

**This is a self-archived version of an original article. This version may differ from the original in pagination and typographic details.**

**Author(s):** Ennsner-Kananen, Johanna; Quiñones-Oramas, Leisa M.

**Title:** 'Sí, yo soy de Puerto Rico' : A Teacher's Story of Teaching Spanish through and beyond her Latina Identity

**Year:** 2022

**Version:** Accepted version (Final draft)

**Copyright:** © 2022 Beth Wassell, Cassandra Glynn and the authors of individual chapters

**Rights:** In Copyright

**Rights url:** <http://rightsstatements.org/page/InC/1.0/?language=en>

**Please cite the original version:**

Ennsner-Kananen, J., & Quiñones-Oramas, L. M. (2022). 'Sí, yo soy de Puerto Rico' : A Teacher's Story of Teaching Spanish through and beyond her Latina Identity. In B. Wassell, & C. Glynn (Eds.), *Transforming World Language Teaching and Teacher Education for Equity and Justice : Pushing Boundaries in US Contexts* (pp. 103-119). Multilingual Matters.  
<https://doi.org/10.21832/9781788926522-009>

## **Title**

“Sí, yo soy de Puerto Rico”: A teacher’s story of teaching Spanish through and beyond her Latina identity

## **Introduction**

“I felt without a place here” - the sentiment Author2, a Latina Spanish teacher in the US, shared in the story we present in this chapter is likely one that resonates with many teachers of color (TOC). Educational contexts are not socioculturally innocent and oftentimes places where cultural, linguistic, and racial belonging becomes contested (Yosso, 2005).

This chapter tells and theorizes a story of a Latina Spanish teacher who worked at a public high school in an urban context of the Northeastern US. Approached through the lenses of Critical Race Theory (e.g., Solorzano, 2019) and Latino/a Critical Theory (LatCrit) (e.g., Yosso, 2006), we offer this narrative as an illustration of the complex identity work teachers of color do in their classrooms. We present the story as coherently as possible, interrupting it in only a few places in order to offer theorizations and interpretations with the aim of pointing to the larger societal phenomena it illuminates. This process allows us authors, one of whom is the storyteller, as well as our readers to oscillate between a deep understanding of a teacher’s experience and a reflective meta-level, both of which we see as enabling or enhancing critical practice in teaching and teacher education.

## **Theoretical Framework: CRT and LatCrit**

Critical race theory (CRT) originated in the context of legal studies but has since become an interdisciplinary line of work that is situated within and between sociology, women’s studies, ethnic studies, and education, among others (Matsuda, 1991). Solorzano (1997) proposed five themes that are fundamental to CRT: the centrality of race and racism and its “intersection with other forms of subordination such as gender and class discrimination” (p. 6), the rejection of neutral, colorblind, and meritocratic discourses, the “commitment to social justice” (p. 7), the importance and legitimacy of people of color (POC)’s “experiential knowledge” (p. 7) as captured for instance in stories and other narrative accounts, and the interdisciplinarity of CRT scholarship. He later applied these five themes to teacher education contexts (Solorzano, 2019), reaffirming the centrality and intersectionality of race, the rejection of neutrality- and meritocracy-based practices and policies, the focus on the “lived experiences of Students of Color” (p. 108), and adding an emphasis on transformative practice (theory-practice links) and historical contextualization of educational work. Thanks to Solorzano and many other CRT scholars, critical race studies have gained and continue to gain traction within the field of education (Lynn & Parker, 2006).

Latino/a Critical Theory, or LatCrit, is closely related to CRT as it also centerstages race in scholarly and activist work, paying special attention to how it intersects with language and accent, nationality, immigration status, surname, and sexuality, to name a few (Espinoza

& Harris, 1997; Yosso, 2006). Both CRT and LatCrit aim to deconstruct hegemonic ideologies and discourses or, as Yosso (2006) has termed them, “majoritarian tales”, externally imposed as well as internalized ones. As Valdes (2005) explains, LatCrit “is a scholarly movement responding to the long historical presence and enduring invisibility of Latinas/os in the lands now known as the United States” (p. 148), adding that the movement has expanded beyond the US and intertwines scholarly with activist efforts.

In this chapter, we address some of the above-mentioned themes by focusing on race-relevant data while pointing to intersections with other social factors. We resist the notion that wellbeing and success at school (both for teachers and students) is a result of a neutral and merit-based process, use a Latina teacher’s journal entries as our key data point, bring together scholarship from education, applied linguistics, and culture studies, and bridge the theory-practice divide in our collaborative analysis and writing and in our addressing of both academic and practitioner audiences.

Following Yosso (2005), we view schools and education through a CRT framework that “works toward the liberatory potential of schooling” and “acknowledges the contradictory nature of education, wherein schools most often oppress and marginalize while they maintain the potential to emancipate and empower” (p. 74).

