

## **Imagining the Knowledge, Strengths, and Skills of a Latina Prospective Teacher**

**By Mary Louise Gomez & Terri L. Rodriguez**

### **Introduction**

Today in the United States, there is a shortage of teachers who culturally and linguistically match the increasing United States school-age population of Latinos/as. Most prospective teachers in the United States are White and monolingual in English (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 1999; U.S. Department of Education, 2001). In the most recent U.S. census (U.S. Census, 2000), 35.3 million people identified as Latino/a, an increase of 58% over the prior administration of this poll. Thirty-five percent of this population are school-age children, yet only between 5-10% of practicing teachers are Latino/a (AACTE, 1999; Farber, 1991; Yates, 1999).

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At the same time, Latino/a youth are not faring well academically in U.S. schools (Fry, 2009; Gandara & Contreras, 2009). One widely discussed remedy for the low achievement and high dropout rate of Latino/a students is developing a larger pool of Latino/a teachers with whom students can affiliate (Gay, Dingus, & Jackson, 2003). In addition to increasing the number of Latino/a prospective teachers, we advocate for

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institutions that prepare teachers to focus on the strengths, knowledge, and skills that Latino/a teacher candidates bring to teacher education and work to improve their experiences on campus and in their course work. To these ends, we have been studying the life history narratives of prospective elementary teachers who are Latino/a and were enrolled in the teacher education program of a large Midwestern university called State University (all names of people, places, and institutions are pseudonyms). The case study presented here is embedded within a larger study that aims to understand how Latino/a prospective teachers experience success in their teacher education program, and how they draw upon linguistic and cultural resources in the crafting of professional identities and practices.

Here, we present a snapshot of how one Latina understands her own knowledge, strengths, and skills as a teacher, and contrast that with how several White teacher educators understood these dimensions of her identity. In doing so, we hope to uncover some encouragements and barriers to educating more Latino/a teachers in predominantly white teacher education programs. We ask:

- How does one Latina prospective teacher, Patricia Maria Morales, view her identity as a teacher—what does she see as her knowledge, strengths, and skills?
- How do university-based and school-based teachers view her knowledge, strengths, and skills as a teacher?
- What implications might these differing views have for the education of Latino/a prospective teachers, and prospective teachers of color in general?

### **Literature Review**

This review of literature is divided into three thematic parts: making family-school connections, orientations towards political consciousness, and developing personal relationships. These are prominent themes we see as grounding the literature on Latino/a practicing and prospective teachers and paraprofessionals.

#### ***Making Family-School Connections***

Studies of Latino/a prospective and practicing teachers and instructional aides reveal a view of families as respected allies with whom they can and should have close, warm relationships (Valdés, 1996). These educators extend themselves to help Latino/s children feel pride and motivation to do well in school through informal contacts in the school setting—offering encouragement and support to students on the playground, before and after class, and in their homes (often in the Spanish language). Building on prior personal experiences of dissonance between their own home and school lives, Latino/a educators also make children's and youth's activities *outside* school a topic of conversation *inside* school. For example, in a series of studies conducted in the Southwestern United States, researchers (Galindo,

2007; Galindo, 1996; Galindo, Aragon, & Underhill, 1996; Galindo & Olgun, 1996; Galindo & Escamilla, 1995) found that Latino/a teachers were likely to privilege personal background as a source of information on which to base their relationships with students and families, and link students' outside of school lives with their lives inside of schools. Galindo and colleagues found that Latino/a teachers' personal backgrounds included numerous extended family relationships, mutual aid among persons in need, and community participation, and that these interactions grounded their professional classroom practices.

Monzo and Rueda (2001) also explored how Latino/a paraprofessional educators' backgrounds mirror those of their students and show how this affinity enables a rich and complex understanding of students' lives that informs classroom teaching practices and relationships. These researchers found evidence supporting findings by Galindo and colleagues that paraprofessionals linked students' families, home, and language backgrounds to school, and made prominent and visible students' home activities and interests in the classroom—specifically in ways that supported children's learning.

Research by Wortham and Contreras (2002) confirms these findings in one paraprofessional's pedagogical practices. Significantly, though, they also problematize how White, middle class teaching staff understood this paraprofessional's teaching—which knitted together ways of being at home and ways of learning at school. Margaret Contreras, a bilingual paraprofessional in a rural school community with a small number of Latino/a students, was attuned to her students' and their families linguistic and class backgrounds. She was able to leverage the strengths and knowledge they brought to school in a way that made them feel welcomed and valued in her classroom. Ms. Contreras eventually left the school, feeling the pressures and criticisms of her White colleagues in a way that made it difficult for her to remain in the classroom and continue to draw upon her students' funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, & Gonzalez, 1992) in creating a safe and welcoming learning environment for them. Colleagues failed to appreciate the “spatiotemporal fluidity” of her classroom, which they interpreted as far too noisy, and incorporating too many activities simultaneously. They valued an individualistic approach that focused on students' regulating their own behavior as they accomplished various tasks set by the teacher for all students. The paraprofessional and the students were seen as not fulfilling their roles for what a “good teacher” should do and how “good students” should behave.

