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Transforming the Culture of Academia One Classroom at a Time: Testimonio of a Latina Junior Faculty Member Engaging in Latina Critical Pedagogical Activism

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Abstract

Inspired by the work of Chicana feminist scholars, the author narrates her process of *academic awakening* and survival by illustrating how *testimonio* can be utilized as a pedagogical tool within the classroom. She introduces the concept of Latina Critical Pedagogical Activism (LCPA) and its' four tenets—*centralización*, epistemological engagement, *educonfianza*, and *lengua resistencia*—as a tool to be utilized by Latina faculty. LCPA serves a pedagogical framework faculty could utilize to validate their experiences in the classroom, while simultaneously communicating to Latinx students that their culture matters; that they belong and deserve to be in academia. Together, students and faculty disrupt hegemonic schooling practices by centering non-white ways of knowing, learning, and teaching.

Keywords: Latina critical pedagogical activism, Chicana feminism, *testimonio*, pedagogy, Latina faculty

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I entered the academy naïvely but with eyes wide open. While I did not know exactly what to expect, I knew I needed to remain vigilant and cautious. My trepidation lied in being a Mexican immigrant and first generation student—identities that caused me to live at the border of *ni de aquí, ni de allá* (Anzaldúa, 2012). For example, as a first-generation college student, I relied on my cultural capital (Yosso, 2005) to help me navigate structural and systemic barriers. I had no name for what I was doing but Yosso (2005) identified it as community cultural wealth—funds of cultural knowledge seldom recognized by educators but widely used by Latinx students. Now as a junior faculty member, I continue to navigate the labyrinth of unwritten rules and procedures (Urrieta Jr, Méndez, & Rodríguez, 2014) and the marginalization many women of color (WOC) endure in academe (Turner, 2002). I find myself consistently defying negative stereotypes about my decision of becoming a mother while on the tenure-track (Caballero et al., 2019) and the all too common pejorative, “oh, you’re a professor?” comment. The pathway towards tenure has been without a doubt treacherous and unpredictable. Nonetheless, Chicana scholars before me collectively organized and unapologetically fought for inclusion in academia. Their legacy and *enseñanzas* have inspired me to do the same. The Latina Feminist Group (2001) emphasizes that while the academy may not have been designed for us to succeed, we need to assert our presence while simultaneously uplift one another. A much needed reminder to persist even when it feels futile or hopeless.

My first year of teaching was challenging as I navigated a new role and attempted to make sense of my *fit* within the academy. I was wary of introducing concepts related to social justice, inequality, and racial discrimination into my pedagogy, after all, WOC professors’ expertise is constantly ignored, dismissed, and challenged by students (Rodríguez, 2009; Turner, 2002). Our marginalization extends into the academy where the intersections of race/ethnicity and gender limit our opportunities (Alarcón & Bettez, 2017). Full-time Latina faculty are severely underrepresented at degree-granting institutions comprising only 4% of lecturers, 4% of instructors, 3% of assistant, 2% of associate, and a mere 1% of full professors (NCES, 2018). Meanwhile, Latinx college enrollment rates for 18- to 24-year-olds increased from 22% in 2000 to 36% in 2017; the highest increase of any other racial or ethnic group (NCES, 2019). These students merit to be served by professionals who understand their gifts, talents, and the barriers they encounter. Notably, it quickly dawned on me that my experiences were one in the same with Latinx students, “situated at the intersections of our social identities; our stories,

[and] the interplay of race and gender” (Alarcón & Bettez, 2017, p. 28), a major difference was that as a faculty member, I have the opportunity to enrich their learning by validating their presence in my classroom.

In this piece, I highlight the often-silenced voices of Latina faculty while also narrating how I “brown [my] teaching spaces” (Alarcón & Bettez, 2017, p. 35). I introduce the concept of Latina Critical Pedagogical Activism (LCPA) by narrating the process that led to LCPA’s development using testimonio (Bernal, 1998). Inspired by the work of so many Chicana scholars, I first narrate the process of my *academic awakening* by highlighting the influence of testimonio in the development of my pedagogy and scholarship, I then introduce LCPA and its’ four tenets—*centralización*, epistemological engagement, *educonfianza*, and *lengua resistencia*. Finally, while the work of WOC faculty is often devalued and invalidated (Urrieta Jr, Méndez, & Rodríguez, 2014), it is my hope that LCPA could be utilized as a tool by other WOC faculty to validate their experiences in the classroom, while simultaneously communicating to Latinx students that their culture matters; that they belong and deserve to be in academia.