## **Counterstorytelling**

In line with the theoretical foundations we chose, we contend that storytelling, particularly the telling of counter-stories that are less heard or do not align with dominant discourses, is an important tool in the push for increased social justice in language education and all other educational contexts. Solorzano and Yosso (2002) explain,

[w]e define the counter-story as a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told (i.e., those on the margins of society). The counter-story is also a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege. Counter-stories can shatter complacency, challenge the dominant discourse on race, and further the struggle for racial reform (p. 32).

Solorzano and Yosso (2002) further point to the long-standing tradition of storytelling in African American and Indigenous communities and differentiate between three forms of stories: personal stories (autobiographical), other people’s stories, and composite stories, which draw on a variety of sources, including autobiographical and biographical information. They explain how they bring together storied data, literature, as well as their personal and professional experience to write counter-stories and name community building, challenging dominant discourses and beliefs, showing new possibilities, and promoting a new reality by bringing together the story with the status quo as the main functions of counter-stories.

In recognition of these possibilities of counterstorytelling, our chapter aims to challenge dominant discourses and beliefs of school as a colorblind or racially neutral space and hopes to promote new realities by highlighting and analyzing the experience of one

Latina Spanish teacher as a basis and call for more racially aware and socially just instruction. In doing so, we are reminded by Chang and Fuller (2000) that, while storytelling can set free anti-hegemonic powers, it is not in itself a tool of liberation but rather “a neutral technique that can perhaps be used more easily to maintain the status quo than to attack it” (p. 1279). If used as a transformative practice, they continue, “the goal of storytelling must go beyond descriptive ‘accuracy’: the “is” must be connected to an explicit or implicit ‘ought’.” (p. 1280) This “ought” will be made explicit in the implications of our findings that we address to teachers, teacher educators, and administrators.

### **TOC narratives as triggers of change and spaces of resistance**

With its goal of pushing for change through the centerstaging of a story, our chapter is situated within the diverse area of narrative approaches that continues to attract attention in educational research. Particularly in teacher education, the value and importance of teacher narratives for renewal of practice as well as theory have been recognized broadly (e.g., Barkhuizen, Benson, & Chik, 2013; Connelly & Clandinin, 1985; Johnson, 2001). In addition, teacher narratives, especially TOC narratives, are also an important space of resistance, as the following examples illustrate.

In Kambutu, Rios, and Castañeda’s (2009) study, the stories of six racially minoritized teachers “disrupt orthodox conceptions of teachers of color” and shed light on how “their experiences with oppression and resistance affect their teaching in rural settings” (p. 96). Based on the notion that CRT provides an appropriate framework for narratives as tools of decolonization, Kambutu et al. analyzed the oppressive experiences of TOC and how they resisted those. Based on the teachers’ narratives, the authors acknowledge the difficult work teachers of color do in rural settings of developing coping strategies and resisting racial and ethnic prejudice. They conclude that “[n]arratives challenge existing perspectives and provide an alternative worldview” and are thus ways to “not only learn about the chameleon nature of oppression but also illuminate the efforts by the marginalized to struggle toward a humanizing pedagogy” (Kambutu et al., 2009, p. 99). In the same vein, we recognize one Latina teacher’s stories as evidence of the complexity and difficulty of racial work that is tied to TOCs’ professional activities and identities.

Another example of the importance and potentially subversive nature of TOC narratives comes from Kohli’s (2009) study. She worked with the 12 Asian-American, black, and Latina female pre-service teachers who taught in predominantly non-white school districts in the US. Kohli analyzed their experiences of racial injustices from their K-12 education (e.g., racial slurs, teachers’ low expectations, curricular erasure), encouraged the teachers to put those stories in connection with their students’ “parallel experiences” (p. 235), and elicited comments on racial hierarchies within teacher education. From her findings, Kohli concluded that “we must continue to explore the racialized experiences of Teachers of Color” (p. 250) and tap them for a pedagogy that promotes social justice within schools and teacher education. In respect to the reflective space (interviews and focus groups) Kohli created for the teachers to share and reflect on their experiences, she comments that “the

study served not only as a means to collect data, but as a pedagogical space for participants ... With critical race reflections, these teachers can utilize their insight as a tool to understand student experiences and to challenge racism in schools” (p. 249).