#### ***Orientations Toward Political Consciousness***

Researchers (Gomez, Rodriguez, & Agosto, 2008a; Su, 1997) also have found that Latino/a teacher candidates are articulate concerning social injustice perpetrated on people of color and those of low socioeconomic status by institutions such as schools. Latino/a prospective teachers often understand how institutions tacitly support differentiated schooling outcomes for various social and ethnic groups and have a sense of responsibility for school transformation. Such critical

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political awareness is related to prospective teachers' sense of ethnic identity and pride in their linguistic, racial, and cultural heritage. For example, Téllez (1999) has shown Latino/a teacher candidates' interest in and attempts to infuse the formal and informal classroom curriculum with culturally and historically accurate information about their ethnic group. Another study of Latino/a teacher candidates (Clark & Flores, 2001) focused on the relation of a strong ethnic identity to a positive teacher self-concept, and found varying ties (but no consistent link) between a strong ethnic identity and thinking positively about oneself as a teacher. With Téllez (1999), Clark and Flores (2001) have argued that what one's ethnic identity means and how that is tied to teaching and learning requires attention in programs of teacher education. Teacher education programs largely have focused on preparing their students to teach an ethnically and linguistically diverse K-12 student population, but have failed to take into account the linguistic and ethnic identities of teacher candidates themselves during their preparation (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001).

Studies are beginning to more closely examine these links. For example, Gomez (in press) documents the story of one Latina teacher candidate whose White peers adamantly expressed to her that people of color *choose* to live in impoverished urban areas near one another because they enjoy living in ethnically familiar neighborhoods. Rather than reflecting on economic and social encouragements and constraints surrounding city housing patterns, these White prospective teachers dysconsciously (King, 1991) maintained their arguments even in the face of their Latina peer's "counter-story" (Delgado, 2001; Yosso, 2006).

#### ***Developing Personal Relationships***

Further, a case study of one Latina teacher candidate in the Southwestern United States (Kauchak & Burbank, 2003) demonstrates the power of personal knowledge of students for all dimensions of classroom life, including classroom management. This prospective teacher drew on relationships with students to understand reasons for their behavior as well as ways to calm the classroom so that learning could take place. She saw the development of personal relationships with students as one of a teacher's primary jobs.

Another study (Gomez, Rodriguez, & Agosto, 2008b) that investigated personal relationships between Latino/a prospective teachers and their students found that three young men grounded their pedagogy in developing and building on personal knowledge of their students' interests and out-of-school lives. They spoke about attending students' after-school and weekend sporting events, serving as interpreters for parent-teacher conferences in the Spanish language, and then following-up with families. Further, they described themselves as advocates and role models for Latino/a youth.

#### ***What Does It Mean to Talk About "Identity"?***

When we refer to Patricia Maria Morales' identity as a teacher, we are speak-

ing about what Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain (1998) call the “imagining of self in worlds of action”—a process that takes place “over a person’s lifetime, populating intimate terrain and motivating social life” (p. 5). Kondo (1998) states that notions about who one is—or identity—is not fixed, but is “negotiated, open, shifting, ambiguous.” She believes that one’s identity is the result of “culturally available meanings and the open-ended, power-laden enactments of those meanings in everyday situations” (p. 24). In other words, our continual interactions with others help us to imagine who we are. In the stories we tell about our teaching, we are narrating our selves negotiating every day social encounters in our classrooms, and telling ourselves and others who we are as a teacher. Or as Holland et. al. (1998) write, “People tell others who they are, but even more important, they tell themselves and then try to act as though they are who they say they are” (p. 3).

### **Context**

From 2004-2007, State University enrolled a total of 400 students in elementary education (100 per year). Of these students, 63 were students of color—20 Asian or Pacific Islanders, 21 African Americans, 21 Latinos/as and 1 American/Alaskan Native (Office of State University Academic Services, 2007). State University enrolled only a small number of Latino/a undergraduates during the period of our study. For example, in 2005-2006, more Latino/a undergraduates were admitted as freshmen (206) to State University than had been admitted in previous years. This is a total of 805 undergraduates identifying as Latino/a in 2005-2006, or 3.4% of 28,000 students (State University Data Digest, 2006).

Lake City, a community of 250,000 where State University is located, is the second largest city in its state. Lake City enrolled 2,500 Latino/a students from a total K-12 school population of over 24,000 (Lake City Schools Website, 2005). Eighty-nine percent of the people in the county where Lake City is located are White, and 4% are Latino/a, of whom 2.5 % are of Mexican heritage (U.S. Census, 2000). Currently, there are few Latino/a teachers employed by the Lake City schools—88% of teachers are White (Lake City Schools Website, 2005). English is the dominant language spoken by teachers and students in the public schools while 10% of students speak Spanish and 3% speak Hmong (Lake City Schools Website, 2005). There is a small, new two-way bilingual (English and Spanish) elementary school in Lake City that is adding a grade per year. This school enrolls both first-language speakers of English and first-language speakers of Spanish, and especially has been popular with families who wish their monolingual-in-English children to learn Spanish. Unfortunately, as the Latino/a population has increased in Lake City, the rate of dropping out for Latinos/as has increased at a parallel pace—in 2003, for example, 9% of Latinos dropped out of school, compared to 2% of Whites (Lake City Schools Website, 2005).

