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Latina/o Educational Leadership: Testimonios from the Field

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Editors’ Message

We are excited to bring you the 2016 special theme issue, “Latino/a Educational Leadership: Testimonios from the Field.” The guest editors, Dr. Rebeca Burciaga and Dr. Gloria Rodriguez, are highly regarded in their field, and we are delighted that they succeeded in putting together a rich, nuanced issue. While the topic and team for this special theme issue was decided long before the results of the U.S. Presidential election were known, we believe that testimonios and their power—the personal witnessing of lived experiences—are needed even more today, given our country’s political climate. More of us in academia should consider the use of testimonio in our research as it captures powerful stories of resistance and creativity that other methodologies do not. Again, the AMAE Journal is proud to support work that takes us to the core of what many Latinx school communities are experiencing nationwide. This special issue includes an introduction, seven featured articles, two poems, and a book review.

Please enjoy this excellent scholarship!

Juntos logramos más,

Patricia Sánchez, Co-Editor
Antonio J. Camacho, Co-Editor
Our schools’ growing Latino population requires a drastic shift in how we approach leadership to reflect these changing demographics. When Latina/o students have the lowest levels of educational attainment at every stage of the educational pipeline (Covarrubias, 2011), it is imperative that we question whether we are doing enough to address this crisis. Time and again, research has demonstrated how these torrential leakages in the educational pipeline for Latina/o students are often perpetuated by unequal resource allocation (Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Rodríguez & Rolle, 2007; Solórzano, Ledesma, Pérez, Burciaga, & Ornelas, 2003; Solórzano & Yosso, 2000). While these outcomes are often mistakenly attributed to Latino families’ lack of caring about education (Valencia & Black, 2002; Valencia & Solórzano, 1997), scholars have demonstrated that families and communities play an essential role in students’ educational and occupational aspirations (Gándara, 1995; Solórzano, 1986). If we are serious about addressing the needs and strengths represented by the increased presence of Latina/o students, these aspirations must be cultivated—and realized—through the engagement of educational leaders who are committed activists for social change (Guajardo, 2009; Méndez-Morse, Murakami, Byrne Jiménez, & Hernandez, 2015; Rodríguez & Alaniz, 2011; Rodríguez, Martinez, & Valle, 2015) that recognize the community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) that is already present in the communities they serve. The limited notions of Latina/o educational leadership in the field of education have misguided institutions of education (Berta-Ávila, Revilla, & López Figueroa, 2011; Guajardo & Guajardo, 2004) and as a result, maintained and in many cases increased societal inequities and institutionalized oppression (López, 2003; López & Burciaga, 2014; Méndez-Morse, 2000; San Miguel, 2013).

In preparing this issue, we posed two questions: What is Latina/o educational leadership and how is it enacted to challenge the narrow parameters of what is considered educational
leadership? How do we (re)envision educational leadership approaches that are respectful and responsive to Latina/o communities? In this special issue, scholar-educators present testimonios from the field—strategies, communities, and concepts that push us to reconsider our current approaches to serving Latina/o Students.

In “Ternura y Tenacidad: Testimonios of Latina School Leaders,” by Melissa A. Martinez, Jocabed Marquez, Yvette Cantu, and Patricia Rocha, the testimonios of four Latina school leaders reveal the important role of cultural capital in leadership development, resistance, agency and deep commitments to social justice for Latinx communities.

“Con Todo Mi Corazón: Mentoring Latinas in Educational Leadership Doctoral Programs,” by Mariela A. Rodriguez, reveals approaches to community-mentoring that supports the research and practice of Latina doctoral students not only for degree completion [but keeping in mind] the importance of preparing the next cadre of school principals and superintendents.

“The Journey from De-Culturalization to Community Cultural Wealth: The Power of a Counter Story-telling Curriculum and How Educational Leaders Can Transform Schools,” by P. Antonio Cuevas, outlines the use of personal counter-stories as curriculum to transform educational spaces by engaging students in reclaiming community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) and creating critically and culturally engaging academic opportunities in an otherwise racist and oppressive educational system.

“Institutionally Responsive Pedagogies: A Community-Cultural Wealth Approach to Latina/o Student Engagement across the Educational Pipeline,” by Louie F. Rodriguez, provides four concrete pedagogical principles grounded in community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). These principles, used in his work with students, communities, parents, and in K-12 and higher education, outline approaches to institutional shifts to recognize the wealth of Latina/o students and communities across the educational pipeline.

In “Reconceptualizing Leadership in Migrant Communities: Latin@ Parent Leadership Retreats as Sites of Community Cultural Wealth,” Pedro E. Nava and Argelia Lara examine leadership development within (im)migrant farmworker communities, and argue for the need to rethink the role of testimonios as a pedagogical tool in parent engagement and capacity building for leadership and agency in such communities.

Reform,” outlines a participatory action case study of ALIANZA; she also describes the development of political agency among ALIANZA members. Vélez highlights organizational strategies aimed at school reform while strengthening counter-narratives to interrupt racist depictions that functioned to cast Latinx parents as “unfit” to serve as educational leaders.

In “Leadership for Chicano/Latino Education and the Politics of Change,” Patricia López describes the persistent entrenchment of corporate interests and market-based reform that embody the growing politics of change in the experiences of Chicano/Latino students and broader communities. She continues with university-based leadership programs that play critical roles when it comes to advancing a leadership for Chicano/Latino communities that equip candidates with a counter narrative analysis that allows them to first understand these realities, and then identify the strategies they must develop if they are to disrupt the talons of corporate interests in and out of education.

Educational efforts to address inequities have increasingly manifested as top-down directives aimed at reductive accountability objectives, thus increasing the power and visibility of certain positional leaders (and profiles of leadership) as the schools’ primary change agents. Given the breaks in the educational pipeline for Latina/os, there is an urgency to our work in showcasing scholarship that interrogates the leadership gaps that seem to persist in schooling systems within Latina/o communities (Guajardo, Guajardo, Oliver, & Keawe, 2012). Therefore, we share these seven articles, two poems, and a book review as a response to broadening the narrow conceptualizations of educational leadership.
References


Abstract

This study utilized testimonio as method to unearth the voices of four Latina school leaders from the southern region of the U.S. to shed light on their experiences, including triumphs and struggles, in navigating their career trajectories. The testimonios revealed distinctions as well as commonalities among the Latina administrators related to how they drew on their experiential knowledge and various forms of cultural capital in the process of their leadership development and roles. How they enacted agency, demonstrated signs of resistance and/or a commitment to social justice, and serving Latinx communities also emerged.

Within a week [as assistant principal], I remember coming out of my office one day and there were four moms up in the front who were talking to the receptionist, and they were telling her ‘we want to talk to the one, the new one, not the other one, not the white lady, we want to talk to the young one, the new girl that speaks Spanish.’ And so I was coming around the corner and I hadn’t met them yet. So I introduced myself to them. All they wanted to do was bring me what they had made. They had made tamales okay, what a welcome! Again, a very traditional, ‘we are here to welcome you.’ I didn’t know who they were, I didn’t know who their kids were, I didn’t know nothing [sic]. But to them that was like their welcoming, we’re bringing you this, and we just wanted to say
hello, and to introduce ourselves, you know all the comadres...I didn’t know these people, I didn’t have any idea who they were, but the fact [was] that they went out of their way because they had heard that there was somebody new [a Latina who spoke Spanish].

-Rachel, Latina elementary school principal

Latinx\(^1\) students, parents, and communities are hungry, waiting in anticipation for school leaders that not only understand their struggles and lived experiences, but who also look like them, and value, respect, and speak their language. Such understanding comes with knowing that familia often comes first for Latinxs, that relationships are built on confianza and respeto, and that the sacrificios that Latinx parents make are necessary to ensure a better life for their children. This is not to say that all Latinx school leaders “get this,” but many do. Murakami, Hernandez, Méndez-Morse, and Byrne-Jiménez (2015) argue, “Latina/o principals, for example, can successfully cross language barriers and be role models for Latina/o students and teachers” (p. 5). As the first Spanish-speaking Latina administrator of her elementary campus, Rachel understood her critical role in serving a predominantly Latinx population with over 90% of students that qualify for free and reduced lunch and over 50% of English Learners. Her identity as a Spanish-speaking Latina was vital in “being able to have those relationships with those [Latinx] parents, for them to be able to open up and share” because she believed “they’re not just going to do that with anybody.”

**What We Know about Latinx School Leaders**

The contributions of Latinx teachers and administrators are significant as Latinx students represent the fastest growing ethnic group in U. S. public schools. Among the 45 million Latinxs in the country, approximately 13 million are school-age-children (Pew Foundation, 2008). Yet, the teacher workforce does not reflect such diversity. As of the 2011-2012 school year, 82% of U.S. public school teachers were White, while 7% were African American, 8% were Hispanic, and less than 3% were Asian, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and American Indian and Alaska

\(^{1}\) The term Latinx is a more inclusive, gender-neutral term used when possible, exclusive of direct citations.
Native (Bitterman, Goldring, & Gray, 2013). Equivalently, of the 90,000 public school principals, 80% (72,070) were White, 10% (9,110) were African American, 7% (6,120) were Latinx, and 3% were of another race/ethnicity including Asian (820) and American Indian/Alaska Native (650) (Bitterman, Goldring, & Gray, 2013; Snyder & Dillow, 2015). Females account for 52% of public school principals with the majority leading primary schools (64%); albeit the percent of Latina principals in particular is lacking (Bitterman, Goldring, & Gray, 2013).

To support and sustain the growing Latinx student population, it is now critical that all school leaders are able to meet the needs of Latinx students (Murakami et al., 2015; Rodríguez, Martinez, & Valle, 2015). However, special attention to support and increase the number of Latinx school leaders becomes especially vital as evidence suggests that principals who are of the same background as the students they serve might be more readily able to understand and address inequities in student achievement (Magdaleno, 2006; Murakami et al., 2015). The work from a number of scholars (Hernandez, Murakami, Méndez-Morse, Byrne-Jiménez, & McPhetres, 2016; Méndez-Morse, 2004; Murakami et al., 2015; Pedroza & Méndez-Morse, 2016) suggests that Latinx school leaders understand the challenges Latinxs face in schools, while valuing their distinct cultural and linguistic attributes. They set high expectations for Latinxs, recognize the extended nature of Latinx families, and how the Spanish language can be harnessed to build sustaining, collaborative partnerships. Latinx school leaders can bridge existing gaps in communication and support between Latinx students, parents, and schools, and in some cases help reconceptualize schooling for those Latinx parents that experienced marginalization as students (Shah, 2009). The leadership styles of Latinx leaders are informed by their cultural values and beliefs: family, community, respect, service, humility, care, compassion, and social justice guide how they work with students, staff, and communities (Campbell, 1996; Hernandez, 2005; Hernandez & Ramirez, 2001; Magdaleno, 2004; Romo, 1998).

**Experiences of Latina School Leaders**

Historically, there have been few women of color in educational leadership positions, and this trend continues today (Jones & Montenegro, 1982; Méndez-Morse, 2004; Montenegro, 1993). Few studies investigate female administrators and only a handful that do include Latinas (Loebe, 2004; Méndez-Morse, 2004; Palacio, 2013). This phenomenon represents an “exclusion and neglect [of] the contribution[s] of Latina leaders” (Méndez-Morse, 2000, p. 584).
Most of what is known about Latina leaders comes from dissertation studies; revealing barriers that Latinas face in obtaining and sustaining leadership positions in schools. Loebe (2004) studied six Latina elementary school principals who perceived discriminatory hiring practices, and barriers to promotion, sometimes at the hands of Latino leaders. Some experienced tension “when they supported non-Latino individuals or causes and were accused of ‘crossing over’ by members of their own communities” (p. 438). Yet the ability to speak Spanish and having cultural insight were assets to build relationships and trust with Latinx parents. The eight Latina high school principals in Palacio’s (2013) dissertation study shared similar sentiments with regards to discrimination in their roles as principals, while divulging their identities as change agents in their schools. Palacio (2013) concluded that the Latina school leaders had “incorporated a different approach to analyzing data, problem solving, and resolving issues for fixing academic achievement gaps,” providing impetus for further study in this area (p. 221).

Undoubtedly, Latina educational leaders continue to face challenges within their careers related to their gender or race and inequitable hiring or promotion practices; challenges that need to be further explored (Hernandez et al., 2016; Loebe, 2004; Magdaleno, 2006; Méndez-Morse, 2004; Méndez-Morse, Murakami, Byrne-Jiménez, & Hernandez, 2015; Palacio, 2013). The lack of mentoring and networking available for Latina leaders presents another challenge, leaving many Latina leaders resorting to mentors outside the traditional mentoring paradigm, including their mothers (Méndez-Morse, 2004). Latina leaders also face conflicting roles at work and in the home; oftentimes feeling guilty for not meeting the societal expectations of motherhood, wife, and caregiver (Murakami-Ramalho, 2009). Therefore, an increased interest in understanding and documenting Latina educational leaders’ contributions and the challenges they still face and work to overcome in the field led to the present study.

**Testimonio as Method**

Testimonios are first-person narrative accounts rooted in an urgency to speak truth to the struggles of those facing “repression, poverty, marginality, exploitation, or simply [to provide a means of] survival in the act of narration itself” (Beverley, 2008, p. 572). Testimonios were first utilized to draw attention to the plight of marginalized Latin American peoples, and were harnessed as a methodological approach in Latin American studies (Beverley, 2008; Pérez...
Huber, 2009; Reyes & Curry Rodriguez, 2012). Testimonio is distinct from other methodologies such as autobiographies, personal narratives, and auto-ethnographies (Beverley, 2008; Delgado-Bernal, Burciaga, & Carmona, 2012), but can be invoked and expressed through documents, journals, oral histories, song lyrics, and poetry (Beverley, 2008; Reyes & Curry Rodriguez, 2012). The Latina Feminist Group (2001) describe testimonio as “a form of expression that comes out of intense repression or struggle, where the person bearing witness tells the story to someone else, who then transcribes, edits, translates, and publishes the text elsewhere” (p. 13). Historically, this process was necessary because “the real protagonist or witness” was often “either functionally illiterate or, if literate, not a professional writer” (Beverley, 2008, p. 571).

Numerous scholars in the fields of education, anthropology, psychology, and women’s and ethnic studies embrace testimonio today as a methodological approach (Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, & Carmona, 2012; Pérez Huber, 2009; Reyes & Curry Rodriguez, 2012). Women scholars of color have particularly embraced testimonio to document and/or theorize their own or others’ struggles, resistance, and survival (Pérez Huber, 2009). The Latina Feminist Group (2001) used testimonios to tell and reflect upon their life stories and gain “nuanced understandings of differences and connections” among group members; highlighting the individual and collective aspect to testimonio (p. 11). Individual stories provide space for solidarity, consciousness raising, and bridge building within communities of oppressed individuals or witnesses of the same marginalizing experiences (Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, & Carmona, 2012; Reyes & Curry Rodriguez, 2012; Yudíc, 1991).

Most educational scholarship in the U.S. that draws on testimonio as method is done so by Chicanas and Latinas whose ways of knowing and agency align with a strong feminista ontology and who “use testimonio as a tool to express marginalization resulting from race, gender, and sexuality” (Reyes & Curry Rodriguez, 2012, p. 528). This study falls in line with this tradition, as we, the authors and interlocutors, identify as Chicana/Latina females with roots in the U.S. borderlands of South Texas. We each have our distinct stories and experiences related to marginalization within schools and society, but share a feminista ontology and a common background as public school educators.

Knowing that the voices and experiences of Latina administrators are often not considered or centered in education research, policy, and practice, four Latinas who currently
or recently served as public school assistant principals or principals, referred to here as Elena, Rachel, Linda, and Beatriz, were invited to share their testimonios in being school leaders. At least one of us had an established relationship with the Latina school leaders, as former colleagues or current friends; providing for an increased level of confianza and understanding.

Testimonios were captured through audio-recorded oral history interviews conducted either in person or over the phone. Three of us captured the testimonios, with one or two interlocutors interviewing the school leader they knew. The testimonio interviews were guided by six questions, which reflected our intent to understand how participants’ experiential knowledge and various forms of community cultural wealth, including aspirational, familial, social, navigational, resistant, and/or linguistic (Yosso, 2005), emerged in their leadership roles and experiences, and impacted how they served Latinx communities. Examples of questions included: 1) What role did your identity as a Latina (cultural and linguistic background) and your gender, play in your career trajectory as a school leader? 2) How did your identity as a Latina (cultural and linguistic background) and your gender shape your experiences as a school leader? 3) How did your identity as a Latina (cultural and linguistic background) and your gender impact or shape your leadership style?

Interviews were transcribed, checked for accuracy, and read numerous times to determine which aspects of each Latina school leader’s testimonio would be shared through this study. As interlocutors we aimed to relay the most significant aspects of the leaders’ testimonios to highlight each Latina’s unique experiences as administrators, while considering the larger collective experience of participants. In this process, it became clear that participants shared a level of tenacity (tenacidad), or persistence even in the face of resistance, juxtaposed with tenderness (ternura), or a genuine kindness with regards to their roles as leaders and the communities they served. To further make sense of their shared experiences, portions of participants’ oral histories were captured in three metaphorical themes that reflect the kind of ternura and tenacidad the Latina leaders exhibited: much like seeds planted, cultivated, and able to thrive in spite of weeds of resistance.

**Latina School Leader Testimonios**

The Latina school leaders in this study included: 1) Elena, an assistant principal at a Pre-Kindergarten Center with prior experience as an elementary and high school assistant principal,
2) Rachel, a principal at an elementary school with experience as an assistant principal at another elementary and middle school, 3) Linda, a high school principal with over twenty years of experience in education, and 4) Beatriz, a district level administrator with experience as an assistant principal and principal.

Sembrando la semilla: Upbringing, Relationships, and Preparations for Leadership

The idea of becoming administrators was not an original goal for all participants, but at some point throughout their lives individuals, some family members and/or mentors, and key relationships played a significant role in the development of the participants’ leadership goals and styles. Elena began her testimonio by describing the significant role mentors played in her trajectory to become a school leader. Elena situated the relationship with her mother at the core of how her leadership evolved, which is congruent with what the literature (Méndez-Morse, 2004) suggests with regards to mothers being the first mentors to many Latina school leaders. “My mom was a great support. My mom at times even when I was going to [local community college] taking courses at night she would wait for me at the bus...at times when I was taking classes at night my mom would go with me.” Elena recounted the role and influence of other mentors as well, key sources of social capital who guided and encouraged her to continue on the road to becoming a school administrator.

There was [also] this lady she was my supervisor [when I worked at a bank while attending college] she was African American and I lucked out because she was the only African American in the bank at that level and she was my mentor there. She was single, she was a very smart beautiful woman...[Later] Ms. V she took me in, well she was the principal at [an elementary later] and she was there for 12 years. So then she was the one that was a 5th grade bilingual teacher [when I became a teacher]...She was the one that told the principal to hire me [at the elementary school]...I was there for three years and the principal there, she told me just give me one more year, just give me one more year, and the reason for that is that she wanted me to replace a teacher that had left. So she kept her promise, but one thing about it is that she sent me to a lot of trainings and she took me under her wing. With that I did learn quite a bit and after the three years, I applied for an ESL position in which there was only one position at
[my former high school where I graduated]...And I applied and got it and I was the only bilingual, I was the only ESL teacher [at the high school].

Rachel’s testimonio was grounded in her childhood educational experiences growing up on the South Texas border. She shared her thoughts on the overwhelmingly White and male demographics of her former school administrators, and revealed how her desire to pursue a leadership role was informed by memories of power structures in the educational system; in this way she drew on her resistant capital to shape her trajectory.

When I was thinking about it, the principal at the elementary school he was a man you know and yes he was a Hispanic male but it wasn’t [a female] and so as far as I can remember I think maybe only one in my schooling here in Texas that I can remember was a female. And that was the only one and if I remember correctly I don’t even think she spoke Spanish…

Rachel also spoke to the role of mentorship, or social capital, in navigating her administrative career and developing into the kind of school leader she wanted to be.

There was one principal in particular who I taught for and that is actually where I was teaching where I became an assistant principal at the same campus and that does not happen very often, but it was under that particular principal’s leadership that she encouraged me to get my mid-management [certification]...And you know she was very instrumental, like very much, really just encouraging my leadership, giving me leadership opportunities. She obviously saw something in me that I wasn’t quite sure of it in myself yet because I hadn’t been teaching that long, maybe five years at the time and she would continuously ask me, “Have you thought about going into administration? Have you looked into any programs?”

Beatriz’s testimonio began with her transition from bilingual teacher to school principal. Her aspirations to become a school principal were rooted in her personal desire to be responsive to the cultural and linguistic needs of Latinx students and families. Beatriz’s familial and resistant capital proved vital in this process.

For me as a bilingual teacher, it was important for me to be a model for my students so that my students know that there’s nothing that Latinas or Latinos can’t do. I wanted them to see that there’s a variety of choices and I wanted
them to be able to dream about that and see leaders in their school that reflect their same cultural background...It was also important for the community to see that, to see that the leadership of the schools also looked like the population. I could speak to the parents and children. They didn’t feel intimidated or anxious whenever they came into school to speak about a problem. They knew that they had a leader at the campus that they could effectively communicate with. So, I think I made my parents feel more at ease knowing that somebody like them culturally was leading the campus and taking care of their children.

Linda was the first person in her family to go to college and attain a university degree. In her testimonio Linda revealed she never intended to become a school principal, but was encouraged by her White male boyfriend who was a school principal to get her administrative certification; he was a source of social and familial capital, as extended kin.

I taught math for fourteen years, I was a math major. I knew I wanted to do math. My main goal was to go and be a secondary curriculum math director or something in that vein. And when I was at a particular school district there was a really good one [director] there and there was just no room for growth unless she happened to leave which didn’t seem like it was going to happen anytime soon, and nor did I want her to leave, she was great and did a really good job. And so my boyfriend advised me to pursue looking for administrator certification just in case. I never really considered the administrator route...I really had my heart set on a math director/coordinator, that position, but I am glad I did. I am glad I kept my mind open because it led to different roles that have ultimately led me here [principalship].

**Cultivando la tierra e enfrentando malas hierbas: Building Community Amidst Challenges**

The Latina leaders transformed the obstacles in their leadership journeys into opportunities to grow, engage, and flourish while being true to their identities. Elena recognized the vital role of her cultural and linguistic ties to her community and how those ties impacted the sustainability of her leadership. Her cultural capital enabled her to make connections with
students and serve Latinx communities, although this was met with resistance at times from other non-Latino administrators.

I always had that inside me that I wanted to be at the high school level, there’s a lack of minority leaders. I remember if you would look at the directory you would see the Hispanic names in the foreign language department, the custodial staff, the cafeteria, and if you found a Hispanic name in other departments like in math or science they didn’t know how to speak Spanish...So, on the first day of school, I remember I was used to doing this, I would go into the classrooms [and] I would introduce myself and I was the AP [assistant principal]. It was a new admin staff they did a wipe out. “It doesn’t matter, I’m here to help you out,” but I said it in Spanish as I was introducing myself. Well, word got to her [the new female African American principal] that I was speaking in Spanish and then she called us up on the radio. I was the first one there, that is when she told me, “You know what, I don’t want you to be talking in Spanish, you can’t speak Spanish here” and I was shocked and I didn’t know what to say. I had heard it [happened] from older Hispanic women in Crystal City, but not in my time and I was stunned…It [the school] was predominantly Hispanic and they [students] were not treated fairly and the custodial staff they used to tell me “Tu eres la primera, tu eres la primera Hispana que habla español.” They had a Hispanic [administrator], but she didn’t know how to speak Spanish so they would call me la primera...Also, [at] our little admin meetings she [the principal] would look at me directly, literally she would yell at me and look at me directly and I was able to pull my composure because deep down inside I remember one time I had so much anger and I knew that what she was doing was wrong and I felt like you know what? I did start to think that good guys do come last.

Elena was assigned to another high school as an AP after this incident. Thereafter, her AP high school position was cut when student enrollment decreased, and she had to return to the classroom for several years until she was hired as an elementary AP with the help of a mentor. In closing, Elena noted how Latina school leaders need to be aware of the racial and political aspects of the job, and how “Not everyone who is in a higher position is in it for the kids. They are more in it for themselves and if they see somebody who can outperform them...”
they feel threatened.” While she admitted she still had some “resentment and anger” given some of her experiences, she felt there were “more positive things than bad things and somehow I have been able to come out of that misery.”

Beatriz made the transition to the principalship and worked on building a sustainable community of parents, teachers, and learners where trust was at the center of her leadership. However, the principalship also came with difficulties. Beatriz endured hardship that impacted her leadership style, her professionalism, and her identity as a school leader.

I am going to speak first to gender and even age discrimination. When I came into leadership, I was still in my 20’s. I think so, I was in my late twenties, yes, when I started in administration and I used to look very young. People would question my experience or how could I be there. I looked very young, short in stature and a little petite. I felt like I had to overcome and get the respect that I felt I should have as a school leader. Yes, maybe it was something that I perceived but I had one parent at one point when I was an assistant principal, he questioned my credentials. He said “Well I want to see where it says that you can do this because you look very young.” He was just upset with the outcome of his child and that was the first thing in my first year as a vice principal...I felt like I had to keep proving myself. I felt like I had to do everything quicker, faster, farther and I had to be on top of my game constantly. I was being compared with others that had more experience or males that had that job.

In addition to the gender and age discrimination she experienced, Beatriz described a meeting with an interim superintendent to discuss budget and staffing allocations, which resulted in a sexual harassment case.

That meeting was inappropriate. He basically was telling me about his ranch. He said it’s where he goes to ponder the decisions that were going to impact everybody. Consequently, what I took away is that he told me that he wanted me to go to his ranch before he made his decision, so that I could help him make his decision. He was giving me directions on how to get to his ranch and what to do if he had some flag up because his wife was there...Of course, I was very upset about that. I left that evening and ran into the assistant superintendent. She called me in and said “You look like you just saw a ghost, are you ok?” She gave
me something to write with and she said I needed to write everything down. Consequently I filed a sexual harassment complaint. I had three days left to my contract and so I took three personal days and I finished all my work...I was the youngest principal there, female. I dressed very professionally with a jacket and either slacks or skirt. I wore professional clothes not trendy or fashionable. I have always been very professional and I want people to look at me and not how I dressed. All that came into question and I thought 'oh my goodness'. At that moment they would never say that to a man but that line of question would never come in with a man and ask about their clothes. It was just the fact that I was female and again going back to that I was Latina.

While Beatriz suggested that such incidents led to her resilience, she acknowledged that the incidents also contributed to her own need to protect herself by portraying a particular professional identity (Crow, Day, & Moller, 2016), “I had to overcome that and I had to overcome the fact that I am Latina and that I did. I would say that I don’t know how to describe myself but very professional and put together.”

