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# Pedagogy for Equity: Teaching in a Hispanic-Serving Institution

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**Abstract** Three female tenure-track faculty members at a Hispanic-Serving Institution explored how their cultural backgrounds inform their pedagogical approaches toward equity. They drew upon Mills's (1959) and Collins's (1993) frameworks to examine how their personal biographies, local social contexts, and broader systemic institutions affect their teaching processes for diverse students. These teaching processes include limiting assumptions about students, encouraging students to consider their own personal biographies in relation to the social world, welcoming students' multiple modes of expression, serving as role models, and challenging inequities in schooling. They conclude with recommendations for enhancing inclusivity in student learning and faculty development.

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Latinos, the largest population of color, will constitute about half the growth in college-age students within the next decade (College Board 2008). Latinos also have the lowest educational attainment rates of any racial/ethnic group (Fry 2002; Gandara and Contreras 2009). Fostering the success of Latinos and other students of color is a critical concern in a higher education system that is serving a more diverse student body and is becoming ever more accountable to external agencies (College Board 2008; Smith and Wolf-Wendel 2005; Zusman 2005).

Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), defined as two- or four-year institutions enrolling at least 25% Latino students, currently serve almost half of Latino college students (Contreras et al. 2008; Excelencia in Education 2009; Hubbard and Stage 2009; Johnson et al. 2006). These institutions tend to be less selective in admissions requirements, but they serve as important gateways to higher education for Latinos. Less selective institutions educate the majority (over 80%) of college students (Kirst and Bracco 2004), and Minority-Serving Institutions educate a large proportion of students of color (Gasman 2008). However, limited research exists about the experiences of students and faculty in these institutions, particularly HSIs (Contreras et al. 2008; Gasman 2008; Hubbard and Stage 2009). At the same time, the concept of access to higher education is often considered to be potentially in conflict with the ideal of academic excellence (Zusman 2005). This conflict can engender a "deficit" perspective that suggests students from backgrounds not historically well represented in college enrollments have weaknesses that must be compensated for, rather than unique "funds of knowledge" (Gonzales et al. 2005) that can inform and complement their academic learning.

Demographic shifts in higher education require that faculty members improve their understanding about the identities and learning processes of students from different backgrounds (Austin 2002, 2003). Through a qualitative study, we sought to contribute to the literature in this area by exploring the connections between faculty identity and pedagogy. The purpose of our study was to examine the teaching processes of three female, tenure-track faculty members at an HSI, with a focus upon the promotion of educational equity. This study contributes to the currently limited body of research, particularly qualitative research, about the experiences and teaching practices of faculty in HSIs (Hubbard and Stage 2009; Turner et al. 2008). Hubbard and Stage (2009) contended that "faculty attitudes . . . form a critical aspect of the conditions under which college students seek to learn" (p. 287) and that qualitative research is well poised to shed light on the attitudes and behaviors of faculty who teach in HSIs. Here we explore how our complex cultural identities inform our attitudes toward our students, approaches to pedagogy, and advocacy for educational equity.

## Conceptual Framework

To consider how our backgrounds have influenced our teaching in this institutional context, we turned to the work of two social theorists who situate personal biography within the larger context of social change, C. Wright Mills and Patricia Hill Collins. Mills's (1959) classic concept of the sociological imagination calls for scholars to "grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society" (p. 6). His perspective

emphasizes including individual experiences in research, locating these within a particular historical period, and positioning the scholar in relation to others in similar conditions. He also emphasized the relationship between one's personal and professional identities and behaviors. According to Mills (1959), "...the most admirable thinkers within the scholarly community ...do not split their work from their lives" (p. 195). Collins's (1993) theoretical framework suggests that people experience oppression on three planes: "the level of personal biography; the group or community level of the cultural context created by race, class, and gender; and the systemic level of social institutions" (1993, p. 619). Collins situates these three planes as "sites of domination and potential sites of resistance" (1993, p. 618). Race, class, gender, national origin, and sexuality are among the multiple dimensions through which an individual may feel privileged and/or oppressed at the same time.

