



# Association of Mexican American Educators

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A peer-reviewed, open access journal

Volume 16 Issue 1

**2022**

**AMAE Open Issue**

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ISSN: 2377-9187

## **Testimonios of Latino Male Preservice Teachers as Models for Caring and Bilingualism**

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### **Abstract**

This qualitative study of three Latino male preservice teachers in a bilingual education preparation program centers on the use of testimonio as a methodology to give voice to the complex experiences of young Latinos as they navigate their way through career choices and college. While work on male teachers has historically focused on white men and more recently black men, Latinos represent a very large ethnic population in the United States with varied histories, cultural practices, and linguistic practices. While caring has been conflated as a practice of female teachers, the young men in this study illustrate an ethic of care that is more complex than that of affect. Their care is directly tied to their willingness to pay forward their learning and experiences to other Latino children by way of teaching in bilingual programs. The findings of this research illustrate the complex terrain that these young men navigate as they decide on a career in a historically white and female profession. This study offers implications for in-service teachers and their role in cultivating the next generation of male teachers. For universities and colleges of education, this study offers insight into the institutional challenges and support systems these Latino men must circumnavigate.

*Key words:* Latino Teachers, Male Teachers, Preservice Teacher Preparation

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.24974/amae.16.1.455>

With the release of the 2020 Census, we learned that the U.S. population of Latinos grew from 50.5 million to 62 million during the last decade (Jones et al., 2021). Up from 22% in the previous decade, this remarkably diverse and heterogenous population composes 27% of our school age population (NCES, 2021). While racial and ethnic demographics have been changing both in the makeup and the populace of the classroom, unfortunately, the latter presents a challenge in terms of teacher representation. The approach of U.S. schooling toward Latino's culture and Spanish language has been to replace it with a mainstream American culture and English by way of assimilative classroom practices that have often positioned Latino ways of knowing as deviant or something to be overcome in order to be successful (Nieto, 1999). A rapid transition to English with immersion or early exit bilingual programs (Wright, 2019) had often been the norm in schools, while bilingual education programs that provide long-term language and culture sustaining approaches are seen as costly, cumbersome, and needless pampering (Crawford, 2004). This educational process has been facilitated by a "largely homogenous teaching force" (Aud et al., 2011).

The latest National Teacher and Principal Survey (Taie & Goldring, 2020) indicated that for the 2017-2018 school year, white teachers accounted for about 79% of the population, with 75.5% of that being women. The lack of race and culture conscious educators often leads to uneven academic and disciplinary outcomes that increase gaps in opportunities to learn for students of color. Furthermore, research has indicated that boys of color have several negative experiences in K-12 educational settings where they are often punished disproportionately, having a higher percentage of suspensions than other boys and their female counterparts (de Brey et al., 2019).

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

This study is mediated by a "critical caring" framework (Antrop-González & De Jesús, 2006; De Jesús, 2012; Irizarry & Antrop-González, 2007). Departing from Valenzuela's notion of caring, which is an extension of Noddings's (1984, 1992, 2001) ethic of care, I examine preservice teachers' caring dispositions towards teaching as a career and the impact of caring on their formation as teachers. Research has indicated that Latino students who lack teachers who look like them (Haddix, 2016) to model multilingual and cultural border crossing, the pressure to abandon home culture and language has led to them expressing feelings of

alienation (Valencia, 2011; Wayman, 2002) and marginalization to curriculum. Latino students view some teachers unwilling or unable to give value to their linguistic and cultural wealth as uncaring (Valenzuela, 1999).

The second framework entails that of challenging normative masculinity narratives. One that comes to mind is “role modeling” (Martino, 2008; Martino & Kehler, 2006; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2012; Rezai-Rashti & Martino, 2010; Skelton, 2009, 2011), which is often positioned as a plus. While students definitely benefit from having a good role model, it is key so that we do not engage in normative heterosexual discourse that pits women and men against each other. There is mention of a current crisis where remasculinization of the profession could solve many of the problems boys are having at the hands of women teachers.