**Floreciendo y creciendo raíces: Nurturing a Path and a Spirit for Social Justice**

*No se raje mi prietita,*
*apriétense la faja aguántese.*

*Su linaje es antiguísimo,*
*sus raíces como las de los mesquites,*
*bien plantadas, horadando bajo tierra*
*a esa corriente, el alma de la tierra madre-*
*tu origen.* (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 200)

This excerpt from Anzaldúa’s poem, “*No se raje, chicanita*” urges the brown skinned Chicana to remain steadfast in the face of adversity, knowing that her roots are ancient and strong like the mesquite tree; roots that physically and metaphorically are born from mother earth. These roots are similar to the kinds of paths that school leaders must forge in the quest for social justice. School leaders must nurture the conditions for meaningful collaboration among educators that stimulate collective thought, inquiry, and reflection, while supporting the
personal and professional development and leadership capacity of teachers. The foundation for floreciendo and creciendo raíces that nurture a spirit for social justice requires a deep understanding of the importance of building and sustaining relationships with both school staff and local community members that work to transform the educational experiences of children. In their roles as school leaders, the Latina administrators leveraged power as mentors, supporters, and dream makers inviting teachers to re-imagine the possibilities and to push boundaries. They equally nurtured and sustained a community of learners built on the assets and strengths of people; empowering their respective school communities and ultimately students and families. Such was the case with Linda, Elena, and Rachel, chicanitas who essentially leveled the power dynamics of traditional school leadership into a more collective approach.

Rachel had applied and interviewed for several principal positions before she was successful in securing her current role. Her superintendent reassured Rachel that her patience was worth it saying, “You are what they need in this community.” To her, “as an Anglo male superintendent, he was recognizing what our district needed because of the population that we served.” Now Rachel reciprocates the guidance and mentoring she received to develop future school leaders, and particularly Latinas.

I think it’s important, I look back, like “Ok, what can I do now to encourage that growth and leadership in my teachers?” And so I look to, particularly again, my strong Latina teachers that just have a strong foundation in curriculum, they have all those good pieces and I try to do some of the coaching and some of the mentoring that I feel was done with me and hopefully again inspire and light something up in them like was done with me. And say, “You know, I see this in you and I really want to encourage you to go for it.” And I can say that in the last couple of years and even when I was an assistant principal, you know that I don’t give my teachers the opportunity to waive their summative conferences. I sit down with every single one of the teachers that I appraise and we talk about professional goals because there’s people that I know want more, and I want them to want more, and I want them to want to become an instructional coach. I want them to become a dyslexia intervention teacher. I want them to become a librarian. And I can say that in the time that I’ve been there we’ve had a lot of promotion and growth with teachers that you know have gone back to school
and gotten their master’s degree...So I think it’s just a matter of encouraging them and them knowing that they have support and if they need to take a day off to take their state exam or if they need to go do observations for their internships that I’m there to support them because I know that the cause for education extends, it’s more than just in-outside of our walls you know what I mean? These teachers will hopefully have a greater impact and I want them to...To me that’s a sign of a good leader. I’m growing more leaders because I know where the need is...

Rachel’s dedication in supporting Latinx communities, as well as future Latina school leaders was evident. She recognized there were other leaders “that don’t feel the same way I do,” but she enacted her own agency for the greater “cause for education”.

When speaking about leadership, Linda acknowledged that most leaders do not look like her. She did not fit the White, male archetype; her mere presence was a sign of resistance.

I am sure you can understand we tend to have male White leaders whether in schools, whether in companies. Always, that is the ideal statue. That is what we see a lot and leaders come in all shapes and sizes and genders and I think that is important for our kids to know, for our parents to know. It doesn’t have to be the strong White male it can be a softer type of female figure that still has the vision and goals and the leadership qualities to run a company, or to run a school, or an organization. But I never made that my overlying mission. I am not that overly feminist. I am all about feminine values but I am not overly annoying feminist, “Oh we have to do this, we have to do that, and we have to prove it because we are women.” We have to prove it because we are good leaders and good people and we are female at the same time.

Moreover, when asked if her culture had an impact on her leadership she responded, Not overtly I don’t think. I have had a lot of mentors from all [cultures] that I respect and took pieces from but I wasn’t trying to be a copycat of anybody.

There were just some things I admired from my role models including my mother that influence some of my leadership qualities. I certainly don’t want to be portrayed, I shouldn’t say this, I don’t want to be portrayed as the angry Hispanic lady that only cares about the Hispanics you know, or that I am trying
to get vengeance on the wrongs of Hispanic culture. I am just trying to close the
gaps that exist and still exist and trying to get better, but we still have a long way
to go because of the discriminatory practices that happened in education a long
time ago that we had no part of but we are dealing with and still dealing with
those effects. I certainly know of leaders I don’t want to be like, and I try hard to
avoid mimicking those leadership qualities and I know I have a lot of leadership
role models that I highly admire and use pieces of them, but I make it my own.
Linda’s experiences highlight the importance of her mentors, including her mother, who
encouraged her to seek administrative roles and informed her leadership style. Interestingly,
Linda’s story also captures the tension of being a Latina school leader who does not want to be
seen as a feminist or as solely an advocate for Latinx children and families.

**Reflections and Hopes for the Future**

The testimonios presented here reflect the tensions and triumphs that can come with
being a Latina school leader. They also reveal the collective themes of *ternura* and *tenacidad*,
while honoring the unique lived experiences and cultural ways of knowing of each Latina leader.
The use of *testimonio* as a deliberate methodological approach breaks traditional and colonized
forms of research and places power and knowledge creation back into the hands of a
marginalized community of women within the public school system. This study challenges future
research and scholars to adopt more congruent methods like *testimonio* that are culturally
responsive to Latinx/Chicanx communities and are grounded in non-traditional epistemological
frameworks.

Given the testimonios shared, school districts in conjunction with their respective
superintendents and school boards are also called to be more deliberate in hiring and providing
support and mentorship to recruit and retain more Latina principals. Investing in the
development of mentoring and peer coaching programs for aspiring and novice school leaders is
key (Barnett & O’Mahony, 2008), although such efforts should utilize culturally responsive and
sustaining approaches, such as same-race mentoring (Magdaleno, 2006), and be flexible in their
structure to foster mutual learning and the development of nonhierarchical relationships
between mentors and mentees (Peters, 2010). Schools and districts can draw upon aspects of
successful mentoring and peer coaching programs for school leaders both from within and
outside the U.S. to guide them in the development of their own programs (Barnett & O’Mahony, 2008). They can also partner with principal preparation programs in their local communities to share in the costs, development, and implementation of mentoring and coaching programs, as well as professional development opportunities that provide support to current and aspiring Latina school leaders.

Moreover, principal preparation programs must make courageous efforts and become more cognizant of the realities faced by Latina school leaders in particular, to ensure their success once in the field. Principal preparation programs can begin engaging in these efforts by devoting greater energies into preparing social justice school leaders ready and willing to serve Latinx communities. Programs should also prepare Latinas, as well as other aspiring leaders of color, for the microaggressions and overt discrimination they may face by explicitly discussing such possibilities and coaching aspiring leaders on how to respond (Peterson & Vergara, 2016). Inviting current school leaders to share their experiences and strategies for dealing with such inequities in the field is also recommended (Peterson & Vergara, 2016). Preparation programs can also ensure their graduates, including Latina leaders, continue to be supported in practice by establishing alumni network organizations that incorporate formal and informal opportunities for the development of mentoring relationships and safe in-person and online spaces to discuss the realities associated with being female school leaders of color. Only when more safe and candid spaces for deliberate conversation and support are created will the pipeline for Latina school administrators begin to grow.
References


Con todo mi corazón:

Mentoring Latinas in Educational Leadership Doctoral Programs

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Abstract

Personal narrative essays were used to analyze the experiences of four Latina doctoral students who completed their first year in an educational leadership doctoral program in a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) in the southwestern U.S. Four themes emerged from their testimonios:
1) Con todo el corazón; 2) Somos como una familia; 3) Hermanas aren’t just doing it for themselves; and 4) Echando pal’lante. These themes demonstrate tenets of Latina/o educational leadership through the community-mentoring practices described in the study.

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of four Latinas in a doctoral program in educational leadership at a Hispanic Serving Institution in the southwestern U.S. Two were practicing principals, one was an aspiring principal, and one was aspiring to a career in academia. It is important to focus on the academic success of these women given that only 1,563 of doctoral degrees earned in 2014 were earned by Latinas out of the almost 25,000 doctoral degrees earned by women nationwide that year (National Science Foundation, 2014). When it comes specifically to doctoral degrees earned in educational administration, only 6.8% Hispanics, both male and female, earned such degrees when compared to 60.2% White males and females (National Science Foundation, 2014). Such disheartening statistics can be remedied, in part, by retaining Latinas in doctoral programs.

Mentoring Latina doctoral students toward program completion is crucial given that they represent a demographic that has low representation in academia (Turner & Myers, 2000) with just a little over 1,600 of them serving as full professors in degree-granting institutions in 2011 compared with over 44,000 White women professors (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). That means that out of the almost 53,000 female professors nationwide only 0.03% were Latina compared to 83% White women. It is important to consider Latina doctorate production
and the overt and covert marginality (Watford, Rivas, Burciaga, & Solorzano, 2006) that these women experience in their doctoral programs. Socialization practices (Gardner, 2008) to help retain Latina doctoral students include offering research support, developing strong working relationships with faculty, maintaining professional networks, and engaging in scholarly productivity. The researcher based her work on two primary research questions: (1) To what extent did mentoring play a role in supporting Latina educational leaders? (2) In which ways did Latina educational leaders benefit from mentoring practices?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study, based on the three dynamics of Latina/o leadership as discussed by Bordas (2001), are: a) personalismo-establishing self-awareness and finding identity that influences actions, b) tejiendo lazos-literally translates into weaving connections and looks at the aspect of building community, and c) desarrollando abilidades-skill development based on the first two dynamics. Through her description of these three dynamics, Bordas (2013) emphasizes the importance of “community” in Latina/o cultural practice. She attests that Latina/o leaders are simultaneously “community builders” and “community scholars” (Bordas, 2013, p. 116). This is clearly connected to research conducted by Hernandez, Murakami, and Quijada Cerecer (2014) who found that the Latina/o educational leadership practices of a Latina principal were influenced by her cultural background, experiences, and interactions with the school community. In further work Hernandez and Murakami (2016) discussed the value of culturally relevant leadership within Latina/o communities. It is through the community concept as identified by the aforementioned researchers that I integrate this component of Latina/o educational leadership within this narrative. This narrative provides a discussion of mentoring relationships between Latinas in an academic community.

In his qualitative study of Latina doctoral students, González (2006a) identified the critical role of mentors in assisting Latina doctoral students as they navigated their graduate experience. Similarly, a study of Latina junior faculty by Ek, Quijada, Alanís, & Rodríguez (2010) described the need for mentoring to extend beyond the doctoral program and into the lives of Latinas in the academy whose representation in the faculty ranks remains one of the lowest among ethnic groups. Such supportive practices can help students to hone their scholarly
potential (Dalia & Castellanos, 2006) into future endeavors within academia or within educational organizations like schools and institutions of higher education as administrators. In this manner they can make contributions to their communities to help improve academic attainment and achievement for students in those communities.

**Background**

The four doctoral students involved in this study attended a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) in the southwestern United States. At the time of the study the institution served almost 30,000 students in over 140 degree programs. The students in this study developed their personal narrative essays during their second year of coursework in the educational leadership doctoral program at this HSI. The program had been in existence for almost 20 years. A unique aspect of the program is the cultural core requirement which focuses nine hours of required coursework on research about traditionally underserved students. Most students in the program enroll in 6 hours each semester while they work full-time. A few students completed the program through full-time study as doctoral research fellows who enroll in 9 hours each semester. In the study discussed in this manuscript, three of the Latina doctoral students were completing their program while working full-time. Two of the women were campus principals and one was a department chair on the science team at her school. Only one of the women in the study was a full-time student and research fellow.

**Method**

Personal narrative essays (Nash & Bradley, 2011) were used to obtain the experiences and perceptions of four Latina doctoral students. The use of personal narratives was a method of collecting data based on the participants’ essays. Such essays allowed the voices of the participants to come through in a sincere and unique manner. The purpose of this study was to identify the ways in which mentoring and socialization into doctoral education were approached by the participants, all women of color (Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 2001). The writing of these essays was only conducted with four Latinas who shared the same academic advisor. Given that the Latinas in this study engaged in a reflexive narrative based on their own stories (Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012), the use of testimonios was the medium for analysis in this study. The findings presented in this paper are intended to focus on the testimonios (Delgado Bernal,
Burciaga, & Flores Carmona, 2009; The Latina Feminist Group, 2001) of the four doctoral students reflecting on their first year of doctoral study then looking toward the future. The students belonged to two different cohorts within the educational leadership doctoral program in a Hispanic Serving Institution in Texas. All of the women self-identified as Latina (González & Gándara, 2005). In the next section, each of the participants will be briefly described, with the use of pseudonyms to protect their identities.

Las mujeres

Dalia and Lucia were elementary school principals. At the time the women wrote their personal essays, Dalia was beginning her second year as a principal and Lucia was a veteran principal. These women were strongly rooted in their school communities and they consistently worked to support the educational outcomes of the traditionally underserved student populations in their schools. Margarita was a high school science department chair who was pursuing principal certification concurrently with the doctoral program. She aspired to lead her own school one day. Esperanza was a doctoral research fellow who left a high school mathematics teaching position to pursue her doctoral coursework full-time. She was considering joining the ranks of academia after completing her degree. Thus, her research fellowship allowed her opportunities to participate in the academic threshold through scholarship and dissemination of research.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data was collected at the beginning of the participants’ second year in the doctoral program. The personal narrative essays were coded using first-cycle and second-cycle coding (Saldaña, 2013). During the first cycle I read the essays in a general manner familiarizing myself with the words of the participants and the style in which they wrote them. I took notes on what I felt that the participants were conveying. For the next coding cycle I analyzed the data applying the framework of Bordas (2001) to explicitly look for themes that reflected the three dynamics of Latina/o leadership. The findings discussed in the following section are grouped into the four themes that emerged from the analysis of the data: 1) Con todo el corazón; 2) Somos como una familia; 3) Hermanas aren’t just doing it for themselves; and 4) Echando pa’lante. These themes highlight the reflections and actions of the four Latina doctoral students through
mentoring and socialization and are key findings. The voices of the participants will be presented within the aforementioned themes through testemonio.

Findings

The first theme that will be discussed in this section focuses on the value of caring relationships that the participants engaged in during their first year of doctoral study. It was evident that the relationships between the women and those whom they named as mentors were rooted in a strong sense of commitment and dedication to each other’s success.

Con todo el corazón

In their essays, each of the women mentioned their dissertation advisor, another Latina who serves as advisor for all four women, as a source of caring and support. Dalia, a second year principal stated,

Dr. Corazón is a strong, passionate, and dedicated Latina who I truly admire. She is my hero and when I grow up I want to be just like her. She is always there when I need her. I know that she believes in me and would not let me fail.

In this description of her relationship with her faculty mentor, Dalia expressed evidence of the commitment displayed by her faculty advisor. She also explained how these actions have given Dalia inspiration and motivation in her doctoral program and for her future. Likewise, Margarita, an aspiring principal, also referred to the dedication expressed by her dissertation advisor regarding assistance, “Once I told her what my goals were, she took the time to outline each step of the doctoral process and has helped me create a realistic timeline to graduate …” Margarita clearly appreciated the time taken by Dr. Corazón to assist her in a dependable manner. Margarita continued by writing, “Although I attend a large university, I do not feel like another number because she treats me as if I am a valued student with the potential to impact educational research.” This reflects the value of relationship-building in maintaining a supportive network.

Esperanza also reflected on her relationship with the same dissertation advisor. She began “Dr. Corazón understands me. She has validated my concerns and helped me through them.” However, this wasn’t the experience that Esperanza had when she was working on her master’s degree:
When I was at [a Research One institution], I remember going to faculty or even to my mentor with my concerns. I remember one time I even cried in front of my advisor because my cousin had passed away. He told me, 'I've seen how students play this game.' Wow! I felt terrible and slowly I closed up … but now that things are different I see that [Dr. ______] really cares and that surprises me.

Esperanza’s recollection about the troubling encounter with the faculty member at the elite institution is reminiscent of the accounts shared by other Latina doctoral students in the González (2006b) study who also voiced feelings of oppression.

Moving from the connections between mentor and mentee, Lucia, an experienced principal, considered her calling to the students that she serves. She explained, “As a Latina principal, I understand the academic needs of minority students and their families. My objective is to use my personal and professional experiences to improve the chances for minority students to achieve the goals that they set for themselves in life.” In this manner, she expressed how she clearly made the needs of the students on her campus a top priority. All four participants discussed the importance of being selfless and dedicated when it came to mentoring relationships. In essence, it is about the love and care that is sincerely shown to students that makes a difference in their lives.

The term love is being used in this manuscript based on work by Calafell (2007) who discussed her experiences with supportive mentors who demonstrated loving actions in professional ways such as taking time to talk outside of classes and writing words of encouragement on her papers. This theme in the current article reflected the voices of the four participants through the frame of love having its rightful place in the world of academia when it comes to relationship building. The work of hooks (2002) took a deeply personal look at the ways in which women search for love within themselves and among each other. She describes the journey toward love as a source of liberation, a space where women can truly find their inner selves. The aspect of love that I refer to in the mentoring relationships that the four Latinas and their mentor experienced is one that is almost familial. This speaks to the role of academic aunting as posited by Ellingson and Sotirin (2008) where the authors elaborated on the importance of relationships through (wo)mentoring. In this vein, the following section will illuminate the Latinas’ voices regarding peer relationships.
Somos como una familia

All of the participants formed part of a doctoral cohort. This model had been consistently used in the program, and it serves as a way to help students build a community. Without prompting, each of the women discussed, in their personal narrative essays, the ways in which members of their cohort were like family to them. Specifically they described the close bonds that they had built between the other women in the study.

Margarita referred to the camaraderie of her cohort members: “Our diversity in our character traits, work ethic, and social outlook in life significantly impacts the dynamic interaction of our group because we bring balance to each other.” She added, “Having them [the other Latina participants in this study] when times are tough has made a huge difference in my success in this program.” As one of the cohort members who Margarita was describing, Dalia described the connection to her cohort members who have become like her “sisters”: “I have really bonded with them. They have become like a second family to me because we are there for each other.” Both Margarita and Dalia commented on the importance of sisterhood or hermandad (Bettez, Kier Lopez, & Machado-Casas, 2009) as an important peer relationship strategy. The sense of kinship that was expressed by the study participants demonstrates the importance of supportive endeavors within academic study.

In the same way, Lucia expressed her connection to the other women: “Part of getting through the first year of study has been because of the encouragement, contribution, participation and commitment of peers to my academic success.” Esperanza, a doctoral research fellow, also reflected on her connection with one of her cohort members who was not part of this study: “We share the struggle of going through the doctoral process together. When I’m down, Guadalupe reminds me of the positives in my life. She brings perspective and seeks help FOR [emphasis by Esperanza] me. I trust her very much and lean on her often.” All of the women described the significant role that being a member of a cohort yielded. They felt that they were not alone in the journey. Being able to turn to others who shared both their dreams and fears was one of the most valuable aspects of the doctoral program.

Dalia, now in her second year as an elementary school principal, referred to both formal and informal mentors as familia. She stated, “My familia continues to be my ultimate system of support or mentorship that influences the way I think, act, and perform.” She continued, “As a Latina principal, I follow the mentorship from great women … whose actions and successes
have been untold. To me, my ways of knowing pay homage to them ...”. In this manner, Dalia offers her gratitude for those mentors who have paved the way before her. She understood the contributions of each of these persons in her own success.

Lucia also used the Spanish term for family when referring to her dissertation advisor: “I feel as though I am part of her familia and with family we always want the best and have their best interest at heart. She has taken me under her wing and has a real, authentic, vested interest in me. I do not know if she intentionally thought she was going to take me under her wing as a mentee, but for me I felt it just naturally turned out that way.” Lucia explained the sense of family that she has experienced with her dissertation advisor. Thus, family members can come in many forms and not necessarily just blood relatives.

In this discussion of theme of family, all of the participants discussed their connections to others within their cohorts and inner circles. This demonstrated the importance of generating a sense of belonging for Latinas in graduate programs (Winkle-Wagner, Johnson, Morelon-Quainoo, & Santiague, 2010). Perhaps it was through their own participation in cohorts and in peer relationships that the four Latina doctoral students in the current study demonstrated their own acts of selflessness in reaching out to others. The following theme that will be presented focuses on the women’s ways of engagement with their dissertation research topics and how these works may contribute to enhanced educational opportunities and outcomes for students of color.

**Hermanas Aren’t Just Doing It for Themselves**

Given that a goal of this doctoral program is to enhance the social justice leader in each student, the type of research conducted and who was included as a participant were key. Within their personal narratives, each of the women reflected on their selected topic for dissertation research. They were asked to consider the reasons why they were engaging in this type of scholarship. In the following section the rationale for the women’s selection of dissertation topics will be discussed based on their own experiences as students and educators.

Esperanza is a full-time doctoral fellow who previously served as an advanced mathematics high school teacher. Thus, her research focus is on college-age Latinas successfully navigating the STEM educational pipeline. She stated “I want to gain access to the experiences that help Latinas persevere. Perhaps it may be a connection to how they will help the world and
others through their career.” Esperanza’s own college-going experiences at Ivy League universities helped her gain an understanding of the marginalization that other Latinas in STEM education face (Sayman, 2013). It appears Esperanza views her dissertation research as a means to help future Latina STEM college students in navigating the process more smoothly.

Dalia, on a different note, acknowledged that she wanted to focus her research on the scarcity of Latina leaders in the role of the superintendency. She is an aspiring superintendent who sees this as a future step in her educational career: “As a Latina leader, I want to understand the barriers that are preventing Latinas from reaching this milestone.” Dalia understands that barriers currently exist for Latinas ascending to the top ranks. She concluded, “Once we see our knowledge, experiences and talents as power, we will be able to transform the face of leadership so that Latina representation is present and established in our educational system.” Thus, she intends to use her dissertation research as a springboard for not only herself, but other women like her, who aspire to be superintendents in communities that would benefit from their skills.

Margarita, an aspiring school principal, discussed how unselfish two of her close cohort members have been regarding her own career goals. She referred to Lucia and Dalia (both school principals) as her mentors and described, “Because I want to be a principal, these ladies periodically invite me to their campus to observe or get hands-on experience with some of their responsibilities.” This demonstrates the ways in which both of the principals understood Margarita’s need to be socialized into that area of school leadership. Thus they were acting as mentors and sponsors into the field, helping Margarita to acquire the skills that would be necessary when she was ready to apply for a principalship of her own.

In this discussion of the theme that is reflective of research for the greater good, each of the women discussed the ways in which they believed their dissertation work would impact their communities and society. They are beginning to create a bridge between their “practitioner-selves” and their “scholar-selves” through identity development (Vetter, Fairbanks, & Ariail, 2011) as they progress through their doctoral programs. In a similar way, the following theme that will be discussed shows how the four Latina doctoral students are sharing what they have learned about themselves with others.
Echando pa’lante

Lucia noted a sense of familia with her advisor because they are of the same ethnic background: “My mentor is also Latina and I feel like we are part of this sisterhood that promotes the academic and professional success of other Latinas.” As a result of this positive mentoring experience, Lucia has become a mentor to a young woman who works at her campus. She explained,

I have taken her under my wing as a mentee because I see a lot of potential in her. Sometimes she asks me how I am able to work, go to school, and be a mom. I constantly talk to her about the important role she has in starting a new trend of college graduates in her family.

This reflects the work of Espinoza (2010) whose research focused on the various demands of Latinas in college and aspects of resiliency (Morales, 2008). What Lucia, the veteran principal, is doing in reaching out to the young staff member is creating supportive behaviors that may support that woman’s persistence in college and eventually work toward a career.

Doctoral research fellow Esperanza has also taken her positive mentoring experience to heart. She has reconnected with some of her former high school students who are now at the same Hispanic-Serving Institution where Esperanza is working on her doctorate. Her goal is for these young women to “look for me if they ever need help … maybe because I’ve been helpful in the past and I just feel that it’s important to keep helping those that are going through the tracks that I’ve been through.” Esperanza confirmed that these college-age Latinas had been her students in the past, and she continues to serve as a support system for them. Obviously, Esperanza understands the importance of making connections with others to support persistence in college.

In a similar way, Margarita, a department chair and aspiring principal, pays it forward everyday in her interactions with her students in her physics courses: “I chose to work in a Title I, Latino majority school because those were my demographics growing up. This is where I can make a direct impact.” Through these words Margarita confirmed her desire to help make a difference in the lives of her students. She doesn’t see teaching as simply a career, but as an opportunity to reach out to students who are growing up in similar conditions to the way in which she grew. Perhaps it was a teacher who made a difference in Margarita’s life which has propelled her to serve as a role model and mentor for her own students. This speaks to the
transformative learning process in doctoral education as posited by Stevens-Long, Schapiro, and McClintock (2011). Like Margarita, Dalia reflected on her own experience as she sought to make a difference in her community:

I want my students and community to know that despite the challenges and obstacles that they face every day in el barrio, they can be warriors. Even when you face all the faces of fear like poverty, not having your parents in your life and having your elderly grandparents raise you, being an English Language Learner, and being labeled at risk of dropping out of high school, a Latina woman is capable of taking the role of a district administrator. The barriers can be crossed when you are that little brown girl who took all the risks and was determined to be a winner even when everything seemed to point to her failure. Having the experience of my community served as my catalyst for change.

Dalia affirmed the importance that she has given to serving as a role model for her students. As a campus principal she interacts with students and their parents on a daily basis. Through these efforts she has demonstrated that perseverance, dedication, and the support of others contributed to her success.

All of the Latina doctoral students in this study expressed their desires to give back to others. They described the rationale as to why they wanted to help other women and their students out of a sense of sincere caring for the well-being of these persons (Vela, Martinez, & Rodríguez, 2016). The women understood that they did not arrive at their current positions of principal, department chair, and research fellow on their own. This reflective practice of how and where they were raised and their need to reach behind them and help bring others forward stem from a shared Latina consciousness, as described by Delgado Bernal (2001).

