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“The Day That Changed My Life, Again”: The Testimonio of a Latino DACamented Teacher

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Abstract This article, based on the *testimonio* of a Latino DACamented teacher, underscores the impacts and benefits of immigration policies for individuals and their communities. Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) has benefitted about 750,000 people; most have used the benefits to pursue higher education and to enter public service careers, including teaching and nursing. Mr. Juárez’s *testimonio* walks us through his educational trajectory and current role as an educator. This testimonio contributes to current debates and struggles demanding the new U.S. presidential administration to maintain DACA. As researchers, we urge students, educators, policymakers, and the incoming administration to listen to the testimonios of DACA beneficiaries prior to making hasty decisions that will have dire consequences for individuals, families, and the nation, as a whole.

Keywords DACA · DACamented teachers · Immigration · Testimonio

Introduction

On the sunny afternoon of June 15, 2012, President Barack Obama stood in the White House’s Rose Garden and serenely announced Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), an executive action providing a reprieve from deportation and authorization to work for qualifying undocumented youth and

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students (NILC 2014). In his announcement, he referred to undocumented youth and students, the primary beneficiaries of DACA, as “Americans in their heart, in their minds, in every single way but one: on paper” (Preston and Cushman 2012). Immediately, Janet Napolitano, then-US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary, listed five stipulations to qualify for DACA: (1) Proven physical presence in the United States and under 31 years of age on June 15, 2012; (2) Entry into the country before the age of 16; (3) Continuous residency in the United States since June 15, 2007; (4) Proof of school enrollment, high school graduation, GED completion, or honorable discharge from the armed forces; and (5) No convictions for felonies or pose threats to national security (Batalova and Mittelstadt 2012; Passel and López 2012). This announcement was warmly received, albeit with a critical eye as DACA did not provide a path to legal residency or citizenship, and as an executive order, its existence rested on the whims of the White House resident of turn. Nonetheless, out of the initial 1.76 million potential beneficiaries, close to 750,000 people have been approved for DACA since the Fall of 2012 when applications were first received (Batalova and Mittelstadt 2012; Passel and López 2012; U.S. C.I.S 2016).

President Obama issued DACA as a result of pressure exerted on him by activist undocumented youth and students organized in the DREAMers Movement (Nicholls 2013). In the Spring of 2012, in the middle of presidential campaigns, DREAM activist organizations launched a series of coordinated actions to pressure President Obama to pass some sort of relief for undocumented youth and students. The primary strategy of the DREAMers was to occupy President Obama’s campaign offices. The pressure placed on his campaign and his fear of losing the Latino vote if he did not take action forced his administration to issue the directive for deferred action. The direct action and advocacy campaigns of the DREAMers scored a victory for the undocumented immigrant rights movement.

The primary benefit of DACA is the authorization to work legally in the country. Findings from national studies on the impacts of DACA report that beneficiaries have experienced positive changes, primarily in improving their educational and employment prospects, and their personal and household financial situations (Gonzales et al. 2016; Patler et al. 2015; Pérez Huber et al. 2014). Upon their DACA approval, many began applying for admission to graduate programs and to careers from which they were previously barred due to their undocumented status. Medical schools, such as the Loyola University Chicago Stritch School of Medicine, changed their admission policy to actively recruit DACA beneficiaries that meet its admission requirements (Anaya et al. 2014; Polsley and Pixler 2014). School districts, such as the Denver Public Schools, and Teach For America, actively sought DACA beneficiaries to cover crucial teaching positions in areas with teacher shortages (Fernandez 2013; TFA 2013, 2014). In addressing teacher shortages and in seeking to diversify the teaching force, states such as New York and Nevada, changed their state policies regarding the issuance of professional certification and licenses to include the DACAmented (García 2016). Overall, recent research studies show that DACA has improved the quality of life for beneficiaries and their families (Jaimes Pérez 2014; Wong et al. 2015, 2016). Edwards and Ortega (2016) report that ending DACA would cost the U.S. gross domestic product (GDP) about \$433.4

billions over a ten-year period. The economic benefits of DACA, at the individual and social level, are enormous.

The Threat to DACA in the Age of Trump

On Wednesday, November 9, around 3 AM Eastern Time, Donald Trump stood behind a podium in the midst of “USA! USA! USA!” chants and announced that Hillary Clinton, the Democratic Party’s candidate, had called him a few minutes before, to concede. Through the evening of November 8, once it became evident that Donald Trump was ahead in the electoral count in key states, youth and students on university campuses throughout the country took to the streets chanting, “Not my president!” and “F*** Donald Trump!” With the sunrise, and throughout the week, high school and college students and other sectors of society repudiated the election results. On college campuses and social media, undocumented and DACA beneficiaries expressed concern as to what would happen to them since one of Trump’s key campaign rallying points was the attack on immigrants, particularly of Mexican descent. During his campaign, Trump had promised to “build a wall” between Mexico and the U.S. to be fully funded by the Mexican state, the mass deportation of undocumented immigrants, and the cancellation of DACA.

Trump’s election and the possibility that he will effectively cancel DACA within his first 100 days in office has prompted an immediate mobilization by the DACAdem and their allies through multiple sources, such as starting the #withDACA hashtag where beneficiaries list how they benefited from this executive action (Nevarez 2016; Rodriguez-Jimenez 2016). Another recent action in support of DACA was a letter signed by close to one thousand higher education professionals, including faculty, staff, and administrators, directed to Mr. Trump urging him to continue with the DACA program. Also, the President the University of California, and Chancellors of the California State University, and California Community Colleges systems also directed a letter to Trump urging to keep the DACA program in place (Napolitano et al. 2016). However, as of this writing, it is still unknown what Mr. Trump’s course of action will be in this regard. The Mexican–American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF) released a bilingual pamphlet detailing immigrant rights under a Trump presidency (MALDEF 2016). MALDEF’s message is to wait since it is still unclear what is to come and to remain informed. The Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA) and the National Immigration Law Center (NILC) are organizing with allies to defend DACA. Even though there are a lot of unknowns as of this writing in late 2016, what is clear is that many are afraid and confused as to the implications of canceling DACA and what that would mean for them as workers and as people residing in the United States.