Using the frameworks of critical caring and paying attention not to engage in the rhetoric of normative masculinities, the overarching question for this study is: *How do three young men in a bilingual preservice teacher preparation program in the Southwest United States draw from their experiences to become elementary teachers?*

## **Review of the Literature**

### **Race and Culture Conscious Educators**

With regard to diversity, data from the 2017-2018 National Center for Education Statistics, Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) reports a poignant news, a small change, a 5% increase in teachers of color for the last two decades where Latino teachers jumped from 6% to 9% but Black teachers decreased by a percentage point.

Studies have shown that students of color have higher engagement and achievement if they have a teacher of color because they provide a model of education and professional success (Ahmad & Boser, 2014). In addition, teachers who share a common culture and language (Dee, 2004) with the minority students they teach has proven to have positive benefits such as increased academic achievement (Quiocho & Rios, 2000) and development of healthy identities that increase the likelihood of graduating. Su (1997) highlighted how preservice teachers of color were aware of issues of inequality in educational opportunities, language difficulties, irrelevance of curriculum, and the need to restructure schools and society.

Additionally, Su (1997) found that preservice teachers of color show more knowledge and dispositions toward social justice and are willing to teach in inner city schools. These

positive outcomes stem from teachers of color possessing a sense of cultural intuitiveness (Delgado Bernal, 1998), where they have insider knowledge of cultural, verbal, and nonverbal nuances of student practices (Nieto, 1999, 2000). Delgado Bernal (1998) cites cultural intuition as a researcher framework: Latino teachers use their cultural intuition composed of knowledge, life experiences and unique viewpoints; they create a pedagogical space that in turn values the knowledge, experiences, and viewpoints of their students. Furthermore, these educators draw on their experiential knowledge and act as change agents (Badley, 1986) in their particular contexts. As the leader of the classroom, they possess the ability to innovate in these spaces. Drawing on Gramsci's notion of radical organic intellectuals, Giroux proposed that we recognize the potential of positioning teachers as intellectuals, who provide the moral and intellectual leadership as well as "pedagogical and political skills that are necessary to raise political awareness in the classroom" (1988, p. 151).

### **Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies**

In hopes of addressing the issues of culture and language, teachers of color have been positioned as possessing caring dispositions and understanding the nuances of culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris & Alim, 2017, Leija et al., 2020). Not only do many co-ethnic teachers share a similar cultural background with their students, but they are also often more invested in the academic outcomes of students of color as well as being more adept at questioning the racist structures in schools (Quiocho & Rios, 2000). Jaime-Diaz and Méndez-Negrete (2020) illustrated the potential of teachers who share a common experience and communal knowledge with their students for critical compassion and to create alternative spaces for self-empowerment. Because minority languages and culture may be viewed by schools as either a problem or a resource (Ruiz, 1984), Latino children would benefit from approaches where the language and culture they bring to school is positioned as a resource for learning.

Studies focusing particularly on Latino male teachers are almost non-existent. Apart from Lara and Leija (2014) and Lara and Fránquiz, (2015) there are still very few. One is Gomez et al. (2008) who describe how during preparation courses and their field experiences the three Latinos in the study often felt misinterpreted. However, the main driving force for Gomez' participants in becoming teachers stemmed from their strong desire to make personal

connections with youth and families. Given the dearth of literature on Latino male preservice teachers, this study seeks to shed light on the experiences of young Latino men in a bilingual teacher certification program in the Southwest United States and the ways their experiences have shaped their identities as role models and bilingual educators.

### Methods

Scholars have used *testimonios* to reflect on their schooling in a raced and classed society (Pérez Huber & Cueva, 2012) and how it shaped their teaching philosophy (Saavedra, 2011). To describe the effects of their schooling, I use *testimonios* (Beverley, 2003; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; Delgado Bernal et al., 2012; Fránquiz, 2003; Haig-Brown, 2003; Latina Feminist Group, 2001) as a methodology that validates “experiential knowledge and theorize problematic structures in education” (Pérez Huber, 2012). When employing *testimonios* in research, they act as counternarratives that provide an alternative to contest majoritarian tales, like western knowledge (Elenes, 2000), that have positioned Latino homes as deficient places with little to offer students and schools.

