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Voices from the Margins: 'Black' Caribbean and Mexican Heritage Women Educators in the Rural South

Lorraine Gilpin and Scott Beck

This paper explores the ways in which immigrant and migrant women educators in the rural South understand and construct narratives of their lives. The 'Black' Caribbean and Mexican heritage women educators in this study experience and interpret events in their lives, as women, minorities, postcolonial 'subjects,' and outsiders in the rural South, a region traditionally dominated by white patriarchal norms and prejudices. We assert that from this position of multiple marginality they construct important insights into the nature of education in the rural South. As so-called "Third-World women" living in the "First World" of the United States, the interpretations that this group of immigrant and migrant women make of their lives illuminate the 'real,' yet fluid (Moya & Hames-Garcia, 2000), nature of identity and representation in this nation and in the "New" South. The experiences of these women clearly reveal that identity categories provide useful theoretical and practical understandings of often problematic constructs such as race, gender, social class and ethnicity and highlight the fact that experiences and interpretations vary within and across these identity categories. Thus, how these women respond to the South demonstrates the impact of significant continuities and discontinuities as these educators negotiate their identities in unfamiliar spaces.

Introduction

Seller & Weis (1997) noted that the rapid growth in our nation's immigrant populations is forcing a reexamination of issues that have long been understood within a dominant black/white paradigm. This is especially true in the rural areas of the Southeastern United States where immigrant populations have grown remarkably during the past few decades (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). Immigrants and migrants, many of whom consider themselves to be outside the South's historically black/white norms, present many unprecedented challenges to the rural South's bipolar social systems (Loewen, 1988). For example, the

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few immigrant and ethnic minority teachers in the schools of this region are often the only staff members from their background in their entire school or school district. For this reason, they are multiply isolated – by race, ethnicity, culture, language, life experience, and religion – identities that hold them outside the norms of the majority of educators who have local roots. We assert that from their positions of multiple marginality (Mohanty, 2000, Moya, 2000, hooks, 1994) they are able to construct important insights into the nature of education in the rural South. This paper explores the ways in which immigrant and migrant women educators in the rural South understand and construct narratives of their lives and how their life scripts impact their worldviews. The paper challenges teacher educators to build upon and support the *potential* of these educators as agents for positive change.

Background

This paper brings together two separate, but parallel and simultaneous studies. Both studies examined the lives of immigrant and migrant transnational (Guerra, 1998) educators in the schools of rural southeast Georgia. During the 1980s, Georgia's booming "sun belt" economy and growing military installations began to draw in immigrants, migrants, and their families. Since 1990, Georgia's immigrant and migrant populations have been among the fastest growing in the nation (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). This is significant because Georgia, especially rural south Georgia, has historically not been home to significant immigrant and migrant populations. While our participants represent two growing groups in the changing South, we found no studies that connected their experiences in the manner presented here. Thus, this comparative analysis allows readers to glean new insights into the changing South from a unique vantage point.

The first study (Gilpin, 2002) is a critical narrative of 'Black' Caribbean immigrant women educators born of the author's experiences as a member of this group. Three 'Black' Caribbean immigrant women teachers participated in the study. All the participants, like the author, were born in the Caribbean, and found their way to rural southeast Georgia a decade or more ago by way of the military. Two participants came to the US as adults and one as a high school student. At the time of the study, each was the only Caribbean-heritage educator in their school. All the Caribbean participants are certified elementary school teachers who had five to ten years of experience in the local public schools.

The second study (Beck, 2003), examining the lives of pioneer Mexican heritage educators, evolved from the second author's decade-plus of work as a bilingual Gringo educator among Mexican heritage migrant farm workers. Ten Mexican heritage women educators (eight paraprofessionals and two certified professionals) participated in the second study. Half of the participants were born in Mexico, and half in the United States. All arrived in southeast Georgia as children of migrant farm working families and enrolled in local schools as some of the first Latinos to ever in these schools. Years later,

all of the participants returned to the local schools as educators and as the only Latino staff members.