Building spaces of reflection and resistance through TOC narratives was also a central goal of a study conducted by Fránquiz, Salazar and DeNicolò. (2011). They worked with three bilingual teachers of color from three different teacher education programs, who shared experiences from their learning and teaching trajectories. Their stories represent important counter-narratives to harmful dominant discourses. For instance, they dismantled narratives of Latina/o families not caring about or being distant to education or depriving their children of literacy-rich environments. Based on the teachers’ lived experiences, the authors recommend using CRT and LatCrit frameworks in teacher education contexts to continue the work of eliciting and sharing counterstories against dominant discourses as well as pushing back against the hegemonic discourses ingrained in teacher education contexts. At the same time, they emphasize the need to support TOC who engage in diversity work: “We propose a vision for teacher education that situates race, culture, and language at the center and also challenges the assumption that bilingual teachers of color are experts on diversity and do not need additional support and training to teach bilingual learners.” (p. 280)

In a similar vein, Colomer’s (2018) multiple case study of six Latina/o teachers at middle schools in the US illustrates their “racial literacy” and “experiences with (un)masking” (p. 1). Colomer understands racial literacy as “one’s ability to resolve racially stressful issues” (p. 1) and unmasking as “the literal and figurative ways in which one covers or embraces racial markers” (pp. 1-2). She sees storytelling as one of the key strategies of racial literacy. Based on their stories, Colomer documents different ways in which and her participants did or did not define themselves (e.g., as Hispanic or Latina) depending on their social environment and the different degrees to which they embraced or resisted social and societal oppression such as monolingual norms or racist comments. Colomer points to the importance of narrative research for creating reflective spaces for identity building. She concludes that storytelling should be included in the preparation of Latina/o teachers as one humanizing strategy that helps them and their students become empowered through higher racial literacy.

Encouraged by these examples of TOC resistance through stories and following Kohli’s (2008) call to “encourage these teachers [teachers of color] to reflect on their own educational experiences” (p. 180), we present one Latina teacher’s story, particularly in so far as it contains or represents counter-hegemonic beliefs and experiences and can thus be a helpful compass in reorienting traditional (or) colorblind teacher education.

### **Who we are and what we did**

Our academic thinking and writing is heavily shaped by our identities and positionalities, which is why we offer the following positionality statement that we hope explains our intentions, choices, and biases.

Author1: I am a white European woman who works as a researcher and teacher educator at a predominantly white university in Finland. I was born and raised in central Europe, received my PhD in the Midwestern US, and worked at a large private East Coast university thereafter. 7 years of learning, teaching, supervising teacher candidates, and doing school-based research in the US had and continue to have a profound impact on how I understand race and racism. As eternal learner of these issues that permeate all educational spaces, I am (at least partially) aware of the privilege, complicity, and responsibility that come with my Whiteness. I met Author2 during my time as a teacher educator at the East Coast university. She was a student in some of the courses I taught for pre-service language teachers and the experience and practice-theory connections she contributed to many classes impressed me and stuck with me. We stayed in touch and close after her graduation, and I remember repeatedly thinking that her stories would be valuable for a larger audience. I consider this chapter as a space to tell a small part of them.

Author2: I am a queer Spanish teacher, born and raised in Puerto Rico. For the last ten years I have resided in a large city of the East Coast in the United States. I moved here to pursue graduate studies in Literature at a large private university. The reason why I was able to attend this university was that I was granted a teaching fellowship. In exchange for teaching one undergraduate Spanish class per semester, the major expenses of my graduate studies (i.e. tuition, food, and rent) were covered. After I finished this graduate program, I continued to work in a large public university in the area, as a part-time Spanish lecturer. Nine months after graduating my first Master's degree I started a second degree in Education, with an emphasis on Second Language Acquisition. For three years I studied as a part-time student, and for the first two years, worked as a part-time Spanish lecturer in several public and private colleges in the area. During my third and final year in the program, at the recommendation of my advisor, and in order to fulfill my pre-practicum requirement, I started working full time as a high school Spanish teacher in a high need, urban, public school. After three years working there, I decided to leave. I am now a middle and high school Spanish teacher at a small, progressive, independent, project-based school. My experiences over the last 10 years as a queer Latina, first as a student and then as a teacher; the recurrent and simultaneous feelings of belonging and *otherness*; the different roles that I have had to play within the institutions where I have studied and worked; and the constant evaluation of what and who I am to my classmates, teachers, students, and colleagues, have made me incredibly interested and aware of *what I do* and *who I am*, and how these two entities shift and shape themselves within parameters of race, racism, and identity within the institution of education. Author2 was unequivocally crucial in introducing me to the importance of authenticity within the classroom. I met her the same year I started working at the public school. Her course on Curriculum Development pushed me to rethink what I knew about and did for my own courses. She also pushed and always encouraged me to think about my own story, where it came from and the value it had to guide my journey as a teacher.

We started working on this chapter by brainstorming the stories Author2 wanted to share. This mostly happened in the form of email and Skype conversations and jotting down notes in a shared document. This process was driven by Author2, with Author1 asking mostly

clarifying questions and recording the conversations. Shortly after she had decided on some main points to build her stories around, Author2 began to write, sharing her texts with Author1 whenever she felt they were ready enough. This process continued throughout data analysis and writing up of the chapter. After reading the stories, Author1 would sometimes send questions to Author2, usually asking for clarifications and elaborations. In this way, the stories grew with the main authorship remaining in Author2's hands and some attention to the questions of a familiar but remote reader. When the main storyline was in place, Author1 made suggestions for the parts that would be included in the chapter and Author2 reviewed these selections. This process was guided by questions of relevance for Author2 and for a wider readership. In other words, we asked: Which parts of the story contain key moments for Author2? and Which parts will our readers likely be able to connect with? After trying out different ways of structuring the chapter, we agreed to preserve the main chronology of the storyline and interrupt the narrative as little as possible with our interpretations and theorizations in the hope to enhance (rather than dissect) the story's meaning.

