

Latina Teacher Agency in Public Schools: Love, Tensions, and Perseverance

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Abstract

This article examined the manner in which Latina teachers' enacted agency to challenge institutional barriers impacting Latinas/os in the educational system. A theoretical framework is suggested as a tool to describe the practices of four Latina teachers working in elementary schools serving a high population of Latino students in Southern California. Using qualitative mixed methods, as an exploratory study, the classroom teachers identified three themes representing their journey in search of an equitable education for Latinas/os.

Introduction

Current demographic trends reveal that we are in the midst of a shift in California's K-12 student population. Nearly one-third of the nation's English Learners (ELs) are found within California (California Department of Education [CDE], 2007), with a total of 1, 571, 463 students identified as ELs during the 2009-2010 school year. Over the past 25 years, over 75 % of English proficient Latinos have been underachieving in basic skills of reading, writing, and math by the fourth grade (CDE, 2007). Consequently, the federal government's National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) indicates that Latina/o students continue to lag behind White students in reading (Gándara & Rumberger, 2009). A recent study by Gándara and Rumberger (2009) on English learners demonstrated that ELs attended segregated schools where facilities and conditions were poor and had teachers with less training, receiving little professional development to aid them in teaching English learners. Consequently, graduation rates for Latina/o students reveal a decline in recent years (CDE, 2009).

To challenge and transform current conditions faced by Latinas/os in education, teachers must advocate for Latinos at all costs. This form of agency examines, critiques, and transforms institutional barriers, shaping the participation and success of Latino parents and students in schools. Furthermore, the teacher's role is key in attaining equality for Latino school communities. (The term Latino school community is used to define a school community where the majority of the student population is Latino.)

We begin this article by providing an overview of relevant literature informing the research study. A Cycle of Liberation Framework will examine the manner in which classroom teachers enacted agency in their particular school site. Next, the methodology section will describe the approach used to collect and analyze data. Three themes emerging from the data are presented, which include: (1) Intentionality of Action, (2) Transformative Resistance, and (3) Negotiation of Practice. Consequently, the authors will discuss the major findings in regards to teacher advocacy in Latino school communities. Lastly, recommendations are presented in support of teacher agency in schools and communities.

Overview of the Literature

Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy (CP) has been acknowledged as a process in which teachers and educators are able to challenge, question, and transform existing status quo practices in public schools (Giroux, 2008; McLaren, 2005;). A review of the research (Darder, 2002; Duncan- Andrade, 2007; Giroux, 2008) reveals that critical pedagogues have used critical pedagogy to identify, examine, and critique socio-political factors influencing teacher practice and student achievement in the educational system.

According to Freire (1974), a liberatory education is guided by love. Studies regarding the influence of love and caring in schools (Ladson Billings, 1995; Noddings, 1984; Valenzuela, 1999) explicate that both constructs are significant to the success of culturally and linguistically diverse youth in the K-12 educational system. For example, Valenzuela (1999) draws from Noddings' (1984) conceptualization of teacher caring as a moral ethic caring driven by a need to nurture and value relationships between teacher and student. Bartolomé (2008) contends that love must be authentic in education settings where teachers serve culturally and linguistically diverse learners. Bartolomé's (2008) study on teacher beliefs found that teachers believed that love, respect and *cariño* outweighed any linguistic and cultural difference between teacher and student. Following this vein, bell hooks (1994; 2003) affirms that love is essential in combating dehumanizing practices that exist in the educational system. Love, as defined by hooks, is a combination of care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, respect and trust.

Teacher Agency

Bound closely to acts of love and caring, teacher agency is a component of critical pedagogy that challenges and transforms schooling conditions, shaping the lives of students and communities (Freire, 1974; Giroux, 2008). Duncan-Andrade's (2007) study of urban teachers working in restrictive school settings revealed that teachers that enacted agency were risk takers with students, the curriculum, and associated their teaching with the struggle for human dignity and justice. Similarly, Nieto's (2006) study of teacher dispositions found that effective teachers in public schools saw themselves as effective because they had both the courage to challenge mainstream knowledge and a passion for social justice. These studies also reflect the need for examining the manner in which power is used to control teachers. The works of Apple (2005), Kozol (2006), and Foucault (1977) have outlined the manner in which the power of institutions is exerted on teachers. More specifically, Foucault contends that those with the most power in society are also those whose ideas are considered to be universal and unbiased truths. Pignatelli (2002) posits that in education there is a need to illuminate essential truths about students and teachers. Thus, it is imperative to challenge power structures in the educational system. Unless leaders transform power structures, schools will remain under "surveillance." Within the context of education, teachers, through advocacy, are seeking a shift in power in schools so that democracy is enacted and schools can be a place where all individuals are valued.

