

## **Reflective Voices: Valuing Immigrant Students and Teaching with Ideological Clarity**

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Students who are not part of the dominant culture need teachers that have a clear understanding of their role as cultural workers (Freire, 1998). Moreover, it is imperative that teachers who work with immigrant children become reflective about their ideology and how their belief systems impact their interaction with culturally diverse families. In order to help immigrant students acquire the necessary academic skills to succeed in our society, teachers must also be supportive and aware of the delicate and nonstatic process of acculturation, which children undergo as they interact with a new culture, language, or reality that may not be “in tune” with their previous experiences. In this article, we will hear the voices of four novice teachers, as they critically examine assumptions they hold about their most disadvantaged students, and as they strive for ideological clarity in their practice.

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**KEY WORDS:** immigrant students; ethnographic research; teacher education; ideological clarity.

It takes great commitment on the part of teachers to effectively work with immigrant students and parents. Immigrant families frequently struggle with economic, social and language constraints that impact their understanding of, and integration into American public schools (Valdés, 1996). It often takes just one person to make immigrant children feel at ease in their new surroundings (Igoa, 1995). This person is often a teacher. Throughout the literature related to educational equity and culturally diverse students, five themes emerge which resonate closely with the attitudes of highly effective teachers highlighted later in this paper. The themes that will be discussed here are as follows: ideological clarity, ideology based on middle-class values, ideological baggage, asset-based education, and “it only takes one person.” The review of literature will be followed by excerpts from the ethnographies of four novice teachers. The narra-

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tives describe their journey toward becoming reflective and, ultimately, effective teachers of immigrant students.

### **IDEOLOGICAL CLARITY**

Ideological clarity (Trueba and Bartolomé, 2000) on the part of educators is critical when working with culturally and linguistically diverse students and is imperative in order to create the kind of schools where children feel truly accepted and welcomed. Educators must understand their personal beliefs, where these beliefs originate and the effect they may have on the students they teach. Trueba and Bartolomé (2000) discuss how the opinions that teachers hold about students and their families can often be directly linked to teachers' childhood experiences. Sometimes, these experiences differ greatly from those of students, especially if the students are from a different culture or socioeconomic level. At other times, the experiences may be similar, depending on the individual teacher.

The constructs teachers use to describe immigrant, ethnically diverse or poor students need to be questioned because they directly impact both the social and academic well-being of children (Trueba and Bartolomé, 2000). These beliefs often mirror myths about the above-mentioned population that are promulgated by the dominant culture. For this reason, ideological clarity is particularly important when working with immigrant students, since the teacher's perception of the child is tied to instructional behavior, methods, and expectations. Like Freire (1970), Trueba and Bartolomé (2000) believe that teachers' beliefs and attitudes are not apolitical; rather, they are grounded in life experiences that deem immigrant students' language and culture as assets or deficits, depending on the teachers' worldview. The values that teachers hold about how people should live, what they should aspire to, and the method they need to use in order to get there are often based on mainstream ideology. Trueba and Bartolomé (2000) write:

[The] restrictive views by which some teachers view their students are usually a product of their own personal theories, internalized beliefs, and values that reflect their own formative and restricted life experiences and influences. However they do not recognize beliefs and attitudes as reflecting the dominant ideology but instead view them as "natural," "objective," and "common sensical"—in other words, the "norm." (p. 281)

### **IDEOLOGY BASED ON MIDDLE-CLASS VALUES**

In clarifying their ideology, teachers also need to critically examine their value systems in relation to those of their students. In *Con Respeto* (1996), Guadalupe Valdés examines the beliefs and values of immigrant families living

in a border town near Mexico. She argues that the values and experiences, which working-class Mexican parents bring with their children to U.S. schools, do not help them make sense of what schools expect from their children. Schools, meanwhile, base their notions of successful students and families on a construct of a “standard” family and a particular notion of achievement that does not reflect the reality of many immigrant families. Valdés argues that the failure of immigrant students is in large part due to the fact that educators “have little understanding about other ways of looking at the world and about other definitions of success” (1996, p. 5).

Valdés found that schools and teachers often assume that immigrant parents do not care about their children’s education because they judge their behavior based on their own middle-class values. She writes:

Many educators and policymakers believe that attention must be directed at educating or changing what I term here “non-standard families” that is, families that are non-mainstream in background or orientation (e.g. non-white, non-English speaking, non-middle-class). This concern for non-standard families and the widely held beliefs that these families—for the good of their children—must be helped to be more like white middle-class families has led to a strong movement in favor of family intervention or family education programs (1996, p. 33)

Valdés does not take issue with parent involvement programs per se, but she makes a strong case that “if family intervention programs are implemented with Mexican-origin families, they must be based on an understanding and an appreciation and respect for the internal dynamics of these families and for the legitimacy of their values and beliefs” (p. 203).

