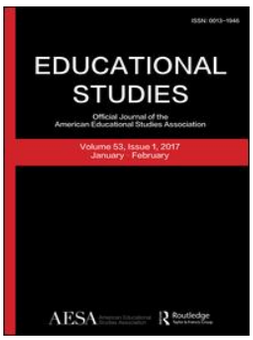

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Sojourners of Truth: Five Women's Stories of Triumph, Tribulation, and Teaching in Academia

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ABSTRACT

Working in academia for women of color is a labor of love. This essay chronicles five women who have been challenged by their roles as purveyors of social justice, equity and access for children, youth and adults in higher education. These sojourners of truth grapple with the realities of their work in academia and how their embodiment remains a shadow against the ivory tower. Grounded in an autoethnographic approach, the voices of these women represent their authentic interpretations and experiences in academia. The conclusions find that social justice needs to be deliberately integrated into education, because this is one path to educating all.

Sojourners of Truth is the term five women who have been friends and professional colleagues for over 20 years found that best represents their lived experiences. This essay chronicles their lives and loves in the work they perform in higher education. Bonded by their graduate school experiences at the University of California Berkeley, they deconstruct their identities, mark their theoretical perspectives and document their existence as purveyors of truth and justice in communities of color and beyond. It is in these stories that they begin to dissect what it means to be a 21st century woman of color in academia. All along these treacherous roads, they have faced racism, discrimination, disdain, disillusionment, failure, joy, happiness, contentment, accomplishment, tolerance and success. These narratives paint a road few would dare volunteer to travel. This is their unique story of being!

Research and theory continue to inform the lived experiences and work that these sojourners embark upon, because it represents their educational foundation and personal and professional beliefs. Theory stimulates the work they do, and the work they do responds to theory. They identify with Gloria Anzaldúa's (1987) notion that borderlands "are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle, and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy (p. i)," As sojourners, they struggle with living on borders, in margins, taking on multiple identities, and the burden of double consciousness of being (Anzaldúa, 1987; Dubois, 1903).

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These sojourners situate themselves as facilitators of knowledge. They see their role as helping students to receive equity and preservice teachers to receive and deliver educational equity to children and youth (Delpit, 1988). These sojourners unpack the work that teachers should be doing within the contexts of Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti's (2005) funds of knowledge that affirms communities' assets and resources, Ladson-Billings (1995) and Gay's (2010) culturally relevant and responsive teaching, and the importance of cultural considerations in the practice of teaching (Delpit, 1988). This sociocultural research frames the thoughts, theories and texts of these sojourners. It situates them within social constructivist frameworks (Vygotsky, 1978). This research informs the need for social justice in the work of advising, teaching and teacher preparation.

The manuscript proceeds with personal narratives of each woman's interpretation of their work in higher education. The methodology of personal narratives is an autoethnographic approach that consists of the authors' stories about themselves. Authors in personal narratives view themselves as the phenomenon to be researched and position their lives through a focus on their research, academic and personal personas. These narratives can focus on oneself, one's life in its cultural context, connections to other researchers, reflections and surviving one's life (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2010). The personal narratives of these sojourners became actualized through autoethnography.

Drawing on the work of Lortie (1975), Joseph and Burnaford (2000), Little and McLaughlin (1993) and Cuban (1993) as it relates to the school teacher, teachers' work and how teachers taught, a series of structured questions (Fontana & Frey, 2000) were developed. Each sojourner responded in writing to the structured questions. However, all responses were not used for every question due to content alignments and space requirements. This qualitative inquiry led to the following themes: The Work, Student Preparation, and The Problem. Geographically isolated in their own communities, these women's voices may echo that of other academics of color (Monzó & SooHoo, 2014) and sojourners of truth.

The work

> Teachers are not performers in the traditional sense of the word in that our work is not meant to be a spectacle. Yet it is meant to serve as a catalyst that calls everyone to become more and more engaged, to become active participants in learning (hooks, 1994, p. 11).

The work that women of color do in institutions of higher education is marked and marred by their embodied existence. Women of color in this context refers to females who identify as ethnic minorities, may be labeled as ethnic minorities or who represent non-dominant groups in a society or culture. This usually includes those persons classified as nonwhite.

The work of these sojourners is a performative act that includes teaching, advising, research, service and administration. In this section, the sojourners begin their narratives by examining perceptions, contexts, motivations, identity formation, reflective practice and trends in their work. They respond to the following structured questions as it relates to their work: How do students perceive you and the work you do; What is the context in which you do your work; Why do you do this work; How has your work influenced your identity; Who do you teach or advise; and What has changed and what has not changed about your work?

How do students perceive you and the work you do?

