider positions. A researcher needs to be cognisant of his or her positionality in relation to the participants under study.

Reflection 3: nature of researcher – researched relationship

Issues of positionality remained active throughout the data collection process. While interviewing my participants, it became evident that my cultural and professional positioning impacted on my interaction with them. As I came from the same teaching community as my participants from Singapore, we share similar backgrounds and familiarity with the teaching context in Singapore. While these shared connections might have facilitated access to the participants and made it easier for rapport building, as the participants may have perceived me as being credible and trustworthy (Williamson *et al.* 2011), it also meant that my Singaporean participants may have assumed that I understood their meaning without the need to provide detailed elaboration. For example, knowing that I had been a reporting officer to teachers in school, Angela assumed that I was well-versed in the teacher appraisal system in Singapore when she told me how she felt she had been appraised unfairly. She frequently prefixed her sentences with phrases such as 'You know right?' and, at times, spoke colloquially, assuming that I would understand. Similarly, Kai Meng used many acronyms when describing the Singapore education system as he thought I was familiar with them.

While my cultural and professional positioning as an educator from Singapore gave me privileged access to the participants and heightened my sensitivity to the collected data, it also resulted in some participants being more guarded when it came to sharing their innermost thoughts, complaints, and negative opinions with me as we had mutual acquaintances in the same professional network. For example, Kate said she had checked my social media account and contacted a mutual acquaintance to ask about me before agreeing to speak with me. Katyal and King (2014) found that being an insider may prove advantageous because familiarity encourages participants to feel less restrained and more willing to speak. However, Shah (2004) observed that the same cultural familiarity might be a double-edged sword as there is the risk that researchers may assume answers and therefore not probe deeper into the response. Alternatively, the interviewee may think that the interviewer has insider knowledge and thus does not elaborate further or omits critical information.

My insider position could have explained Janice's decision to curtail her interview. I met Janice through an online social group for Singapore teachers in Australia. She readily accepted my invitation to participate in the study and was glad to talk to a fellow educator from her home country. During our interview, Janice was initially warm and welcoming. She spoke in a quick successive manner without much prompting. However, about 45 min into our interview, Janice stopped talking abruptly. It was as if she sensed she had voiced too many opposing views about her former schools in Singapore and Australia. 'I got to go. I have talked a lot already. Words may go around. I better stop'. Knowing that we have mutual friends, Janice may have been concerned that her negative remarks about former colleagues could destroy any harmonious relationships she had in the teacher professional network in both countries. Although speaking ill of someone or something is frowned upon in many cultures, some Asians, particularly those of Chinese ethnicity, may feel the additional loss of social reputation (Hwang 2012).

While most participants readily shared their innermost thoughts, and negative experiences, a few were reluctant to share too much, giving superficial and non-committal answers, particularly in our first interview. It seemed that even the assurances in the Participant Consent Forms (detailing

informed consent, anonymity, and other ethical obligations) did little to increase trust in the anonymity of the research process. Participants may have feared that the recorded interview would be leaked to acquaintances. However, the situation improved for most participants in the second interview, possibly because we had established a more trusting relationship by then. I also noticed that some participants talked more freely when their voices were not recorded. For example, Nara was quiet and reserved for most of the interview. However, after I turned off my recording device at the end of the session, she was suddenly more relaxed and started talking animatedly about the discrimination she faced and the difficulties of managing challenging students. She said much more in those 10 min than in our one-hour recorded conversation. King and Horrocks (2010) call this the 'recorder phenomenon', where participants are wary of being recorded and appear more reticent on-record than off-record.

The relationship between the researcher and the participants is another legitimate factor. Some participants may participate in the research out of goodwill, while others may do so for other personal reasons. For example, Michiko participated in my study because our mutual acquaintance helped her when she first arrived in Melbourne many years ago, and she felt that participating in my study was a way of repaying the kindness of our mutual acquaintance. Kai Meng requested to be interviewed at my workplace. He toured my research facility and asked questions about my doctoral programme as he is interested in pursuing a similar one at my university.

Throughout the interview, Kai Meng attempted to 'take charge' by asking me questions about my project and what I plan to do with the findings and offered his views before I had the chance to put forward the prepared questions. I tried to return the focus to the areas I wanted to discuss by inserting questions whenever possible to prevent the conversation from deviating. It was not easy. At times, I found myself being interviewed by Kai Meng. I was asked, Why do you research this topic?, What will happen after you are done with the research? Are you going to get a job at the university? Have you taught in schools in Australia? He also hinted that my life as a PhD student is a leisure and privileged one since I am flexible with my time and have a stipend to cover my living expenses, and that he should also apply for postgraduate study just like me.

