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# Beyond Burritos and Lumpia: Ethnic Identity as a Difference in Preservice Teacher Education

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*Chapter Five*

**Beyond *Burritos* and *Lumpia*:  
Ethnic Identity as a Difference  
in Preservice Teacher Education**

*Sara S. Garcia & Edmundo F. Litton*

Teachers play a pivotal role in society. On a daily basis they influence the futures of the children they encounter. Not only do they teach children how to read and write but teachers are also charged with the task of creating responsible citizens who should think critically about society. Teacher educators, and specifically those individuals charged with the task of preparing preservice teachers, have responsibilities similar to teachers in the field. Education, on any level, ought to be a transformative process.

Thus, the preparation of teachers as instruments of social change ought to be a central focus in preservice teacher education programs. Teacher educators, as well as elementary and secondary mentor school teachers, are agents who have the potential to guide preservice teachers to think critically about educational structures that either promote or hinder the development of social equality in schools. Our views are corroborated by scholars such as Gloria Ladson-Billings who states that “teacher education programs throughout the nation have coupled their efforts at reform with revised programs committed to social justice and equity” (1995, p. 466).

As teacher educators, we understand our role to be part of a growing movement to create teacher education programs that address issues of multicultural education and diversity. The focus of our work, therefore, is

in concert with A.L. Goodwin's (1997) view that, in order for teacher education programs to move away from the "additive" approach whereby multicultural content is seen as an "add-on" to the mainstream teacher education curriculum, preservice teachers must come to an understanding of their own cultural values and identity so that they are better prepared to deal with their culturally and linguistically diverse students.

In our ongoing self study, the main question is, "How does our ethnicity affect our practice as teacher educators?" Through self narrative and a dialogic process of collaborative discourse, we explore our development of cultural understanding as teacher educators. Our exploration started after numerous conversations between us over the last two years in the context of our work environment. We are the only full-time faculty members in a small teacher education program. Our recorded narratives and dialogues serve as a catalyst for us to examine aspects of our cultural backgrounds that have influenced our decisions in constructing the content and teaching approaches in our respective courses in the teacher education program.

A deeper understanding of our own cultures in connection with mainstream culture often becomes a dialectic process through which tensions arise; however, this process also becomes the basis for dialogical inquiry with one another and with other faculty in the program. This is especially important because the rest of our faculty, with the exception of one African-American colleague, are not representatives of ethnic minorities. Our students, with few exceptions, also are not ethnic minorities. Furthermore, our practice is continually influenced by a commitment by our university to social justice in education. We are actively engaged in structuring a teacher education program that includes the ideals of social responsibility.

An important common factor between us is that we are both immigrants to the United States. Sara immigrated from Mexico as a child although, having spent most of her life in the United States, she does not feel like an immigrant. When someone asks where she is from, only then does she reflect on the fact that she is an immigrant. Perhaps the most important aspect of feeling different from a mainstream American is that

Sara is a representative of an ethnic minority population. Edmundo immigrated from the Philippines as an adult. A unique aspect of our relationship is that Sara has been a teacher educator for more than twenty years while Edmundo has just completed his second year as a teacher educator. At the time of writing Sara is an assistant professor, and Edmundo is a full-time lecturer.

We follow the model of multicultural teacher education presented by Goodwin (1997). This model suggests the use of reflective self narratives as a process of looking at ourselves through autobiography and personal history. By looking inward through the use of self narrative, we explore the factors in our lives that have shaped our conceptions of culture, ethnicity, and social justice.

We consider our ethnicity as being one aspect of our culture, albeit a profound aspect, since we feel that who we are, our history, and our ethnic identities have an impact on the way we conduct our teacher education practice. Thus in this way our self study of teacher education practices also follows a premise stated by Vicki LaBoskey (1996) which urges that research focus on teacher education practices and the role of the teacher educator in that practice. Our goal then is to improve our practice by collaborative introspection which we hope will contribute to our general knowledge base. Additionally, by generating our reflective self narratives, we feel our stories are constructed of the imagination in the same way as a narrative. When we reflectively discuss our lives, "the process becomes a cognitive achievement rather than through-the-clear-crystal recital of something univocally given" (Bruner, 1987).