Jiménez-Castellanos' (2010) study of one Latino teacher coalition found that critical teacher networks had a significant influence in the decision-making process at the school district level. The Latino teacher coalition was composed of one group with 30 members. The teachers advocated for Latino youth and consistently challenged their school district for more than 10 years. This study reveals that Latino teacher networks are influential in challenging power and transforming schools in regards to the success of Latinos.

Teacher agency in Latino school communities has been regarded by scholars as necessary for the achievement of Latinos (Trueba, 1995; Valencia, 2002). Research on Latino parents (Olivos, 2011; Valencia, 2002) has demonstrated that the education system, historically, has disregarded the contributions of Latino parents as it relates to students' academic trajectory. Along this vein, in a recent book on Latino parents, *Bicultural Parent Engagement*, Olivos, Jiménez-Castellanos, and Ochoa (2011) recommend that teachers must engage with their community and provide opportunities for parents to engage democratically with schools. Further, through a democratic process, Latino parents have an opportunity to become critical leaders that examine, critique, and challenge barriers shaping the educational terrain of their children.

Theoretical Framework for Naming Teachers' Actions in Schools

The Cycle of Liberation Framework (CLF), Figure 1, draws from Freire (1974) and critical pedagogy, as discussed earlier. The CLF was used to analyze actions enacted by classroom teachers in this study—i.e. to closely examine their teacher agency. The CLF illustrates the process for analyzing inequities and action towards liberation (Harro, 2000). The CLF involves a process of interpersonal, intrapersonal, and systemic change with love at the core of all action (Freire, 1974; Harro, 2000). Tension is part of the CLF. Hence, tension derives

from institutional constraints causing stress on individuals seeking equality and liberation. Specifically, the CLF is composed of three stages: (1) Waking Up and Reaching Out; (2) Building Community and Coalescing; and (3) Creating and Maintaining Change. A description of each stage follows.

Waking Up and Reaching Out. In the first stage, the intrapersonal tensions caused by critical incidents create an enlightenment of one's place in the world, where one's known reality is now questioned and challenged as being true. Individuals or groups in this phase begin to take steps toward self-empowerment by further questioning and understanding the contradictions they have brought to their consciousness (Freire, 1974; Gioux, 2008). For instance, a teacher that is forbidden to speak Spanish by a school principal realizes that her view of education has changed because someone in power is diminishing her most valuable cultural asset in working with Latina/o students. The teacher uses this critical incident to empower herself and consequently, names injustices in her school.