As junior faculty interested in advancing equity for diverse students, we agree with Mills that "Scholarship is a choice of how to live as well as a choice of a career" (1959, p. 196). Collins's recognition that people can experience marginality with respect to one level or within multiple levels at the same time also speaks to our complex identities that involve dimensions of potential privilege and oppression, depending on the context. These ideas inform how we examine the intersections among our personal biographical experiences, various sociocultural contexts, and broader systemic conditions. In this article, we explore the following question; How do our cultural identities as female, tenure-track professors of education inform how we build our teaching philosophies and approach to pedagogy within the institutional context of an HSI?

## Methods

We employed the qualitative approach of critical performance ethnography (Denzin 2003) to examine our philosophies and pedagogies as faculty members at the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA), an HSI. Critical performance analysis is a non-linear and simultaneous exploration of the connection between biography, history, and politics, with an emphasis on the promotion of educational equity (Denzin 2003). This qualitative method is based on Mills's (1959) concept of sociological imagination. While we employed a reflective approach to examining our teaching, we also aim to influence pedagogy. Our study therefore offers a critical performance analysis with an emphasis on action, particularly in the classroom.

### Site and Sample

UTSA is a four-year comprehensive university, which currently enrolls about 28,000 students. A key part of its mission is to provide access and opportunity to minority students in the South Texas area, especially Mexican Americans. Minority students represent 57% of the student body, and Latinos constitute 43% of this group. This HSI has grown rapidly in the past decade, partly as a result of the 1993 South Texas Initiative, a state legislative bill passed to strengthen higher education in the South Texas area. The initiative responded to the 1987 class action lawsuit, *LULAC et al. v. Richards et al*. (Acosta 2009), which stipulated that Mexican Americans in the area had been severely underserved in higher education.

Our research and teaching interests span various sectors of education. Elizabeth teaches leadership and qualitative research in an educational leadership department; her research focuses on the preparation of K-12 urban school leaders in local and international contexts,

particularly leaders who serve Latino students. Anne-Marie teaches courses about higher education and research methods in the same department; her research focuses on college preparation, access, and retention of students of color and first-generation students. Kimberley teaches about language, literacy, and bilingual education in an elementary teacher preparation program. Her research addresses bilingual/biliterate development and educational equity for children of color and those from working-class backgrounds.

We all have ties to South America. Elizabeth is a third-generation, trilingual (English, Portuguese, and Spanish), Japanese, Brazilian Latina, who is phenotypically Asian. She came to the U.S. to earn her Ph.D. in education and has remained in the U.S. Kimberley is a bilingual (English and Spanish), White, native-English speaker, who was raised in a middle-class military family. She is married to an Afro-Colombian immigrant, and they are raising their two children bilingually. Anne-Marie is a bilingual (English and Spanish), phenotypically White Colombian-American, who comes from a mixed-heritage family in the northeast.

We joined the University at about the same time (one year apart) as tenure-track faculty members in education. We met when we joined a group of 10 female tenure-track faculty members at our HSI, who study various aspects of education and share a particular interest in expanding Latino educational opportunities. This group, Research for the Educational Advancement of Latin@s (REAL) Collaborative, was created in 2005 to establish a female support network of scholars committed to improving education for Latinos while navigating an academic environment that has traditionally been dominated by White males (Turner et al. 2008). The goals of this collaborative include engaging in active interdisciplinary research focusing on Latin@ issues. The group members share related research agendas and a critical desire to transform the academy to a more just and equitable environment for all students and faculty (Alanís et al. 2009).

Collectively, this group's research interests range across the entire education pipeline, from elementary to graduate school. Most of the group's members are Latina faculty of color of Mexican American descent, reflecting the dominance of the Mexican American population among Latinos and in our HSI's city. Given the limited number of Latina professors in the academy, the opportunity to form such a group has been quite remarkable.