Taken together, the studies collected and examined the life stories of thirteen participants (aged 20 to 43) using methods of narrative analysis. Narrative analysis describes "the meaning of experience for individuals, frequently those who are socially marginalized or oppressed as they construct stories (narratives) about their lives" (Marshall & Rossman 1999, p. 5). Clandinin and Connelly (2000), He (1998), and Phillion (1999) have helped to center the role of stories of teachers' personal knowledge as derived from their cultures and experiences as curriculum discourse. Preskill (1998), Goodson (1998) and others have looked at the transformative potential of these stories.

Theoretical Framework

As so-called "Third-World women" living in the "First World" of the United States, the interpretations that this group of immigrant and migrant women make of their lives have much to tell us about shifting identities and changing experiences of race, class, gender, and culture in this nation and in the "New" South. The experiences of these women clearly reveal that such categories are fluid constructs that do not reflect a unitary space or experience (Nagar, 1997, in Jones, Nast & Roberts, Eds.). Thus, how these women respond to the South demonstrates the impact of significant continuities and discontinuities (Osler, 1997) as these educators negotiate their identities in unfamiliar spaces.

This paper is framed within theoretical positions articulated by Moya (2000) and Mohanty (2000) in the fields of post-colonial literary criticism and philosophy, while also drawing from other critical, feminist, post-colonial theorists (Apple, 1990; McCarthy, 1998; Alexander & Mohanty, 1997; Memmi 1965). From this perspective, identity categories provide a way of organizing and articulating experiences of people within specific social locations (Moya, 2000; Mohanty, 2000). This conception of identity is not premised on the clearly fallacious notion that all individuals within a group always have the same set of experiences, but rather that members of identity groups often have parallel experiences and thus experience life differently than non members (Harding, 1991; Zinn, 1995; Heyes, 2000; Moya & Hames-Garcia, 2000). Based on their particular similar experiences, identity groups use recursive social cognition to construct valid theoretical understandings of the world. Using these identity-based understandings, groups and individuals are able to articulate their own experiences and act on their own behalf with greater agency (Henze, 2000). Multiple oppressions have historically silenced and marginalized the multiple groups to which our participants belong. By gathering and exploring the narratives of these educators, this study seeks to situate their experiences and actions in the larger sociopolitical realm and thereby encourage the praxis of critical reflection and action (Freire, 1998; hooks, 1994).

Methodology

Employing recursive processes expected in narrative analyses, data was collected primarily through repeated semi-structured interviews. All participants were interviewed (formally and informally) multiple times yielding approximately 75 hours of recorded data. The interviews explored education, race, social class, gender, ethnicity, and the participants' contrasting life experiences in their home context, the US, and the rural South in particular (See appendix for sample questions and prompts). The data was transcribed and the transcriptions were double checked by the researchers and participants for accuracy.

The transcribed data was manually coded using highlighter and post-it color codes to identify emergent and related themes and conflicting ideas (Clandinin & Connelly 2000) for ease of field text composition. Later, the information was electronically sorted into narrative schemas – files for clusters of themes that emerged from the data. From these schemes, we formulated the “interim texts” with tentative reflections and preliminary analyses (Clandinin & Connelly 2000).

Themes (both convergent and divergent) that emerged from the data were connected in the interim texts and were further clarified through specific questions to participants regarding the transcripts or during follow-up interviews. Thus, the emergent themes served as springboards for recursivity in data collection, which resulted in well-defined research texts (Clandinin & Connelly 2000; Hollingsworth, Dybdahl & Minarik 1993). The integrity of the participants' stories was maintained and the impact of the broader social, political, and economic contexts in which stories of these teachers are set were made explicit. True to our feminist vein, these studies used the stories as a starting point for theorizing and encouraging praxis by participants, researchers, and readers (Freire, 1998; hooks, 1994; Harding, 1991).