This paper illustrates the promises and complexities in the struggle over DACA specifically, and undocumented immigrant rights, in general. We do so by featuring Mr. Juárez’s *testimonio* to underscore the impacts and benefits of immigration policies for individuals and their communities. In this case, Mr. Juárez, an

elementary school teacher, honored as a Champion of Change¹ by the White House and selected as his school's teacher of the year in 2015, narrates his educational trajectory and discusses the impact of policies directed to undocumented youth and students in the form of in-state tuition initiatives and DACA. Throughout his testimonio, Mr. Juárez points out days in which significant events changed the course of his educational, professional, and life trajectory, thus, the title of this testimonio-based paper.

Testimonios, like Mr. Juárez's, are real-life, first-person accounts that "bear witness" to significant events or experiences. In testimonios, participants critically reflect on personal experiences within a particular sociopolitical context (Delgado Bernal et al. 2012). They often are presented as novel-long oral narratives produced in print, told in the first person with the narrator as protagonist or witness of the narrated events, and have a sense of urgency for social justice in the telling of the story (Beverley 2000; Urrieta et al. 2015). This form gained prominence during the latter half of the twentieth century as a way for subaltern populations to publicly "testify" to the state-sponsored violence of authoritarian governments, particularly in Latin America (Beverley 1991). Most recently, this tradition has been used by researchers to examine the experiences of Latina/o students and teachers in the United States (Reyes and Curry Rodríguez 2012).

Recent events, like Brexit and Donald Trump's electoral victory, have signaled a surge of far-right nationalist political projects couched in the language of bigotry and xenophobia (The New Nationalism 2016). For some theorists, like Cornell West (2016) this surge signals a transition from American neoliberalism to a *new* political project grounded on an ideology of authoritarianism and neo-fascism under Trump. This transition presents special dangers for minoritized populations and immigrants, in particular. Accordingly, we believe that "urgency narratives" (Jara and Vidal 1986) about the experiences of minoritized populations, including the undocumented and DACA beneficiaries, are more important than ever. By listening to these testimonios we are set to get a better sense of the contemporary social, political, and economic world we live in. Emphasizing the perspectives of historically marginalized individuals and communities is not so much to "give them voice" but rather as a way "to facilitate the emergence of alternative perspectives and accounts" (Moya 2002, p. 169). It is our hope that sharing Mr. Juárez's testimonio will raise the consciousness of our readers, and invite them to be a public "jury" and act to redress injustice.

In what follows, Juárez's testimonio speaks for itself. Rather than break-up his "telling" by theme or topic, we use footnotes as needed to provide context and connections to the overall narrative. We conclude by providing commentary on Mr. Juárez's testimonio, our approach to testimonios as a method of research and struggle in the current context, and on our responsibility as researchers and

¹ The Champions of Change program is a White House initiative that honors and recognizes people and organizations creating change in their communities in an effort to "win the future" (White House 2015). On July 24, 2015, nine DACAmented teachers were honored as Champions of Change for their outstanding work as educators; Mr. Juárez was amongst this group. Interestingly, the Champions of Change event recognizing these DACAmented educators was held a few days after Donald Trump announced his presidential campaign along with anti-Mexican and anti-immigrant remarks (Peña 2015).

academics in standing with our students and colleagues, particularly those who might be in the crosshairs of the incoming administration and its supporters.

Mr. Juárez's Testimonio

I never knew how much I appreciated silence until I became a teacher. At the present moment, I find myself sitting in my classroom, the one place where everything revolves around me. Where I go, 28 sets of eyes follow. It is incredible to think that I find myself here at this moment.

My name is Mr. Juárez and I am an immigrant. I arrived to the state of Texas with my family on October 7th, 2004. I had the privilege of moving freely without a hassle through the Texas border. My family and I traveled with a visa and a passport; I vividly remember the moment when the border patrol agent came into the bus and held up my documents to verify it was me, a 14-year-old teenager that had not grasped the magnitude of THAT moment. 6 months later after my encounter with the green man² our permit to stay expired, and just a year after that my passport expired. It was a bittersweet moment because two things happened that day; I got my first cellphone and at the same time I became undocumented. But who cared, right? I was just excited that I finally had a cell phone.

My parents never talked to me about our status, but I knew that we weren't the same. We were different. I remember the feeling and it still haunts me today; for instance, simple things like going to the grocery store had to be carefully planned.³ The trick was to go after the ICE⁴ raids hit to avoid being spotted. Buses lined up outside the local Wal-Mart and other stores waiting to load up and ride away, tearing families apart, and crushing already broken dreams. We always had to keep a low profile no matter where we went or whom we interacted with. School in the States, or the "other side," was extremely different. The most shocking fact that brought mild relief to my parents was that public school was free here. Through my middle school years, I worked tirelessly to learn the new language. Resiliency and perseverance have always been my strengths; with the help of teachers I was able to achieve the success that many other students in my situation could not reach. Teachers realized that I wanted more than *just* an education. Since I arrived to the United States, I knew that I was going to work twice or three times as hard as others around me. By this point, students had already solidified their social groups and it was incredibly hard to break into them. There was something about being the ESL kid that was almost frowned upon by my peers. That was my motivation. I needed to prove to myself and others that the ESL kid was talented and well capable of

² The green man refers to the border patrol agent, "la migra", and their highly identifiable green uniforms. Green man is also used in popular culture to refer to "aliens".