Process of Awakening *La Intellectual Latina Feminist*

For far too long I acquiesced in my discontent with feminist traditions that ignored the multiplicity of my identities. White feminism was decisively exclusive (Moya, 2001) and completely overlooked the fact that feminism, for WOC, begins with race as a critical variable in analyzing our experiences from several sources of oppression (Garcia, 1989). These sources differ based on multiple factors and it is impossible to decide which of these identities are more pronounced than the other. Within the academy, “...the work of Latina feminist theorists remains understudied, underanalyzed, and tokenized in order to satisfy the demand of inclusiveness and pluralism associated with feminist theory” (Ortega, 2016, p. 4). Yet, Chicana feminist scholarship is not about pleasing the status quo or self-serving. Hurtado (2003) asserts Chicana scholarship was not, and has never been, about reaching consensus or avoiding disruption. Chicanas boldly introduce(d) epistemologies of lived experiences that leave the carnal body and mind replete of open wounds only to be healed through critical action-based reflection. The Latina Feminist Group (2001) terms this process, “flesh and blood theory” (p. x) which fosters a new type of intellectual Latina feminist, one who narrates her experiences, and centers her knowledge of the political, cultural, and historical in order to stress the multiplicity of her racialized and gendered identities.

Villenas (1996) and Martínez (1996) argue Latinas have been academically socialized to believe that their experiences and stories are beyond the scope of formal theory and knowledge. I therefore had to unlearn years' worth of lies taught to me by my educators in order to believe that I could eventually become an intellectual Latina feminist educator. This process has been both psychologically and spiritually fulfilling. I found a new form of liberation in texts like *Telling to Live*, *Latina Feminist Group*, and *This Bridge Called My Back*. They challenged me to walk in *el camino de conocimiento*, to encounter the shadow deep within, to confront whatever inhibits the *facultades*, and begin healing (Anzaldúa, 2015). It was their intellectual contributions that awoke a dormant desire deep within my core, silencing the noise of negativity and academic exclusivity, to finally begin claiming my place in academe. Chicana feminist scholars had perfectly modeled the challenges and rewards associated with walking *en el camino de conocimiento*. They declared war against “dogmatic and hegemonic patriarchies, and racist, middle class matriarchies, bent on making invisible the simultaneous experiences of race/ethnicity, gender, and class, not to mention sexuality” (Martínez, 1996, p. 117). Their intellectual works granted me *permiso* to challenge deficit perspectives that “judges the scholarship produced by scholars of color as biased and nonrigorous” (Bernal & Villalpando, 2002, p. 169) and to teach without fear. As I began to understand the role of *la facultad* in my academic journey, I realized it was imperative to tell my story using *testimonio* (Bernal, 1998), for me, it is about academic survival (Anzaldúa, 2012).

***Testimonio* Runs Through My Blood**

Chicana feminist scholarship gave me wings to fly. I had felt like a caged bird whose potential was cut back with deficit-based scholarship that insisted on depicting Latinxs as deficient. The intellectual genocide of Latinxs begins in elementary school and is reinforced by lies printed in academic journals. Yet, despite the intentional erasure and misrepresentation of Latinxs in educational research, Chicanas have long resisted (Bernal, 1998). Rodríguez (2018) candidly narrates the delicate dance we are forced to perform in order to navigate the self, academe, decolonization, and all the *-isms* designed to keeping us in our place. Chicanas have embraced *testimonio* as a bridge between antepasados and the self, *comunidad* and the academy, *consejos* and academic writing—it serves as a life-line to a cultural tradition that spans generations (Bernal, Elenes, Goginez, & Villenas 2006; Latina Feminist Group, 2001; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2015). They have broken away from sterile writing-rules to vivid depictions of

physical and mental turmoil/joys that are skillfully embedded within empirical data. They welcome metaphors, Spanish, Spanglish, and everything in-between—they grant us permission to be ourselves and invite us to share our *testimonio*.

Bernal, Burciaga, and Carmona (2016a) orchestrate a delightful ensemble of entries that highlight *testimonios* as an effective approach to understand inequalities within education. Contributors underscore the use of *testimonio* as a way for the “reader to position herself as a listener and witness” (Cruz, 2012, p. 98), a process “to expose the complexities within Latina[s] lived experiences[s]” (Espino, Vega, Rendón, Ranero, & Muñiz, 2016, p. 83), and a method for re-assigning “agency to Chicana/Latina scholars through the telling of one’s history as part of a larger collective memory” (Pérez Huber & Cueva, 2016, p. 35). It is the use of *testimonio* that connects our stories, the collective desire to forge change and resist marginalization. Our *antepasados* utilized *testimonio* to pass down a collective history filled with *enseñanzas*, *consejos*, *remedios*, traditions and more. The Latina Feminist Group (2001) utilized *testimonio* to break “down essentialist categories, since it was through the telling of life stories and reflecting upon them that [they] gained nuanced understanding of differences and connections among [them]” (p. 11). Thus, *testimonio* is not only a methodological tool to conduct research, it is also an ancestral mechanism by which to connect with one another and validate our mutual existence in educational spaces.