The highly competitive undergraduate elementary education program at State

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admits 50 students per semester to either its early childhood to middle childhood (birth to age 8/9) or middle childhood to early adolescence (age 8/9 to age 13) programs. As for socio-economic status, students enrolled in teacher education programs at State are, for the most part, middle class. The mean income of all families of undergraduate students at State University is \$100,000 per year (State University Data Digest, 2006).

There are 13 faculty members in the elementary education program—the majority of whom are White (10) with two African Americans and one Latina. Faculty members lead the four practica and student teaching semesters, and sometimes teach in the program. Prospective teachers enrolled in the State University elementary education program primarily are taught and supervised by White and monolingual-in-English graduate students who are credentialed teachers. Although a few speak Spanish and identify as Latino/a, Puerto Rican, African American, or as coming from international contexts, most are of White, Euro-American heritage.

In this picture of the university context in which Latino/a teacher candidates are living and learning, White, English-speaking, and economically privileged undergraduate peers and graduate student supervisors and teachers prevail. Also, in the community of Lake City, White, monolingual-in-English teachers are the majority. These dimensions of campus and community provide many challenges for prospective Latino/a teachers who often are from immigrant families and have different cultural and linguistic practices than those of their university-based peers, instructors on campus, and cooperating teachers in school classrooms.

## **Methodology**

### ***Why Did We Conduct A Life History Study?***

We initiated a life history study, as we believed that it might provide a way to understand the experiences of Latino/a students in our program. Cole and Knowles (2001) have written that life history research:

...is about gaining insights into the broader human condition by coming to know and understand the experiences of other humans. It is about understanding a situation, profession, condition, or institution through coming to know how individuals walk, talk, and work within that particular context. It is about understanding the relationship, the complex interaction, between life and context, self, and place. It is about comprehending the complexities of a person's day-to-day decision-making and the ultimate consequences that play out so that insights into the broader collective experience can be achieved. (p. 11)

So, too, do we hope to comprehend one Latina prospective teacher's experiences so that our work might shed some light on the collective experiences of Latinos/as in teacher education.

Extending Cole and Knowles' definition, Linde (1993, p. 21) argues that life (hi)stories "consist of all the stories and associated discourse units, such as explana-

tions and chronicles, and the connections between them told by an individual in the course of his lifetime.” She says that these stories must meet two criteria, they must have “extended reportability” (p. 21)—or can be told and retold over a long period of time and often are about milestones in one’s life (p. 23), and make an evaluative point about the person speaking. This evaluative point generally is “a moral communication” (p. 21) about how we wish to be viewed by our listeners and can be discerned via how the speaker ascribes meaning to actions performed by her and others. Mishler (1999) states that stories people tell about their lives are characterized by these dimensions: they are socially situated actions that are located in an “unfolding scene of talk,” they are identity performances or the ways we “express, display, make claims for who we are—in the stories we tell and how we tell them,” and are negotiated between us and the persons with whom we speak (p. 19-20).

#### **Data Collection**

To begin our work concerning Latino/a prospective teachers, we contacted the Office of Academic Services in the School of Education at State University and inquired about numbers of students who self-identified as Latino/a and had been admitted to elementary education. Following contact with participants via email and telephone to explain the study, we were able to conduct life history interviews with 13 of 21 Latinos/as (nine females and four males) enrolled in various cohort groups admitted to the program between 2004 and 2007. These sequentially covered their experiences in family, school, university, and teacher education contexts. We generally conducted these interviews in two segments of one to two hours in length, in a place of the participant’s choice, often in a conference room in a building where they had many classes.

As part of our semi-structured interviews, we asked prospective teachers to name teacher educators they believed saw them as successful teachers. We told participants that we would like to interview teacher educators concerning their strengths, knowledge, and skills as prospective teachers. We did so because many Latino/a teacher candidates had told us dispiriting stories of their experiences with campus-based and school-based teacher educators. Rather than highlight these negative depictions of Latino/a prospective teachers, we sought the perspectives of teacher educators who contrastively might offer a way to think about their strengths, knowledge, and skills. We chose to interview people working in varied contexts, those who worked as faculty and teaching assistants responsible for coursework as well as cooperating teachers in the field who were supervising prospective teachers’ classroom practices. We believe that soliciting such varied perspectives might offer more rich and nuanced pictures of who prospective teachers were and what they knew and could do.

We interviewed those persons named as seeing prospective teachers as successful in an office on campus (if they were faculty or teaching assistants) or in their school classroom (if they were cooperating teachers) for one to two hours.



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These interviews covered topics such as: what the nominated person saw as the prospective teachers' strengths, knowledge, and skills; how they saw these playing out in the classroom; and what they saw as evidence for their claims.

