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The editors of the *Journal of Education and Social Justice* invite submission of original manuscripts which contains essential information on education and social justice. All manuscripts must be carefully edited before submission. Article submissions should not exceed 25 to 30 pages doubles-spaced 8.5" by 11" manuscript pages (roughly 6,500 to 7800 words), in a 12-point font and with one-inch margins. The manuscript must be typed utilizing Microsoft Word. Submissions should include one e-mailed copy. Authors should include a separate cover page with their names, titles, institutions, mailing address, daytime phone numbers(s), fax number(s), e-mail addresses, and a brief biographical sketch. Every effort should be made to ensure that, except for the cover sheet, the manuscript contains no clues to the authors' identity. The manuscript must be accompanied by a cover letter containing the name, address, and phone number of a contact author, as well as a statement that the manuscript is not under consideration elsewhere. The editors request that all text pages be numbered. The page length includes the "Footnotes" section (for substantive additions to the text which should be included at the end of the paper) and the "References" section (where full citations amplify the abbreviated in-text references for books or periodicals, e.g., alphabetized by author's name). References should include the most recent publications on your research topic. For writing and editorial style, authors must follow guidelines in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA)*. The editors reserve the right to make minor changes for the sake of clarity. Manuscripts should be sent to Editor at ashesmail@aol.com.

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Editors' Note

Special Edition of the *Journal of Education and Social Justice*

“Education and Social Justice *a lo Latin@*: Insights from Future Latinx Faculty”

This special edition of *ESJ* seeks to explore the ways that U.S. Latinx scholars and educators—past, present, and future—imagine the relationship between education and social justice. It does so by giving voice to a select group of future Chicano/Latinx faculty, as they reflect on the lessons of the interdisciplinary field of Chicano/Latinx studies for educators that work with underrepresented students and assess their own efforts to teach for social justice in the still predominantly white space of American higher education.

Following an introductory essay by Anita Casavantes Bradford, Professor of Chicano/Latino Studies and History at the University of California Irvine, the remainder of the essays featured in this special edition were written by a diverse group of UCI Chicano and Latinx doctoral students. All are currently enrolled in PhD programs at this large, public, research intensive Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) in southern California. Comprising the ancestral lands of several indigenous peoples, this region is also home to a large historic Mexican American community, as well as an increasing number of newly arrived Latin American migrants. A significant African American community, the nation's largest southeast Asian American community, and a growing number of African and Middle Eastern refugees, also call Southern California home.

The emerging scholars selected for inclusion represent a wide range of Social Sciences and Humanities disciplines. Their essays explore an equally broad range of complex and contentious topics, from the politics of Heritage Spanish language teaching, the impact of standardized testing on low income, Latinx ELL students with learning disabilities, to the legacy of anti-Blackness within the field of Chicano/Latino Studies. They are nonetheless unified thematically by their shared attempts to grapple with the historical and contemporary structures of marginalization, oppression, exclusion and violence that continue to structure the experiences of Latinx and other BIPOC students in US schools and universities, as well as to understand the complex ways that intersecting axes of inequality, organized around differences of race, class, gender, sexuality, ability and national origins, shape those students identities and experiences. The essays articulate the individual and collective strategies that diverse Latinx students have adopted in struggling to achieve their educational goals; explore the complex meanings, emotions, and aspirations they attach to their education; and celebrate the resilience, creativity, and determination of first-generation low-income students of color.

Theoretically, the essays are unified by their attention to the contributions of the discipline of Chicano/Latino Studies to how we understand the relationship between education and social justice, as well as their engagement with other critical epistemologies, including Black, feminist, indigenous and queer theories. They also share a commitment to mining the insights provided by critical Latinx and other transformative pedagogies, including anti-racist, feminist, and indigenous pedagogies, for practical strategies that can be used to embody their commitment to social justice in the classroom. Finally, they are unified by their collective use of autoethnography as a method through which to generate powerful new knowledge about the educational experiences of Latinx and other underrepresented communities; and as a means of

articulating their individual visions of what it means to teach for social justice *a lo Latin@*-leveraging their own identities and experiences as resources in order to advance social justice within and outside the academy.

Though the essays in this edition are all authored by scholars who identity as Chicax and/or Latinx, the insights they offer will resonate for anyone who shares their commitment to advancing equity and justice in American higher education. We hope you find them thought-provoking, compelling, and ultimately inspirational.

Ashraf Esmail, Editor, Dillard University

Anita Casavantes Bradford, Guest Co-Editor, University of California, Irvine

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CURANDERAS OF THE ACADEMY: AN ODE TO CHICANA/LATINA FACULTY

JES TORRES BEHRAVESH - UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA IRVINE

*Holding in all the sand and salt
She still gives us the moon
Perfectly unassuming yet loud
“The institution cannot love you” she warns us
Weathering her own war
she offers her umbrella
Careful not to draw outside the lines,
she dares to come right up to their edges
Brave, unafraid, but realistic
knowing these dangerous roads well
With expertise, Spanglish, and cultural prowess
she touches our souls, expands our minds
Healer, compañera
holding a candle for each of us forever
Chicana/Latina educator, profesora
Curandera of the academy*

Abstract

The violence of academia experienced by Chicana/Latina students is countered through the distinct pedagogical and care work that Chicana/Latina professors perform in academic spaces. Yet, the common practice of marginalizing the contributions that Chicanas and Latinas make to different movements and institutions is also salient in studies of U.S. higher education. In this autoethnographic essay, I highlight the unique ways that Chicanas and Latinas work to counter academic violence through the practice of *curanderismo académico*. As healers and agents of transformation, they engender a sense of belonging in the classroom by way of their positionality as both influential academics and cultural kin. Through sharing, cultural connectedness, and the valuing of student *testimonios*, they facilitate inclusion in the classroom for Chicana/Latina and minority students.

Keywords: *Chicana, Latina, pedagogy, care work, curanderismo académico, belonging, inclusion*

Curanderas of the Academy: An Ode to Chicana/Latina Faculty

For many Chicana/Latina students, the academy is a violent place where we often are made to believe that we do not belong. Moreover, because of the white supremacist heterosexist patriarchal dynamics of the academy, Chicana/Latina students also often struggle to find their way through these institutions. Still predominantly white university faculty tend to favor white students who either appear more palatable, or in whom they see young versions of themselves. As a result, it is rare for white faculty to take the initiative to mentor young Black and Brown rising scholars, although this support is so necessary to promoting greater levels of educational achievement for Chicana/Latina youth. More often than not, it is Chicana/Latina professors who fill in the gaps.

In this autoethnographic essay, I explore the ways that Chicana and Latina faculty support their students in navigating and resisting academia's unwelcoming spaces and inequitable practices, and thus serve as transforming agents within higher educational institutions. I analyze how the distinct positionality of Chicana/Latina professors within the academy can facilitate belonging in the classroom for Chicana/Latina students. That is, through both their societal authority as faculty and their cultural connectedness as Chicanas and Latinas they are able to cultivate relations to Chicana/Latina students that generate inclusion in higher education. Furthermore, I investigate how Chicana/Latina educators take an effective decolonial approach to this task by decentering themselves and reimagining the typical Anglo classroom hierarchy. Adopting the analogy of the *curandera*, I argue that through a practice of *curanderismo académico*, Chicana/Latina faculty play a meaningful role in healing the academy by elevating their students as co-authors of knowledge production.

I conclude that professoras play a crucial role in engaging and empowering young Chicana/Latina scholars, of whom there are still too few. In 2019, 40 percent of non-Hispanic whites aged 25 and older had a bachelor's degree or higher, while only 18.8 percent of Hispanics had the same educational outcomes (US Census, 2020). The discrepancy between educational attainment among Chicana/Latina and their white counterparts underscores the importance of investigating the factors that facilitate higher levels of educational attainment among Chicana/Latina youth, namely, mentorship and guidance from individuals with a shared background.

A Review of Chicana/Latina Classroom Care

Many scholars have explored the Chicana and Latina struggles to access educational equity. Demands for inclusivity and culturally affirming curricula were at the root of the student-led Chicano movement which sparked the creation of Chicano/Latino studies in the late 1960's (Munoz 2018). It is impossible to divorce the objective of educational belonging from the Chicano/Latino classroom setting without misrepresenting its genealogy. For this reason, many Chicano/Latino studies scholars have attempted to study inclusive classroom practices (Castaneda & Krupczynski 2021; Aguilar-Hernandez 2020; Huber 2009; Bejarano & Shepherd 2018; Toscano-Villanueva 2013; Garcia Peña 2021). For instance, Castaneda and Krupczynski have developed community academic praxis which considers the influence of community in an academic setting (2021). They challenge the academy's assumptions of what constitutes valid

knowledge production and assert that the *testimonios* of community members are worthy forms of expertise.

While much of the research within Chicano/Latino studies has focused on classroom inclusivity, there is limited work on the unique role of Chicana/Latina educators and their contributions to power-devolved classroom practices. In *Latina Teachers* (2017), Glenda Flores captures how Latina educators in Los Angeles schools used cultural resources to teach their students how to navigate race and class in America while maintaining their cultural roots acting as “cultural guardians” for their students. Reyes et al (2023) examines Chicana/Latina contributions to the classroom and identifies a politics of care that they found to be pervasive among the educators’ pedagogical practices. Engaging with black feminist epistemologies, the mothering role of the teacher in their study operated in a *nepantla* sense that created a space for care and community. Blurring the lines between typical relations of power found in student/teacher dynamics, the educators embodied “othermothers” where they expanded their roles to support students as community members.

Rich with evidence to support the outcomes for theories of care, Reyes et al (2023) and Flores (2017) engage a critical component of teaching for social justice at the K-12 level. My autoethnographic essay adds to this discussion by exploring theories of care practiced by Chicana/Latina educators in higher education. While there are several autobiographical pieces on the experiences of Latina professors in higher education (da Silva 2021; Robinson & Clardy 2010; Briscoe 2023; Gutiérrez y Muhs 2012; Reyes 2022), there is little written from the perspective of the student, discussing the impact of Latina profesoras on our lives. This autoethnographic essay thus contributes to further theorizing the role of care in the classroom by identifying *curanderismo académico*, where healing is a central teaching component practiced through anti-authoritative and collaborative approaches to higher education.

What is Curanderismo Académico?