³ Deportability refers to, "the possibility of deportation, the possibility of being removed from the space of the nation-state" (De Genova 2002, p. 439). For undocumented immigrants, the possibility of removal is always present.

⁴ ICE or Immigration and Customs Enforcement is the agency in the Department of Homeland Security primarily responsible for immigration enforcement and the deportation of undocumented immigrants.

performing in and outside of the classroom. I was not only representing myself, I was representing my family, who have always been my rock and motivation.

Fast track to senior year in high school. By this time, I had already built a positive reputation and I was taking 7 Advance Placement courses. By the end of the year, I was at the top of my class. I want to make sure that you, the reader, understands that the success I experienced in high school was not just handed to me. I, along with key teachers, worked extremely hard to get into the best public university in Texas. My status did not stop me, however, it remained partially hidden until the end of the year. There was one instance where people began to realize that I was not like them. Mr. Glover, then my physics teacher, did not allow me to go meet with some college representatives that came to meet with seniors at my high school. According to him, I was not worthy of it because I was an immigrant and he made sure the whole class knew it. If there was anything that was going to stop me, it was not going to be Mr. Glover. The college application process made me more aware of the disadvantages that my situation posed.

College as an Undocumented Student

I graduated with honors from high school in June 2nd, 2010 and in August of that same year I started at *The University of Texas at Austin*.⁵ Let me remind you of some basic facts. It has been only 6 years since I arrived to the country, my family is supportive and stable and by this point, I have already beaten so many odds. Undocumented male, low-income family, Latino.⁶ That is the perfect recipe to “fall through the cracks.” My success was everything *but* luck. It was sweat, tears, dedication, commitment, and resiliency. It was my drive to prove to my parents that they made the right decision when they dropped their lives in our home country and came to a place where they started from zero. I made it that far because of people that believed in me enough to push me and guided me. I made it that far because I believed in myself.

⁵ Mr. Juárez was admitted to UT Austin through Texas’s “Top 10% Rule,” a statute that guaranteed admission to Texas universities for students with grade point averages in the top 10% of their graduating class. Later the percentage was decreased to the top 7% which would account for 75% of students admitted to UT Austin starting in Fall 2010 (Mr. Juárez’s freshman year). The program was implemented through Texas House Bill 588 following the 1996 *Hopwood v Texas* decision, which prohibited the Texas universities from considering race in admissions and financial aid decisions (Cortes 2010).

⁶ Mr. Juárez’s specific reference to his undocumented status, social class, and gender identity in relation to his potential to “fall through the cracks” is significant. As Boehm (2012) points out, the creation of masculinity is “strongly tied” to migration (p. 75.) and, historically, working class Mexican men were considered threats, particularly to the sexual purity of white women (Kitch 2009, p. 98–99). These dehumanizing narratives about Latino men are at the root of the discourse of Mexicans as “criminals” and “rapists” that President Trump used to launch his campaign (Hee Lee 2015). Such “myths and mythmaking” about Mexican Americans (Valencia 2002) are part of what Latinos like Mr. Juárez must overcome in order to succeed in school and society.

Financial Aid

I knew that I was different because I could not apply for financial aid like everyone else at school. I could not request federal aid through FAFSA. I had to go through a lesser-known route and I had to figure out the ins and outs of it. As an undocumented student, I had to apply for TASFA, the *Texas Application for State Financial Aid*. Thankfully, I was able to request state funds, but I had to learn how to navigate the system by myself. The paper application had to be mailed in and I was not entirely sure I had done it right, but I crossed my fingers and sent it.

Let me walk you through my experience. As a soon-to-be high school undocumented graduate, I had no idea how to navigate the system. Neither one of my parents graduated from high school so they were not able to advise me or support me in that way. All my father did was sign papers and give me words of encouragement. Being undocumented also means not having a social security number so my father had to be creative about finding a job to sustain us. He worked for my uncle and received cash payments every week. That means that I could not provide any tax return we could use to turn in along with my financial aid application. After extensive phone calls and talking to many university representatives, I found out that a family like mine that lived well below the poverty line did not have to provide a copy of the tax return with the application. I heard back from various financial aid offices including the University of Texas at Arlington, the University of Texas at Dallas, Brookhaven College, and the University of Texas at Austin (UT Austin). Brookhaven, a community college in Dallas, offered me the Rising Star scholarship that paid for tuition and fees for two years. UT Austin offered me \$12,000 in grants and loans, enough to pay for one year there. To be completely honest, I was just ecstatic that they deemed me worthy enough to even review my application. At this point, I gambled with my future, said a few prayers, and committed to going to UT Austin.

Every time I meet someone and I reach a certain level of comfort with them I tend to disclose my situation. There is no possible way to share my life story without mentioning my journey through the educational/legal system. Typically, people provide baffled responses when they find out I am undocumented: “*Wait, what? So how did you get into college?*” The lack of information leads many to believe that undocumented students do not have the opportunity to get into higher education. Even today, I meet students and parents that believe this misconception. Others just are not informed enough to know of all the resources and opportunities available for them. Automatically, this causes thousands of undocumented high school graduates to not even attempt to go to college. Public high schools are not playing their part in education and supporting undocumented students *and their parents* about the access to higher education.