#### **Analyses**

Our analyses of the narratives of teacher candidates and of teachers they nominated as seeing them as successful are both inductive and deductive (Graue & Walsh, 1998). They are inductive in that we first read and then reread the interview transcripts on multiple occasions and sought recurring themes in the data. The authors read the transcripts independently and then included those themes on which both agreed. Our analyses of Latino/a prospective teachers' narratives also are deductive in that we looked for themes that we expected might be present from three sources: from Mary Louise's growing up Latina, from Terri's more than 25-year marriage to a Latino and her relationships with a large, extended Latino/a family, and from our reading of the extant literature on prospective and practicing teachers who are Latino/a. Examples of these deductive themes include those of immigration and meanings assigned to it; discrimination grounded in prejudices concerning language, ethnicity, and/or physical appearance; close family relationships; learning English; and pride in culture and its artifacts such as food and celebrations. We also looked for deductive themes in teacher educators' narratives that suggested how teacher educators thought about prospective teachers' identities and the relationship of these to teaching, as well as how they thought and talked about their own teaching identities.

We do bring particular subjectivities to our analyses related to our ethnic backgrounds and affiliations, and also to our roles as teacher educators engaged in teaching that is critically reflexive and multicultural. We also acknowledge that in spite of such similarities with our participants, we never will know their exact experiences. What we can say is that after 13 life history interviews, we had reached saturation of the data set (Bertaux & Bertaux-Wiame, 1981). Of course, we did not hear exactly the same stories from all participants. However, we did hear consistent and similar stories from participants regarding their close, warm family experiences; disappointing K-12 schooling; and troubling interactions with peers and teacher educators on campus and in school classrooms. We believe that all researchers and teacher educators hold such subjectivities as ours related to who they are and what they value and do, and that the rigor of our analyses was not comprised, but enhanced by these.

#### **Patricia Maria Morales**

We choose to focus in this article on Patricia Maria Morales because she is emblematic of the Latino/a teacher candidates we have studied at State University—she is a very good student with a grade of B or above in course work at our



university; she is bilingual in Spanish and English; and she is from a family which immigrated to the United States. Further, like her peers whom we researched, she was persistent in her attempts to make State University a more welcoming place for Latino/a students in general. In particular, Patricia Maria founded a Latina sorority so that her “sisters” might find music, dancing, books, and political knowledge and arguments more familiar and consonant with their home and family cultural experiences.

Patricia Maria named one school-based and two-campus-based teacher educators as seeing her as being a very successful future teacher. She first named Barbara Barnes, the cooperating teacher for her student teaching semester, as someone with whom we should speak. Patricia Maria also named two doctoral candidates as people whom she believed saw her as a successful teacher. Both were teachers of required courses at State University for elementary education teacher candidates: Jenny Smith was a teacher of a required course called “Teaching Art” and John Johnson, in the mathematics department, was an instructor of a geometry course for prospective teachers. We then interviewed these persons, and particularly asked them to discuss what qualities they thought Patricia Maria possessed that would make her a successful teacher. In addition to interviews, we also observed Patricia Maria for more than 30 hours during her student teaching in Barbara Barnes’ 5<sup>th</sup> grade classroom. We generated field notes and collected artifacts related to Patricia Maria’s planning and instruction.

### **What Kind of Teacher Will Patricia Maria Morales Be?**

In this section, we present narratives in which Patricia Maria expresses ideas that are illustrative of her identity as a teacher. We also discuss how campus-based and school-based teacher educators envision her as a prospective educator. Soliciting diverse perspectives allows us to see not only a more nuanced portrait of Patricia Maria as a prospective teacher, but the ways each narrator’s experiences has shaped the particular lenses through which they view her as a teacher. For the purposes of this article, we focus on three related themes that characterize Patricia Maria’s narratives of professional identity and are evident in our observations of her teaching practices. These are a personal commitment to individual students and upholding high expectations for them; critical reflexivity; and the importance of community building for students’ learning. In interviews we conducted with her, Patricia Maria often spoke with concern about individual students’ knowledge and skills in her student teaching classroom. In observations we conducted, we noted her consistent attempts to differentiate instruction and boost students’ achievement. She consistently employed different grouping and pedagogical practices to accomplish these ends.

Different themes characteristic of Patricia Maria’s strengths emerged when we interviewed Jenny Smith and John Johnson, two campus-based educators. Through their teaching of two university classes, art and mathematics, Jenny and John

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developed relationships with Patricia Maria centered around what she knew and could do in their content areas. They did not see her in classrooms with children. Nonetheless, both instructors focus on Patricia Maria's sociability as her primary asset as opposed to her content knowledge. Both talked at length concerning how her personal good nature and "charisma" would serve her well in teaching children. As Jenny Smith describes Patricia Maria, "she wears her heart on her sleeve." Both contrasted her with other prospective teachers in their classes and pointed to what they perceived as her lack of content preparation in art and mathematics.

Finally, we discuss the theme of advocacy as it emerges in the interview narratives of Barbara Barnes, Patricia Maria's cooperating teacher. Barbara spoke of Patricia Maria's advocacy for students in her 5<sup>th</sup> grade classroom. She narrates how Patricia Maria consistently concerned herself with the out-of-school lives of her students and made links to their in-school lives. For example, in a narrative that follows, Barbara speaks of Patricia Maria's interactions with a new student who appeared unhappy in school. Patricia Maria made certain to check in frequently with him as the days passed to find out if he was feeling better. Barbara valued this behavior because for her, it indicated Patricia Maria's ability to build trust with students.