## **Findings and discussion**

Analyzing a story can constitute or feel like an act of violence. However, as most academic genres and discourses demand a theorization of narrative of some kind, we offer an analysis of Author2's experiences that aims at the same time to preserve the story's integrity. In the following, we present Author2's story interspersed with interpretations and reflections that intend to highlight its relevance for a larger audience.

### **“Se hace camino al andar”:** messages of hope and strength

Author2 started her narration with the start of the school year a few years back when she began to work as a Spanish teacher at the large urban public high school in New England. This school served a majority of students of color, many of whom came from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. Low grades, school violence, drug usage, absences, and apathy towards learning were common issues the community was facing and fighting, but a group of committed, kind, resourceful, and supportive teachers balanced the harsh working environment. Two years after the events first narrated here, when it felt as if the school was moving in a better direction, its journey came to a halt. During the fourth week of school all teachers were informed that a year from then the school would embark on a “turn around” process. As a consequence, the talented group of teachers would all be fired from their jobs in the spring, and would have to reapply if their positions were available. What had started as a year full of promise and hope quickly changed. Students, teachers, and staff immediately became discouraged by the news. During the spring, after receiving their lay-off notices, the atmosphere became extremely tense. After being in this school for almost three years, and seven months away from becoming a permanent teacher in the district, Author2 decided to search for a job elsewhere. Not only had all three language positions

disappeared in the school's plan for the upcoming year, but the community that she had been a part of, and those who had worked tirelessly together, was to be disbanded.

Two years earlier, during the last days of summer vacation, and with the excitement and apprehension of having her first job as a high school teacher, Author2 decorated her very first classroom. This is where her story begins.

I had the idea of putting up quotations in Spanish that I found inspiring up on a very high wall in the room. I thought for several days which ones I was going to choose. I wanted them to be relevant to my future students, whom I hadn't met yet, but I also wanted to include things that I liked and that tied in with my love for Hispanic literature. In the end I choose three different ones. The first quotation "Caminante no hay camino, se hace camino al andar" are two verses from the poem "Extracto de Proverbios y cantares (XXIX)" by Spanish poet Antonio Machado, later musicalized by Joan Manuel Serrat. The second "Nada se pierde, todo se transforma" comes from the song "Todo se transforma" by Uruguayan singer and songwriter Jorge Drexler. Lastly, the third "Tú no puedes comprar el viento, / Tú no puedes comprar el sol, / Tú no puedes comprar la lluvia [...]" is part of the chorus of the song "Latinoamérica" by the Puerto Rican band Calle 13. Why did I choose these in particular? Well, the verses by Machado are universally recognized and speak of our own power to make our own paths through life. Drexler's song acknowledges the power of transformation and renewal. In Calle 13's verses there is a cry against consumerism, capitalism, and the exaltation of natural resources and the beauty and power in Latin American countries. Even without knowing my students personally, I knew that the school in which I was to be working served mostly low-income families and students of color. By choosing these three quotations, it was my desire to send them a message of hope and strength.

Several choices Author2 made in her classroom decoration process deserve closer attention. First, she decided to use her own cultural background, identity, and interests as foundation for her classroom mottos, a decision that fall within the realm of using "identity as pedagogy". This approach has been recognized as a valuable teaching strategy. For instance, Morgan (2004) reports on using his students' image of himself as emancipated male to stimulate discussion and thinking about gender roles in his classroom, and Author1 & Co-author (year) observed the ways in which teachers in their course on teaching culture in the language classroom intertwined their bicultural and bilingual identities with their lesson and curriculum planning, for example in order to understand pedagogical concepts and add nuance to their teaching. All these studies exemplify how the use of teachers' identities can support teachers' and students' learning in ways that present complicated and potentially sensitive issues in non-threatening, relatable ways. In addition to using her Latina identity as basis for her choice of Spanish and Latin American texts, Author2 used her identity as a member of a minoritized group when she, very deliberately, selected the quotations she put up in her classroom. The messages of "making your own paths through life", transformation and renewal, and the anti-capitalist tribute to Latin America's beauty and power take on very



specific meanings in the context of Author2's school and classroom. Having some sense of her students' racial identities and socioeconomic status, Author2 hoped to tell her students, through these quotes, to believe in themselves, their identities and backgrounds, and in the possibility of change, despite their potential experiences of not belonging or being harassed and oppressed. Marking her classroom as a safe space, potentially even a space for resistance, Author2 positioned herself as a trustworthy ally, who could, due to her own identity and background, relate to them in ways that would enable trust and transformation. In this sense, the identity-as-pedagogy approach fulfilled multiple functions as an introduction to Latin American language and literature, introduction of the teacher's identity and background, and offer for building trust and solidarity.