In-State Tuition

My journey through higher education continued just a week before the beginning of my freshman year in college. This was when I found out about a single piece of Texas legislation that was my passport to a new world. In Texas, if you attend a high

school for three consecutive years and graduate from it, you are eligible to pay in-state tuition. When I registered for college courses, I was surprised to find out that I was going to pay the international student rate. Nobody told me I was going to run into this so I had to find a solution to this problem. I only had \$12 grand and that would not even cover the tuition for one semester. My father and I went all over campus and finally ended up at the International Office where I met a patient and understanding financial advisor that had me sign an affidavit. By signing the affidavit, I pledged to become a legal US resident as soon as federal law allowed it. I became a “1403 student.” House Bill 1403,⁷ signed into law by former Governor Rick Perry, continues to be a powerful and life-changing legislation for Texas undocumented high school graduates. The absence of HB 1403 would cause unimaginable disaster; without the law, I would not have been able to pay in-state tuition and instead pay the international student rate. That would have been, and still is, impossible for me to pay. When signed into law back in 2001, HB 1403 was expected to benefit 735 students. By 2013, about 25,000 students benefited from it (Bernstein 2015).⁸ Undocumented students like myself who seek to continue making our country a better place use this law to the advantage of everyone. We became the “skilled workers” that the U.S. constantly seeks and we became assets. The money that the state invests in us is quickly returned when we join the workforce and pay income taxes and pitch into social security funds.⁹

Student Loans

I mentioned that it was a gamble when I made the decision to go to UT Austin. I went there knowing fully well that I would not be able to use my degree when I graduated. Think about it this way: you’re investing time and money into building a home knowing that you might not be able to live in it when you finish it. I paid in-state tuition and I had to take out a loan to make up the difference left to pay for

⁷ The 77th Texas State Legislature that met in 2001 signed House Bill 1403 (HB 1403), granting undocumented students access to in-state tuition. Texas was the first state to adopt an in-state residency tuition policy for undocumented students. HB 1403 changed section 54.052 of the state’s Education Code to clearly define residence status for purposes of tuition and fees in higher education (Texas Statutes 2015). Many felt that the determination of resident status was ambiguous and in 2005 Senate Bill 1528 (SB 1528) was passed to clarify this statute because U.S. citizens born in Texas but that had lived in other states for a period of time made claims to Texas residency for the purpose of paying in-state tuition in universities and colleges in the state. SB 1528 further amended the Education Code to clarify the meaning of “Texas resident” and to set limits to such claim; it also included a stipulation for undocumented students to sign an affidavit stating that they will become permanent and legal residents of the country as soon as they became eligible to do so (Texas Statutes 2015). As Texas residents, undocumented students gained access to some forms of state financial assistance, such as grants, to cover tuition and fees in all state institutions of higher education.

⁸ According to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 24,770 non-citizen resident students out of 1,303,684 total students (1.9% of total students) paid in-state tuition under HB 1403 in 2013. This includes Texas public universities, public community, technical and state colleges, and public health related institutions (Bernstein 2015).

⁹ Mr. Juárez’s statement reflects a common misunderstanding that undocumented immigrants do not contribute social security. In 2010, Social Security Administration estimated that undocumented workers and their employer generated about \$13 billion in payroll taxes. In 2013, this same group contributed about \$12 billion in social security taxes (Campbell 2016).

housing at UT. I had already signed an affidavit to become “legal” as soon as I could and now I had to find a way to get a loan. At this point, I am 18 years old, no social security number and no credit history. My parents do not have a social security number either nor credit history so they could not help me as co-signers. I had to be very creative because I could not get a loan on my own. The stress of the situation definitely caused me to have a very rocky freshman year. I tried reaching out to previous teachers to help me out, family friends, and acquaintances without much success. Finding a co-signer is not an easy feat—as a co-signer you are agreeing to pay the rest of the loan in case the main borrower defaults on it. If I could not get a loan on my own, I could not pay for housing. It created a domino effect of stressful situations. Finally, one of my uncles was approved right before the payment on my dorm was due. The financial stress that comes to people in my situation truly takes a toll. We are just trying to get an education! I cannot depend on my parents to pay for my tuition since they lived “paycheck to paycheck” and the only support they could offer me was moral and emotional. An ideal way to support undocumented college students is to provide specific financial services that understand the unique hardship from being undocumented and not having an established credit history.

The first step is getting into college, the second step is staying in college, and the final step is graduating from college. Through my persistence and dedication to graduate in 4 years, I was able to make it every year. It was bittersweet. I had the urgency to graduate as soon as I could to start working and help my parents in any way I could. I can say with confidence that, as undocumented immigrants, the last thought in our mind is to go out and “take people’s jobs”.¹⁰ Every year I finished, I knew I was getting closer to my goal of graduating. The first two years were particularly hard primarily because my status haunted me every day. Unfortunate events happened on the UT campus that made me feel unsafe. I feared for my family and myself after I spoke out against racist theme parties hosted by sororities and fraternities. Sadly, it is just one of those things that occur, cause uproar and disbelief, and then people forget about them—until they happen again. These events made me realize the value and unity of minority groups at the university.¹¹ Without this, I am sure I would not have completed step two of my journey.

¹⁰ Here Mr. Juárez is referencing the common misconception that undocumented immigrants take the jobs of documented U.S. workers. However, a recent analysis of Census data by the Urban Institute found that foreign-born workers without a high school diploma perform different jobs (e.g. in agriculture, construction, etc.) than native born individuals who are overrepresented in jobs in the service industry and low-level office work (Enchautegui 2015).