**Discussion and Conclusion**

The testimonios of the participants revealed truths and connections to each other in an authentic manner (Pérez Huber, 2009). The women in this study confirmed how the mentoring process through academic support and personal encouragement (Dalia & Castellanos, 2006) served as a key motivator to remain in the doctoral program and persevere. Returning to the Latina/o leadership framework presented earlier in this manuscript, the findings support the three dynamics posited by Bordas (2001, 2013). The first dynamic, *personalismo*, focuses on
individual preparation for leadership. The theme from this study “Hermanas aren’t just doing it for themselves” demonstrated the growth of the four mujeres through the doctoral program and within their respective leadership positions in schools. The findings clearly document how they enacted culturally relevant leadership in the communities that they served. The second dynamic in the framework by Bordas was tejiendo lazos. This dynamic focuses on empowerment to build community. The theme from the findings “Somos una familia” showed how the four women engaged in community-building practices with each other, their families, and their peers. These practices enabled them to maintain family ties that grounded their leadership work and application toward their doctoral studies. The third dynamic in the framework is desarrollando habilidades. This encompasses the development of Latina/o leaders as community-scholars. The theme in this narrative of “Echando pa’lante” demonstrated how the four mujeres paid forward the supportive practices that they received and how their goals for the future included the success of the students in the schools where they led and taught.

The value of keeping Latina doctoral students in doctoral programs through program completion will help to fill the thin pipeline of Latina scholars in academia (Reyes & Ríos, 2005). It is important to mentor Latina researchers who will extend the scholarly work that focuses on linguistically and culturally diverse students (Ceja & Rivas, 2010). As a result of the findings of this research, participants can develop socialization strategies for Latina graduate students at their own institutions (Turner, 2002). This community-mentoring experience gave the Latina doctoral students the support and encouragement (Espino, Muñoz, & Marquez Kiyama, 2010) that they needed to thrive. In this manner they will help to increase the number of Latina educational leaders holding doctorates who will grow to be scholars in four-year degree granting institutions, and administrators in schools and districts across the country.

It is important to consider community-mentoring practices in helping to support Latina doctoral students toward degree completion. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2012), only 8,123Latinas held tenure-track positions in colleges and universities nationwide in 2011. Latinas significantly lag behind White females given that over 150,000 of them held tenure-track positions in 2011. Thus, the need to support Latina doctoral students in educational leadership programs is vital to maintaining a strong stream of candidates for principalships, the superintendency, and academia.
Testimonio from the Author

As the faculty advisor for the four mujeres whose voices were shared in this article, I want to take the opportunity to offer my own testimonio. I reflect on the work of Barnes and Austin (2009) who remind us of the value of having doctoral advisors reflect on our roles and how such roles directly impact our students. As a Latina educational leader, I take my role of doctoral advisor to heart. I cannot separate my Latina identity from my daily work and interactions with students (Espinoza-Herold & González, 2007). In this way I strive to mentor my students in the same culturally responsive manner in which I want them to serve their own students. For it is from another Latina educational leader, my own mentor and doctoral dissertation advisor that I learned that effective mentoring relationships are about love—the kind of love that stems from the emotional qualities found in mentoring relationships (Goldner & Mayselless, 2009) and genuine caring between the mentor and mentees.

It has been my sincere honor to work with the four women in this study. Their sense of service and care for the students that they work with feeds my soul. Con mi corazón en la mano I offer these women my sincere gratitude for allowing me to join them on their journey toward the doctorate degree. Through these experiences I was able to learn more about myself as mujer, maestra, and mamá. These women are my academic hijas. They come to me with corazones abiertos and I return that amor through my support of them as friends, scholars, and practitioners. I was honored to have walked alongside them in their journey. De aquí y pa’lante they will remain en mi corazón.

Recommendations

In this section I would like to share some recommendations for practice. A primary recommendation is related to recruitment efforts and strategies for Latinas into doctoral programs. It is important that faculty members connect with networks that reach Latinas. Outreach efforts must be focused and intentional to recruit women of color into graduate programs of study. Then it is vitally important to support Latina students upon enrollment in doctoral programs. The goal to support them through the dissertation process and toward graduation with the terminal degree must be done by their faculty advisors, dissertation committee members, and other faculty in the program. This leads to the value of training university faculty about the best ways to mentor and support women of color in doctoral
studies. Training should include a panel of Latina graduates and current students who would share which practices worked best for them.
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The Journey from De-Culturalization to Community Cultural Wealth: The Power of a Counter Story-Telling Curriculum and How Educational Leaders Can Transform Schools

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Abstract

Generations of Latino students have been negatively impacted by de-culturalizing policies, epistemologies and pedagogies in the U.S. educational system. This article examines the impact of Critical Race Theory (CRT) in the classroom. In this article I give my testimonio documenting my educational journey and how I have been transformed as an educational leader by conducting research on the power of CRT in practice. My research demonstrates a revolutionary way to engage Latino students. By exploring their personal counter-stories, their testimonios, Latino students were able to 1) tap into their Community Cultural Wealth (CCW), 2) provide insight of their social context, and 3) repair some of the wounds caused by a racist and oppressive educational system. Replication of this curriculum could redefine educational leadership with disenfranchised Raza youth by creating academic opportunities for Latino students that would counter the racist and oppressive educational system.

Keywords: Critical Race Theory, counter-storytelling, de-culturalization, Hegemonic Educational Paradigm, Youth Participation Action Research, Counter Educational Approach

Introduction

I stood over his casket and could not believe how atrophied his once powerful body had become. I am haunted by the sound of his mother’s uncontrollable sobbing and the sight of his younger brothers standing by helplessly. Antonio (a pseudonym) was just 15 when he died from a bullet to the head from a rival gang member. He was a former student of mine that was pushed out of school because he would not conform to the de-culturalizing forces of the
United States educational system. Antonio was like many Latino youth that are not engaged by the traditional educational curricula and dominant ways of thinking. Many Latino students drop out of school because they are unwilling and unable to navigate the culturally oppressive educational system, many times to destructive ends.

As a member of the Latino community I have experienced firsthand the impact of the de-culturalization of the U.S. educational system. Like Antonio, I struggled with the cultural oppression of our subtractive schools that try to eliminate our culture (Spring, 2010). I was involved with crime, violence, and drugs. I was fortunate to survive my turbulent adolescence and get a second chance at an education and life. I discovered that I did not have to succumb to the low expectations that teachers had for me and I reinvented myself through arts education. I spent five years teaching theatre to incarcerated men and women. While working with incarcerated felons it became very clear that the Latinos in jail were simply the children that slipped through the cracks of the educational system that de-culturalized them and were later caught up in the streets. It was at that moment that I dedicated myself to working with and educating children before the known dysfunctional educational cycle continued. However, my first 10 years working in school systems clearly showed me that the educational system continues to strip away the culture of Latino students with many casualties along the way just like Antonio.

I have since re-committed my life to creating a revolutionary pedagogy of engaging and educating Latino students. I have created a Counter-Storytelling Curriculum (CSTC) and this article is based on my research of that curriculum and the impact that counter-stories have on Latino youth. My research illustrates the transformative power of testimonio, in the form of counter-storytelling, in education and demonstrates an alternative and creative way for educational leaders to address the academic disparities facing disenfranchised Raza youth. I am now the Founding Principal of a school in San Jose, California and implemented this curriculum as a core class for all students. This article illustrates the impact of my research and how it can be implemented at an institutional and systemic level illuminating a revolutionary path for educational leaders.
Educational and Historical Context

As previously mentioned I began my educational journey 19 years ago teaching theatre to convicted felons and incarcerated youth. While behind bars it became very clear to me the disproportionate numbers of Latinos. It also became evident that they could not read or write. It was in jail that I had an epiphany and decided to get my teaching credential and work with Raza youth before they got caught up in the destructive cycle of the U.S. judicial system. I began teaching in Oakland at a small school that was nearly all Latino and African American in one of the worst neighborhoods I could find. Although we had a lot of success and my classroom was particularly successful, after several years it became clear that most other classrooms were not engaging all the students, and I was very aware of many of the students that were unable or unwilling to conform to the de-culturalizing forces and pedagogies. It was during this time that I met and began working with Antonio and his family. He did well in my class but was continually in trouble in all his other classes. Ultimately he was forced out of our school and turned to the streets, which led to his untimely and tragic end. It was also during this time that I began my journey as an educational leader searching for a new way to engage disenfranchised Raza youth. I began the creation of my CSTC in order to tap into the CCW of our students and families because what was being done was failing many of our students.

A new way of educating Latinos is desperately needed because Latino youth in the United States educational system are in crisis (Covarrubias, 2011; Valenzuela, 1999; Yosso, 2005). The “educational pipeline” shows us that Latinos that do not navigate, or are unable to navigate the educational system, exhibit grave academic disparities. Only 44 out of 100 Latino students entering elementary school can expect to graduate high school, only seven out of these 100 will graduate with a bachelor degree and less than one will receive a Doctorate (Covarrubias, 2011; Yosso, 2005). The educational pipeline clearly shows that Latinos are among the most poorly served of all racial communities and are pushed out of school with some of the highest rates of racialized groups (Covarrubias, 2011). There are many reasons for Latino underperformance, of which I will briefly address three. Specifically, I examine 1) the historic de-culturalization of Latino students, 2) the hegemonic Eurocentric epistemologies and lack of culturally relevant curriculum, and 3) the impact that de-culturalization has had on Latino students’ identities and engagement.
The de-culturalization of Latinos in the United States has inflicted a mental, emotional and spiritual wound on Latino youth as they try to navigate the educational system (Carrillo & Tello, 2008; Spring, 2010). This de-culturalization includes the loss of language, values, and ancestral wisdom in the pursuit of whiteness and forced assimilation, which has been reinforced by a series of laws targeting Latinos such as California’s Propositions 227 and 187 and Arizona’s HB 2281 and HB 1070 (Spring, 2010). These laws show the dominant culture’s continued effort to de-culturalize Latinos through legislation and policies that strip away the language and culture of Latinos; a subtractive process which is manifested in the classroom setting (Valenzuela, 1999). As Delgado Bernal explains (2002), “For too long, the histories, experiences, cultures and languages of students of color have been devalued, misinterpreted or omitted within formal educational settings” (p. 105). This Eurocentric epistemology creates an environment that makes Latinos feel inferior and I refused to be a part of system that continued to de-culturalize our Raza youth. My own personal experience and my early experiences as an educator made this very clear to me and was the driving force of my transformation as an educational leader.

Eurocentric epistemologies are the basis of knowledge and justification of beliefs that place White values and the English language in a superior position to all other ways of thinking (Anzaldúa, 2007; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Freire, 2000; Smith, 2008; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). These destructive Eurocentric epistemologies, which portray Latinos as backward, broken and unable to transform their communities, manifest themselves in current educational policy, pedagogies, curriculum, and assessments (Tuck, 2009). Students express disappointment at the lack of culturally relevant curriculum and the school system’s focus on a Eurocentric history that denies the history of students of color (Delgado Bernal, 2002). These Eurocentric epistemologies reinforce the subtractive element of our educational system that strips away the culture of Latino students (Valenzuela, 1999). Valenzuela (1999) describes subtractive schooling as a process that divests Latino youth of vital social and cultural resources, which leaves them vulnerable to academic failure.

Many Latino students are negatively impacted by the loss of culture experienced in our subtractive educational institutions (Spring, 2010; Valenzuela 1999). This de-culturalization manifests itself in the stripping away of cultural identity, which leads to a lowered self-esteem, a
lessened connection with community, and a loss of family history. The Eurocentric epistemologies that dominate schooling make many Latinos feel inferior because of the domination of White values and language in the curriculum, pedagogies, and assessments. As Valenzuela (1999) clarifies, “Schools are organized formally and informally in ways that fracture students’ cultural and ethnic identities, creating social, linguistic and cultural divisions among students and between the students and staff” (p. 5). These fractures result in a loss of cultural identity, perpetuating a destructive cycle that leads many Latino students to become lost and disengaged in their educational journey (Valenzuela, 1999; Tello, 2008). The loss of cultural knowledge, connection with ancestors and understanding of their familial counter-stories creates a cultural vacuum and forces many Latino students to search for something to fill the void, many times to destructive ends just like Antonio. I have outlined and created a visual representation of the dysfunctional cycle of the Hegemonic Educational Paradigm (HEP) (Figure 1) that demonstrates the de-culturalization process going from macro policy and legislation to micro implementation and the impact it has on Latino student identity and engagement.

![Figure 1. Hegemonic Educational Paradigm](image-url)
It was during my first several years that I experienced going to the funerals of some of our lost youth. I was also an advocate and support person for many of my families when their children got arrested and went to court. These children would excel in my class and I constantly strived to create opportunities for them to use their voice about their lives which led to them doing well and being engaged in my class. I would also spend much time in the homes of their families and created powerful connections and relationships with my students many of which continue to this day. However, many of the other teachers would continue to struggle and blame the students and their families for their lack of success. These teachers would complain and not reflect on their practice. It was during this time that I began my journey as an educational leader and left the classroom, which was a hard time for me because I enjoyed my time as a classroom teacher. When I began my journey as an administrator I implemented and researched my CSTC and the impact it had on Latino identity and engagement. In the next section I will briefly discuss the process of the study, but will focus mainly on the impact of the CRT on the students as framed within their action steps. The results of the study are important because it was the process of the students giving their testimonio, which allowed me to give my testimonio.

**Implications: Our Stories Do Matter!**

I’d like to thank everyone for their time, devotion, cooperation, but most importantly their stories. I would have no sense of direction and no path paved for me. Every story they told, every rule they broke, every obstacle they surpassed only to get me the education and life everyone deserves but few achieve. I have to take advantage that my education has been given to me for free unlike my ancestors that fought so hard but still were ignored. Their voices however still live in me, in my culture in my history and in my future. I want…no I need to prove that their struggles weren’t all in vain and that our voices will not be silenced. Just as my mother worked for her children, I will work for my future. Just as she was forced to quit school for work, I will force myself to stay and achieve my goals and aspirations. She is my inspiration, she is my warrior and I will not let anything my warrior did for me be forgotten and only spoken in
the whispers of the wind. Now that I have portrayed an event that someone else lived I feel privileged to be who I am so I walk like I only have one life to live and stand like I have nothing to lose. I stand here as a proud Latina looking ahead to my future (Esperanza).

The above reflection was written by Esperanza (a pseudonym), one of the student/co-researchers as a monologue that synthesized the Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) action steps and integrated the data analysis of her reflections. The monologue/research was performed at the world premier of La Guerra Cultural: A Culture Clash. She performed in the play and recited her monologue at the conclusion with her mother in attendance. It was a powerful moment with not a dry eye in the audience. All of the student/co-researchers wrote monologues using the same process and had opportunities to do the same when their parents were present. It was the intersection of research and performance and was amazing to behold. Esperanza’s monologue contains some of the answers to the YPAR action steps and illuminates the impact that a CSTC has on Latino students. Her monologue also contains some of the components of Yosso’s (2005) Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) as she describes her inspiration and resilience to overcome obstacles she is connecting resistant, aspirational, and familial capital.

This study relied on the student/co-researchers as holders and creators of knowledge (Delgado Bernal, 2002), tapped into their CCW (Yosso, 2005), and implemented YPAR as an aligning methodology. Since so much of the study depended on the student/co-researcher voice, leadership, data generation, and data analysis, I frame the findings based on the action steps created by the student/co-researchers. Four interconnected stages of data collection shaped this research (Figure 2).
I highlight stage 4 due to its relevance to the results. My research questions were based on the impact that CSTC would have on Latino student identity and engagement. Stage four was the student's/co-researcher's YPAR study of the impact of counter-storytelling on their identity and engagement. Stage four was the most important because it was the stage that answered my research questions and gave the student/co-researchers the opportunity to answer their co-created action steps. My research questions served as the guide to the research. As the students engaged in the curriculum they became my co-researchers and developed their own actions steps, which then became the co-researcher/iterative process that framed the entire process.

The student/co-researcher action steps are as follows:

1. Examine the impact of our stories on my motivation towards my education.
2. Examine the impact of our stories on my racial cultural identity.
3. Examine the impact of our stories on my relationships with my family.
4. Examine the impact of our stories on my self-confidence.
In the next four sections I focus on a small group of participant reflections because although the data on the questions was very similar, some students went into much more detail in their written reflections. I will provide some of the findings of the YPAR-generated data and discuss the intersection with CCW (Yosso, 2005). I begin with a section that includes the impact on their motivation towards education then a section on the impact on their racial/cultural identity. Next, I discuss the impact on their relationships with their families and conclude with the impact on their self-confidence.

**Motivation Towards Education: Sacrificios, oportunidad y agradecimiento**

The first action step created by the student/co-researchers was to “Examine the impact of our stories on my motivation towards my education.” Using journals, the student/co-researchers reflected regularly on the impact that the CSTC was having. In the analysis that follows I rely upon the student/co-researcher definition of motivation towards education: *Continuing to get educated and inspired to do well. A yearning to want to accomplish something.*

These journals capture some of the student journeys that demonstrate a transformation in motivation towards their education.

During in-class reflections student/co-researchers shared findings with the group. During the analysis of motivation towards education, two things became clear: 1) the student/co-researchers were not aware of the sacrifices made nor the challenges and oppression that their parents endured so that the students could get a quality education and, 2) once the student/co-researchers made this connection and understood the difficulties their parents faced, students shifted their view on education for the better.

All of the students relayed conversations with their parents in which their parents would tell them to do well in school because they themselves never had the opportunity to go to school. However, the students also expressed that many times this became a lecture that fell on deaf ears. The student/co-researchers explained that the lectures did not provide the context or counter-story that explained the reason why it was so important to their parents. Through interviewing parents, writing them into stories and creating a performance, the student/researchers were able to connect with and understand what their parents were trying to communicate.
As we went through the process, their reflections became deeper as their understanding of their parent’s journey deepened. Esperanza elaborated on the impact shortly before our world premier by writing:

I’m much more motivated to continue my education because I know who I’m representing when I receive that diploma. I yearn for a fulfilled life and I’ve learned that it begins with an education. Through these stories I’ve gained a unique understanding of exactly what our ancestors had to go through for my success. I feel a strong need to defend what they fought for (Esperanza).

In this reflection, Esperanza connected sacrifices that her mother made with deep empathy and tapped into both familial and resistant capital (Yosso, 2005). She explained that through gaining a deeper understanding of her ancestors, in this case her mother, she wanted to do better. She also demonstrated a level of resistance in wanting to defend the progress made by her mother. Esperanza described how she was at first unaware of her heritage and did not even realize the importance of exploring her culture. Through the interview process, reflections on the co-researcher’s action steps, analysis of data and staging of the final results she was able to reclaim her cultural heritage and also tapped into Yosso’s (2005) resistant capital. Her transformation also demonstrated her courage and resistance against discrimination that she knows she will have to face, but now knows that she can.

Reyna was another young Chicana that articulated the impact of her journey when she reflected:

These stories made me think and realize that my ancestors and family members could not have this experience. So I need to take responsibility for my actions in school and take opportunities that others were not able to have and make them proud. When I realized this, I figured out that I need to push myself to work my hardest and be successful in life to be somebody important not as somebody who joined a gang and took drugs (Reyna).

Reyna was able to reflect on the transformation the CSTC had on her motivation towards her education through not only showing how she understood her parent’s sacrifices, but what learning this meant to her. In this reflection Reyna also directly addressed intervening obstacles such as: gangs and drugs, which many of them face on a regular basis with a newly found
resistant capital. Her reflection and transformation demonstrates the integration of familial capital, aspirational capital, and resistant capital. Her newfound connection to her family and the hopes and dreams found through investigating her counter-story shines in her and through her motivation towards her education. It also gives her the navigational capital to be aware of the obstacles and the resistant capital to engage and resist.

**Racial and Cultural Identity: What You Don’t Know Can Hurt You!**

The second action step created by the student/co-researchers was to “Examine the impact of our stories on my racial/cultural identity.” Student/co-researchers defined this action step as: *Special languages, rituals, food, celebrations and values that make you, you. Makes you special and unique and defines where you come from and who you are. Your roots.* Student reflections based on the action step show a transformation in racial and cultural identity. In this section, I discuss how student/co-researchers transformed themselves as they engaged with their families’ counter-stories.

As with the previous action steps, in-class reflections and findings were shared with the group. During analysis of racial/cultural identity three things became clear: 1) the student/co-researchers had been de-culturalized and did not even know it, 2) once the student/co-researchers made this connection and understood their loss of culture and the importance of their culture they became determined to reclaim it, and 3) the parents of the student/co-researchers experienced profound racism regularly and now the student/co-researchers were aware of the racism they faced in their lives as well. As a result of this discovery the student/co-researchers became resolute in their role to fight against discrimination.

In a written reflection Esperanza described the impact that her mother’s story had on her cultural/racial identity by reflecting:

*Before I learned about my family’s story I never felt a need to learn who I truly am and who’s blood flows through me. What heritage that is engraved in my skin, lungs, and heart didn’t matter but now I feel foolish that I ignored all the stories written on me when I look in the mirror, I’ve learned that my race gives me another reason to stand tall and brace against any obstacle in my path. Being Latina gives me a sense of fear of the discrimination that I will face but with that*
it also brings a sense of courage because I know I am not standing alone. I’m standing with many Aztec and Mexican soldiers (Esperanza). Esperanza described how she was at first unaware of her heritage and did not even realize the importance of exploring her culture. Through the curriculum she was able to reclaim her cultural heritage and also tapped into Yosso’s (2005) resistant capital. She explained how learning about her race helped her develop internal fortitude to “stand tall brace against any obstacle in my path”. It is also an example of Esperanza tapping into her familial capital and how that elevated her aspirations, which also allows her to resist oppression.

Reyna also described her transformational journey of engaging with her counter-story in a written reflection:

Before these stories I was kinda ashamed that I was Mexican because people thought that we would be 16 and pregnant, in gangs or on drugs. But also they think that Mexicans cannot succeed or do well but after reading these stories I realized that I am MexiCAN not MexiCAN’T, so now I can go into the world and say that I am Mexican and proud. These stories help me understand my culture and why it’s important because if I do not know my culture than I don’t know who I am (Reyna).

In this reflection Reyna directly addressed how important it is for Latinos to know their culture. She explains how knowing a culture helps define who a person is and in doing so taps into a resistant capital to succeed. Reyna transformed from feeling ashamed to being proud. She also reinforced the importance of knowing your cultural self in order to withstand the intervening obstacles that stop many students from achieving their goals. Her journey tapped into resistant capital and familial capital as described by Yosso (2005) by proclaiming that now that she has regained her culture she will be able to overcome the negative stereotypes and succeed.

**Relationships with My Family: Empathy and Understanding**

The third action step created by the student/co-researchers was to “Examine the impact of our stories on my relationships with my family.” Student/co-researcher’s defined this action step as: How we get along with and understand our parents. Student reflections based on this action step show a transformation in their relationships with their family. In this section, I
discuss how student/co-researcher’s relationships were transformed as they engaged with their family’s counter-stories.

Esperanza demonstrates the impact and transformation that the curriculum had on her relationship with her mother by describing her shift in perspective as she learned of the daily sacrifices, discrimination, and abuse her mother had to endure. In her final reflection she explains how it made her more grateful:

Before this experience I wasn’t grateful of every day-to-day sacrifice my mother makes to lift me up and bring forth success. Like how she faced discrimination and abuse from her own family. I now feel a sense of pride because I have a mother that went through hell and back and still stands tall with her head held high. She still works for her family and everyday I look at her in awe of how much courage and strength she has (Esperanza).

Esperanza discusses how the CSTC transformed her relationship and put her in touch with a familial capital that she was unaware of at the beginning. Her mother’s story was made more profound because she played her own mother and portrayed the difficulties she endured as Esperanza elaborated: “It was a really challenging experience since most of the roles I played I was being abused. It was mind blowing every time I thought of how much struggle they went through.” Through her exploration and subsequent portrayal of her mother she was able to understand her mother’s sacrifices which ultimately led to Esperanza being more grateful for her mother. Her newfound empathy of her mother’s struggles allowed her to access the familial and resistant capital that her stories reclaimed. Her improved self-confidence showed in how she carried herself and by carrying the weight of portraying her mother on stage. Both during the show and after the tears shared by her and her mother were the tears of healing and newfound strength.

Dulce also explained the transformative impact of exploring her mother’s story when she elaborated in her final reflection:

My relationship with my family has changed dramatically. I never respected my mom and dad. I always questioned why did they push me to the extremes? Or why did they treat me this way? I always discouraged their feelings. Then that night it was cold and seemed like the perfect night to surprise them with the
feeling of me being curious. The memories and the feelings just exploded from my mother’s mouth. The energy and excitement in her voice made me realize that I was wrong all along. I didn’t believe that I can miss out on so much. After that our relationship was so entwined. There was no way I was going back to my old life. I no longer question her authority (Dulce).

Dulce’s journey demonstrates the transformation that the CSTC had on her relationships with her mother. Before she explored her mother’s story, Dulce did not respect or understand her parents. After going through the process of researching her mother’s counter-story, Dulce understood her parent’s motivation and decision-making. Her journey was so similar to many of the other participants. They simply did not know the struggles and obstacles their parents faced on a daily basis just so their children could get the opportunity their parents never had. By transforming their relationships and opening the lines of communication the student/co-researchers were able to tap into familial and aspirational capital. It also allowed them to feel empathy towards their parents and anger towards the racism and oppression so that they have that capital as they too become young adults and begin navigating a racist world, but now they also have the requisite resistant capital to overcome any and all obstacles.

**Self-Confidence: Fuerza, orgullo and resistencia**

The final action step created by the student/co-researchers was to “Examine the impact of our stories on my self-confidence.” Student/co-researchers defined this action step as: *Stand up for who you are. Proud, not afraid to be yourself. Speak up for yourself and what you believe in.* Student reflections based on this action step show the impact that the stories had on their self-confidence. In this section, I discuss how student/co-researcher’s self-confidence was impacted as they engaged with their family’s counter-stories.

José’s journey demonstrated a transformation in his relationship with his grandfather. This improved relationship had a great impact on his self-confidence and gave him access to his familial and aspirational capital. As a result of the curriculum and specifically his grandfather’s story, José explains the impact that it had on his self-confidence:

I feel extremely confident now and feel like I can do great things. These stories have given me the knowledge to keep fighting for what I believe in. I am not
afraid to change stereotypes because they are wrong and for me that’s enough to fight back. I have the courage to stand up and fight back. I am proud to be Mexican, knowing my cultural background has released my mind because I know where to go now. These stories have inspired me to be brave and persist because my grandpa did. He was brave so should I (José).

José’s self-confidence was transformed, his relationship improved and the understanding of his cultural background deepened. This transformation was buttressed by aspirational, familial, and resistant capital. When he began the leadership program he was quiet and reserved, but at the end he played several different characters and wanting to do more. By accessing his family’s counter-story he was armed with a newfound confidence. He became a very vocal leader within the group and took on more and more responsibility on the project.