### **“You are too white”: Feeling without a place**

Having set the stage with her description of her classroom mottos, Author2 continues her story with the opening of her first lesson.

It was 7:45 in the morning the performative act that teaching is was about to start. “Hola, buenos días” I said as I clicked on my laptop pad and my presentation slide changed to display my words and an image of a sun. “Me llamo Señorita Quiñones,” another click, another slide, new words. “Yo soy de Puerto Rico.” At this several things happened all at once. I clicked, new words appeared and a bunch of images of the island: one of the outlines of its shape, another with a beach in my hometown of Isabela, and another of its flag. Simultaneously, I heard several cries from students. “From Puerto Rico?” one boy said. “Nah, nah, you are not from Puerto Rico,” followed another. “You are too white,” a girl said. Quiet and not so quiet “yeses” echoed through the room. For a minute I did not know what to do, but eventually I repeated “Sí, yo soy de Puerto Rico.” I felt my face turning bright red and tears rushing to my eyes. It must have been 8:00AM, and on my very first day of high school teaching, I was already ready to cry. Several years before, as a newcomer Latina in Olden (a pseudonym), I had already lived through mixed reactions about my heritage. “Oh, but your English is so good!” “Really?! You barely have an accent.” “But you were born here, right?” “How long have you lived here? Years, no?” Were some of the many comments I received and politely answered. Somehow these did not signify much to me then. I deflected them and took them as critiques, or even flattering remarks, about how I talked and sounded. I could not see the relationship between my speech, my physical appearance, and my place of origin. It is 8:01AM, I am back in my classroom and surrounded by 15 and 16-year-old students, when a truth about myself materialized before my eyes: “I was not brown enough to be considered brown by my students, but I was not white enough to be considered white in this city.” I felt without a place here.

The moment Author2 described in this part of the story is a critical one for several reasons. As she states, “several things happened all at once”. Maybe most importantly, the identity as Latina ally she offered in the first part of the story was doubted, if not rejected, and experience that has been documented in studies with TOC who teach in high-minority schools (Achinstein & Aguirre, 2008). This happened as calling into question her racial and cultural identity and affiliation as woman from Puerto Rico. Specifically, the students named Author2’s language (“English”) skills, accent, and skin color as reasons for doubting her identity.

Reading this story prompted Author1 to ask Author2 what explanations she had for the students’ actions. Author2 offered two explanations, which had to do with the how students perceived Puerto Ricans along the lines of race and class.

### **Two groups of Puerto Ricans**

Author2 explains:

After living in Olden for 10 years, I have faced an interesting and dual world. On the one hand, this city is filled with Puerto Rican college students and young professionals, who like me, came here to pursue undergraduate and graduate studies, and who come mostly from middle to high income households who could either afford the expenses or whom (like my case) were lucky to get fellowships to study, and decided to stay beyond graduation. On the other hand, Olden is an important hub of Puerto Ricans who live in the diaspora. This is noticeable in certain areas of the city. For example, the Sound End, which prior to more recent gentrification used to be a mostly Puerto Rican neighborhood, where low income families live(d). [...] Even when these two spaces and experiences, that of the young newcomer and the established immigrant, often unite (when the former becomes the latter), it seems that there is a lack of connection between the two. I feel that my students, who grew up and were often in contact with families that belonged to the second group of Puerto Ricans, were reacting to socioeconomic status. To what extent had they been in contact with young professionals, undergraduate and graduate students from Puerto Rico? I do not know, but I didn’t fit the mold.

Author2’s explanations for the students’ doubts about her identity also have to do with the conflation of race and class. In her book *Exposing prejudice: Puerto Rican experiences of language, race, and class*, Bonnie Urciuoli (2013) lays out the complexity and different meanings of the term “class”, which is often comprised of a variety of social factors including income, place of residence, occupation, and educational background. Putting the emphasis on individuals rather than on social institutions and systems, such an understanding of class “becomes morally marked” (Urciuoli, 2013, p. 26.):

In this way, *black* or *Hispanic* or *Puerto Rican* become metonyms for (naturally connected to) the idea of an *underclass*. In this metonymy, class/race difference becomes morally marked. Activities seen as typical of bad citizens (dropping out of school, becoming teenage mothers, taking drugs, committing crimes, going on welfare) are habitually associated with, for example, *Puerto Ricans*, and become “explanations” for their “failure”. (p. 26)

It may be such discourses that Author2’s students were exposed to and reproducing, albeit indirectly through their responses to a teacher who claimed Puerto Rican identity that did not match these race-class assumptions. In contrast to these discourses, Author2 mentions two existing groups and great diversity among Puerto Ricans in Olden. Through this, she pushes back against a) a perception of the group as monolithic and b) the discourse of individual failure, which she redirects towards a description of the city as segregated (e.g. her students not having had much exposure to a variety of Puerto Ricans) and the different groups of Puerto Ricans as fairly isolated.