Ruth: I think students see me as a Latina professor and their perceptions about me are influenced by beliefs about and their experiences as Latinxs. When I introduce myself at the beginning of each semester, after stating my name and sharing that I'm a daughter of immigrant parents, and a child who started kindergarten without speaking English, I sometimes wonder what students are thinking. Do they question my academic preparation? Do they feel uncomfortable having a Latina professor? The few students who are Latinxs and others who are themselves immigrants or children of immigrants, I believe appreciate my presence because I can relate to their experiences.

Esther: In my role as the coordinator of the Bilingual Teacher Pathway program, the advisor and sometimes instructor for the program, I would say that my students appreciate the energy, care, and dedication that I give to my work for and with them. I remember at the beginning of the fall term, I was having difficulty with the room choices the university was offering our class. I recall voicing my frustration and apologizing to the students for this disruptive process. One of my students spoke up "Esther, it doesn't matter where we meet—what matters is that you are teaching us." I looked up surprised by this students' vote of confidence after a very short time of knowing me. And what made my heart beat faster were the nods and smiles from the other students around the room.

Lilly: Since people view others with different lenses, I think that students could perceive me in a number of ways—African American, woman, educated. My hope is that they perceive me as one who is most concerned about their academic development and success.

Beth: I think the majority of students are a bit taken aback by me. For many, I am the first course in the teaching credential program. Many have not had an African American supervisor—of any kind. This inexperience with people of color in a supervisory role to them can become problematic because students may act out. Sometimes the acting out happens when they object to a topic that they were first introduced to yesterday. Students automatically decide that they don't like how you conduct the course. They may object to course readings and time the course is offered. I don't think they even realize what they are doing. But it's a push back because they don't know how to take you or me as an African American woman with a PhD.

Marie: Since my students are diverse, I believe that there is no one way that they perceive me. Overall, I can expect that I confuse students. At the beginning of each class, I provide students with a brief personal biography with the aim of reducing how distracting my background can be as I launch into course content. I think that a universal response students have to me is one of surprise when they realize that I am both black and a native Spanish-speaker. Nonetheless, I think that most students, regardless of background, perceive me as their ally. Invariably, a handful of students find my appearance and my actions incongruous, as is the case across contexts.

What is the context in which you do your work?

Esther: One of the ways that my work is distinct and different than my White colleagues has occurred during conversations surrounding social justice and equity issues.

I teach all my courses with a social justice and equity lens so it is difficult for me to see any other way to teach. My colleagues may *believe* in social justice and equity; however, their words and topics seem to focus on teaching about the standards, methods, skills, content, and a high stakes educational portfolio now required by the state for licensing. What seems to be missing in our conversations are the critical questions about what this might mean to a racial and ethnically diverse student, or recent immigrant, or emerging bilingual learner. There is almost never any connection made to families and communities in our conversations about teaching. The dialogue remains fixed on the isolated classroom and the role of the teacher.

Marie: The overwhelming majority of my daily work is centered on the preparation of public school teachers. The reality is that my post-bac department is quite marginal to the life of the university. Hence, we are constantly beset by policies and institutional practices that favor the more traditional undergraduate departments and create undue hurdles for our work. This, in addition to the very robust bureaucracy of any state educational agency's teacher education mandates, means that I am forever finding ways to minimize the impact of record keeping, table-making, and report-writing on my intellectual time.

Lilly: I began to pursue higher education administrator roles, because I wanted to make a difference in students' academic development where it seems to affect them the most. I served as a director and executive director in Centers that were in Student Affairs but academic facing. They were designed to either serve the academic needs of all students at the university or specific populations of students (i.e. students having academic difficulty, on academic probation, students of color or first-generation college students). As a result of my experiences, I am now passionate about creating environments within higher education in which people feel respected, valued, and appreciated. It is about creating opportunities for staff to grow professionally and develop so that student needs are best met. An environment where professional development is a high priority because staff is a higher priority.

Why do you do this work?

Esther: I became a teacher because I was determined that children could experience an acceptance and something more loving and nurturing in school than I had experienced (Steele, 2009). Every child deserves to experience the tremendous possibilities life could offer them with a strong education or as Lisa Delpit (1988) describes—that educators should see their brilliance and beauty. I love being a teacher. I love teaching—all ages—children, youth, adults—it doesn't matter, we ALL have something to discover and learn from each other every day.

Beth: Working in higher education has afforded me the opportunity to influence the work that preservice teachers do. However, I have no measure of my success. Did I help these predominantly white and female teachers to better understand their role as purveyors of the target culture? Did I help them to look beyond the black and brown faces and see the child or young adult? Did I do anything at all? Have I been part of the problem versus solution. This is my great concern.

Ruth: I do this job because I want to help prepare future teachers who will be teaching a diverse population of children. As a former public school teacher, I taught students from a similar background as myself—native speakers of a language other than English. The increasingly diverse student population needs teachers familiar with the language learning process and a willingness to appreciate students' culture and language as assets and resources rather than limitations (Gonzalez et al., 2005).