### Participants

This study utilized snowball sampling (Merriam, 2009) in working with three research participants who were born in diverse parts of the Southwest United States to Mexican immigrant parents. Two participants were sons of 1<sup>st</sup> generation and immigrants and grew up speaking Spanish at home. A third participant’s mother was a 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrant and his father a 1<sup>st</sup> generation immigrant, so he grew up speaking both English and Spanish. An important commonality among all three participants is that they all came from working class backgrounds and were the first in their family, immediate and extended, to attend college. At the time of the study, the participants were finishing up their last year of bilingual education methods and student teaching.

The literature review generated questions for the interview. To ensure triangulation (Yin, 2011) of the interviews, I conducted 8 observations of the students, as they taught in their field placements, lasting about one hour each with each of the participants and wrote field notes. The observations aided in providing a “thick description” (Geertz, 1973). Artifacts such as journals, writing, and pictures were collected to aid in triangulation purposes. Initial semi-

structured interviews were conducted, transcribed, and analyzed for the purpose of tracing recurring themes as well as to member check. I used open coding procedures (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) for the transcripts and the participant observations. The data was organized into chunks and then grouped into emerging themes. Through repeated readings of the interviews of field notes, the researcher became familiar with the data and then used a systematic approach to address the research questions, including identifying emerging themes (Berg, 2004).

### **Positionality**

As a former schoolteacher, who happens to be a heterosexual bilingual Latino male, I recognize that my experiences may affect the way I interpret data. I always enjoyed teaching others, seeing my Latino peers struggle, I often helped them with their homework during class or even tutored at home. In high school, a special elective was created for me so that I could act as a teacher aide and support content teachers by helping the English as a Second Language students. After graduating from high school, I was accepted into a prestigious private college in my hometown. I always wanted to teach but was always dissuaded by my peers as part of cost-benefit analysis of what I would pay for a degree versus what I would make and the prestige they felt the profession had. I continued working as a tutor in various capacities and eventually changed to a university that housed a bilingual education major. Being first generation student, I myself did not possess much navigational capital (Yosso, 2005), but I had a wealth of support that would check all the community cultural wealth from my family, a teacher, and a tracker in my school. Without access to mentorship and support systems most of the burden of navigating college fell on me.

Being born in the US but growing up in México for a large portion of my childhood helped to color my experiences and experienced first-hand the process of acculturation as an immigrant in my own country of birth. Additionally, learning English as my second language gave me opportunity to develop another layer of multidimensionality to my self-identification. While I identify with the label of Latino, I self-identify as Chicano, being that the Chicano movement has employed a process of reclamation and appreciation for the culture of Mexican-Americans in the Southwest. I myself use the term Chicano to denote a more politicized Latino identity encompassing people of South American, Central American, the Caribbean, Mexico, and the Southwest U.S. states of the Mexican Cession.

As the primary instrument of analysis in this qualitative work, my experiences, background and influences shape my epistemology and paradigms that may influence the interpretation of the data. As a transnational, bilingual, bicultural male (sometimes the only one in my teacher preparation courses or one of a couple of male teachers in the building) these experiences shape my relationship with the participants and the data.

The data analysis deriving from the interviews, classroom observations, and artifacts culminated in three themes across the student participants: (1) sowing the seeds of hope: teachers and their positive role in the teacher recruitment pipeline, (2) finding common ground, and (3) recognizing the limits of familial support systems: challenges of Latino preservice teachers. The three themes revealed there was overlap in the teaching experiences.

## Findings

### **Sowing the Seeds of Hope: Teachers and their Positive Role in the Teacher Recruitment Pipeline**

In reflecting on an interview question that centered on who was important in their decision to become teachers, all three participants expressed that their former teachers played an important role in shaping their desire to become teachers. The teaching styles and dispositions of their former teachers had an impact on them. Antonio was lucky enough to have been taught by Latino men. For Antonio, his 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher had a lasting impact and led him to want to teach 3<sup>rd</sup> grade as well:

In 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and 5<sup>th</sup> grade I had a pair of teachers. We would switch between the two classes and both of them were male teachers. They were really great role models. They were really professional. They really, uhm got our attention, a lot of the students. They could relate to us. They liked comic books. They would bring comic books and action figures and they would use that to get us motivated. It was really fun. I always thought it was like really, so fun, so I kind stuck with that idea.