By using this dialogic process of collaborative inquiry, we aim to compare events in our lives at different times in order to form ideas of our ethnic identity and diversity that relate to our work as teacher educators; this is often either taken for granted or not actively used. Our objective in this joint dialogic reflection follows aspects of the narrative model proposed by P. Ricoeur (1992) wherein "the essential difference distinguishing the narrative model from every other model of connectedness resides in the status of events which have repeatedly made the touchstone of the analysis of the self" (p.168). Doing this type of self analysis of our

development generates "the ethical primacy of the other than the self over the self" (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 168).

Social justice is our ethical foundation and guides our practice of self reflection for the ultimate goal of guiding our students towards self transformation and individual agency as teachers. Furthermore, we continue to insist that in order for future teachers to be prepared to deal with diversity, they need to be actively involved, through praxis, in controlling their own education (Aronowitz, 1993).

### *Looking at Ourselves*

We created reflective self narratives of our development as teacher educators and agents of social change. Through these critical reflections we examined some of the factors that have influenced the evolution of our embedded perceptions of complex change and self clarification. This process also influences the way in which we communicate educational theories and practices to preservice teachers in courses and presentations as we use our life experiences to illustrate many of the theories. Preservice teachers are encouraged to examine these theories and practices so that they promote social justice for all students, especially students who are often marginalized because of their cultural and linguistic diversity.

### *Sara's Story*

I have been a teacher educator in different capacities for twenty years at four California universities. Before taking a tenure-track position at Santa Clara University, I had a lecturer position at a University of California campus where I taught courses for undergraduate students interested in pursuing a teaching credential. I was also a coordinator of field experience for preservice credential candidates at another major university campus. My career as a teacher educator started in 1976 when I was offered a position with a state university to work with inservice teachers at a federally-funded center. That year I decided to leave my high school classroom.

Leaving the classroom was not something that I had actively thought about doing when the opportunity in the area of teacher professional

development was presented. In retrospect, part of the reason for the shift in my career was because, during the early 1970s, many school districts received federal funds to develop bilingual programs across the nation. In California, the educational needs of Spanish-speaking students were a central focus of bilingual education programs at all levels. I had the bilingual skills, energy, and enthusiasm to generate creative ways of working with bilingual Spanish-English students in the classrooms and to help others develop new instructional approaches.

Long before becoming a teacher I had personally experienced, in the public school classroom, the cognitive and affective dissonance of living in a society that only valued mainstream culture and English language. I was reared and educated in the United States in environments that required the separation of my two cultures and their languages. In a natural process of acquisition, I actively used, albeit separately, two languages; I became bilingual and bicultural in spite of educational inequities in the public school system that prevented bilinguality from flourishing in a formal manner in the classroom. My commitment to issues of diversity and multiculturalism stems from the core of my experience. I have a strong commitment to social equity because I was reared in a home where maintaining a sense of pride in my ethnic culture and the active use and development of literacy in the Spanish language were always emphasized. My formative experiences gave me a particular view of the world; while I could act as if I were assimilated into mainstream culture when necessary, I also developed a strong affiliation to Mexican ethnic culture and language.

Various aspects of my cultural identity and personal history as daughter of an educator involved in the socialist education reform movement in Mexico<sup>1</sup> have also contributed to my strong commitment to social justice issues in education. In the United States, people from Mexican background have historically been socially marginalized. Although social conditions have changed, the Southwestern United States has had a population of Mexican origin since the late 1700s when the settlements were first under Spanish rule and later under Mexican rule. Issues such as "English Only" legislation have always affected the Spanish-speaking population of the Southwest, especially regarding schooling. These are

not only contemporary struggles for the Mexican people; there is evidence that these issues also existed in California (as well as other states) in the mid and late 1800s during the Westward movement and the establishment of the public school system.

As an educator who has lived in active defense of my cultural values, early in my educational career I learned to live with the stigma of being identified with the hyphenated name of Mexican-American and at times not considered American but referred to as Mexican. This has also shaped my view of other cultures, including mainstream culture, within the context of schooling. As a Mexican-American teacher, I often felt like a token in a profession where people from my ethnic background are not well represented. Although we have many more teachers who are representatives of ethnic minorities now, there is still a dramatic shortage of qualified bilingual bicultural teachers to meet the needs of an ever growing ethnically diverse population.