Lilly: I remember individuals from my own undergraduate experience who were passionate about student success. I engaged with faculty and staff who seemed to know how to help students like me navigate and succeed in a large public research institution. I do not think I realized it at the time, but I internalized the positive, affirming support that I received. Now, it is my time to give back to the communities that gave so much to me.

Marie: Though I found working with kids and their families very joyful as an elementary school teacher, I had to concede given my Ph.D. training to prepare college students to work with diverse children. For me, public service has been a vocation since my mid-twenties. Teaching in the early twenty-first century focused my attention on the enduring value of teacher education as a public service.

How has your work influenced your identity?

Esther: I'm not sure that my work influences my identity—but instead my identity has influenced my work. When people ask about what I "do" I say "I *work with* aspiring bilingual teachers" or "I am a teacher of teachers." *This is really at the core of my identity;* I am a teacher. I never set out to become a teacher and as a young woman, I aspired to become a veterinarian. In high school, I was tracked into vocational education even though I didn't know this was being decided for me. I just knew that I loved plants and animals. So, in high school, I spent part of each day in the nursery and greenhouse on the school grounds learning about propagation, caring for seedlings, and how to cut plants for optimal growth. Another part of my school day, I was bussed to a bungalow 20 miles away where I attended a class on Small Animal Care and Control. It wasn't that I didn't enjoy these experiences, but I slowly began to realize during our field trips to the zoo or the City Animal Control facilities that everyone who looked like me were the ones using shovels. It didn't fit my vision of working with animals. In my mind, I saw myself as a veterinarian, and yet society and my school saw someone not worth preparing for college. I never took a biology or science course in high school, and when I realized later in life that I was not offered an equitable education. I cried with a broken heart.

The dream that my mother instilled in me "mi hija, puedes ser lo tu quieres—con mucho trabajo y las ganas."—that I could do anything in life. And yet, the reality of the subtractive schooling experiences (Valenzuela, 1999) I had were in conflict with my dreams. So, how did I end up becoming a teacher? It was because a few rare individuals saw something in me that they wanted to nurture and support; they saw a brilliance and a beauty in me.

Beth: Student perceptions of my dark skin have varied over the years from pure silence to a simmering rage. Most are able to adapt and work through the course

curriculum. I try to foster a connection with them although it still feels very distant. For 15 weeks, I try to build what I hope is a temporary relationship that has long lasting effects. I have spent much time and effort trying to help students to see me differently and to see the children they will work with as—human. Not beings who they will subjugate. Not beings they will mar or scar. I don't want my students to see themselves as modern day abolitionist of the 21st century. I think I have failed at this task. In trying to get preservice teachers to realize their power and privilege, I could have done more to help them. But sometimes I had to worry about student evaluations. Sometimes, I had to worry about relaying the stilted literacy curriculum that hadn't changed in a decade. Sometimes, I had to worry about just keeping my job.

Lilly: My work and desire to serve students is borne out of my identity as an African American woman raised by African American parents who demonstrated work ethic, persistence, dignity and pride in their work. "Whatever your hands find to do," my mom used to say, "do it with all of your might." They stressed the importance of higher education as a tool to advance and grow individually and to give back to the communities from which I came. They instilled in me the confidence and persistence that I needed to deal with racism, microaggressions, and other challenges.

Marie: One unexpected consequence of being a teacher educator has been that I've gained confidence in unapologetically being myself linguistically and ethnically in and out of work contexts. Prior to becoming a teacher educator, after decades of standing at the "borderlands" (Anzaldúa, 1987) of most cultural activity in the US, I had found that being invisible culturally and linguistically was preferable to having to explain and defend my local culture and epistemology. Exhaustion and alienation had resulted in not defending myself when people misunderstood, judged, and sometimes insulted me whenever I did not conform to their notion of who they believed I ought to be. To borrow a metaphor, I had agreed with myself to remain ethno-linguistically "in the closet." Through helping new teachers to articulate, make public, and use their histories to inform their professional lives, I have been able to do the same for myself. It has been a great relief.

Who do you teach or advise?

Esther: The diversity of ethnic backgrounds and languages reflects the populations in the Pacific Northwest however, like much of the nation, the largest population of bilingual or multilingual individuals speak Spanish and represent a variety of Spanish-speaking countries. Students in the Bilingual Teacher Pathway program, graduate with a bachelor's degree or a master's in education, with a teaching license and an ESOL endorsement. As a teacher educator, researcher in a public university, my aim is to prepare bilingual teachers for the diverse classrooms they will enter with a strong social justice and equity lens and culturally responsive practices (Delpit & Kilgour Dowdy, 2008; Gay, 2010).

Marie: Most of my students are post-bac teacher candidates for the multiple, single, or education specialist credentials. A small handful are Spanish-English bilingual candidates. Once a year, I teach an undergraduate course for the Ethnic and Women's Studies department. I rarely have the opportunity to work with graduate students.