In her book, *Woman Who Glows in the Dark* (2000), author, nurse, and *curandera*, Elena Avila, explains the similarities that *curanderismo* shares with psychoanalysis. Both schools of thought believe that individuals are “socialized early in life but are also in some ways deeply misled; that the person is often wrongly encouraged, rewarded and even threatened into living a life that excludes an entire continent of knowledge -- the life of the soul, *la alma*”¹ (Avila, 2000, pp. 6-7). At its core, *curanderismo* is an investigation of the soul in an effort to assist with a vision or path forward, encourage strength, and kindle wholeness. Through the valuing of stories from an individual’s life, their dreams, and their mundane circumstances, *curanderismo* deals with the negative and positive aspects of the psyche, connecting the inner and outer worlds that make up our human experience.

Literature has shown that campus climate and institutional diversity can have a significant impact on students’ academic experience and success (Hurtado et al 1996). Additionally, Hurtado & Carter (1997) find that for Latino students specifically, the campus climate can directly affect their sense of belonging in higher education. For this reason, I argue

¹ Avila feminizes the term “la alma” in her book, a word that traditionally uses a masculine article in formal Spanish. Her book does not explain why she does this, and although I prefer not to speculate, it is noteworthy.

that the distinct values and practices seen within Chicana/Latina led classrooms contribute to a greater sense of belonging among Chicanx/Latinx students. Specifically, what makes the *curandera académica* distinct is her commitment to an anti-authoritative student-faculty relationship and an engagement of familism (Corona & Chen, 2017) through narrative and storytelling from her own experience.

For the *curandera*, it is well known that destruction is an easier path to take over healing and this is seen in higher education where minority students may feel discouraged to participate in response to discouragement from peers and faculty (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). As an educator who holds the power in the classroom, it is easy to disenfranchise underrepresented students and diminish the internal light that is a curiosity for knowledge. It is a much harder task to heal someone and repair what has been cut down or lost. This is the noble and silent undertaking of the *curanderas* of the academy. Chicana/Latina faculty understand that an animated spirit is just as important as intellectual meaning and that the two belong together.

Another defining quality of the *curandera académica* is her commitment to collaborative and relational learning. The character of *curanderismo* lends itself to abolishing the hierarchies of the classroom because it is understood that the healer is forever in training and is never graduated (Avila, 2000). As a perpetual student, it is second nature for the *curandera* to continue to learn and remain teachable. There is a meaningful and analogous relationship that *curanderismo* has with teaching for social justice where one abandons claims to power and promotes a soul-filled empathy that is often undervalued in higher education where intellectual hierarchies exist. This reality of the world of the spirit is a resistance to an empty life full of false selfhood and offers us a path forward where educational institutions can heal.

Mis Curanderas

My goal in this essay is to step away from the deficit approach to Chicanx/Latinx communities that is often familiar when we discuss our experiences within the academy. This is not to diminish or hide the struggles we endure within the confines of academia. These painful *testimonios* should never be suppressed. However, I intend to expand this conversation to offer us the opportunity to reimagine our experiences and how we see ourselves, not only as survivors, but as thrivers. That is, we do not enjoy academic success or achieve educational attainment in spite of our brownness, our womanness, or our queerness. We enjoy them precisely because of these parts of ourselves and the connection to others that our identities bring to our academic journeys. Through shared cultural backgrounds, *curanderas académicas* facilitate belonging and joy for Chicanx/Latinx students in higher educational spaces. I want to acknowledge and speak truth to the way our connected journeys are enriched by being brown, being woman, being queer. Our stories, *nuestras historias*, are nothing less than transformational, reflecting a praxis that is grounded in community work and activist scholarship specific to Chicana and Latina scholars (Alarcon et al 2011).

As a Chicana in academia, I have spent the majority of my academic time in predominantly white spaces. Despite attending several Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) in Southern California, the faculty at these colleges and universities were still majority white. While it has been atypical for me to find Chicana/Latina mentors in academia, I consider myself lucky to have encountered a few. Chicana/Latina educators have been my most inspiring and meaningful

connections at the university. They have often facilitated my greatness and unearthed my potential even when I could not see it for myself. Feeling both represented and respected in their classrooms was my first indication that the spaces created by them were different from the typical classroom experience.

As an undergraduate studying sociology and women's studies at a HSI in San Diego, my mentor was an Afro-Latina who was also my department's chair. Though she was the only tenured faculty across the university who was a Black woman and among the few Latinas on campus, she was and still is a pillar amongst the social science faculty. As the chair, I went to her to discuss a requirement for graduation. After reviewing my transcript, she suggested that a previous class I had taken could meet the remaining requirement I needed to graduate. I was astonished that a faculty member could and would extend this kind of help to me. With a sense of relief that I might graduate on time, I asked her "Are you sure that would be OK? You can do that?" She smiled and replied with authority, "That's what happens when you get a little power. We get to help each other out, too."

By using the word "too," my Black professor was calling attention to the way white men or white people tend to extend covert support to one another. Despite being an ambitious student, my academic journey was still opaque as I was surrounded by white academics who overlooked me and simply did not see themselves in me enough to offer support. It was at this moment that I began to realize that Chicana/Latina educators were co-conspirators in my journey through the academy. This extension of her social capital (Bourdieu, 1977) or unrecognized cultural currency (Lo, 2015) gave me the opportunity to continue on my path without setback or interruption. I knew that someday it would be my turn to offer similar understanding and assistance to Chicana/Latina students and other minorities. This instance in my academic career showed me how powerful it is to have someone believe in you and cosign your intellectual contributions.

Later, when I was studying economics in a master's program at a neighboring HSI in San Diego, I found it to be especially isolating given that I was constantly surrounded by majority white men in this particular field. In my master's program, I happened to be given a teaching assistant assignment to help the one Chicana lecturer in the department and I would often go to her for advice and mentorship. During a time when I was feeling inadequate, excluded by my peers, and questioning whether I even belonged in the program, she was the only person in the department who I felt like I could turn to. On this particular day she could tell that I was on the verge of tears, so she got up from behind her desk, closed the door, and said to me, "Go ahead and cry. This is the space where you can cry and let it out, because you can't do it out there." I was relieved by the sense of security this brought me and the assurance that she understood what I was facing as a Chicana in our department. Without hesitation, she offered me words of encouragement, reminded me of my power, and refused to let me reduce myself to defeatism and a victim mentality. Her empathy was healing, and I believe it kept me from giving up on myself and my goals during that difficult year. Despite her having left after my first year to accept a tenure track position at a local community college, we have remained in contact over the years, and I often see her at conferences.

While there is a scarcity of Chicanas and Latinas in academia, as a doctoral student my luck in encountering *curanderas académicas* has increased tremendously. Perhaps it is the intention of my university to make this so, perhaps it is the sheer size. Regardless, I am grateful to have found myself in the company of a handful of Chicana/Latina scholars. Before I became a

doctoral student, I had never had a Chicana advisor. She is both relatable and inspirational being from South Los Angeles as well as a Harvard alumna. I often forget what it was like before being paired with her and I have to remind myself that the pleasure and effortlessness that comes with having an advisor who you can relate to is not to be taken for granted. Latinas are a rarity in higher education, and for me, finding Chicanas has been even more uncommon. There is something about Mexican American women who grew up in California that feels like home to me, like *un abrazo* in spaces where I do not often find emotional intimacy.

The authenticity that my advisor brings to our dynamic allows me the discretion to be my true self and release the performativity that I often practice as an academic. As her teaching assistant during a large student workers' strike, I was anxious when anticipating her reaction to sharing that I wanted to participate in the strike. After finally getting the courage to share my plans with her she simply replied, "I understand, and I support you all. I will be at the picket line as well." I knew in theory she supported equity for students, and it was refreshing to see where her theory met her practice. For graduate student workers, the strike revealed the character of many faculty members, and I was comforted to know that our stories were heard and validated by my advisor, someone who has a lot of power over my experience. In this moment, she contributed to incremental institutional progress by believing and taking seriously the *testimonios* of students, a core value of the *curandera académica*.

As a doctoral student completing an emphasis in Culture, Law, & Society, I was paired as an advisee to a recently promoted full professor of Chicano Latino Studies and historian of migration, of multiracial Cuban background. I also happened to take a Chicano/Latino studies graduate seminar she was teaching. This coincided with the year I became pregnant, a transformational moment in my adult life. I had to negotiate how I would complete her course while also trying to manage childbirth and welcoming my new baby. She made this transitional time seamless for me. While I was still required to complete all major components for her course, the care and enthusiasm she offered me throughout the quarter before I gave birth grounded me with a kind of support that made my life's complexities feel normal and manageable. The excitement and kindness she showed me bled into the rest of the classroom setting as she asked how I was doing each class. Granting me the space to incorporate my own *testimonio*, there were many moments in class where I shared my journey to motherhood in tandem with reflecting on theory we were covering that week.

Following her lead, my peers also began to ask and check in with me about my pregnancy and I came to see them all as my *comadritas y compadritos*. They became powerful teachers for me, meeting each week to dive into new concepts and research while carrying my child. After giving birth I was able to attend one online session and share my new baby with my academic *familia*. The warmth that my classroom community showed me was guided by our *profesora's* kindness and the candle she held for me as a mothering student. In this class full of Chicana/Latina identified people, I was reminded of how sacred our community is, how compassionate and caring we are for one another. My life is enriched being in circle with my Chicana/Latina community.

Embodying the Curandera's Spirit and Teaching for Social Justice

Having had the luxury of so many Chicana/Latina faculty, *mis curanderas*, I am committed to offering this intellectual nourishment to my future students. For me, teaching social justice as a Chicana means to embody the spirit of the *curandera*, the healer. In the brief moments where I have been in the educator's role, I have not taken this assignment lightly. While working for the government at the Federal Reserve I was often given the opportunity to share my academic and career journey with underrepresented youth in the Washington D.C. area as part of a program to encourage minorities to pursue careers in economics. Coming from a working-class background, I would not hesitate to let the students know that I was the granddaughter of Mexican immigrants and the first in my family to earn a college degree, starting my academic career at a two-year community college.

After these presentations, several students would approach me to ask how I managed to make it to the Federal Reserve because they too were planning to attend community colleges. These moments, where sharing my story engendered a sense of belonging and created space for others to be vulnerable about their own journeys is the essence of *curanderismo académico* and teaching for social justice. Using my story to create clarity for pathways toward academic success and empower Chicana/Latina students has the potential to heal self-doubt and transform educational institutions into more just spaces. For me as for many Chicana/Latina educators, demystifying ourselves within positions of authority acts as a catalyst for others to contribute their own *testimonios* as sources of knowledge production. When I reflect on all the *profesoras* who this for me have done, I want to tell them "Thank you for sharing y(our) story."