Utilizing *Testimonio* to Fashion LCPA

Although there is no universal definition of *testimonio* (Pérez Huber, 2009), proponents agree it communicates an authentic narrative propelled by the urgency of the situation (Yúdice, 1991), a verbal journey that highlights injustices and their effects (Brabeck, 2003), and gives structure and form to our lived realities by providing a means from which to translate our *vidas* into scholarship. When I discovered the versatility of *testimonio*, I excitedly pondered on how to utilize it to inform my pedagogy and research. Yet, like Pérez Huber (2009) I had been warned against utilizing methods that were perceived to be made-up and/or unscientific. I had also been advised by many senior scholars that in order to be successful in academe, I needed to remain as objective and distant from students as possible. How then could I embrace the innate characteristics of *testimonio* while remaining objective and distant from my students? After all, *testimonio* is about reflecting on lived experiences and utilizing them to connect with others through shared realities (Pérez Huber & Cueva, 2016). I concluded that the demand for

objectivity was the source of the problem. Latinx students deserved to be validated in the classroom and their cultural knowledge recognized—it is about relationship building through our stories.

The desire to share my authentic self with my students was fueled by my subtractive educational experiences (Valenzuela, 1999). I still find deep inside my being, live remnants of hollowness and feelings of inferiority, gaping wounds inflicted upon me by my educators who in their blissful ignorance, awoke the fire from deep within my soul to become the type of educator I deeply yearned for when I was a student. Now that I am a professor, I know I cannot consciously remain compliant and uphold the status quo; even if it means jeopardizing my pathway towards tenure. I know what it feels like to be in a classroom where microaggressions are ever-present, it slowly kills your *espíritu guerrero*. Therefore, in crafting my pedagogy, I knew that it needed to uphold the essence of *testimonio*. I wanted to fashion a pedagogy that could serve as a tool to breathe academic life into the souls of Latinx students and faculty, who have been betrayed by an education system that insists on delegitimizing their worth. Thus, I began to theorize what it would look like to include *testimonio* in my pedagogy.

Developing LCPA

Initially my goal of incorporating inclusive pedagogies that “transgress those boundaries that would confine each pupil to rote, assembly-line approach[es] to learning” (hooks, 1994, p. 13) was challenged by students. The fear of negative student evaluations was always on the back of my mind. Urrieta, Méndez, and Rodríguez (2014) described tenure as a “tool of fear” (p. 7); where minoritized faculty express being concerned about engaging social justice topics in the classroom for the fear of not receiving tenure. Nonetheless, I felt a moral obligation to challenge the status quo despite the possible backlash, after all I was working at a Hispanic Serving Institution and most of my students were Latinxs. I knew exactly what it felt like when faculty failed to address issues that disproportionately impacted minoritized students and I could not fathom replicated those practices. Chicana feminist epistemology was developed as “a response to the failure of both mainstream education research and liberal feminist scholarship to address the forms of knowledge and experiences Chicanas bring to educational institutions and research” (Calderón, Bernal, Pérez Huber, Malagón, & Vélez, 2012, p. 515). They directly challenge(d) the deficit perspective many researchers adopted about Latinxs.

Chicana feminists were at the forefront of centering traditionally marginalized non-Eurocentric sources of knowledge. Alarcón and Bettez (2017) briefly noted Latina faculty *browned* research methodologies by introducing materials centering indigeneity, feminism, and non-Eurocentric ways of knowing. They expanded content knowledge to be inclusive of multiple marginalized identities—validating their presence in the classroom. Furthermore, Anzaldúa (2015) wrote about the importance of centering personal experiences, opening all the senses to serve as a bridge; “*la nepantlera* leads us in celebrating *la comunidad soñada*, reminding us that spirit connects the irreconcilable warring” (p.149). To that end, Bernal, Burciaga, and Flores Carmona (2016a) identified the political urgency of unveiling new epistemological, pedagogical, and methodological approaches that connect bodily experiences of oppression and resistance to each other.

