Resisting Negative Images and Stereotypes: One Latina Prospective Teacher's Story

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Abstract

This article focuses on one Latina prospective teacher's act of resisting negative stereotypes regarding attire imposed upon her by a white female principal. The event is embedded within a larger life history study that explores the experiences of bilingual Latino prospective teachers in the elementary education program of a large Midwestern university. The selected narrative is contextualized in relation to resistance narratives. Patricia Morales tells about her experiences in U.S. schools. It explores how Patricia's life history is marked by experiences of discrimination, yet how her constructions of these events represent "counterstories" (Delgado, 2000; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002) through which she "talks back" (hooks, 1989) to distorted images and stereotypes. Patricia's narratives are shown to constitute creative acts of resistance through which she negotiates a positive and affirming identity (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001) as a Latina prospective teacher.

Keywords: preservice teachers; teacher education; Latino critical race theory; narrative inquiry

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"I feel like sometimes people just get sick and tired of me challenging their thoughts. I always feel like everybody else is blue colored pencils and I'm the red one" (Interview, Patricia Morales, 12/04).

The above quote represents the perspective of Patricia Morales (names of people and places are pseudonyms), a Latina prospective elementary teacher enrolled in a large Midwestern university teacher education program from 2004-2006. Patricia's case emerges from a larger life history study inquiring into the experiences of bilingual Latino preservice elementary teachers during their teacher education program at State University (Gomez, Rodriguez, & Agosto 2008a; 2008b). The stories Patricia tells of herself -- through her own writing and through the life history interviews generated during this study -- allow us to bear witness to her journey. This article focuses upon Patricia's act of resisting negative stereotypes about Latina attire imposed upon her by a white female cooperating principal during her student teaching semester; it is situated in relation to other resistance narratives told by Patricia about her experiences in U.S. schools. I contend that Patricia's narrative of the event represents a "counterstory" (Delgado, 2000; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002) through which she "talks back" (hooks, 1989) to distorted images. Further, it constitutes a creative act of resistance through which Patricia negotiates a positive and affirming identity (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001) as a Latina prospective teacher.

Why Study the Experiences of Latina Prospective Teachers?

In the U.S., increasing numbers of students, like Patricia, speak a language other than English at home and are foreign-born or first-generation immigrants (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000). Latinos are seen to form an emerging ethnic and racial majority who, as a group, are labeled "at risk" in social institutions (Garcia, 2005, p. 1) and experience higher rates of school failure than their white counterparts on many measures of academic achievement (Clark & Flores, 2001; Donato, 1997; Espinoza-Herold, 2003; Grant & Gomez, 2001; Nieto, 1999; Valenzuela, 1999). An often-implicit understanding within the literature focusing on the "achievement debt" (Ladson-Billings, 2006) experienced by Latino students is that teachers are predominantly monolingual, middle-class, and White. The percentage of white teachers grew from 88% in 1971 to 90.7% in 1996 at the same time that the numbers of Black and those classified as "other" decreased (National Education Association [NEA], 1997, 2003).

The NEA's racial classification of Latino teachers in the U.S. as "other" (i.e. not Black *or* White) reflects a conflicted history of marginalization (Perea, 2000, p. 346). For example, Donato (1997) documents the "other" struggle for equal schools during the civil rights era in which Mexican-Americans in the Southwest organized in resistance to segregation and discriminatory policies. Classifying Latinos as "other" also points to the shifting nature of identity politics, a process that is often called "Hispanization" (Santos, 1997) or the construction of "Latinidad" (Valdivia, 2005). Suárez-Orozco and Páez (2002) emphasize that the term "Latino" has meaning only in reference to the U.S. experience and that "indeed, Latinos are White, Black, and indigenous" (p. 3).