### **Skin color and accent**

Having outlined the local ways of “being Puerto Rican” in this way, Author2 continued by addressing race, specifically skin color and accent.

I wonder if there was also something connected to the color of my skin. My skin is lighter but that is not abnormal in Puerto Rico. Because we are the result of such a rich racial mix, we come in all shades and sizes. I would be lying if I said that there isn’t racism in the island, there is, but one is made more aware of it when one leaves and comes to a place where not only your skin color dictates your origin, but how you sound as well. I might not have sounded as the Puerto Rican people my students knew or were surrounded by. I was too “polished”, grew up speaking and reading Spanish.

In the instance of being rejected as Latina from Puerto Rico and Author2’s explanations, several larger social processes are at play that work to oppress members of non-dominant groups. First, a rejection of Author2’s identity can be viewed as part of a larger discourse around racialized identities that do not fit with a black-and-white paradigm. As Trucios-Haynes (2000) has pointed out, US conversations around race are sometimes literally a “black and white” issue:

Latinas/os are indeterminately raced because racial identity in the United States occurs within a Black-White Paradigm, and this paradigm does not incorporate the experiences of Latinas/os and other groups of color.” (p. 8)

Being pushed to the offside of the main race discourse thus complicates the racial identity work Latina/os do. In addition, the dynamics of colorism may be at play in Author2’s

story. While light skin has been associated with, among others, economic and professional advantages and perceived beauty and intellect, relative to dark skin (Hunter, 2015), it also brings certain disadvantages:

In societies where resources are divided by race and color, light-skinned people get a disproportionate amount of the benefits. However, light skin may be viewed as a disadvantage with regard to ethnic legitimacy or authenticity. In many ethnic communities, people view darker-skin tones as more ethnically authentic. (p. 880)

In educational settings, colorism has contributed to a mismatch between how students identified and how they were perceived (Fergus, 2009). In addition to Latina/o identities falling through the cracks of a black-and-white discourse and colorism establishing additional hierarchies, the discourse of alignment that is palpable in Author2's story creates an obstacle for identity recognition. It seems that her students are reproducing a larger societal discourse that expects race, phenotype, nationality/place of origin, language proficiency, and accent having to align in particular ways in order to produce credible Latina/o identities. Such an expectation of alignment not only combines harmful ideologies of racial bias, nationalism, and linguistic normativity, it also sets impossible standards for Latina/os, a phenotypically highly diverse group, whose members can come from a variety of national backgrounds, and whose English proficiency can cover a wider spectrum. In combination with discourses that leave little room for nuance between black and white and promote colorist hierarchies, misalignment of either white or black features can produce irritation, confusion, and rejection for those who are operating within the black-or-white paradigm.

Author2's experience of having her identity questioned is not merely or even mainly due to her students. Considering the bigger picture, she worked and lived in the context of a large city on the US Eastcoast that is predominantly white and permeated by discourses of white supremacy. As Rosa has pointed out, the perpetual stigmatization of Latina/os in such contexts based on their linguistic practices reaches far beyond a linguistic issue. He explains that "standardized American English should be conceptualized as a raciolinguistic ideology that aligns normative whiteness, legitimate Americanness, and imagined ideal English" (p. 165). Between her students and the larger societal context rejecting her identity as either "too Latina" or "not Latina enough", Author2 experienced a strong sense of non-belonging. Driven by the experience of her students' as well as the white supremacist context of her professional and personal life, both of which were doubting her identity, Author2 decided to integrate the instances described above into her lessons.

### **Racial identity as race-sensitive pedagogy: Faces of Puerto Rico**

Author2's story continues with integrating Puerto Rican identities into her lessons.

I decided to try something to address their reactions and surprise at my "Puerto Ricanness". I compiled images of fellow Puerto Ricans. Famous people (singers,

athletes, artists), friends, family members, pictures of unknown people I found on the Internet became the subjects of one slide of my daily PowerPoint. I had planned an activity around origin with the students. They were to communicate where they were from using a very simple structure using the first person present conjugation (yo soy de...). Then they were going to learn how to communicate where others were from using the third person present conjugation (él/ella es de...). I believe I first had them make guesses about the origins of the people in the pictures, while using the target grammar. I provided a list of possible places for them to use. After they had spent some time sharing with a partner we opened up the discussion for the whole class and took note of some of their answers on the board. Famous people were easier to identify, of course. However, when I would say that someone wasn't from a particular place, but from Puerto Rico, students responses varied. Some told me things like "Nah, nah Ms. you are lying". In others I could see the disbelief and surprise. Others stayed quiet and seemed not to react.