Beth: The majority of students I teach are European-American females. These preservice candidates will be teaching predominantly black and brown children in urban and suburban communities. Most of our undergraduates come from high school settings. Many of our graduate students come from other professions believing that teaching is their next path. Naturally, everyone believes they can teach—and that they can teach well. It's easy. This fantasy is far from the truth.

Ruth: I teach mostly undergraduate Liberal Studies students with a few graduate students. I provide academic advising for approximately 25 undergraduates each semester. The majority are European American females with few African-Americans, Asians, Latinx and students of mixed ethnic backgrounds. Some students identify as "third culture kids" because they've been born or raised in a different country than that of their parents. Others have been homeschooled for part of their schooling. All students profess to be Christians.

What has changed and what has not changed about your work?

Esther: If I were to think about what has changed in my work—I would say that I am emboldened to speak out more than I have in the past. I still work quietly, often under the radar, caring for and working with aspiring bilingual teacher candidates. However, when injustices are "in my face" and cannot be ignored—I stand up and cross cultural borders into a professional and academic discourse. I speak in ways that reach the ears of those who cannot hear the cries of the oppressed or marginalized individuals or groups. It never ceases to amaze me that they cannot hear—they cannot see—but I sigh and my mother's words come back to me "en cada cabeza hay un mundo." I know that if I am to reach those who cannot see or hear. I need to understand their world—thus, I become a border crosser.

I feel that now that I have tenure, I feel more empowered to say "no" and to step up when a leader is needed. Sometimes, I don't want to be a leader, but if not me, then who? The social justice work will remain undone if I don't step up. So many of my colleagues will ask about extra pay to "do the work" or to say they are too busy or not interested. The cost to me is tremendous—as it takes a toll on my health and sometimes, my well-being suffers, because I am stretched too thin.

Lilly: What has changed for me is that I feel more empowered to advocate for myself and for the students that I serve. I am less concerned with people's perceptions of my work and more concerned with making sure that every project that I undertake is consistent with my values, desire to see students succeed, and professional goals. Now that I am taking care of a family, I give myself permission to disengage from the work, and to fully engage with the people whom I love. My work is only one small part of who I am. What has not changed in my work is directly related to students' access to the University, need for community, and lack of inclusivity and equity. For some of the students of color that I have met over the years, there persists a subtle yet crystal clear demand for them to prove that they belong at the University—to make folks feel comfortable. However, I am energized by students' active resistance to bias and hatred in all forms.

Beth: My work has not changed. But I have changed. Students ask the same questions year after year. I answer the same way. The course content, as mandated by the state, has not changed in 14 years. Why? The district doesn't bother to care or care to bother about what we know or don't know as professors. I don't know anything about brain-based research, but it's required in the literacy curriculum. In the last 12 years, I can say that I am no longer a literacy educator. I have transformed and transferred out of this disciplinary slump. My research, ideas and theory are focused elsewhere in the field of instructional design & technology and software development. I have changed—no I have evolved.

Ruth: Various things have remained the same with respect to the nature of the work I do: teaching, advising, supervising student teachers, administrative duties, etc. The work has changed based on policies from the California Commission for Teacher Credentialing (new Teacher Performance Expectations, new Program Standards, changes in the Accreditation process etc.). Maintaining a life-work balance continues to be a challenge.

Marie: I have become better at understanding how my students can best engage with central theories, concepts, and practice implications of equity education in diverse schools. I have also gained expertise in how to address state teacher education standards in meaningful and critical ways in the courses for non-bilingual candidates. Conversely, I have constantly had to be imaginative in attempting to provide a quality bilingual program with little assistance for recruitment and retention of qualified candidates, and woefully inadequate state requirements for bilingual teacher preparation—a byproduct of years of sanctions on bilingual education. Similarly, university structures have not changed at all to address the institutional contexts for teacher preparation. For example, my predominantly undergraduate university continues to apply undergraduate formulae to analyze our post-baccalaureate department, resulting in disadvantages for full time equivalent calculations, and for the opening of new hiring lines for tenure-track faculty. Additionally, administration's desire to increase the University's research portfolio has not come with commensurate infrastructure support for research and writing. As a dyslexic, the teaching load, 4–4, makes any meaningful engagement in research and writing difficult for me. In other words, structural impediments continue to dampen the effectiveness of my work.

The work – analysis

Research describes the work of academics of color as "Transforming and being Transformed" (Jean-Marie et al., 2014); "Making Visible the Dead Bodies in the Room" (Niemann et al., 2020) and "Hot Commodities, Cheap Labor" (Duncan, 2014). These phrased analyses confirm the complex identities and embodiment in the work of women of color in academia. It is very hard work as individuals are being challenged by every crossroad from credentials to competence to worthiness. In analyzing "the work" performed by these sojourners, they identified several themes—students perceptions, teaching, social justice and equity, giving back, negotiating identities, and awaiting change.