The racial, ethnic, and linguistic identities of preservice teachers are important to consider because linguistic and cultural disparities between K-12 students and their teachers are understood as one factor affecting achievement (Walker, MacGillivray, & Aguilar, 2001). Researchers focus on the lack of critical consciousness, cultural understandings, and linguistic

knowledge that white teachers often bring to the classroom (Darling-Hammond, French, & Garcia-Lopez, 2002. Weisman and Hansen (2008), however, call for us to go beyond simply recruiting teachers with diverse backgrounds. Together with Monzo and Rueda (2003), they urge us to examine whether or not (and how) culturally and linguistically diverse teachers' beliefs and practices actually differ from those of white teachers, especially if they are middle-class. I add that we must also examine the ways in which teacher education programs themselves support and constrain the successes of bilingual Latino teacher candidates (Gomez & Rodriguez, in press).

Conceptual Framework

Narrative Theory

Narrative inquiry is "a way of understanding experience....a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction.... [It] is stories lived and told" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20). Gomez (1997) adds that narrative scholars hold in common a view that the stories people tell are "frameworks through which they impose order on and make sense of their own and others' experiences" (p. x). The aim of narrative research is to "understand how people think and act as they do in the situated contexts in which they live and labor" (p. x). Narrative inquirers pay attention to "layers of narratives" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20). For example, this analysis spans resistance narratives located across Patricia's life history and considers the larger socio-political contexts of what it means to be a Latina in the U.S. Embedded within it is my own personal narrative -- I position myself as a white, native English-speaking woman whose life experiences frame a situated interpretation. As a non-Latina who is part of an extended Puerto Rican family through marriage, I pursue this research because I am particularly interested in the experiences and education of Latino students and teachers in U.S. schools. At the time of the study, I was a graduate teaching assistant in the teacher education program who came to know Patricia through our shared experiences there.

Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit)

Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) names race as central to one's experience and allows it to be prioritized as a social category while understanding that race is inextricably linked to other social categories like gender, sexuality, ability or socioeconomic class. López (2000) asserts, "[R]ace *should* be used as a lens through which to view Latinos/as in order to focus our attention on the experiences of racial oppression" (p. 375). Matsuda (1995) reminds us that critical race scholarship "looks to the bottom," which means that "those who have experienced discrimination speak with a special voice to which we should listen" and suggests a "new epistemological source for critical scholars: the actual experiences, history, culture, and intellectual tradition of people of color in America" (p. 63).

According to Fernández (2002), narratives serve multiple functions within a LatCrit framework, including allowing the participant to reflect on her/his experiences; making public his/her story; subverting the dominant story; and raising consciousness of common experiences (p. 48). She emphasizes the imperative to study the "experiences of marginalized Latina/Latino

students” in order to “get a deeper understanding of how they are oppressed, but at the same time, use their personal agency to resist their social conditions” (p. 48). Within the field of LatCrit and central to this analysis, Solórzano and Villalpando (1998) and Solórzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) provide models for understanding forms of resistance in higher education, including ways of examining relationships between the social, political, and historical contexts of participants’ lives and their interactions with white peers, cooperating personnel, and university staff.

Methodology

As mentioned previously, Patricia’s case study (Stake, 1995) emerges from a larger life history project conducted at State University between the years 2004-2006 in which 19 Latino prospective teachers participated (15 female/4 male). Life history was chosen as an appropriate methodology because, as Cole and Knowles (2001) have written, life history research is about “gaining insights into the broader human condition by coming to know and understand the experiences of others” within situated contexts (p. 11). The aim of the larger project is to better understand how Latino preservice teachers experience success in their teacher education program, and how they and others speak about their successes. The goal is to improve teacher education to be more receptive to their strengths and needs.