In addition to making learning fun, it was these teachers who planted the seeds of hope within Antonio:

One that I really liked was my 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher. He always believed in me. He was like: 'You're going to go to college. You're going to do great.' I looked up to him because he was one of the best teachers, and he was a male teacher, who I had never really had before.

The ability of teachers to gain the attention of students like Antonio might center on the fact that they employed non-traditional teaching approaches, like bringing in action figures to get the students' attention. This is an example of taking other approaches and making teaching relevant to the students' interests, but not the best example of a culturally or linguistically relevant or sustaining approach but equally powerful: setting up the expectation of success. Antonio repeats the narrative of the teacher as a role model but it is important to note that it does not entail being a gendered role model in particular. The type of modeling on display is pedagogical in nature and not charged with notions of hegemonic masculinity.

The unique pedagogical approaches of Latino males are also evident in Raúl's narrative. In high school, he took Spanish II through V with the same Latino Spanish teacher and reports that they created a "real close bond." Raúl attributes his love for learning to the philosophy and approach of this teacher. For example, this Latino male teacher was open to student input. The teacher expected his students to tell him when they did not agree with or understand something. "He made learning interesting and would not move on until we all got it." Raúl recalls taking his Spanish AP test and to his surprise scoring a 5. Showing competency in his native language is a special accomplishment for students like Raúl. He stated:

Walking out of that test, I was like, 'I bombed it.' But when I got the results back, I went to him and said this is all you. . . He was just a good influential figure in my life. He was also a support system outside of being a teacher. I know I could always go to him for anything else as well.

The critical caring approach taken by this Latino teacher had a lasting effect on Raúl. However, his sense of caring extended beyond the classroom. During an interview, Raúl recalled events of his junior year in high school.

Raúl: He called my parents to push me to go to college. That was a big moment in my life. It was the first time any one of my teachers had done such a thing.

Gilberto: Why do you think he called?

Raúl: He helped more than my academic advisor. She was white and she would help the white kids. From our conversations he could tell that I was scared of college, and I didn't believe in myself. I thought I wasn't capable. I mean, how was I going to pay for tuition, books, and still help out at the house?

The caring disposition exhibited by Raúl's and Antonio's teachers shows how co-ethnic teachers may be that only person in the school that will provide, what Yosso (2005) calls aspirational capital – “the ability to hold onto hope in the face of structured inequality and often without the means to make such dreams a reality” (p. 77). In a critical caring approach, teachers use their historical knowledge of institutional inequity and failure to try and counteract by giving students that push they need to succeed. Just like Antonio's teacher, Raúl's teacher makes college a conversation of possibility and an expectation. A kind word not just to students but to their parents might make the difference for Latino students who may be full of doubt. Having navigated college, as degree holders, teachers and counselors possess navigational capital (Yosso, 2005) and knowledge that parents and students might never have access to unless explicitly stated. While Raúl felt that it was his academic advisor's responsibility to guide him through the transition to college, he noticed a difference in who did get guidance and it fell along lines of race. The counselor should have recognized that a first-generation student would benefit from guidance and that parents do not know what they do not know. While there may be a strong possibility that Raúl's counselor was paying attention to co-ethnic students, they may have also been listening to the loudest voices, or simply just acting on old deficit rationales about Latinos and their parents not caring about education (Valencia, 2010, 2011).

On the other hand, Rubén's experience serves to illustrate that co-ethnic teachers are not the only ones that can have an impact on the successes of Latino children. Rubén shared an example of how caring was exemplified:

Looking back, there were a lot of teachers that I thought: ‘Wow, I want to be just like that person.’ There were a lot of teachers that were very influential to me. It made me feel that I needed to give back. I need to pay it forward and just be that person for some people, because that is what they need. One of the

teachers that I had my Junior and Senior year in high school, she was very, uhm, she was Caucasian, Caucasian middle-class woman, but she was very compassionate towards the students. She was very direct that we needed to go to college, that we needed to apply. 'There's plenty of free money and don't let legal status worry you. . .' There was a lot of students at my high school that were undocumented, and she was like, 'Well that's not an excuse.'