Student perceptions of the sojourners' identities are mixed and can sometimes be confusing when students have never encountered or been supervised by someone like them in their lifetimes. However, most students know that the sojourner is there to help them to succeed. In the university, the sojourners' perception of self is confident, but there is an unease in that student perceptions become measures of performance, competence, and success. Students' perceptions of sojourners inhibits their freedom to be themselves in academia. However, the sojourners gain a renewed sense of self in out-of-work contexts. For some sojourners, they remain ethno-linguistically and personally neutral at work in order to survive.

The sojourners teach students of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. However, most of their preservice teachers are European American depending on the geographic location of the university. The dominance of white women in the teaching profession is supported by national statistics (Podolsky et al., 2016, Sleeter, 2017).

The context of the sojourners' work is social justice and equity focused just based on their presence as women of color in academia. There is a complex balance of performing one's job and abiding by state teacher education standards and institutional regulations. The sojourners seek to balance their work to help students feel valued, appreciated, and successful while they themselves continue to navigate the labyrinth of academia.

All the sojourners expressed their admiration for teaching and mentoring, the desire to give back to communities that helped them, and wanting to help preservice teachers educate children of color. This work of helping teachers to help children in underserved communities is highlighted several times. Their own desire to serve runs across all communities because the students they help to become teachers will impact thousands of children and youth.

Work, as an act of labor, serves as a means to multiple ends of identity. Their identities influence their work. Work serves as a way to help others humanize the children they teach. Sojourners' work is the labor of love.

The most significant change in the sojourners' work is that they, as individuals, have changed even when their institutions, policies and practices have remained the same over decades. The sojourners have moved forward in their thinking, research and professional practices. They are more emboldened to speak out about injustices, hold leadership positions for change, advocate for students and reflect on their effectiveness as educators. However, the cost for their work can affect their health, happiness, and family. They sacrifice much for their people and communities.

Student preparation

> The main purpose or objective is to prepare the young for future responsibilities and for success in life, by means of acquisition of the organized bodies of information and prepared forms of skill which comprehend the materials of instruction (Dewey, 1938, p. 18).

The goal of student and preservice teacher preparation are to educate college students with the knowledge, skills and abilities needed to succeed in their chosen professions. These five women bear the burden and the blame for their success and faltering. In this section, their narratives reflect the challenges of preparing students and preservice

teachers, proficiencies needed to teach in public schools, meanings behind culturally responsive pedagogy, student perceptions of the "other," and ways they accommodate. The sojourners respond to the following structured questions as it relates to their work: What are the challenges faced by your students; What do your demographic groups need to be effective and culturally proficient in public schools; and What does culturally responsive pedagogy mean to you?

What are the challenges faced by your students?

Esther: For students who are non-native English speakers and who may have been raised outside of the USA, standardized testing is one the greatest challenges they face. My program sets aside funding for tutoring and for test-taking fees in order to provide a pathway for their success—but even these supports are sometimes not enough. Sometimes, they just need more time to acquire fluency in the nuances of the English language found in standardized tests. Sometimes, they just need to build up the courage and confidence to face the exams and not give up. It is so hard on their spirits and their self-esteem when they fail to meet the passing scores on these tests. It hurts me as well knowing that they are suffering to peel off the layers of years being told they are not good enough or smart enough. I do as much as I can, but ultimately, they have to find that internal space that believes in themselves and to keep trying and not give up.

Lilly: The challenges that my students face are related to financial burden, feelings of isolation from the campus community, and a lack of students of color on campus. Recent events such as the George Floyd incident also impact our students, and we have tried to provide opportunities for them to come together to process and heal.

Beth: Students' greatest challenge is classroom management. "If you cannot manage the class, you will not be able to teach. Basically, the students will not let you teach." The learning curve is high. The majority of preservice teachers succeed because they have 200 hours to practice in their practicum that spans two semesters. The ones who flunk student teaching usually fail to learn the nuisances of teaching or building relationships with students and colleagues.

Ruth: Different students face different challenges depending on factors such as SES, cultural and linguistic background, and academic preparation. Some struggle with finances due to the high cost of attending a private school. Some Latinx, African-American, and Asian students have experienced feeling alienated in a predominantly white Christian university where some of their peers are not culturally sensitive. Others struggle with health/emotional issues due to their own or their families' issues (e.g. depression, anxiety, divorce, parent financial difficulties etc.)

Marie: My students are predominantly working class millennials who pay their own way. Many work as teachers' assistants or after-school homework teachers, jobs that provide them with excellent preparation for teaching. Many are bright problem-solvers who found their way to a four-year institution after community college and K-12 public schooling that was woefully inadequate. Hence many of my students are autodidacts whose unconventional approaches to formal education can be both a blessing, and a curse, for teacher preparation. Several of my students understand and analyze difficult social issues with relative competence while struggling with basic tertiary literacy

conventions. In addition, the bilingual language users have been educated almost exclusively in English, and have not had the opportunity to learn to read and write in their heritage languages. Their ability to read and write in a language other than English has been compromised, hence it is difficult for me to find bilingual teacher candidates.