Policy and Teacher Training Recommendations

The following is a letter written by one of my student/co-researchers, Maria, to an organization in order to secure funds so that the Leadership program continues. In it she explains why the program is so important to her and the other Latina/o students:

Leadership is a necessity to our school! We have guiding principles, such as having integrity or being compassionate, and high expectations for each student to lead them to a bright future. Leadership clearly makes it easier for students to achieve something beyond what they’d originally do in a classroom. It opens doors to new experiences as well! Seventh and eighth grade is where students have to make that sudden change from toys to tools. This program really brings out their maturity. It would be a great gift if we had this beneficial program for generations to come and we’d like you to be the people who help us get to this goal. Thank you for your time.

This letter highlights the impact and importance of the Leadership program. Maria also began the conversation about why this curriculum is so important. She also demonstrates the beginning of how this curriculum can be replicated in schools with Latino students without betraying the standards that teachers need to adhere to in order to be in academic compliance. The impact is very clear and now the curriculum has been studied by those with the most to
gain from engaging in this type of research. In Maria’s words, “Leadership is a necessity at our school!”

I expand on Maria’s thoughts by providing policy and teacher training recommendations, though it is difficult to reduce such complex issues into bullet points, and I do so with hesitation. Each of the following policy and professional development recommendations are very large and complicated issues that must be implemented within already established structures and systems. For my part, I hope that this study and the voice of the student/co-researchers becomes one of the pebbles necessary to create a ripple effect that helps change the course of our toxic, dysfunctional, and failing educational system. I begin with macro level policy changes and conclude by listing teacher professional development recommendations.

**Policy Recommendations**

1. Increase parent and community engagement components for all schools.
2. Provide parent trainings and workshops that educate parents on the policy-making process and pressure points in which they can influence decision-making processes.
3. Organize parents and families to advocate for legislation that empowers Latino communities and against laws that strip marginalized communities of their rights.
4. Grant school districts and schools more autonomy in order to choose curriculum that allows teachers to implement curriculum based on the student demographics they teach.
5. Extend the hours of all schools to provide adequate wrap around services and create more opportunities for family and community engagement. This would include homework help, counseling services, enrichment programs, and adult classes.
6. Foster partnerships with outside organizations dedicated to equity and social justice.
7. Create systems that share best instructional practices across district and charter schools.

**Teacher Professional Development Recommendations**

1. A realignment of teacher credentialing programs that shifts the epistemological lens to CRT.
2. Professional development opportunities for all teachers on the practice of CRT, which I have implemented at the school I recently founded.

3. Invest money for professional development opportunities on cultural sensitivity and awareness of white privilege, also implemented at my site.

4. Professional development opportunities for teachers to learn the languages of the students and families they serve.

5. Replication of a CSTC for Latino students in all middle school settings. I have centered my CSTC so that all students have access to my curriculum and have begun researching its impact.

**Educational Leadership: Adelante con la lucha!**

As a professional educator, this research illuminated my role and not in a way that made me feel good about my practice. I was participating in an educational system that was contributing to the de-culturalization of Latinos and I did not even know it. Even though I was experiencing success as first an instructor and later as an administrator, there was something not quite right. The schools that I was working for were experiencing success in the Academic Performance Index (API) which was the measurement of academic performance, graduation rates and college acceptance rates, but I was still witnessing large numbers of our young Latinos being pushed out of school and the blame always on the students and their families. Through this research I have found that there is so much more that we can do to reach every student. This research has shown me that there is a way to tap into a strength that comes only from the community and culture of the students. My CSTC is a way to tap into their CCW and can provide some of the missing ingredients for them to navigate the racist and oppressive systems. While engaging in the CSTC the students were given the space to be leaders in co-creating the curriculum. I trusted in them to research their stories and in doing so the student/co-researchers tapped into a strength that can only come from their stories. They began the process of reclaiming their culture, language, history, and identity, which allowed them to take ownership of their educational lives.

My research demonstrates a revolutionary way to engage Latino students. By exploring their personal counter-stories Latino students were able to 1) tap into their CCW, 2) provide
insight of their social context, and 3) repair some of the wounds caused by a racist and oppressive educational system. Replication of this co-created/iterative curriculum could create academic opportunities for Latino students so fewer youth end up like Antonio, the student of mine that dropped out of school and later died as a result of gang violence.

This research also contributed to my departure from the institution where it was conducted. This journey made me understand how dangerous and frightening this type of work is to the status quo. Upon completion of the initial year of CSTC implementation, the response was incredible. Many teachers, administrators, parents, and students talked about how important and special this work was. I felt that the time was ready for me to push this work and get wider implementation within my former institution. However, I believe that this increased pressure to expand on this work made many people feel threatened and contributed to the non-renewal of my contract. Anderson (2007) describes how this work can scare some educators: “It is political in the obvious sense that asking critical questions about one’s practice, classroom and school can offend those with a stake in maintaining the status quo” (p. 5). The year following the initial implementation of the CSTC was very difficult. It began with my removal as director of the Leadership program that I founded, developed, and researched, followed by the elimination of my position from the school. Ultimately, I was able to complete the second year of CSTC only because some of the teachers spoke up on my behalf and on the importance of the program to this community, but I was still let go from the school. My former school was not ready for such a different approach of educating Latinos. Students, staff, and family members were devastated by my departure and the way I was treated by my supervisors. My last few days on campus were filled with many tears and sad goodbyes.

The year that I spent with my student/co-researchers was the most profound year I have spent as an educator. It has completely changed my views on education and I feel blessed to have had the opportunity to work with such amazing students. Despite good intentions, despite coming from the community I served I was simply another piece of the U.S. educational system that de-culturalizes Latino students. However, the results of this research have demonstrated that there is an alternative way to teach Latino students that shifts the epistemological lens. This epistemological shift allows for the culture of Latino students to be
placed in the center of a pedagogical approach that taps into the homeland culture of Latino students that increases engagement and has a positive impact on their racial/cultural identity.

Through the implementation of a CSTC, the student/co-researchers demonstrated that they were able to directly tap into their vast CCW. This enabled them to heal old wounds attributed to a loss of culture, reclaim their racial/cultural identity, improve their relationships with their families, experience a heightened sense of self-confidence, which all led to the student/co-researchers being motivated to do better in school. They reported a transformation in their attitudes as a result of understanding the sacrifices, challenges, and racism endured by their family members. The data showed that when students are denied their culture they are missing the very component that makes them who they are, but by engaging the CSTC they were able to reclaim their culture and history. As stated previously, my year implementing the CSTC was the most profound year of my 15 years as an educator. I set out to examine the impact that the CSTC had on Latino student identity and engagement not realizing that I would be transformed and tested along the way. As a member of the Latino community, one thing I have learned is that our stories, history, language, and culture are incredibly important. Without them we are nothing. This journey has had a significant impact on me both professionally and personally.

As the student/co-researchers were transformed by the journey, so was I. Being dismissed and disrespected from the job I had and losing the opportunity to continue growing the Leadership program that I developed and researched was devastating. However, I too now had access to my own CCW and was not going to simply go away. As previously mentioned I embraced my departure as an opportunity to overcome and do something special. I am now working with an organization in San José, California. Our mission is to prepare first generation Latino students for college. They believed in my Leadership program and the research I have done and I am now a Founding Principal of a new middle school where my Leadership program has been implemented institutionally and ALL students have access to the curriculum. So now all my current middle school students have the opportunity to reclaim that which was rightfully theirs from birth and it happens daily as a core class. As our program grows and as I grow as an educational leader I am working on taking this curriculum and implementing the CCW and CRP aspects into all that our school does. I will begin the research on institutional
implementation of this curriculum in all content areas in the fall of 2016. My transformation and journey as an educational leader continues as I strive on with the implementation of this curriculum and pedagogy institutionally and organizationally as I prepare for more widespread implementation systemically.
References


Institutionally Responsive Pedagogies: A Community-Cultural Wealth Approach to Latina/o Student Engagement Across the Educational Pipeline

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Abstract
The educational system continues to inadequately serve Latina/o students across the educational pipeline. A key shortcoming is the system’s inability to develop, support, and grow educational leaders that can respond. In this article, the author poses a series of pedagogical approaches using a Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005) lens. In the spirit of testimonio, the author sets the context by articulating his own principles for engagement as a Chicano scholar directly engaged with Latina/o students and communities across the educational pipeline. Then the author shares four concrete pedagogical principles that have been used in his work with students, communities, parents, and in higher education, particularly in a leadership development program. The article concludes with a proposed set of principles focused on Institutionally Responsive Pedagogies driven by Community Cultural Wealth and centers on the ways in which institutions need to shift so that the cultural wealth of Latina/o students and communities are realized across the educational pipeline.

Framing the Problem and Possibilities
As a Chicano scholar I have been interested with the ways in which traditional teaching and learning spaces have engaged\(^1\) or failed to engage students, especially Latina/o youth across the U.S. For the last 16 years, I have worked in three geographically distinct areas with very similar demographics, challenges, and possibilities. All three regions have been mostly people of color with significant immigrant and English Learner student populations. While these communities have faced numerous

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\(^1\) Engagement within the teaching and learning context is drawn from the work of Paulo Freire (1973). For instance, engagement occurs when students and teachers co-construct knowledge, when students are legitimized for their experiential experiences, and when the purpose of teaching and learning is not only about literacy and numeracy but also critical consciousness.
challenges, there have always existed “pockets of hope” (de los Reyes & Gozemba, 2001).

At the center of inquiry and action is to promote the Cultural Wealth of Latina/o students, and their peers that sit next to them in classrooms across the educational pipeline (Yosso, 2005). In the spirit of realizing a praxis-driven approach, I often ask, *In what ways are my research and engagement approaches driven by a perspective that respects, honors, and legitimizes the voices, experiences, and perspectives of Latina/o youth?* This question urges that my pedagogical and methodological approaches are driven by principles that value the wealth, knowledge, and truth of the people (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). This approach obviously departs from the traditional assumption that knowledge is something to be acquired from textbooks rather than something that is co-created and realized in classrooms, schools, and communities. To this point, our communities are the curriculum, and a pedagogy driven by Community Cultural Wealth is centered and driven by our students.

In order to legitimate the role that Latinas/os play in the educational spaces we call schools, community colleges, and universities, we need a process. While many social justice and equity-minded educators and leaders espouse to engage in this work in authentic ways, there are often huge gaps between the realities on the ground (i.e., interracial conflict on high school campuses, disparities in disciplinary practices by race and gender, and curricular (ir)relevance particularly for students of color) and the methodologies that are used to engage educators. This struggle has to do, in part, with the ways in which teachers and educational leaders are developed in higher education. There remains an overemphasis on technical skills development versus an exposure to the social and cultural conditions that inform and drive much of the work of educators (Trueba, 1999). For example, a high school teacher can be exposed to the most up-to-date curriculum and assessment approaches in mathematics, but if they are unable to recognize, understand, and reach students via student-teacher relationships and community and cultural relevance, they will struggle. This condition then evolves into a pattern and deficit ideology that is not only destructive to students but seeps into school culture. This only exacerbates the counterproductive policies and conditions that face students and schools. So, the question becomes, how do we get ahead of
these conditions and what kinds of pedagogical approaches might an educator use if they are currently in the field as a teacher, leader, counselor, or community stakeholder?

In this article, I propose several concrete approaches that have effectively engaged Latina/o youth in powerful ways. The goal of this article is to articulate what those approaches look like and provide ways that K-12 practitioners, teacher educators, and others concerned with professional development initiatives can consider. Because there is often a research-practice gap between the realities on the ground and the ways in which universities develop educators, this article is particularly relevant to any educator concerned with using concrete pedagogical strategies that start with the educator, honor the community, and remain rooted in practice. Below I share five principles that guide my work followed by a discussion of four key pedagogical approaches.

**Principles for Engagement: Teaching, Research, Service, and Leadership**

In my university teaching, it became increasingly apparent that in-service and pre-service teachers, leaders, counselors, and other practitioners are likely to have been in the field or enrolled in an existing graduate program in education without any opportunity to articulate a set of principles that guide their actions. Therefore, I created an explicit pedagogical exercise for doctoral students in an educational leadership program that provides them with the opportunity to develop their principles with the input of their communities.

On the first day of class I introduce the assignment and share my five principles. I emphasize that my five principles have evolved, changed, are forever developing and emerging for as long I am honored to work with my community. I charge the doctoral students, many of whom who are current and seasoned teachers in PK-12 and higher education, school leaders, school district executives, and community college and university leaders, with the task of developing their principles over the course of the quarter. Students can draw on previous experiences, current literature, and materials and concepts explored in the course, in addition to some aspirational considerations as they strive to complete the program and continue to serve their communities. Once they develop their five principles and a working definition of each principle, students are
asked to garner feedback from their communities/stakeholders. Some students elect to use social media, email, or some other medium. The goal is to explore the relevance and clarity of the principles with the people they serve. Once the feedback is received, students then incorporate the feedback and submit a complete draft to me. The assignment culminates with a final presentation to in-class colleagues and a final draft that can be displayed in the department offices. One cohort co-presented at a college-sponsored research symposium and shared via poster presentations. Once the quarter ends students are encouraged to frequently reference, add, edit, and build upon their five principles.

At the end of the quarter I once again share my five principles with the class. In the winter 2016 quarter, my five principles felt particularly good given the evolution of my research, teaching, and collaboration with the community. My five principles are: 1) humanistic, 2) truth-telling, 3) historical, 4) equity and excellence, 5) intentionality.

1. **Humanistic**: Through my work I intend to treat all people with respect driven by perspective-taking and reciprocal dialogue. A recognition that each person’s intersectional identities are honored and considered throughout the teaching, learning, research, and collaborative process.

2. **Truth-telling**: There is a continuous goal of truth-building, truth-seeking, and truth-honoring throughout the engagement process. While everyone may not be ready to hear the truth, communities deserve to know the truth. Therefore, my teaching, learning, research, and engagement must be a vehicle to unearth that truth.

3. **Historical**: Ahistorical approaches to education must be erased. All communities exist within a historical context and we must learn, build, and in some situations honor this history to recognize our community’s contributions to society and the world.

4. **Equity and Excellence**: Equity must drive the process and outcome we seek in our education and social systems. One approach is to use excellence as an organizing tool. Every community exemplifies excellence. We must use excellence to strive for equity. Our ability to use excellence as a tool is a
gesture of equity. Our inability to do this work through excellence says something significant about our context and ourselves.

5. **Intentionality:** Social justice and transformative change will not happen by accident. We must work in collaboration to intentionally co-create the conditions that facilitate opportunities for engagement and educational, social, and political change.

So, not only do I model my principles with my students, but I also use these as a reference and community accountability tool in my classes. These principles for engagement drive my direct work with communities. When it comes to actual praxis with Latina/o students across the educational pipeline, these principles become the guiding lenses that inform my work to help explore and unearth the Community Cultural Wealth they bring to the educational space.

**Four Pedagogical Approaches for Latina/o Youth**

There are no magic solutions to engaging Latina/o students across the educational pipeline. However, there are approaches that have proven to be particularly transformative in my work in engaging students in various spaces. In a project titled, The PRAXIS Project in the Inland Empire region of Southern California, I devised a set of pedagogical experiences that I have articulated elsewhere (Rodriguez, 2014). The goal of this section is to describe the significance of these pedagogical approaches for Latina/o students and for the educators that serve them. In an effort to apply with these pedagogical approaches, my own guiding principles for engagement must be a lens that informs this work.

**Educational Journeys**

Any community engagement approach must begin with a willingness to dialogue with the people. These dialogues must be rooted in respect and a willingness to listen and learn. One of the approaches I have used extensively is Educational Journeys/Caminos Educativos (Rodriguez, forthcoming). Educational Journeys were first introduced by my colleague Tara Brown at the University of Maryland College Park with her Participatory Action Research (PAR) work with youth in a continuation high school
setting. Over the last 10 years, I have developed Educational Journeys as a way to engage youth in powerful storytelling about their struggles, triumphs, and hopes and dreams. As the leader of the work, I always begin by telling my story and I push that all of my university or community team members do the same. Then, students are given the opportunity to share their Educational Journeys. Students are given a prompt to reflect on their PK-12 experiences in school and in the community and are asked to identify 2-3 experiences that were defining or transformative in nature. Students then develop presentations, videos, poems, raps, maps, or artwork on construction paper.

At the time of this writing, I am finalizing a conceptual framework that describes the conceptual foundations to Educational Journeys and the pedagogy of healing, building, and thriving through this approach (Rodriguez, forthcoming). By using this approach with high school youth, college and graduate students, parents, and educators, there are some powerful trends and learning experiences that have evolved out of Educational Journeys. Many participants talk about the healing nature of reflection, storytelling, and truth-telling. For instance, students often recall troubling experiences like embarrassment, public denigration, and low expectations and we discuss that the pervasive presence of these experiences are manifestations of racism, discrimination, policy irrelevance, culturally and community irrelevant curriculum and teaching and learning experiences. However, many of us have never been given the language or liberty to explore these experiences, especially as an academic/intellectual exercise. Educational Journeys serve as a vehicle to explicitly acknowledge those challenges and constructively theorize and build on those truths. In conjunction with the opportunity to tell one’s stories, we bridge those experiences with policy realities facing Latina/o schooling conditions in the U.S. For instance, their stories are contextualized in the ways in which discrimination and special education designations are driven by race or language abilities, or situated in contexts of ability tracking, the use of standardized testing, school segregation, teacher quality, and a host of other issues.

Through the process of storytelling and theorizing about the ways in which experiences can be historicized and contextualized in school, district, community, state, and national/global realities and trends, the consciousness and scope of students’ lenses begin to awaken/widen. Many students begin to ask why they have never been exposed
to the conditions in their communities or exposed to an analysis on the ways in which policy has impacted their people and communities.

Almost simultaneously, the healing evolves into a pedagogy of building. Because the story is being delivered to a group of listeners, many of the stories told by Latina/o students resonate in many ways with their peers. While there are always differences, students begin to reflect on the power of recognizing and understanding one’s existence in relation to one another. The realization and shared space and experience often builds a collective consciousness and a realization of social injustice. On a very basic level, students begin to see each other through a different set of lenses, and as one student put it, “I now know I shouldn’t hate or judge so and so (in reference to a peer in class). I had no idea they had been through so much.” Of course one condition is to tell students that they are in no way obligated to share. It is optional and so is the content. However, the stories tend to be powerful. Similarly, we emphasize the power of triumphs as well. Students share the impact that a particular teacher had on their educational opportunities, the power of a program, or the leadership opportunities afforded to them. Participants often talk about that “one teacher” that believed in them, pushed them, or never gave up on them.

**From Storytelling to Action**

We have observed that healing and building leads to an opportunity to thrive. Students are provided with an opportunity to envision their future. Students begin to create and imagine the conditions required for them to thrive. They may propose projects, policies, or new directions in teaching practices that will have a direct impact on them. Students begin to create the stages, venues, and audiences that need to engage with their work. Students define their agency as a reflection of their emerging role as a public intellectual in their schools and communities. Along the way, they gain valuable skills in perspective-taking, presenting, organizing, analyzing, and synthesizing information, relationship building, and a knowledge about power and politics. In one of our projects, students assembled a series of professional development sessions for preservice teachers. The students were concerned about teacher quality issues and identified five characteristics of a high quality teacher. Students assembled themselves
into groups by theme, created surveys and observation tools that exemplify their particular characteristic (i.e, a caring teacher) and then used the school context as a laboratory for exploration. Then they assembled their findings, prepared a presentation, and provided a set of recommendations for policy and practice. It is our hope that students leave with an experience and set of skills that they can use elsewhere, while empowered to build their own educational pathway so that they thrive in and with their communities.

We have learned in this work that Educational Journeys become the foundation of our community work. In order for us to understand where we want to go as a community of scholars, we need to understand the struggles and triumphs that drive us. Educational Journeys facilitate rich “data” about each student that no file or transcript could ever tell us. Teachers engaged in this work are rewarded with a set of knowledge that makes student engagement inevitable, if, they are committed to centering their work on the knowledge, experiences, and truths of Latina/o youth.

**Recommendations for Practice**

- K12 leaders should share their Educational Journey with staff, students, and parents; they can use professional development time to encourage teachers to share their Educational Journeys.
- District leadership and policy should support the work through time allocation, materials/resources, and political support.
- University faculty should use Educational Journeys as a classroom assignment.

**History of Educational Inequality**

When I first met Juan he was withdrawn, wore black jeans about 4 times too large, a long white T-shirt, and never said a word. As I began to engage his class in a lesson on the history of educational inequality specifically for Black and Latina/o communities in the U.S., his physical posture suggested indifference. He sat slouched in his desk with his arms crossed and exuded a “I’m not interested” attitude. I occasionally passed by his desk, asked him questions, and all I got was a shrug. He never verbally engaged with me or the teacher on record.
It all changed one day when I taught a brief lesson on *Lopez v. Seccombe 1944* (Oseguera, 2010). This was a case involving the city of San Bernardino’s discriminatory policies against Latinas/os’ use of a public swimming pool and other public facilities. When a group of children were denied admission into the public swimming pool, a class action lawsuit was filed and the judge voted in favor of Latino community. This case was the first time the equal protection clause of the 14th amendment of the Constitution was invoked to protect the rights of Latina/os in the U.S. (see Oseguera, 2010 for a detailed overview of the case).

Juan suddenly sat up. “What?? That happened here? Why haven’t we ever heard of this?” This information woke him up. For years he passed through the school system with very little interest in what school had to offer him. Based on what I observed in my brief experience with him, it is likely the case that his resistance to school was merely a reaction to an environment that failed to meaningfully engage him. Teachers could try all they want. They could tell him about the ramifications of his behavior on “his future.” They could kick him out of class. They could fail him. In the end, he refused to entertain a school system and everything they had to offer because the system failed to recognize him, his community, and his history.

This is precisely the goal of engaging students in the History of Educational Inequality. Our approach includes a review of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the Americanization movement for Native Americans, Women’s access to education and women’s suffrage, *Mendez v. Westminster, Brown v. Board of Education*, Chicano Walkouts, School Desegregation in Boston, and the more recent Jena 6 case. Students are provided with an opportunity to discuss its relevance for today. Documentaries, readings, news clippings, and social media are used to engage students and teach each case/moment. In some classes, students are expected to research the topic and deliver a 20-minute presentation on the case/moment, and explore evidence of its impact today.

The reality is that many of these events are excluded from the traditional state-sanctioned curriculum, especially in spaces serving most Latina/o students across the U.S. and most universities. While the exceptions lie in ethnic studies departments and given the recent expansion of ethnic studies in high schools in different states should be acknowledged, most Latina/o students will not learn about their history and these
pivotal moments in U.S. history unless educators explicitly engage students with the content.

As a pedagogical approach with Latina/o students, explicitly and intentionally engaging students in these approaches acknowledges the Community Cultural Wealth of their communities and their contributions to education and society (Burciaga & Erbstein, 2013). Most Latina/o children are never taught about the brilliance of their people. Such a pedagogy should be non-negotiable and can be integrated in any subject and content area. The challenge to educators is to collaborate with one another and with public partners like universities to approach the work authentically and with relevance.

**Recommendations for Practice**

- University faculty who are developing future educators should use local moments in educational inequality as curriculum. Students can research, share, and develop curriculum. These efforts should be practiced with transparency; future educators should engage youth in similar ways.
- Current K12 leaders should support and provide a platform for current teachers to explore topics of educational inequality in the U.S. with their students; such work should be publicized and celebrated with the community.
- District leaders and policymakers should fund and develop policy that builds upon the Cultural Wealth of students and the legacy of their communities.

**Powerful Ideas in Education**

The third pedagogical approach involves a deliberate attempt at exposing students to some powerful ideas in education. While in no way is this list of ideas comprehensive, it does introduce some transformative concepts that they normally do not get until college or graduate school, if ever at all. This is important because of the reality facing many of our “educational” institutions and the presence of a Literacy for Stupidification that Macedo (1993) addresses in his analysis of schools and society. That is, in many educational spaces, students, students of color, and Latina/o students specifically are not exposed to critical theories, concepts, or ways of seeing the world. In many instances, this prevention of access is deliberate. The struggle for ethnic studies in Arizona over the last 10 years is a perfect example. Teachers, scholars, and
researchers have worked with students to introduce powerful ideas such as Paulo Freire’s (1973) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* or Rudy Acuna’s (2015) *Occupied America*. To those of us in the field of education, sociology, ethnic studies, Chicana/o Studies and others, these are seminal texts. However, they often fail to reach high school or middle school students unless these works are ushered in by ethnic studies programs.

Without an ethnic studies program to work with, our work through The PRAXIS Project with Latina/o youth has committed itself to exposing students to concepts like the dialectic approach to teaching and learning and the banking/domesticating trends in education (Freire, 1973), power in classrooms and schools (Delpit, 1995), resistance theory and critical race theory (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001), and subtractive schooling (Valenzuela, 1999). Not only do we introduce the concepts, but we encourage students to take a critical look at their Educational Journeys/Caminos Educativos and draw connections. While many of our students have a critical view of their own educational experiences, they often lack the opportunity to reflect and bridge their experiences with concepts that exist in the world. For many students, feelings and experiences of shame or denigration by teachers or systems have been normalized largely because they do not have a language to critically analyze their social and educational conditions or their resistance emerged in counterproductive ways that resulted in the discipline, punishment, or exporting students from school (Fine, 1991). Learning about Valenzuela’s (1999) subtractive schooling concept allows students to put a language to their experience and then work to envision and create a new reality.

Engaging with these texts is carried out in small groups of 4 to 5 students. Each group is assigned a college student when available. Each group is required to define a facilitator, note taker, and speaker although all students are encouraged to speak for the purposes of developing that specific skill. Rather than providing students with an entire text, excerpts are used to ease access to the material as many of the writings are considered theoretically dense, even for advanced graduate students. Students are encouraged to struggle through the material and identify key takeaways. Many students welcome the challenge especially when we tell them that this material is taught to students pursuing a doctorate in education. This latter point also addresses a major
void and pedagogical experience in middle and high schools serving mostly low-income Latina/o youth across the country: intellectual starvation.

Powerful Ideas in Education provide students with an opportunity to bridge their inherent forms of Community Cultural Wealth with theories and concepts that often reflect similar contexts, challenges, and possibilities. In the end, students walk away with a language, an analytical experience, and a set of practical skills that they can use later in school, in college, and beyond. Wrestling with content, making connections with their own lives, and building with others around these experiences results in transformative pedagogical experiences that help realize the purpose and significance of Community Cultural Wealth with Latina/o students.

**Recommendations for Practice**

- K12 teachers should create lessons where students explore the origins of key concepts, their origins, time periods/political contexts, and relevance/applicability today.
- District leadership and policymakers should provide material support for teachers engaged in this work with students; support needs to come from the top.
- University faculty charged to develop future educators should create similar assignments so they are exposed to the content prior to working in the school system.