¹¹ Mr. Juárez is referencing a series of high-profile racist nativist (Pérez Huber 2009) events that occurred at UT Austin during his time as a student. These events included “Mexican” and “Border Patrol” themed parties put on by sororities and fraternities and a “Catch and Illegal Immigrant” “game” sponsored by the Young Conservatives student group. After he was quoted denouncing one of these events in the student newspaper, Mr. Juárez became the target of online harassment and attacks.

DACA: The Day That Changed My Life, Again

I do not believe that I took somebody's spot at the University of Texas. The reason I made it there was because I was more qualified and worked harder for it than someone else that did not get accepted.¹² I officially declared my major to bilingual education in the fall of 2011; by this point, I was still uncertain about my future. Do I continue? Is this worth it? I constantly asked myself. I knew I wanted to be a teacher and I knew that I would not be able to do it at the end. It was not until months later that my situation changed for the best. The single moment that changed the course of my life for the first time was when I came to the United States. My life changed again on June 15, 2012 when President Barack Obama got on TV and announced Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), an executive order that allowed people like myself to get a social security number, a work permit, and gave me temporary immunity from deportation.

Once I received my work permit, I went to the social security administration office and eventually got my driver's license. For years I was driving without a license because I needed to; it was a necessary risk and I was willing to expose myself in that manner. By this time, I was a Junior in college and now that I had a social security number and I could work legally, I did everything I could to find a part-time job on campus to help my parents and myself. I had the luxury of having family that was able to financially support me at this point. However, I needed to pitch in, too. I never once worked illegally; I never took somebody else's social security number. The reality is that undocumented people like myself want to do things the right way because we want to play by the rules. We have a potential future here in the United States and we do not want to risk that by committing grave offenses. I received my work authorization in December 2012 and by February of the following year I already had my first job at the College of Communications at UT Austin.

Deferred Action opened the door that we had been anticipating and hoping for such a long time. For me, DACA came at a perfect time; it was what I needed because I was ready to soar in many aspects. Even before DACA, I did not let my status stop me and I constantly sought ways to progress. Even though I have been undocumented for most of my life in the U.S., I continuously try to excel at everything I do. I do not just dream about my goals, I try my best to accomplish them. DACA gave me the legal path, the documentation, to be able to do this.

¹² In 2010, 75% of incoming freshmen (including Mr. Juárez) at the University of Texas were admitted under the school's "Top 10%" rule that grants automatic admission to students at the top of their high school class. That year, however, the students admitted under this rule were actually in the top 7% of their graduating class. The remaining 25% of admitted students went through a "holistic review" that considers multiple factors, including race and ethnicity, extracurricular activities, grades, test scores, etc. In 2013 the U.S. Supreme Court heard *Fisher v University Texas*, a high profile challenge to affirmative action where the plaintiff, Abigail Fisher, claimed that UT Austin had offered admission to racial and ethnic minority students who were less qualified at her expense. In fact, the university denied admission to 168 Black and Latino students with grades as good or better than Fisher's in the year that she applied (Hannah-Jones 2016). Although Mr. Juárez's grade point average was high enough to grant automatic admission, affirmative action challenges like the *Fisher* case are often premised on the assumption that minority students are fundamentally less qualified than white students (Guinier 2015).

While I actively participated in my teacher preparation field experiences, my background as an undocumented immigrant gave me a sharp advantage in the classroom. Being undocumented in a teacher certification program helped me see issues through a more complex lens. Up until today, I use my status as motivation for my students and their parents. I am able to easily navigate between two worlds. The first world is defined by my undocumented immigrant experience, and the second is the world that continues to be shaped by my experiences as a college-educated immigrant. Having had the access to a college education has armed me with a plethora of resources that I now share with my students' families and the community around my school. My student teaching experience included working with a pre-kindergarten class for an entire year. While working with the parents I was able to connect with them at a more meaningful level because I disclosed my status and, in turn, they felt more comfortable to do the same. I think that this is a common trend with people like myself because *DACA makes us feel more protected and valued*. It is incredible when I see many brave souls standing on the front lines, lobbying, and constantly pressuring legislators to do what is right for our community. I take a very different approach and instead focus on educating my students and their families.

My immigrant experience is extremely helpful when getting the parents involved at school and in their student's academic life. Parents are able to see in person the power of a good teacher and the effect that it has on a student. Classroom discussions are very analytical and include social issues because these students are aware of everything. I teach in a bilingual classroom and all of my students are emergent bilingual students. Our upbringings are almost identical. They live in Latino households where Spanish is the dominant language. TV, radio and reading materials are in Spanish. Every evening, these kids go home, have dinner, do their homework, and around 7 or 8 pm they sit down in their living room, usually with mom, and watch telenovelas. After these telenovelas are over, the news begins and they are exposed to so many things through these news channels. Lately, the coverage has revolved around the presidential race and every day they ask if what Trump says is true. More often than I'd like to, students ask me if their families are safe because of something the man said. It has gotten to the point that they worry for me because they know that I am one of those immigrants that would have to leave the country if Mr. Trump carries through with his campaign promises. I worry that my students might be the victims of hateful rhetoric and oppressive acts because some are starting to see that it is okay in the current context to say these kinds of comments and make certain actions. I also worry that students within our district might become the perpetrators of hateful acts. I worry that they are starting to think about it, that a hateful seed has been planted.