We share many things in common with members of this group, but we also differ from them in important ways. None of us is Mexican American; and to many who do not know our backgrounds, Elizabeth is reduced to being "Asian" and Kimberley and Anne-Marie to being "White." While Kimberley categorizes herself racially and ethnically as White, Elizabeth, Anne-Marie, and Kimberley's daughters elude straightforward cultural and racial/ethnic categorization. We have found that the term "Latino mixed-heritage" accurately reflects our blended families and cultural, racial/ethnic, and phenotypical backgrounds. However, even though we affiliate with the Latino community, we may not necessarily be phenotypically marked as Latinos in the U.S. Thus, we have recognized that our "non-marked" Latino backgrounds may be influencing our professional commitments to the Latino community in distinctive ways. Moreover, our South American Latino background is not typically viewed as mainstream or foundational to the U.S. Latino experience, but as "other" Latino (Torres-Saillant 2007).

## Data Collection and Analysis

We took four steps to address the question of how our identities inform our teaching philosophies and pedagogical approaches. First, we wrote journal entries about our experiences as female faculty from diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds. Then, we discussed how these experiences affected our pedagogical practices and advocacy regarding Latinos

and students of color. Subsequently, we conducted a dialogical analysis (Padilla 1993) of our journal entries, during which we questioned one another to clarify the meaning of our texts and teased out non-articulated issues. Finally, we examined transcripts of our discussions and journal entries and identified common themes, as well as relationships between themes, in the transcripts. We then connected these themes with the research literature to draw broader conclusions and related recommendations about building pedagogy oriented toward equity.

## Findings and Discussion

In this section, we examine how our personal biographies, sociocultural group contexts, and the broader systemic level of social institutions (Collins 1993) relate to our pedagogical orientation toward equity. In Fig. 1, we present a heuristic depicting how we draw on the three levels of experience to develop a pedagogy for equity. Our heuristic suggests that the relationship between these three levels of experience and pedagogy for equity is dynamic and fluid, rather than static, and can involve one, two, or three levels simultaneously. Thus, we acknowledge that the distinctions between these levels can seem artificial or blurred. We then discuss how we develop pedagogies oriented toward equity through our personal biographies, group or community sociocultural contexts, and broader systemic level of social institutions (Collins 1993).

### Personal Biographies

In the context of our teaching, our personal biographies reveal how our processes of self-identification influence our attitudes and beliefs about our diverse students. We identified two perceptions of ourselves in relation to our students: affirming flexible modes of identity and critically reflecting on our assumptions.

*Affirming Flexible Modes of Identity* In finding a way to articulate our connections with the Latino community, we agreed that we all affiliate with the Latino community in a "familial-

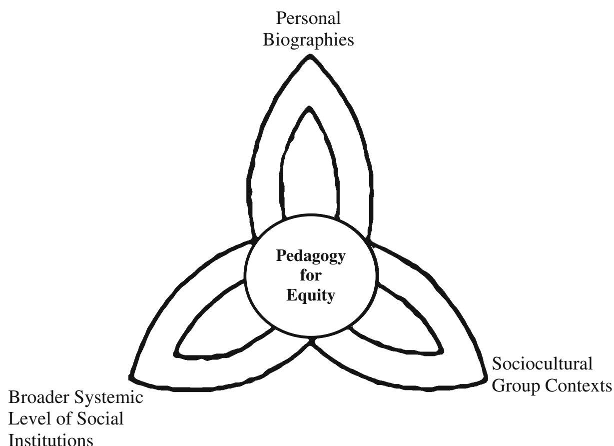


**Fig. 1** Heuristic of pedagogy for equity (based on Collins 1993)

historical" way (Gracia 2008). A "familial-historical" approach to Latino identity involves affiliating with this heterogeneous community much in the same way that different members of a family might relate to their family in different ways, but still feel connected with their family due to a sense of a shared background and history (Gracia 2008). Conceptualizing our identification with the Latino community in this way allows us the flexibility to acknowledge our multiple positionalities with respect to other categories such as phenotype, class, and nation of origin. It also enables us to relate to our students' cultural identities in varied ways. This process encourages us to be open to our students' capabilities, as we discuss next.