Setting

In 2005-2006, 805 undergraduate students identified as Latino -- a total of 3.4% of all undergraduates (State University Data Digest, 2006). Between 2004 and 2006, 19 Latino prospective teachers were enrolled in the elementary education program that admitted 75 students per semester. The majority of students were White and upper-middle-class—the mean income of State University families was \$100,000 per year (State University Data Digest, 2006). There are 14 faculty members in the elementary education program, of whom the majority are White (10), with 3 African Americans and 1 Latina. Faculty broadly shares a vision of social justice education rooted in the belief that “schools in a democracy can and should prepare citizens to work actively and collectively on problems facing society” (Grant & Sleeter, 2007, p. 258). There is a strong focus on understanding students’ and teachers’ identities as significant factors in understanding what happens in schools. State University is part of Lake City’s community, a mid-sized Midwestern city with a population of 250,000 that enrolls 2,500 Latino students from a school population of 24,000 (City Schools Website, 2003). Like Patricia on campus, Latino students in Lake City are schooled with mostly Euro-American and English-speaking teachers and peers. In 2003, 9% of Latinos dropped out of school in Lake City, compared to 2% of Whites (City Schools Website, 2003). The cooperating teachers with whom the university collaborates are 88% White and most are monolingual in English (City Schools Website, 2005).

Data Generation

Patricia, like the other 19 teacher candidates who agreed to participate in the larger study, was sent a letter explicating its goals, consent forms, and life history interview protocols (Goodson & Sikes, 2001; Mishler, 1999; Capps & Ochs, 1995; Linde, 1993) that asked about her experiences

in family, school, university, and teacher education contexts. Over the course of three semesters, I conducted three semi-structured, formal interviews with her. I audiotaped the interviews and transcribed them, returning the transcripts to Patricia for any changes she wished to make. During the fourth semester, I observed Patricia for more than 30 hours in her 4th/5th grade student-teaching classroom. I wrote field notes and collected artifacts, including Patricia's lesson plans and reflections, a classroom newspaper, and the email/letter that she sent to the chair of the elementary education program. I also asked Patricia to nominate university professors, supervisors, and cooperating teachers who could talk about her successes in the program. I interviewed her white female cooperating teacher, Barbara Barnes, and two of her university teachers (graduate teaching assistants who identified as white female and white male). I elicited these interviews as a way of triangulating data -- to help me better understand multiple and competing perspectives of Patricia's stories of her experiences in the program.

Data Analysis

As part of the larger life history study, a research team that included me, another doctoral student who identified as African-American and Latina, and a Latina faculty member conducted the analyses. We also employed member-checks, shared emerging theories, and sought confirmation of our interpretations with participants. Our analyses are both inductive and deductive (Graue & Walsh, 1998). We first read and reread interview transcripts independently and sought recurring themes in the data. We then included those themes on which we agreed. We looked for themes that we expected might be present from three sources: from two researchers' experiences of growing up Latina; from my relationships within a large, extended Puerto Rican family through marriage and through teaching experiences in Puerto Rico; and from our reading of the extant literature on Latino teachers. Examples of themes include those of immigration and meanings assigned to it; discrimination grounded in prejudices concerning language, ethnicity, or physical appearance; close family relationships; learning English; and pride in culture and its artifacts such as food and celebrations.

For this article, I approached Patricia's life history from a holistic-content perspective (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). The data that constitute the narrative of the event are discussed in relation to previous narratives emblematic of Patricia's construction of herself as "resistant" and include the email Patricia wrote describing her response to the principal's actions as well as both formal and informal interview data from Patricia and her cooperating teacher, Barbara.

Patricia's Story: The Red Colored Pencil

Patricia emigrated to the U.S. from Venezuela with her family during political upheavals there between the years 1994-1995. She attended a private elementary school through third grade in Venezuela where she learned to read and write in English and Spanish. She positions herself as inhabiting middle-to-upper-middle-class socioeconomic status in the U.S. and upper-class status in Venezuela. Her parents are fluently bilingual and have earned advanced degrees in education and veterinary science. Patricia's life history is one of movement and migration, yet one that is also centered in a secure sense of herself and her role in her family. When asked to compose a poem introducing herself, she wrote the following:

I Am From...

I am from the rich soils of coffee bearing fields,
 And from the high peaks of the Andes Mountains.
 I am from wherever the wind picks me up and drops me off.
 Gainesville, Caracas, [Lake City],
 Who knows where to next?
 Doesn't matter what I want, destiny decides.
 I am from the familiar cooking smells of my mother's kitchen,
 Where she creates delicacies with her special ingredient: love.
 I am from my father's dream, where he wishes upon a star for a baby girl.
 But lastly, I will always be from wherever my family is.
 "Me voy" my mother announces,
 We drop whatever we are doing, because where my parents are, we are home (Course
 assignment, 9/04).