Conclusion

The contributions of Chicanas and Latinas across different movements and institutions are often overlooked by mainstream audiences (Rebolledo, 1993; Yarbrow-Bejarano, 1987). Retroactively and upon reflection, they are given a small space off center, at the margins, where their critical roles are finally acknowledged. Within the field of education research, and especially in higher education, this is also painfully true. And yet, without the need for fanfare, most Chicana/Latina faculty continue to teach to heal the institution of education. This emerges organically from their positionality, but also requires a commitment to a set of values, practices, and skills that are consciously cultivated and deployed.

Through their anti-authoritarian politics of care in the classroom, *curanderas académicas* assert the importance of a mind-body-spirit connection, validating the students' academic pursuits while integrating intellectualism with their lived experiences and emotional journeys. In doing so, as Amanda Ellis (2021) has noted, they demonstrate the capacity to heal not only individual bodies, but also entire institutions that need restoration and decolonization.

Our *cultura* tells us that to heal others is an honor and a sacred practice. Our experiences in a heterosexist white supremacist world tell us that we have to be practical. *Curanderismo* is both pragmatic and of spirit, with animation for life and intelligent meaning (Avila, 2000). Through her practice of care and decolonizing the typical classroom hierarchies, the Chicana/Latina *profesora*, *curandera* of the academy, generates a metaphysical space where Chicana/Latina students and other underrepresented students belong and can be healed. By offering a seat at the table as co-authors of knowledge production, *curanderas* of the academy provide a framework for supporting future generations of minority scholars.

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EL ESPAÑOL IMPORTA: PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES TO MAKE SPANISH LANGUAGE PROGRAMS MEANINGFUL AND PRACTICAL FOR HERITAGE LEARNERS

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Abstract

Many university Spanish Language programs enroll heritage speakers, students who come to the classroom with diverse experiences with the language. However, evidence shows that in Spanish literature courses, professors dominate classroom discussions. Furthermore, while many students major or minor in Spanish believing they will be better equipped as professionals, most programs center on literature courses. Thus, instructors miss opportunities to develop students' linguistic skills when they engage in baking models of education. In this autoethnography, I pose the questions how do we as academics contribute to making Spanish language and cultural studies relevant and useful to our students? I argue that we must employ caring and culturally relevant pedagogies in tandem with practical language applications in order to effectively prepare our students to be global citizens.

Keywords: Heritage Speakers, Spanish, Spanish major, Spanish programs, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, Pedagogies of Care, Critical Language Awareness, Productive Language Pedagogy

El español importa: Pedagogical Practices to Make Spanish Language Programs Meaningful and Practical for Heritage Learners

As Humanities based-programs struggle with funding and face uncertain futures across universities,² I ask – how do we as academics contribute to making Spanish language and cultural studies relevant and useful to our students? While undergraduate Spanish majors and minors have attracted students from diverse backgrounds, as the daughter of Mexican immigrants and first-generation college student who studied Spanish at the university, I am particularly interested in enriching the learning experience for heritage speakers. Heritage speakers are defined as “students who relate to a language other than English through a family connection or household language use, who have any level of fluency in that heritage language” (Gomez, 2020, p. 50). Although heritage students possess rich linguistic and cultural knowledge, it has historically not been valued or cultivated by educators.

In this autoethnography, I will engage with scholars who advocate for culturally responsive (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Holguín Mendoza, 2018) and productive language pedagogies (Colombi, 2009; Colombi, 2021; Holguín Mendoza, 2018) to reflect on my own personal experience as a high school teacher and as a doctoral student, in order to discuss the decisive role of educators and the impact of their pedagogical choices in the Spanish language classroom. In order to make language studies relevant to our heritage students, I propose that culturally relevant, student-centered pedagogy, and the teaching of applicable language skills are crucial in Spanish heritage programs. I argue that we have a dual task of empowering our students through identity and experience-affirming content while also equipping them with skills and knowledge that will advance their professional aspirations. I conclude that the future of this field of study (and hence our future as academics) depends on shifting current practices in educational experiences that resonate with their culture and prepare them to make practical use of Spanish beyond the classroom.

Literature Review

Recently, scholars have been interested in understanding what effective instruction looks like in the heritage classroom. Many studies³ suggest that Spanish language and literature programs need to move away from what Paulo Freire called the banking model (Freire, 2009) towards pedagogical practices that “center learners as agents in their own knowledge process” (Colombi, 2021, p. 869). To achieve this, it is important to consider who teaches our students and what they learn in the classroom. Reyes et al explain the importance of educators who will engage in “caring pedagogies that foster a sense of belonging” (Reyes et al, 2020, p. 2) and demonstrate “authentic care... [of] their culture and community” (Reyes et al, 2020, p. 3).

In particular, it has been well established that culturally relevant pedagogy is paramount to the experience of minoritized university students (Ladson-Billings, 2005; Allen et al, 2017; Gay, 2018). Furthermore, many scholars such as Jennifer Leeman (2005), Claudia Parodi (2008), Tamra Ogletree (2020), and others have advocated for an “asset” language approach to teaching

²See for instance hechingerreport.org and dailyuw.com

³ Colombi, 2021; Holguín Mendoza, 2018; Salinas, 2017; Reyes et al, 2020.

heritage speakers, shifting away from “a corrective model – merely aiming to perfect language skills – to one that instead recognizes and builds on the language skills and identities students have already negotiated within the heritage language” (Gomez, 2020, p. 50). However, while culturally relevant pedagogies are of utmost importance in the heritage classroom, scholars do not always take into consideration *how* to combine those caring approaches with developing linguistic/bilingual skills in our students. My autoethnography is an attempt to merge both approaches to teaching Spanish, employing caring pedagogies that promote cultural empowerment as well as linguistic competence in our heritage students.

In a study on university Spanish heritage language programs, Claudia Holguín Mendoza (2018) discusses the importance of creating a “welcoming space” for Spanish Heritage students in tandem with improving their “communication skills in Spanish” (p. 72). However, as demonstrated by Zyzik & Polio (2008) and Hertel & Dings (2014), many university Spanish programs are centered on literary studies with lecture-based upper division courses which limit student interaction and deemphasize linguistic development. While some scholars propose restructuring the language curriculum, others propose that instructors be more willing to adjust syllabus to fit student needs (Zyzik & Polio, 2008, p. 65). Limited are the studies that discuss *how* to effectively teach heritage speakers in advanced university Spanish language programs. My intention in the pages that follow is to contribute to the growing field of heritage Spanish language programs as I consider this a way to reclaim bicultural, bilingual and biliteracy as powerful tools to better serve our communities.

My Journey as a Language Teacher: From Prop 227 to Ph.D.

“Speak English!”, yelled my third-grade teacher when I spoke Spanish with my friends on the playground. It was 1998 and Proposition 227, a law that practically eliminated bilingual classes and required English-only education, was enforced in California public schools, including my elementary school in southeast Los Angeles. All of this was unbeknownst to me of course, but my 8-year-old mind perceived the unfairness and the irony behind this hostile moment. I could not believe that my Mexican American teacher, whom I had heard speak Spanish before, was forbidding me to speak my language—*our* language. And worst of all, this public scolding happened during recess, our free time to play and forget about classroom rules.

Fifteen years later, I became a Spanish teacher; and perhaps as a form of poetic justice, I did not allow my students to speak English in my class, so they could fully immerse themselves in the language. Becoming a high school Spanish teacher in my native Los Angeles was an issue of social justice for me. I had the opportunity to teach at two different public charter high schools where the student population was over 95% Hispanic and over 90% of students qualified for free or reduced lunch. Many were children of immigrants or had immigrated themselves. Teaching in predominantly Latino communities provided me an opportunity to teach about identity and the importance of knowing our language, culture, and history.

Though it took me years and many tears to learn the craft of teaching, I made it a point to use engaging material in my classroom. We learned relevant content and developed language skills by implementing analysis of primary historical sources, literary texts, songs, and other forms of expression. For instance, at the beginning of the school year we studied about the “conquest” of Mexico by comparing Hernan Cortés’ letters and indigenous chronicles in *The*

Broken Spears which portray differing perspectives of this history. Students also read excerpts from Rigoberta Menchu’s memoirs to study about the Maya Quiche Genocide in Guatemala and relate it to the racism and discrimination that indigenous communities continue to face.

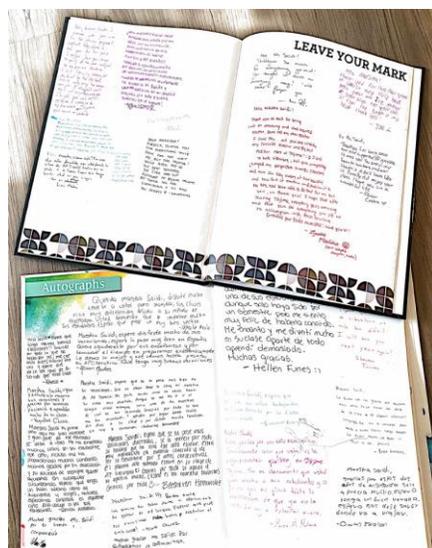
Though students had varying levels of Spanish fluency, I formed groups where they supported and at times distracted each other. But they read in Spanish together, responded text-dependent questions using evidence, discussed diverse topics in Spanish, and drew comparisons to current events and personal experiences. Group work was one of my most effective strategies as it encouraged student collaboration, discussion, and support.



Group presentations in Spanish where students discuss community-based projects (2017). Listeners are engaged by taking notes about presentations.

At the end of the year, many of my students thanked me for teaching them about their culture because they did not learn it in traditional history courses. Some of these comments are captured on the yearbooks my students signed:

- “...I’ve learned so much about my culture and myself through you and this class... I don’t think anyone could have taught this class better than you did.”
- “There are no words to express my gratitude for meeting you. I thank you for instilling the importance of simply speaking Spanish and being proud of where I come from. My parents never taught me how to speak Spanish and after 3 years in your class, I have improved significantly...”



Student messages on my Yearbooks include thank you notes, loving words, lessons they learned in my classroom, and special memories (2018, 2019).

Hearing my students express these feelings and seeing their growth inspired and fueled me to continue this labor of love for over eight years. I was determined to teach culturally relevant material that reflected their experiences as well as to improve their Spanish skills.