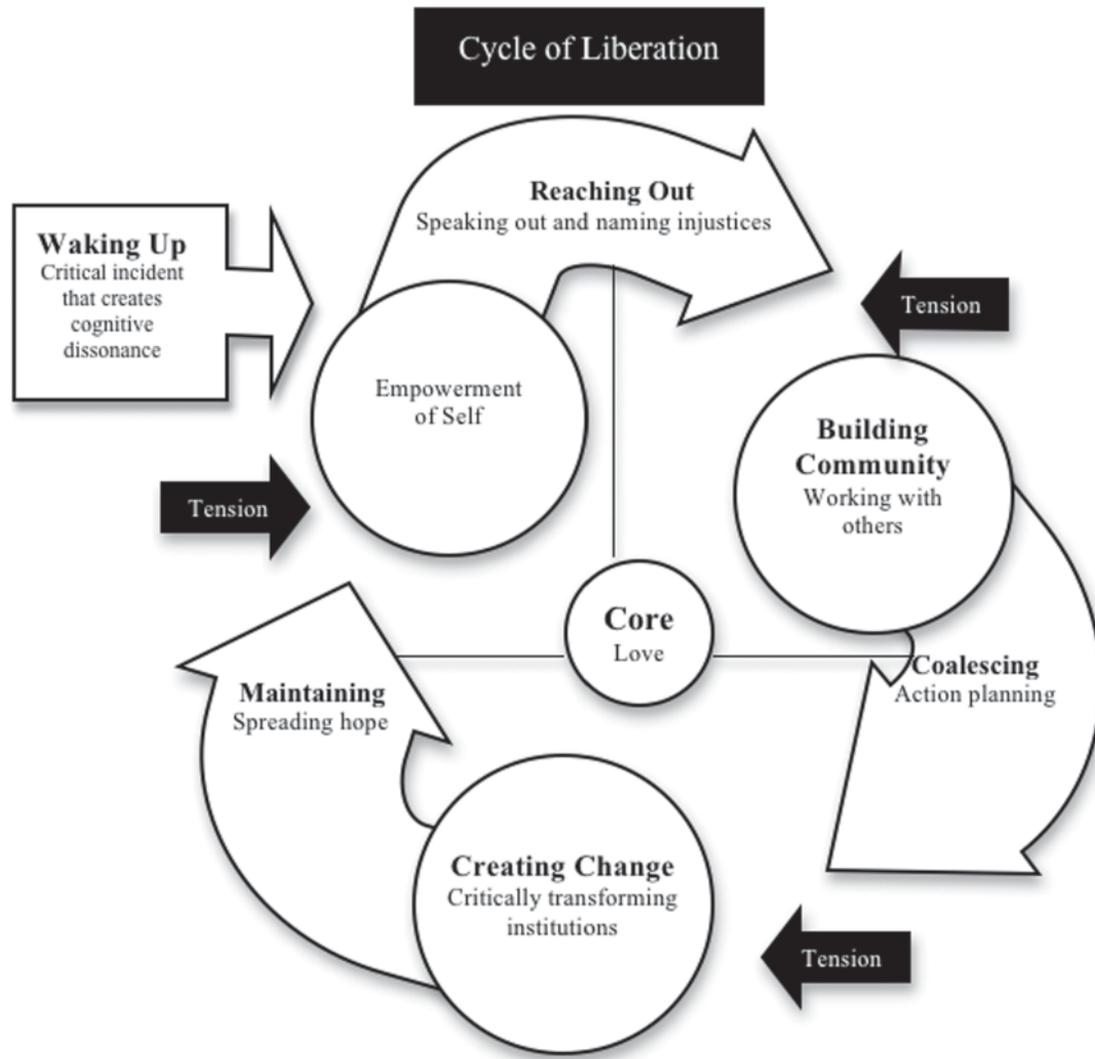
Building Community and Coalescing. In the second stage, the interpersonal tension that drives the CLF involves a change in an individual's worldview triggered by the need to further understand the personal, social, and systemic forces that cause inequitable conditions. Building community allows a space for dialogue with individuals or groups that have similar and different perspectives. A classroom teacher that participates in professional development seeks to build relationships with all members, regardless of ideological differences, in the pursuit of equality in education.

Creating and Maintaining Change. The final stage, creating and maintaining change, is fueled by tensions that challenge existing structures, assumptions, philosophies, rules, and roles that stifle transformative change (Harro, 2000). The challenge is to strengthen and integrate change into the daily lives of everyone, through dialogue and cooperation, towards the possibilities for equality, justice, and humanness (Freire, 1974; Giroux, 2008). A teacher that wants to integrate a program that will benefit schools, such as technology classes for Latino parents, uses dialogue and hope to challenge power structures and institutional barriers undermining Latinos' potential. Love, which is the core of the CLF, is a fundamental quality needed to battle oppression waged against Latinos in the educational system. We have observed a dual language school in Southern California that exemplifies the CLF. Latinos in this school community continue to go through the stages of the CLF as new barriers are presented in the educational system.

Significance of Study

This study sought to examine the manner in which four Latina teachers enacted agency in their school community. These processes are significant for Latinas/os in education given the constrictive practices presently enforced in the public school system (such as the elimination of bilingual curricula and high stakes testing). The investigation was guided by two questions: 1. What guides teacher action? 2. How do teachers enact agency in the educational system?

Figure 1. Cycle of Liberation Framework



Methodology

A multiple case study approach (Yin, 1994) was used to collect data and examine how the four classroom teachers enacted agency in four distinct K-5 elementary school settings. Interpretive research (Denzin, 2000) was utilized to analyze participants’ practices and beliefs regarding their school community. Critical pedagogy was used as a lens to examine how classroom teachers named and challenged the barriers faced at their school sites.