Their works inspired me to not only celebrate my authentic self within the professoriate but to also actively resist the ideological manipulation of knowledge and white hegemony of the education system. Therefore, in the process of connecting my individual experiences to the larger WOC faculty collective, I pondered on how I could position my words, teaching, and proficiencies as gifts to be shared. I therefore developed Latina Critical Pedagogical Activism (LCPA) to validate, celebrate, and support the existence of Latinx students, while simultaneously fostering inclusive classrooms that respect diverse ways of knowing. I took aspects of liberatory pedagogy, my personal and professional experiences, and incorporated practices informed by the works of Gloria Anzaldúa, bell hooks, Kimberly Crenshaw, Norma E. Cantú, and Dolores Delgado Bernal—to name a few. LCPA is a pedagogical tool of inclusivity and claiming space, of doing the work of *nepantleras* (Anzaldúa, 2015; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2015) within the classroom, validating the identities of Latinx students as *pensadora/es* by “valuing culture and difference in the formation of identities and education” (Godinez, 2006, p. 25). I introduce LCPA and its’ tenets below.

Latina Critical Pedagogical Activism

LCPA was developed out of the need for a pedagogical tool that was not prescriptive of where, when, and how to utilize it, but rather, afforded Latina professors with the freedom to teach with honesty, love, and courage. LCPA resists white heteronormative practices and the “apartheid of knowledge that marginalizes, discredits, and devalues the scholarship, [and] epistemologies” produced by WOC (Bernal & Villalpando, 2002). It challenges practices that

have long been utilized to discredit non-white ways of knowing. Therefore, minoritized students are free to learn without the unfair burden of mediating their disadvantaged identities within the classroom. LCPA is a dynamic, introspective, and personal process that helps Latina professors, as well as her students, discern the multiple layers of their identities. It encourages her to draw from her educational experiences and the world around her, centering *testimonio* as a way of connecting with others. Then, through constant reflection, she identifies similarities between the transgressions she has endure(d) and those of her students. The goal of storytelling and reflecting is to mediate the intellectual and emotional violence minoritized individuals experience by interweaving their collective (his)stories.

LCPA positions Latina faculty and students in the same learning process (Freire, 2000). It encourages communal theorizing about how their embodied experiences can help decipher the oppressive conditions they navigate, and together, move towards intellectual liberation (Anzaldúa, 2015). Furthermore, it centers ethnic and cultural pride (Bernal, Burciaga, & Flores Carmona, 2016b), the hybridity of racialized identities (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2015), and the ancestral wisdom to garner the power of resistance by effecting change for minoritized students (Latina Feminist Group, 2001). LCPA is upheld by four tenets—*centralización*, epistemological engagement, *lengua-resistencia*, and *edu-confianza*. While all tenets are in simultaneous use, each one is introduced separately in order to better flesh out their components and how *testimonio* informed their development. Finally, although course evaluations have been cited as being biased against women and minoritized faculty (see for example Laube, Massoni, Sprague, & Ferber, 2007; Martinez, Chang & Welton, 2015), I utilize them to demonstrate the effectiveness of LCPA as a pedagogical tool.

Centralización

Latinxs' academic socialization into a white heteronormative educational system has left us feeling inferior and inadequate (Bernal, 1998; Yosso, 2005). These feelings never leave as we constantly question our fit and place within the academy (Batista, Collado, & Pérez II, 2018). However, it is our socialization into a white heteronormative educational system that makes us feel inadequate, as our stories are kept out by design (Pérez Huber, 2009; Rodríguez, 2018). *Centralización* acknowledges it is through institutional erasure and exclusion of Latinxs that a violent rupture happens between us and our educational goals. Therefore, the violent nature of the schooling system must be countered with love and patience. *Testimonio* centers “first

person oral or written accounts” (Blackmer Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2016, p. 162) and *centralización* takes it a step further to introduce reflection in action. Professor and students embark on a communal journey to unlearn lies we were indoctrinated to believe. *Centralización* is achieved when stories of traditionally marginalized populations are centered in classroom discussions and required readings. Therefore, primary components of *centralización* include the intentional diversification of syllabi, halting negative schooling practices, and welcoming difficult conversations.

Latinas enter the classroom fully equipped with the skills necessary to achieve *centralización*, after all, we have been navigating systems of privilege and oppression our entire lives (Hurtado, 2003; Latina Feminist Group, 2001). Facilitating contentious conversations in the classroom that engage relevant topics is both risky but needed. Thus, there should always be an intentional connection between theory and classroom dialogue; it is through this practice that third space feminism informs Latina classroom pedagogy. Pérez (1999) argues time has not granted Chicanas a voice, it is in the process of uncovering those voices who have been renegaded to silence where the learner finds liberation. Therefore, *centralización* calls for *la profesora* to strategically design her syllabi to center scholarship written by minoritized and WOC scholars. It becomes a symbolic gesture of giving agency to silenced voices, and in doing so, courses become liberatory and culturally inclusive. They transform into safe and validating spaces for targeted communities. However, diversification of syllabi must be accompanied with critical engagement and facilitation of topics traditionally ignored. Thus, *centralización* directly challenges the status quo by affirming traditionally silenced voices (Pérez Huber, 2009; Martínez, 1996; Villenas, 1996). *La profesora* must decide how, and to what extent, to engage contentious topics as it could come at a cost to her personally and/or professionally (Urrieta Jr, Méndez, & Rodríguez, 2014).