Patricia's account of her family's emigration marks a defining point in her life history. According to Patricia, "[it] doesn't matter what [she] wants, destiny decides" where she and her family will live. It is clear that she feels loved by her parents and will be "home" wherever they are. Patricia's status as a native Spanish-speaking immigrant in U.S. schools also becomes a marker of her identity and informs her sense of herself as a student and a prospective elementary teacher. After her move to the U.S., Patricia entered fourth grade in a suburban Chicago public elementary school where she was identified as an ELL and was pulled out of the regular classroom. As she talks about herself as a student, Patricia reveals conflicting images. She states that she was "a very advanced reader" in Venezuela and that English was an integral part of the curriculum. She points to the quality of instruction as the reason she "skipped first grade" because "they [the teachers at her private school in Venezuela] had [her] writing, adding, and subtracting by the time [she] was out of kindergarten." By this account, she learned "full-blown English" in the U.S. in "about three months" and was quickly mainstreamed into "regular classrooms" (Interview, Patricia Morales 12/04). In another episode during the same interview, however, Patricia compares her academic abilities to her teacher education cohort peers. She says, "I just kind of fell through the cracks into the [teacher education] program. All of [my cohort peers in the teacher education program] are straight 'A' students since they were in elementary schools...like all their lives... and they've never really had a challenge with anything. One of the students in our class had dyslexia and two of us had ESL." The challenges of being a student of color in a predominantly white teacher education program are intertwined with the challenges of learning in another language and acquiring academic competence as a student and as a teacher. She continues:

I feel like a lot of the students just responded to the questions of why we should have multicultural classrooms and stuff like that. They know how to answer the questions, yet they don't implement it. And a lot of the stuff that they say, whether they realize or not, and I call them out on it, and they get annoyed by me calling them out on it, that it's racist. What they're saying, the way they think, and they way they say it. It's very infuriating for me, because out of the three people that are not White in the classroom, I'm the only one that identifies all the time as a student of color (Interview, Patricia Morales, 12/04).

In relation to her cohort peers, she states: “I feel like sometimes people just get sick and tired of me challenging their thoughts. I always feel like everybody else is blue colored pencils and I’m the red one” (Interview, Patricia Morales, 12/04). As the red colored pencil, she is the “corrector,” the one who points out the racism that she feels permeates classroom spaces that are filled with predominantly white perspectives and voices. She names her own voice as the resistant one, the “only one who identifies all the time as a student of color.”

Through such narratives, it is evident that Patricia constructs what Darder (1991) and Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco (2001) describe as “bicultural competencies” that become integral to her identity and serve as important resources. One of these resources is the resistance with which she responds to the negative images and stereotypes that are projected upon her by the “social mirror” (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). The following exemplar narrative portrays Patricia’s perceptions of her white high school peers after her family’s second move:

The Whole Maid Thing

People assumed “Hey! You just crossed the border!” [about my family when we first moved to the U.S.]. I don’t know if I’ve mentioned this before because when we moved to Georgia, by that time my dad was earning quite a bit of money. Like, we were pretty good. We had never been pretty good, you know, up to then, and actually, obviously, houses are cheaper in the South than they are up North, so we basically had like, a mini-mansion. We really did. It was a gorgeous brick house, you know? When we started making new friends, they were like, “Wait, you live here? Like, does your parent...do they WORK here? Does your MOM work here?” Or assuming the whole maid thing. And then the favorite was like, “Oh! So your dad must be a Colombian drug lord or something!” and I’m just like, “Oh, God. Thanks. Thanks” (Interview, Patricia Morales, 1/06).

In her story, Patricia is an adolescent who is anxious to make friends. She doesn’t call her “friends” on their mistaken assumptions about her and her family, but jokes along. However, the narrative is constructed to highlight their racist perceptions. Through her counterstory, Patricia resists negative stereotypes and reaffirms a positive sense of herself as someone who is well-traveled and well-educated in relation to her peers.