*Critically reflecting upon our assumptions* Reflecting upon our personal biographies has inspired us to identify and challenge any assumptions we may have about our students, including those about what our students are capable of achieving professionally. Elizabeth reflected that, "My phenotypical features do not fit a romantic perception of a professor or a school administrator...often a White male in a suit, and idealist, and a dedicated hero" (McPhee 1984). Describing how people sometimes react when she identifies herself as a previous school administrator and now professor of education, she said, "A puzzled look will spread across their faces; and they will pause and ask me to clarify my professional role, as if they were questioning how an Asian-looking Latina like me holds enough experience to research and teach authoritatively."

Kimberley and Anne-Marie have similarly faced assumptions about their background based on their appearance. Kimberley has been asked by strangers if her phenotypically darker, bilingual children are adopted. When Anne-Marie initially introduces her Latino surname, she sometimes gets questions about whether she is married to a Latino or why she looks the way she does. These are only a few examples; but in general, we each find ourselves at times clarifying and explaining our cultural and racial/ethnic identities quite often, in several different contexts. These are not uncommon experiences for mixed-heritage people (Root 2003).

We are often challenged to check our assumptions in the classroom. Anne-Marie recalled one incident in which she was teaching a racially diverse class of White, Latino, and African American women and men about the less traditional methodological approach of autoethnography. In trying to prompt a quiet class to discuss the rigor of autoethnography, she asked, "So how is autoethnography any different from just telling stories?" After a long, quiet pause, one student described how he had read a Latino school superintendent's autoethnography. He said that this article gave him analytical insights about a superintendent's experience that he would have not gotten through any other research method. Anne-Marie was grateful for this person's thoughtful response, which broke the silence and provoked further discussion among the students. She also realized, however, that she was surprised at who made this comment—a White male in a suit, in a leadership position, the stereotype of a school leader (as Elizabeth noted above) and someone she had assumed would prioritize more traditional methods of inquiry. She realized that she was making assumptions and even creating stereotypes about how her students thought, depending on their gender or cultural background and their apparent privilege or lack thereof. This incident reminded her to remain open to her students' unique perspectives and capabilities of identifying with others different from themselves.

Given our personal biographies, we strive to be mindful about our conscious or unconscious assumptions about our students' cultural and racial/ethnic identities, their capabilities in the classroom, and their potential in professional roles. We often relate our own experiences as persons of mixed-heritage to those of our students who come from

“non-traditional” or “underrepresented” cultural backgrounds. However, we also recognize that we carry elements of privilege and realize that we must not make assumptions about students who we perceive to carry privilege either. We have found that our mixed heritage and multiple affiliations with different communities and perspectives serve as resources upon which we can draw when teaching in an institution with such diverse students. Similarly, we see the importance of identifying and cultivating the diverse cultural resources, or funds of knowledge (Gonzales et al. 2005), that our students bring to our classrooms. To consider students’ cultural backgrounds as resources rather than liabilities is particularly important when the capabilities of students of color have traditionally been perceived from a deficit perspective (Valencia 2002). This is also particularly critical, considering that higher education’s principles of access and excellence are often perceived as inversely related (Zusman 2005).

## Group or Community Sociocultural Contexts

A second, but similarly important, part of the heuristic for creating pedagogy for equity relates to group or community sociocultural contexts (Collins 1993). Here, we discuss how our personal biographies influence our teaching in the group or community contexts of our classrooms. For us, this involves encouraging students to consider their own personal biographies and identities in relation to their communities. It also entails being responsive to students’ varied forms of expression, including cultural expression, as well as being mindful that we can serve as role models for our students.

