

Assignment 2: Critical Personal Biography of Schooling

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Introduction: Intersectionality Statement

This is Not America by Residente and Ibeyi



My name is Adriana Lucía Barranco Muñoz and I was born in Gunadule and Cueva territory in what is known today as Ciudad de Panamá. Me and my family’s ancestry can be traced back to the colonization of Panama, which means that I come from a very long line of mestizo people. That means that I am the descendant of the Indigenous people of Panama, of black slaves that were brought to the land by colonizers, and of Spanish conquistadores. Who I am as a person has been shaped by my experiences as a mestizo woman raised in a colonized country, as a queer woman raised in a Catholic house, and as an immigrant currently living on stolen land. All of this to say that there are many categories that are tangled and tied to my life and story, yet I chose to focus on ethnicity for this examination of my educational journey, since it's the one thing that constantly influences and reshapes my view on education. My culture, my language, my history, my whole being. In the following essay, I will be taking parts of my grandmother’s and mine’s educational stories, as well as aspects of my culture and ethnicity to critically analyze what led me to this career path and educational philosophy.

Growing up in Panama: Academic Expectations and Social Struggles

Hasta la raíz by Natalia Lafourcade



“Abuela, ¿te acuerdas de cómo era la escuela cuando estabas chiquita?”

“Sí, por su puesto. La primera escuela a la que fui estaba hecha de madera, era pequeña y tenía muchos estudiantes. Me acuerdo que era dura! Tenía que estudiar mucho.”

Translation:

“Grandma, can you remember what school was like when you were a little girl?”

“Yes, of course. The first school that I attended was made out of wood. It was tiny and had many students in it. I remember how demanding it was! I had to study a lot.”

Growing up in Latin America meant being raised with specific cultural, social, historical, and linguistic dimensions that affect how I, and many Latinx kids, view education and work (Phillips, Deleon, et al., 2022). When my grandmother was a little girl, she attended an underdeveloped elementary school in the countryside in which she was expected to excel so she could move to the capital, go to a good high school, and then a good university. When I was a little girl, I attended a private school in the capital in which I was expected to excel so that I could pursue a higher education of quality in or outside Panama. Generations may have passed but our societal views on education remained; it was and still is the responsibility of Latinx kids like me to study and work hard to better the country we live in. As Phillips and Deleon, et al., (2022) explained, “I think a Latina woman gives so much of herself because those are role dynamics that are set up culturally, but it’s really an uphill struggle. You’re trying to do everything and be everything for everyone. Then you come to be secondary... As a woman of color, you feel you must prove yourself even more” (p. 8), meaning that my grandmother and I were raised to be overachievers, to be fixers and providers, and to be perfectionists so that we could better the society we live in. We studied for others, not for ourselves. Even now knowing how the social and cultural expectations of my ethnicity have influenced my educational journey, I cannot rid myself of the desire to excel academically so that I can represent my people well, receive the best opportunities possible, and better the place where I came from in some way. As Brookefield (2017) states, “Culturally learned habits can’t be broken easily” (p. 15), meaning that my cultural and traditional habits are what made me desire for a better education and led me to the path I am now.

University Years: Immigration to Canada and Cultural Differences

Immigrants (We Get The Job Done) by Residente, Riz Ahmed, Snow Tha Product, K'naan



“Abuela, ¿usted fue a la universidad?”

“¡Claro, cómo no! Me gradué de biología y química con honores. La Universidad Nacional era muy demandante y todos los estudiantes eran brillantes. Yo tenía que ponerme las pilas.”

Translation:

“Grandma, did you go to a university?”

“But why, of course! I graduated in Biology and Chemistry with honors. The National University of Panama was so hard and every student was brilliant. I had to get my act together.”

When I was in high school, I made the decision to study education against the wishes of family members and school staff, which meant that I had to pursue a higher education in order to achieve my dream career. Yet, coming from a third world country that values education and labor but has a broken educational system meant receiving a poor higher education if I was to stay. So, a conflict between my culture’s expectations and my own ideals began; I could stay and do my best with what I got or go and start from scratch somewhere foreign to me. Against guilt and traditions, I opted for the latter, which meant being exposed to a different educational system that did not share my same values and traditions. Nonetheless, Canada is known as the country with the highest rate of immigrant students and for having an accommodating educational policy for education since 1980s, so I believed that integrating myself to the culture of the country through a university was the way to go (Volante et al., 2017). At first, classes were difficult and foreign to me since I did not think the same way other students that were born and raised here did. I did not think of how different a classroom in Canada would be given our cultural differences, as seen when Brookefield (2017) states that, “Structures and forces present in the wider society always intrude into the classroom. Classrooms are not limpid, tranquil, reflective eddies cut off from the river of social, cultural, and political life. They are contested arenas—whirlpools containing the contradictory crosscurrents of the struggles for material advantage and ideological legitimacy that exist in the world outside” (p. 10). Studying and taking classes in Canada felt hard at first because I was viewing my courses as unmovable and unaffected by other cultures or traditions, when in reality it is impossible for classes to not be driven or influenced by society or people. I was used to my culture’s way of teaching and not anybody else’s. Once I included myself as part of the culture of the classroom rather than forced myself to fit into what I believe was a set-in-stone culture, classes became better. Learning how to deal with different ideals and epistemologies unknowingly shaped the way that I viewed education and positively affected how I want my future classroom to be; a positive classroom environment that promotes a

mentality of inclusion rather than assimilation (Burns, 2002). A mix of every student, parent, staff, and teacher so that the culture of the classroom can become rich and accepting.

My Educational Journey/Conclusion: Representation and Culturally Diverse Classes

Patria (Motherland) by Rubén Blades



“Abuela, ¿me puede contar como era para usted ser profesora en Panamá?”

“Tenía 25 años cuando empecé a dar clases y era duro! Los estudiantes eran muy vivos y yo tenía que ponerme a la altura. También fue una época muy dura para todos los panameños. Casi que no dábamos clase, muy poco íbamos a la escuela por las revueltas. El 9 de enero de 1964, nos tocó a los profesores salir a la calle a defender la patria junto con nuestros estudiantes.”

Translation:

“Grandma, can you tell me what it was like to work as a teacher in Panama?”

“I was 25 years old when I first started and it was hard! My students were too clever, so I always had to come prepared for their questions. It was also a hard time for all Panamanians. Classes were postponed most of the time because of the riots. On January 9, 1964, we teachers had to go out and fight for our land alongside our students.”

All in all, my ethnicity is something that is deeply tied to every single aspect of my life and particularly, my education, which has shaped the way that I learned, the career that I chose, and the kind of teacher I want to be. All the teachings that I carry from my family and home country, along with my history and language, are all things that I am honored to carry with me through the culmination of my studies and into my future classroom; all things that I know have made me a stronger, better, and grateful person and teacher. In comparing the educational experiences of my grandmother to mine, I realize just how fortunate I was to learn at a time where I did not have to fight for an education, for democracy, and for freedom. My grandmother not only had to learn in strenuous circumstances, but also teach at times where life was hard and somber. The struggles and the gains of my people are all things that have taught and shaped me to appreciate the education that I have and

still am receiving, as well as the diverse education that I want to give my students. I know that in Canada, my ethnicity reduces me to a minority or a person that is often at a disadvantage given social and cultural differences (Burns, 2002), yet my ethnicity has positively influenced me to proudly take the label of a minority to be to be the representation many students did not have growing up. The teacher that honors the backgrounds, beliefs, and stories of her students, as well as takes pride in her own story. That is where my educational journey has and is still leading me to thanks to my background and culture.

References

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