In such resistance narratives, Patricia’s peers are constructed as antagonists who reflect negative images and stereotypes upon her and her family. In other narratives, Patricia describes what she perceives as the racist actions of white educators. As a Latina student and ELL, Patricia must also work to construct her self as an academically successful student. For example, in the following story, Patricia’s white high school guidance counselor advises her not to apply to State University:

In Your Face!

He [the guidance counselor] just didn’t believe in me, and he was telling me to shoot for these dinky little schools, and it wasn’t really until one of my white friends said that she was applying to State, I’m like, “What kind of GPA do you have?” And she’s like, “I got a 2.8.” And I’m like, “Why are you applying? You’re not going to get in!” She’s like, “I gotta try.” And seriously, that got me thinking. That’s the one I wanted to go to in the first place, so I might as well give it a try. I got accepted the day I was doing the school visit, so it was actually just thrilling, and I just went up to the counselor, and I’m like,

“Guess what?! State University accepted me!” And he’s like, “Really? That’s a surprise.” And I’m, “OH MY GOSH!” This is the type of encouragement I have to deal with here in the United States from educators!” And it’s really a sad experience, and at the same time it’s what made me thrive and go through, ‘cause I’m like, “IN YOUR FACE!” Everyone thought I was going to end up being pregnant by the time I was 15, or in a gang, or...you know...just doing drugs, or something like that. Just because I hang out with the bad Latino kids and all the stuff like that, but seriously, my parents were on my ass the entire time! And I knew what I had to do. I knew what I had to do, and I did it, and I can’t believe I’m here today (Interview, Patricia, Morales, 12/04).

In her narrative, Patricia creates the powerful character of the white guidance counselor who embodies and expresses distorted images of the academic abilities of Latino ELL students. It is significant that Patricia responds vehemently to the advice of this person of authority who is supposed to be a supportive role model, yet who demeans and belittles her. The strength of her reaction is in proportion to his strength as a powerful figure who is representative of the views of the dominant society.

Darder (1991) clarifies that “[t]he role of the White educator in the development of the bicultural voice is...significant to this discussion...[in that] the White educator can become for the bicultural student the primary reflection of not only the public institutions, but also the society at large” (pp. 70-71). Her analysis captures the essence of the meaning about what happened between Patricia and her guidance counselor and helps us understand how Patricia constructs a sense of herself as agentive and powerful. The narrative serves to frame a situation that is a catalyst for Patricia’s sense of herself as a successful student, as persistent and determined, and as politically conscious. Within the contexts of these and other resistance narratives (and Darder’s imperative for white educators to assist bicultural students in “developing their voice” (p. 70)), I now move to analysis of the key incident during Patricia’s student teaching regarding her attire.

As mentioned earlier, I was graciously allowed to visit Patricia in her student-teaching classroom and conducted over 30 hours of observation that focused on her literacy teaching practices. Shortly after her placement began, Patricia told me that her white female cooperating principal reprimanded her for dressing “provocatively” (Patricia Morales, personal communication, January 9, 2006). Patricia shared with me an email/letter that she wrote to her university supervisor (a Korean male international graduate student) and to the chair of the education department (an African-American male) in defense of her attire and to attest to her feelings of discrimination. In her letter, Patricia narrates her perception of the event and tells how Barbara, along with other teachers in the building, supports her choice of attire. She speaks of the injustices she feels are being visited upon her by the principal and compares her experiences with other student teachers (all of whom are White) in the building. With three weeks left in her placement, Patricia asks that she be transferred to another school. After she sent the email, Patricia told me that her supervisor responded to it with mixed messages. She reported that he met with the principal and asked that the principal refrain from such criticisms, but he also reprimanded Patricia for writing the letter, calling her action unprofessional. While she finished the placement, Patricia’s experience left her with a negative view of the school, of her student teaching experience, and of the teacher education program in general.