### **IDEOLOGICAL BAGGAGE**

Teachers are a product of their own schooling processes, and carry deep within them schooling experiences that affect their classroom behavior. Farber refers to these experiences as “ideological baggage” (Farber, 1995). When these experiences are shared with others and brought out into the open, important information can be gained about what brings individuals into teaching as well as what keeps them there.

In her study of preservice teachers, Elizabeth Sugar Martinez explored how six teachers’ early schooling experiences affected how they taught their immigrant students (2000). First, Martinez collected journal entries from preservice teachers, where they wrote about their ideological baggage and its effect on their interactions with students. In these journals, preservice teachers reflected upon their own schooling and how these experiences now impacted them as teachers. What she found was so revealing that she decided to do follow-up interviews two years later after they were credentialed. She discovered that all

of the teachers in the interview group who had been second-language learners had experienced humiliating experiences during their early public school education. Those interviewed wrote about teachers who had either been insensitive, or outright hostile toward their language and culture.

What is interesting to note from Martinez' reflective dialogue with the interviewees, is that such painful events in their schooling experiences positively impacted the way in which they worked with their own students. For instance, Martinez writes that

all [of the teachers] stressed the importance of maintaining a warm and nurturing relationship with students so that the naturally uninhibited and inquisitive spirit in these young children would be free to question, receiving answers about issues related to culture and language without the traumatizing sting of rejection and humiliation [they had] experienced. . . . As I listened to each interviewee, the contrast was acutely pronounced between the kind of teacher they described from their past and the kind of teacher they aspired to become. The pain they felt—and that they still feel—has transformed them into a unique kind of educator. Along with the pedagogy they mastered in their teacher education program, these new teachers possess an authentic comprehension of their students' cultural frame of reference, not only because they, too, are Latinos but because of the adversity they encountered in schools. (2000, p. 98)

All of Martinez' interviewees experienced negative schooling experiences in which they were "mauled" by the ideological baggage of misdirected teachers. Nonetheless, all six teachers were determined that what had happened to them would not happen to the students in their own classrooms. In contrast, the teachers interviewed by Martinez valued the experiences that the children brought into the classroom and used them to create inclusive environments where children felt welcomed.

### **ASSET-BASED EDUCATION**

If teachers can learn about immigrant families' funds of knowledge, they can begin to transform their reaction to these families and avoid the deficit trap of assuming that these families are somehow devoid of abilities or skills. In his work, Luis Moll (1994) looks at classroom teaching and the sociocultural context of literacy from the perspective of immigrant households and community life. Moll contends that the high rate of educational failure among many immigrant students is due to "existing classroom practices [which] underestimate and constrain what Latino (and other) children are able to display intellectually" (p.179). Moll argues that teachers need to appreciate the assets which their diverse students provide, and use these "cultural resources" in their instruction.

Rather than emphasizing ways in which immigrant households should seek to adapt to the dominant culture, Moll argues that children's academic performance will only be improved when their ample language, cultural, and intellectual resources—their “funds of knowledge”—are used as the basis for their schooling.

In “Literacy Research in Community and Classrooms: A Sociocultural Approach” (1994), Moll documents how a reciprocal learning relationship was established between a Mexican working-class community and a school in Tucson, Arizona. After Moll and his research staff conducted a household analysis of Mexican families, they learned that collectively, these families possessed extensive domains of knowledge in a myriad of areas, which had not been previously tapped into by schools.

Moll also found that teachers could learn from the pattern found in Mexican households by establishing social networks with families and with colleagues. Once teachers became aware of the rich assets which their students provided, they were then able to bring the “living knowledge” from the community into their classrooms. Moll also points to the larger significance of learning and literacy for immigrant students, stating:

Our household and classroom work suggest the importance of thinking about literacy and about the consequences of literacy in fundamentally new ways, beyond the skills of reading and writing, and as intimately related to broader social and cultural practices. We must think of literacy (or literacies) as particular ways of using language for a variety of purposes, as a sociocultural practice with intellectual significance. . . . To become literate is to gain access to the valued resources of the culture. (1994, p. 201)