I decided to pursue a doctoral degree in the Spanish and Portuguese Department at the University of California Irvine, believing that academia would provide the resources to create and teach knowledge that represents and empowers my community. UC Irvine takes pride in being a Hispanic Serving Institution as well as Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution. In my department, the majority of undergraduate majors as well as doctoral students are Latinx. Though I am only in the second year of a 5-year PhD program, the experience thus far has been complicated to say the least, as I often find myself perplexed by jargon, abstract theories, and bureaucracy pervasive at all levels of the university system. I often question whether or not this was the right decision and if it is taking me closer to (or further from) my goal of serving teachers and students in the Latinx community. I find my grounding in friends, courses, and mentors that provide safe space for expression, concrete tools for learning, and examples of how to merge academia with service. This autoethnography serves as a space of reflection on my journey and goals as a scholar invested in continuing to make literary and culture studies relevant to my community.

Practicing Caring and Culturally Relevant Pedagogies

Educators are arguably the most decisive factor in making literary and culture studies relevant and attractive to Latinx students. It is instructors who have the power to decide what and how to teach their students. In “Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy”, Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) argues in favor of teaching a “culturally relevant pedagogy” which has been demonstrated to “improve student academic performance” (p. 466). When it comes to programs like a Spanish major/minor to heritage speakers, culturally relevant pedagogy is of

utmost importance in combination with affective practices (Reyes et al, 2020) and language attitudes (Holguín Mendoza, 2018) that can positively or negatively impact students' learning. Though one may think that Spanish for heritage speakers automatically implies culturally relevant pedagogy, the reality is that these courses often require dense readings (i.e., medieval Castilian Spanish poetry or existential stories in South American dialects) that are not easily relatable to most Latinx students' experiences. It is the instructor's role to facilitate the reading process and make space for explicit personal connections with the texts.

In my department, a professor recently shared that he taught a course on Mexico and Central America using film, images, chronicles, and other texts. Most of the students in this course were first-generation Latinx students. And though he is originally from a middle-class family in Mexico and immigrated to the United States with a student visa (an experience quite different from that of his heritage students and their families), he incorporated a meaningful and sensitive way of discussing Latin American migration. He showed a powerful documentary titled "Aguilas" which discusses immigration, death, and humanitarian work in the US-Mexico borderlands. After watching and discussing the documentary, the professor asked his students to investigate their families' migration history. He was humbled by the vulnerable responses shared by his students and proud to have made his course relevant to students' identities and families. This example demonstrates what Reyes et al call "pedagogies of care" as this professor demonstrated "authentic care by getting to know [his students], their culture and community" (Reyes et al, 2020, p. 3). His lesson could have simply centered on the analysis of a film but instead he created a personal learning opportunity that merged the "academic, emotional, and personal needs of [his] students" (Reyes et al, 2020, 3). The conversations they held in class "validate[d] students' cultural knowledge and experiences as they develop a consciousness that leads to social change" (Reyes et al, 2020, p. 4).

"Español de Rancho" and "Español de la Academia": Valuing Heritage Speakers' Diverse Language Skills

Nonetheless, having a Latin American or/and native Spanish-speaking professor, does not necessarily mean that affective and culturally relevant practices will be implemented in the heritage classroom. As Holguín Mendoza (2018) points out, having "Critical Language Awareness" is of utmost importance for Spanish instructors so that heritage students feel that the "language varieties they bring from their homes and communities" (i.e., Spanglish, dialects, informal Spanish, translanguaging, etc.) are considered "an asset and culturally valuable knowledge" in the classroom (65).

It is crucial for instructors of heritage speakers to be "willing to change our own attitudes about society and language and ultimately to renew our pedagogical praxis" (Holguín Mendoza, 2018, p. 68). This is particularly true when scholars from Spanish-speaking countries (like Mexico, Argentina, Spain, Colombia, etc.) come without much knowledge and/or sensibility for the language and identity formation process of Latinos in the United States. Oftentimes, these scholars can harbor (discriminatory) ideologies of "linguistic correctness: 'purity,' 'native speaker,' 'authentic,' and especially 'standard', [that] are all markers not only of evaluation of competence but also of identity construction" (Holguin Mendoza, 2018, p. 68).

In my journey as a young undergraduate, I encountered a wonderful professor who nonetheless refused to engage in a casual code-switching conversation outside of the classroom and asked me to choose between English or Spanish. A Chicana classmate shared a similar experience in which a Venezuelan professor in her Spanish department corrected her for her “español de rancho”. Our experiences exemplify how heritage students like ourselves may come to feel “alienated and disempowered” in traditional Spanish language programs (Holguín Mendoza, 2018, p. 65). Not having a sensitive understanding of language variations attached to identity, these remarks may be interpreted as linguistic microaggressions⁴. Sadly, our examples serve as a counterexample to what Reyes et al call “pedagogies of care, cariño and respect”, which are indispensable when “teaching Latinx students” (Reyes et al, 202, p. 472).

Students as Protagonists: Encouraging Students to be Agents of Their Own Literacy

Many Spanish language programs (at the undergraduate and graduate levels) are heavily centered on literary studies. These literature courses often rely on “banking” methods of teaching. In a study conducted in undergraduate Spanish Literature courses, Eve Zyzik and Charlene Polio (2008) found that students produced “less than 10% of the total discussion” (p. 61). Furthermore, they state that “discussions in literature classes were dominated by teacher talk, with student participation being limited to ‘telegraphic style’, speech consisting of word-, phrase-, and sentence-level utterances” (Zyzik & Polio, 2008, p. 58). How can we bring liberatory pedagogy in literature courses if students are passive recipients of knowledge? Paulo Freire (1983) advocates for literacy that goes beyond “decoding the written word or written language” (p. 5) to include an interactive sociocultural process that includes “knowledge of the world” (p. 5). As a humanistic field, Spanish courses have the potential of taking students beyond appreciation of the language to apply their skills to real-world contexts.

In literature courses where the majority of students are heritage speakers (such is the case at my university’s Spanish department), it is a golden opportunity to involve students in their learning. María Cecilia Colombi (2021) highlights the important role that students play in developing their own literacy:

“A new model of biliteracy learning needs to move from the transmission of language... to one that is centered on learners as agents in their own knowledge processes, capable of contributing their own as well as negotiating differences... in this transformative model of literacy, learners are apprenticed into professional and academic communities as they develop their own agency and identity” (p. 869).

This approach may present a challenge to professors, especially in R1 institutions where they are researchers, experts, and producers of knowledge, to yield the role of protagonist to students in

⁴ Microaggressions are considered “verbal and non-verbal assaults directed toward People of Color, often carried out in subtle, automatic or unconscious forms”. For more on linguistic microaggressions see Jenna Shim’s “Self-identified Linguistic Microaggressions among Monolingual Pre-service Teachers: Why They Matter for English Language Learners” (2017), and “Critical Race Theory, Racial Microaggressions, and Campus Racial Climate...” by Daniel Solórzano et al (2000)

their classes. It is especially important that Spanish literature instructors of heritage students include student-centered practices in their classrooms.

Learning and Connecting Through the Sharing of Personal Narratives

In “Compartiendo nuestras historias: five testimonios of schooling and survival”, Alarcón et al (2021) share the power of personal testimonios as a form of “activist scholarship” that has the potential to be “a process of healing” (p. 370). Cristobal Salinas Jr. (2017) also examines the importance of rescuing the “voces perdidas” (p. 746) of minoritized students whose voices may be lost within academic spaces. In my experience as a high school teacher, I centered my instruction and content on students’ identities and created spaces for sharing personal narratives. One of the most profound moments I had in my classroom was an identity project I borrowed from a colleague who mentored me as a young first year teacher. It was called “La Bolsa” (The Bag) and it required students to write about their past, present, and future then draw images that represented these moments on a brown lunch bag. It was a way to practice multiple language modalities such as writing, listening, and presentational skills in Spanish using past, present, and future tenses.

I decided that it would be fun if I modeled the project for my students first and presented my project first. I shared a few stories about my past – the constant moves between the US and Mexico, my low self-esteem which led to a period of anorexia and bulimia as a teen, and my experience studying at UCLA and abroad in Spain and Brazil with a full scholarship. Then I talked about issues I was dealing with presently as an adult, such as living on my own, paying bills, and the hardships of balancing a full-time job while attending graduate school. I finally shared the vision I had for my future which included being a college professor and traveling to new places around the world. Students evaluated me with the same rubric I would use to grade them, and they were invited to ask me follow-up questions. This was an effective strategy because they learned about high expectations, connected with me at a personal level, heard my struggles and aspirations, and got them excited for their own identity projects.

I was not prepared for the level of vulnerability and openness my students brought to class on the day of their presentations. Students shared intimate stories about death of family members, separation of parents, immigration, deportation, and other heart-wrenching stories. Some students cried during their presentations – I and other peers joined them with some tears. But students also shared about their dreams, passions, hobbies, close friends, and family. Some students chose not to share any personal details, but they all gave a little bit of themselves in these presentations. They listened respectfully, asked each other questions and some even hugged each other after the presentations.

In *Teaching to Transgress* (1994), bell hooks states that “empowerment cannot happen if we refuse to be vulnerable” (p. 21). She proposes that professors must take the “first risk” (p. 21) if they expect students to share their own narratives to enhance learning. What I loved so much about the “La Bolsa” project was that students were engaged with the language meaningfully, but more importantly, I felt like we became a family as we learned about each other’s histories. This initial activity set the tone for the rest of the school year, not just academically but personally. The safe space we created to express intimate stories bonded us. Because “language, culture and emotion” play key roles in “the development of literacy” (de la Luz Reyes, 2012, p. 252), I created opportunities to incorporate the personal with the academic.

While the teaching experience at the college level is quite different from that of high school, student-centered pedagogy remains relevant across disciplines and levels. In language and literature courses, professors have unique opportunities to connect students in meaningful and personable ways. In “Teaching as a Healing Craft: Decolonizing the Classroom and Creating Spaces of Hopeful Resistance through Chicano-Indigenous Pedagogical Praxis” (2013), Professor Silvia Toscano Villanueva shares that her process of teaching and preparing her curriculum “has been consistently informed by the demographic make-up of my campus, a Hispanic Serving Institution” (p. 24). As part of her pedagogical practice, she consciously incorporates “personal narratives” as an act of resistance to decolonize the classroom (p. 25). As an aspiring professor of Spanish language and literature, I look forward to finding creative ways to make my college classroom an empowering place for students.