**Group Research Project**

The culminating pedagogical experience revolves around the group research project. This project uses a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach to engaging Latina/o students in work related to issues they identify as critical to their lives, especially in their schools and communities (see Ayala, Cammarota, Rivera, Rodriguez, Berta-Avila, & Torre, forthcoming). Traditional research would simply facilitate opportunities to collect students’ experiences via surveys, interviews, and observational techniques. However, PAR actually engages students as the researchers to the point

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2 The author is collaborating with a group of scholars who are currently authoring a book on the **PAR Entremundos** approach to Participatory Action Research with Latina/o communities across the Americas.
where they name the issue to be explored (usually related to some significant theme that emerged from the Educational Journey/Caminos Educativos experience), construct a research question that addresses the issue, identify the kinds of data to collect and how to collect it, build bridges with the theories and concepts explored in powerful ideas in education, and collect, analyze, and disseminate their findings to various communities and audiences. The ultimate goal is to facilitate real change in practice and policy at the local level and beyond.

Researcher/facilitators pose a series of critical questions to initiate the process. Students’ responses generate a list which is essentially a set of potential research topics. The collective group narrows the list to roughly 10 topic areas. Students then select and assemble themselves into groups by area of interest. There may be roughly 4-6 students in each group. Using a discussion template, students begin to discuss why the topic is a problem, to whom, and transforming the problem into a researchable question. Over time their research question is refined, data collection methods are identified, surveys and interview protocol are created when applicable, and students lead the data collection and recommendations process.

In previous work, students explored issues like teacher quality, student engagement in the classroom, school cleanliness, and student dropout issues. After a series of practice presentations, the school’s principal and superintendent were invited to a presentation. Perhaps more important than the content of the presentations was the superintendent’s awe at students exercising their voices via high quality academic work. In this particular instance, the superintendent seemed struck by the students’ level of engagement and enthusiasm with the work. Shortly after this meeting, the superintendent decided to implement a district wide policy to be applied at high schools that centered around student voice forums and drawing students in each month to assess and monitor the school’s culture. The goal was for each teacher to identify two students—a highly engaged/high achieving student and a disengaged/low-achieving student—and send them to the student voice forum. At the forum students addressed three key questions: What is working well in school? What is not working well in school? What are some solutions to these challenges? These forums served as an ongoing barometer check on the school culture and served as real time data that the
principal and district can act on as needed. Through this work, Latina/o youth exercised their role as public intellectuals. All they needed was an opportunity and a process to help get them there. But how did these opportunities emerge? It was intentional.

During the initial brainstorming session, we engage with problem-posing pedagogy in the spirit of Paulo Freire’s (1973) work. We ask, why do some students succeed and some fail? Why do some graduate and some drop out? What is the difference between schooling and education? These kinds of questions generate exciting energy and dialogues with Latina/o students. Students generate endless reasons to these questions and demonstrate complex understandings of the issues. The facilitators must have strong sensibilities to group process and a mindful eye on both process and outcome goals. It is vital that the historic silencing of students’ voices or devaluing of students’ theories, perspectives, or ideas is not replicated within the PAR space. For years students have been socialized to believe that their stories, their testimonios, and their Educational Journeys/Caminos Educativos do not matter. PAR works as a process to desocialize students as identified by Paulo Freire (1973) and from these subtractive forms of education and replace it with an authentic approach that values their voices and experiences. However, this work won’t happen overnight.

In one of my projects, a young lady in the back of the classroom sat silent but engaged for nearly three months. While she seemed engaged by producing her Educational Journey and engaging in small group discussions about the powerful ideas in education, she never stepped up to take a leadership role with the project. It wasn’t until the Group Project experience where her voice and leadership was exercised. When we asked why it took her so long to engage with us she stated, “I didn’t trust you guys. I didn’t know if you were committed to us or if you would be gone next week.” This experience spoke volumes about the work and the context in which the student attended school. The school had been struggling academically, socially, and economically for years. Leadership turnover was high, school violence was on the rise, parent and community engagement was virtually absent, and the school was on notice given it perpetual academic failure. Given this context, this student was rightfully suspicious about our intentions and commitment to students. In other words, it was one thing to say we were committed to students and the project; it was another thing to prove it.
Apparently we proved it after three months and this was a major lesson learned about the pedagogy and politics of this work.

Those wishing to engage in this work cannot simply implement a PAR-type approach with Latina/o youth or any other marginalized students in our schools/colleges/universities. There needs to be a commitment to the patience and process required to move the work forward. It will not happen overnight and facilitators may face resistance. The resistance is not personal. The resistance is not defiance. The resistance is not disinterest. The resistance is simply a learned response from a system that has largely subtracted their spirit from the teaching and learning process. The group research project and the PAR approach to make this happen is just one way where the Community Cultural Wealth of students can be used to engage in work that is relevant to students' interests.

**Recommendations for Practice**

- K12 educators can integrate PAR approaches during group project and significant assignments;
- School, district, and policymakers should support the work of teachers and students in terms of access to data, access to school, and freedom to engage in the field whether it is on campus or in the community;
- University faculty should model these approaches for future educators; if they experience it, they will be able to practice it in the field.

**Where Do We Go From Here? Toward Institutionally Responsive Pedagogies that Foster Latina/o Students’ Community Cultural Wealth**

Much of what has been discussed above has been the why and the how. I addressed how my own principles for engagement shape my work with communities, research, scholarship, and teaching and pedagogical engagement with students across the educational pipeline. Then I described four pedagogical approaches that I have used with Latina/o students that create the conditions so they position themselves at the center of the educational endeavor. By engaging with these approaches, there is no shortage of curricular ideas, engaging students in creative ways, and findings audiences
who need to engage with this work. In fact, there are teachers and other pedagogues who do this work every single day.

The question now becomes, what conditions are necessary for this kind of work to flourish? How might institutions transform their practices to comprehensively make these pedagogical approaches the norm rather than the exception? The transformative possibilities of Community Cultural Wealth with Latina/o students will not be realized unless there is a commitment by leaders. Here leadership is not just positional authority as defined by an institutionally ascribed title. Rather, leadership is defined by a commitment from any community member—student, teacher, parent, principal, community organizer, nonprofit leader, curriculum specialist, counselor, community college faculty member, tenured university professor, college/university administrator—to exercise a pedagogy that centers on creating conditions with Latina/o students that facilitates opportunities to name, dismantle, rebuild, and thrive. At the same time, it is equally important to recognize that pedagogy is in part shaped by the context. Thus, for the purposes of this work, and with the intention of working to address the possibilities with Latina/o students, the power of policy needs to be included.

In order to set the stage for this work to grow and thrive, a pedagogical approach at the institutional level is necessary. Historically, pedagogy has been largely viewed as a teacher-centric, classroom level practice that is often confined to the four walls of a traditional classroom space. For the purposes of proposing an institutional pedagogy that is responsive to the power of Community Cultural Wealth, a series of principles that aim to push and promote institutional culture must be considered to move the work forward. Because leadership does not occur in a vacuum, institutional culture and all of its associated complexities must be considered as leaders engage with this work. It is my hope that these principles inspire a dialogue within the field that explores what kinds of conditions are required for Latina/o students’ Community Cultural Wealth and all forms of capital (Yosso, 2005) to thrive.

Additive and Constructive

Leaders within institutions need to focus on additive and constructive work with Latina/o students. In this context, additive refers to the strengths and positive
developments and contributions within the Latina/o community, while constructive connotes a spirit of growth and improvement over time. The additive work in no way subtracts from naming, denouncing, and deconstructing all forms of past and present day oppression facing all marginalized peoples. In fact, that work must be done and perhaps prior to creating an additive agenda. Leaders should commit to guiding the community through efforts that build our own practices, pedagogies, policies, and power. It is through these practices that individual and collective consciousness is born. Inherently, when an additive lens is used as a guiding principle driving the work, it will be naturally constructive as it contributes to building more humanizing spaces that prioritize, legitimize, and elevate our lives, our communities, and our cultures, languages, and legacies.

Community as Curriculum

Secondly, leaders need to leverage the community as the curriculum. The Community Cultural Wealth framework allows us to recognize that our community is rich with power, knowledge, history, and skills. This deviates from the state-sanctioned curriculum that drives and defines most of our teaching and learning spaces and for that matter the ways in which our “educators” are trained in higher education. So, not only must leaders recognize the wealth of the community, but they must be action-oriented and willing to put the community front and center in course syllabi, lesson plans, and assessment approaches. One way to do this is to create content that reflects the rich history of the community. This requires an institutional commitment by leaders to create the conditions so this work can happen.

An equally important leadership commitment needs to focus on the testimonios of the people (Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, & Carmona, 2012). Each of our communities has a rich history that has largely gone unexplored given the narrow, subtractive, and prescriptive approach to legitimate knowledge. Educational Journeys is one concrete approach. Another example is the 2014 documentary Stolen Education produced by Dr. Enrique Alemán at the University of Texas San Antonio. Through his own research on his family history he learned that his mother and aunts and uncles were at the center of a major desegregation/school discrimination case in 1950’s in south Texas. He collected
documents, conducted interviews, and toured the community to tell a powerful story about his own community and the Mexican American struggles for civil rights in this country (Alemán, 2014). These are the types of stories that sit in our communities and will remain covered by a blanket of institutional racism unless we do something about it. Leaders play a key role in lifting this blanket so that Latina/o students actually lead these community exploration efforts.

**Dialoguing—A Skill and a Disposition**

There is no shortage of ideas and creative responses in our communities. However, what is often lacking are leaders who have the capacity to bring people together and have constructive dialogues with our communities and the people who serve them. I have met numerous progressive, equity-minded, and social justice-oriented leaders in many communities. However, they often find it difficult to move a group of people in one particular direction. One of the reasons has to do with a shortage of leaders who know how to employ certain dialoguing sensibilities with communities. Facilitating and leading group dialogues is both a skill and disposition and I will attempt to address both of these approaches together.

First the leader needs to be committed to dialoguing as a healing and knowledge-generating endeavor. The leader must recognize that the solutions to the various challenges facing our communities are in our communities. With recognition that our communities are culturally wealthy, leaders can proceed with co-creating processes that capitalize on a problem-posing approach as recommended by Paulo Freire. Through the dialogue, the leader must not only privilege the content and ideas that emerge, but recognition of the process must be monitored as a reflection of the temperature and tone of the community. Further, the silenced and the act of silencing must be examined by recognizing the process that comes with the work. Over participation and dominating behavior need to also be monitored and called out. Similarly, power dynamics by race, gender, class, sexual orientation, immigration status, religion, and language must be acknowledged as well. Leaders must also be committed to moving the process forward by exercising a keen sensibility around process and outcome. While the goal is to always work toward equity, social justice, and liberatory outcomes for and
Institutionally Responsive Pedagogies

with our communities, the process is just as important as the end goal. The process itself is an educational struggle where participants learn about group process, capacity-building, group dynamics, individual power, group power, and much more. Leaders committed to this work must carefully monitor the process-outcome duality (Rodriguez, 2015) as they engage with communities committed to developing institutionally responsive pedagogies so that Community Cultural Wealth can grow and thrive.

Education for Liberation

The question that occasionally emerges, and perhaps should be asked more frequently is, Latina/o education for what? For whom, and for what purpose? Elsewhere I have written about Transformative Recognition and the role that education plays for Latina/o youth and communities (Rodriguez, 2012). For struggling communities in general and Latina/o students specifically, inequalities and injustices persist. Whether the analysis is on the input side of the equation or an examination of the outcome or impact of a policy, Latina/o students and the communities where they reside are largely operating in state of crisis. Yet, they demonstrate incredible collective resistance by overcoming considerable obstacles and showing up to school or class each day and symbolically say, “Show me what you got?” If what the teacher, school, or institution is deemed relevant or worthy, students engage. If not, they won’t. The question remains, Will we take advantage of this opportunity?

I would argue that education for the basic skills is necessary, but not enough. Antonio Gramsci argues that education, in part, should aim to provide discipline, rigor, and skills for students (Giroux, 2000). But again, the question become, education for what? A liberatory agenda realizes what Paulo Freire (1973) calls reading the word and the world. Education should be about transgressing the boundaries as identified by bell hooks (1994). Education should afford opportunities to understand the self in the world as Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) addresses in her work. These perspectives demonstrate that education is far more than an acquisition of skills. Leaders should work to develop liberatory education for Latina/o students and communities by creating conditions for students to generate knowledge, theorize about their communities, share their
knowledge, deconstruct their communities, and reconstruct their communities where
they can grow and thrive.

**Closing Thoughts**

If we are committed to transforming the Latina/o educational condition in the
U.S. today, we must be committed to developing and fostering leaders who are
principled, bold, community-centric, and committed to education for liberation.
Community Cultural Wealth as an approach not only gives us an opportunity, but
requires a social, political, and educational commitment to be forthright and visionary so
all our Latina/o students across the educational pipeline are recognized as agents of their
own conditions and have the capacity to transform these conditions by growing,
building, and thriving together.
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Reconceptualizing Leadership in Migrant Communities: Latina/o Parent Leadership Retreats as Sites of Community Cultural Wealth

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**Abstract**

This article examines how the Education Leadership Foundation (a leadership development community based organization) in partnership with the Migrant Education Program use parent retreats for building leadership, and skill development of migrant farm-working families. Utilizing cooperative and community responsive practices, these retreats build on the Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005) in migrant communities as parents develop cohesive networks and community leaders to engage in school advocacy in the service of their children. This study draws from testimonios and participant observations to reveal the particular ways that social, familial, and resistant capital are activated. We examine the unique dimensions of leadership development within (im)migrant farmworker communities, and argue for the need to rethink the role of testimonios as a pedagogical tool in parent engagement and capacity building for leadership and agency in such communities.

**Introduction**

*No me quedo otra mas que . . . ir a la escuela.*  
—Raúl Moreno

Translated to “I had no choice but to go to school,” this quote was uttered by Raúl Moreno when he delivered his testimonio at the opening of a parent leadership retreat. Raul was referencing the cruel realization of knowing that he would no longer be able to follow in his father’s footsteps and become a foreman in the fields—the man he most admired. Losing most of his vision after a tragic accident, Raúl had to dedicate himself to his studies and obtain the formal education that had eluded his illiterate farmworking father. In sharing his testimonio with participants in parent leadership retreats, Raul was modeling for them a type of “teaching that
enables transgressions” (hooks, 1994, p. 12) against and beyond the boundaries that so often deny migrant families the ability to engage in and with schools. These migrant parent leadership retreats were collaboratively organized by the Migrant Education Program (MEP) and the Educational Leadership Foundation (ELF) with the purpose of raising consciousness around the needs of (im)migrant families and communities and the roles that parents can play in addressing them.

ELF is a community benefit organization (CBO) founded on July 3, 2007 in Fresno, California by Raúl Moreno, a university and community leader, and former migrant student himself. The mission of ELF is to “empower communities through educational opportunities, leadership development, and civic engagement.” As a community-based organization, ELF has strategically focused on forming partnerships with other key community organizations and businesses to leverage different types of support for students and families. In addition to resources and mentorship, migrant students and their families throughout the San Joaquin Valley also require professional and leadership development. Towards addressing these needs, ELF develops parent retreats that build on culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2014) and community responsive methods (Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2015). This article examines the ways that Latina/o parent leadership retreats foster Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005) in (im)migrant communities as parents develop into leaders through cooperative and community responsive practices (Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2015).

The purpose of this article is to examine the unique dimensions of leadership development within (im)migrant farmworker communities, and argues for the need to rethink what is meant by parent engagement and capacity building for leadership and agency in such communities. This article is guided by the following research question: How do Latina/o migrant parental retreats help develop the leadership skills and abilities of parent participants? In contextualizing parent engagement and capacity building we first review the literature on Latina/o parent engagement and examine how these retreats are different from traditional forms of parental involvement. Next, we draw on Community Cultural Wealth and document how it provides a powerful framework for illuminating critical features of leadership to understand and engage Latino migrant communities. Finally, after an overview of the methodology, the study’s findings are revealed and we conclude with a set of recommendations that includes the use of testimonio as a pedagogy of leadership development.
The Power of Testimonio for Leadership Development in Migrant Communities

Within the field of education, the use of testimonios has attained heightened visibility broadly and, in particular, within the critical work of Chicana/Latina scholars undertaking pedagogical and methodological approaches (Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, & Carmona, 2012; Cruz, 2012). Testimonios are powerful narrative accounts with historical roots in Latin American liberation movements (Burgos-Debray, 1984). Testimonios can be understood as an account told by a person who “has experienced or witnessed great trauma, oppression, forced migration, or violence, or of a subject who has participated in a political movement for social justice” (Cruz, 2012, p. 461). There is a particular sense of urgency in which the testimonio directs attention to a cause or an issue as a way of raising consciousness (González, Plata, García, Torres, & Urrieta, 2003). As pedagogy (Freire, 2000), the use of testimonios centers critical reflection of lived experience, connects individual to collective knowledges, and disrupts the silencing of voices so prevalent in “top down” approaches commonly used in parent involvement and leadership development. This approach towards leadership development requires a deep faith in the ability of people to critically think, reflect, and engage as active participants in their local communities, schools, and the social worlds of their children.

Literature Review

Literature has documented that parental involvement is linked to improved student academic achievement (Chavkin, 1993; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Recently, scholars have examined the engagement practices of low-income Latino families (Auerbach, 2002; Ceja, 2006; Delgado-Gaitan, 2001; González & Moll, 2002; Olivos, 2006) and have acknowledged the differing notions of involvement that often times exist between working class and immigrant families and school officials. Few studies have yet to examine the engagement practices of farmworking families (Lopez, 2001, Treviño, 2004), an occupation overrepresented in the region examined here. Most research on family engagement still conceptualizes being “involved” in school-centric terms defined by school officials (Olivos, 2006; Pérez Carreon, Drake, & Barton, 2005) and assumes egalitarian power relations in “partnerships” between the school and the home (Auerbach, 2002), ultimately subscribing to assimilatory ideologies.
A small but increasing number of studies are beginning to examine the role that community-based organizations can play in developing broader and deeper forms of engagement between families and schools (Warren, Hong, Rubin, & Uy, 2009). Some CBO’s are developing the leadership capacity of parents to self-advocate and engage with schools around family and community needs, simultaneously building relationships and political power (Johnson, 2012; Warren et al., 2009). This study makes a contribution to that literature by exploring the ways one CBO utilizes testimonios in leadership retreats as a way to center migrant family and community needs in leadership development.

**Community Cultural Wealth Framework**

The concept of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) has been applied extensively in sociology and education to study U.S. inequality. An overemphasis in that literature toward forms of cultural capital that dominant groups possess (Carter, 2003; Dixon-Román, 2014), has resulted in a failure to examine the cultural capital held by marginalized groups. Yosso (2005) has proposed a model of Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) to suggest that centering the research lens on the cultures of Communities of Color, makes “visible” their “array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts” (p. 77). Yosso (2005) fleshed out empirical examples in the literature that revealed how Communities of Color nurture cultural capital through dynamic and overlapping processes leading to CCW in the following ways:

- **Aspirational Capital**: A hopefulness rooted in dreaming of possibilities beyond what is present today.
- **Linguistic Capital**: The intellectual and social skills learned from communication experiences, more so than from language or style.
- **Resistant Capital**: Oppositional dispositions undertaken to challenge inequality and marginalization.
- **Navigational Capital**: Maneuvering through social instructions.
- **Social Capital**: Networks of people and resources, often overlooked.
- **Familial Capital**: Cultural knowledges nurtured among *familia* grounded in community history and memory.

In conceptualizing the different forms of capital in CCW, Yosso (2005) contributes a framework that struggles for social and racial justice through a firm commitment to “conduct
research, teach and develop schools” (p. 82). CCW exposes the cultural deficit theorizing privileged in solely “seeing” cultural capital through its dominant forms, while highlighting how societal institutions could potentially transform and be remade by incorporating the experiences and knowledges of Communities of Color.

CCW’s anti-deficit framework focuses on ways to open channels that encourage dialogic leadership to emerge from within Latina/o migrant schools, organizations, and spaces. While all six forms of Yosso’s capital are present, this article focuses on three dimensions of CCW that exemplify ways researchers can redefine leadership in relation to parent engagement in migrant communities. Here, we highlight the role of social, familial, and resistant capitals because they privilege the role of shared experiences, cultural knowledge, and community-based collective action in the service of challenging inequities in schools and communities of these participants.

**Methods and Methodology**

This qualitative study explored the use of *testimonio* as part of a case study (Yin, 2014) that examined leadership development across two parent leadership retreats led by ELF in partnership with MEP. The three-day retreats took place in April and October of 2007 in a remote location in the California San Joaquin Valley. This study relied on multiple sources of data including individual and collective *testimonios*, ethnographic field notes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003), and collective reflections. In addition, leadership style pre- and post-assessments from participants in both retreats were also examined.

Data collected from the leadership retreats were analyzed and compiled into two separate reports produced on behalf of the Migrant Education Program. *Testimonios* were encouraged and shared across the 6 days. *Testimonios* were transcribed and manually coded (Saldaña, 2015) to identify ways parents articulated roles of leadership and the ways that community cultural wealth was expressed in relationship to schools, families, and communities.

**Raúl’s Testimonio**

Raúl Moreno frequently opens the parent leadership retreats by providing his powerful *testimonio*, or his own lived experience, as a product of the migrant farm-working context. As part of his and the ELF’s vision, working with communities necessitates a perspective that
privileges a focus on the lived experience of (im)migrant families, yet from an asset-based perspective. Raúl’s parents and older siblings migrated to the U.S. from Mexico in 1973 leaving him and his younger siblings behind, until the following year when the family reunited in the community of Planada, in the San Joaquin Valley in California. A few months after settling in, he experienced a life-changing event at 12 years of age that would radically transform his educational and life trajectory. Participants in the educational leadership retreat listened intently as he shared his testimonio:

I was riding like a kid on a brand new bike . . . I remember seeing a beautiful girl that really caught my attention as she was sitting on the rear seat of the station wagon that her father was driving . . . I pedaled faster . . . to show off in front of her . . . By then I was going full speed, but the station wagon suddenly turned to the left, and I wasn’t paying close attention . . . a car coming from the other side hit me throwing me 12 feet up in the air. I landed on my head in the pavement. Six months later, I remember waking up in a hospital in Santa Clara . . . the first thing that I asked my father when I saw him was . . . “Dad, why don’t you bring me a comic?” My father didn’t respond and instead he got up and withdrew a little. Then after he came closer, and I asked him “Dad, why don’t you bring me a book? Bring me the [comic]” . . . It took him a couple of days but he brought me one . . . When he took me the comic, I had a big shock when I realized I could no longer read! I had lost 75 percent of my vision. So I asked him, “What happened Dad, why can I no longer read?” He told me, “Well, the doctor said that maybe down the line.”

“So then, I can’t read?”

“Well son, what do you want me to do? I would read for you, but I don’t know how to read either.” Because he didn’t know how to read, he only went up to the first grade . . . Excuse my language but I was very angry at God. I would curse at God. “And why me? Why did he do this to me? Why did I lose my sight?” I was angry at God because I returned to the fields to pick figs and guess what happened to me? I could no longer pick . . . because I could no longer see well. And so I failed . . . My dad pulled me aside one day and said to me, “Son, you have no other choice but to [pause] . . . but to go to school.” So there I go with
a deep pain in my heart off to school. I went with that pain for two reasons . . .
because at school I did not know a single person and second, because . . . I
depthly admired my father and I yearned to be like him. I would often look at
him and say, “One day I want to be like my father. I too want to be a foreman of
the picking crew.” So then my dreams of becoming a foreman were shattered. I
no longer had an option but to go off to school. Go to school without even
speaking English, without being able to see the blackboard, and without friends?
Forget about it.

Raul had little time to dwell on what he had lost as a result of the accident. He learned to rely
on his hearing, he reached out for reading and writing support, and struggled, but graduated
from high school. In college, he drew motivation from courageous students struggling against
greater adversity. He leaned on study groups for support, transferred to a 4 year university
and graduated with bachelors and Master degrees, and now assists others.

One day a few years ago, when my father visited me at the university he said to
me, “Do you remember son when you used to curse at God because you
suffered your accident and lost your eyesight? Do you realize now, that it was all
a blessing by God—a blessing in disguise?”

Raúl’s testimonio conveys a response to experiencing a tragic incident that left him no option but
to tackle adversity head on.

I tell you my testimonio…to each of us, our task is not so much to see our
weaknesses, but to find the means to overcome them, to focus on the assets and
strengths that we do have. I no longer have my eyesight, but God helped me to
hear better . . . I invite you, if you have a particular weakness or are struggling
with something—move that aside and let’s keep going forth as if there is no
other option..

He invites participants in the retreat to collectively reflect around their own experiences of
oppression and marginalization, and to focus on their areas of strength and think of particular
ways to collectivize to overcome adversity.
Findings

In this section, examples from the approach employed in education and leadership retreats speak to the particular ways that these less formal, out-of-school spaces, are culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 2014) and responsive (Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2015) to Latina/o communities. For the purpose of this article, we primarily focus on three of the six ways that CCW of these parents were “seen” and legitimated.

Building Social Capital

Social capital includes the networks of people and the embedded resources within their communities (Yosso, 2005). First, teambuilding and icebreaker (dinámicas) activities were utilized strategically from the beginning of the retreat as a way to have parents interact in entertaining and engaging ways with each other. The dinámicas consisted of playing games where they were encouraged to learn each other’s names, birthdays, and ages and line up alphabetically. Other collaborative dinámicas/teambuilding activities implemented over the three-day retreat included participating in an assortment of hula-hoop activities, as well as “team skis”—participants utilized listening, communication, positive reinforcement, and cooperation skills. The dinámicas served the purpose of helping to forge relationships among parents, move outside of their comfort zones, and engage in activities that were also entertaining.

Second, after developing a stronger sense of community through the assortment of teambuilding activities, they began work—hand-in-hand with other parents from their school districts—on student and community needs efforts. In these groups, parents were asked to engage in dialogue identifying specific and common issues in their communities and schools. The primary objective of these dialogues was to begin to discuss and raise consciousness in a community context and propose possible roles parents could play in working towards addressing these pertinent issues. After the identification of the community needs and problems, representatives from each group incorporated possible solutions in their Parents Advisory Council (PAC) Operational Plan and then presented them to the larger group. Included in figure 1 are some of the identified needs and corresponding actions parents committed to undertake:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Need</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Increase access to education resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>Improve health services in the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>Enhance environmental sustainability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

...
To conclude this session, members from each parent group presented the action steps that they vowed to take as a means towards addressing the needs they had identified.