### **IT ONLY TAKES ONE PERSON**

Additionally, reflective teachers are aware of the tremendous power and responsibility which they shoulder as they help immigrant students navigate a delicate acculturation process. In *The Inner World of the Immigrant Child* (1995), Christina Igoa discusses the traumatic process that immigrant children undergo as they adapt to a new environment. Teachers need to provide such students with a warm and nurturing environment wherein they can feel safe and accepted. During this acculturation process, Igoa argues that the cultural, academic, and psychological dimensions of the whole child must be integrated in the classroom. Immigrant children, Igoa reminds us, have been uprooted from their own cultural environment and “need to be guided not to fling themselves overboard in their encounter with a new culture—for some a ‘powerful’ culture—and with a new language” (p. 9). During the initial period of acculturation, it is imperative that teachers provide students with support to help them open up to the new, while also retaining their heritage culture. Igoa documents how *just one person* can make immigrant children feel at ease in their new

surroundings. Moreover, she stresses that teachers who make a positive difference in the lives of immigrant children engage them in learning that builds on their assets (culture, language, and funds of knowledge). According to Igoa (1995):

Those of us who work with children know that our task is complicated; we have to examine the teaching practices we use, the policies we are expected to follow, and the theories we adopt. In the end, regardless of policies, philosophies, theories, and methodologies, the success or failure of an individual child—the way that child experiences school—depends on what happens in that child’s classroom, what kind of learning environment the teacher is able to provide, and how well the teacher is able to investigate and attend to the particular needs of that child. (pp. 8–9)

Laurie Olsen, in *Made in America* (1997), also points to the crucial role that one teacher can play in the lives of immigrant students. In her ethnographic research conducted in the San Francisco Bay area, she looked at the racial sorting that occurs in high schools and at the “Americanization” of immigrants. She documents the loss of language and culture that these children suffer and writes about the solitary struggles that a few courageous teachers fight on behalf of their ever increasingly diverse students. Olsen argues that, “for most immigrants, ‘Americanization’ means leaving behind their fuller national, cultural, and language identities, and abandoning hope that others will see and accept them in their full humanness” (1997, p. 11).

Olsen believes that teachers need to intervene to halt the dehumanizing aspects of this Americanization process and help students who are straddling, and those caught between cultures and languages by providing more inclusive and pluralistic practices rather than endorsing homogenizing school policies. She says teachers

must honor and support the gifts and strengths children and youth bring through their cultural and linguistic heritage; must recognize the benefits of developing skill and connection in more than one culture and language; and create the conditions and support for young people to be able to claim their own cultural world, appreciate and learn about other cultural realities, and gain the skills to build bridges across cultures, religious faiths and languages. (2002, pp. 14–15)

## **BECOMING REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONERS**

In our work with intern teachers over the past two years, we have observed some promising patterns that have prompted us to look at how interns work with culturally diverse parents and students. We have noticed that some novice teachers work with immigrant students quite successfully and seem to have a clearer understanding of the families’ background and factors that impact their

lives. There are also interns who struggle all year long with similar student populations and at times develop a combative stance against parents and students, which prevents them from knowing and teaching immigrant children effectively. Those interns who are successful at teaching immigrant children tend to structure learning around their students' assets (culture, language, and funds of knowledge) and make a true effort to listen and understand the voices of the parents and students they serve. Conversely, interns that struggle tend to focus on the parents or children's *perceived* deficits and often have a difficult time engaging with students and their families in a productive and meaningful manner.

For the purpose of this paper we will focus on those interns who are able to connect with immigrant children and create classroom environments that help them feel welcomed by honoring their language and culture and using these assets effectively. Teacher education programs need to create opportunities for novice teachers to engage in a reflective process that explores, names, and questions their ideology. If novice teachers do not reflect on their beliefs they can judge students based on erroneous personal views of language and culture. We believe that similar to the Freirian (1970) concept of *conscientizacao*, through reflection, dialogue, and action, negative educational views can be changed. Because we are all part of a historical process that is not fixed or irreversible, attitudes can be transformed. When teachers recognize the cultural differences between themselves and their students they can find ways to actively include their students' experience and language in their teaching. To do this effectively, teachers must be willing to look critically at their own culturally hegemonic (Gramsci, 1971) biases and examine how these affect the ways in which they teach.

Educators who successfully teach immigrant students recognize that the world is made up of multiple realities and that white, middle-class values are not superior to those found in other cultures. In other words, communal values that promote empathy and respect are just as important as those that foster independence and achievement (Valdés, 1996). Effective teachers who have ideological clarity recognize the positive and negative aspects inherent in all cultures and do not assume that their values and beliefs are superior to those of the families they serve.