#### ***Patricia Maria: Personal Commitment to Individual Students***

Prominent among Patricia Maria's notions of herself are commitments to students' well being, particularly those children who have extra challenges in their lives. She sees herself as purposefully connecting with these children, monitoring what they are learning and insuring that they obtain an equitable education. She says of one child in her fifth grade (student teaching) classroom:

Once I get in well with a kid, I know what to do. But, starting off those interactions is tough, tough. There's a little girl [in my class] whose parents are in jail. She just got adopted by another community member and she's insisting on writing down what her legal name is now. She's always drawing, constantly doodling...daydreaming, thinking. Just seeing how easily kids like this can fall through the cracks, if I don't keep my eye out for this kid, she will miss all of the fifth grade curriculum.

Like the Latino/a educators cited in our literature review, Patricia Maria forges personal relationships with students. As with other Latino/a teachers and paraprofessionals, Patricia Maria links her life with that of her students, especially those who face extra challenges in school and in life. Further, Patricia Maria sees herself as having high expectations for all of her students, and says she will "just not settle for you know just the least bit from them."

#### ***Patricia Maria: Critical Reflexivity***

Patricia Maria considers how her behaviors will affect the futures of her students; she sees these as linked: "[You have to] be organized; I think you should be organized because that really helps the kids' future, the more organized you are

the better you are going to do a [your] job for them.” She sees many of her peers creating explanations for why they cannot accomplish some of what she and the State University teacher education program aim for—they use their small town backgrounds as excuses. She quotes them as saying: “I’m from a small town and I never dealt with that situation before.” Instead, Patricia asserts her classmates should take on these challenges: “You have the opportunity now, so go and do it. Really go out there and try it. You know what, if you’re scared about it or whatever, that’s fine. But you gotta go out there and face your fears.”

Further, she talked about how she considered what she taught and how it connected to those whom she taught. Patricia Maria said:

I am thinking always about where my students come from, their cultural and language backgrounds—what they bring to school, and I am thinking about how to connect these things with the curriculum, and I’m trying to make these big, big connections so they can learn better, and achieve more. I am also thinking about how so much material we are supposed to teach kids has nothing to do with their lives, and how teachers have got to do this—make these connections for them.

With these remarks, Patricia Maria demonstrates her commitments to connect what children are expected to learn in school with what they bring to school.

***Patricia Maria: Community-Building***

Patricia Maria also draws on children’s strengths to collaborate with one another and help their peers. She told us:

I felt that working together really helped the class. Who were the kids who would be fully included and who were the kids who wouldn’t be? We have some kids who are so advanced and having them be able to teach [others] helps them get a full learning experience.

However, she recognized that these partnerships between the skillful and the less skilled could result in situations where one student felt superior and the other felt badly about what they did not know, situations where “I’m the stupid one and you’re the smart one.” She sought to avoid these in her teaching and actively worked to pair students for maximum benefits to both partners. She explained:

I really just want to build community within the classroom. There is a lot of influence from my [Latina] sorority; part of forming the sorority was building a community, a family here on campus where you feel comfortable in talking about your frustrations, telling something that happened in your life, sharing what you are doing. That is my goal in teaching.

Patricia Maria aimed at forming community when she began a newspaper run by the children in her student teaching classroom. Called “Inside 102,” after the class’s room number, the students wrote, edited, and published each issue. The students’ goal was to continue writing the newspaper after Patricia Maria ended her student

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teaching. Patricia Maria saw the classroom newspaper as a legacy of her time in Ms. Barnes' classroom and the power she saw in students' collaborating with one another for mutual benefit.

#### ***Jenny Smith: Patricia Maria's Sociability and Preparedness***

Jenny had been a middle school art teacher for six years in the Midwestern state where the university was located. As a doctoral candidate, she had worked at the university for one year. She taught one section of a course for all elementary teacher candidates concerning an introduction to teaching art.

In our interview, when we told Jenny that Patricia Maria had nominated her as someone who saw her as a successful prospective teacher, Jenny said, "I really, really like her." During our conversation, though, Jenny kept returning to what Patricia Maria lacked in terms of knowledge and skills in art. She said, "You know, she just doesn't seem to get it. Her work was very unorganized. It wasn't aesthetically there. I think she was too busy to put it together." She added that she did not know *what* (her emphasis) Patricia Maria was doing outside of class, but that she seemed very busy, often too busy to attend fully to her art homework. Jenny did not see Patricia Maria as having a different artistic aesthetic than that which she held; rather, she saw her as failing to take up the one Jenny was trying to teach her.