Third, parents also participated in a networking and business card session where they were introduced to the hidden curriculum (Giroux & Purpel, 1983) around networking and engaging school and community leaders through mock school board presentations. Parents were provided with a protocol on how to “formally” address and engage school board members and power brokers in their respective communities. For most of these parents, entering formal spaces of power to engage “leaders” on a one-to-one basis is not something
they have been socialized to do. In this session, facilitators emphasized losing timidity, making eye contact when speaking, and giving a firm handshake as being key. Parents were also provided with MEP “fill in the name” business cards to take home with them for upcoming engagements. They were reminded that by introducing themselves as members of an organization like MEP they are advocating not just for the interests of their own child, but are seen as members of a collective. Mock school board presentations provided a safe space for parents to practice and have a platform to raise issues that emerged in prior dialogues. The range of issues raised by parents in these sessions included but were not limited to: the need for a stoplight by the school, after-school programs, services for undocumented students, babysitting services, false accusations of children with lice, police racial profiling, new textbooks, students being called “wetback” by others, unfair disciplinary procedures by teachers, and too many remedial classes.

**Tapping into Familial Capital**

Familial capital are the “cultural knowledges nurtured among familia,” all of which are grounded in community, history, and memory. In this context, familial capital addresses the migratory experience and how it extends the notion of family to include relatives and non-kin networks such as *compadres*. This form of wealth engages a commitment to community well-being and expands the concept of family.

The collaborative approach of the retreats structured opportunities for families to draw on each other’s familial capital and engage with one another in ways that surpassed typical leadership work in school spaces. For instance, Raúl Moreno guided parents through a reading of *Angel De Mi Guarda*, a play he authored and published as a children’s book (Moreno, 2007). The play follows José and María Martínez, and their three children—Concepción, Angel, and Esperanza—through the turmoil leading to their departure from the state of Michoacán, México in their journey to the San Joaquin Valley agricultural town of Planada. The 13-scene play critically deals with the Martínez family’s social, political, and economic context prior to departure, including hunger and joblessness. This forces José Martínez to draw upon his social and familial capital (Yosso, 2005) by seeking the help of his *compadre* Manuel, who now resides

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1 Ángel de Mi Guarda translates to My Guardian Angel.
in California, and setting off a chain of events that climaxes when he and his family arrive at the Mexican border.

*Angel de mi Guarda* exposes the wide array of social and familial capital that migrant families rely on in order to borrow the $15,000 that “coyotes” charge to smuggle each family into the United States. These seldom told perspectives reveal the many dangers that families face as they attempt to cross the U.S.–México border. Once in the U.S., exploitative labor conditions arguably structure a modern day version of indentured servitude for farmworker families. For José and María Martínez, this arduous transnational journey inculcated in their children the importance of obtaining a formal education (Lopez, 2001; Nava, 2012) in order to escape labor and economic exploitation, attain a higher standard of living, and no longer be subjected to such policies of dehumanization.

The most significant scenes of the play focus on the pressures the Martínez children face in terms of cultural assimilation. At 17 years old and as the oldest of the three Martínez children, Concepción has grown tired of her family’s harsh struggles, drops out of school, and elopes with her boyfriend. As time goes by, Angel, the middle child, deceives his non-English speaking parents into signing a consent form to enlist into the U.S. Army. Ashamed of his cultural background and the poverty he grew up in, Angel views his enlistment in the Army as a way to assimilate into mainstream U.S. society and leave behind his cultural background and heritage. In contrast, the youngest daughter, Esperanza, graduates high school near the top of her class and aspires to leave for a top-ranked four-year university, but struggles to gain her father’s approval. While, Mr. Martínez supports his daughter’s desire to obtain a higher education, his unfamiliarity with the educational system makes it difficult to give his permission. Ultimately, though, Mr. Martínez acquiesces and allows his daughter to go to college with the condition that her family remain a priority. The culminating scene captures the brutal irony of Angel—now an agent for the Department of Homeland Security and the Border Patrol—shooting and killing his own Godfather as he attempts to cross the U.S.–México border in pursuit of similar opportunities as his *compadre* José and the Martínez family had done only a couple of years before. The play ends with Angel embracing and comforting his dying Godfather—Angel has finally realized that cultural assimilation and his own desire to dutifully serve his new country have been fraught with serious contradictions and consequences.
Following the play, parents were invited to reflect and dialogue on their reactions to it. One of the mothers, María, shared her testimonio to address the contradictions of familial pursuit of the American Dream:

In the play, what was most sad was the young man Angel, who was Mexican. He came from México, he studied here, and then he became an ICE agent. The saddest thing to me was that he was there to repress and kill his own people. And it was sad what happened to his Godfather and that is what happens with us, with our children today. If they came here or were born here, now they become part of the same machine that does not let us pass through.

María spoke to the tragedy inherent in the socio-political processes that lead people to migrate (Gonzales, 2013) across borders. In these scenarios, immigrants face immense dangers, as well as leave much of what they know and love behind. María’s commentary can also be understood as the fear that many immigrant families have of U.S institutions like the military, or that formal education will erode the cultural imprint that parents leave on their children. In his story of becoming a border patrol agent, in many ways Angel symbolizes the failure to cultivate an educación (Burciaga & Erbstein, 2012; Valenzuela, 1999)—or the role a family plays “in inculcating in children a sense of moral, social, and personal responsibility and serves as the foundation for all other learning” (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 23). Not limited to formal education in the form of certificates and degrees, this notion of educación refers to “competence in the social world.” This competence in the social world would lead Angel to “respect the dignity and individuality” and humanity of border crossers grounded on empathy and learned from the lived experiences of his family and as a fellow migrant.

Another parent shared her testimonio highlighting the challenge to traditional gender roles, the evolving role of fathers, and the potential to also transform cultural knowledge and cultural roles in father–son relationships. The mother confided:

This is the first time that I come to a retreat like this one. One always says that one has problems, and we think that no one has problems bigger than our own. I’m starting to find out that for example, it is true that as a parent (more my husband in my case) who is the one that works, he is the one that worries more about putting something to eat on the table at home, than all that having to do with our children’s education. In part my husband used to be like that . . . now
he is beginning to change because I have a son in high school and he is making his
dad understand that he needs help, and not just economic support, but that he
also needs to talk to him. He tells him, “Look dad I need you to understand that
I will be graduating from high school soon, and I want to continue to study.” And
my husband would tell him, “It’s just that studying is not for . . . you can’t keep
going to school because you don’t have papers.” And my son would respond,
“But you have to help to continue to fight so that I can continue to study. You
only seem to worry about providing me with something to eat, to give me
money with what I may need, but you don’t pay attention to what I may need
you beyond those things.” And now I understand, it is true that some parents
worry more so about providing the necessities, and school and the children get
left in last place.

In the beautiful testimonio above, a mother shares the unconditional love a son has for
his father and explains to him that he can play a much larger role for him beyond being a
provider. Despite being undocumented, the son’s desire to continue to higher education
reformulated for his father the concept of familial capital, or an evolved “caring, coping, and
providing” (Burciaga & Erbstein, 2012; Yosso, 2005) that necessitates expanded roles adapted
to the new realities facing migrant students and their families in the U.S. Furthermore, Raúl
Moreno helped crystalize this session by reminding parents that evolving gender and leadership
roles are important in a family. In fact, Moreno then challenged them to take the message to
those who could not make it to the retreat.

Activating Resistant Capital

Resistant capital is defined as those “knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional
behavior” that are put in motion to challenge political neglect, social inequality, and oppression”
(Yosso, 2005). While one form of cultural awakening involves understanding oppressive
structures, this process also necessitates counteracting them. Formal school spaces where
parents are typically invited and expected to participate are often not welcoming to migrant
Latina/o parents (Nava, 2012). The leadership retreats facilitated and cultivated the resistant
capital of parents through individual and group reflections, in creating spaces for parents to
articulate the new knowledge co-created in this space, and in helping them build confidence that they can and do play very significant roles in the educational trajectory of their children.

The final day of the retreats served as an opportunity for participants to collectively reflect on their participation in the retreat and to share their desires of what they wished to engage in with their newfound knowledge. For example, Magdalena, who resided in a community outside of Fresno, shared how the retreat provided her an opportunity to practice some of the challenges parents will face in “real life” once they return to their respective communities. A benefit for her was gaining the motivation to follow through on her commitment toward getting her city to build a stoplight at a dangerous intersection across the street from the elementary school, hoping to save the lives of children who cross that intersection on a daily basis. María, another parent, revealed in her testimonio difficulties that her child has endured as a result of their undocumented immigration. When she sees injustices perpetrated against migrants, María asks herself, “Why don’t you want us? We only come to work the most difficult jobs. I never see a ‘white person’ bending down and picking lettuce like me.”

Other parents, including Guillermina and Socorro, took it upon themselves to challenge parents to broaden and expand the migrant education network of participants who attend leadership retreats. For example, Guillermina challenged other parents to recruit more and more participants for an upcoming retreat by urging, “We need to fill 3 or 4 buses next time. We need to have different parents next time as well.” She then stated how she pushes her children in school, “We tell them to always work hard so you don’t have to struggle like we do.” Socorro, another parent who provided her powerful testimonio, reminded the audience that her own community had originally begun their migrant parent meetings with 4 parents; now, more than 85 parents are often present at their meetings. She asserted, “We need to get and hook those parents that are in the background and reel them in! We can do it.” Her successful past strategies included raffles and an assortment of fundraisers to help raise money for scholarships for undocumented students attending college. During moments of reflection Socorro was often seen knitting beautiful blankets that she then used to raffle off to raise funds for scholarships for college-going students.

The culminating event of the retreat was the creation of Individual Action Plans (IAP) where parents made family, educational, and community commitments. IAPs provide parents
an opportunity to utilize the new knowledge and networks established during the retreat to mobilize them towards concretely listing the project and actions they commit to undertaking upon returning home. In their IAPs, parents listed commitments including being more supportive of their children, attending more parent–teacher meetings, paying closer attention to the educational progress of their kids, becoming involved in school-sanctioned activities, sharing the newly acquired information with community members, recruiting more parents (especially fathers) to upcoming events and retreats, and organizing their neighbors for social/educational issues, among others.

The retreats helped shift the consciousness of many parents by providing them opportunities to reflect on how they already provide *apoyo* (Nava, 2012), or support to further promote for the education of their children, and to imagine particular ways—both as individuals and as a collective—that they can assume leadership roles to help advance academic success and the pressing needs of their communities. Perhaps this parent said it best on why the retreats were transformative:

I’ve been to many workshops but what I liked about this one is that we worked as a team here, that we all had a place. It was fun, and we went more in depth in many of the things we did. I feel more motivated to return to my district. The information on the service agreement will help me out a lot. And also the event planning information that was given to us.

These *testimonios* depict how migrants in underserved communities can come together, build relationships, identify common problems in their communities, engage in deep critical reflection, while building leadership skills, and begin to exert and enact agency to mobilize for action upon their return to their communities.

**Conclusion**

In summary, community based organizations like ELF in partnership with MEP play an important role in bringing parents together to reflect on the educational needs of their community and to devise corresponding action plans that they can enact collectively. Beyond traditional programming for parental involvement, these retreats create opportunities for families to build social capital and their CCW is acknowledged. The leadership retreats serve
as spaces where broader and deeper engagement can begin to take place in ways that are rooted in the migrant experience and also builds on the strengths of migrant communities.

The parent retreats also reveal the powerful role that testimonios play as pedagogical tools that serve to affirm and legitimate the presence of migrant parents. This study reveals that when migrant families are engaged in the education of their children in culturally responsive, (Ladson-Billings, 2014) and community responsive (Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2015) approaches and when their culture and history are seen as assets (Cabrera, Milem, Jaquette, & Marx, 2014), parents can have deeply transformative and empowering learning experiences. The types of cultural wealth that emerged through the use of testimonios offer a realm of possibilities to develop the leadership capacity of parents looking to more meaningfully engage on their own terms and in ways that authentically address the needs of the migrant community.

This study illuminates how CBO’s like the Education Leadership Foundation play an important role in supporting migrant leadership development by authentically drawing from the forms of cultural wealth that migrant families and communities bring to bear in the education of their children. By utilizing testimonios as pedagogy that emphasizes critical consciousness (Freire, 2000), educators can center the voices and experiences of families, learn from their struggles, and build upon their strengths in generating forms of educational engagement that are true to migrant families and the broader community. Further research should highlight the specific ways that CBO’s can utilize asset based pedagogies and practices to legitimize the cultural wealth among Latino families, particularly in migrant communities. In addition, future research should examine how schools can learn from the framework established by the leadership retreats in order to rethink the goals and purposes of their parent engagement approaches.
References


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Abstract
This article draws on a multi-year, participatory action case study of ALIANZA, a California-based Latinx im/migrant parent group. Grounded in Latina/o Critical Theory (LatCrit), this article focuses specifically on the development of political agency among ALIANZA members, highlighting organizational strategies aimed at school reform while strengthening counter-narratives to interrupt racist depictions that functioned to cast Latinx parents as “unfit” to serve as educational leaders. Data suggests that ALIANZA’s approach helped its members heal from past abuse and racist encounters, identify and speak out against injustice, and build a collective and shared political capital to leverage their voice in local reform efforts. The author concludes with implications for future research and practice, providing specific recommendations for other educational leaders and those who train them.

Introduction
It was a typical ALIANZA meeting. I had come to admire the multiple purposes ALIANZA meetings served, one of which was the opportunity to convivir.1 Tonight was especially important for nuestro libro,2 as Olga had coined our collective work to bring attention to their efforts as parent activists. I opened up the conversation by asking the group to define how ALIANZA had impacted their identity as madres y padres valientes en lucha.4 Elena responded, “Creo que la mejor manera de capturar lo que [ALIANZA] ha hecho por mi es a través del dicho, “no más atole con el dedo.” 5 Unclear about the dicho’s

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1 Convivir is the Spanish word for “sharing time and experiences.”
2 Translated to English: Our book
3 In an effort to honor the voice of my informants throughout this manuscript, I have kept their words unaltered and in the language in which they were originally shared. English translations for each quote, when needed, are provided in the footnotes.
4 Translated to English: Courageous mothers and fathers in struggle
5 Translated to English: I think that the best way to capture what [ALIANZA] has done for me, and I believe for many of us here, is through the saying, “no más atole con el dedo.”
meaning, I asked Elena to elaborate, “Cuando una mamá está amamantando es natural que se case especialmente si le toca un niño comelón. Hay momentos que no puedes más y para apaciguarlo entre sus horas de comer se le da un poquito de atole con el dedo. Pues lo mismo pasa con nosotros – se nos ha dado atole con el dedo para apaciguarnos, para engañarnos, para no quejarnos de las injusticias que se cometen día tras día contra nosotros, contra nuestros hijos. Se justifican dándonos una miseria mientras disfrutan de los beneficios de la explotación de nuestro labor. [ALIANZA] nos dio las herramientas para reconocer y desafiar a los que se proponen seguir dándonos atole. Antes aceptamos esta realidad pero ¡no más!66

It was common to hear members of ALIANZA, a grassroots organization of Latinx7 im/migrant8 parents in California, communicate their critique of social structure, understanding of oppression, and role as resisters through the use of stories, dichos, consejos,9 and metaphors. This was especially true of Elena. Her analogy, highlighted in the opening vignette, underscored the transformative aspect of ALIANZA in challenging what she felt had become a normalized practice in institutions serving Latinx im/migrant parents. At its core, her use of a dicho spoke to a process of silencing by deception, of being tricked into believing they had been equitably “served” through false promises and stand-ins for real reform. She uses the same dicho to credit ALIANZA in providing her the tools to call out acts of deceit on behalf of those in power. Most striking, though, was the connection between the dicho and Elena’s role as a mother. By using a saying that reflects an act only a mother could fully comprehend, the dicho emphasized the

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6 Translated to English: When a mother is breastfeeding, it’s natural that she becomes tired, especially if she has a child who is a big eater. There are moments that you can’t anymore, and to calm the baby between feedings, you trick her by giving her a bit of atole (a Mexican drink made from cornmeal) with your finger. Well the same thing happens with us—we have been given atole with the finger to calm us, deceive us, so that we don’t complain and speak up about the injustices that are committed day-after-day against us, against our children. They justify themselves by giving us a pittance while they benefit from exploiting our labor. ALIANZA has given us the tools to recognize and challenge those who would like to keep giving us atole. Before, we accepted this reality but not any more!

7 I use the term “Latinx” as a gender neutral alternative to Latino. It aims to disrupt the gender binary and represents a grammatical move toward justice.

8 I place a “/” between “im” and “migrant” to challenge the notion that all im/migrants move to the U.S. in pursuit of the “American dream,” often masking the underlying socio-political and economic factors for their migration or that transnational migration is not always one directional. Im/migrants may migrate back and forth from the U.S. and their home countries, send remittances to family members outside of the U.S., and/or dis-identify with citizenship structures and efforts to assimilate (Morissey, 2013). In an effort to more accurately represent these varied and complex realities, I chose to use “im/migrant” in lieu of “immigrant” as a grammatical move toward justice.

9 Consejos is the Spanish word for “advice.”
extent to which a mother, based on her lived experience, could identify, comprehend, and expose acts that render injustice possible.

Extending Elena’s analysis, this article provides a deeper look at how members of ALIANZA developed political agency while also highlighting how they worked to continuously adapt and remake ALIANZA’s political identity as one of madres y padres valientes en lucha.10 While difficult to capture the range and depth of approaches the group has employed since its inception, my goal here is to provide an analysis of those key strategies that best frame how ALIANZA supports and develops the leadership of its members so that collective action to create social change is possible. It’s not meant to be exhaustive. Rather, the aim is to share defining group practices that ultimately make the case for using ALIANZA as a platform for unpacking the politics and possibilities of Latinx im/migrant parents as leaders in reforming schools and society at large.

ALIANZA

Since its inception in the late 1990’s, ALIANZA defines its purpose as training, organizing, and facilitating the participation of parents in local school reform. In the process, they have called attention to the conditions affecting Latinx students and their families, who comprise the majority of students in their district. ALIANZA has organized numerous activities grounded in popular education,11 such as directing leadership development trainings for parents, organizing forums with elected school and city officials, and working with other non-profit and grassroots organizations to bring resources to local families in schools. Comprised predominantly of Latinx im/migrant parents ALIANZA has been instrumental in foregrounding Latinx im/migrant concerns within local school and city politics over several years.

The Racial Politics of Parent Leadership for Latinas/os

A large body of educational research unequivocally concludes that parent involvement has a positive impact on student achievement (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990, 1996; Epstein, 2009; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Hoover-Dempsey & Whitaker, 2010). Although such work has been

10 Translated to English: Mothers and fathers in struggle
11 ALIANZA defines popular education as “. . . a process of analysis, critical and participative reflection through economic, political, and socio-cultural realities that arise from impoverished organized groups” (Organizational website, concealed to protect anonymity).
numerous, it has also highlighted important contradictions in how “parent involvement” is operationalized, the causes for the “lack” of parent participation in schools, and ideas for how to build better partnerships between schools and parents. This is not surprising considering that “...the concept of parent involvement is a social construct whose boundaries and expectations are impacted by culture, race, class and gender issues” (Jasis & Ordañez-Jasis, 2005, p. 32). What has become a dominant thread in this work, though, has been the unrelenting search in the home for the “problem” of low parent participation. Consequently, much of this research has served to brand parents as the primary culprits for a failed relationship between them and public schools. This has been a popular finding as it pertains to Parents of Color, particularly Latinxs (Donato, 1997; Moreno & Valencia, 2002; Olivos, 2004, 2006; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Valdes, 1996; Valencia & Black, 2002).

Challenging these findings, researchers have found that Latinx parents continuously expressed a strong value for their children's academic achievement (Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Valdes, 1996; Valencia & Black, 2002) and provided a rich socio-cultural environment of learning at home (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990, 2001; Olivos, 2004; Valdes, 1996; Valdez, 2015). Several scholars have also explored the personal and collective empowerment of Latinx parents as they organized to address educational concerns in their communities (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990, 2001; Dyrness, 2011; Jasis & Ordoñez-Jasis, 2012; Moreno & Valencia, 2002; Olivos, 2004, 2006; Pardo, 1990).

To understand this contradiction—the prevalence of culturally deficit (Valencia, 1997) portraits of Latinx parents despite evidence to the contrary—I employ Latino Critical Theory (LatCrit) to more fully examine how multiple forms of oppression based on immigration status, language, culture, ethnicity, and phenotype intersect to shape the experiences of ALIANZA (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). In his work as parent activist in a Latinx community, Olivos (2004) finds utility in a critical race framework for understanding how the relationship between Latinx parents and public schools

... is negatively affected by the cultural biases ... inherent within the institution of public education as demonstrated by its historic role of using

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12 “Students of Color” is intentionally capitalized to reject the standard grammatical norm. Capitalization is used as a means to empower this group and represents a grammatical move toward social and racial justice. This rule will also apply to “People of Color,” “Parents of Color,” “Im/migrants of Color,” and “Communities of Color” used throughout this article.
13 All of the work cited here challenges the argument that Latinx parents are to blame for the failed relationship between them and schools.
its power to impose the values and wishes of the dominant culture onto bicultural student and parent populations (Olivos, 2004, p. 29).

While Latinx parents demonstrate a high regard for education and exhibit multiple forms of involvement, their contributions to the education of their children do not “fit” within the narrowly-defined white, middle-class, standards of what it means to be a “good” and “involved” parent (Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Valdes, 1996). In their research on cultural capital in family-school relationships, Lareau and Horvat (1999) argue that “the rules of the game” that mediate the interactions between parents and school are race-specific, where white, middle-class parents have what Lareau (1989) calls “home advantage” (Lareau, 1989; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Shannon, 1996). This can translate into an environment where Latinx parents are frequently rebuffed by administrators and teachers, not included in school discussions about their children, and even less so in school decision-making (Auerbach 2002; Olivos, 2004; Rogers 2002; Valdes, 1996).

Taken together with dominant notions of parent involvement, educational policies on school accountability only contribute to a further marginalization of Latinx parents in schools (Rogers, 2002). The ineffective system of implementing such policies through school-based decision-making bodies, like school site councils, has necessitated that Latinx parents engage and/or create decision-making spaces in order to generate meaningful change. I argue Latinx parent leaders, like those in ALIANZA, acknowledge a relationship exists between the activities and strategies they employ and the context that affects, informs, and may even be contested by such efforts. Compared to white, middle-class families with “home advantage,” (Lareau, 1989; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Shannon, 1996), Latinx parents are tasked with transforming, not just becoming involved in, the spaces often allocated for them in schools. And for Latinx im/migrant parents, particularly the undocumented, there is the additional burden of dealing with the legal boundaries of political membership in the US, that complicate the terms of engagement in school reform.

Methodology

Using a participatory action approach, I employed a qualitative case study design to guide data collection. Events that were seen as critical, influential, or decisive were extracted as “critical incidents” as a means to understand larger phenomena from the perspective of
ALIANZA (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This type of approach allowed me to capture the relationship between ALIANZA and the broader context that informs their work, as they see it.

As a research paradigm, participatory action research (PAR) facilitates a research space for research collaborators to construct knowledge, transform their experiences, and work to change those conditions that affect their lives (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001). It demands a move from a unilateral researcher-based approach to a multilateral community-based participatory paradigm. PAR challenges traditional, positivist research approaches that fail to recognize how knowledge is co-constructed in relationships between the researcher and the informant (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001). Combined with LatCrit, PAR provided the tools to help capture the experiences of ALIANZA parents while directly engaging my positionality and cultural intuition (Delgado Bernal, 1998) as a Chicana researcher and community organizer with ALIANZA.

I conducted observations of ALIANZA’s planning of key group events that occurred from 2008 to 2012, including their internal monthly meetings, community forums, graduation events, parent trainings, and invitations to present at local and national conferences. ALIANZA parents were also asked to participate in three oral history interviews and one focus group during this same time period. In order to protect the anonymity of ALIANZA, its members, and other groups with whom it associates, all names, both individual and organizational, have been replaced by pseudonyms.

Data collected from this study was analyzed through an inductive grounded theory approach to develop themes and categories from which to make sense and interpret the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Here, I specifically employed a critical race grounded theory approach (Malagon, Pérez Huber, & Vélez, 2009), to assist me in isolating emergent themes. Critical race frameworks, far from functioning as “predetermined” categories, were necessary for allowing the experiences of the parents to emerge and inform the entire research process.

Three key themes emerged that defined ALIANZA’s central strategies. The first approach was the creation of counter-spaces where members came together to celebrate culturally-based traditions, share concerns about a range of issues without judgment, heal from past abuse, and build solidarity. Collectively, the mothers referred to this function as conviviendo
A second strategy comes in the form of workshops and trainings, where ALIANZA employs popular education to help its members identify, name, and speak out against injustice. They define this as *aprendiendo a hablar y luchar.* Finally, the third approach, which is connected to the first two, captures how ALIANZA comes together to create new opportunities for themselves, their children, and communities. This is a strategic effort to build *political capital* that the group then uses to leverage their voice and participate in reform efforts and rests on members’ confidence and critical know-how of schools and civic institutions. The group defines this last approach as *realizando y rehaciendo.*

**Conviviendo y desahogando:** Sharing, Healing, and Honoring Lived Experience

Central to ALIANZA was the practice of coming together to share experiences, celebrate traditions, find support, and build solidarity. *Conviviendo y desahogando,* as ALIANZA called it, was similar to Dyrness’ (2011) experience working with Latinx im/migrant mothers in Northern California when she described entering their space as “. . . soothing, comforting, like background music” (p.139), referring to the “rhythm” of their meetings, which was characterized, among other things, by a sharing of experiences, laughter, food, and the use of “non-traditional” spaces for parent engagement, such as the kitchen table. This was *conviviendo* and it was core to ALIANZA. To appreciate this process, it’s necessary to understand its relationship to the spaces in which it occurs and, conversely, where it doesn’t occur.

ALIANZA’s gatherings occurred primarily in three locales: (1) the home of Justo and Selina, two of ALIANZA’s founding members; (2) *la casita,* a small gathering place sponsored by a local non-profit organization; and (3) *Don Beto’s,* a local restaurant whose owner is a long-time friend of the group. Taken together, Justo and Selina’s home, *la casita,* and *Don Beto’s,* comprise ALIANZA’s working spaces where they conduct group meetings, trainings, workshops, event planning, and other activities. Although members held positions on local school or district-level advisory councils, ALIANZA rarely operated from within school or district-supported spaces, such as a parent welcome center or a PTA office.