As teacher trainers, we have also noticed that successful teachers of immigrant students have often encountered life experiences where they have "crossed" cultural or economic borders (Anzaldúa, 1987; Rosaldo, 1993). In some cases, these border crossings are a result of travel abroad, of friendships with others whose culture is different from their own, or of personally experiencing the consequences of living outside the dominant "norm." Because of these "border crossings," some teachers have recognized the arbitrary and unfair nature of discrimination (Trueba and Bartolomé, 2000), thus helping them to open up to

diverse realities and to develop empathy toward those assigned a lowered status due to economic standing or differences in language and culture.

### ETHNOGRAPHY AS A REFLECTIVE PROCESS

The tool which we have selected to examine the interplay between educational ideology and the acculturation process, is an ethnography project that teacher interns at Claremont Graduate University, a private research institute in Southern California, write during their first year in the classroom.

The internship program allows beginning teachers to learn the profession while teaching in the classroom. During this time, interns are nurtured as well as critically evaluated by faculty advisers. At the same time, interns must learn to critically evaluate their own practice and work collaboratively with their faculty advisers, for continuous growth and support. Faculty advisers frequently observe interns in their classrooms, provide them with constructive feedback and teach weekly seminars. Most of these advisers have extensive classroom experience and are doctoral students, exemplary teachers, or administrators on leave.

The ethnographic research project, developed over the course of the teacher education program, guides intern teachers into developing the necessary skills and attitudes to become great teachers committed to contributing to academic excellence, equity, and integrity for their students and themselves. It serves as a guide for teacher growth and classroom change, as well as meeting the thesis research project requirement of the master's degree in education.

The purpose of conducting the ethnographic research project is to open teachers' eyes to other meanings of culture and thereby change their thinking about themselves and their own culture. In using this research tool, interns describe their own teaching experience. By using the ethnographic process to reflect on what they do as teachers in the classroom, they can examine and analyze the instructional strategies they use, and discover the reasons why they use them. In this way, the teachers can make visible the links between theory and practice.

The role of the ethnographer is similar to that of the anthropologist, who gathers information about different ways of living. In *Ethnographic Eyes: A Teacher's Guide to Classroom Observation* (1999), Carolyn Frank cites the primary skills required to conduct classroom ethnographies as being "observation, inquiry, research and reflection." Using this frame of reference, the goal is to continuously generate more questions, thereby learning and reflecting through the inquiry process. As participant observers, interns learn to observe (through multiple sources of data), what to observe (different contexts and social situations), and from what perspective (the child's, the teacher's, and other adults).

When looking from just one perspective or when accumulating surface infor-

mation, only part of the classroom experience can be seen. But when multiple sources of data are used, from different perspectives, teachers get a more holistic view of students and of the effectiveness of their teaching (Frank, 1999).

In each ethnography, interns begin by sharing their personal story, exploring why they decided to become teachers and reflecting on how their story impacts the way they view their students and run their classrooms. Schooling and formative life experiences are explored, along with interests, academic knowledge, and special skills. In the next section, the interns monitor the progress of their students and conduct an in-depth analysis of five students who are culturally or linguistically diverse from themselves, and who are struggling academically. Frequently the children selected for the ethnography are immigrant students and English language learners. Throughout the year, interns collect data on these students, including standardized assessment scores, student work, and interviews. They also conduct home visits, interview parents, and participate in family events.

The ethnography project continues to move outward in studying families and communities, state and national policy, as well as the larger social, political, economic, and cultural environment, and ends with an overview of historical and philosophical worldview contexts in education. The ethnography concludes with a statement of the teachers' own emerging philosophy, integration of pertinent professional literature, a summary of their progress with the five students, a statement of how the interns will interrupt social reproduction in their classrooms and schools, and next steps for professional development. The ultimate goal is for interns to become more reflective and effective practitioners, and the final product is an ethnography that documents their beginning struggles and successes.

During the 2001–2002 Teacher Education Internship Program, 17 interns (out of 103) received recognition for their outstanding ethnographic research. Ethnographies were selected by faculty advisers based on interns' depth of reflection, effectiveness in the classroom, and commitment to working with disadvantaged students and their families. Due to space limitations, and to allow for a more in-depth view of several teachers, this paper will utilize excerpts from four ethnographies: three from the 2001–2002 ethnographies and one from the previous year.

### **THE FOUR NOVICE TEACHERS**

The four narratives—while by no means being exhaustive—represent succinctly and articulately the attitudes necessary to work effectively with culturally and linguistically diverse students. All four of these teachers are highly reflective, truly value their immigrant students, and are clear about their ideology and role as “cultural workers” (Freire, 1998). All four teachers are em-

ployed in urban schools located throughout the greater Los Angeles area and work with high populations of English learners and immigrant students.