What do your demographic groups need to be effective and culturally proficient in public schools?

Esther: It's not so much about what *they* need to be effective and culturally proficient, but rather—what they NEED to survive in a hierarchical, oppressive system that they will enter into as novice teachers. How do they advocate for the children and families under their care? From what some of my former students have told me, they are quietly pressured to conform, to not make waves, and to not complain. What!? The bilingual teachers have to administer more exams than their monolingual colleagues—in two languages! And often, they have to create material that is appropriate for their bilingual students when their monolingual peers have ready-made curriculum and materials available to use. They are underappreciated, seemingly work harder and go beyond the norm in making connections with families.

Ruth: Some of the students, of all cultural backgrounds, need to learn more about others who are culturally and linguistically different than themselves. In some cases European American students seem to have a superficial understanding of students who are Latinx, African American, Asian or of other backgrounds. Some European-American students are very familiar with one culture or another due to a number of experiences (travel, missionary work, church involvement). Some of the Latinx, African American, and Asian students seem to also have only a superficial understanding of other cultures. All teacher candidates need to spend time in schools with a diverse population as part of their preparation.

Beth: All beginning teachers need life experience to be effective teachers. Many of our students come from middle and upper middle class backgrounds. They have been privileged to obtain a consistent education, in a consistent place, and for a consistent time. Their schooling experiences complement versus contradict who they are as white, European American, individuals. This is where the rub begins. Many of our preservice students have not worked with children of color nor have they interacted with communities of color. So when you teach a multicultural course, instructors are usually starting at ground zero. Introducing concepts that students have heard but have not experienced or analyzed in depth is another problem. Honestly, many faculty don't understand concepts like diversity, equity or social justice, so how can they teach it to someone else.

Marie: My teacher candidates are idealistic and realistic young people who are impatient to bring about positive change in public schools. I believe that what they need the most is to develop critical tact to evaluate educational structures and teaching interactions to decide whether these promote or impede social justice education. With that foundation, they require methods and field experiences that support their ability to develop practices and dispositions that bring about students' academic excellence while simultaneously affirming and building on their home cultures.

What does culturally responsive pedagogy mean to you?

Esther: Over the years of working with preservice and in-service teachers, I've seen that it is too easy for novice educators to accept the majority narrative of "pulling oneself up by our bootstraps" or often referred to as meritocracy. This becomes translated to how Spanish-speaking families do not care about their children or are not interested in their child's education. Hogwash! Another caution I watch for is when teacher candidates fall into the "Blaming Game" and point to bilingual children, immigrant families, and cultural or linguistic differences for a lack of progress in academic standardized exams. As a teacher educator who teaches with a social justice lens, I have a strong radar when it comes to deficit thinking and assumptions. I don't permit these to be promoted in my university classroom, and I quickly and decisively redirect, correct, or if needed I point to the research that shows the fallacy of these erroneous ways of thinking about children and families. Instead, I direct my teacher candidates to consider the funds of knowledge (Gonzalez et al., 2005) and cultural wealth (Yosso, 2006) of their communities in order to see the brilliance and beauty of their students (Delpit, 1988) to affirm and build upon this knowledge (Nieto & Bode, 2012).

Ruth: I believe culturally responsive pedagogy has to do with teachers' attitudes and beliefs about their students; therefore, I would say that in addition to instructional methods, equally important is teachers examining their beliefs about their students and their ability to value and respect their cultural and linguistic background. Teachers ideally should be able to acknowledge that they may not know about their students' culture and therefore be open to learning from their students and through other means.

Lilly: Culturally responsive teaching, for me, is understanding the dynamic relationship between teachers' and students' backgrounds and beliefs, and finding ways to ensure that all students' educational needs are met. It requires a willingness to change one's preconceived notions about people.

Beth: I think culturally responsive pedagogy has failed to achieve what multiculturalism should have done. That is, both have failed to change how people of color are perceived, written about, taught, learn, etc. Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (Gay, 2010) or Culturally Responsive Teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1995) has never been fully adopted. The last 20 years, I have watched how issues surrounding cultural relevancy have been swept under the rug. No one is really implementing it in their classrooms. No one is really holding teachers accountable. We usually see knowledge of diversity as one assessment point on student teachers' field assessments. Is one data point enough for such a critical issue? Culturally responsive pedagogy has run its course in being an effective tool to advance the academic achievement of children of color.

Marie: I consider that part of culturally relevant teaching includes the competence to draw upon a robust, contemporary, theoretical foundation for learning in diverse schools. I believe that addressing deficit-based views and teacher dispositions is part of culturally relevant teaching from the perspective of teacher education.