Heeding the warning to not essentialize any one ethnicity or gender, Rubén's case illustrates what Ladson-Billings (2009) found when it comes to culturally relevant teachers. Accordingly, they do not have to be of the same ethnicity but possess an understanding of the culture and the child. Critical caring scholars point to the importance of bringing together the community knowledge and the students' needs into the curriculum by having high expectations with a sense of caring about them. In the case of all the three teachers identified by my participants, each understood that they needed to communicate high expectations and begin the conversation about going to college even at an early age. Ruben and Raúl's examples show that teachers need to understand the reasons why students may feel college is out of reach and not just perceive them to be uninterested or incapable (Valencia, 2010).

### **Finding Common Ground**

The preservice teachers in this study were sensitive to issues of Latino achievement and access to higher education. Similar to the participants in Lewis (2006), they expressed a sense of responsibility to work with Latino children in order to provide them with aspirational and navigational capital. Having had to navigate the process of mastering the English language, graduating from high school, and going off to college allowed these students to build vast amounts of navigational capital that they could now pay forward.

One unique resource among the participants is their bilingualism. Maintaining this resource as inspirational and navigational capital was explained by Antonio as he reflected on his interaction in his teaching program:

Antonio: I think we have an advantage. You can connect with students and their families. One of the moms was really interested in me, she wanted to ask a lot of

questions about me, and how it was that I got into school and this and that. And so, I think it's a great way of connecting with the families.

Gilberto: Was she asking about how you got to college?

Antonio: Yeah, she's like, how did you go about it and whatever, 'cause she was wondering about her children as well, and she saw me, you know, I had a similar background as her. I come from the same type of family. They got married in México, moved here and so forth. So, I think it's a way to connect with families.

In Antonio's case, having commonalities in culture and language with the children's families allowed this parent to develop *confianza* (Fránquiz & Salazar, 2004; Monzó & Rueda, 2001; Vélez-Ibáñez, 1996) in asking him about his experience, thus extending the navigational capital to the family. This cultivation of *confianza* between the school and home embraces the success of the child as a mutual endeavor.

The success of Latino students was a common theme across the interviews. For example, Raúl spoke of his preference for teaching fifth grade precisely because it is the last elementary grade in the district with bilingual support and propels children forward on the trajectory toward college:

That transition period into middle school is a big part of these kids' lives. . . I became a teacher, just because, I guess growing up college was not an option and I want to try to impact the students that I have and let them know that it is possible. Anybody can go to college.

Here the influence of Raúl's high school Spanish teachers is visible. Where at one time Raúl needed someone to dispel the myths of access to higher education, he now wishes to do the same for his students. Rubén expressed another example of showing sensitivity to the issues faced by Latinos, in terms of language and achievement. He expressed how his experiences informed his decision of wanting to contribute to society as a bilingual teacher:

My best friend, that I've had since middle school, when I first met him, he really did not know very much English. He used to struggle a lot in school and I used to think, I used to help him out a lot just because he was my best friend. 'I don't

want him to get behind in school.' So, helping him learn English and just, I think that has always been a factor in me deciding like, well if have this extra ability why not use it? Why not help people, my people, overcome this obstacle?

Rubén's use of "my people" indicate that his pedagogy is aimed at helping and caring for Latino children. This ethos of caring started at a young age as he helped a friend to not fall behind in school. Teachers can facilitate the development of students' sense of caring beginning very early on. This ethic of care can develop across the years into a strong sense of cultural responsibility. Antonio alludes to "wanting to help out." When I asked him about what he enjoys about teaching he responded:

It's a great way to help the community, and just helping the students, helping their families, 'cause these families, you see a lot of situations you definitely want to improve 'cause, you see a lot of the kids' situations where they are really bad. And you want to be there for them. You want to try to do that. . . It seems that the parents sometimes don't know how to work with the teachers, so I kinda want to be that mediator between school and families.

For Antonio, cultural responsibility means to help out and become a mediator between families and school. He understands that there is a need for teachers to be that link. He possesses cultural competence about the issues families are faced with and speaks their language. With this array of knowledge, skills, and abilities, he is confident about creating the bridge between students' home practices and school practices. Raúl described this phenomenon as, "Hearing them out and understanding where they are coming from." When asked to clarify why he feels that his ethnicity and language play an important role in teaching Latino children, he added:

I feel like we are able to connect easily. I know there are students in other classes that automatically talk to me in Spanish, like first instinct. I know even in my classroom that I had, there was several times, it was probably everyday where the students felt comfortable code-switching. Or even the first couple of days, I don't even think my students knew that I spoke Spanish and when I started speaking to them in Spanish, they were like '*Oh, él habla español como*

*nosotros.*' They were just automatic—once they knew that I was able to talk Spanish they lowered their guard down.