Our comparative meta-analysis of the narrative threads of these women's stories reveal significant commonalities in the themes developed in the two studies, including: the participants' childhood struggles and the motivation they derive from those struggles; their sense of initial isolation upon arrival in the South; the reasons for their choice to be educators; and how their status within the school and community impacts their ability to advocate for change. In other areas though, the two participant groups displayed very different perspectives, particularly regarding their contrasting experiences vis-à-vis continued racism in the South. Finally and frighteningly, both groups have adopted and applied problematic, but popular, “blame the victim” scripts to the interpretation of the experiences of their identity groups in the rural South.

These themes will be developed below using quotes from the participants. All participants are referred to by pseudonyms and designated by a (C) for Caribbean or (M) for Mexican heritage.

Childhood Struggles and Motivation

The thirteen participants were all from impoverished backgrounds. They all helped their families survive through hard labor and hard luck and took pride that what little they had came honestly.

Growing up, we didn't have a toilet and my friends from the city they had bathrooms and everything... When they came, the same tub we use to excrete they had to use it too, so we weren't ashamed. I was never ashamed of who I was... - Mercedes (C)

Upon migration to the rural South the participants and their families worked at minimum and sub-minimum wage jobs such as poultry processing, housecleaning, child care, fast food, and migrant farmwork. However, they were all determined that these jobs would be stepping stones toward a better life.

I said that when I grew up, I wasn't going to be caught up in that [migrant farm work]. I always said if I ever get married and if I ever have my kids – I don't want to have them like that. - Berta (M)

The necessity to work was always framed within their family's communitarian needs.

I got to work with my family and we actually had the opportunity to make a living, you know. An honest living and not doing drugs or not doing anything illegal. I always had like a *una meta* ... we had like a goal, you know. And we always worked in a group and I think that's the best thing and everything because all these families always worked to better themselves as a family and everything goes for the family. - Ester (M)

They were encouraged by their family and friends in their determination to "better themselves" and "be someone" – by doing something 'different' with their lives than their parents had done.

People are encouraged by life. People are encouraged by friends. My friends encouraged me so when you get the opportunity you make yourself. I remember one of my friends from Dominica telling me "make yourself the opportunity." – Mercedes (C)

Both the Caribbean and Mexican heritage participants emphasized their humble beginnings and how the poverty and hard work of their youth shaped their adult choices. They did not fall into a discourse of disempowerment, rather they asserted how their community had cultivated their individual and familial agency. Their sense of agency worked in concert with the 'Horatio Alger' myth of America as a land of opportunity. Meanwhile, their status as recent immigrants insulated them from multi-generational patterns of failure caused by structural racism (Hyun & Marshall, 1997).

Initial Isolation in the South

When they came here, almost all the participants brought fears and stereotypes about the rural South derived from media and cultural representations and history.

In Georgia, [I thought] there's a lot of discrimination here – ya'll don't like blacks, ya'll hit them, ya'll kill them, ya'll hang poles up there and ya'll walk in the streets with fire and stuff like that. - Manuela (M)

Many of the participants found substantiation for these fears during their first days in the South, especially in the racial tension and isolation they encountered in the schools:

My first day I was scared, I've never been around a lot of white people. I've never been around a lot of black people either. I was like, do you know, scared. - Guadalupe (M)

When I came here I was scared, very scared. I came here in 12th grade and they just had the riot thing at the high school here. I remember my grandma was telling us about it and stuff. So you know that was the high school I had to go to, you know, couple of months after it. So you know that I was afraid. - Dianna (C)

When I came to this country, it was culture shock with the outside ... I couldn't deal with it because it [segregation] was totally foreign to me ... We never had the Sixties. We never had that Sixties [Civil Rights] experience. – Jane (C)

Unsurprisingly, given the participants' fears and unfamiliarity with the social dynamics of the region, most experienced a profound sense of isolation as one of the few or often the only outsider of their background in the school.