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14 Translated to English: Spending time together, sharing, and getting things off your chest
15 Translated to English: Learning to speak up and fight
16 Translated to English: Realizing and remaking
17 Actual name of restaurant has been replaced by a pseudonym to protect the anonymity of ALIANZA and its members.
18 Parent-Teacher Association (PTA)
I argue that ALIANZA’s convening locales can be more appropriately framed as counter-spaces, where they challenged people and spaces that seek to exclude, silence, distort, or delegitimize their lived experiences as Latinx im/migrant parents. Dyrness (2011) defines a central function of counter-spaces as, “. . . the ability to collectively dissect controlling images of one’s group and fashion alternative selves” (p. 125). Similarly, ALIANZA’s use of space suggests the importance of operating from sites not mediated by deficit ideologies of Latinx parents, from which they claim institutional spaces suffer. As counter-spaces, Justo and Selina’s home, la casita, and Don Beto’s, offer ALIANZA members the opportunity to safely interrogate their experiences as madres y padres en lucha while allowing them to construct new arenas that respect their dignity and value.

ALIANZA often discussed the contradiction in using these other spaces as a means of gaining entry into more traditional decision-making arenas. Yesenia, a long-time ALIANZA member explained this tactic:

Somos los de afuera queriendo cambiar a los de adentro. Nuestra meta es entrar al sistema, pero para hacerlo, tenemos que analizarlo de afuera y verlo por lo que realmente es. Haciéndolo de esta forma como lo hacemos nosotros en [ALIANZA] asegura, yo pienso, que el trabajo nuestro sea honesto y con mayor impacto porque no estamos ligados a las ideas de los que están en poder.19

For Yesenia, the purpose of working from the “outside” was essential, where they defined the terms of their participation. But working from the outside did not mean staying there. Yesenia and the other parents highlighted how crucial it was to insert themselves politically into these “inside” spaces, or those spaces where power was leveraged. To make this happen, Yesenia relies on ALIANZA as a supportive platform. She stressed, “sabemos que allí se toman decisiones importantes. Tenemos que entrarle, pero armados y listos para luchar. Ellos no nos van a proveer las herramientas de un conocimiento crítico. Ese es el trabajo de [ALIANZA]. Pero no por eso abandonamos esos espacios.” 20

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19 Translated to English: We are outsiders trying to change those on the inside. Our goal is to enter into the system, but in order to do that we need to analyze it from the outside and see it for what it really is. Doing it this way, like we do here in [ALIANZA] ensures, I believe, that our work is honest and will have a greater impact because we are not tied to the ideas of those in power.

20 Translated to English: We know that important decisions are made there. We need to insert ourselves, but armed and ready to fight. They won’t provide us the tools of a critical consciousness. That is the work of [ALIANZA]. But not because of that do we abandon those spaces.
Extending Yesenia’s comments, Elena pointed to the structure of school-based committees as especially alienating for individuals who do not fit the mainstream model of a leader, which she defined as white, middle-to-upper class, male, English-speaking, and of course, a U.S. citizen. According to Elena, even when you have knowledge about how the system works, it is still an uphill battle just to be heard, let alone taken seriously. For Elena, her experience through ALIANZA has shown her first-hand how easily one is dismissed as a Latina im/migrant mother. She highlighted,

_Hace poco, el distrito organizó lo que le llaman un ‘task force’ para desarrollar estrategias para involucrar a más padres. Fui, y cuando entré, me entero que contrataron a una firma con supuesto conocimiento en el área de involucramiento de padres para construir un currículo. Cuando empezó a presentar el señor americano, gringo, yo levanté la mano pero me dijeron que no podía comentar o preguntar hasta el final. . . . [T]enia que hablar porque el currículo que usamos en [ALIANZA] es igual o hasta mejor de lo que estaban presentando. ¿Por qué no usar el de nosotros? . . . Prefirieron pagar miles de dólares a este otro señor porque a él sí lo vieron como experto en el área de padres más que un propio padre. Para mí era obvio. Somos padres inmigrantes. Si no fuera por [ALIANZA], yo me hubiera desesperado hace mucho . . . [ALIANZA] me ayuda a perseverar cuando te hacen a un lado._

Elena points to several noteworthy reasons for why ALIANZA’s decision to organize outside of schools is needed. The first rests in how these “traditional” decision-making spaces structure and often limit how individuals can participate. Second, she notes her frustration at witnessing how an agency was hired to develop curricula for parent workshops when ALIANZA already had a successful curricula and approach for carrying out these same activities. For Elena, it was clear that ALIANZA was not seen as possessing the same type of expertise and, therefore, not

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21 Translated to English: Recently, the district organized what they called a task force to help develop strategies to involve more parents. I attended and when I entered I came to find out that they had hired a firm with supposed knowledge in the area of parent involvement to develop a curriculum. When the presenter, a white U.S. American, began I raised my hand but they told me that I had to wait until the end to ask a question or make a comment. . . . I needed to speak because we have a curriculum in [ALIANZA] that is as good or better than what he was presenting. Why not use ours? . . . They preferred to spend thousands of dollars on this other person because they saw him as more of an expert in the area of parent involvement than a parent herself. For me it was obvious. We are im/migrant parents. If it wasn’t for [ALIANZA] I would have become frustrated long ago . . . [ALIANZA] helps me to persevere when others push me aside.
capable of performing the task, even in light of evidence showing the contrary. It is this same belief about Latinx parents that Elena later describes as permeating most “traditional” spaces of parent engagement within schools. Because she grounds herself in ALIANZA, she is able to persist and persevere in these arenas, in large part, because the group operates outsides of school and is less susceptible to the raced, classed, gendered, and anti-im/migrant ideologies informing deficit rationales for why voices like hers matter less.

In my conversations with other group members, several of them echoed Elena’s sentiment, describing a sense of strength because the group operated in ways and within spaces that validated and honored their language, traditions, cultural norms and practices, and lived experiences. All of them stressed at one point or another that these types of validation rarely, if ever, occurred within institutional spaces. In fact, many talked about the need to recover after school board or city council meetings. They described feeling drained, exhausted, and often discouraged from returning to these spaces in the future. Having ALIANZA as their home base was necessary to their recovery. A common theme characterizing these moments was the opportunity to come together as a group para convivir y desahogar.  

In describing this function, ALIANZA members highlighted in particular its connection to their autoestima that had endured injury and assaults throughout their life, and more recently, as parents working to challenge a system set on keeping them at the margins. Since joining ALIANZA, they felt their autoestima nurtured, healed, and strengthened, an indispensible process for doing the work required of them as madres y padres en lucha. As Caridad pointed out, the group helped her “. . . volver a encontrar la confianza en mi papel como madre. Sólo aquí [en ALIANZA]. . . me siento renovada y lista para seguir luchando dentro y afuera de mi casa.” Similarly, the im/migrant women in Coll’s (2010) study identified, “. . . the importance of engaging in collective political action, but the urgency of many members’ concerns meant that their needs for social and instrumental support demanded attention in order for them to engage at all with politics and politicization” (p. 100).

22 Translated to English: To spend time together sharing and getting things off your chest
23 The term autoestima translated literally to English means self-esteem. But, in this study, how ALIANZA uses the term means much more than its counterpart in English. I use the term similar to how Coll (2010) uses it in her work on Latina im/migrant women. She defines autoestima as a process more aligned with developing a positive self-concept that “. . . encompassed personal transformational processes. . . . tied to peer support and dialogue about social issues and how to address them collectively” (p. 103).
24 Translated to English: Regain my confidence in my role as a mother. Only here [in ALIANZA] do I feel renewed and ready to keep fighting both in and outside my home.
Although *conviviendo y desahogando* represent only part of what ALIANZA does, it is impossible, I argue, to understand its other activities without first exploring this function. It represents the foundation on which ALIANZA relies to “. . . [support] each other in naming and recording the experiences that [have] been suppressed, [reject] the controlling images that framed them as unworthy or ‘problem parents,’ and [recast] themselves as concerned advocates for their families and community” (Dyrness, 2011, p. 140). Using counter-spaces, ALIANZA provides a critical platform for its members through *conviviendo y desahogando* to challenge injustice and find the strength *para hablar y luchar*, the second function of the group explored next.

**Hablando y luchando: Learning to Name and Speak Out Against Injustice**

It was common for ALIANZA members to use words like “*opresión,*” “*hegemonía,*” and “*patriarcado.*” Justo laughed remembering the shocked reactions they received when ALIANZA spoke in public. For him, these reactions simply affirmed what he’s known all along: that Latinx im/migrant parents are often viewed by those in power as incapable and unintelligent and, thus, unable to understand, let alone participate in, important school decision-making. He shared,

> Me siento orgulloso . . . cuando reto sus ideas racistas del padre inmigrante. Claro, nunca te van a decir que son racistas pero sus caras de sorpresa al momento de escucharnos hablar . . . revela lo que realmente piensan de nosotros—la expresión de ‘¿como es posible que este padre sepa tanto?’ Por eso es importante que estemos bien armados con un conocimiento amplio y profundo. . . . Para mí es importante nombrar las cosas como son, con sus nombres y términos apropiados. Por eso usamos la educación popular. Nos enseña a hablar y es a través de nuestra voz que podemos luchar.”

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25 Spanish word for “oppression”
26 Spanish word for “hegemony”
27 Spanish word for “patriarchy”
28 Translated to English: I feel proud when I challenge their racist ideas about im/migrant parents. Of course, they will never tell you that they are racist but their looks of surprise when they first hear us speak reveals what they really think of us. Their expression of ‘how is it possible that this parent knows so much?’ This is why it’s important that we are armed with ample knowledge. For me it’s important to call things what they are, with their appropriate names and terms. This is why we use popular education. It teaches us to speak and it is through our voice that we are able to fight.
For Justo, part of the process of becoming politicized required naming injustice, using terms to appropriately describe what informs it, how it functions, and the consequences it has for their lives. He believed that when grounded in the life experiences of ALIANZA, these terms have the power to strengthen the group’s ability to strategize and organize more effectively because they are more aware of what they are up against.

Others in the group shared Justo’s sentiments. Several mothers commented that it was not until they joined ALIANZA and began sharing, desahogando and learning from each other that they finally could “name their pain” and muster the courage to change what causes it. Prior to ALIANZA, many felt vulnerable to mainstream attacks that blamed them for their social conditions and described often questioning whether they had the right to speak out and demand dignity and respect, even for the most basic things. As Felicia so aptly put it, “yo me culpaba. No tenía una visión del mundo que me ayudara a sentirme de otra forma. Ahora me siento capaz. Puedo cambiar mi realidad y no quedarme con los brazos cruzados. Es mi derecho y mi deber. Gracias a [ALIANZA] estoy consciente y nadie me volverá a tapar los ojos o hacerme sentir mal por ser madre inmigrante.”

Felicia’s comments capture why desahogando in ALIANZA was so important in the process of coming to consciousness and a necessary step for speaking out against injustice. Coll (2010) found a similar process at work. For her informants, being able to speak with other women and articulate one’s story was part of being able to claim rights and demand recognition as political subjects . . . The ability to desahogarse was critical for those trying to change their lives individually, as well as for those hoping to speak up for their children, their families, and their communities (Coll, 2010, p. 116-117).

Comparably, for ALIANZA, having the space to get things off their chest provided them the opportunity to articulate injustice. Combined with popular education, they developed a new set of skills, along with a new vocabulary, for addressing social problems. This is why Selina argued that the mothers were able to grasp complex terms and theories with ease. Neither she nor Justo introduced these ideas in the abstract, but rather made sense of them through what the

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29 Translated to English: I blamed myself. I didn’t have a vision of the world that helped me feel any other way. Now I feel capable. I know I can change my reality and I refuse to sit back, with my arms crossed, and do nothing about it. It’s my right and responsibility. Thanks to [ALIANZA] I’m aware and no one will ever cover my eyes again or make me feel bad because I am an im/migrant mother.
mothers shared cuando se desahogaban, and the historical context of the community in which they all work and live. She stressed, “para mi es imposible entender un concepto si no lo veo reflejado en mi vida. Los temas de ‘poder’ y ‘patriarcado’ suelen ser difíciles porque son temas complejos. Pero si alguien me enseña estos conceptos a través de mi experiencia como mujer abusada es más probable que lo llegue a entender y aceptar.”

Without exception, all ALIANZA parents spoke about the importance of popular education, a method of teaching and learning rooted in Freire’s (1973) proposals for liberatory education, most notably, his problem-posing method. Popular education is cyclical not linear, with identifiable stages of inquiry. The central goal of its approach is to gain a deeper understanding of the world as dynamic as opposed to static—a historical reality that is susceptible to transformation, as opposed to a fixed fatalistic absolute. As such, it requires that those who use it exercise patience and flexibility as they learn to continuously examine, name, and challenge injustice. It allowed ALIANZA to reclaim their subjectivity and develop a shared language of belonging along with new terms to name and speak out against injustice. It reshaped their, “ . . . normative ideas and aspirations about the relationship between motherhood, rights, entitlements, and politics” (Coll, 2010, p. 73). Popular education radically shifted their understanding of the social world and their role in it, and only from this re-imagined “place,” I argue, were they able to realize their goals as a group of madres y padres en lucha, and remake opportunities for themselves, for their children, and for their communities. The following section briefly explores the task of realizando y rehaciendo as the final approach used by ALIANZA to build political capital and participate in school reform.

**Realizando y rehaciendo: Building Political Capital for Social Change**

In ALIANZA, all members are expected to participate in shaping the group’s practices and defining its future. As an example, Selina and Justo led a revision process of ALIANZA’s mission and vision statements during one of their meetings. Although they framed these guiding statements as a perpetual work-in-progress, at the end of the meeting ALIANZA had

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30 Translated to English: When they got things off their chest.
31 Translated to English: For me it’s impossible to understand a concept when I don’t see it reflected in my own life. Themes like ‘power’ and ‘patriarchy’ can be difficult because they are complex ideas. But if someone teaches me these concepts through my own experience of abuse as a woman it is more likely that I will come to understand and accept them.
32 Translated to English: Realizing and remaking.
collectively agreed on what would be the final revisions of their mission and vision for the time being.

**Misión:** Promover el cambio social, cultural y educativo de la comunidad Latina e inmigrante con sentido de justicia social a través de programas que favorezcan su coexistencia y desarrollen su conocimiento y defensa activa de los derechos humanos y civiles. Esto se llevará acabo bajo la propuesta pedagógica de la educación popular (EP), que apoya la construcción de una sociedad justa y democrática.33

**Visión:** Promover la coexistencia democrática de nuestras comunidades en la vida social con dignidad, respeto e igualdad de oportunidades, favoreciendo la construcción y permanencia de nuestras culturas e identidades como parte de la riqueza socio-cultural con la que contribuimos a esta sociedad.34

Both statements clearly reflected an embracing of their collective identity as madres y padres en lucha, one that employs political agency for social justice and reclaims a place of belonging within the bounds of a U.S. political community, asserting rights as citizens, regardless of legal status, on the basis of their humanity and contributions to society. These statements were profoundly radical, especially when considered against the backdrop of continued anti-im/migrant sentiment, legislation, and attacks throughout the country.

As I watched its members conduct community forums, speak in front of school board and city council members, and organize marches, among other things, I realized that its mission and vision is fundamentally about realizando y rehaciendo. This does not represent a specific activity as much as an underlying strategy and goal of continuously learning about, deconstructing, and remaking the relationship between their role as Latinx im/migrant parents and the spaces where important decisions are made that affect them, their children, and their families. To do this requires the capacity to name and speak out against injustice, but goes one

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33 Translated to English: To create social, cultural, and educational change in the Latino community, particularly among im/migrants, utilizing programs rooted in social justice that believe in an equitable multi-ethnic and multi-lingual society. Our goal is to develop a critical consciousness that can translate into action to defend human and civil rights. To accomplish this we base our work in the pedagogical premises of popular education (PE) that support the construction of a socially just and democratic society.

34 Translated to English: To promote democratic co-existence whereby members of our communities can live with dignity, respect, and have access to equitable opportunities. Our vision is to foment the development and permanency of our culture and identities as part of the cultural wealth with which we contribute to society.
step further to actualize efforts to change what is unjust. For ALIANZA, rendered outsiders, this means *redefining and remaking* the boundaries of belonging in order to *realize* the hopes articulated powerfully in their mission and vision statements. I argue that central to this third approach is a strategic effort to build a type of *political capital* that the group then uses to leverage their voice and participate in reform efforts and rests on members’ confidence, knowledge, and critical know-how.

Through the use of popular education described above, ALIANZA intentionally builds from the community cultural wealth\(^{35}\) of its members. Its founders, Justo and Selina, combine this strategy with a critical know-how of how institutions function, showing parents the ropes of how decision-making spaces work and how to operate within their limitations. For example, learning to speak up in spaces that use Robert’s Rules of Order for conducting business. Some of this is embedded in the workshops they provide, but some of this knowledge comes from strategic alliances with other community groups, school and civic leaders, and selected institutional agents. The strategy is meant to develop ALIANZA’s political network and knowledge as a necessary tactic for gaining entry into important decision-making spaces. This has aided them in developing a broad base of support that has proven vital when they campaigned for city- or school-wide policy changes or fought for im/migrant rights. The combination of efforts—identifying and building from the mothers’ community cultural wealth, developing a network of political allies, and providing institutional knowledge—has led to the development of ALIANZA’s *political capital*, which I define as a set of critical political skills and wisdom grounded in community cultural wealth but developed through strategic engagement with institutions and their agents.

It is important to note that in building political capital, ALIANZA adds to its shared community cultural wealth and shapes the spaces and interactions they have within schools. As evidence, all of its members sit on decision-making bodies within schools, and this access has provided them with insight and knowledge that continually shapes ALIANZA’s overall strategy. Building political capital has also profoundly affected ALIANZA’s members’ sense of self as

\(^{35}\) *Community cultural wealth* is defined as a community’s cultural assets and resources accumulated over time (Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998; Yosso, 2005). Yosso (2005) specifically identifies six types of capital that Communities of Color possess but are often ignored, largely the result of mainstream cultural deficit arguments more concerned with identifying pathology in these communities than about celebrating their skills and knowledge. The six types of capital include: aspirational capital, familial capital, social capital, linguistic capital, resistant capital, and navigational capital (Yosso, 2005).
capable and confident madres y padres en lucha. They referred to these skills and knowledge as herramientas or tools necessary for the work they do. As Clara poignantly described, “es imposible ser buen cocinero si no tienes una licuadora, sartén—pues, herramientas básicas de la cocina . . . De la misma forma creo que es imposible ser buen líder si no tienes las herramientas que resultan de un conocimiento amplio y profundo de nuestro mundo. ALIANZA nos da esa herramientas para poder seguir luchando y peleando por nuestros hijos.”

In closing, I am reminded of a long conversation I had with Justo one afternoon at Don Beto’s, as we worked to plan a series of popular education workshops that he and the mothers had decided to call, la universidad dentro del pueblo. He shared with me that ALIANZA’s efforts to realizar y rehacer do not simply refer to the project of remaking the world around them. Realizando y rehaciendo is first and foremost a project of consciousness-raising, of redefining themselves in a way that makes it possible to create change.

**Discussion**

Without question, all of the parents identified ALIANZA as crucial to their development as political actors. My goal here was to capture how they understood the utility and significance of ALIANZA for creating change, as they define it. I grounded my analysis in their meaning-making about the value of the group and its efforts. This does not mean that future research on ALIANZA should not attempt to affirm what its members have claimed. Perspectives outside of, but connected to, the group can serve to better understand how ALIANZA has altered the educational outcomes of Latinx students, improved conditions for Latinx families, and/or effectively changed the course of civic and educational reform decisions to be more inclusive of Latinx participation, particularly that of im/migrant parents.

While difficult to capture all ALIANZA has done, there were several defining practices that ultimately make the case for using ALIANZA as a model for unpacking the politics of participation for Latinx im/migrant parents in schools and society at large and showcasing what is necessary to engage parents, like those in ALIANZA, in school and larger social reform. Three central practices stood out: (1) conviviendo y desahogando, which involved the creation of

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36 Translated to English: It is impossible to be a good cook if you don’t have a blender, pan—well, the basic kitchen utensils. In the same way, I believe that it is impossible to be a good leader without the tools that come from a profound knowledge of how the world works. ALIANZA has given us those tools so that we can continue fighting for our children.

37 Translated to English: The university inside the community
counter-spaces where members came together to celebrate traditions, share concerns about a range of topics and issues without judgment, heal from past abuse, and build solidarity; (2) aprendiendo a hablar y luchar, where ALIANZA’s leaders employed popular education to help its members identify, name, and speak out against injustice; and (3) realizando y rehaciendo, a strategic effort to build a type of political capital that the group then used to leverage their participation in reform efforts and rested on members’ confidence and critical know-how of schools and civic institutions. Viewed through a LatCrit lens, these strategies can rightfully be seen as counter-strategies used to resist the ways in which race, language, and im/migration status mediated the experiences of ALIANZA as marginalized subjects in educational reform.

For school administrators, teachers, and other school leaders, as well as those who train them, ALIANZA is a compelling case to consider. Groups like ALIANZA inform how to build school-community partnerships in Latinx im/migrant communities and support a greater inclusion of the Latinx parental voice in school decision-making. As concerns of increasing “opportunity gaps” continue (Oakes, Rogers, Silver, Horng, & Goode, 2004; Pérez Huber, Vélez, & Solorzano, 2014), the importance of including Latinx im/migrant parents, particularly the undocumented, within educational spaces for improving schooling conditions is now more important than ever.

The testimonies of ALIANZA parents are a call to shift how educational leaders view, engage and partner with Latinx parents. Implications from this case study include, but are not limited to, the following: 1) a commitment to re-examine how parent engagement is articulated within school-based decision-making bodies, paying particular attention to the language and intent of policies governing these bodies that can exclude Latinx parents, particularly im/migrants; 2) a willingness to step outside school boundaries to understand and make visible spaces where Latinx parents convene and often organize, refusing the assumption that because Latinx families do not “show up” on school campuses, they do not care about education; 3) an understanding that including Latinx parents in shaping school-community partnerships means they are included in the process of defining those partnerships, and not simply viewed as the target or outcome of these efforts; and 4) acceptance and support of Latinx families when they

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38 Here, I am borrowing from the report issued by Oakes, Rogers, Silver, Horng, & Goode (2004), to define “opportunity gap” as the disproportionate distribution of “opportunities to learn,” such as qualified teachers, facilities that are not overcrowded, appropriate learning material, etc., between schools in affluent, white neighborhoods and schools in low-income Communities of Color.
choose to meet and organize in spaces outside of schools, even when every effort is made by teachers, principals, and other school leaders to create inclusive spaces.

Conclusion

ALIANZA challenges educational leaders to expand what we understand as leadership. For these parents, leadership was marked by a deep faith in the inherent capabilities of those most marginalized to transform the world. Through conviviendo y desahogando, aprendiendo a hablar y luchar, and realizando y rehaciendo, leadership was (re)born as solidarity for ALIANZA, as a collective commitment and cultural synthesis to work side-by-side toward justice. These counter-articulations of educational leadership, I argue, are deeply respectful of and responsive to Latinx communities, while deepening our understanding of how leadership functions as a contested terrain in schools serving racially and ethnically diverse communities.
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Leadership for Chicano/Latino Education and the Politics of Change

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Abstract
The purpose of this article is twofold. First, I situate a discussion on Leadership for Chicano/Latino education that is grounded in a history of resistance and activism among these same communities generally, and in particular acknowledging the contributions of Chicana feminist scholarship. Second, I discuss how the topic of Leadership for Chicano/Latino education is mired by a broader political climate that must be acknowledged in scholarly analyses of education and leadership, as well as the pedagogical approaches applied in leadership preparation. This discussion includes the argument that Leadership for Chicano/Latino education must go beyond a pedagogy and epistemology of supervivencia (survivance)—one’s singular ability to endure and thrive in systems of oppression (see Galván, 2014)—if we are to prepare transformative leaders equipped to traverse a political climate overwhelmed by anti-Chicano/Latino sentiments and a diminishing investment in public and higher education.

Introduction
Today, Latino/as account for one in two people added to the U.S. population (Fry & López, 2012) and there is no better visual for this demographic shift than public school classrooms. While the representation of Latina/o students continue to climb and outpace other peer groups, mainstream discourses guiding policy debates, curriculum and instruction, and the overall education of these students continues to ignore the assets, needs, and knowledge of this growing population. This disconnect is joined by a political climate overwhelmed by anti-immigrant and anti-Chicano/Latino sentiment, voter suppression efforts, and a diminishing investment in public and higher education. These broader circumstances add to an ongoing marginalization of Chicano/Latino communities from social and political life—arguably beginning with their experiences in our public school system. In the context of critical leadership for social justice, I echo the significance of Darder’s (2015) call for scholarship and pedagogy to shed light on systematic forms of oppression—namely market-based reforms—
that further erode culturally democratic principals in education and broader society. These analyses are useful for understanding how the ongoing entrenchment of these systems impact leadership preparation and the limits and possibilities of critical leadership practices in K-12 settings.

No longer is it the case that education is defined by a “challenging” goal to meet the needs of a small sector of Chicano/Latino students. Rather, current data and future projections clearly underscore that Chicanos/Latinos are increasingly the face of public education—comprising the fastest growing segment in U.S. public education—and already the overwhelming majority in larger, populous states (Fry & López, 2012). Educational gains in high school completion, college enrollment, and degree completion among Chicano/Latino communities are at a numerical upswing, though these gains have not kept pace with the proportional growth among the Chicano/Latino school-aged population who today.

The purpose of this article is twofold. First, I situate a discussion on Leadership for Chicano/Latino education that is grounded in a history of resistance and activism among these same communities generally, and in particular acknowledging the contributions of Chicana feminist scholarship. Second, I discuss how the topic of Leadership for Chicano/Latino education is mired by a broader political climate that must be acknowledged in scholarly analyses of education and leadership, as well as the pedagogical approaches applied in leadership preparation. This discussion includes the argument that Leadership for Chicano/Latino education must go beyond a pedagogy and epistemology of supervivencia (survivance)—one’s singular ability to endure and thrive in systems of oppression (see Galván, 2014)—if we are to prepare transformative leaders in education.

This article draws upon three sources of knowledge. The first is a cursory portrait of scholarship highlighting the historical role of Chicano/Latino communities’ engagement with the topic of leadership in education. Second, I build upon the arguments articulated by Antonia Darder’s (2015), “Critical Leadership for Social Justice: Unveiling the Dirty Little Secret of Power and Privilege,” to underscore broader political factors informing higher education’s role in preparing K-12 leaders. Finally, I draw upon my own research findings from a five-year study examining whose knowledge is privileged in educational decision-making processes—and whose knowledge is not—and the roles that external (monied) interests play in circumventing Chicano/Latino communities’ historical struggle for educational justice (López, 2012, 2016a;
As part of this scholarship, I highlight important epistemological and empirical nuances related to issues of power, privilege, and educational leadership that are rooted in a testimonialista perspective as researcher and participant in the legislative arena (Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, & Carmona, 2012).