Recruitment of Educators and Doctoral Students: Decisions that Impact Spanish Language Programs

A problem that is important to the work of making Spanish language programs relevant is the process of scholarly gate-keeping that determines who becomes a professor of Spanish—and who doesn’t. This process begins with graduate admissions and continues through the process of hiring faculty. Top candidates are those with impeccable language skills, well versed in theory, experience teaching college courses, publishing experience, letters of recommendation from renowned scholars, etc. However, in addition to these necessary criteria, an important element to consider is potential graduate students’ and faculty’s ability to bridge academic expertise with hands-on pedagogical practices that will support students’ aspirations, interests, and identities.

As a graduate student representative in my department, I recently participated in a meeting where we discussed the (intriguing) process of hiring a new faculty member who would share appointments with Spanish and another department. It was mentioned that this new hire would be “funded by the Office of Inclusive Excellence,” which had the goal of recruiting a person who “represents values of diversity, equity and inclusion.” The Spanish department was particularly interested in finding a US Latinx candidate who would share a similar background to the majority of the undergraduate students in our department. Nonetheless, the strongest candidate was an Argentinian scholar. On the other hand, the other department preferred a Latino man who was, disappointingly, not experienced enough to teach Spanish. I found this predicament intriguing because it demonstrated the difficult and nuanced process of recruiting and selecting faculty.

While it is important to have qualified individuals who have earned the necessary academic accolades, it is also important to have individuals who can relate to the cultural and linguistic experiences of our students and will caringly guide them in the process of fine tuning their language skills. And while academia seems to be actively searching for such qualified candidates, the reality is that this recruitment process actually needs to start much earlier, during the graduate admissions cycle. In my department, I have observed explicit praise given to international students from Latin America and Spain applying for the Spanish PhD program. In a faculty meeting where professors discussed admissions for next Fall, a remark was made about international students being stronger candidates, and more qualified overall, due to their publication records and research experience. This made me feel insecure about my own acceptance into the program. Though I absolutely support the admission of international students

and believe it makes for stronger Spanish programs, it is also important for admissions committees to consider why international students may be stronger than US (Latinx) candidates and discuss how we can change that so that Heritage Spanish undergraduate students can become competitive candidates for graduate school.

Adapting Spanish Programs to Meet Students' Professional Interests

Heritage students often enroll in Spanish majors or minors because they believe that these programs will better equip them as bilingual professionals (Colombi, 2009). Furthermore, they are often motivated to enroll in Spanish Language programs “to reconnect with their cultural heritage, to learn about the history, values, and traditions of their own and other Hispanic cultures; and to connect with other members of the heritage language community (Beaudrie, 2020, p. 418). While these goals may be accomplished through courses “such as Advanced Language, Culture/Civilization, and Introduction to Literature” (Hertel & Dings, 2014, p. 546), the reality is that Spanish major programs tend to be structured an antagonistic language-literature divide (Hertel & Dings, 2014, p. 548). Traditionally, lower division language courses emphasize vocabulary acquisition and interpersonal communication, while upper division courses heavily focus on literature and presentational writing. This creates a pedagogical problem, since literature professors generally “do not attend to problems of linguistic form” (Zyzik & Polio, 2008, p. 54) (i.e., develop students' language skills), one of the main reasons Heritage students enroll in these programs in the first place.

I return to my original question here – how do we make Spanish majors and minors relevant and useful to students, especially when classroom instruction often does not support their linguistic development? In a symposium I recently attended for a Chicano Studies Graduate Seminar, visiting scholar and keynote speaker Dr. G insightfully discussed the gap between universities' mission statements (which tend to be abstract and list intangible goals) and students' actual motivations for seeking an education (such as getting a job, upward mobility, earning a livable salary, etc.). He affirmed that these two missions are “in conflict” and invited us to consider how to “rethink the classroom to match students' missions.” He explained that academia trains graduate students how to think but not how to *teach*; thus aspiring professors reproduce the same oppressive pedagogical practices (such as Freire's banking model) employed by their own untrained professors. To break this cycle in Spanish language programs, it is important that professors think of their classrooms as opportunities to meet the needs and professional goals of their students (Hertel & Dings, 2-14, p. 548).

Eve Zyzyk, Charlene Polio, and other scholars strongly advocate for “an explicit and planned focus on language [as] necessary for students to become more proficient in the academic language that they need to succeed” (Zyzik & Polio, 2008, p. 54). Citing another study, Colombi (2021) supports the notion that “it is more helpful to conceive *literacy as activity rather than knowledge* [author's emphasis]” (p. 871). This approach might be difficult for professors of literature who may tend to see literature as the end goal and not necessarily consider it a tool for developing students' academic discourse. Spanish majors, such as UC Irvine's, require at least 6-8 upper division courses, many of these centered around Iberian and Latin American literature that range from the Middle Ages to postmodern periods. However, heritage students have often not had opportunities to develop literacy and a formal register in Spanish to access such readings. Their language skills are typically used informally “around the home or [in] community

domains” (Colombi, 2021, p. 869). Thus, a new “model of biliteracy” needs to be adopted by professors in which students are “agents in their own knowledge process” (Colombi, 2021, p. 869). Professors also need to demonstrate greater willingness to adjust instruction to “language learning opportunities” (Zyzik & Polio, 2008, p. 64). This means that literature instructors should “subscribe to the view that content and language are inseparable and that learning about literature and developing linguistic proficiency are not mutually exclusive goals” (Zyzik & Polio, 2008, p. 64).

Practical Applications of Spanish Language Programs

María Cecilia Colombi (2021) argues in favor of the “productive language pedagogy or action literacy” (p. 871) when teaching heritage speaker learners. This methodology “goes beyond knowledge of writing and reading” and teaches students how to use language in “different social contexts” (Colombi 2021, p. 871). It requires instructors to teach explicitly “specific forms of language” (more vocabulary, grammar, etc.) and how to use it in context (Colombi, 2021, p. 871). Zyzik and Polio (2008) recommend restructuring literature courses so that these “include language break-out sessions... in which students can focus on the problematic grammar and/or vocabulary in the texts they are reading” (p. 65). Holguín Mendoza (2018) describes the successful implementation of a Critical Language Awareness (CLA) curriculum where students learn “critical sociopragmatic language awareness” (71) which empower students to access distinct registers of the Spanish language. When teaching heritage speakers, instructors miss out on a great opportunity for interactive and dynamic pedagogy if no space for dialogue and collaboration is practiced. Providing space for students to integrate both informal and formal (or academic) language will provide linguistic tools that help them “become apprentices in... [a] professional community” (Colombi, 2021, p. 886).

In my experience as a student, I have not observed this pedagogical practice in Spanish upper division courses. However, as an Advanced Placement (AP) Spanish Literature high school teacher, I (unknowingly) implemented forms of “productive language pedagogy or action literacy”. In this advanced course, my students read 38 texts of the Spanish literary canon, dating from medieval to contemporary literature. Though my students were native speakers, they did not have the knowledge or the language necessary to access all the complex readings. But for every literary text we read in this course, I introduced a set of vocabulary words relevant for reading comprehension and for discourse analysis. For instance, when discussing *Don Quijote*, one of the most important texts in Spanish and world literature, I taught my students useful words such as “hidalgo”, “rocín” and “venta,” which recur throughout the text. But I also equipped them with additional academic language – such as “metaficción,” “sátira” and “yuxtaposición” – words that would help them discuss and analyze the story within an academic register. Furthermore, I designed discussion questions that connected students to the text in a personal way:

¿Cuál es uno de tus pasatiempos favoritos, qué te apasiona?

¿Cuál es una meta o sueño que te gustaría realizar?

¿Cómo te relacionas con la historia de Don Quijote?



End-of-the-year student projects in my AP Spanish Literature course. Students had liberty to choose how to engage with the literary texts by creating art pieces, reading their favorite quotes, sharing personal connections with the texts, and showcasing their artistic talents (2019).

As stated earlier, one of the most important practices I implemented was partner and group work. Students were expected to discuss the texts with their groups and implement vocabulary learned in their responses. They also shared their personal reactions and connections to the texts. Through these techniques, I believe that I was able to successfully expose my students to elevated registers of Spanish and advance their literacy skills. As a testament, a former student who is about to graduate from Barnard College recently reached out to me with the following message:

“Maestra!!!! I wanted to let you personally know I got into UCLA PhD program in comparative literature! I’m so excited and so proud. Your influence in high school has dictated my research proposal and I cannot thank you enough for that inspiration you have given me and many others! Thank you so much for being such an awesome educator ❤️.”



Figure 1: Picture of the student who shared the message above on her high school graduation in 2019. (Image shared with permission from student.)

I feel humbled to be part of this student's academic journey and a sense of pride knowing that my teaching inspired and prepared students beyond my classroom. As an aspiring college professor, I hope to continue to make my instruction meaningful and practical for my future students and put into action my theoretical knowledge.

Conclusion

The future of Spanish Language programs (and other Humanities based majors) heavily depends on invested educators who are willing to make their classrooms meaningful and relevant for student learning. Many Latinx students “want to develop a good level of Spanish for use in their professional lives. In those aspirations they reflect a segment of society that values the use of Spanish in public settings, in jobs and careers, but also in the context of friends and family” (Colombi, 2009, p. 41). Our language and culture matter to students; they are personally and professionally meaningful for them. We need to invest time and resources in implementing curriculum and pedagogy that will prepare “today's students of Spanish for fuller participation in the global village and economy into which they will graduate” (Zyzik & Polio, 2008, p. 548). Implementing pedagogies of care and culturally relevant instruction is equally important to developing students' language skills as they prepare to be professionals and/or future scholars. As Dr. G argued in his “Thriving in the Academy” keynote speech, it is imperative that universities serve students and help them thrive, survive, and create options for their futures. As Spanish faculty serving heritage speakers, we have the responsibility of equipping our students with linguistic and cultural knowledge that will benefit our Hispanic/Latinx community as a whole.

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THE ROLE OF ACADEMIC BRIDGE LEADERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: SETTING THE FOUNDATION FOR LATINX STUDENT SUCCESS

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Abstract

This essay examines how Academic Bridge Leaders play a crucial role in the success of Latinx students in U.S. institutions of higher education. In it, I argue that by mentoring and supporting students, building a sense of community and highlighting resources on campus, ABLs can help Latinx students navigate their way through colleges and universities. ABLs also guide students in the proper direction, offer them advice, and prepare them for life after completing their college degree. Through autoethnographic reflection, I highlight the several ABLs that guided, mentored, and supported me throughout my own higher education journey. I also detail how, as a doctoral student and future faculty member, I am working to implement this same approach as an ABL in training.