My interaction with Kai Meng illustrated that interviews are more than just getting responses from participants. They also involve moving into and confronting complex negotiations about the research agenda, what knowledge is relevant, and shifts in inferior and superior knowledge positions. The interviews with Kai Meng challenged the inherent power of my researcher position and made me feel vulnerable. It showed that interaction between the researcher and the participants is always tentative; their roles are not fixed but may shift and develop during the projects. I also came to realize that while I initially thought that I had more 'power' as the interviewer who set the stage and controlled the scripts and the interview questions, it was Kai Meng who had control over what he said and how he says what he says, which then influences the outcome of the interview (Brinkman and Kvale 2005). Hence, while I possessed the information about the study, it is Kai Meng who owned the knowledge and experience for the study (Karnieli-Miller *et al.* 2009). Roulston (2022) further suggests that interactional problems experienced by researchers in interviews reveal the gaps in questioning, provide valuable insights into the research topic, and complement the 'rich' descriptions often sought by researchers in qualitative studies. In hindsight, instead of focusing on getting through my list of interview questions, I could have gone with Kai Meng's interest and allowed issues that concern him about the research topic to surface organically.

Discussion and conclusion

The three reflection narratives illustrate that data collection is an intricate and nuanced process that is impacted by a range of complexity that shapes the relationship and interaction between the researcher and the participants. The first narrative illustrates the impact of my positionality on my access to the participants and, consequently, the characteristics of the participants recruited; the second narrative demonstrates how my experiences, assumptions, and attitudes influenced my

engagement with the participants and interpretation of the data; and in the final narrative, the researcher – researched relationship was impacted by my positionality. As no research is free of the researchers' values, biases, and assumptions, reflexivity strategies have been widely supported to address the issue of credibility and trustworthiness (Horsburgh 2003). Despite the extensive discussion in the literature about reflexivity, it remains an elusive multi-dimensional construct, and its impact on the research outcome is challenging to establish (Lynch 2000).

My experience researching fellow immigrant teachers illustrated that although familiarity may have enabled a more in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences, researchers need to be mindful about imposing their experience as the frame of reference for interpreting participants' experiences. Lietz *et al.* (2006) suggest that 'asking questions, engaging in reflection on both differences and commonalities [between researcher and researched], will sensitise the researcher to ways in which varying perspectives can both support and potentially hinder this process' (448). Some practical strategies for maintaining the balance between the participants' experiences and those of the researchers include memoing (Charmaz 2014) and bracketing (Tufford and Newman 2012). My experiences of memoing brought to light my ideas and feelings during the data collection and analysis while bracketing heightened my sensitivity to prior assumptions and biases, which I then made a concerted effort to put aside to minimize their influence. The time interval between the first and the second interview was also helpful as I had the opportunity to reflect on the first interview data, identify potential areas that my personal experiences might have interfered with, and clarify queries with the participants during the second interview. While there is no one-to-one correspondence between an interview report and what goes on in reality (Weinberg 2014), the act of clarifying participants' stances to minimize potential misinterpretation of the data on my part served to help minimize the gap between the data and the reality they are supposed to represent (Blaikie 2009).

An additional aspect to consider when approaching potential participants is to address potential participants' anxiety in the research process by being transparent and communicating upfront what is expected of the participants, the risks and benefits, and the researcher's ethical obligations to them, such as what happens to their data (King and Horrocks 2010). Building trust and rapport and allowing interactions to flow more naturally rather than being strictly guided by pre-determined questions is also critical. While it is essential to prepare the interview well, the interviewer should also strive to be a good listener (Roulston 2022). Pezalla *et al.* (2012) observe that qualitative researchers are differently calibrated instruments (182), and that depending on the nature of the research topic, specific interviewer characteristics may be more effective in eliciting detailed responses from the participants due to the dynamic of the interviewer-interviewee interactions. Therefore, in practising reflexivity, one must acknowledge the implications of what an interviewer says, how it is said, and how those utterances are connected to one's characteristics.

In conclusion, this paper contributes to the ongoing dialogue in qualitative research that explores positionality and reflexivity. Through reflecting on my experiences, I provide insights for other scholars embarking on qualitative research that highlight the need to pay attention to the different facets and fluidity of their insider/outsider positions. My experiences illustrate that a researcher can be an insider professionally while simultaneously an outsider culturally. While a researcher might consider themselves an insider, the participants may perceive them to be an outsider. Therefore, contemplating the researcher's insider/outsider positioning is essential for enhancing reflexivity. Future research could investigate issues around the impact of how changing researcher positionality over a longitudinal study affects the research outcome and how multiple researchers' positionality interact to shape the research outcomes. This approach could help to deepen our understanding of the complexity and nuances associated with positionality and reflexivity in a qualitative study.

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