Three of these teachers are from immigrant families, but the fourth teacher—a white woman with strong historical roots in this country—displays how consciousness, rather than ethnicity, makes the difference. Herein these teachers will be known as Olga, Barbara, Yadira, and Lisa.

### EXCERPTS FROM THE ETHNOGRAPHIES

Olga, a fifth-grade teacher in her late 20s, emigrated from El Salvador and grew up in central Los Angeles. Olga's family was forced to leave El Salvador for economic reasons. Her family crossed several borders to finally reach the United States. Their decision to leave their country was based on the need to provide their children with a better life. Olga writes, "At age seven I already knew some children were lucky and some were not. At age seven I also knew my parents were desperate to give us a better life." After her parents established themselves in the United States, they sent for the rest of the family. In her ethnography, Olga describes this experience:

Three months after my mom arrived in the United States, my grandmother brought my two sisters, my brother and me to Mexico all by herself! We rode trains, buses, taxis, and walked. In Mexico, a woman to whom my parents had paid \$4,000 boarded us on a plane bound for Los Angeles. She was supposed to give my grandmother \$1,000 so that she could fly back to El Salvador. Instead, she gave my grandmother \$100 and my little brother. According to this "*coyote*," my brother was too dark to pose as her son. My grandmother begged for money and food all the way back to El Salvador.

Barbara, a white middle-school teacher in her mid-40s, grew up in a rural part of New York. Barbara's father died during her early childhood, and her mother died later when she entered college. Barbara left college after the birth of her daughter in her senior year. She eventually completed her bachelor's degree in her late 30s and entered the graduate teaching program a few years thereafter. In her ethnography, she shares the challenges she faced while growing up:

My father died when I was 10. My mother died when I was 18. Both my oldest brother and sister were dispersed across the country, due to their careers in the military. By the tender age of 18, I was going to college and tending to my severely mentally retarded brother.

Yadira, a bilingual first-grade teacher in her early 20s, is a first-generation Mexican immigrant from the Coachella Valley in California. She comes from a

family of farm laborers. In her ethnography, she recounts how her parents came to this country pursuing the immigrant dream:

My parents immigrated to the United States following their dream of a better future. Now I understand that the better future was not for them, but for us, their children. For the first five years of my life, I lived with my grandparents in Mexico, while my parents worked in the United States. When I was old enough to attend school, my parents decided it was time for me to come to California, so that I could get a good education. . . . My parents worked in the hot fields to provide my siblings and me an opportunity for a brighter future. I remember working in the fields during my summer vacations and my parents telling me it was not a job to be ashamed of, but that I should aim for something that fulfilled me as an individual.

Yadira's parents would tell her, "El trabajo siendo honrado bueno es, pero tu tienes la oportunidad de estudiar y encontrar algo de provecho que te llene come ser humano." (Honest work is good, but you have the chance to study and find something of opportunity that fills you as a human being.)

Lisa, a second grade-teacher also in her early 20s, is also a first-generation immigrant. She stated:

I am Chinese. My grandparents were born in China and migrated to Vietnam, where my parents were born and raised. My parents and brother left Vietnam, the only home they knew in December 1978. They escaped the country shortly after it had been taken over by the communist government in hopes of seeking a better life elsewhere. The United States was their salvation. It was their dream. My mother was one and a half months pregnant when they boarded a ship for what was supposed to be a six-day journey across mysterious waters. They arrived in Malaysia, and stayed for a month before the Malaysian troops scurried them off the coast in small boats. With minuscule portions of food, they pushed out to sea without a compass to direct them. Women, men and children cried as troops shot tear gas at the refugees and many cried in agony as they realized they had possibly made the wrong decision to leave their homeland. My family eventually reached Indonesia, where they sought refuge for six months. By now, my mother was nearly nine months pregnant with me. My uncle, in America, sponsored my family's immigration to the United States. The paper process and red tape were finally approved for our entrance, and my family was flown to California. A few weeks later, I was born and became the Chang family's first-generation baby.

## RECURRING THEMES IN THE ETHNOGRAPHIES

While the selected ethnographies provide moving personal accounts, some common themes also become apparent: Ideological clarity, ideology based on middle-class values, ideological baggage, asset-based education, and "it only takes one person" resonated strongly within the interns' narratives. Olga, Bar-

bara, Yadira, and Lisa all worked successfully with immigrant students, valued the cultural resources that their families provided, and vigilantly monitored their internalized beliefs.