Twenty-five years ago, when I became a bilingual teacher, the bilingual education issues seemed complex because, as educators concerned with meeting the educational needs of our students, we were struggling within the educational systems with issues of linguistic assessment, program evaluation, and bilingual materials acquisition, in addition to constant educational policy change in our credentialing process. At that time, I was actively engaged in both organizing my own classroom and helping other teachers develop strategies to help them take into account the native language proficiency of their Spanish-speaking students in order to bridge their learning in English as a second language context. I did not realize, at that time, that this aspect of my professional development in collaboration with other teachers was already forging the direction of my career as a teacher educator. Not only did the educational issues dealing with bicultural and bilingual education pave the way in public education for a view toward cultural pluralism and multiculturalism, the myriad of complex issues regarding teacher development and preparation with regard to diversity were just beginning to emerge.

From 1976 to 1978, I worked at the inservice center but decided not to renew my contract because I felt burned-out. I also needed more

preparation in order to better serve the needs of the field. For two long years I learned by doing and was involved in many activities that became major events in the history of bilingual education in the State of California (e.g., Language Dominance Survey, Teacher Proficiency Assessment). On a monthly basis I served on committees for the Commission on Teacher Credentialing in Sacramento. Before the age of thirty, I had already done school evaluations, worked with assessment of teacher linguistic proficiency, provided technical assistance sessions for many schools, and worked with hundreds of classroom teachers. I then returned to graduate school at the University of California at Los Angeles to pursue a certificate in English as a Second Language, and there I worked with prominent researchers in that field. I finished my Master's degree in education and later my Ph.D.

Within a three-year period, I had been catapulted into a field commonly referred to as "teacher training"<sup>2</sup> without knowing what it meant for my future as a professional educator. Later, when I started working with preservice teachers, I constantly reflected on my own processes of development since my role as a teacher educator happened so quickly. Most of my work with teachers was guided by intuition, but I felt that I needed formal preparation in order to continue to help teachers deal with the constant demographic and cultural changes taking place in the student populations. I continued to explore the decisions I made in my own graduate education with regard to my commitment to improve, through teacher preparation, the education of culturally and linguistically diverse students and to promote social justice through education. Throughout the process of three advanced degree programs and an entire decade, I continued to work in teacher preparation programs.

The issues regarding my marginalized status as a Mexican-American woman, however, have only minimally changed. I believe that what I represent is not readily accepted in academe. Not only am I seen as an affirmative action representative, in many instances I am treated differently because I represent a socially marginalized group in American culture. I was considered an exception when I was a classroom teacher, but this is even more pronounced in my position as a teacher educator in a tenure-track position at a university. At all of the universities where I have



worked, teacher education was seen as a step-child in relation to the other education programs. As an assistant professor in my third year at Santa Clara University, I was asked to take administrative responsibilities and direct the teacher education program. At about the same time the student enrollment in the program doubled and new state policy in the credentialing process also changed. I was charged with not only directing an existing program but restructuring it to integrate the new Cross Cultural Language and Academic Development (CLAD) emphasis credential that all new teachers need in the State of California. I spent most of my first year as director writing the document for approval by the state Commission as well as teaching my regular course load and running the program for fifty new students.

Because of my academic background and work experience with teacher development, I am well qualified to generate new programs in teacher education. This fact, however, consistently positions me in circumstances where I end up being over-extended and constrained in the pursuit of my own research efforts. For instance, the new CLAD program that I created takes place over four academic quarters as opposed to a regular academic year of three quarters. As an assistant professor I have a nine-month contract, but each year that I have had administrative duties it has been necessary for me to work on program matters during the summer.

To make matters more taxing, last summer the governor of California gave school districts resources to reduce elementary class size. This legislation created a frenzy in the schools and for the university programs charged with preparing teachers because, all of a sudden, there was a shortage of teachers. As a result, we created two internship programs. I now simultaneously direct three different programs all year round. Taking on these responsibilities has been both a challenge and an opportunity to structure the program in such a way that reflective practice coupled with critical theory could be integrated throughout the program.

What does this all mean for my pre-tenure position within the academic institution? I took the position at the university as a tenure-track assistant professor—a position that for many years I coveted—to find that I was expected to apply my experience and knowledge gained over the

years to keep alive and renew the teacher education program. This has taken a toll on my research projects and efforts. This year, 1997-1998, I will submit my petition for tenure.