My first-hand immigrant experiences give me an advantage in the bilingual education classroom. This is not to say that anyone with an immigrant experience or from a minority group could be a successful teacher, this could be accomplished with the right teacher preparation program. In a place like Texas where the Latino population maintains a steady growth, it is imperative that we have prepared teachers in our classrooms. I feel like I can speak on behalf of those of us that share the same conditions; we are such important assets to our student's life because we

understand them and we are able to provide transformative learning experiences. To provide a more relevant perspective I share the following story. When I arrived to the United States back in 2004 we did not have anything but the clothes in our suitcase. Our family had to rebuild from zero and find the resources through local community groups and churches. We slept on the floor and ate on a makeshift table for months because at that time a bed and a table just were not a priority. We approached a local church and they donated to us a bed, sofas, a table, microwave, and many other essential kitchen and living room tools. This would have taken us many months to obtain on our own; however, it was the good hearts of people that gave us the support we desperately needed. Last year, I received a student from Mexico. Very similar story as mine just that she was a few years younger than me at the time. She was a bright student but I noticed that she struggled to stay awake and appeared tired often. I met with her family and we talked for a whole evening on a Sunday. They were hesitant to ask for help because they knew that they would eventually get what they desperately needed. It is hard to ask for help. They were also sleeping on the floor; they did not have couches or a table. I saw myself in my student because I lived what she was going through. After the father finally asked for help, I reached out to a local church and within days the family had a fully furnished apartment. We understand the struggles that immigrant families in Texas schools face today. We are not hesitant to lend a hand where and when it is needed. I would not have been able to do this if it wasn't for the Texas DREAM Act and DACA, it just would not be possible.

Now, I am a college graduate, Latino, male, and a bilingual education teacher. Oh, how the tables turned! Once I graduated from college, these qualities became my best allies.¹³ There is a shortage of bilingual teachers in Texas, and there is an even larger scarcity of male bilingual teachers. I will not tell you that it was hard to find a job because it was not. District after district tried to recruit me. Teach for America¹⁴ constantly requested individual meetings with me in an attempt to recruit me in furthering the goal of diversifying their corps. The opportunities that DACA has provided me, and other beneficiaries, are incredible and I benefit from them

¹³ Contrary to deficit notions of Latino men and masculinity (See Mirandé 1997), evidence suggests that students of all races have more positive perceptions of teachers of color (Cherng and Halpin 2016) and that male teachers of color emphasize culturally responsive approaches to pedagogy (Lynn 2006). However, in a report on racial diversity in the teacher workforce, the Department of Education (2016) noted that only 8% of the teaching force is Latino while 24% of the total U.S. student population self-identified as such. It is reported that Latino male teachers comprise 2% of the total U.S. teacher force (Lara and Franquiz 2015; Turner 2017). Given this context, Mr. Juárez's background, skills, and disposition as Latino, male, bilingual education teacher grounded in his community make him a true asset to the teaching workforce. Not only would his presence in the classroom diversify the teaching force but also ensure that students have access to a teacher that understands their experiences and cultural background.

¹⁴ Teach For America, in its quest to diversify its teaching corps, is at the forefront of recruitment, preparation, and placement of DACA beneficiaries as teachers. As a way to increase its numbers of Latina/o and DACA beneficiaries, TFA has allied with Latina/o and undocumented youth and student advocacy organization with a national presence, such as United We Dream, the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), and the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute (CHCI) (García, under review; TFA 2014). Teach For America reported that, as of the 2016–2017 school year, it has placed 146 DACA beneficiaries as teachers in school districts throughout the country (Cramer 2016).

every day. We want to bring good to the United States because this is our country. We had to leave our first home for various reasons, some more serious than others. DACA has been life-changing, however, it is only a temporary solution. The coin is still in the air and I am uncertain about my future once more because of the outcome of the presidential election. I made a commitment to my family, my students, and myself, that I will be here for years to come and I cannot idly wait to see what happens. I will continue to provide resources and education to my community, and I will educate my students about the issues that directly affect us. I will be that bridge that constantly connects the two worlds and I will be doing this with everyone's best interest in mind.

Hope After the Elections

The week of the Presidential election was the hardest week of my teaching career. Wednesday was unexpectedly hard. It was tough because of my direct connection to the outcome of the election. It was tough because of my family; I found it challenging to hear their questions and their concerns and not being able to give a direct answer. "So what's next?" it was daunting to even think about it.

I went to sleep on Tuesday night with the hope that I would come up with an answer by Wednesday morning. *An answer for myself but most importantly, an answer for my students.* I woke up on Wednesday not knowing what to say. There was an editorial in the Huffington Post that someone forwarded to me that morning and it gave me key points to discuss with my students. When I picked up my 5th graders from the cafeteria, our looks crossed and we remained silent; it was a deafening silence. It was charged with emotions, with concern.

I felt, and still feel, an incredible amount of responsibility for my family, my students, and their families. This responsibility comes not only from being a teacher, but it also comes from being involved in groups such as Justice For Our Neighbors (JFON), and from being part of other respected organizations. *People look up to me, they seek me for answers.* This makes it incredibly hard because I don't have any clear answers yet as to what is going happen in the years ahead.

I talked to my students about the outcome of the elections. I've given talks before. I've spoken in front of large crowds. Standing in front of my 5th graders and talking to them on Wednesday morning was the hardest speech I have ever given. However, it was needed. My students needed reassurance; they needed to hear it from me that we will be okay. In the face of adversity, humans depend on each other to work together and be resilient together. Talking to them was especially challenging because *I was not okay.* Although I knew that my words were not empty, it was hard to get in front of them and put on a brave face. We mourned together. It was heart-breaking to see them cry out of fear. The uncertainty poses a challenge that many of us are still trying to understand. However, we remained hopeful. We unified and we agreed that we must depend on each other and push each other to move forward, together. We will love each other, treat each other with respect. We will speak out when we hear something we don't agree with. We will

do this with respect and dignity. We will remain true to our values and beliefs. We agreed to do all of that. Hope dies last.