Selection of Participants

The participant selection process for this study began by asking California scholars and experts, who are well known in their field of study in education—and have extensive background knowledge in the area of critical pedagogy research, curriculum, and educational processes—to recommend four to five Latina/o K-6 teachers from San Carlos County¹¹ (located in Southern California) whom they determine enact agency in the educational

11. Pseudonym given to county.

system and qualify as having advocacy strengths. In addition, the participants in this study had to have more than five years of teaching experience and work in a school providing services to ELs, bicultural students, immigrant students, and other culturally and linguistically diverse learners.

In total, 30 teachers, who are Latino/a and teach in K-6 schools, were recommended. The ten most identified teachers were contacted. From initial contact and discussions with each of the ten teachers, four were selected based on their willingness to write an autobiography, be interviewed, and be observed in their classroom and community settings. Upon agreeing to participate, the four teachers were assured that their names, those of their students, school and district would be kept confidential. The teachers include: Mrs. Cruz, Mrs. Paz, Mrs. Flores, and Mrs. López.¹² Each of the four teachers has more than ten years advocating for Latinas/os in the educational system.

Data Collection

Multiple sources of evidence were essential in gathering data that would address the research questions. Because of the qualitative nature of this study, it was important that both validity and reliability be established. This case study included autobiographies, interviews, and classroom and community observations for data collected from September 2010 to August 2011. The participants wrote autobiographies examining pivotal moments in their lives that influenced their beliefs about education. Each participant was interviewed three times. The questions focused on tensions they faced in the school setting and instructional practices in support of ELs. Each participant was also observed three times in the classroom setting and two times in a school-community environment. Observations in the classroom and school community were essential in terms of examining congruency between teacher ideology and practice.

Data Analysis

Once the data was conceptualized, a thematic content analysis approach was utilized to code and identify patterns in the data. The themes were determined based on a thorough analysis of interview transcripts and observation notes. Moreover, descriptors were highlighted to identify patterns. After the data was coded and patterns emerged, those particular descriptors were placed under a stated theme. This process was repeated three times to seek clarity of themes. Consequently, themes were member-checked (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) by classroom teachers for accuracy and content validity.

Teachers' Agency Enacted in School Communities

Three salient themes emerged from the autobiographies, interviews, and observations: intentionality of action, transformative resistance, and negotiation of practice. The themes directly correlated with the three stages of the CLF.

Theme One: Intentionality of Action

Intentionality of Action represents the manner in which pivotal moments or experiences in a teacher's life shaped the beliefs and attitudes regarding Latinos/as in education (Bartolomé, 2006). Their ideological grounding led them to enact intentional actions in the educational system and in Latina/o communities. Their practices take into consideration social, political, and racial factors that interplay with the success of Latinas/os. At the same time, these actions originate from a love teachers have for the school community which is closely tied to Stage One of the CLF. Teachers' deep sense of care is demonstrated in their advocacy for Latina/o students and parents. Consequently, teachers have empowered themselves to speak out and name injustices that exist in their school community.

¹². Pseudonym given to classroom teachers.

Mrs. Cruz has taught in a biliteracy classroom in a kindergarten and first-grade setting for the past twenty years. In this study, we observed her in a first-grade biliteracy classroom. Mrs. Cruz, through her autobiography, commented on her beliefs regarding immigrant students' and Latino families' success:

I see myself as an immigrant always. I came to this country believing in the United States' democracy. It exists here, but for immigrants it is different. I feel that my work is to support immigrant students and parents as much as possible because they deserve all the rights possible to be successful in the current education system.

Over the past 20 years, Mrs. Cruz has been a leader in multiple organizations in her school community, including English language advisory committees (ELACs), teacher committees, and a Latino parent school organization.

Mrs. Paz has been a kindergarten teacher for the past 15 years and consequently has taught most of her career in a bilingual classroom setting. In this study, she was observed teaching Kindergarten students. Mrs. Paz has faced discrimination and scapegoating in both her personal life and as a Latina teacher during the past 25 years. She describes in her autobiography her beliefs about the power of being Mexicana and bilingual and how it impacted her identity:

I have always seen myself as a Mexicana first, then American. This goes way back to when I was growing [up] in southern California. During this time, there was horrible discrimination towards people of color, but specifically Mexicans in Southern California. I lost my identity by not being able to speak in Spanish at school.