Traditionally, tenure committees have not taken into consideration that applied research in teacher education is often linked to teacher educators' practice. In my case, my research includes work on the process of integrating notions of cultural knowledge of ethnic communities in the coursework for preparing teachers. It also includes theorizing my own reflective practice with regard to issues of history, culture, and ethnicity. My main concern is that the tenure committee will not fully recognize or value the research basis I have used for program development through an integrated education paradigm which is the foundation in our teacher education program. A secondary concern is that, although I was recruited as an assistant professor with a preparation in psychometrics, cognition, and learning theory, the changes in the field have made my research interests evolve toward interdisciplinary and cultural studies as related to education.

For the last three years there has been an imbalance between my administrative duties and my research. I cannot both teach and direct a program without constantly generating new ideas and thoughts about my practice; however, unfortunately, my energy dwindles and it is difficult to switch to a constant reflective mode that is backed up by theoretical research. To aggravate the tensions regarding the tenure application process, there have been times when insensitive colleagues have commented that, since I am a Latina woman, I will get tenure. These kinds of comments are insulting and they are often made at unexpected and inopportune times in hallways or in meetings; in the everyday struggle, over time, these comments have adversely affected my efforts. I expect to be evaluated for tenure on the basis of the work I have done in preparing teachers, program development which is in tune with the demands of a diverse and multicultural society, and on my scholarly pursuits linked to those ends. I also have learned that to generate new programs and approaches as educators we must build networks with other educators, including our own faculty, who understand the needs of the field with regard to diversity issues, and also by continually reflect on our practice.

As an ethnic-identified professor I provide for my students a unique experience to help them view my culture, as well as other ethnic cultures, in a completely different way than they often have been exposed to previously. Enhancing the way I teach courses by bringing in my worldview as a bicultural person aids them to better understand the cognitive schemas of other modes of thinking which ought to be supplementary to mainstream cultural views. This understanding helps them begin to connect to the world at large and initiates a transformative process that eventually will forge directions toward praxis, understanding ethnic others, and social justice.

### *Edmundo's Story*

I am an immigrant from the Philippines. I grew up in the city of Manila. The first seventeen years of my life were uncomplicated. I was raised in an affluent family and I wanted for nothing. My exposure to issues of social justice and equity was minimal. When I was going to school I had classes that discussed some of these social issues and I did some work with poor families in Manila; however, I still returned to a comfortable home. At that time in my life, I knew I wanted to become a teacher, but the biggest driving force to education for me was the development of academic competence.

My experience with the Christian Brothers is one of the most important factors that has contributed to my development as an educator and agent for social change. During my seven years as a Christian Brother, I worked with people who changed my life. In one situation, I worked as an English teacher at a leper colony on the outskirts of Manila. Like most of my colleagues, I was fearful about working at the colony. Aside from the concern of contracting leprosy, I was hesitant to deal with the awkwardness I thought I would (and did) feel when talking to a leper. As I lived and worked with these people, however, I realized that behind the disease, there were wonderful people. I soon became involved with their struggle for equity and justice when I began teaching these students how to create a newspaper. Through reflective sessions with them I heard first hand what it was like for people to be shunned and ostracized because of external factors. I also realized how powerful the literacy experience was to my students. Once they started reflecting and narrating their experiences, they felt empowered.

Working with children of farm laborers was another experience that shaped my development as an educator. This also occurred when I was a Christian Brother. I was assigned to teach in one of the southern provinces in the Philippines. This province had just experienced a severe economic depression due to the collapse of its primary industry. My students were children of farm laborers. When I worked with these children I saw the negative effects of poverty on a daily basis. It was not uncommon for many of my students to have only rice and salt for lunch. I also saw the empowering nature of education at work. In many of my classes I facilitated discussions that encouraged the students to think about the political and social reasons for poverty. The faculty had high expectations for these students. We insisted on quality work. Admittedly, I felt awkward at times, when I insisted that English papers be typed, when I knew that many of my students were struggling to buy paper. These students were getting the type of education that was normally reserved for the upper classes of Philippine society. As a result of our efforts, many of these children went on to receive college degrees and decent-paying jobs. Some of these students have returned to the school as teachers after completing teacher preparation programs.

Through these experiences, I saw what it was like to be a member of the poor and neglected sectors of society. From the people with whom I worked, I learned the value of living a simple life. I saw and experienced a tremendous amount of joy with these people. More than anything else, I learned that something is learned best when there is a lived experience. Thus, I constantly advocate for experiential learning. I believe it is important for my preservice teachers to feel what it is like to be in the situation of their students. My experience with the poor in the Philippines has also helped me make more knowledgeable decisions about working with people who may have different experiences from my own.