I cannot give up. People like you and me cannot give up. Too many individuals look up to us and hold us high with respect. We must show that we are resilient. We need to demonstrate what that looks like because many people don't know how to. The moment that we break, they will break, too. The moment that we show hopelessness, they will lose hope, too. We cannot let that happen. They will give up, too.

Executive actions, like DACA, are in danger by the eminent threat of the new administration. I am able to be in front of my students every day because of it. It sounds crazy to even say this but I have two years to figure this out. My life has been ruled by two-year intervals since 2012 and, although I am thankful for the opportunity to work every day, it weighs heavy on my conscience. I must keep teaching. I must remain in the classroom because I am incredibly committed to my school, my students, and their families. My job and my future are at jeopardy *in my country*. I will remain fighting and I will continue sharing my story because it matters. This election cycle made some damage and it is time for us to begin the healing process. I am doing my part in the classroom, one pencil at a time.

Discussion and Conclusion

Mr. Juárez's testimonio is powerful and speaks directly to what is at stake for the roughly 750,000 DACA beneficiaries who find their ability to pursue higher education and careers under threat. In this section, we comment briefly on our choice of *testimonio* as a method of research to convey Mr. Juárez's story, on our own (García and Bybee) responsibilities as researcher *interlocutores*, and end with a call to preserve DACA and create permanent pathways to citizenship.

Testimonio as Method and Our Approach as Researchers and Interlocutors

As research method, the use of testimonios brings to mind Gloria Anzaldúa's call to "rewrite history using race, class, gender and ethnicity as categories of analysis, theories that cross borders, that blur boundaries" to create "new kinds of theories with new theorizing methods" (1990, p. xxv–xxvi). Testimonios are also useful for creating knowledge and theories based on personal experiences, and highlight perspectives of marginalized people which are often silenced and obscured by the academy and society (Latina Feminist Group 2001). Postcolonial and indigenous scholars have long pointed out the connection between western research methodologies and the white supremacist colonial project (Chilisa 2011; Tuhiwai Smith 2012). Testimonio speaks back to the authority of objectivist research paradigms by displacing the writer or researcher with the narrator who speaks from experience (Yúdice 1991). In the process of producing a testimonio, the researcher functions as a tool for the narrator to access an audience that might not listen to him/her because

of “the conditions of subalternity to which the testimonio bears witness” (Beverley 2000, p. 556). These stories center the voice of the narrator by maintaining the first person pronoun “I” in the printed narrative to convey the urgency of telling the story. Testimonios cannot be “requested” by field researchers in the first instance, but emerge from a relationship of trust and *confianza* between the teller and the listener and should be viewed as a “gift” (Urrieta et al. 2015 p. 52). Testimonios invite us to consider epistemological and axiological stances that speak to reality and research ethics in relational ways (Chilisa 2011; Wilson 2008).

In this collaborative paper, the relationship between the testimonialista (Mr. Juárez) and the researchers/interlocutors (García and Bybee) extends back several years. As graduate students, García and Bybee developed overlapping relationships of *confianza* with each other and with Mr. Juárez while the latter was a bilingual pre-service teacher at The University of Texas at Austin (UT). Through separate qualitative dissertation studies with Latina/o Chicana/o pre-and in-service teachers, Bybee (see 2015) and García (see 2016) each conducted many hours of interviews and observations with Mr. Juárez as a key informant and collaborator. Through this process, we found that, in spite of our different racial, class, and migration trajectories we all shared some similar experiences growing up attending predominantly Latino schools in working class communities (See Bybee 2015), and navigating predominantly white institutions (PWI's) of higher education.

As researchers committed to social justice, García and Bybee each draw from the notion of “relational accountability,” which Wilson (2008) describes as an approach to all aspects of research (topics, methods of data collection, analysis and presentation of data, etc.) from the perspective of accountability toward all of our relations (p. 97). Approaching our work with a sense of relational accountability meant being aware of the way that all of our relationships (to people, communities, ideas, etc.) are implicated in our research and required adopting approaches that are reciprocal, ethical and beneficial to all our relations. As researchers, this meant forming relationships that extended beyond simply “building trust” or “getting to know” participants to forming friendships and mentoring relationships with each of our collaborators as they finished their coursework, matured into new teachers, and as some considered alternate paths to graduate school.

In the case of Mr. Juárez, relational accountability meant supporting his public activism in response to on-campus racist nativism at the University of Texas (See Pérez Huber 2009), and collaborating with him in presenting his testimonio at an academic conference and in research publications. Though García and Bybee played the role of interlocutores and Mr. Juárez as *testimonialista*, we drew from the notion of testimonio as a co-created act (Prieto and Villenas 2012; Urrieta and Villenas 2013) and participated in three online video chats where we shared our personal, professional, and research trajectories. In these sessions, we re-shared and discussed the transcribed testimonios that Mr. Juárez had shared over several years as well as other written research products and academic literature on testimonio and DACamented students. Through this process we decided on a guiding question that could inform Mr. Juárez's testimonio addressed to policy makers: *1.) As you reflect on your experiences in higher education, teacher training, and making the transition to the K-12 classroom, what are some things that you would like*

policymakers to know about the experience of being an undocumented college student and a DACAmented classroom teacher? Mr. Juárez's testimonio above responds directly to this question and was intentionally presented with a brief introduction and minimal editing to foreground the importance of his story. Mr. Juárez was actively involved throughout the writing of this paper, including adding a reflection he had written for the JFON newsletter on his actions the day after the election.