Jenny also saw Patricia Maria as a sociable prospective teacher. She talked about how over the semester they had known one another, Patricia Maria had issued many invitations to events sponsored by the Latina sorority she had founded. Jenny said, "She was always inviting me to activities and fundraisers." However, Jenny admitted that she had never attended any of these. She said that Patricia Maria talked a lot—mostly in class to Jenny, as she said Patricia Maria told her that most of her peers did not like her. She cited their not inviting her to parties the group held as evidence of their dislike. However, Jenny did not see Patricia Maria as someone who was isolated in the community of students or that she needed extra support. She did not see that as a teacher, she might be Patricia Maria's ally. Rather, Jenny noted that Patricia Maria's art work was "not as good as her Caucasian (her word) peers" and also commented regarding Patricia Maria and her Latino peer, Frank Hernandez, "They were receiving lower grades than the rest of the class. I *wanted* (her emphasis) them to succeed. When the project was turned in, it didn't meet all of the requirements." Jenny also said that "Frank's and Patricia Maria's papers were not as eloquent as their peers and there was much more basic language used in their papers." It is not clear whether Jenny recognized that both students had learned English as a second language or on what criteria she based her assessment of their writing skills. Further, Jenny did not recognize the sorority as having a relationship to what Patricia Maria was learning about the power of community in her personal life or for the school classroom. Jenny seemed to think of these only as "activities" that took time away from homework and were perhaps, aligned with having fun.

Why Patricia Maria nominated Jenny as someone who saw her as a successful teacher seems related to the friendliness with which Jenny treated her in class. It was clear to us that Jenny liked Patricia Maria as a person, and that she was conflicted about seeing a person of color as less capable than her White peers. However, Jenny did not seem to see her role as helping Patricia Maria improve her written work, or that she should get to know her in ways that would provide further insight into Patricia Maria's thinking about art and/or teaching. Nor did Jenny see that she could create a classroom community that would open up spaces for dialogue among students and reduce the isolation that Patricia Maria felt in class.

***John Johnson: Patricia Maria's "Charisma" and Affability***

John, teacher of a required course on geometry for elementary teachers, clearly saw Patricia Maria as a potentially successful teacher. He admired in her qualities that he said he did not see in himself. For example, he thought she had "charisma" to which he felt children would be responsive. He said of Patricia Maria:

Her strength is communication, no doubt about it, she has charisma. There is no doubt she could head a group of youngsters. I would flounder. My charisma is from the intellectual; hers is much more emotional, and yes, emotional. I would definitely say her strengths are much more in communication.

Consonant with Jenny's assessment of Patricia Maria, John focused on affability as one of Patricia Maria's primary teacher characteristics. Also like Jenny, John said he "liked Patricia Maria" and also saw weaknesses in Patricia Maria's preparation for his course. He said: "As far as knowledge gained mathematically, she was less well prepared than others," and that the "number of facts at her fingertips were less than some other students; the logical thinking, she struggled with it." He, too, compared her with her White peers, saying, "She doesn't have it, the knowledge I would expect—the other students clearly are better at what I am teaching."

John had come directly to a doctoral program in mathematics from his private Midwestern college bachelor's degree, and admitted to "having some problems in my teaching." He had participated in the university's fellowship program in outreach from the mathematics and science departments to the public schools in Lake City, and understood the value of what he called "self reflection" on one's teaching for clues on what was happening in a classroom. He was quick to say that when students were not "getting it," that their learning was likely related to their teacher's skills rather than their inattention.

However, John did not link his own teaching skills to what he saw as Patricia Maria's weaknesses of learning geometry. He didn't see that what he interpreted as Patricia Maria's "lack" of mathematical knowledge as something he could or should remedy, or that he might inquire more into the content or pedagogical knowledge she held regarding teaching mathematics. Neither John nor Jenny saw their role as getting to know students' educational or personal backgrounds, interests, or strengths.

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John saw Patricia Maria as primarily charming students with her personality, which as one cooperating teacher narrates below, Patricia Maria did, in part, do. However, we and her cooperating teacher Barbara Barnes see Patricia Maria as bringing far more to the classroom than her charm.

#### **Barbara Barnes: Advocacy**

Barbara, Patricia Maria's cooperating teacher for her student teaching experience was, like Jenny and John, a White Midwesterner. She had earned her degree in elementary education at State University 11 years earlier and also had earned a master's degree in Inclusive Education from the university. She said that she and Patricia Maria had "hit it off" right away upon meeting one another, and that she greatly enjoyed her role as Patricia Maria's school-based mentor at Hilltop Elementary School. She saw Patricia Maria as a highly successful teacher—someone who could think on her feet, make decisions based on the needs of students, and change her plans according to the tone and tenor of the classroom. Barbara Barnes saw Patricia Maria not only as sociable, but also as a teacher who could make the extra effort required to see that students felt supported and cared about.

One such effort she observed was with a boy who was new to the school. Barbara said:

She really had a knack to be very patient with him. If he was having a bad day she could be like, "Hey, tell me what's going on," and later on that day or later in the week, she'd be like, "You know, I know this was bugging you earlier this week; how are things going?" And, I think making that connection and that follow through helped that student to really trust her and that created a bond between them, that you know, really helped their relationship throughout the semester.