In this final part of her story, Author2 shares how she addressed her experience of having her identity rejected in her Spanish lessons. With the goal of broadening the students' understanding of being Puerto Rican, she provided pictures and stories of Puerto Ricans from a variety of social and professional backgrounds. In addition, she made connections to the students' background by involving them into the discussion around origins. Although students continued to express disbelief, this activity opened up two important potential avenues for learning. First, it exposed students to a variety of Puerto Rican identities, thus challenging the monolithic understanding of the group as well as stereotypes and harmful connotations such as that of race with class. In addition, it included the students' selves into the topic, thus creating a space where the (otherwise often racializing and inappropriate) question "Where are you from?" could potentially generate debate about the complex relationship of place of birth, living environment, social and racial affiliations, cultural belonging, and linguistic practices, etc. By complicating her students' images of Puerto Ricans (and potentially themselves and each other), Author2 went far beyond the identity-as-pedagogy approach she started out with. Rather than limiting her teaching to her own person, she used her classroom as a platform to a variety of people from a variety of backgrounds, including her her students. In other words, rather than using identity, she made space for alterity in her pedagogy.

### **Take-aways**

This chapter has told the story of Author2, a Latina teacher in a large city on the US East Coast. Her experiences from an underfunded high school which at that point served mainly black students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds have deeply shaped her, and although this chapter could only give a small glimpse of them, they are illustrative of the complex work racialized teachers do in such contexts.

Starting out with an identity-and-pedagogy approach, which included decorating her classroom with quotes that represented her cultural background and were intended to offer solidarity to her students, both her Latina identity claim and her solidarity offer were rejected by her students, thus leaving her socio-culturally and racially homeless. Motivated to respond to her students in a way that would promote learning and challenge their biases, Author2 offered them opportunities to explore their own as well as a variety of Puerto Ricans' origins, thus acknowledging variety and difference of (a least) race, socioeconomic status, and professional and educational background. This move from identity as pedagogy towards alterity as pedagogy enabled her to bring the complexity and richness of the sensitive topic of cultural, racial, and linguistic identities to the fore. Although an identity as pedagogy approach has been shown to be conducive to learning in some contexts (Author1 & Co-author; Morgan, 2004), a sole focus on an individual (e.g., a teacher) or on identity as representational, unified, and static runs the risk of enabling colorblindness and thus perpetuation of racial and cultural stereotypes and hierarchies. Author2's story can thus be understood as a call on teachers to embrace alterity for pedagogical purposes, for instance to challenge stereotypes and biases. Of course, this implies a call on teacher educators and administrators to support their TOC in the extra work that they shoulder simply through by bringing their identities to school.

In the end, Author2's story is a story of learning for everyone: Author2 herself learned to navigate a difficult situation that called her identity into question and her students were offered opportunities for developing racial literacy (Colomber, 2018). In addition, through her experience, readers learn about "the efforts by the marginalized to struggle toward a humanizing pedagogy" (Kambutu et al., 2009, p. 99), and are instructed or reminded of the damage colorblind curricula and pedagogies in schools and teacher education can do. Further, as teacher educators (Author1 implicates herself here), Author2's story serves as an important reminder that an approach to teaching and teacher education based on CRT and LatCrit that centers race, rejects colorblindness, and foregrounds the stories of POC, particularly the ways in which race, language, nationality are intertwined (Espinoza & Harris, 1997), can truly make a difference for TOC. To be even clearer, this chapter echoes the call to end colorblind pedagogies in teacher and other educational contexts (e.g., Fránquiz, Salazar, & DeNicolo, 2011; Kohli, 2009, Solorzano, 2019): Pedagogies that are rooted in CRT and LatCrit cannot be a voluntary exercise but should be at the heart of teacher education programs. For administrators and policy makers it is important to critically question the assumption of "cultural match" (Achinstein & Aguirre, 2008) between students and teachers and support their TOC in developing strategies and networks around negotiating their identities, alterities, and pedagogies.