Student preparation – analysis

Research supports the need for critically conscious teacher educators who understand equity, structural inequalities and disenfranchisement. Many teachers with these critical

perspectives happen to be teachers of color (Kohli, et al., 2019). However, the teaching workforce remains 80% white and female (Podolsky et al., 2016). In analyzing the "student preparation" narratives of these sojourners, they identified several themes: recruiting bilingual teachers, the qualities of preservice teachers and culturally responsive pedagogy.

One concern for sojourners is the recruitment and retention of Bilingual teacher education candidates who are proficient in both English and their heritage language. Non-native English speakers are challenged in terms of their self-esteem, academics, family issues, health, and passing standardized assessments. These stopgaps hold back Latinx from entering and staying in the teaching profession. Although research indicates that there is a growing number of teachers of color in the remaining 20%, the retention of teachers remains an area of concern (Podolsky et al., 2016).

The sojourners believe that preservice teachers need to develop critical tact, life experiences, know the politics of the profession, and expose themselves to diverse groups of people. Institutionally preservice teachers are bound by policies, practices, and a common educational system. However, many preservice teachers lack exposure to culturally and linguistically diverse children and families; this disadvantages preservice teachers in understanding the population they teach. The fault does not just lie with the preservice teachers, but many of their college instructors have much to learn about inclusion, diversity, and equity to name a few.

Culturally responsive pedagogy is an activist action that the sojourners engage in subtle but explicit ways. The sojourners work at redirecting preservice teachers' faulty thinking and assumptions about children of color. They want preservice teachers to value, acknowledge and understand culturally and linguistically diverse children. Culturally responsive pedagogy should be a prerequisite for any new teacher, but its impact is waning. This is a concern given that children of color will be in the majority by 2050 (Hussar & Bailey, 2013).

The problem

> It is about learning to see differently. It is an argument about seeing our work with youth and communities in ways that can help education researchers see ingenuity instead of ineptness and inability, to see resilience instead of deficit, and to imagine futures with youth from non-dominant communities instead of imposing failure (Gutiérrez et al., 2017, p. 30).

Many would say that there are more circumstances than problems in education broadly and teacher education specifically. This is far from the truth. As the dialogue continues so do the five women of color's concerns, heart-aches and will to push forward in academia. In this section, they discuss what they have learned, what they believe teachers need to know, and what has and hasn't changed in their work. They respond to the following structured questions as it relates to their work**:** What have we learned as educators in higher education; What is it that teachers need to know and What has changed and what has remained the same in education?

What have we learned as educators in higher education?

Esther: I remember a class I had in Berkeley where a peer was arguing that "we ALL have experienced success in school because we were sitting in a doctoral program class

at UC Berkeley." My breath was taken away and my heart pounded in my ears. *That's not true!* I spoke out and pointed out the grave assumption that this peer had made. He didn't know me. He didn't experience my life. He had no clue about the struggles I had to overcome as a high school dropout, teen mother, and young woman who left home at 16 years of age. Yes, I was at UCB, and to be honest, it was because a bilingual scholar saw something in me that wasn't reflected in a standardized test score. He saw the brilliance and beauty in me, which held promise for the future education of bilingual children and families. It takes educators who see the world with an equity lens, who *tend the fires of social justice,* and who understand that it is a collaborative process to move forward. We need to find others who see the world as we do AND who can cross cultural borders into academia to amplify diverse voices to be heard.

Marie: I know that there will always be too much work to be done and little infrastructure to do it—that I need to protect myself because the system can easily chew me up, spit me out, and go on to the next committed person. I've re-discovered that creative thinking in course and program design is essential to attempt to minimize the impact of bureaucracy on teacher education.

Lilly: I have learned that not every environment is supportive to African American women in higher education. The places where I have had to accommodate folks the least in terms of my blackness are those where I have been most successful.

Beth: Teacher education has been slow to change. Although we have discussed, published and pontificated about diversity and the impact of culture on learning, there seems to be little movement in these areas. The K-12 curriculum has not succeeded in better educating all children and youth. The inclusion of diverse groups of people in the curriculum has failed to make any measured mark. Infusing, visceral examples of culturally relevant pedagogy has not moved learning forward (Ladson-Billings, 1995). When is change coming?

Ruth: I've learned that training teachers is important and demanding work that can be very rewarding. At times, the work and having to address changes at the state, university and department level can be stressful due to the short timeframe in which changes need to be implemented, reports completed, syllabi updated, etc.

What is it that teachers need to know?

Esther: Teachers need to know that they are so important and needed in this world. Society and the public media often doesn't recognize teachers for the tremendous work they do. There is a lot of research that tells us that teachers need to know themselves, their biases, their world lens—in order to understand and appreciate their students' lives. That is the first step. Secondly, they need to understand that what they "do" matters. The act of creating a community of learners, fostering a positive climate, and engaging their students in curriculum and activities that promote inquiry and critical thinking matters to the children and youth in their classrooms.

Marie: I've confirmed that, like other students, teacher candidates flourish when their teachers take time to build relationships with them.