Centralización encourages us to hold difficult, yet intentional, conversations in the classroom that acknowledge the experiences, perspectives, cultures, and ways of knowing of minoritized populations. Dialectic encounters coupled with critical facilitation foster a learning environment where students can identify why and how education, social-political events, and transformative change are inextricably linked. The materialization of *centralización* is evident when minoritized students find validation in course readings and class discussions.

[Professor] understands when to contextualize our academic experience, allowing students to lead discussions and create a space where students are in control of their learning. As an AfroLatino, I appreciate the academic freedom to explore my interests... I have matured as a scholar and am beginning the journey to active full critical consciousness. Thank you for creating that space. – Masters Student, Summer 2018

It is evident this student felt comfortable and encouraged to engage in lifelong learning. The intentional diversification of syllabi and the deliberate facilitation of critical conversations allows for *centralización* to unfold. It facilitates the production of consciousness that challenges the dominant Eurocentric epistemological perspective which are damaging and demoralizing to everyone—including whites.

For those who have felt marginalized, invisible, and/or targeted their entire educational journey, *centralización* can serve as a tool to actively resist the replication of pervasive negative schooling practices. It encourages *la profesora* to continue the activism she engage(d) in as student, community member, educator, and/or minoritized individual. *Testimonio* is a tool that helps us heal in *comunidad*. *Centralización* places the responsibility onto the faculty member, leaving space for marginalized students to learn freely.

Epistemological Engagement

Seldom are Latina *profesoras* granted permission to bring their traditional ways of knowing and teaching into the classroom. Epistemological engagement encourages *la profesora* to embrace her various forms of knowledge, cultural wisdom, research methods, and personal experiences to inform her pedagogy. Inspired by “Anzaldúa’s persistent mixing of cultures, languages, and even writing genres” (Anzaldúa, 2012, p. 7), epistemological engagement extends her approach into the classroom despite the possibility of being labeled “blasphemous” (p. 7). It calls for an interdisciplinary approach at *knowing*, embraces critical scholars’ work, the role of students and educator are blurred, cultural and ancestral knowledge are legitimized, and the decolonization of methods is enacted. Furthermore, students are encouraged to question and critique all scholarship, to actively engage with course content and ask questions, to bring their authentic selves to the topic and if they do not see themselves reflected, pose difficult questions.

Epistemological engagement is not oblivious to the pervasive vilification of WOC faculty and non-white ways of knowing. Scheurich and Young (1997) remind us that when a racially

exclusive group has remained under control for so long, they develop the epistemologies and legitimate ways of knowing that society accepts as true. Consequently, the privileging of white-Eurocentric sources of knowledge over other racial/ethnic and cultural groups is endemic. It legitimizes and normalizes the exclusion of other forms of knowledge deemed as inferior since they do not center around white practices, histories, or social realities (Gordon, Miller, & Rollock, 1990). Yet, critiquing systemic evils but not enacting change only reinforces their promulgation. hooks (1994) warns “there can be no intervention that challenges the status quo if we are not willing to interrogate the ways our presentation of self as well as our pedagog[y]” (p. 185) is biased. Epistemological engagement proposes an approach that the *profesora* implement based on her reading of the room, perceived readiness of students to engage, and personal mental health capacities.

The *profesora* is called to actively work towards building trust and community with students—but never at the cost of her own well-being. Nonetheless, she must be willing to accept criticism, “without feeling that to question how [she] teach[es] is somehow to question [her] right to exist on the plant” (hooks, 1994, p. 134). Both the *profesora* and students must uphold each other’s stories while at the same time recognizing that systems of privilege and oppression are always at play. An essential component of creating an inclusive learning environment involves the recognition that access should guarantee all students an equitable opportunity to learn (Bolitzer, Castillo-Montoya, & Williams, 2016). Therefore, the process of resisting the status quo and positioning cultural knowledge as legitimate and rigorous is facilitated when the *profesora* engages in the same process as her students.

She allows everyone to participate in class discussions instead of her only lecturing the whole class period. We are encouraged to share our experiences and ask critical questions and answers. She is all about making sure you get as much as you can from your education and not just wasting your money to not learn anything.— Masters Student, Fall 2016

This students’ evaluation illustrates the impact epistemological engagement had on their learning; they were encouraged to share their experiences while asking critical questions. If educators want to become catalysts for change, they must dismantle the notion that the educator is the only one who bears knowledge (Freire, 2000). Intentionally incorporate diverse

epistemological principles through dialectic, theoretical, and participatory components in the classroom is to enact epistemological engagement at its core.