In her letter, Patricia situates the principal's comments about her clothing within the contexts of other "petty" criticisms that are not "constructive" and that "disturb" Patricia. She writes:

For example, at three distinct times this semester, she [the principal] has commented on my attire (all regarding the shirt choice) when everyone in the staff has assured me that I dress within perfectly acceptable boundaries. She continues to tell me that community members (I'm assuming staff and parents) are commenting on my dress, however, I don't believe it to be true, since she did not give me specific names, and I cannot substantiate this" (email, Patricia Morales, 1/06).

While narrative inquiry does not seek to prove or disprove the "truth" of an event (Blumenfeld-Jones, 1995), it is important to understand the meaning of the event to Patricia, who perceives the principal's actions as discriminatory. For example, I did not ask Patricia to show me the shirts that she wore on these occasions. She clarifies in the letter that she has sought assurance from other teachers in the building and is convinced that her choice of attire is "within perfectly acceptable boundaries." Barbara adds further insights into what she perceives as Patricia's "struggles" with the principal and her resources as a prospective teacher:

You Have to Play the Game

I thought her passion for teaching...her passion for kids...and just wanting to have fun [were her resources]. And I think that was a struggle for her here because she wanted to play with the kids. She wanted to make that connection. And sometimes, you know, she was made to feel that wasn't appropriate. And I think that it WAS appropriate. [For example,] she wanted to have a snowball fight with the kids after school. Well, you know, then there's all these rules and stuff like that. But she was really connecting with them and getting on their level, and what they wanted to do was to have fun...I think that maybe some administrative rules were put into place or that...um...and I don't, she WASN'T breaking any of the rules. I think she was made to feel that she was, which was unfortunate. And I think on one hand, in a positive way, made her really learn about politics in school and how why even though you wouldn't think so in an elementary school you have to play the game, and there are hoops, and there are little politics that go on that aren't fun, but you have to kind of go through. It was unfortunate that she had to deal with it because I think you have enough when you're student teaching than to have to deal with that stuff, but she handled it in a real professional way, and she had such a great attitude about it where she was like, "Well, okay, everything's a learning experience" (Interview, Barbara Barnes, 1/06).

From Barbara's point of view, the struggles faced by Patricia were the "politics" that go on in every school and part of the "game" one had to play to get along with co-workers and supervisors. In an informal conversation with Barbara about Patricia's email, Barbara describes the principal in a different light. She reports that she has known the principal to have had conflicts with student teachers in the past and said that the principal "feels threatened by confident, successful people" (field notes, 1/9/06, p. 140). She also relates her perception that the principal resents Patricia and that she is "jealous of the kids' affection" for her (field notes, 1/9/06, p. 140). Finally, Barbara shoulders some of the burden for the principal's displeasure

with Patricia herself when she says that “the principal was after me at the beginning of the year” and so she is also critical of Patricia, her student teacher (field notes, 1/9/06, p. 140).

In the email, Patricia reiterates her feelings of discrimination by providing a third example and declaring her intent to provide evidence in her favor: “Last night [at Open House], she [the principal] addressed her concern with my attire once again. I would be more than happy to bring the peasant top I was wearing for you to see” (email, Patricia Morales, 1/06). A “peasant top” is not a cultural reference to folk clothing, but a popular kind of cotton blouse worn by many young women in the teacher education program. Patricia further constructs the principal’s actions as unjust because the principal will not provide the names of “community members” who are “commenting on [Patricia’s] dress.” Patricia thus sets up the principal as a conspirator, along with faceless and nameless others, who accuse her. Rather than constructing the principal as supportive or as someone who seeks to understand her experiences as a Latina prospective teacher, Patricia remembers her as another powerful white character against whose negative perceptions she must struggle. Patricia adds:

The third thing, which is what inspired me to write this e-mail, was that I have been approached two days in a row, with again, more unconstructive criticism. This morning she [the principal] came in and observed me while I was giving the weekly Math Fact Tests. She again criticized me for using this curriculum that I was asked to keep up by my cooperating teacher for consistency. I also feel I was attacked because she felt [I was] discriminating against my students, by letting the students who have passed out of all of the Math Fact Tests to be able to check off when the other students had finished the test. I have never been so appalled in my life! I feel of all the people in the world, a White upper class woman, should not be telling a Latina woman (who represents the second person of color in the staff) that she is discriminating against students (email, Patricia Morales, 1/06).