The school that I used to go was very scary. A lot of people would make fun of me. ... It was mainly whites and black people that would make fun of me. The teachers wouldn't care. They would listen, but they wouldn't say nothing to them [the students]. I was always by myself, never had friends in school. – Katia (M)

I remember the kids they would pick on me because I didn't know English and I couldn't tell the teacher when they would push me around. I hardly didn't have any friends – I couldn't talk to anybody. - Ester (M)

In particular, both groups of participants spoke of being caught between the historically-established bipolar Southern groups: whites and black.

One of the girls said, "Well, Nanci may make one [a good Homecoming Queen]." And the teacher said, "She's not 'Black.'" And then a boy said, "Well she's not black and she's not white, what is she?" – Nanci (M)

I mean I just do my thing. I get along with the teachers, but I am not close to any of them, white, black, or any... I am not white, I am not African American. - Jane (C)

They [the whites and blacks] had some fights I remember in 1991. They wouldn't even speak to each other. I was like caught in the middle because I'm not black, I'm not white, who am I supposed to talk to? – Ester (M)

I didn't understand the whole issue of racism. I really didn't ... I spoke to everybody but I would spend more time with maybe the white girls because I found that it was really easier to be around them... I got a lot of heat for it [from the blacks]. "Oh why are you hanging around those white girls? Why aren't you coming over to talk to us?" – Dianna (C)

Each participant upon arrival in Georgia experienced shock, disorientation, and a realization that they did not fit into any existing racial or ethnic category in the local, and long-standing black-white dichotomy. Prior to arrival, participants thought only in terms of the classifications that were pertinent in their home places: national, familial, religious, and livelihood. The American, and in particular the Southern, obsession with racial labels troubled the participants when they arrived – even though they did not yet fully understand the consequences of such labels in this society.

Being an Educator

These stories of isolation were part of our participants' motivation as educators and their solidarity with their students, especially their students from the similar backgrounds as their own (Callender, 1995; Henry, 1992).

I like to work with people, I like that you can really make a difference on somebody's life if you really get close to that person and try to understand them and see what they really need. Not just isolate them. – Ester (M)

Once I tried [teaching], I enjoyed it. I loved working with the kids. I loved seeing their little faces and I kept looking at them and the whole time that I would sit there and teach them, I would think back to when I was a child. I would think, well they gave me this opportunity; why not give it to them. I guess I wanted to just give back a little bit of what was given to me. – Ignacia (M)

Other participants repeated the importance attributed to education in their families and home culture.

Back in the Caribbean, teachers are respected a great deal. I am telling you even if I did something and I was right, my mother would believe the teachers over me. I think teachers have a closer relationship with parents back home... They take education more seriously. – Mercedes (C)

These various reasons for becoming educators were shared by both our Caribbean and Mexican heritage participants. In both cultures, the teacher continues to be valued as a leader and someone who can give back to the community. All of the participants spoke enthusiastically about the teachers of their youth who had inspired them with caring and commitment to both them as individuals and the larger community (Henry, 1992; Galindo & Escamilla, 1995; Callender, 1997; Montero-Sieburth & Batt, 2001).

The Rural South Today: Racism or Refuge?

Not all the themes that emerged from the participants' narratives were so comparable across the two groups. Initial isolation, described above as shared upon their arrival by both 'Black' and 'Brown' participants did not extend through their current experience. Instead, over time, the two groups diverged toward very different interpretations of the rural South, interpretations that correlate with their skin color. Although the 'Black' Caribbean women acknowledge a superficial difference in the treatment they receive as immigrant 'Blacks,' they uniformly express continued discomfort at racialized social segregation in today's South, particularly as evidenced in the classroom.