Honoring students' ontologies directly combats epistemological racism and resists the use of "ethnocentric paradigms that are generally accepted as scientific truisms, but are lacking validation in the minority scholars' experiences and/or intuitions" (Gordon, Miller, & Rollock, 1990, p. 17). In validating minoritized students' experiences, *la profesora* transforms the learning process into one of healing and reparation. These practices transcend the classroom into everyday life. Marginalized students will experience growing pains and intellectual turmoil when encouraged to unlearn deficit stereotypes about their abilities (Bernal, Elenes, Godinez, & Villenas, 2006; Hurtado, 2003; Martínez, 1996). However, it is through the growing pains they build awareness about their social identities and their incredible potential.

Edu-confianza

Testimonio cannot happen without raw honesty; the process includes theorizing the body, mind and soul, which are directly connected to the intellectual, spiritual and personal (Bernal, 1998). This process requires transparency, vulnerability, and openness. Therefore, in order to reach this level of theorizing *confianza*—confidence based on a mutual understanding and appreciation among a group of individuals—must be established (Gloria, 1999). *Edu-confianza* centralizes the Latinx cultural value of *confianza* along with an honest recognition that pejorative schooling experiences have lasting negative consequences on Latinx students (Yosso, 2005). Utilizing transparency as a tool to build rapport and establish *confianza* with marginalized students can help them regain confidence. *Edu-confianza* calls on *la profesora* to become vulnerable through radically honest, a "strategy that enables scholars and students to bring their 'whole self' to the classroom, while getting rid of the shame that frequently accompanies their bodies in academic settings" (Williams, 2016, p. 73). This process is beneficial for both the student and *la profesora* as both are navigating similar experiences. It helps mediate the imposter syndrome minoritized individuals have been forced to believe in. Furthermore, students witness critical pedagogies in practice that humanize their experiences by fostering awareness, reflectivity, and critical thought (Bernal, 1998).

The process of establishing *edu-confianza* is both scary and liberating for Latina faculty. They are asked to *play by the rules* but serve as role models for minoritized students—amounting to a complex juxtaposition. *La profesora* is a product of subtractive schooling

(Valenzuela, 1999), demoralizing schooling practices (Yosso, 2005), and apartheid of knowledge (Bernal & Villalpando, 2002); yet, she is asked to serve as the bridge between the institution that has hurt her so much and minoritized students who are being hurt. Remarkably, it is their mutual experiences of pain and erasure within academe that serves as the catalyst in establishing *edu-confianza*. Both can come together and reflect on how to withstand their own marginalization. *Edu-confianza* becomes the mechanism by which to establish a safe space where students are welcome to share their experiences, and *la profesora* feels at ease with her role of being an institutional representative. Once *la profesora* and students identify a commonality “[minoritized students] may be more willing to relate their personal and familial concerns” (Gloria, 1999, p. 250). Ultimately, radical honesty is a tactic for gaining their *confianza* and beginning to alleviate systemic aggressions.

La profesora is responsible for beginning the process of *edu-confianza*. It starts the first day of class through the sharing of her *testimonio*; a brief narrative regarding her educational experiences, research interests, and most importantly, her commitment to their educational excellence. The sharing continues throughout the semester. The process of establishing *confianza* is underway and students increasingly partake. Radical honesty upholds truth-telling to connect personal experiences to theoretical principles (Williams, 2016). *Edu-confianza* challenges everyone in the classroom to engage in the process of holistic learning through critical and honest engagement. However, it is important to note that establishing *edu-confianza* could be risky for both parties. For example, Rodríguez (2018) underscored the professional and psychological costs Latina faculty are forced to pay when engaging in decolonial pedagogies.

Practicing *edu-confianza* can come at a cost and it is up to the *profesora* to decide how much she can risk, and to what degree she will engage in radical honesty. Still, it is important to be relatable to students, to create connections, and establish *confianza* in order to counter deficit-based narratives about Latinxs in academe.

[Professor] often draws on her personal experiences to help illustrate key points. Her experiences and struggles as a first-gen, ELL, Latina in higher ed proved beneficial in multiple ways and made her completely relatable. She's also not ashamed to put her shortcomings out there for us to learn from as well... She not only says she welcomes opinions that are different from hers, but she actually does welcome them along with the opportunity to openly discuss/ debate them. – Masters Student, Spring 2017

The student embraces radical honesty and clearly identified how components of *edu-confianza* made *la profesora* “completely reliable.” It is the relatability aspect that makes *edu-confianza* so powerful. For many minoritized students who seldom see themselves reflected in their educators, relatability to their professors could mean the difference between dropping out or persisting. Therefore, fostering safe learning spaces starts with the opportunity to speak.