In light of earlier resistance narratives, Patricia’s story of her frustrations with her cooperating principal and her feelings of being “attacked” reflect narrative continuity within her life history (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). She draws attention to the fact that she is the second person of color in staff in a way that is reminiscent of her portrayal of herself as the “red colored pencil” in her teacher education cohort. Finally, Patricia implores her supervisor to find her another placement. With only three weeks left in her student teaching, she writes:

The fact is I am sick of all of the unconstructive criticisms I have been receiving from the Principal. I have been told by the staff time and time again that I take it so well, and that they cannot see themselves dealing with this as well as I have. I am the only student teacher being constantly badgered by her. I am writing to ask you to please ask her on the University's behalf, to back off, and let me be. I only have three more weeks to finish my placement here. If she is unable or unwilling to change her response to this in a positive nature, is it possible for me to finish my student teaching semester as of January in a different school? I have spoken to my cooperating teacher about this, and she completely understands my position, and is very supportive of this option if needed (email, Patricia Morales, 1/06).

Patricia's tone and use of strong language alerts the reader to the seriousness of her intent. While she begins and ends the letter in formal language reminiscent of a professional business letter, her frustrations lead her to implore her supervisor to advocate for her in less professional language that is emotionally charged. She is "sick of all of the unconstructive criticisms" and feels "badgered." She begs the University to ask the principal to "back off." While we might not agree with her choice of language or her tone, it is evident that she is upset. Further, Patricia did not tell me if she ever attempted to talk to the principal directly or in what ways she might have attempted to negotiate her relationship with her. She invokes the support of other teachers in the building, including her cooperating teacher, to gain her supervisor's sympathy.

Discussion

How does Patricia's narrative and the letter she crafted around it represent creative resistance? Throughout her life history, Patricia characterizes herself as a "transcultural bicultural creative agent" (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Such children are described by scholars as able to do well in school, see parental authority as legitimate, learn Standard English, and easily communicate and make friends with members of their own ethnic group as well as students, teachers, employers, and colleagues of other backgrounds (p. 113). For example, Barbara describes Patricia as a fun and friendly person who "connects well with kids" and who has a "great attitude." Patricia, however, represents herself as someone who "resists," who doesn't get along well with her peers, and who often feels like "everybody else is blue colored pencils and [she is] the red one." Through the construction of stories like "In Your Face!" and others, she narrates acts of resistance that add layers to perceptions of her identity. Her emailed letter defending her choice of attire serves as a counterstory (Delgado, 2000; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002) through which she positions herself as a creative agent with the confidence and skills to act on her own behalf (Solorzano & Solorzano, 1995). In a way similar to earlier narratives, the letter shows how Patricia resists the negative images that are projected upon her as a Latina prospective teacher. Like one of the "powerful characters" invoked in earlier narratives, the principal is the central antagonist who issues the challenges that Patricia takes up and struggles against (M. L. Gomez, personal communication, September 5, 2006).

The stereotype that Patricia resists in her letter is that of the "Hispanic woman" as a "hot tamale" or "firebrand" who dresses in clothing that is too "flashy" (Ortiz Cofer, 2008), especially for a teacher. Weber and Mitchell (1996) interrogate the power that images of teachers hold over our collective subconscious, citing that when asked to draw themselves as teachers, prospective teachers in their study employed "certain conventional ways of portraying [their] physical appearance and clothing [as] most often women with shapeless bodies and their hair tied up in buns, wearing skirts, pearls and glasses" (p. 306). Regardless of her attire, with her "phenotypically Latina features" (Lopez, 2002) and long, black curly hair, Patricia does not "fit" the traditional image of schoolteachers in the U.S. Similarly, Rolon-Dow (2004) draws upon the intellectual work of feminists of color who assert that images and representations about women of color are powerful forms of domination and control. She describes "the power that images created by and about Puerto Rican girls hold in shaping their schooling experiences" (p. 8). In her study of interactions between white teachers and Latina students in a public middle school on the East Coast, she finds that the teachers are unable to see the girls as academically successful,

in part, due to the teachers' overriding emphasis on the girls' sexuality, as perceived by the teachers to be expressed in their ways of dressing.