Even though Raúl was in a bilingual classroom, by 5<sup>th</sup> grade in this particular bilingual program most students make a full transition to English. During classroom observations, I noticed that Raúl's cooperating teacher preferred to use English with the students. However, Raúl's ability and inclination to speak Spanish and to code-switch was taken up by the students and himself. Raúl, employed his two languages to check for comprehension, as opportunities to clarify concepts, and to establish common culture and language practices with his students.

Through their lived experiences, these three Latino preservice teachers have developed a cultural intuition about what it took for them to succeed. In turn, this cultural intuition coupled with a critical caring approach helps them to be aware their students' needs. Of particular importance is their navigational capital gained as they have traversed the educational system.

### **Recognizing the Limits of Familial Support Systems: Challenges of Latino Preservice Teachers**

When asked about their support system or how they went about dealing with challenges that arose during their undergraduate career, Raúl, Antonio, and Rubén reported that they drew on their family and closest friends. Rubén describes why he goes to his mother for advice:

I go to my mom a lot, 'cause she is one of my best friends, she had me really young. So, she has been one of my best friends. So even though she didn't have that college experience, I still go to her for a lot of my problems.

Having raised him primarily as a single mom, Rubén's mother is his closest mentor and confidant. Being his only parent, Rubén depends on her for advice on most matters. As a first-generation college student much of the practical advice may prove helpful. However, Raúl also draws on older brothers:

I mean I tell my brothers about it but to be honest, they don't understand what I am going through. So, they just hear me out. But I mean, just having that support

where they are just there to listen, I feel is important enough. My parents, they are probably my number one motivator.

Even though Raúl's family can lend support, he understands that being the first in his family to make headway into college increases his family's ability to navigate the path of schooling. Raúl describes how his father would come home from work "tired and dirty" from working in construction. His father told him that he did not want him having to work so hard for the rest of his life. These talks influenced him to try harder in school. Raúl adds, "My most influential figures are my parents, but as far as when I need advice, it's pretty much, you're on your own." Raúl recognized that there are limits to familial and aspirational capital and advice that offers specific navigational goals to challenge oppressive conditions (Yosso, 2005). While his family is fully supportive, there are situations and aspects of college life for which they have little experience. Raúl described other supports such as the U.S. Department of Education TRiO program, which he is a part of at his university. This program assists first generation students by offering support, workshops, and academic advisors. Yet, Raúl confided that he was not always able to connect as a constraint of the program. "My first year I connected really well with my counselor, then she got a promotion, so I never saw her again and I had a new counselor. This semester we are barely getting to know each other." Raúl also mentioned that he felt that his counselors could not relate to him. Like the other three participants, when pushed further about his extended support system, Raúl mentioned that he could go to the elementary certification cohort coordinator for help with paperwork or guidelines. Apart from these institutional supports, Raúl mentioned that he does not remember going to professor's office hours when he had a question or concern. "I just always felt intimidated or full of fear walking in there one-on-one with them." As a first-generation student and not understanding that professors hold office hours to answer questions and give advice about how best to approach classwork, Raúl and many of his peers relied on their family and closest friends for advice.

## Discussion

Teacher preparation programs can draw on pre-service teachers' experiences and *testimonios* to look closely at how they prepare their teachers to address the needs of Latino students. As previously discussed, Latino students are a large portion of the enrollment in elementary school. The history of disenfranchisement of Latinos in many states such as Texas is troubling. Colleges of education have a responsibility to evaluate their approaches for recruitment and preparation of the teachers that will teach this increasingly growing school population. From the three *testimonios* provided in this paper, we can see how important one teacher's caring demeanor and actions might be in encouraging young children to successfully navigate educational institutions and engage in an ethic of care. Further, teachers' actions model good pedagogical practices needed for linguistic and cultural minority students as opposed to role models in terms of masculinity or gendered norms. If school personnel plant the seed of going to college in the minds and hearts of Latino children, especially young boys, then the importance of high expectations cannot be understated. As the children of immigrants who historically have suffered from low graduation rates (Portés & Rumbaut, 2001), these Latino children need a critical amount of care to ensure they can access higher education. At least one teacher of each of these participants understood that they needed to have conversations about college with them. Having navigated the postsecondary system those teachers passed on navigational capital onto the participants. Subsequently, the participants understood their role in helping their future students to imagine themselves as going to college. This ever-increasing movement of paying it forward can address the achievement gap that is currently lamented.