*Encouraging students to understand their identities in their relation to their communities* As we have done in considering our own personal biographies, we also invite our students to understand how their identities are situated within larger group or community sociocultural contexts, particularly with respect to social categories such as gender, race/ethnicity, and class. This process also can involve discussing social categories that tend to have been overlooked in research and practice. We each incorporate material about diverse students, forms of teaching, and types of leadership into our curricula. With students, we explore questions such as: “Where do you fit, and in relation to whom?” and “Which communities are being overlooked?”.

Kimberley described how she encourages students to consider their social locations toward the beginning of the semester. Teaching about racism, she conducts an exercise where she explores the concept of privilege by drawing five to six concentric circles. She then has her students brainstorm the identity traits privileged in U.S. society, and she writes those traits in the center circle. She notes that, “Many traits are immediately and automatically named, like White, middle-class, protestant, and male.” She continues to ask them to name other types of societal privilege. Kimberley observes how, in this exercise:

> Other traits tend to roll out much more slowly and often require more prompting and more wait-time—heterosexual, able-bodied, right-handed...Interestingly, neither my generalist nor my bilingual education students mention native English speaking or U.S. born. The fact that these other traits are barely mentioned or not mentioned at all demonstrates to me that we need to take these issues much deeper and much more critically. In referencing the concentric circles, I explain somewhat simplistically that, for every trait that is different from those in the center, we have been socially conditioned to marginalize individuals with traits that differ from the center and, even more subtly, privilege those who meet the center criteria.

Bringing her own personal biography into the exercise, she then uses herself as an example by placing herself on the circle just outside of the innermost circle, because, as a woman, she lacks the male privilege in the center. In this exercise, she goes on to "explain that those of us from dominant cultures have been conditioned to judge others based on the ideologies of the center." This visual exercise demonstrates a strategy for displaying and examining the relationship between different hierarchies of privilege in the classroom, particularly for students who already inhabit a diverse classroom (Chaisson 2004).

Many of Kimberley's students have told her that this exercise of drawing concentric circles of privilege helps them to grasp the ideas of privilege, racism, and social reproduction. This strategy reveals forms of privilege that tend to be less recognized, such as native language, status, and nationality. In this exercise, Kimberley also models how a White woman can engage in being self-reflexively aware of her own racial privilege while still being an advocate for members of a marginalized community (Cantu and Ammons 2008). This process can encourage other students, including those from privileged backgrounds, to explore their own relationships with the communities in which they are involved.

Encouraging students to understand their communities can also highlight the experiences of communities that have been overlooked in scholarship and practice. Our university is located in a place where many military personnel and veterans live, so military students are a presence in our classes. Anne-Marie noted that:

> One of my military students, for her final project, designed a program to educate higher education faculty and administrators about the needs of military students who enter college. There is a lack of literature on how to serve military students, and I credit her with introducing me to this topic and for developing a way of teaching others about this important population. . . . As diverse students enter education, they will create knowledge about groups that have not been studied before.

Since then, several of her other students have also developed projects to serve military students. In examining understudied communities, her students not only demonstrate ownership over their learning, but also became agents and co-creators of knowledge (Collins 1993).

In terms of curricula, Anne-Marie has noticed that including material on first-generation college students in her research methods class "has encouraged students to make connections between the research approaches and their personal experiences." Many of the students at UTSA are the first in their families to go to college. Anne-Marie finds that, "They will speak up in class and say that the research results reflected their own experiences." Likewise, Elizabeth includes readings on women leaders and leaders of color, so that her students can see how people from underrepresented backgrounds become school leaders. Students from underrepresented racial/ethnic and class backgrounds do not necessarily see their experiences reflected in university curricula or culture (Harper and Hurtado 2007). Incorporating course readings that address diverse experiences helps students relate to the broader course content, see how it is relevant to their lives, and feel more "validated" (Rendon 1994). They realize that their experiences are seen and represented in the academy. It allows students to connect their personal biographies and the academic experience.