I want to thank you for being so open and honest with giving us a safe place to talk. –
Masters Student, Spring 2017

Honesty, transparency, and creating safe spaces to hold difficult conversations is important but not easy. The biggest challenge may be facilitating open, honest, and respectful conversation about social justice without disenfranchising or losing student’s interest along the way.

Edu-confianza helps *la profesora* maintain a balance by forcing her to confront her biases through active listening. Taking on the role of facilitator and engaging with students through dialectic encounters can facilitate the awakening of critical praxis. Students should be encouraged to critically assess how they could effect change in their respective fields.

[Professor] brings a balance of optimism, enthusiasm for the field, and honest, insightful perspective on issues of social justice in higher education. Class discussions have been meaningful and educational due to her leadership and tone-setting in the classroom. She is gifted at affirming and challenging students. – Doctoral Student, Fall 2017

This student identifies how *la profesora* engaged in radical honesty while maintaining high rigor, facilitating difficult conversations, and centering social justice topics. *Edu-confianza* is about the educator building rapport and trust with her students who have been neglected and marginalized in their educational pathway. It is “the commitment to provide an account of selfhood that does justice to lived experience[s]” (Ortega, 2016, p. 6) of the marginalized and oppressed.

Lengua-resistencia

To be bilingual (or multilingual) in the United States is often treated as a disease. Something to run from and hide. *Un secreto que no se cuenta* or else the consequences could be disastrous. Benmayor (2001) affirms Spanish provides speakers with a complicated connection to family, culture and history, to traditions, the past and present; it aids in establishing allegiances that extends beyond blood lines. When *la profesora* refuses to be silenced and

rejects the demand to speak the academic jargon that alienates and disenfranchises minoritized individuals, she is reclaiming her tongue—embracing *lengua-resistencia*. Hurtado (2003) suggests reclaiming Spanish in a public space is the acknowledgment of the linguistic limbo many of us experience. *Lengua-resistencia* reclaims the right of bilingual and multilingual speakers to introduce diverse languages into the classroom. It rejects the language genocide Latinxs have endured for generations and English only policies (Alcoff, 2005). Since the body often communicates what the tongue cannot, *lengua-resistencia* includes written, verbal, and body language.

School environments have silenced Spanish speakers, it has told them that their language intertwined with their identity and the way they speak is not welcome in academic spaces (Benmayor, 2001). *Lengua-resistencia* recognizes *la profesora* is also navigating the same pejorative academic environments as her students. Yet, she can resist her silencing through the incorporation of Spanish in her pedagogy. In doing so, she challenges the notion of *proper Spanish* and language hierarchies that privilege some accents over others (Alcoff, 2005). *La profesora* speaks Chicana Spanish sprinkled with *dichos, enseñanzas, y refranes* snubbed by *la Academia Real de Madrid*. The “linguistic terrorism” (Anzaldúa, 2012, p. 80) bilingual speakers are forced to navigate is challenged. They are no longer forced to dispose of their native tongue (accent, slang, and language variations), at least not in the classroom of *la profesora*. Students are encouraged to provide their testimonios through code switching, Spanish, Spanglish, and slang—learning requires them to process and communicate how the literature affirms or rejects their lived realities.

Lengua-resistencia calls upon the faculty member to introduce multilingualism into the classroom, as a way to counter deficit perspectives about Chicanx students’ linguistic assets (Yosso, 2005). Bernal (2001) identified how bilingualism and biculturalism has been utilized against Chicana/o students by labeling them as limited English proficient, inferior, and not worthy of being on campus. *Lengua-resistencia* is a useful tool that encourages multilingualism in the classroom, regardless of subject-matter.

[Professor] makes you work for everything in that class and she speaks Spanish! Love it!
– Masters student, Spring 2017

Spanish is culturally bound to the identity of *la profesora* despite it also being utilized as a tool of exclusion against non-Spanish speaking Latinxs (Anzaldúa, 2012). Yet, when Spanish (and all its variations) are utilized in academic spaces, it can turn into a form of inclusion and cultural validation. It allows *la profesora* to connect with multilingual students through the mutual understanding that bodily experiences and feelings may not have an English translation. *Lengua-resistencia* welcomes and affirms their cultural and linguistic contributions as gifts to be shared with others—in whatever language best communicates their experiences.