Barbara saw Patricia Maria's compassion and caring for the children as tremendous strengths. She viewed Patricia Maria as someone who was concerned about *how* the children were learning as well as *what* they were learning. She said:

She loved getting the information across to them—that really was fun for her, and when they got it, that was really exciting for her. Bringing that through to them and congratulating them and praising them; it was very genuine. They could tell that. When she was excited they got something, they could tell that and they wanted to please her.

Barbara saw Patricia Maria as building community among children, seeking personal connections with the children—especially those living in difficulty or having problems in school, and relishing all children's achievements.

She also vigorously defended Patricia Maria when the school principal, a White woman named Anne Jones (with many years of experience as a building administrator) criticized her for what she termed "inappropriate dress" for school, citing her tops as "suggestive" (a word Anne used). This seemed like a stereotype of Latinas' fashion choices and to her credit, Barbara told the principal that Patricia

Maria did not dress differently than any other student teacher in the building. Anne also criticized Patricia Maria as using too loud a voice and being too directive in manner when getting children in line or moving them from one activity to another. Once again, Barbara said that she and Patricia Maria had similar and compatible styles of addressing students, and that these also were effective. Barbara also tried to deflect these critiques from Patricia Maria—who knew about and was upset by them. At the end of the semester, Patricia Maria wrote to the faculty member responsible for student teaching at State, arguing that the criticisms were grounded in ethnic discrimination. We are not privy to his reply. However, we do know that she finished student teaching in good standing and later was hired by the Lake City district as a middle school teacher.

### **Discussion**

Why do art instructor Jenny Smith, mathematics instructor John Johnson, co-operating teacher Barbara Barnes, principal Anne Jones, and Patricia Maria Morales herself each interpret Patricia Maria and her teaching so differently? Who is telling “the truth”? Each of these people narrates a picture of Patricia Maria as a teacher. It is as if each is looking through a kaleidoscope, and at each turn of the mechanism, a new and different portrait of Patricia Maria emerges. The elements may remain the same, but the interpretation of who she is changes at every turn. We suggest that each interprets Patricia Maria’s teaching through the particular lenses available to them. Each is gazing at Patricia Maria, but what they see and how they see her varies with the personal and professional standpoints (Crites, 1997) they bring to the task. These allow each to imagine her as possessing certain teaching strengths and/or deficits. Further, each is enacting a particular identity—they each are “producing, from the cultural resources available to them, understandings of themselves that [seem] to be not only ‘of’ [about] themselves...but also ‘for’ themselves” (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998, p. 4). In other words, when they speak “about” Patricia (or represent their sense of who she is and what she can do), they also are speaking “about” and “for” themselves from the situated contexts of their own experiences. As Connelly and Clandinin (1999) state, when we ask participants to tell us “who Patricia Maria Morales is” we ask them to construct narratives of identity that necessarily “have histories” of origin and are “multiple depending on the life situations in which [they find themselves]” (p. 95). In speaking about Patricia Maria, they are speaking for and about themselves. They are trying to “act as though they are who they say they are” (Holland et. al., 1998, p. 3) in relation to this young woman.

Jenny saw a busy, sociable young woman who engaged in many hours of work in a campus sorority. She saw Patricia Maria not as a person who felt marginalized by her White peers and was engaged in building community with Latina peers in her sorority, but as someone who often busied herself with purely social activities rather than focusing on school work. John saw an engaging prospective teacher



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and imagined Patricia Maria charming students with her winning personality. He contrasted himself with her by saying that he had “intellectual charisma” while her strength lay in “emotional charisma.” He also saw a university student less skilled mathematically than her class peers. Jenny and John primarily saw Patricia Maria through the windows of their respective, required courses and the knowledge and skills each required for success in class. They also interpreted her through biographical lenses that privileged ethics of hard work on required assignments and a strong focus on the tasks at hand in their particular courses.

Barbara viewed Patricia Maria as a multi-skilled teacher who was compassionate with children, especially those who required extra support. She offered several examples of Patricia Maria’s caring behaviors. She also saw Patricia Maria as being firm and direct when the job required it. Like Patricia Maria, Barbara sometimes used her voice to gain control, and argued that students were not offended by this direct approach to classroom management. She was privileged to see Patricia Maria in many different contexts over several months time. They became close colleagues who worked to support one another and the children whom they taught.

Anne failed to see the strengths that Barbara narrated. Instead, she saw a young woman who dressed inappropriately for teaching, and used a loud voice to capture students’ attention. From a principal’s perspective, she did not see Patricia Maria as embodying many important dispositions of being a teacher—particularly those of demeanor and dress.

We point out that all three teachers whom Patricia Maria nominated as seeing her as successful are White European Americans, and that they are privileged through their racial identities and achieved status to critique Patricia Maria, a prospective teacher of color. We recognize that these critiques also are a dimension of their professional responsibilities. However, only one of them, Barbara, was able to view Patricia Maria from a standpoint of caring mentor. Each of these persons holds certain privileges that they have accrued through education, profession, age, etc., and activates these when their vision of “good” and “effective” student teacher either is upheld or interrupted. In the case of Barbara, she drew on her race and years of teaching to defend Patricia Maria from what she saw as unjust accusations from her building administrator. Contrastively, Jenny and John set their privilege in motion when Patricia Maria failed to complete class projects to their satisfaction. Consequentially, Patricia Maria received a lower grade than her White peers against whose knowledge and skills she was contrasted.