I bring into the classroom another important aspect of my background: I am an immigrant. I moved to the United States from the Philippines in 1987. I never questioned the value of my ethnic heritage until I came to the United States. I see my Filipino students struggling with the same issues. Since I am a Filipino immigrant, I have been involved in

educational settings that deal with the Filipino community. My first teaching assignment was a third grade classroom in a school where a majority of the students were from the Philippines. Now that I am working in an institution of higher education, I am still in contact with Filipino students because I teach a group of children either as a volunteer or as a substitute teacher at the Filipino Education Center in San Francisco.

My contacts with other Filipinos in the United States have made me aware of the need for socially conscious teaching. Like many ethnic minorities, Filipino children do not receive validation of the positive aspects of their heritage. Many Filipino immigrants have the mistaken belief that assimilation guarantees success in the United States. Thus, many of the Filipino children I have taught tried hard to "become American" but have soon realized that it is impossible to "become American." Even if they are American citizens and have lived in no other country but the United States, they are still treated like outsiders because of their physical features and ethnicity. Thus, in my work with the Filipino community, I am involved in the constant struggle to convince the Filipino children that it is alright to be who they are.

My work at the Filipino Education Center has influenced my own practice of supervising student teachers. One of the most striking incidents occurred one morning when I was preparing to teach a first grade class. One of the students asked me "Ikaw ba ang teacher ngayon?" ("Are you the teacher today?") I replied that I was. She replied by saying "Ay, mas gusto ko ang teacher na puti" ("Oh, I would prefer a white teacher.") I admit that I was taken off-guard and I knew that she did not mean to be disrespectful when she made the comment. I asked her why she felt that way, and she replied, in a very proud manner, "Because I am an American."

It was then that I realized what it was like for my teacher education students with European-American backgrounds to go into classrooms with students who had different backgrounds from theirs. Many of my teacher education students would tell me that they would get called "white bread," and they would have a difficult time working with these children because they are dismissed for being white. In the incident I just described I felt I was being dismissed because I was Filipino and that I was not a proper role model

for what it was like to be American. The strong desire of many Filipinos to assimilate often leads to tension even within the culture.

Empathy with my student teachers is something I developed when I became a substitute teacher at the Filipino Education Center. Like the student teachers I was supervising, I was in someone else's classroom, and I did not feel comfortable changing too many things that the students were accustomed to doing. Like my students, I also realized how important my past knowledge of teaching influences the way I teach. While substituting, I would do things that I know have worked for me in the past because I experienced so much success with these practices; however, in the class where I was expected to teach only once a week, none of these "tricks" worked. Unlike many of my preservice students, I had a number of years of teaching under my belt and my experience helped me to realize that it was unrealistic to rely on these past strategies. I know that the pedagogical tools that worked for me were a product of experience and a process, and they could not be implemented in one day.

All my cultural and teaching experiences have shaped my views of my role as a teacher educator. This role is best illustrated in a metaphor of a journey. I explained this metaphor to a student teacher who had just completed all her requirements for her credential. During our final meeting, she said "thank you for helping me." I responded by saying "I really do not see myself as someone who helped you but as someone who accompanied you on your journey." During the journey that I take with my students, we engage in a conversation, where we both learn from one another. During this conversation, we reflect on the meaning of teaching. I do not tell them how to teach, but through dialogue, we discover more about who we are and the gifts that we can share with all those we meet in our journey.

When my students complete their credential, we reach a fork in the road, and we go our separate ways. On my road new credential students join me on my journey and recently credentialed students begin a journey with the children they will teach. I do not think that one ever *becomes* a teacher. Teachers are always in the process of *becoming*. In the Gospel according to Luke, there is a story of two disciples who go on a journey

with Jesus on the road to Emmaus. At the end of their journey, they sit down for a meal and recognize the Risen Messiah. At that moment, the disciples are filled with joy, and they begin sharing the Good News with others. In my journey with my teacher education students, it is my hope that we recognize the good in each other and begin sharing the Good News of education: equity, social justice, and peace.