The following excerpts reveal the ideological clarity necessary when working with diverse students. Here teachers express ways in which they link their life and schooling experiences with their classroom practices. These teachers are critically conscious about how their past has shaped the way they run their classrooms. For example, Yadira writes:

My parents taught me that hard work was not only physical, but mental and emotional as well. There is no doubt that the values I have grown up with are what guide me toward the teaching profession. As a teacher, these are also the values that I transmit to my students on a daily basis. My values are based on respect and love. Teaching is an art that reflects both of these values and much more. To teach, one needs to be caring, have patience, and really believe in making a difference in the lives of children.

Olga's childhood experiences as a Spanish-speaking immigrant who struggled to learn English, directly impact her approach to teaching her immigrant students. At first, she assumes that her students will be successful if she can teach them to read and write in English, but she soon discovers that this is not an easy task and that it is not the only element that will determine their success. She ponders:

Perhaps public schools are failing children because the focus is on getting them to master the dominant language/belief system and not on teaching them how to deal with their position as disadvantaged children. Perhaps we harm our students by making them believe that as soon as they learn how to read and write in English they will make it. Why did I believe that this was true when I knew from personal experience that it took more than reading and writing in English to make it? Why did I allow my actions toward and my perceptions about second-language learners and fluent English speakers to be governed by the belief that mastery of the English language is equated with academic success?

The importance of being clear about her purpose and ideology as a teacher comes out clearly in Lisa's ethnography as she examines the roots of her own ideological clarity. She reflects on her childhood and how certain experiences have shaped her teaching:

When I wake up in the morning, as I am driving to work, as I welcome the children in my room, as I hug them goodbye, as I lay my head to rest at night—I keep a clear head of who I am, what I want to accomplish, and how I will reach my goal. I truly believe that my socioeconomic and family situation has contributed to the way I am now. My mannerisms, thinking, and character are the products of my lifestyle, family,

and the environment that I was raised in. I am who I am as a result of what I have experienced in the past. I care for children in such a way that I would always look to provide them with things that I never had when growing up. For example, I was never read to as a child because my parents could not read English. Therefore, I now encourage parents to read to their children, in whatever language, and I read frequently with and to my students.

### **QUESTIONING BELIEF SYSTEMS AND UNCOVERING IDEOLOGICAL BAGGAGE**

In the ethnographies, teacher interns write and reflect on their own biases and assumptions, as they learn more about the lives of their students. Once they begin to know the students and the parents better through interviews and home visits, they often come to recognize that they had held assumptions about families based on a lack of knowledge about their students' cultures. Through the ethnographic process, the interns also begin to question their belief systems and to appreciate the beliefs and experiences of their students. As Lisa comes to better know the Suarez family, she is able to value their contributions. She writes:

The Suarez family is from a working-class background, striving to maintain a well-balanced lifestyle. Mr. And Mrs. Suarez both worked at one time. Marcos informed me that his mom used to work at a restaurant. However, as the children grew older, Mrs. Suarez decided to stay home to become more involved with their education. Mr. Suarez is balancing two jobs as a part-time restaurant cook and a full-time mechanic. He often does not return home until late at night with cuts and scars from his work. The family lives in tight quarters, sharing the house with extended-family members. Marcos does not have a designated study area for his schoolwork. Mrs. Suarez told me that they are planning to buy him a desk in the future, but for now they work together on the dining room table in the kitchen. Mrs. Suarez lamented that it can be difficult for Marcos to concentrate sometimes, like when she's cooking.

While initially Lisa advocated the primacy of English, after interviewing the Suarez family she comes to also respect the family's attitudes toward their linguistic heritage. She recounts:

Mr. Suarez grew up in a large family where Spanish was their native language. He is familiar with struggling in school because he had to learn English by himself. He recalls that "when I was in school, I didn't get what the teacher was saying." The primary language spoken in the Suarez home is Spanish. Mr. Suarez, however, has been trying to teach his children English. He regrets that Marcos [Lisa's student] "doesn't want to learn" and "doesn't want to say the words." Nonetheless, when Marcos observes his father teaching his sister, he comes closer to listen, wanting to participate.

After visiting the home of her Sudanese student (Ibrahim), Barbara acknowledges her erroneous assumptions about his culture and comes to appreciate the assets that his parents provide him. She states:

One of the most precious memories that I will never forfeit from this visit was the apparent love and honor that Ibrahim's parents show for each other. While it is obvious that Amir is the head of the house, he respectfully consults his wife and values her opinion. This is a true partnership. . . . I learned how the whole family came to the United States and the sacrifices they had made to come. Ibrahim's parents' expectations for him are very high. There is no doubt that they expect him to attain a degree of at least a bachelor's level. Both parents are highly educated. This was a surprise because I didn't think many Arabic women had a chance for education, let alone at the university level.