Keywords: Academic Bridge Leader, student success, higher education, guidance, mentorship, and community building

The Role of Academic Bridge Leaders in Higher Education: Setting the Foundation for Latinx Student Success

For many U.S. Latinx youth, the process of navigating higher education is a long and challenging road. However, as a first generation Latinx graduate student, I know from experience that there are bridges in place to assist them in obtaining a university education. Therefore, in this paper, I will ask: how can socially justice-minded educators support students from historically excluded communities to thrive as undergraduates and prepare them for success in graduate school? To answer this question, I will explore the crucial role played by “Academic Bridge Leaders—” which I define as individuals who were or are in higher education that guide, mentor, and support students through the process of obtaining a college degree. I argue that they do this by assisting students to succeed as undergraduates while fostering a sense of community and belonging and helping them to develop the confidence and self-efficacy that encourages them to pursue graduate school. In order to do so, I will use autoethnographic reflection to highlight the women that were my ABLs and critical to my success in higher education. I will also reflect on my own evolution as an ABL in training, as I develop my own pedagogical vision and practice and mentor underrepresented students seeking to follow in my footsteps toward graduate school.

Through these reflections, I will demonstrate that Academic Bridge Leaders (ABLs) are a crucial factor in helping Latinx and other underrepresented students to thrive in higher education. Moreover, as my life story reveals, I will demonstrate that when students who receive this kind of assistance go on into faculty positions, they often go on to offer the same guidance, mentorship, and support they received from ABLs to the next generation of students.

The Foundation for the Bridge

As a child of Mexican migrants and born in the U.S, I have experienced firsthand many of the inequities that students from marginalized communities endure when navigating the U.S educational system. I recognize the long histories of education inequalities that Latinx communities through the Southwest have endured.⁵ From the early 1900s to the late 1940s, ethnic Mexican communities fought to gain an equitable education for their children in public schools through combating segregation tactics (Acuña, 2004; Camarillo, 1984; Cotera, 1976; Gonzalez, 1990; Wollenberg, 1978; Valencia, 2008; Haro, 1977; Strum, 2008; Garcia, 2018). Even after the *Mendez v. Westminster* (1946) court decision ruled that segregation was no longer permitted in California, public schools, districts, and administrators continued to treat Mexican

⁵ I am aware that demographics of cities like Los Angeles have changed over time, and that identities have also altered as well. For example, the early twentieth century Los Angeles was made up of predominantly Mexican communities. Thereafter, the first generation of Mexican-American were born and it was not until the late 1960s that children of Mexican ancestry called themselves Chicano. However, it was not until the 1980s that heavy migrations from Central America like El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Honduras entered the U.S, due to military encroachment of the U.S in these countries. Now, in a more multi-ethnic community, Latina/e/o/x is the more common term to identify Spanish-speaking communities from Latin-America. It is also important to note that Chicana/o/x is also an identity that has changed overtime. For this paper, when I use Latinx, I refer to students from Latin America. I may also use other terms if I know the identity of the student or anyone else mentioned in this paper.

origin students as separate and unequal.⁶ It was not until the latter part of the 1960s that the Civil Rights Movement encouraged the Mexican American community to push for a better quality of education. Driven by this desire for educational equity, the Chicano Student Movement gained momentum 1968, after thousands of students from five local public schools in East Los Angeles walked out of class, demanding a curriculum that embraced their culture, embraced their identity, and encouraged the use of Spanish alongside English in the classroom (Gómez- Quiñones 1978 & 1990; García and Castro 2011; Gutfreund 2018). Despite their efforts, the needs of many Chicana/Latina students remain unmet, not only in K-12 public schools, but also in higher education.

In an effort to address these kinds of historic educational inequalities, U.S. scholars have highlighted some of the attempts that colleges and universities have made to promote the success of historically excluded students. L. Scott Miller & Eugene E. Garcia (2004) stress the importance of institutional research to support undergraduate students striving to enhance their learning. They were able to identify certain features of exemplary programs, such as strong institutional leadership, engaged faculty, personal attention, and peer support. Building on this study, Christina N. Baker (2013) and Rebeca Mireles-Rios & Nichole M. Garcia (2019) builds on the notion of L. further that positive relationships with faculty and graduate students are crucial to the success of underrepresented undergraduate student. Without their guidance, support, and mentorship, many Latina students would not achieve academic success.

Delving more deeply into the specifics of these relationships, I build on Belinda Robnett's (1997) concept of the "bridge leader," an actor that is able to maneuver between the public life of social movement organizations and the private spheres inhabited by their adherents and potential constituents. She argues that African American women were the bridge leaders in the Civil Rights Movement, as they handled the processes of recruitment, mobilization, and sustenance. Similarly, Bernal (1998) highlights how Chicanas played a crucial role in the Chicano Movement, especially the Student Blowouts in 1968. She argues that Chicanas held positions in student and community organizations, developed consciousness in school through discussion and print media, networked with other diverse groups, organized meetings, activities, and events, and acted as spokesperson (Alarcón, 1990; Garcia, 1989; López, 1978; Blackwell 2003 & 2015; Chávez, 2010; Prado 1998, Orozco 2009; Ruíz, 2008). Both Robnett and Delgado emphasize the role of women in the Civil Rights Movement and Chicano Movement, which is often erased by national narratives that focus on men.

While Robnett and Delgado use the concept of "Bridge Leaders" to analyze U.S. social and political movements, in this paper, I will use it to analyze the work performed by a similar group of institutional actors—many of them again women—in U.S. higher education. Highlighting the women that were my "Academic Bridge Leaders," I will reflect on the ways that ABLs assist undergraduate students from historically excluded communities to succeed as

⁶*Mendez v Westminster* was a landmark case against racial discrimination in Southern California and the greater American South. *Mendez* paved the way for the latter *Brown v Board of Education* (1954). Not only was each case racially motivated but also legal and administrative methods justified the segregation. In the *Mendez* Case, the Orange County School districts used the excuse of English-language proficiency to segregate Mexican American students from attending English speaking schools. Compared to the *Brown* case where they confronted the question of whether separate but otherwise equal education facilities for black and white students solely on the basis of race. *Brown* overturned the infamous separate but equal doctrine upheld by the Supreme Court in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896). Both these cases struck historic blows against de jure segregation.

undergraduates, to pursue graduate school, and to go on to “pay forward” the same guidance, mentorship, and support they received by becoming ABLs in their own right.

Finding my own Academic Bridge Leaders

Since August 2011, my journey in higher education has not been a steady progression. Being the first in my family to graduate high school and attend college, I faced many new obstacles and challenges. This led to me being placed on academic probation after my first semester at the University of California, Merced (UCM); and then, in 2013, to my academic dismissal. While I was at UCM, I never felt a sense of care from faculty or educators; nor did I have a sense of community. I had no idea of what support looked like at the age of eighteen. After being academically dismissed from UCM in 2013, I was overwhelmed by the emotions of being considered a failure, a disappointment, and the realization that I was not going to be the first in my family to graduate from college after all. This led me to avoid any discussions around higher education, and I had no aspirations to go back.

However, my mother, a beacon of hope, inspired me to return. My mother’s intervention echoed what Sakshi Bhargava et al. (2017), call “education related involvement.” According to Bhargava, many Latinx parents similarly support their children’s elementary and high school education, through example home-based involvement, encouraging academic aspirations, and resource seeking.⁷ In my case, this also applied to my higher education. My mother’s unconditional love and willingness to share with me her belief that community college would be a safer, more accessible, and economical choice motivated me to enroll at Los Angeles Harbor College (LAHC).

I met my first ABL while attending LAHC from 2014 through 2017. In a rush to register at LAHC for Spring 2014, I realized that the history courses were not filled up and quickly signed up for all the available classes. I recalled that history was one of the subjects that I enjoyed in high school; however, not passing the AP U.S. History exam had changed my thoughts about history. Nevertheless, during my first semester at LAHC, I had one sociology course and three history classes. The most significant one was History 19: History of Mexico. Prior to this class, I’d had no exposure to the academic history of Mexico. I only knew a few stories my parents told me about their homes in Torreón, Coahuila, Mexico.

The instructor of the course, a Mexican American woman, shared historical information that was new to me. Fascinated and intrigued by the material, the readings, and exposure to my culture, I approached the *Profesora* to learn more and ask if she could help me make sense of all this new knowledge. Through my countless visits to her office hours, she guided me in the process of writing and formatting essays and mentored me on how to navigate community college. Through her actions, she demonstrated care and commitment to my academic success, and later supported my goal of completing the yearlong UCM reinstatement process. Although I was ultimately unable to return to UCM due to financial reasons, this did not deter me; I

⁷ Sakshi, Bhargava et al., provide the following examples as education parental involvement. Home-based involvement focuses on creating structure at home to do schoolwork. Furthermore, Academic aspirations are shared by their parents and how many immigrant families see higher education as a vehicle for social and economic mobility. Lastly, Resource seeking is when Latinx parents seek, or encourage their children to seek, educational resources.

prepared instead to attend California State University, Northridge (CSUN). This first ABL gave me hope, motivation, and created a foundation to build on while I made my way back into a four-year university.

While at CSUN, one of my previous high school teachers, an African American woman, now a Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership and Administrations, also became my ABL. Different from every other ABL that has come into my life, Dr. Williams had known me since I was a ninth grader. She knew my whole family and all the hardships I'd endured in higher education. She had always fostered a sense of community in her classroom, and she continued to share that while I was at CSUN. I recall the many times she called to check in to see how I was doing, sharing her guidance, support, and concern for my academic success. Regardless of what challenge I had in front of me, she showed up for me. For example, CSUN had a writing requirement that all junior transfer students must complete before their second semester. If students do not meet this condition, an academic hold is placed on their account, and they are not able to register for courses the following semester.

Not knowing of this prerequisite and with the semester coming to an end, I searched for information via Google and read that I could write a letter to postpone the requirement and still register for courses. Unaware of how to ask for this extension, I reached out to Dr. Williams. for assistance and feedback on the draft of this letter. Together, we worked on it, and I was able to come up with a message and send it to the office. A few days later, I got an email notification that my petition had been approved. I no longer had an academic hold on my registration.

My ABL took the time out of their day to work with me for several hours to help resolve this urgent problem. She did not ask me to wait, nor say that she would get back to me.. Her unconditional support, guidance, and care fostered a relationship and a sense of community. My first year at CSUN would have been disastrous if my ABL hadn't stepped in to assist me. Until this day, Dr. Williams continues to be one of my ABLs, and she demonstrated the patience, persistence, and positivity that is needed to formulate caring and loving relationships in higher education.