Patricia Maria saw herself as someone who built on personal understandings and connections with students to help them become more successful in school. She also saw herself as someone who drew on the power of critical reflexivity to consider how what she taught and how she did so helped her students learn important content material. And, finally, she considered the power of community building to help each student see themselves as both an individual and a member of a classroom community that could scaffold their learning.

Now, because we are teacher educators and see possibilities for change in programs of teacher education, we ask: What can State University, and universities in general, do to construct more welcoming and supportive contexts for Latino/a prospective teachers—as well as other pre-service teachers of color—to explore their identities and the relationship of these to teaching?

### **Implications for Teacher Education**

First, we suggest that the pool of teacher educators who currently are located in colleges and universities be diversified. We hope that by increasing the pool of teacher educators of color that we may find people who can see a more multi-faceted view of the varied skills and strengths that all prospective teachers bring to their classes. Also needed is a broadening of knowledge of existing teacher educators of all backgrounds to help them envision different individuals' strengths and ways of assessing those strengths than currently are in our repertoire.

We also need to support prospective teachers who lack skills and strengths in some areas, should we find these—whether it be in a university writing skills center, mathematics lab, or through our own face-to-face assistance. It is not adequate to say a student lacks some knowledge and skills, and then metaphorically shrug one's shoulders, saying, "they lack that knowledge," or "she is not well prepared." We understand that some teacher educators, graduate teaching assistants for example (as we have shown), may be new at their university-based jobs and are developing knowledge and skills, just as prospective teachers enrolled in their classes are doing. However, we suggest that they become more introspective and self-critical given the experiences of students like Patricia Maria. This is challenging work as they, too, are vulnerable beginners.

Further, we believe support groups for Latinos/as and other students of color need to be established inside programs of teacher education so that prospective teachers may talk through dilemmas that will and do face them, and that may not challenge their White peers in similar ways in what is unarguably a charged context dominated by White, monolingual in English persons. No such assembly currently exists inside our teacher education program, and we are about to begin such a support group, thinking with Patricia Maria that through collaboration and community, many challenges can be faced and problems analyzed and resolved. The emphasis here is on analysis and resolution, as mere commiseration only will take prospective teachers so far, and will not necessarily help them become strong professionals who can support one another as well as support students and their families. As we prepare prospective teachers to create safe and supportive, equitable classrooms for all children, so too we must create such environments for all teacher candidates.

We also suggest teacher educators begin making spaces in their classrooms for students to share stories of their experiences, either experiences that result from people disrespecting their ethnic backgrounds or privileging them, as through such

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dialogue we believe teacher candidates can develop compassion for one another's viewpoints. Too often, we have heard from White, middle class prospective teachers that their peers from low-income families and families of color seem angry or upset, and likewise from teacher candidates of color, that their White peers are "clueless" about what happens to people of color and those living in poverty in this nation. We believe that reasons for such feelings by members of both groups—Whites and people of color—require sharing and of course, understanding, and that teacher educators can mobilize and sustain such interactions among people. Of course, such relationship building must be led by sensitive, skilled, and knowledgeable persons.

And, we call on teachers and school administrators to welcome all prospective teachers to schools, including Latinos/as. White teachers and teachers of color alike can be allies and mentors to prospective teachers of color, and like Barbara Barnes, appreciate a multi-faceted, rich, and complex view of their knowledge, strengths, and skills. Administrators can inform prospective teachers about what is expected and honored in their buildings as well as how they imagine helping prospective teachers to meet these expectations. Administrators can be curriculum leaders, budget-keepers, *and* staff leaders who can make a difference in the way students, families, and prospective teachers are welcomed and appreciated for their potential varied contributions to schools and schooling.

We recognize that all of these suggestions pose challenges for teaching and teacher education. However, if implemented, we believe that all involved—prospective Latino/a teachers, other prospective teachers of color, and their White, European American counterparts, as well as practicing teachers, administrators, and teacher educators will benefit. Finally, we believe the ultimate beneficiaries of such practices and policies will be students, who will have a more diversified teaching staff.

### **Conclusion**

Finally, we see Patricia Maria Morales as strongly contributing to U.S. schools with her compassion for children and youth, her championing of those students who are challenged by difficulties beyond their own making, her infectious enthusiasm and praise for students' work well done, her efforts to try another way when students don't "get it" the first time, and her development of classroom community. All of these qualities of a teacher's identity and practices are to be admired, and we especially honor Patricia Maria's persistence in searching for ways to meet students' instructional and personal needs. We aim to nurture these qualities in other teacher candidates. We see Patricia Maria's teaching as consonant with the ideals and pedagogy that our literature review of Latino/a teachers evidenced, and see our study as elaborating the literature on Latino/a prospective teachers. We hope that through developing this picture of one Latina teacher candidate that we contribute to what we hope will be become "a case book" of who Latino/a teacher candidates

and teachers are, how they are developing, how and why they practice their craft, and what we might learn from them.

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