Due to her ideology, Mrs. Paz has been a key member of bilingual committees in San Carlos and in California. Mrs. Paz is a leader of bilingual school committees that work to restore bilingual education in San Carlos County School District. In addition, for the past 15 years, she has been a contributing member in community and parent organizations in San Carlos.

Equality for Latinas is the foundation of Mrs. Flores' teaching ideology. Mrs. Flores has been teaching fifth grade Structured English Immersion (SEI) classes for the past 10 years, and consequently, teaches in the community she was raised in as a youth. Mrs. Flores has been engaged in community programs for the past 10 years providing mentorship and support in academics to Latina youth. In her autobiography she chronicles her community work with two Latina youth:

I mentor two young ladies every Saturday. They are very bright girls but they are also struggling. Most come from single parent homes, just like me. So I tell them I have been through this. When we meet we have real conversations about problems they are going through. They trust me and tell me when they don't understand something. If they fail, I fail. This is my community. The young ladies that I meet with—we have strong bond. I love being part of their lives and helping them be successful in life.

Mrs. Flores' is invested in the community where she grew up. She has high expectations and encourages Latina youth to persevere despite challenges they may face. Mrs. Flores provides mentorship driven by her own lived experiences. Love is key to Mrs. Flores community work. She expresses care and commitment regarding the relationship built with Latina youth.

Theme Two: Transformative Resistance

Transformative resistance is a method by which critically-minded teachers challenge oppressive conditions in schools that perpetuate deficit-based practices in the educational system. The classroom teachers are resisting detrimental parental programs, discrimination, and institutional constraints that seek to exert deficit-based schooling practices in their particular school community. Moreover, they strive to transform oppressive conditions that have historically shaped the success of Latinos/as in the educational system. The teachers in this study are in the process of creating change, which is reflective of Stage Three of the CLF. Teachers are

transforming the process by which schools service Latinos by providing mentorship to parents and students, thus, strengthening their leadership skills.

Mrs. Cruz is able to enact transformative resistance practices in her school site because of her past experience and working relationship with school administration. According to Mrs. Cruz, parents have not been valued in her school site. She has developed parent literacy classes that support their overall learning and builds leadership skills for Latino parents. Although she was met with criticism by school administration, Mrs. Cruz negotiated space for parents as documented in an interview:

All the work that I do in this literacy project is connected with parents and students learning together and student achievement. Parents want the best for their children. They believe in it. I tell parents they may participate when they have time and they are always welcomed.

Mrs. Cruz seeks space for Latino parents so that they can become leaders and be able to understand the educational system. In this context, Latino parents are valued for their intellectual capabilities. This challenges status quo perceptions of Latino parents that are pervasive in schools and undermine Latino parents' value. Within the context of parental engagement, Mrs. Cruz describes the history she has collaborating with Latino parents in her school community. She discusses, through an interview, her role with parents:

I have been doing this for most of my career. It's who I am. I love talking and learning from my parents. Most of the parents I have known have been disrespected by schools. Yet parents continue to come back! I admire my parents so much.

Mrs. Cruz understands the struggles Latino parents encounter. Mrs. Cruz loves her community and admires their resilience. This form of parent engagement is developed through building community and trust.

Mrs. López has been teaching fifth grade biliteracy and has been a key member of a Latino community organization (Comunidad en Acción¹³) for the past 10 years. She is passionate about supporting Latino parents' rights and has challenged school administrators about school practices detrimental to parents. Mrs. López believes schools should provide human rights classes for parents, especially, since many parents in her school are undocumented Latinos. Mrs. López expounds on this topic through an interview:

I have talked to Latino parents about community issues such as immigration raids, fear, and education. I have voiced this concern with the school principal and asked for human rights' forums. The principal does not believe in transformative parent involvement in this school. This is a long process. It takes time.

Mrs. López advocates for undocumented parents by engaging in dialogue with the school principal regarding human rights' classes. By critiquing the political position that her school takes against Latino parents, she identifies institutional tension that currently exists. Mrs. López seeks, through a political lens, to transform the manner in which her school views parent involvement.