The Latino preservice teachers in this study show that they understand how having first-hand knowledge of the Latino culture and Spanish language helps them make inroads with Latino families and students. They understand that they possess the power in a classroom to dictate strict rules of language separation or to allow the children to use their Spanish language as a resource during all parts of the school day (Fránquiz & Reyes, 1998). Using what may be the only language the parents know proves very beneficial in developing caring relationships as well as building inspirational and navigational capital.

It is noteworthy that the preservice teachers did not have the confidence to approach their university faculty when they had questions or challenges in college classes. Instead, they

turned to their peers or immediate family even if they had never attended college, they spoke to the limits of such support. Luckily these Latino male pre-service teachers did not internalize their problems and engage in self-defeating behavior. They used support programs like TRiO aimed at helping first generation students yet acknowledged that consistency in personnel matters for establishing trust. Coming from a personal history where non-Latino teachers demonstrating an ethic of not caring, Raúl found it difficult to bond with his counselors.

### **Conclusion**

While there is strong evidence indicating that students of color benefit from the approaches of co-ethnic teachers, or male teachers, it is important not to essentialize co-ethnic male teachers as uniformly effective. Given the fact that the teaching force has shown a propensity for being homogenous in terms of class (middle), language (monolingual English), and gender (female), it behooves us to encourage not only students of color but also men of color to take up careers in teaching. Brown (2011) warns teacher education programs to not envision male teachers of color in a one-dimensional fashion because any warm bodied male of color will not do. Men account for 16% of the elementary teaching population, (Aud et al., 2011), Latinos and African-Americans combined comprise only 2% of the teaching population (Smigiel, 2011). Finding teachers that fit the pedagogical needs of Latinos by incorporating culture and language and contributing to the closing of the gender gap may prove challenging but not impossible. Our teacher preparation programs benefit from the testimonios of current teachers and student teachers to learn about their experiences, reasons for, and challenges of becoming elementary teachers.

It is important to note how these pre-service teachers are guided by a commitment to teach and improve the academic and social outcomes of Latino children. Teachers who engage in critical caring are needed to hold children to high expectations but foster a caring community that takes their experience and knowledge into account. However, the success of Latino students does not only rests on the shoulders of K-12 teachers but also the school staff. Valenzuela (1999) illustrated the power of student's success when feeling cared about. These testimonios illustrate the effects of the lack of communicating caring but also the far-reaching effects of critical caring. This study shows that it is the entire institutional endeavor from

elementary school to the preparation of pre-service teachers that is in need of attention. Latino students need funds of inspirational and navigational capital to succeed beyond high school in their university courses. For Latino students to succeed, university faculty and staff must also assume responsibility. There is work to be done everywhere. I have shown how teachers can be effective in influencing the academic outlook of other young Latino men and their willingness to pursue the teaching career. When a course of study in college is not what was expected, they can reinvent themselves and draw on their greatest gift of all, their bilingualism, as a pathway to a university degree and career. Ironically, as shown by Saenz and Ponjuan (2009), Latino males are becoming scarce in the universities. Without a healthy pool of university enrollees, colleges of education may continue to have very small numbers of Latino male teachers and, once more, defer the dream of creating a cycle of success for future generations of Latino children. Several colleges and universities have expanded the Call Me Mister program hosted by Clemson University and the State of New Jersey had a bill in review to establish a pilot program with the intent to recruit “disadvantaged or minority” young males into alternative teacher preparation programs to place them in failing schools (Calefati, 2013). A lot can be said for the importance of having a diverse teaching force and encouraging young men to become teachers, just as long as we do not hold them to normative ideals of gender and expect that they are a one-size-fits-all answer to all of our problems but instead seek them for their cultural intuitiveness along with cultural and linguistic wealth.

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