Americans are fixed in racism and prejudices. Sorry to say that....Yes, it is deep rooted and like I read in this book, it is sickness you know and you really can't cure the sickness...until the Lord comes because it is a sickness and they don't have a cure for it and a lot of them don't want to change. My school district is predominantly white. There are very few blacks and there is a 4th grade EIP class ... the class had 14 children, 11 blacks. Some of them [black children] were in my class. As far as I can see, they didn't have more problems than the ones I have now... In special education, you usually find those kids who don't have a mental or health related problems are mostly black and mostly males. Now when you look at the gifted program... in the whole school, there were only two children in that class that were black... - Jane (C)

In contrast, as time passed, the Mexican-heritage, brown-skinned Latinas found the South to be better than they expected. Today, they frequently speak of their home in the rural South as a refuge from the struggles of their youth, a land of opportunities where prejudice does not affect them anymore.

My parents decided to stay here because... they wanted us to finish school and they didn't want us to be changing from school to school... So they stayed here because there was always work. - Angelica (M)

We feel safe and secure ... I felt like we were fitting in - into town. It was a totally different point of view once I got to meet everybody or they got to meet us. - Manuela (M)

I think they get along - everybody with everybody now. More than what they used to. Back then it was like different colors didn't care for other colors or whatever. And now it's like it don't matter. - Dominga (M)

Only a few Mexican heritage participants, those with higher levels of education and professional stature spoke directly of contemporary racism, and even then without the heart-felt anger of the 'Black' Caribbean participants. Thus, although our Caribbean and Mexican heritage participants shared common experiences through the beginning of their years in the South, with time their interpretations have split regarding the relevance of racism. Significantly, it appears that the 'Black' Caribbeans still feel the sting of racialization, while the 'brown' Mexicans may have acquired a modicum of deracialized privilege.

Limited Status = Limited Advocacy

This divergence was reflected in how the two groups respond on the job to their implicit roles as advocates and representatives for students from their backgrounds. All the participants repeatedly spoke of their work “behind the scenes” to motivate their students. Given their status as outsiders though, their advocacy for their students was often limited to such discrete efforts. In particular, the Latina participants were often reluctant to mount overt challenges to the status quo. Even when they did acknowledge problems, they were generally very discrete and tentative in their efforts to cause change.

They [fourth grade teachers] are the ones that they have the most problems with Hispanics... They have a bad attitude. I don't want to get involved or in any kind of trouble with them. – Dominga (M)

I didn't try to do it because first of all I was only a teacher..... You cannot, you have to earn, especially if you don't have any status. I don't think I had status – I was just a teacher, a regular teacher who went to school and everything. So I don't have like a family name that's going to back me up. – Ester (M)

In contrast, the 'Black' Caribbean participants were likely to be quite vocal.

Most of us from the Caribbean do not take it [discrimination]. It is like, “I am not going to take it, and I am going to let you know that you are doing it. You may not be aware that you are doing it, but you are doing it. I don't appreciate it. Don't do it do me.” I think that we are outspoken in that way because of the way were brought up– Jane (C)

We started a reading [tutorial] program at our school this year... the question was asked at the faculty meeting who was going to do the reading, who the helpers or tutors were going to be. The response was the custodians and the school and whomever. So at the grade level meeting she [the “white lady”] asked, “Do you think the [black] custodians are equipped to read to these kids in our room?” So I asked, “What do you mean are they equipped or do you think they cannot read at least a paragraph to the kids?” She said, “Well I just don't know.” – Dianna (C)

This Caribbean / Mexican difference regarding overt critique of the status quo, as with the contrast regarding perceptions and interpretations of contemporary racism, raises a number of important questions: How much of this divergence is cultural? How much of this is because of differences in how they have been racialized by rural Southern society since they arrived? How much is attributable to the generally higher SES of the Caribbean women as certified teachers? These questions merit further inquiry as we continue to study the evolution of these immigrant communities.

Blame the Victim

Regrettably, one theme repeatedly shared by the narratives of both Caribbean and Mexican heritage participants were deficit framed or “culturally deprived” (Sleeter & Grant 1999, p. 40) descriptions of their students and the students' families.