## References

- Achinstein, B., & Aguirre, J. (2008). Cultural Match or Culturally Suspect: How New Teachers of Color Negotiate Sociocultural Challenges in the Classroom. *Teachers College Record*, 110(8), 1505-1540.
- Author1 & Co-Author
- Barkhuizen, G., Benson, P., & Chik, A. (2013). *Narrative inquiry in language teaching and learning research*. New York: Routledge.
- Colomer, S. E. (2019). Understanding racial literacy through acts of (un) masking: Latinx teachers in a new Latinx diaspora community. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 22(2), 194-210.
- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Chang, R. S., & Fuller, N. (2000). Introduction: Performing LatCrit., *UC Davis L. Rev.*, 33, 1277.
- Espinoza, L., & Harris, A. P. (1997). Embracing the tar-baby: LatCrit theory and the sticky mess of race. *Cal. L. Rev.*, 85(5), 1585-1645.
- Fergus, E. (2009). Understanding Latino students' schooling experiences: The relevance of skin color among Mexican and Puerto Rican high school students. *Teachers College Record*, 111(2), 339-375.
- Fránquiz, M. E., Salazar, M. D. C., & DeNicolo, C. P. (2011). Challenging majoritarian tales: Portraits of bilingual teachers deconstructing deficit views of bilingual learners. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 34(3), 279-300.
- Hunter, M. (2016). Colorism in the classroom: How skin tone stratifies African American and Latina/o students. *Theory Into Practice*, 55(1), 54-61.
- Lynn, M., & Parker, L. (2006). Critical race studies in education: Examining a decade of research on U.S. schools. *The Urban Review*, 38(4), 257-290.
- Johnson, G. (2001). Teacher Reflection Narratives: A poststructural approach. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 27(2), 199-200.
- Kambutu, J., Rios, F., & Castañeda, C. (2009). Stories deep within: Narratives of US teachers of color from Diasporic settings. *Diaspora, Indigenous, and Minority Education*, 3(2), 96-109.
- Kohli, R. (2008). Breaking the cycle of racism in the classroom: Critical race reflections from future teachers of color. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 35(4), 177-188.
- Kohli, R. (2009). Critical race reflections: Valuing the experiences of teachers of color in teacher education. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 12(2), 235-251.
- Matsuda, C. (1991). Voices of America: Accent, antidiscrimination law, and a jurisprudence for the last reconstruction. *Yale Law Journal*, 100, 1329-1407.
- Morgan, B. (2004). Teacher identity as pedagogy: Towards a field-internal conceptualisation in bilingual and second language education. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 7(2-3), 172-188.
- Rosa, J. D. (2016). Standardization, racialization, languagelessness: Raciolinguistic ideologies across communicative contexts. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, 26(2), 162-183.

- Solorzano, D. G. (1997). Images and words that wound: Critical race theory, racial stereotyping, and teacher education. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 24(3), 5-19.
- Solorzano, D. G. (2019). Toward a Critical Race Theory for Teacher Education. In P. M. Jenlink (Ed.). *Teacher preparation at the intersection of race and poverty in today's schools* (pp. 107-112), Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Solórzano, D. G., & Yosso, T. J. (2002). Critical race methodology: Counter-storytelling as an analytical framework for education research. *Qualitative inquiry*, 8(1), 23-44.
- Trucios-Haynes, E. (2000). Why race matters: LatCrit theory and Latina/o racial identity. *Berkeley La Raza LJ*, 12, 1.
- Urciuoli, B. (2013). *Exposing prejudice: Puerto Rican experiences of language, race, and class*. Long Grove: Waveland Press.
- Yosso, T. J. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race ethnicity and education*, 8(1), 69-91.
- Yosso, T. J. (2006). *Critical race counterstories along the Chicana/Chicano educational pipeline*. New York: Routledge.
- Valdes, F. (2005). Legal reform and social justice: An introduction to LatCrit theory, praxis and community. *Griffith Law Review*, 14(2), 148-173.

## Author details

### Johanna Ennser-Kananen

[Johanna.f.ennser-kananen@jyu.fi](mailto:Johanna.f.ennser-kananen@jyu.fi)

Dunckerinkatu 35

50170 Mikkeli

Finland

Johanna Ennser-Kananen is a University Lecturer of English at the University of Jyväskylä in Finland. Her current work focuses on linguistically and culturally sustaining education for migrant teachers and anti-oppressive (language) pedagogies for migrant students, particularly those with refugee experience. Within those areas, she is particularly interested in legitimacy of knowledge (epistemic justice) and language practices. She is the co-editor of the Routledge Handbook of Educational Linguistics and has published in *The Modern Language Journal*, *The International Review of Education*, *The Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics*, and *The International Journal of Language Studies*, among others.

### Leisa M. Quiñones-Oramas

[lmqoramas@gmail.com](mailto:lmqoramas@gmail.com)

227 Amory Street



Jamaica Plain, MA 02130

USA

Leisa Quiñones Oramas is currently a middle and high school Spanish teacher in Boston. A native of the coastal northwestern town of Puerto Rico, Leisa moved to New England after finishing her dual bachelor's degree in Comparative Literature and Hispanic Studies. There she completed a Masters of Art in Spanish Language and Cultures and a Master of Arts in Teaching in Second Language Acquisition. She also taught various levels of Spanish at local universities and colleges. For the first three years of her career as a high school teacher, she taught Spanish at a large school district, where she faced the many thrills, challenges, and rewards of teaching in an urban classroom. Throughout her career, she has focused on making language learning relevant to students by fostering oral communication and the use of art and authentic resources.