Along with parents, Mrs. López also advocates for her students with great passion. Mrs. López is conscious of the fact that many Latino students need to be full participants in their education. Many of the students in the community organization, where Mrs. López is a member, are undocumented Latinas/os. She describes, through an interview, the role of the organization:

Students want to be part of the social justice movement and want to take action in their school and community. Some of my students like Cornelia [pseudonym], who is undocumented, wants to go to college regardless of barriers. Students we work with learn to empower themselves. Schools do not do enough.

13. Pseudonym for organization.

Mrs. López is aware that Latino students are not treated equally. She provides critical mentorship guided by social justice. The community organization is a facilitator for information, and consequently, faults the public school system for the lack of communication towards undocumented Latino students.

Theme Three: Negotiation of Practice

Negotiation of Practice refers to the manner in which teachers who subscribe to critical pedagogy dialogue, reflect, and challenge the educational system so that students and parents obtain the best services a school can provide. The teachers illustrate Stage Two, Building Community and Coalescing, of the CLF.

Teachers are in the process of working and collaborating with school administration in regards to the needs of Latino youth. Nevertheless, tension, in the form of institutional constraints, influences dialogue. Mrs. Paz has had to struggle in order for the kindergarten biliteracy program at her school site to begin. She is constantly addressing the role of biliteracy in her school community. Mrs. Paz, describes in an interview, the challenges faced when advocating for biliteracy:

Our school is beginning a biliteracy program in some K-I classrooms, and I have been demanding for things that were owed to us. I have questioned my principal about our resources and curriculum for K-I classes. I attempt to have conversations with my principal in our professional development meetings. Most of our conversations are very tense. I won't give up my beliefs about bilingual education and she knows that.

Mrs. Paz is in constant dialogue with the school principal and is assertive in negotiating for resources needed for Latino students. The process is significant because it allows her to challenge the power structures in her school site. Her perseverance allows her to maintain a critical dialogue with the school principal, which is key to the negotiation process regarding biliteracy programs.

Mrs. Flores struggles to negotiate with peer literacy coaches at her school site for quality instruction for Latino ELs. She has documented, through interviews, that her school believes in providing quality instruction, but, in the end there is no follow through:

In the past six months, all of our fifth grade team has had to change our schedule in terms of our literacy and math instruction due to peer coaches. I have had disagreements with them in regards to the best way in supporting the needs of students. In many instances, they have critiqued the work I have done with my students. What hurt the most is that sometimes they perpetuate deficit perspective [s] onto my students. I am very honest, and I tell them that as a school we need to reflect on how to best support Latino students

Mrs. Flores is aware of the symbolic practices enacted by her school regarding EL youth. She names and documents discrimination towards her students and her classroom instruction. Further, Mrs. Flores advocates for all ELs and understands the ramifications of Latinos not receiving quality instruction. Her presence and critique are instrumental in negotiating for Latino students.

Overall, the four teachers are committed to their school communities despite tensions their actions may produce. The teachers in this study have unconditional love for their school community. Love is reflected in the teachers' constant efforts to transform oppressive conditions that exist in their school and community. Teachers face tension from school administration due to their beliefs and ideology regarding equality for Latinos/as in their school community. Moreover, teachers are challenging power structures in schools by negotiating for services needed for Latinos in their particular school community. Perseverance allows them to continue to advocate for parents and students and to create transformative change in their school community. Unconditional love and perseverance guides teachers through the CLF.

Conclusion

In this article, we document a one-year qualitative study that examined the manner in which four veteran Latina teachers enacted agency in their school community. This study employed the CLF to analyze practices operationalized by teachers serving Latino school communities. The CLF was important in examining three overarching themes: *Intentionality of Action, Transformative Resistance, and Negotiation of Practices*.

Stage One of the CLF, *Waking Up and Reaching Out*, was exemplified by all four teachers. Teachers were influenced by pivotal moments in their lives, consequently shaping their beliefs regarding issues of equality for Latinos in education. More specifically, their ideology influenced their advocacy for Latino students and parents. Gándara and Contreras (2009), affirm that the best teachers for Latinos are those that understand Latinos' struggles and experiences—consequently, leading to advocacy on their behalf. Teachers in this study are invested in their school community. Teachers in this study have advocated most of their career for the advancement of Latino parents' rights, bilingual education, and Latino students' academic success. Moreover, their ideology and beliefs, which are undermined in the educational system, are powerful tools utilized to unveil the oppression that Latinos face on a daily basis.