In a similar way, the principal's comments about Patricia's way of dressing can be interpreted as a form of control. From Patricia's perspective, she focuses on "petty criticisms" of Patricia's appearance rather than acting as a mentor concerned with helping Patricia to develop as a successful teacher. I am not suggesting that how teachers dress is unimportant, nor that conversations about professional attire are not necessary between teacher mentors and student teachers. However, such conversations require cultural sensitivity and care. Instead, the principal's lack of socio-political awareness (or perhaps her conscious decision not to consider the effects of her reprimand in the contexts of Patricia's experiences as a Latina) reflects for Patricia a "dysconscious racism" (King, 1991) that permeates their interactions. According to King, dysconscious racism "denotes the limited and distorted understandings" we hold about cultural diversity and reflects "an uncritical habit of mind (including perceptions, attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs)" (pp. 134-135). I believe it is also significant that Barbara does not refer to Patricia's accusations of discrimination by the principal regarding her attire. While it is not clear *why* Barbara chooses to ignore the principal's reprimand (at least in her conversations with me, a white female graduate student and representative of the university), her story provides an alternative perspective. However, by not acknowledging that negative stereotypes might play a role in the principal's reprimand, she is able to hold fast to a color-blind perspective that denies Patricia the right to feel that she has been discriminated against.

Implications for Teacher Education

As a qualitative case study, this inquiry seeks to interpret the meanings of lived experience. Through such a perspective, this single key event and the narrative crafted in its telling can be seen to highlight the complexity of Patricia's experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Dyson & Genishi, 2005). Furthermore, it delineates the ways in which culture and power intersect in classroom spaces (Darder, 1991) and demonstrates an example of the struggles faced by Latina teacher candidates within teacher education. This analysis also makes visible the ways in which prospective teachers' experiences may influence their feelings about their teacher education program and also their sense of themselves as future educators. As Capps and Ochs (1995) state, "Along a life's span we become the stories we tell about our lives" and "through a storytelling process" we reshape these identities in keeping with who we feel or hope ourselves and others to be at the moment (p. 14). Acts of discrimination like those experienced by Patricia occur daily in the lives of prospective teachers of color who are confronted with distorted reflections in the social mirror (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Patricia's experience seems opposite to what *should* be happening in a teacher education program committed to social justice. Her experience reveals that there is a disconnect between teacher education programs and the practice setting of the schools in which student teachers are placed. However, mere judgments about who is "right" and who is "wrong" are not productive. We must focus on translating a social justice approach into the existing systematic environments of schools and a more complex understanding about the ways that human relationships and our perceptions of one another are informed by personal, professional and social identities and life experiences.

Patricia's story of her journey into becoming a teacher represents a success story, especially in light of the current contexts of education for bilingual Latino students in the U.S.

and the accompanying lack of cultural diversity in the teaching force. Within the debate focusing on the whether or not (and how) diverse teachers' beliefs and practices actually differ from those of Euro-American, middle-class teachers, little attention has been paid to the potential resources bilingual Latino prospective teachers bring to the crafting of their teaching or to the ways in which their professional identities are informed by their life experiences, including their experiences of oppression within the teacher education program itself. The findings of this study contribute to this discussion by highlighting the voice of one Latina prospective teacher who reveals the sometimes overt and sometimes "passive" and "invisible" racism (Marx, 2006) that frames her experiences in U.S. schools. I argue that it is essential to focus on the resources preservice teachers like Patricia bring to U.S. classrooms. Their narratives highlight the challenges they confront, but also the powerful ways that they *resist*. Narrative inquiry from a critical stance helps make visible the creative resistance and resourcefulness of culturally and linguistically diverse teacher candidates and strengthens our work to make teacher education more responsive to their strengths and needs.

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