La profesora encourages her students to move beyond sharing their *testimonios* in the classroom and into academic outlets. The silencing of Latinxs voices and experiences must be challenged (Batista, Collado, & Pérez, 2018; Hurtado, 2003; Yosso, 2005), therefore, *lengua-resistencia* calls on the *profesora* to provide critical honest feedback on their academic writing. Students are held to the highest academic standards which includes an invested commitment to their development as effective writers. Martínez (1996) notes “that doing theory is often not so much about theory but about who has the power to get their version of the story told” (p. 125), Latinx students must be encouraged to theorize about their experiences, write about them, and push methodological and epistemological boundaries that humanize their experiences (Bernal, Burciaga, & Flores Carmona, 2016b; Ortega, 2016). However, this can only happen if students are provided with critical feedback about their writing as speaking and writing are integrally connected.

She genuinely cares about the writing of each student (shown in the elaborate feedback given in papers). I’ve never been given such constructive criticism to improve my writing (and I’m on my third degree!)! – Doctoral Student Spring 2018

Lengua-resistencia extends the sharing of *testimonios* from classroom into written form. *La profesora* believes it is an ethical obligation that the voices of Latinxs does not remain hidden inside the four walls of her classroom. At the same time, she is cognizant that there is risk for students when sharing. Therefore, *la profesora* incorporates course readings and content that gives voice to the multiplicity of their marginalization, hoping to affirm their experiences and inspire them to write.

La profesora is impelled to scan the classroom, to read body language, and translate it to live-feedback. She gauges the impact course content and language is having on minoritized students and adjusts accordingly. *Lengua-resistencia* calls on *la profesora* to identify

microaggressions, to engage them and resist verbal attacks. *Lengua-resistencia* impels *la profesora* to celebrate her multi-lingual identity within a monolingual society. It recognizes body language as a valid form of communication as often marginalized communities are forced to sit in discomfort as their bodies processes what their ears cannot censor. *Lengua-resistencia* acknowledges that the body can communicate their *testimonio* without the mouth ever opening. Finally, it recognizes the valuable insights Spanish speakers bring to academe and encourages them to write and counter lies told about them and their communities (Martínez, 1996; Villenas, 1996). Rather than keeping her multilingual identity concealed, locked away and forgotten, *la profesora* is encouraged, and encourages her students, to live through their *resistencia*.

LCPA as a Liberatory Practice

LCPA expands on the works of inspirational and fearless Chicanas who put their soul into ink and provided us with tools like *testimonio* for our academic survival. It is a pedagogy of hope, love, resistance, and compassion, as it centers ancestral forms of knowledge and wisdom and recognizes them as worthy of being studied. LCPA upholds what the Latina Feminist Group (2001) termed “flesh and blood theory” (p. x) as it encourages *la profesora* to be an unapologetic feminist scholar. She is inspired to leverage Chicana feminist pedagogies in order to foster her academic survival as a minoritized, gendered, and racialized individual. Latina faculty often encounter isolation and lack of appropriate mentorship (Alarcón & Bettez, 2017) amounting to unfavorable professional experiences. Thus, it is my hope that LCPA could help *la profesora* (a) challenge feelings of inadequacy, (b) identify epistemologies that are consistent with her realities, (c) utilize her position of privilege (as a faculty member) to fashion a counter narrative to the largely deficit informed assumptions about Latinx students, and (d) to utilize scholarship produced by minoritized scholars as seminal epistemologies.

Since each tenet operates off of unique principles, LCPA could be implemented individually or combined differently; in the classroom or in practice. For example, *centralización* could be utilized when advising students by leveraging shared cultural strengths. However, *lengua-resistencia* could also be activated to communicate complex topics in the student’s home language. Thus, the use of both tenets could better communicate urgent yet complex information to an individual who may otherwise feel disenfranchised. Advising models and institutional policies may require professionals to follow a certain script, but engaging in

centralización and *lengua-resistencia* helps the professional meet the students where they are, rather than where a policy says they should be. Furthermore, enacting *lengua-resistencia* could help establish *confianza* since language often provides comfort and assurance (Anzaldúa, 2012).

The effectiveness of LCPA in the classroom was evidenced by the written comments in formal evaluations. It is critical to reiterate that *la profesora* must make a cost benefit analysis of when, how, and to what degree to implement LCPA. The reality is that higher education institutions may profess a commitment to diversity but it is not always welcome (Rodríguez, 2018). If *la profesora* decides to employ LCPA, it could be one more resource in her toolkit to help Latinx students see themselves reflected in course materials, epistemologies employed, and their experiences mirrored in those of their educator. *La profesora* joins her students on their academic journey by being honest, relatable, and preparing them to excel academically. Furthermore, it is the hope that when students graduate, they will utilize aspects of LCPA to effect lasting change in their respective communities.

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