After receiving my Bachelor of Arts in History from CSUN, I decided to stay at CSUN and pursue my Master of Arts in History. I chose to stay at CSUN because I was familiar with the department, campus, and had a job lined up as a Writing Tutor in the Chicana/o Studies Department. This was where another ABL, Dr. Galvan, a Mexican American woman, cemented my passion for archival research, sparked my interest in recovering local historical accounts of the Latinx and Chicanx community, and assisted me in the PhD application process. I'd met Dr. Galvan in Fall 2018, as an undergraduate student in her class CHS 345: History of the Mexican Peoples. Beginning with this course, I cultivated a meaningful relationship with her after countless trips to her office hours, and always stopping to say hi and chat with her when I saw her walking around Jerome Richfield Hall.

I then took her Chicana/o Research Methods class as an M.A student, The first time she discussed archival research as a method, I was clueless as to what that was. But then my ABL took us to the Special Collections and Archives located in the CSUN library to view archival documents. I sat by myself, examining the record in front of me: a biography of a man named Dr. Julian Nava. Not once had I heard of him before, but after reading his bio, I was drawn in by his accomplishments as an educator, scholar, and member of the CSUN's History Department. This encouraged me to dive deeper into his collection at CSUN. I later wrote my M.A thesis on

his successful campaign to be elected the first Mexican American on the Los Angeles School Board of Education in 1967. While writing this paper, Dr. Galvan encouraged me to analyze Julian Nava's collection and bring forth a new perspective on the history of Latinx and Chicanx education. Her historical expertise helped me learn the techniques for analyzing primary sources, comprehending the historiography of the research topic, and stating my intervention.

The foundation of these historical skills pushed me to go further into my academic journey and pushed me to apply to PhD programs in History. I was able to create a spreadsheet that contained deadlines, requirements, and letters of recommendation needed to apply to each individual program. Yet, I lacked a pair of eyes to look over my personal statement, statement of purpose, and curriculum vitae. Two weeks before the first PhD application was due, I reached out to Dr. Galvan, to ask if she could look over the final drafts. She agreed. After reading them, she noticed that there were a lot of things missing to make my materials into a competitive application. During those two weeks, we worked on them constantly to make sure I had the best possible chance of admission. After the PhD application cycle was finished, I received the news that I had been accepted with full funding to the University of California, Irvine (UCI). I called Dr. Galvan to share the amazing news and thank her for support and guidance.

The story I've shared here about Dr. Galvan and my other women ABLs illustrate the crucial role that Academic Bridge Leaders play in many underrepresented student's journey through higher education. Multiple ways that Academic Bridge Leaders. All three women demonstrated the care from an educator that was never present while I was at UCM. They supported me through difficult times and guided me in processes that were new to me. Without their presence, I do not know where I would be at this point in my life. Moreover, they left with me a set of values and a pedagogical blueprint to carry into my PhD program. I have done my best to embody the values and practices of an ABL as I've taken on the new role of Teaching Assistant in the History Department at UCI.

An ABL in Training

As a first-generation, Latino, low-income graduate student, my journey through higher education has not been direct. However, thanks to the ABLs in my life, I am now a PhD student in History—and an ABL in training. This means I am invested in historically marginalized students' academic achievement and wellbeing. I am committed to social justice and believe in being patient, persistent, and positive with undergraduate students. My goal as an educator is to guide, mentor, and support all my students through this Eurocentric institution that continuously neglects their culture, identity, and language.

As a Teaching Assistant at UCI, I have taught discussion sections for History 40A: Colonial American/New Worlds, and History 21 B: World: Empires and Revolutions, 1650-1870. Both these courses are made up of students from diverse backgrounds, most of them completing the classes as general education requirements for graduation. I use this space to support what the Professor wants the students to learn. However, I also take the time to implement a sense of community among students, guide them through higher education and life, and support them to the best of my ability, as my ABLs assisted me.

As an ABL in training, I try to implement a pedagogy of social justice and care in my sections. To me, this means first working to dismantle traditional power relations in the classroom, which often leads to the silencing of students—a dynamic that Cristobal Salinas Jr. (2017) explains through the terms *voces perdidas* and *voces de poder*. By implementing pedagogies of care, ABLs can recover the “lost voices,” or “representations of academic experiences and reflections of the Latinx community whose primary language is Spanish,” and nourish *voces de poder* (voices of power) in higher education spaces where many students would otherwise lack confidence to speak up (Valenzuela, 1999). Furthermore, by being intentional, transparent, and honest with my students, I try to cultivate trust—in higher education.

As an ABL in training, I also aspire to create a welcoming space for all my students by sharing stories of my challenges, hardships, and the obstacles I went through in navigating higher education. The power of storytelling or *testimonios* in this way allows students to create a sense of understanding (Ruíz, 2006; Alarcón et al., 2011). It also provides them a bridge to understand the historical struggle for Latinx students in higher education. Students can relate to ABLs when they know they have gone through similar setbacks. This may encourage them to seek an ABL’s assistance and support. The power of an ABL’s *testimonio* also empowers students to know that regardless of the hurdles placed in front of them while completing their college degree, they can and will ultimately succeed.

During my first section meetings, I shared stories and pictures with students to tell them a bit about myself and my journey in higher education. The purpose of the activity is to explain to them the many setbacks that I experienced, but also illustrate how I had people, like my ABLs, to support and guide me through my educational journey. I also tell students to call me by my first name to eliminate the classroom hierarchy. I then break students into a pair-share activity that asks them to introduce a campus resource that has been helpful to them while at UCI. While I allow them time to speak among themselves, I also play some music at a low volume from either Kendrick Lamar, J. Cole, or Tupac Shakur. After a couple of minutes have passed, students are encouraged to speak on the resources they exchanged. This allows the rest of the class to have information about tools that can be helpful for them or their peers. It also fosters a sense of community to know that everyone in the class is willing to share resources to help others.

After building this sense of community with my students, I then ask them about their expectations of the class and of me. Because for me the point of being a TA is letting the students have agency and *voces de poder*, I ask if there are things they would like me to host a workshop about in class. They usually respond by suggesting topics like how to create a curriculum vitae; how to apply to graduate school; how to navigate higher education; or how to set boundaries and master the skills of time management. I then plan to host one or two workshops with the intention of providing targeted guidance and support. I also created a class discord on Slack. This permits students to have a direct line to me, and allows me to drop information about the course, events on campus, work opportunities, music, and food recommendations, while eliminating the overwhelming sensation of having too many unread emails.

I have also used my ABL skills as an Academic Advisor for a Latinx Sorority at UCI. I have done my best to host workshops for the women in this organization and have fostered a sense of academic community with them. Many of the sisters of the organization have come to seek guidance and support for graduate school applications, post-graduation careers, letters of

recommendation, managing their time, and advice on how to maintain balance as an undergraduate student with other responsibilities outside of school. For example, one sister came asking for help to write a cover letter for an internship opportunity to work with an Orange County politician. Not knowing where to start a cover letter, I shared with her a cover letter template that I used when I was at CSUN. I also shared examples of successful cover letters I had submitted. After going over the template and the examples, she was able to create a rough draft of the cover letter. We worked on it up until the deadline, and she was selected. This reminded me of the time my ABL, Dr. Galvan, worked with me to get accepted into a PhD program.

As an ABL in training, my goal is to continue to guide and support my students in and out of the classroom and to build an academic community where we can all thrive together. This is easier said than done. But I know change can happen. All it takes is a bit of patience, persistence, and positivity. I have come to understand that Teaching Assistants are crucial to students' academic success. That is why as current and future ABLs we must emphasize care for students. So that they do not lose hope; or maybe so they can recover the hope that was lost prior to enrolling in our classes.

Conclusion

ABLs know that guidance, support, and a sense of community is critical in helping students from historically marginalized communities to obtain a college degree and build a foundation for future success. We know that this work takes time, and that there are factors in and outside the institutions of higher education that do not allow students to solely focus on their education. However, by being an ABL, we can foster an educational space of care, show respect to our students' identities, and acknowledge that they are producers of knowledge. By being that beacon of hope for our students, we can help them to thrive and create the necessary change to better higher education for all.

In this essay, I have discussed the critical role that Academic Bridge Leaders play in Latinx and other underrepresented students' academic success. I have highlighted the patience and positivity that my ABLs displayed to me as I navigated higher education: guiding me through academic processes, persistently supporting my academic aspirations, and building a community that positively impacted my time at LAHC, CSUN, and UCI. As I transition from student to future educator, my goal is to offer the same patience and positivity to my students, mentees, and Latinx community on campus. As I get one step closer to obtaining my PhD in History, I am encouraged more each day to share the values and pedagogical practices I learned from my ABLs with students, colleagues, and faculty. For as these social-justice minded educators, mentors and advocates taught me, change can only be achieved when it comes from a place of LOVE.

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SUPPORTIVE PEDAGOGIES FOR LATINX STUDENTS: CENTERING HUMANIDAD AND COMUNIDAD

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Abstract

This essay interrogates what social justice in education looks like, and specifically what it means to serve Latinx students. Through data collected from my educational and teaching journeys, I capture the Latinx student experience at a predominately white institution (PWI) and Hispanic serving institution (HSI), highlighting the barriers faced by First-Generation Low-Income (FLI) students and the factors that contribute to their success. I then explore how educators can promote social justice and provide tangible strategies to implement in the classroom. I conclude that pedagogical approaches centering apoyo (support), Humanidad (humanity), and comunidad (community) are critical in promoting Latinx FLI student success and overall well-being.

Keywords: Identity, Race, Critical Latinx Pedagogy, Immigration, Education, Chicano/a and Latinx studies, Hispanic Serving Institutions, Predominantly White Institution, Social Mobility

Supportive Pedagogies for Latinx Students: Centering Humanidad and Comunidad

According to the Pew Research Institute, by 2020, 3.7 million Latinos were enrolled in postsecondary institutions. Although their enrollment rate has doubled since 2000, Black and Hispanic Americans are still the least likely to be enrolled in college or have a bachelor's degree (Mora 2022). Moreover, although Latino enrollment in postsecondary institutions is increasing, the many obstacles faced by Latinx students are still largely ignored, leading to increased stress, poor mental health, and low graduation rates.