**An Epistemology of Resistance and Activism in Education and Leadership**

Engaging education as a political system and basing its efficacy on the capacity to extend justice and self-determination to historically marginalized peoples is an important and historical component of Chicano/Latino activism (San Miguel, 2013). While these efforts arguably go back as far as the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the Civil Rights Era surely marked a significant moment when historically marginalized communities generally, and Chicano/Latino communities specifically, forged deliberate conversations on the need to interrogate the U.S. public education system (Donato, 1997; San Miguel, 1985). These discussions include rejecting racial/ethnic and linguistic segregation and assimilationist approaches to classroom instruction, fighting for bilingual education, fair and adequate school funding systems, affirmative action, and even developing Chicano/Latino-centered schools (Acuña, 2006; Trujillo, 2011).

Operating through a lens of resistance and activism, Chicano/Latino communities informed a focused action plan that was expressed in *El Plan de Santa Barbara* and the priorities put forth by Chicanas during the 1973 National Women’s Political Caucus Convention (Delgado Bernal, 1999). These agendas called for increasing the representation of Chicano/o educators and administrators, school board members, and broader elected and appointed leadership positions as a means for disrupting the status quo in education. Catapulting Chicano/Latinos generally, and Chicanas/Latinas more specifically, into positions of power were arguably central to the goal of transforming public (K-12) and higher education systems, and by extension the socio-political standing of these communities. Going beyond a focus on mere presence of Chicano/Latinos in leadership, was the call to affirm Chicano/Latino identities and redistribute power and wealth. In the context of public education, this agenda contributed to a then early emergence of Chicano/Latino studies and critical pedagogy in education, particularly as a tool for increasing Chicano/Latino students’ awareness of issues of power, oppression, and social justice activism (Acuña, 2006; Valenzuela & López, 2016). These demonstrations of leadership and epistemology of resistance and activism in education are further demonstrated
through student walkouts (Berta-Avila, Tijerina-Revilla, & Figueroa, 2011), courtroom battles (Valencia, 2008), policymaking (López, 2012, 2016a, 2016b; López & Moreno, 2015, 2016), and electoral politics (Gutiérrez, 1998)—all of which were deemed necessary to holistically transform the broader system of education.

**Chicana Feminist Epistemology and Activism in Education**

Adding to Chicano/Latino communities’ historical role in education is the emancipatory approaches taken by Chicana feminist scholars. Writing from the margins, Chicana feminists have long engaged issues of power and structural factors that curtail educational justice and social change; yet these contributions remain marginal in the study of these same topics and subsequently how we understand the persistent disenfranchisement of Chicano/Latino communities (see López, 2012 for elaboration). Among many things, a Chicana feminist epistemology acknowledges how women of color commonly deal with the motivations that are closely tied to a commitment to improving social conditions, and being agents of transformational change—this position chooses to “construct theory and political agenda[s] for achieving social justice rather than only engaging in intellectual debates that deconstruct existing paradigms” (Hurtado, 1997, p. 215).

Chicana feminist scholarship has been historically committed to examining community struggles and power dynamics that includes theorizing their own agency and roles in transformational change (Cordova, 2005). This is particularly the case for scholars who hold coveted tenure/tenure-track positions in higher education (Latina Feminist Group, 2001; González & Padilla, 2008; Trujillo, 1997). Advancing Chicana feminist epistemologies in practice and scholarship (in part) involves two important elements: first, that examining Chicano/Latino communities’ historical struggle for educational justice cannot be examined in isolation; and second, how Chicana feminist epistemologies take shape in practice are uniquely individual and often accompanied by collective commitments that manifest through the production of knowledge and social action (Hurtado, 1997).

A Chicana feminist epistemology informs my own work, namely a five-year analysis of whose knowledge is privileged in legislative decision-making processes, and whose knowledge is not (López, 2012, 2016b). ¹ In particular, I am guided by Black and Chicana feminist notions of

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¹ Data for this longitudinal study are comprised of numerous primary and secondary sources across various
intersectionality that acknowledge race-, gendered, and class-based dimensions of social and political life. Influenced by the work of Kimberly Crenshaw (1989, 1991), the concept of intersectionality as the various ways in which social constructs, such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation simultaneously mediate how individuals and groups interact with institutions and broader society. This lens allows me to deconstruct the interplay of multiple experiences of exclusion and subordination among the people, practices, and politics that embody public policy and educational decision-making.

As part of the research process and my analyses, I reflect on my testimonialista status (see Delgado Bernal, Burciaga & Carmona, 2012) as researcher and participant holding privileged access to the inner workings of the state apparatus (López, 2012, 2016a, 2016b). This latter knowledge allows me to theorize my experiences and prolonged engagement in a manner that broadens understandings of the roles that power and privilege play in policymaking and Chicano/Latino education with an eye towards emancipatory, actionable change. Furthermore, this work contributes to the historical contributions of Chicana/Latina scholars in the production of knowledge and commitments to emancipatory and transformative change (Anzaldúa, 1987; Delgado Bernal, 1998).

Today, my positionality and privilege includes my status as a tenure-track, Assistant Professor of Educational Leadership at a public, four-year California State University—a system that influences who obtains leadership credentials in higher and K-12 education. In this position, I have the ability to merge my scholarship, engagement with community organizing and emancipatory movements, and Chicana feminist epistemologies with the pedagogical approaches I put into practice when preparing educational leaders. A Chicana Feminist epistemology in the context of my classroom pedagogy allows me to model and ground leadership candidates in an approach that is responsive to a growing demand for K-12 teachers and administrators that are equipped to critically respond to issues of race, gender, class, ability, and sexual orientation as they relate to the academic trajectories of students generally, and contexts, as follows: verbatim transcriptions of public legislative hearings; analysis of policy documents—i.e., public reports, bill analyses, research briefs, written testimony, public forum documents, and position papers from internal (i.e., government, state agency, and legislative committees) and external entities (i.e., academic entities, interest group, formal organizations); media clippings; participant observation; “elite” and key informant interviews with researchers, practitioners, civil rights and community members, state agency staff, legislative staff, and legislators; and field notes. This study orders data chronologically. Cases were developed based on time frames, or phases, that correspond with the Texas State Legislature’s policymaking process. All data were coded to identify themes, patterns, and corroborate findings.
Chicano/Latinos in particular. Finally, my motivation to merge these complex worlds and produce knowledge from a Chicana feminist standpoint rests on a commitment to expand our understandings of Critical Education Leadership, Chicano/Latino Education, and Chicana Feminist epistemology—particularly as it relates to issues of power and racial/ethnic justice.

**Power, Privilege, and the Public Good**

In the context of critical leadership for social justice, Antonia Darder (2015) sheds light on systematic forms of oppression—namely market-based reform and neoliberalism—that continue to erode democratic possibilities. Central to this analysis of critical leadership for social justice is the role of neoliberalism and higher education—a context mired by market-driven interests and colonizing paradigms that place profits before people. This entrenchment of neoliberalism similarly defines K-12 education and the circumstances that educational leadership preparation must negotiate, and by extension the limits and possibilities of critical leadership in practice.

As graduate students seeking credentials from university-based preparation programs, leadership candidates are required to traverse the gauntlet of neoliberal policy reforms that places managerialism and efficiency over public intellectualism and one’s capacity to affirm transformative knowledge and practices (Lipman, 2011). This culture of control and governmentality has historically defined conceptualizations of educational leadership particularly in K-12 settings (Callahan, 1962). Leadership preparation is further influenced by faculty who embody diverse predispositions, motivations, and analyses of the climate of higher education and their positions within it (see Young & Brewer, 2008). These epistemologies arguably manifest into varied definitions of social justice and meanings of transformational change that leadership candidates take with them as they ascend into leadership positions.

According to Darder (2015), the neoliberal hegemony finds expression in policies and practices that reproduce racialized structures and by extension circumvent emancipatory struggles for justice. As part of a five-year analysis examining the agency of political actors in legislative policymaking, I set out to unravel the politics of whose knowledge is privileged in decision-making processes—and whose knowledge is not. In part, this scholarship highlights the growing influences of external, monied interests and corporate reformers who conceal increased authority over advancing market-based policies and infiltrating broader power
structures related to education, such as due process and electoral politics (López, 2012, 2016b). With regard to leadership, I reveal how the agency of educational leaders (i.e., school principals, district superintendents, agency and governmental staff) legitimate corporate reform agendas during decision making processes, particularly with respect to deficit understandings of Chicano/Latino youth and school and districts’ approaches for attending to these communities’ educational needs. These findings hold important implications for educational leadership and Chicano/Latino education.

**Leadership for Chicano/Latino Education and the Politics of Change**

For nearly three decades, neoliberal policy agendas like punitive accountability and high-stakes testing policies have inspired fundamental shifts in education and the academic trajectories of Chicano/Latino students. These systems, by design, are never without losers. Research has highlighted how these policies socially construct schools, educators, and students—particularly low-income, emergent bilingual, students of color—as mere failures based on reductive indicators (Haney, 2000; Valenzuela, 2004). This act of shaming schools and students has compromised educational equity for decades while playing into the hands of corporate reformers that capitalize on the ability to turn education problems into business opportunities, whereby embracing the educational needs of Chicano/Latino communities to the extent that they are profitable. Furthermore, these policy agendas continue to inspire privatization schemes that seek to circumvent elected governing bodies, repeal collective bargaining and educators’ rights to due process, and lobby for changes in tax structures that further debilitate public education funding (López & Moreno, 2013, 2015). Rather than view these phenomena as new, scholars must situate these hegemonic practices of power within an historical analysis of ongoing subordination and disenfranchisement of marginalized communities generally, and Chicano/Latinos in particular (López, 2016a).

Public education’s use of high-stakes testing has arguably become one of the most politically contentious issues and outgrowths of market-based reform. Moreover, these policies have taken shape in the form of teacher and leadership evaluation mechanisms currently under debate in numerous states and nationally. The use of high-stakes testing has been found to detrimentally impact the academic trajectories of students (Valencia & Bernal, 2000; Valenzuela, 2004) and induce teacher and administrator turnover due to the role that these systems play.
on educators’ job security (McNeil, 2000), all the while imposing political and sanctioning threats to the existence of neighborhood public schools (López, 2012). Furthermore, these systems reduce students to “cells” or indicators, associated to test scores that are subsequently used to measure the success or failure of schools and districts. This practice, by design, has been shown to influence deficit characterizations of students—as expressed in objectifying terms like “weakest link” and “bubble kids”—that absolve schools, while favoring corporate profiteers who swoop in and claim that they have what it takes to turn around students and the education system (López, 2012).

Given that educational leaders are increasingly required to traverse a political climate influenced by corporate interests, it’s pertinent that aspiring leaders have the tools to analyze and consider the breadth of factors that influence the agency of relevant actors. These political dynamics have implications for how schools and the educational needs of Chicano/Latino students and communities are attended to, or not. For one, educational leaders have been shown to align with market-based agendas and discourses in politically risky moments, particularly as it pertains to sharing deficit perspectives on the capabilities of Chicano/Latino students. Two cases in point are during deliberations and decision making related to student curriculum and assessment policies, and the use of high-stakes testing.

During Texas’ recent overhaul of its K-12 curriculum and assessment system—i.e., the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR)—changes to policy were initially written to include the use of fifteen high school exit exams, each tied to student’s final course grades. While these changes drew outrage from obvious constituents such as teachers, parents, and civil rights and community groups, these responses were not matched among school administrators (i.e., principals and superintendents). In fact, administrators, as a block, responded with ahistorical and apolitical statements such as how the newly proposed system might pose “unintended consequences” by encouraging students to take an easier course load in order to lessen the total number of exams they would be required to take. In other instances, administrators advanced meritocratic perspectives by referring to the exacerbated testing system as a “motivator” that would ensure that students had “skin in the game,” whereby serving as a “pretty good incentive [for them] to try hard” (López, 2012; also see Mellon, 2007). These perspectives are problematic for students and the perceived viability of public education as they feed the legitimacy of punitive policy approaches at the same time that
they contribute to administrators’ own demise.

When given an opportunity to forge a counter narrative that disrupts meritocracy and the growing status quo of neoliberal policy agendas, administrators’ deficit ways of knowing carry a political cost in decision-making processes—particularly when they engage as a block. When these actors forge ahead with a mere focus on how exacerbated testing systems would be standardized and streamlined in practice, devoid of challenging the merits of empirically flawed systems, students and support for public education arguably experience a loss. This critique of administrators’ deficit practices in decision-making processes must also be seen in conjunction with demographic shifts that emphasize the growing representation of Chicano/Latino students in K-12 education. As the fastest growing recipient of K-12 public education—and already the majority in large populous states—Chicano/Latino communities are an imminent constituency for market-based reforms. When leadership in (traditional) public education settings show little regard for humanistic treatments of this community, and students of color generally, we should not be surprised when they are baited—knowingly or unknowingly—by corporate interests and the [empty] promises of neoliberalism.

The persistent entrenchment of corporate interests and market-based reform epitomize the growing politics of change in K-12 education and the experiences of Chicano/Latino students and broader communities. Moreover, acknowledging these dynamics inform the broader, political circumstances that educational leaders must negotiate as they ascend in leadership positions. University-based leadership programs play critical roles when it comes to advancing a leadership for Chicano/Latino communities that equip candidates with a counter narrative analysis that allows them to first understand these realities, and then identify the strategies they must develop if they are to disrupt the talons of corporate interests in and out of education.
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A Call to Action

Blanca Baltazar-Sabbah
San José State University

I am enraged by the racism, the stereotypes and the lack of respect for my gente.

What makes me angry about education, you ask?

Silence—the systems and people that make us voiceless

Passivity—the people who don’t act upon injusticias

Stereotypes—the lack of expectations because of the color of our skin, our gender, nuestra lengua natal

Inequities— the tracking of students, the lack of resources, underachievement of Latinos

Apathy—complacency with the status quo

Silence, passivity, stereotypes, inequities, apathy— that’s what makes me angry

I am enraged by the racism, the stereotypes and the lack of respect for my gente.

I’ve learned to let my anger fuel my passion for change

to make the voiceless have a voice

to call out the inequities and challenge the status quo

to rise to a position of influence despite being a Spanish-speaking, brown-skinned immigrant, born to teenage farm-working parents

to be an advocate for our most marginalized students

to hold people accountable, including myself

I am no longer enraged, I am empowered.

I will stand up and speak up, will you stand with me?

Will you break up the silence, passivity, stereotypes, inequities and apathy?

Let our voices tear through the silence and oppression!
The Schooling Pipeline

Raúl Lomelí
Principal, Sherman Oaks Community Charter School

Education is key is what was told to me...
For my family and my community it means much more than words on a page
and things important people may say
Educación should mean much more than a rigged game with a biased history
that tells a story with no mystery.
No mystery just facts!
Facts that emphasize the rich, privileged and white,
while ignoring the mystery of the Natives’ power and might!
Facts that are ingrained into youth’s minds whereby slave owners are revered as heroes
and legends, thus perpetuating a feeling of isolation for the supposed free man and
woman.
Facts that guide the content and curriculum across the nation,
leaving Latinos out and without inspiration.
Facts, all of these are facts because they are directly taught by the teacher, by the
school, by the authority.
Facts because all other facts have been discounted by the teacher, the school, the state,
the majority!
These majority facts are all over our textbooks, policies, tests, and classrooms.
We have grown accustomed to them.
Only one group has capital in this rigged system;
The dominant group that continues to outperform.
Yet we question why others cannot reach the standard, mean score,
College, the goal.
One language has all of the value and we demand
that all others take a backseat and hold on.
What message are we sending, what is being communicated?

We hold the same standards for all, yet we make the game easier for some!

Who would appreciate this if it were a sport or competition?
Who would pay to watch and listen?
Not one soul, not one soul, for we can all predict the outcome of a rigged game that
greatly favors “I” over “the other” more.
Why are we amused at the fact that our numbers look the same year after year?
Have we done anything to address, hope, opportunities, equity, and diversity here?
We haven’t even approached equality when we know that the real goal is equity.
We know this and can predict who may go to jail and who may go to college with integrity.

Schooling is loud and clear!
Develop the pipeline,
develop the pipeline,
develop the pipeline, the pipeline to where???
Answer this question
Whose culture has capital?
and then you can tell.

Whose on the pipeline to College and who’s on the pipeline to Jail!
In *Reframing Community Partnerships in Education: Uniting the Power of Place and Wisdom of People*, co-authors Guajardo, Guajardo, Janson, and Militello (2016) present their theory of change in action called, “Community Learning Exchange (CLE),” along with a model they developed and termed, “Relationships, Assets, Stories, Place, Politic, and Action (RASPPA),” to engage in social justice efforts. Though not explicitly stated, in my estimation, the authors incorporate into their CLE model the critical scholarship of *Funds of Knowledge* (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992), *Community Cultural Wealth* (Yosso, 2005), humanizing research (Paris & Winn, 2013), and Freire’s (1970) pedagogies of learning and teaching.

CLE and RASPPA result from the authors’ individual and collective lived experiences. These concepts arose during a gathering hosted by an outside broker—the Kellogg Leadership for Community Change. However, its full materialization was a continuous engagement in questioning, active boundary crossing, and reflection of their roles, or positionality, as educators, advocates, and community organizers.

For instance, for the Guajardo brothers—both PhDs and both raised in the south Texas Rio Grande Valley—family cultural values and the limitless creativity and imagination used during their childhood games in a farm labor camp were foundational to their intellectual development. In terms that Moll, et al. (1992) would describe as “funds of knowledge,” assets were discussed by the authors as key learning and educating practices, happening outside the classroom, yet integral to their academic success. Most importantly, their experience with socially structured poverty, covert segregation, and systematic inequality in agricultural labor gave them an awareness of the assets, strengths, and possibilities within their own community and its members to challenge and transform a socially unjust reality.
As a collective, the authors identify five circular axioms of learning forming the proposed CLE theory of change in action and RASPPA. These axioms shape the three central “ecologies of knowing”—the self, organizations, and the community. Interwoven and as a generative process, these schemas or frames of reference organize the ways in which thinking and learning happens, as well as the way in which life is experienced. It is through these life experiences that knowledge is created. Those pushed to the margins of society, the authors argue, are best suited to recreate knowledge of themselves, reimagine their existence, and to use their agency and transform everyday conditions of inequity.

Theoretically speaking, CLE is composed of the stories, storytelling, and lived experiences shared in “gracious spaces” or places of trust. Through an invitation to participate in questioning of concrete reality, and thus crossing intentionally established boundaries (conscious and unconscious, physical, and imaginary), participants reposition the self and engage in what Freire (1970) might describe as the dialogic process of learning, naming, and acting upon the world. These stories are fueled by ancestral knowledge, grounded in the freedom of imagination and creativity and are best told by those experiencing it and invited to re-experience it. This invitation is not just a formal entrance to a consciously and collectively created space, by means of social gathering; instead, this is an invitation to undergo engagement akin to what Paris and Winn (2013) propose in Humanizing Research as the “worthy witness” of the true self in the process of liberation.

Methodologically, the continuous, collective, and reciprocal process of relationship-building is at the core of the ecologies of learning and the CLE-informed RASPPA method. Through a process of questioning, acting, and reflecting upon social reality, CLE repositions individuals as subjects rather than objects, actors rather than acted upon, and assets rather than handicaps, needs, or deficits. This reconfiguration and re-authoring of the self and community can be achieved through the use of tools such as, but not limited to, asset and community mapping and two proposed “dynamic-critical pedagogies”—the pedagogies of reflection, which engage participants in a circular practice of appreciative listening, meaningful critical dialogue and the pedagogies with and in community that engage participants in strategic community action, defined by the active problem-posing and recognition of community assets (p. 91-92). Thus, individuals are reframed as capable, with the ability to make familiar the unfamiliar, to shift the lens from a deficit view of communities of color, and to instead focus on recognizing and
employing what Yosso (2005) has similarly conceptualized as Community Cultural Wealth (CCW): the wide array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities and networks possessed by communities of color but uncredited by dominant forces.

As a theoretical and methodological tool, this book is seminal for those interested in the creation of a more socially just society, including educators/practitioners, community organizers, administrators, policymakers, and researchers. However, readers may note the absent voices and experiences of women of color in the shaping of the theory proposed. Noting this omission runs the risk of falling into a solely gender-binary critique. This observation is thus made in the interest of acknowledging the power of the collective experience, documented by the authors, while also ensuring that we not ignore the detrimental effects of patriarchy, class, race, and institutionalized racism. Nonetheless, the inclusion of third-world feminist perspectives, such as interwoven *trenzas de identidades* (see Gonzalez, 2010), counterstorytelling and *testimonios* (Delgado-Bernal, 1989; 1993; 2002), and community examination through the intersectional lens of race, class, gender, ideological, and political forms of interlocking oppression (Crenshaw, 1991) can strengthen the power of the proposed CLE and RASPPA model and widen the tools needed for recuperating people’s sociohistorical experiences and community memory.

Much work remains undone in achieving the full inclusion of the heterogeneous voices and experiences of communities of color. Rather than solely removing dominant deficit-based notions and practices when engaging historically disenfranchised communities of color, CLE and RASPPA re-center, honor, and privilege the lived experiences of those at the very margins of society. By allowing individuals and communities to re-gain new insight of their agency and imagination to design the much needed sustainable change, the framework presented in this book moves us forward in an effort to raspar (chip away at) and transform the existing historical structures of power hindering our collective humanity.
References


Author Bios

**Blanca Baltazar-Sabbah** is an immigrant, language learner, former migrant student, and a first-generation college student. She is a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership program at San Jose State University. She currently works as Associate Superintendent of Instructional Services for the Salinas Union High School District, located in Salinas, CA and provides services to 10 schools serving 15,000 secondary students.

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Argelia Lara is a Visiting Assistant Professor at Mills College in Educational Leadership. The focus of her scholarship is on immigration and education, race and ethnic studies, and higher education. Argelia completed her Ph.D. from UCLA’s GSEIS in the Social Science and Comparative Education division with an emphasis in Race and Ethnic Studies. She has been published in the *Urban Education Journal*.

Raúl S. Lomelí graduated from Santa Clara University with a Psychology and Music degree. He has a teaching career in Salinas, CA as a part time music teacher. He joined the Latino College Preparatory Academy where he was determined to make a positive impact in the lives of the students he served. He founded the Music program at LCPA. He later became the Associate Director of Curriculum and Instruction. He currently leads a dual immersion elementary school in San Jose where he looks forward to ensuring that students are appropriately engaged and supported.

Patricia D. López is an interdisciplinary scholar, teacher, and activist born and raised in Visalia, California. Her award-winning research focuses on the politics of education and public policy, and Chicano/Latino education. Patricia is currently an Assistant Professor of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at San José State University.

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Melissa A. Martinez, Ph.D. is an assistant professor in the Education and Community Leadership Program at Texas State University. Her research focuses on equity and access issues along the P-20 education pipeline, particularly in relation to: 1) college readiness, college access, and fostering a college going culture for underserved communities, 2) equity-oriented school leaders/leadership, and 3) experiences of faculty of color. Some of her work has been published in the *Journal of School Leadership*, *The High School Journal*, *Urban Review*, and *Journal of Latinos and Education*. 
Pedro E. Nava is an Assistant Professor of Education in the Educational Leadership Program at Mills College in Oakland, California. The focus of his scholarship is in urban and rural schooling inequality, critical pedagogy and critical race theory, immigration and education, family-school engagement, and participatory action research. Pedro completed his Ph.D. from UCLA’s GSEIS in the Urban Schooling division. Pedro has been published in InterActions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies, Teachers College Record, and in Latino Studies.

Patricia Rocha is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Counseling, Leadership, Adult Education, and School Psychology at Texas State University. She has experience working in public schools as a bilingual teacher, elementary assistant principal, elementary principal, and district support specialist.

Louie F. Rodriguez is an associate professor in Educational Policy Analysis and Leadership and Education, Society, and Culture at the University of California, Riverside. His work focuses on equity issues in urban education with a particular focus on Latina/o student engagement, institutional culture, and community excellence. His two recent books include Intentional Excellence: The Pedagogy, Power, and Politics of Excellence in Latina/o Schools and Communities (2015) and The Time is Now: Understanding and Responding to the Black and Latina/o Dropout Crisis in the U.S. (2014). He earned his master’s and doctorate from Harvard.

Mariela A. Rodriguez is an Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at the University of Texas at San Antonio. Her areas of scholarly research focus on educational equity for Latina/o students in P-20 perspectives, but specifically the role of school principals in supporting English Learners. In addition to several book chapters, Mariela’s work has been published in the Journal of Equity & Excellence in Education, the Journal of Latinos and Education, and Border-Lines: The Journal of the Latino Research Center. She recently collaborated on the book ELLs in Texas: What Administrators Need to Know.
Verónica Nelly Vélez is an Assistant Professor and the Founding Director of the Education and Social Justice Minor at Western Washington University (WWU). Before joining WWU, Verónica worked as a Research Fellow and the Director of Public Programming at the Center for Latino Policy Research at UC Berkeley. Her work focuses on Latinx parent leadership in educational reform, community-based action research in schools, and the use of GIS mapping technologies to explore the spatial dimensions of educational (in)opportunity. In addition to her scholarly work, Verónica serves as a consultant for several grassroots and non-profit organizations throughout California.
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I'm not sure. Please place me or make me a member at large.

The chapters are too far away. I'd like to start a new chapter. Contact Executive Director.

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### Journal Reviewer Form

The following is the rubric to be used for the evaluation of manuscripts considered for the *AMAE Journal*.

To the Reviewer/Evaluator: please feel free to make embedded changes to the article to improve the quality and/or the delivery of the message. Please do not change the message that the author intended, however. The edited piece will be forwarded to the original author for feedback. The name of the reviewer/evaluator will remain anonymous to the original author.

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<th>Reviewer/Evaluator</th>
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**Article Title:**

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<tr>
<th>Article addresses the general scope of the Association of Mexican-American Educators Journal</th>
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<th>4</th>
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<tr>
<td>Timeliness and relevance to current Latino/Mexican-American scholarship and issues</td>
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<td>Theoretical framework/review of the literature is well grounded, focused, and aligned to the topic/methods of manuscript</td>
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<td>Research methods are clearly articulated and supported with appropriate data to substantiate findings.</td>
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<td>Article is accessible and valuable to researchers and practitioners.</td>
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<td>Clarity, Style, organization and quality of writing</td>
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Overall Score on the Rubric: _____ / 30

Do you recommend inclusion of this article in the AMAE journal?

Yes, as submitted
Yes, but with minor revisions
Yes, but would need significant revisions and another review
No

Comments/ suggestions to improve the article (for the author):

Comments/ suggestions about the article (for the guest editors) (these comments will not be shared with the author):