Lilly: Teachers need to know that their work is situated in a context in which learning is the one thing that should be consistent and should be happening to and through

everyone who is participating in the process. Teachers need to know their subject area, their students, and know that the work is never static. Teachers need to be settled with the idea that their students' experiences and backgrounds are not deficits to be corrected. Rather, the differences (and the careful and thoughtful discourse around differences) create inclusive and meaningful experiences in the classroom.

Beth: The preparation of teachers has deep meaning for me—as I am trying to help them not mess up some bodies brown skin. I am trying to help students see the world differently. I am trying to help them see me differently not through their biased lens. I got so I would begin classes by saying, "I am here to help you. I am here to help you." For some reason, this gets lost in a higher education setting. Students fail to see that I am there to help them.

Ruth: Teachers need to know their students. They also need knowledge about language and cultural diversity. Teachers need knowledge of the content they will be teaching, knowledge about pedagogy, and knowledge about the context in which they will be teaching (community, school district, school, classroom). Teachers need to be willing to be lifelong learners.

What has changed and what has remained the same in education?

Esther: In a negative view, I feel that Teacher Education has not changed much in the way the programs tend to follow an outdated banking approach to teaching. Moving toward a constructivist approach to teaching teachers is hard work, I believe teacher education programs avoid this. On a positive view, there is still the belief that education is a way to bring about social change and equity to underrepresented or marginalized populations. The stats, however, are not really showing this to be true. The narratives of youth who have been pushed out or who drop out point to the ineffective and unpleasant experiences they've had in school. But the vision and the belief remain. I just know that there appears to be hope in the idea that education can be a way out of poverty, and a way to empower individuals. In some ways, that is my story, BUT it's always been coupled with my family, people who have loved me, who believed in me, and who encouraged me. Education by itself is not enough.

Lilly: What has changed over the years is that there are fewer numbers of African American students on campus and the amount of funding available for student support services seems to have decreased in California. What has not changed is marginalization, the need for community, and proving that they (African American students) belong.

Beth: Very little has changed in teacher education. The future of public schooling is at great peril from oligarchs, philanthropists, liars and illusionists. The problem has always been that other people think they know what is best for the marginalized. Is it arrogance, aristocracy or just amazing? Things have not changed, because it is by design that the poor remain without, the marginalized remain on the edge and the lost stay blind. How do our children get to and stay in the promised land?

The problem – analysis

Research suggests that little has changed in teacher education. Sleeter (2017) argues that there is a chasm between teacher education programs that claim to teach social justice

and the continued reproduction of a majority white teacher labor market. Social justice continues to be inadequately addressed in the curriculum or by instructors. In analyzing "the problem" narratives of these sojourners, they identified two themes—teaching with an equity lens and the work.

Teachers must see the world with an equity lens. They need to know themselves, their biases, the world lens, and that what they do matters. Further, teachers need to build relationships with students, celebrate and appreciate student backgrounds, and continue to acquire knowledge throughout their lifetimes. The need for teachers to acquire and maintain an equity lens remains a problem that has not been resolved or solved.

Sojourners continue to be concerned about their work. The work environment remains unsupportive and this makes the work itself extremely difficult and in particular for African American women. The workload continues to be demanding and stifles their ability to do research.

The sojourners' stories exemplify their unique journeys in academia each as valid and wearied as the next. There is much work to be done. They seek to protect themselves in supportive and unsupportive environments (Sleeter, 2017). Overall, change is slow to come.

Conclusion

This essay of five women's interpretation of their work in higher education speaks to the challenges of being female scholars of color in academia (Jean-Marie, 2014; Niemann et al., 2020). The structured questions mapped each scholars' personal journey and interactions along the way. In The Work section, these women examined perceptions, contexts, motivations, identity formation, reflective practice and trends in their work. In the Student Preparation section, the women described the challenges of preparing students, public school teaching, culturally responsive pedagogy, and ways they accommodate. In The Problem section, the women discussed what they have learned, what they believe teachers need to know, and what has and hasn't changed in their work.

These sojourners belabor that society has failed to enact social justice or demand equity. Although recent events such as the pandemic of 2019 and the George Floyd movement bring hope, the future is still untold. Teacher preparation, as suggested by these sojourners, requires a social justice lens from the perspective of the instructor and student. Social justice is more than a calling; it is one solution to educating all.

The autoethnographic approach provided a lens into the work, lives and thoughts of women of color in academia (Nicol & Yee, 2017; Romero-Hall et al., 2018). Without these stories their experiences would be unknown. Like the work of Anzaldúa (1987), these sojourners negotiate the borderlands of their lives trying desperately to stay safe.

There is much work to be done in academia to support women of color who remain marginalized versus celebrated for their contributions. Although they remain sojourners of truth as it relates to their unique situations, these five women have charted forward despite the "isms" that bind them—despite their shadowed existence against the ivory

tower. Their stories are uniquely the same as many women of color in academia who remain voices for social justice yet voiceless in academia.

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