The Latina teachers were able to name injustices and challenge practices that dehumanize Latinos/as. Further, love was a significant construct that shaped their advocacy and ideology. The classroom teachers' actions in their school community reflect hooks' (2003) definition of love, which encompasses care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, and trust. Mrs. Flores' love and commitment to her community was illustrated through the powerful relationship she developed with Latina youth in her school community. The love that teachers have for their community prepares them to combat tension. This resonates with Bartolomé's (2008) findings in regards to the significance of love in educational settings.

Stage Two of the CLF, *Building Community and Coalescing*, represented the process by which the four classroom teachers attempted to collaborate with others in their particular school site. The study revealed that tensions were produced when attempting to work with other school members that had opposite ideological beliefs about Latinos/as in the educational system. The study reported that negotiation and dialogue were significant in addressing the need of Latinos. The teachers were astute and assertive when seeking resources and instructional programs for Latino youth. Mrs. Flores and Mrs. Paz denounced their schools for not effectively providing support for students in regards to biliteracy and effective instructional practices for Latino students. This form of advocacy aligns with Duncan-Andrade's (2007) findings in relation to teachers being risk takers. More specifically, the four Latina teachers understood the significance of being part of decision-making processes with school administration. Their actions were focused on transforming the political and ideological beliefs that schools had about the education of Latino youth.

This practice reveals a shift in power that the teachers were seeking in reference to the dignity and success of Latinos/as in the educational system. Mrs. Paz, who advocated for biliteracy, understood that it was critical for the school administration to support biliteracy. She addresses this concern directly to school administrators through multiple meetings and conversations. Mrs. Flores attempted to engage with peer coaches to consider effective instruction for Latino students. Her presence and critical voice interrupted the manner in which her school addressed the needs of Latinos. Perseverance was a key characteristic that guided teacher advocacy. Teachers did not conform to their schools' ideology regarding Latinos. Their perseverance guided their interaction with others who did not share the same beliefs about Latino students. This disposition is key in challenging deficit-based schooling practices and power structures pervasive in the educational system.

Within Stage Three of the CLF, *Creating Change*, all four teachers were critical about the discrimination and marginalization of Latino parents and students. According to Olivos (2011), teachers must be advocates for democracy for Latino parents at all costs. Moreover, the classroom teachers in this study believed that Latino parents were intelligent leaders capable of empowering themselves and others. Teachers worked towards preparing parents to be key members of their schools. In addition, teachers understood parents' struggles in the community and challenged their schools' political beliefs regarding Latino parents. The parent literacy class developed by Mrs. Cruz, which focused on leadership skills, illustrated a change in the manner in which parents were treated in her school. Teachers' actions countered the deficit perspectives (Valencia, 2002) of Latino

parents, which were prevalent in the school system.

The community action enacted by Mrs. López in her school community illustrates stage three of the CLF. She enacted agency outside the school and collaborated with Latino organizations to serve as a mentor. Mrs. López, through her community organization, provided advice to undocumented Latinos regarding college access and social justice. This form of mentorship was guided by a social justice lens. Mrs. López understood that Latino/a youth do not receive access to information from schools and, conversely, engaged youth to empower themselves. Critical Latino organizations have an influence on the success of Latino youth. This form of community action creates change needed in the educational system (Duncan-Andrade, 2007).

Given the findings shared in this article and the existing literature regarding Latinos and teacher agency, we offer recommendations focused on the advancement of teacher agency in schools. Schools must recruit Latina/o teachers that are invested in the community. Latina/o teachers' love for a school community influences the success of its students and families. Model teachers that exemplify a deep sense of care and commitment for Latino school communities are an asset. Furthermore, teacher mentorship is vital in Latino school communities.

Latina/o teachers must continue to provide mentorship to other teachers that seek justice and equality in the educational system. This mentorship must be guided by a socio-political lens required to challenge and transform power structures in schools. Moreover, Latina/o teachers are needed in leadership positions in regards to the evaluation of school curricula and programs geared towards Latino youth. It is essential that teachers advocate for Latino youth's culture and language in relation to curricular development. In regards to community organizations, schools must make sure teachers are mediators between the community and school so that the best educational services are provided for Latinos. This process will have a profound impact on Latinos' academic trajectory, and perhaps, ensure future student leaders return to their communities.

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