Barbara crosses cultural borders, as she reflects on experiences that made her acutely aware of her own low socioeconomic status. She writes about painful experiences at the start of public school, when she became aware of her own subordinate status in relation to the dominant middle-class mold:

I did not realize I was poor until I started public school and was taunted by other children. I found myself made fun of by my peers. I was told that I was just "white trash." I will never forget the tears streaming down my face as I got off the bus the first day of school in front of the trailer park where I lived. I was an outcast.

In her ethnography, Lisa writes about how important it is to teach immigrant students the value of academic excellence. Although she recognizes this as a typical middle-class value, she has come to understand the importance of exposing her students to this kind of thinking in order for them to succeed in American schools. At the same time, she recognizes that the students in her classroom hold values that are different from those of the mainstream. Nonetheless, she recognizes that in order for her students to be successful, they must also master the hidden "codes of power" (Delpit, 1995) of the dominant culture. Lisa acknowledges that "the student's value system in academic excellence is also a key to his or her success. I believe that it is both the student's and the teacher's responsibility to meet each other's value systems at a compromising median to ensure learning and success for both parties."

Olga is clear about her own ideological baggage and reflects on her formative life experiences as she articulates why she selected the five children in her ethnography:

I chose these students because in some form their struggles were my struggles as a young girl. Here are their lives through my eyes. What you read I saw only after I looked very closely, and after they and their parents unlocked their world to me. The more I learned about their thoughts, aspirations, experiences, struggles, and triumphs,

the more I saw myself in them. I found so many parallels between their experiences and some of my childhood experiences. It was at that experience level that I connected with these five children. I felt their pain and happiness as if it were my own.

Yadira reflects on her own ideological baggage when she talks about painful schooling experiences and articulates how these have impacted her teaching approach:

I want to make my students' schooling experience a positive one. My own public school experience was not entirely a positive one. I can clearly remember the painful and traumatic experience of learning English. I was scared, I did not understand, and I remember seeing my teacher break down in what I can only describe now as complete frustration. In retrospect, I can understand that my teachers were probably not prepared for the challenge of working in a diverse community.

Olga broadens her notions of academic success as she uncovers her students' assets. She describes her ethnographic inquiry as twofold: "First, I want to find out if I have taken or will take the necessary measures to know as much as possible about my five students' home environments, and second, if I have used or will use this information to meet my students' needs as the year progresses. She then asks herself, "Do I as a teacher use my growing awareness of my students' home culture to make their classroom experience more meaningful and significant? And if so, how does this awareness manifest itself in my classroom?"

## **AN ASSET-BASED EDUCATION**

As Olga begins to acquire a greater appreciation of the "social capital" (Bourdieu, 1977) which her students possess, her view of academic success becomes driven by the unique needs and contributions of her students rather than the more prescribed and typical indicators, which tend to be school-driven. She reflects how initially

I let myself believe that language acquisition was an indicator of academic success because that was the number one factor that was constantly used to prove that my students were "low/slow." I was so eager and desperate to remove this language stigma from them that I focused solely on getting them to learn to read and write in English, so that future teachers and administrators could not use their level of English mastery to rationalize school failure. . . . My triumph this year was not teaching the majority of my students to read, write, and speak English adequately, but in teaching my students that they have a voice.

After a parent conference, Lisa realizes that she could have been more effective had she focused on the funds of knowledge provided by the Valencia fam-

ily. She also regrets not having engaged in a reciprocal relationship, or social network, with that family:

I was a bit nervous about meeting and talking to the Valencias in person. The language barrier between us was still unclear because I was unsure to what extent they understood English. I also recognized the fact that I tended to talk fast when I got excited, which I was doing because Saul was doing so well! Therefore, at our conference, I talked slowly and limited my choice of words, in fear that they would not comprehend what I was saying. Then I paused and realized that I was assuming they would not comprehend what I was saying. I had not given them the benefit of the doubt. For one thing, Saul had improved significantly in his English skills, so I later considered that he must have been receiving some feedback at home. Mr. And Mrs. Valencia did not say much during that conference, which made me really reflect on how I should have approached the conversation.