*Being responsive to students' forms of expression* We each described different ways of striving to be open and responsive to students' multiple forms of expressing their ideas. In our institutional context and city, Spanish serves as a major form of cultural expression. If we hear our students using Spanish or they address us in Spanish, we often communicate

with them in Spanish. When she arrived at STU, Elizabeth recognized that expressing herself in Spanish and addressing her cultural background enhanced her capacity to connect with students: "Students in my classes seemed to value my contribution, especially when they realized that I spoke Spanish and was authentic in my experiences as a Latina educator." Anne-Marie agreed:

> Once my students recognize that I speak Spanish, some will communicate with me in Spanish before and after class, engaging me in everything from small talk, like the results of NFL football games over the weekend, to serious issues, like struggles with writing. Regardless of how serious the topic of conversation is, I feel like speaking in Spanish makes them more comfortable approaching me, and it makes me more human to them. It helps to build more trusting relationships, I think.

Kimberley teaches at least one course (entitled *Reading Comprehension)* each semester primarily in Spanish, for students seeking certification in bilingual education. Most of her students seeking bilingual certification are Mexican Americans from South Texas who have grown up speaking Spanish within their communities and networks of family and friends. However, many students comment that the course acted as an important bridge to their professional lives as bilingual educators because they typically have not taken university coursework where they are required to express their pedagogical knowledge and methods in Spanish.

Using multiple types of assessments that enable students to express their understanding in novel ways is another way to be responsive to students' various ways of expressing knowledge. In this regard, Kimberley has connected her teaching with her scholarship. She co-authored an article with five of her undergraduate students (2008) regarding the culminating assignment in one of her classes where students had to represent their connections to the course through an aesthetic representation (e.g., dance, painting, sculpture). Yvonne, an undergraduate student seeking her elementary teaching certification, chose to do an open-hand kata demonstration (which she learned by taking Karate alongside her son) to represent her connections to a course entitled *Reading Comprehension*. She reflected:

> Participating in and seeing other aesthetic representations was fun for me because I have always been comfortable representing myself in artistic forms. However, I noticed that some of my other classmates were much more reserved and took a long time to figure out how to express themselves aesthetically. The aesthetic representations forced everyone to open up in a different way. As a result, we had the opportunity to see each other in different ways—comical, spiritual, loving, family-oriented, driven, and artistic. (Cuero et al. 2008, p.19)

As a full-time Latina student and single parent, Yvonne valued being able to express her academic connections in personal and unique ways, an approach which echoes Mills's (1959) counsel not to split our personal and professional lives.

*Serving as role models* Given the low representation of Latinas in the academy, Elizabeth and Anne-Marie also recognize that they serve as role models for our students. As Elizabeth says,

> There is a strong message that we pass on to our students by being females of color in the academy. . . .we pose the possibility that one can attain the credentials and become professionals in fields not traditionally represented by women or other people of color.

Likewise, in one of her course evaluations, a student of Anne-Marie's mentioned that it was "inspiring to have a Latina professor." Our presence in the academy signals to our students that, as Elizabeth says, "Sí, podemos—we can become scholars and leaders."

### Systemic Level of Social Institutions—the Educational System

Finally, we addressed how we encourage our students to examine and challenge the inequities in the U.S. educational system. One theme that emerged from our discussions was inviting students to reconsider the current institutional structure of schooling. Elizabeth illustrated how she challenges her students:

> When I ask my students to draw a school, they often draw an 1800s schoolhouse with a bell at the top. I then ask how many of them work in a school with a bell and how many have had to use the bell in their daily routines.