Preserving and Building on the Strengths of the DACAmented: A Call To Action

“Higher education should be open to all, not just an elite few. It must be responsive to the needs of our growing and changing population, and it must continue to push the envelope of excellence and innovation. That growing and changing population includes children of undocumented workers, young boys and girls that we serve in our public schools because it is the right thing to do. I believe it is time they get the same treatment in our colleges and universities.” -Governor Rick Perry, June 22, 2001.

The above statement, issued 15 years ago by former Texas governor and Republican presidential candidate Rick Perry, seems a far cry from Mr. Trump's present rhetoric about building a wall with Mexico, canceling executive actions like DACA, and summarily deporting millions of undocumented immigrants (Helm-camp and Cooper 2013; Desjardins and Boyd 2016). Governor Perry's statement, shared when he signed HB 1403 to provide in-state tuition for undocumented students, speaks to the acknowledgment from actors across the political spectrum about the valuable assets that undocumented immigrants, particularly youth and students, contribute to our schools and society. However, in stark contrast, over the last few years there has been a surge that continues and expands on nativist and anti-immigrant discourses that have sought to increase the militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border, restrict access of the undocumented to basic rights and services as well as to dehumanize them. In short, the narrative of the “Latino threat” (Chavez 2008) that constructs immigrants, especially Mexicans, as an invading horde that challenges the well-being of the nation has become hegemonic. It is imperative that as researchers and educators we amplify the voices of those that are poised to lose the most in the current moment, particularly undocumented immigrants and Muslim communities.

In its fundamental humanity, Mr. Juárez's testimonio stands as a rebuke to Trump and his supporters' discourse of Mexican immigrants as “criminals” and “not the right people” that are parasitic and have nothing to contribute to the United States. Rather, Mr. Juárez's testimonio demonstrates breathtaking resilience, one of the most lauded values of the American meritocratic ideology, in overcoming a number of obstacles to be what he is today: a successful and award-winning fifth-grade bilingual educator. These include obstacles related to gaining admittance to the premier university in the state of Texas, seeking funding to pay for housing and

tuition, navigating a racially hostile campus environment, and the ability to actually use his degree upon graduation. Reflecting on his trajectory also reveals the myriad ways his path could have been (and still can) be cut short by changes in the current political climate. Policies like the Texas Top 10% Program, HB 1403, and DACA are necessary but limited solutions for beneficiaries. While we are encouraged by some indications of renewed bipartisan push to protect undocumented students and youth (Smilowitz 2016), we believe continuing the legal protections of DACA and creating permanent pathways to citizenship are urgently important.

Mr. Juárez's testimonio also illustrates the range of benefits to having teachers with diverse experiences teaching an increasingly diverse student population. Colleges and Schools of Education should be at the forefront of recruiting Latina/o and DACAmented pre-service teachers. Teachers in low-performing schools serving predominantly minority students have an advantage in the classroom due to the shared experiences with these students. These experiences directly benefit and positively impact the student–teacher relationship, which has been proven to have positive effects in student performance and in their development of positive orientations towards education (Fee 2010; Quiocho and Rios 2001; Valenzuela 1999). Immigrant teachers might be best positioned in serving immigrant and diverse students because of their affinity with language and cultural practices as well as the experience of migration and adjustment to a new country (Adair 2011; Adair et al. 2012; Bascia and Thiessen 2000). In his testimonio, Mr. Juárez alludes, and García (2016) points out in his work, that organizations like Teach For America are at the forefront of recruiting, preparing, placing, and supporting a culturally diverse teaching force that includes DACA beneficiaries. Schools and Colleges of Education need to increase their efforts to recruit more Latina/o and DACAmented students to diversify the teaching profession and to prepare future educators using an ecological model that takes into consideration sociocultural influences and contextual factors that directly impact developmental and learning milestones (Valenzuela 2016). Mr. Juárez's orientation to teaching and his strong commitment to ensuring the well-being of his students and community are due, in part, to his participation in a teacher preparation program that emphasized the sociocultural contextual factors at play in the education of minority and low-income students. Accordingly, we call upon university-based teacher preparation programs to foster the assets of students like Mr. Juárez through specific and tailored recruitment and retention strategies for individuals with DACA.

We applaud current efforts to create “sanctuary campuses” across the nation (Najmabadi 2016), however, these efforts still fall short as most of these are symbolic. Olivas (2016), a distinguished professor of law at the University of Houston, warns that the term “sanctuary” has no legal meaning and might present problems of implementation. The establishment of sanctuary campuses also presents a challenge for public universities that heavily depend on federal funding. Needless to say, efforts to establish sanctuary campuses and cities in Texas, whether for symbolic purposes or in good faith for implementation, have been halted by Governor by threatening cuts to funding to any higher education institution or municipality that declares its intention to not cooperate with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) (Grissom 2016; Haurwitz 2016; Redden 2016). These

efforts presently pose a challenge in an already hostile environment and add to the divisiveness and lack of support in states such as Texas. Symbolic actions are important to communicate to the most vulnerable that local governments and educational institutions that they are in fact welcomed and supported within the limits of those spaces. We support these efforts, however, as undocumented, DACAmented, educators, researchers, and allies, we must also join organized efforts to first, defend DACA, and secondly, to push for comprehensive immigration reform. It is our hope that presenting this testimonio reveals the urgency of preserving Deferred Action and creating pathways to legal residency and citizenship, of improving our policy and institutional response to DACAmented students and teachers, and of the incredible resource that teachers like Mr. Juárez are to our schools and society.

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