Because I figure that America has so many opportunities. There are so many opportunities if people would just get out and go to school; be disciplined to do what they have to do to get that education, but a lot of them don't... I come with ambition to go to school, get an education to further myself and this person who is just sitting there and has no problems getting into the country and everything is right there and just decides she is not doing anything, not going to school.... I think that is what it is, lack of ambition... – Dianna (C)

I know some [Hispanics] don't drop out themselves, the parents make them drop out. Either because they are not doing well in school or because – mostly the guys, they don't take time to study – they don't really care, they just go there to have fun. Because I've noticed that. Maybe because their parents need their help, you know, with...with working – more income. – Angelica (M)

Ironically, these descriptions echo contemporary nativist attacks on immigrants and thus present the worrisome possibility that our participants have internalized the attitudes of their mainstream colleagues and are losing their connection with their youthful struggles.

This pattern was clearly the most disturbing theme to emerge from this meta-analysis of the two studies. As mentioned earlier, our participants were able to succeed as educators for a variety of reasons: individual agency cultivated by family and community, belief in America as a land of opportunity, and the lack of experience with multigenerational, systemic racism. However, in their narratives, the participants generally ignored this third, systemic element and focused on themselves, their families, and their dreams of America – creating a script that valorized their own successes and blamed others who did not or could not follow their path.

Conclusions

Our participants face many challenges in constructing the narratives of their lives and thereby building their identities. Their experiences set them apart from the majority of the local community at large, the local non-white community, and even the local immigrant community. By heritage they are not rural Southern whites or blacks. However, by socio-economic and educational status, neither are they part of the economically struggling immigrant community. In this position they have attained a level of agency (Henze, 2000) and success that impacts their world view, construction of self identity, and their interpretations of others' lives in contradictory and sometimes discomforting ways. This reflects the complex fluidity of identity, especially in new and forming communities such as our participants' (Moya & Hames-Garcia, 2000). In response to their combination of difficult backgrounds and subsequent successes, the women in this study find themselves caught in a double bind regarding schooling:

- Their experiences of struggle and marginal positions as racialized outsiders have cultivated skepticism and criticism in their perspectives regarding the treatment of racialized groups. These critical

perspectives were clearest among the 'Black' Caribbean and certified Mexican heritage participants and acted upon by the Caribbeans.

- However, the participants are also well aware of how schooling has allowed them to achieve more than they would have otherwise. Additionally, their current investment as members of the institution of schooling often inspires a positive outlook upon local schools, especially among the lower status Mexican heritage participants.

Thus, in these aspiring-middle-class immigrant and migrant women's choices regarding advocacy, we see the complicated shadows of the "colonized psyche." (Memmi 1965) Although the teachers have identified numerous instances of racism, classism, and other injustices toward their students and themselves, many of them also seemingly accept the myth of an equitable American system by invoking "deficit model" (Sleeter & Grant 1999) scripts that blame today's children and their families for failings at school. This position likely separates our participants from other immigrants whose class status is not as high. Thus, disturbingly, even among women whose childhood experiences of struggle were central to their life stories, we see that powerful, conservative, institutional scripts can undermine their potential as advocates for change. In the end, their roles in their schools can, at least in part, be understood as cogs in the machinery of social reproduction, creating a slightly more diverse status quo that welcomes a few high achieving immigrants while dismissing many others as shiftless and lacking in ambition.

The presence of our participants in the local schools reflects intermittent, sometimes genuine, sometimes token, efforts by administrators to diversify their faculty. When these Caribbean or Mexican heritage educators bring deficit scripts, attitudes, and behaviors to the classroom the consequences can be terrible for all concerned:

- Like mainstream educators, 'Black' Caribbean and Mexican heritage educators play out deficit scripts in their behavioral and performance expectations of students, which often result in self-fulfilling prophecies, such as school failure.
- For Caribbean and Mexican heritage and other underrepresented students who seek a mentor and confidant in a similar-background teacher, how devastating to find one's hopes for empathy and solidarity dashed?
- For prejudiced mainstream students and faculty, how reassuring to hear one's racist and ethnocentric attitudes validated by a non-mainstream authority figure?