When her students respond that they typically do not use or see a bell, she suggests to them that, "Imprinted in our minds are models that have not changed for centuries, yet we carry those as true in our society." This exercise serves as a springboard for challenging the mental models that people can carry about schools and for raising the possibility of how their cognitive perceptions might be shifted to promote organizational improvement and change (Senge et al. 2000).

Given the dominance of White males in educational leadership positions (Turner et al. 2008), Elizabeth also encourages her students to reconsider who is capable of serving as leaders in schools. She has seen more and more women interested in studying organizational leadership and explained that, "I encourage female students to understand the academic life and also be confident that they can be outstanding school leaders if they are ready to negotiate potential sexism and racism regarding occupational stereotypes." To encourage students to address issues of sexism and racism analytically, Elizabeth emphasizes gender and ethnicity in the readings concerning school administration in her syllabi. She works with her students to identify and challenge how sexism and racism operate in the U.S. schooling system.

As part of addressing educational stratification in higher education, Anne-Marie teaches Bourdieu's (1986) theories of cultural and social capital. She finds that, "The students engage with these concepts and find them intuitively very relevant to their work, so together we develop vignettes and compelling examples based on their personal and professional experiences of why this theory is relevant to their work." In her class, Anne-Marie emphasizes that the discourse on college student departure has traditionally placed responsibility on the student for dropping out of college. She assigns readings that emphasize the institution's role in degree completion in order to highlight the structural and institutional factors at work in affecting educational possibilities. She has found that examining the tension between an emphasis on individual agency and structural factors in determining educational outcomes can equip her students with more knowledge to effect institutional change that is responsive to the needs of diverse college students and faculty.

This example reflects the power of developing the sociological imagination, which involves the capacity to shift perspectives from personal and everyday experiences to the larger systemic level, in an effort to make abstract concepts more concrete. Moreover, the connection of academic course material with students' personal and professional experiences can serve to limit the academic jargon that Mills disdained (1959) and that can also inhibit learning, particularly for marginalized students (Hooks 1994).

## Recommendations

First, at the level of personal biography (Collins 1993), our qualitative study suggests the importance of taking time to reflect on personal identity and how it informs one's own teaching. Doing so can help increase consciousness of how we affiliate with students from multiple communities and challenge our assumptions about students that may hinder our capacity to work constructively with them. For example, we can be more open to the funds of knowledge (Gonzales et al. 2005) that students can contribute in the classroom.

At the level of group and community context, we find that coming together as faculty members from underrepresented groups helps ease the isolation commonly experienced by such faculty (Turner et al. 2008). In his classic book on new faculty socialization, Boice (2000) emphasized the value of new faculty mentoring one another. In sharing teaching strategies as well as personal perspectives, we have served as peer mentors for one another. This peer mentoring has smoothed our transitions into the academy. Consistent with our process of affiliating with different communities flexibly, we recommend that junior faculty form single or multi-institutional peer mentoring groups on the basis of any relevant shared affiliation—gender, race/ethnicity, faculty status, cultural background issues, shared research interests, and/or other issues (Boice 2000; Friend and Gonzales 2009; Gillespie et al. 2006; Piercy et al. 2006; Wildman et al. 2000). As faculty members, relating to each other's complex identities has also allowed us the opportunity to validate (Rendon 1994) our personal biographies as mixed-heritage Latinas, as well as our teaching approaches and concerns for educational equity. Becoming more vulnerable with one another has had risks, but the rewards have included diminished isolation and a reinforced sense of personal and professional purpose.

In the classroom, we encourage faculty members to invite students to explore the connections between their personal biographies, group and community contexts, and broader systemic institutions (Collins 1993). This process helps students clarify their goals for pursuing education, understand their relationships to various communities, and discern power relationships that they may be negotiating in their personal or professional lives. It can help students affirm their own identities and create new knowledge about understudied groups. We also recommend that faculty members be responsive to students' multiple modes of expression, in both informal and formal interactions. Supporting students in linking their backgrounds and modes of expression with course content can help bring abstract concepts to life and to challenge those concepts as well, a process that is essential in advancing educational equity.