### THE IMPACT OF ONE TEACHER

In the interns' ethnographies, the theme that one teacher can make a positive impact on students' lives comes out strongly. Barbara tells about a special teacher who provided a healing force in her life:

After my father died, my third-grade teacher, Mrs. Johnson, decided that my mother needed time to get things in order. Therefore, she offered to take me with her for the weekend. . . . Mrs. Johnson had a beautiful home that was in stark contrast to what I was accustomed to. I will always be thankful for her caring and generosity.

Yadira also writes about the positive impact that particular teachers had on her life as she struggled during the acculturation process:

I believe that, communication and respect are essential for a positive learning experience, which in turn leads to academic excellence. My desire to learn was later fulfilled by understanding and caring educators. They were dedicated teachers and I felt they truly believed in me. My teaching reflects my commitment to academic excellence and social justice. I hold high expectations for all my students, and they know I will not accept anything that is not their very best.

Finally, Olga reflects on the tremendous responsibility and power that she, as a reflective practitioner, shoulders in the lives of her students:

I know that unless we observe and question every aspect of our students' lives we miss out on the issues/concerns that truly impact them. If I wasn't aware of their critical issues/concerns, then most likely I did not give the 27 students sincere love and respect, but after teaching for two years I've come to realize that most students need specific guidance that is relevant to their particular situation.

## DISCUSSION

In this paper, we have argued that only teachers that reflect critically on their practices—that are aware of the political and cultural nature of their work—can effectively meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students. For teachers to be successful in the fullest sense of the word, they must negotiate their ideology in a manner that is fluid and based on a reciprocal learning process that takes into account both their own and their students' living histories. We have found that reflective practices can be acquired and that positive attitudes toward challenging students can be fostered through the use of ethnographic research. As intern teachers write personal yearlong ethnographies of their classrooms, they explore many aspects of their practice and are constantly stimulated to reflect on their effectiveness with students who are different from themselves.

We recognize that there are some obvious limitations to this study, primarily due its small sample size and gender exclusivity. In the future, we hope to expand this study to reflect the voices of more teachers, male as well as female, and to provide contrasting examples from those that are not as effective in working with diverse students. However, despite these limitations, we feel that some important conclusions can be drawn by policymakers and teacher-training institutions. The personal narratives of the four exemplary teachers that were used throughout this paper can help educators come to a greater understanding of the power and complexity that is required to truly bridge the distances between culturally diverse families and schools (Valdés, 1996).

Furthermore, we have found that an ethnographic perspective enables teachers to observe their own classrooms in a more effective manner. It can also change the consciousness and thinking of teachers to expand their cultural perspective and encourage teachers to reflect more critically on their own practice. The four teachers whose stories were shared in this paper are reflective about their ideology and how this ideology plays out in their interaction with culturally and linguistically diverse students. Their ethnographies illustrate how their experiences resonate with themes identified by other researchers in the field of educational equity and culturally diverse students. Ideological clarity, ideology based on middle-class values, ideological baggage, asset-based education, and "it only takes one person" not only are the themes highlighted in this paper but also represent the reflective practices found to be significant in those intern teachers who we have found to be most successful in working with diverse student populations.

First, teachers need to be very clear about how their ideology affects the lives of their students and constantly question whether or not their underlying assumptions are helpful or harmful to the reality of their students' lives. Along these lines, teachers must also be open to multiple ways of knowing the world

and be on guard to ensure that their own cultural beliefs and values do not become supreme to those of children who may have ideologies that differ from dominant middle-class values.

Additionally, in order to ensure that quality people are drawn to and remain in the educational profession with the noblest intentions, teachers need to analyze their own ideological baggage. This requires a careful examination of the classroom experiences that affect their practices, and they must find ways to provide the most inclusive and nurturing environments where culturally diverse students will feel welcomed. In order to provide the most positive and socially meaningful classroom environments, teachers must use children's cultural and linguistic assets as the foundation for their practice. Only by listening, knowing, reflecting, and dialoguing—in other words, by learning with and from their students and families—can teachers be most effective.

Furthermore, reflective teachers know the tremendous impact that they as one person, have on the lives of their students. They are particularly sensitive to the needs of those students who may be immigrants and who are struggling with a painful acculturation process. Again, they do not accept deficit views of these students or try to deny and strip them of their cultural and linguistic richness. Instead, they provide them with the most humanizing classroom environments wherein they embrace their students lived experiences and social capital and help children to acquire healthy bicultural identities.

Teachers who truly value their immigrant students, can create classroom environments that help children feel welcomed by honoring their language and culture, and by using these assets effectively. Lastly, it is the responsibility of teacher education programs to provide opportunities for practitioners to engage in a reflective process that critically explores, names, and questions their ideologies.

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