My belief in life as a journey helps me persevere in teacher education. I am not in a tenure-track position. I had hoped that, after two years of being on a yearly contract, my position would be converted to a tenure-track position. During the last academic year, I have applied for a number of tenure-track positions all over California. Recently, I was called for a full-day interview at one institution and had a wonderful experience. I was not offered the position, but I was thankful for the experience. I know that, on this road, I will find a place for myself.

### *From Divergent to Convergent Modes in our Practice*

The impact of our cultural backgrounds is evident in the courses that we teach. One of the courses that we restructured was the reading methods course. Aside from presenting a course that gave the students a wide array of methods for teaching reading, we added a multicultural dimension. In this component, students are guided to reflect on the cultural variations connected to literacy. Our students become aware of how different communities experience literacy. Through their reflections, the preservice teachers begin to see the cultural heritage and community of their students as an asset in literacy. We also provide the students with questions to encourage them to become aware of the issues that promote illiteracy among language minority students, such as low teacher expectations.

In the summer of 1996 we offered, for the first time, a course on language development and literacy. The emphasis of the course is on the social consequences of literacy. The students are engaged in the study of the works of Paulo Freire. The course content is shaped by our experiences of literacy while working with people living in poverty. We know how empowering literacy can be. Through this course, we hope our students

will also realize that to be illiterate is similar to being powerless in society. People who are illiterate are unable to participate fully in the decisions made in their community.

Both of us are bilingual. Sara speaks Spanish and Edmundo is fluent in Filipino (Tagalog). Our bilingual backgrounds make us natural believers in bilingual education. Thus, our courses on language acquisition and language teaching methodologies have a bilingual education component. We help our students to understand that bilingual education is not only a matter of developing linguistic competencies in two languages. Bilingual education fosters pride in one's ethnic heritage and broadens one's view of the world. We help our students realize that being bilingual is a cognitive asset and a tool for empowerment. We also encourage our preservice teacher candidates to respect the language of their students. In our view, this respect for the native language of students promotes pride in the cultural heritage and self esteem does not suffer in the process of learning mainstream language and culture. This positive self esteem will allow the students to feel that they are welcome in American society and that they have a voice in the decisions made in their community.

Our commitment to issues of social justice is also evident in a course we did not design but have supported and in which we actively participate. Every year, all of our preservice candidates are involved in what is called "Immersion." During immersion activities, the students are involved in many situations that ask them to reflect on social justice concerns. In one of these activities, the preservice candidates are asked to work with students from an alternative school. Many of these students in the alternative schools are considered to be unmanageable by the regular school system. The preservice candidates not only focus on teaching these students to become literate, but they begin to see how society may play a role in the promotion of some social problems. Through these immersion activities, the preservice teachers experience some of the social problems that students face.

Our cultural background also has an impact on the way we interact with students. In both the Filipino and Mexican cultures, there is an emphasis on a formal respect for our elders. The respect given to elders is



determined more from age rather than professional stature. In the teacher education program we often have had to mentor and guide students who are much older than we are ourselves. Sometimes it is difficult to give feedback to these students because many come into the program with fixed notions of their own cultural identities and are not as flexible as some of the younger students. This difficulty is exacerbated by our own cultural notions of deferring to our wiser elder. We constantly have to work through our values and to remind ourselves that we have had more teaching experience and more recent and advanced academic preparation; however, we do not ever forget about the significance of the wisdom of our elders and remain open to the life experiences that our more mature learners share. They always enhance our notions of diversity, life-long learning processes, and the need to see ourselves as developing the capacity to constantly learn from one another.

Another dimension of working with the diversity of our student population as ethnic minority professors is that we realize that we are role models for some of our students. Although ethnic minority students are not well-represented in our program, we do receive two or three of these students each year. The impact that we make on these students is always significant because they immediately bond with us. In one case, a student during an individual conference became emotive about the fact that she was overwhelmed because this had been her first learning experience with a Filipino professor. She said that she hopes that when she begins teaching she will also be able to show other Filipino students that it is possible to succeed in making a difference in education and schooling for her own community.

Similarly, the few Latino, African-American, and Asian students who go through the program are always encouraged by the fact they can discuss their ethnicity and cultural differences; they feel comfortable expressing their view about their own schooling from a minority perspective in our classes. We provide the classroom environment for all students to share their experiences but especially encourage the few minority representatives to share their views. By emphasizing the reflective process and sharing our diverse views on culture we learn acceptance from one another.