In these ways, our participants serve to concretize a status quo of valued mainstream and value-less outsiders, while appearing to change it by their mere presence.

Let us be clear though, this should not be used as a justification for a retreat from the training and hiring of educators from underrepresented groups. Rather this is a call to action for better and more critical training of educators, both mainstream and especially those from underrepresented groups. Immigrant and migrant educators, as both outsiders and insiders in the schools, remain in

key positions to help students in multiple ways, if they have the tools and status to do so. The presence of educators from underrepresented backgrounds in the schools and the sharing of their stories can be a powerful motivation to students from various backgrounds. Educators from underrepresented backgrounds are often more explicit with students and parents about the racialized challenges they face and the need to be proactive in order to succeed in school. Finally, with time and increased awareness these educators could mount more overt challenges to racialized education in the schools of the rural South, but only if they are supported in maintaining a connection to the interpretations and narratives that emerged from their youthful struggles as migrants and/or immigrants.

Thus, our goals must be to simultaneously diversify school staff and faculty while working to change the status quo. These two goals can complement each other if educators like our participants develop both critical understandings of the systemic causes of school failure and professional agency to confront the system. This provides an agenda for our own work with pre-service and in-service educators.

As teacher-educators we model and hold our students accountable for this agenda in our teaching and theirs. We design our courses to include reading lists that incorporate critical histories of our nation and the role of schools in both reproducing and redefining our society. Additionally, we include fictional and non-fiction narratives from non-mainstream voices and use role play and modeling to bring these voices to life in the classroom. We create activities that require our students to connect these histories with their families' struggles and opportunities so they can understand that large political controversies and historical traumas affect individuals – and how individuals and organized groups, in turn, can change history. Further, we require our students to informally and formally interact with and interview 'others' whose life experiences are different from their own. Finally, we support our students' efforts to reflect upon all of these experiences and rebuild their understanding of how the struggles of the past have built our society, our families and ourselves. In this way, our students develop the understandings and the wherewithal to maintain a connection to the interpretations and narratives that emerged from their youthful and familial struggles, rather than falling back to deficit-framed scripts. It is our belief that a similar set of approaches could do the same for Mexican heritage migrants and Caribbean immigrants who have become educators.

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Appendix: Sample Interview Questions and Prompts

- Tell me about your life.
- How have your experiences living in your home place shaped your teaching?
- Do your experiences as a immigrant differ from the experiences people born in the United States? Explain.
- Before you came here, what did you hear about the United States? ... about the American South and Georgia?
- Imagine a young girl, maybe your cousin, was coming today from home place to live in Georgia. What things would you tell her, what advice would you have for her?
- How did local Georgia people make you feel when you arrived?
- Compare and contrast the educational systems in the U.S. and in your home place.
- Compare and contrast the classrooms in which you now work and the ones in your home place.
- How and why did you become an educator?
- How have your experiences as a 'Black' or Mexican woman in the United States shape your priorities as an educator?
- Describe your teaching style.
- What are the characteristics of a good student? Which students most often display these characteristics?
- Describe your relationship with your students.
- Do you find it easier to relate to any particular group of students (girls, boys, Black, White, etc.)? To what do you attribute this?
- What do you see as some of the ways you help students?
- Describe your relationship with parents.
- How do you relate to your colleagues and administrators?
- How do the other teachers and staff at your school relate to students from different backgrounds?
- Are students from low social class treated differently from upper class students? Explain.
- Are Black or White or Hispanic students more often labeled as 'behavior problem' students?
- Do you ever find yourself caught between parents or students and the school? How do you deal with that?
- As a teacher, what are your responsibilities to your students and to society? How do you see your role in the school?
- How have the schools changed since you first came here? How are they better? How are they worse?
- What is the biggest problem in U.S. education today? How can we begin to fix this problem?
- Discuss any special interest, concern, etc. that you have about education.