At the broader level of systemic institutions (Collins 1993), leaders in the academy need to foster continuously a more inclusive environment that intentionally maximizes the potential of faculty and student diversity across multiple institutional units (Smith and Wolf-Wendel 2005). While many efforts have been made to promote inclusivity, observers have concluded that institutions still have a long way to go in terms of creating a welcoming environment for students and faculty from all backgrounds (Harper and Hurtado 2007; Hurtado and Sharkness 2008; Smith and Wolf-Wendel 2005; Turner et al. 2008). Steps toward building inclusivity include recruiting and hiring diverse faculty, supporting faculty so that they can thrive, and rewarding community-oriented research and service (Hurtado and Sharkness 2008; Turner et al. 2008). Supporting faculty also involves facilitating senior and peer mentoring; making bureaucratic and advancement procedures more transparent; and providing resources such as money, physical space, and the political will to develop faculty support systems.

Our research on building a pedagogy for equity in an HSI links the "scholarship of teaching," through promoting students' critical thinking and active learning, and the "scholarship of application," through addressing social problems related to educational inequities (Boyer 1990). It provides an example of how new faculty members from historically underrepresented backgrounds in the academy develop an "inclusive pedagogy" (Tuitt 2003) to serve diverse students within an understudied institutional context. Research on higher education has primarily addressed the experiences of students and faculty from elite and selective institutions, rather than those from less selective institutions, which enroll the majority of college students (Kirst and Bracco 2004). Moreover, the discourse about Minority-Serving Institutions has historically been framed by agents outside of these institutions (Gasman 2009). We hope that, among other things, our study serves as a departure point for faculty at Minority-Serving Institutions to reflect critically about and share their pedagogical strategies with researchers and practitioners. These faculty members can enhance our understanding about the socialization process for new faculty members interested in advancing the public good (Gonzalez and Padilla 2008) and can teach us all about balancing concerns such as access and excellence in the academy and possibly challenging the dichotomy between the two (Zusman 2005). Dialogues about pedagogy in HSIs, and in Minority-Serving Institutions more generally, can offer new insights about serving an increasingly diverse college population within all institutions of higher education (Gasman 2008).

## Conclusion

Although students of color will dominate the growth in college-age youth in the coming years, the U.S. higher education system still has far to go in terms of being truly inclusive of and responsive to diverse faculty and students with respect to research, teaching, and service (Aguirre and Martinez 2006; Harper and Hurtado 2007; Smith and Wolf-Wendel 2005; Turner et al. 2008). As female tenure-track professors in an HSI who share affiliations with the Latino community, we have jointly explored how our personal biographies and cultural backgrounds relate to our professional roles and concerns with effecting social change to broaden educational opportunities for Latino students (Collins 1993; Mills 1959). We have examined how the classroom can serve as a site for teachers and students to be active co-creators rather than passive recipients of knowledge. Moreover, we have considered how teachers and students can connect this knowledge with their experiences in the social world, and envision multiple perspectives and possibilities for addressing social problems.

As we develop our pedagogical skills, we aim to encourage students to develop the sociological awareness that can enable them to define their place in history and to determine their choices in how to live, as both students and professionals. Striving to create spaces in which students can realize these choices more concretely and visibly is a constant balancing act, especially in our positions as junior faculty at a relatively open access, comprehensive HSI that is simultaneously seeking to become a research university. Indeed, new faculty members, particularly those interested in promoting educational equity, often do not receive clear guidelines about socialization into the academy in a way that honors their or their students' personal and professional commitments (Austin 2002, 2003; Gonzalez and Padilla 2008; Rhoades et al. 2008). Therefore, our study yields several implications for faculty or other institutional personnel interested in advancing educational equity.

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