Our ethnicity and our culture also affect the way we present cultural concepts in our courses, especially when concepts are related to looking at diversity within cultures. Many of our students start the teacher education program believing that culture is composed of visible aspects (dance, food, and celebrations). Through our own experiences, we are able to give an explanation of the deeper aspects of our respective cultural practices that are abstract, sometimes subtle, but are truly a foundation for our cultural beliefs and sensitivities. We also make a constant effort to dispel any stereotypic views that students may have about minority cultures in the United States, particularly those misconceptions related to learning and the institutional education process.

Many students comment that we are more believable than other professors when we talk about culture, because we have had to deal with cultural conflict in our personal experiences when dealing with mainstream cultural values, especially in our own schooling process. In addition, through our work together, we have constantly taken into account not only the similarities of our respective cultures but also the differences. Thus, we have learned to appreciate one another's culture in ways that help us to recognize the complexities in cultures other than our own. By so doing, we are constantly aware of the importance of not being ethnocentric. In other words, we have learned to respect the diversity within a particular culture and not to see any one culture as homogenous. Over the last two years, this aspect has also influenced our practice in many subtle and obvious ways that, at least to the two of us, are significant.

When we teach we model classroom methods and teaching practices that are appropriate for diverse learners. For example, one approach is the use of the lived experiences of students to connect new information to their previous knowledge. By using their experiences as a basis for recognizing bicognitive modes of learning in their own students, they learn to structure the content of the courses in more innovative ways.

The practice of constant reflection, discussion, and collaboration among students often requires us to relinquish full control of our classes; we opt for taking the role of facilitators. This often requires additional planning time, as the students are conditioned to learn only through a

lecture mode. We need to convince our students that alternative methods are effective and more inclusive of all students, particularly diverse learners. We also feel that it is important at the same time to make them feel confident that there is a planned structure to the switching around of small group work activities. Constant active interaction is stressed. We have found that this approach also motivates students to come to class well prepared to discuss the assigned readings. In essence, giving students the responsibility for their own learning makes them feel empowered. Our hope is that they will use these experiences to fashion their teaching approaches in their own classrooms.

As ethnic minority professors, we sometimes feel that we must constantly defend our credentials. We need to establish a sense of authority, yet this is difficult at times. For instance, in both the Mexican and Filipino cultures, talking about one's strengths is not encouraged because it may be seen as boastful. We have had to fight this cultural trait because we deal with many issues that are controversial and, as professors, we need to establish our presence in the classes we teach. This sense of not feeling comfortable reverts to the fact that the students have not been exposed to diverse learning in their own schooling. In addition, they are also much less accepting of ethnic minority professors in the role of authority, a reality that we face every year at the beginning of the academic program. In many cases, after our students leave and become teachers, they come back to express their gratitude for a transformative experience, since they do not readily see the results until much later. Only later, do they acknowledge that the concepts we exposed them to are useful and applicable in classrooms and school community situations. Ultimately, though, regardless of what positions we hold or what practices we espouse, we are seen by our students, and colleagues as well, as ethnic minority representatives before anything else.

### *Conclusion*

Our cultures of origin are more collective than mainstream American culture and doing this collaborative self study raises many questions related to how we bring our cultural beings into our practice. Although we

know that we will continue to work together, we do not know how the circumstances of the future will change our working relationship. Aside from all of the institutional constraints, we have come to realize that it is important to acknowledge the role of our ethnicity in the work that we do as teacher educators and this work will continue, in spite of all of the institutional constraints. Our ethnicity and life experience influence what is taught in our respective courses. We both also realize the importance of constantly reflecting by examining the dynamics of our everyday practice and how who we are influences how we teach. The experience can often be cathartic. This is often more challenging when it is done in a collaborative manner. For us, acknowledging our past has allowed us to view the future with a different lens.

### Notes

1. For a complete story of this aspect of my personal history I refer the reader to an article about the work my father did in Mexico related to rural education published in the *Journal of Folklore Research* entitled "Origins and Destinies: A Mexican May Day Political Corrido as Symbolic Personal Legacy," Volume 31, Numbers 1-3, January-December 1994, University of Indiana Folklore Institute.
2. Over the years I have learned to dislike the term "teacher training." I prefer to use the term teacher preparation since training sounds too behaviorist and does not take into account the holistic transformations that teachers develop over time in their development as professionals.

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