As a first-generation low-income (FLI) Latinx student and second-generation immigrant, I am aware of the barriers and obstacles to achieving a higher education and the difficult journey that ensues for those who enter academia. In my own experience, facing imposter syndrome and adjusting to graduate school during the pandemic posed additional challenges. So did beginning my Teaching Assistant duties in a virtual format. I felt disconnected from teaching and the students. However, after the pandemic ended, the opportunity to teach in person for the Chicana/Latinx Studies Department allowed me to work with FLI students of Latinx origin and engage in critical pedagogical training. I gained knowledge about different teaching methods and practices that empower and recognize diverse and intersecting student identities including Critical Latinx Pedagogy (Casavantes-Bradford and Morales 2021), pedagogies of care (Reyes, Banda, Caldas 2020), and community of cultural wealth (Yosso 2005). I employ these pedagogical strategies as a teaching assistant and advocate for social justice in education throughout other facets of research, teaching, and community service.

Building on these experiences, this essay seeks to address the following questions: What are the factors that contribute to the success of Latinx FLI students in higher education? Which pedagogical practices meet the needs of Latinx FLI students? To answer these questions, I first situate my study within the current literature on PWI's⁸ and HSI's⁹ and address its gaps and limitations. Additionally, I delve into the research on Latinx women's educational achievement, college decision-making and other processes that inform their career trajectories. Then, I discuss my use of autoethnographic methods and data and why they are relevant to the research questions I pose here. Recounting my journey as an undergraduate student at a predominantly White institution (PWI) in the Southeast and a graduate student in a Hispanic-serving institution (HSI) in Southern California, I highlight experiences of injustices I faced in educational contexts and specific moments that informed my current pedagogical practice of teaching for social justice. I conclude that pedagogical approaches centering apoyo (support), Humanidad (humanity), and comunidad (community) are critical in promoting Latinx FLI student success and overall well-being.

⁸ Predominately white institution (PWI) are post-secondary institutions where fifty percent or more enrolled students are White (Lomotey 2010). In this paper, I refer to my undergraduate institution in Southeastern part of the United States. I was unaware that I enrolled at a PWI and did not learn about the term until my senior year; although, I was conscious of my marginalized identity since the start, and it became more apparent with time.

⁹ Hispanic serving institutions (HSI's) refer to postsecondary institutions where at minimum twenty-five percent of the full-time undergraduates are Latinx and fifty percent are eligible for federal financial aid (Aguilar-Smith 2021). Part of my decision for applying to graduate programs in Southern California was to be within proximity to Mexico to reconnect with family and my culture. Therefore, I was partial to being at an HSI which has opened many doors including working with Latinx faculty and peers.

Through autoethnography, I seek to challenge positivist beliefs of what warrants and merits scientific research and scholarship. By reflecting on my experiences, I shed light on the historical underpinnings of exclusion, segregation, and violence faced by students of color in education which the Chicano/a movement sought to dismantle. Although the battle for equity in education continues, I remain optimistic because of the wonderful mentors, educators, and administrators I have encountered, who continue to support and uplift marginalized students like me through providing funding, programs, and curriculum that advance social justice in education..

Literature Review

La decisión y sus consecuencias

For Latinx women, the decision to attend college and its respective outcomes is constrained by a number of factors. According to Ebelia Hernandez, these include the need to balance independence and connection, reputation and cost, and parent's idealism with reality (2015). Latinas' educational decision making is especially influenced by their family, and their educational and occupational outcomes are also affected by their obligations to help their families financially (Flores 2017). As a result of these and other constraints, as Flores reveals In *Latina Teachers: Creating Careers and Guarding Culture*, some Latinx women's career decisions—in her study, becoming a teacher—are not always proactive, but rather accidental.

Flores concludes that many women of color with limited financial resources have “experienced socio structural disadvantage early on— whether intentional or unintentional— at the hands of many individuals...at various institutional levels.” They also struggle as university students when they confront academic challenges for which their high school preparation often leave them “woefully underprepared” (70; 2017).

The testimonios presented in Flores' study reveal overlapping themes and life experiences that are similar to my own. These include aspiring to medical school but failing to successfully complete necessary prerequisites and having many doors to my educational goals closed (Flores 2017). Many Latinx students suffer from the cumulative consequences of the lack of overall college preparation in their high schools, including not having opportunities to conduct research or develop reading and writing skills. This sets students up to fail and be tracked into low-paying jobs with low occupational prestige, leaving little room for economic mobility and for generating generational wealth that would place subsequent generations at an advantage. As Flores points out, Latinx students from middle class families can navigate school with financial support and have greater access to opportunities that facilitate their thriving and preparation for post-graduate careers (2017). However, solely admitting Latinx students to university does not solve the educational equity and inclusion issues they confront.

Universities that do not account for the increased socioeconomic and cultural heterogeneity of Latinx youth also fail to address the needs of all students. Anthony Abraham introduced the term “the privileged poor” to capture the experiences of low-income students educated at preparatory or boarding schools, where they are immersed in privileged environments. These students tend to do better than those who are doubly disadvantaged, entering university from segregated and underfunded state schools (2019). Whereas doubly

disadvantaged university students face culture shock and personal, and external barriers to seeking help and resources, the privileged poor are often more comfortable speaking with the professor and developing support networks with other students for their advantage. These divergent experiences consequently shape the unequal trajectories of low-income Latinx and other underrepresented students and highlight the equity gaps in student success and retention.

Programs like QuestBridge attempt to address these disparities by specifically serving low-income high school students through the transition to college and beyond. However, not all institutions are partnered with organizations like QuestBridge, and the types of resources offered across universities vary greatly. Top-tier institutions have the largest endowments and the ability to fund programs and offer grants to FLI students. But many universities that serve the majority of FLI students have less funding. Additionally, the wealth inequality represented in top-tier universities exacerbates the stress experienced by the doubly disadvantaged students who are constantly faced with the dissonance between their world and a new one that they do not belong in (Abraham 2019). These experiences again mirror my own.

Hispanic Serving Institutions and Predominantly White Institutions

Hispanic serving institutions are public and private 2- and 4-year postsecondary institutions where at minimum twenty-five percent of the full-time undergraduates are Latinx and fifty percent are eligible for federal financial aid (Aguilar-Smith 2021). However, as Aguilar-Smith argues, “in their race-evasive pursuit of Title V funds, many HSIs capitalize on their Latinx students, rendering serving into *S*erving and ghosting the “H” and “S” in HSIs” (2021). HSI institutions may vary in the ways they may use racialized funding, whether to build their financial reserves, address institutional needs, obtain legitimacy, or provide support services to all students. In many cases, however, they are not used to directly help Latinx students.

It is equally important to consider how predominantly white institutions with less than twenty-five percent Latinx students address their needs. Predominantly white institutions are those post-secondary educational institutions where fifty percent or more enrolled students are White (Lomotey 2010). Chang argues that PWIs are sites whose prevailing norms, values, and practices cater mostly to White students (2002). In PWIs, incongruities between Latinx and other minoritized students’ culture and the norms of the institution directly influence those students’ attitudes and behaviors, further fueling imposter syndrome and affirming their inferiority to white students. Admitting underrepresented students to PWIs benefits universities in supporting their diversity and inclusion efforts, but can also do a disservice to those students, denying them access to an equitable education where their cultural identity is affirmed and celebrated.

Latinx? American? Identidad and Latinx achievement.

Those Latinx students who make it to graduate school often struggle to navigate the lack of Latinx faculty, a culture of minimal collaboration among students, and faculty’s color-blind equal expectations for all students, despite their disparate preparation. Most graduate programs also fail to provide quality pedagogical preparation to graduate students, who as professors and instructors will be teaching future generations of students. This training is especially necessary for Latinx and other future faculty of color, who at both PWIs and HSIs will carry the burden of

mentoring underrepresented undergraduate and graduate students, often without recognition, while also teaching and conducting research and managing their personal and family responsibilities. Moreover, Latinx graduate students also feel the pressure after making it through undergraduate education and entering academia, a new space where they are afforded privileges while continuing to face marginalization within their departments and program curricula (Reyes and Rios 2005). The cumulative effect of the inadequate support Latinx students receive in high school, and then in college and in graduate school, reveals the systemic disadvantage violence perpetuated by these social structures.

There are nonetheless ways that universities can help support Latinx university to succeed. For example, Cerezo and Chang highlight the positive impact of cultural congruence and diversity on Latinx student success (2012). Their findings reveal that students' connection to other co-ethnic minorities and a campus climate based in cultural congruity are predictors of college GPA. Thus, these authors highlight how Latinx college education success is fostered through the validation of their cultural identity, both in academic contexts or through the fostering of community in and outside the classroom. Supporting Cerezo and Chang's findings, Castillo-Montoya and Reyes demonstrate the importance of Latino Cultural Centers (LCCs) and service-learning courses for Latinx students. They find that students that participated in a course offered through their campus Latino Cultural Center engaged in meaningful identity inquiry, developed critical consciousness, developed socio-political capacity, and came to view Latinx faculty as valuable. They conclude that the establishment of cultural centers supplements the support that Latinx students receive outside of class. However, cultural centers across universities vary, and their existence does not guarantee that all Latinx students are accessing the resources.

Methods

Autoethnography is a methodological research tool that “uses one's own experience in a culture to look at our culture and ourselves” (Chavez 341; 2012). Autoethnographic research stands in opposition to mainstream methodologies; and, as Chavez highlights, “challenges the role of objectivity in research since it underscores the positionality of the researcher in this investigation” (2012; 342). This allows for the interrogation and reflection on one's experience and emphasizes “the centrality of experiential knowledge. “Autoethnographies can also highlight the oral histories and culture of Latinx and Chicanx people, thereby offering an “activist approach to social justice that transgresses traditional paradigms in academia” (Bernal, Burciaga, Carmona 364; 2012).

While they centers the individual, testimonios are also an important tool for collaboration; when employed in educational practice, they can be understood as a “bridge that merges the brown bodies in our communities with academia.” (Delgado Bernal et al. 364; 2012). Thus, this essay uses autoethnography to center my experiences and make connections between my personal life, education, and commitment to social justice in education. Autoethnography allows me to place my voice at the forefront among scholarship that seeks to challenge the conventional, facilitating the creation of a “dialectical space where new understanding might emerge through the integration of polarities” (Rendon 68).

Data

In this study I rely upon a dataset composed of conversations, audio recordings, course evaluations, course notes, presentations from my discussion sections, and essays from my undergraduate and graduate education. I systematically collected and organized my course notes and conversations with my peers in a ten-week graduate Chicana/Latina Studies seminar in order to reflect on our individual and collective educational experiences. In this space I felt heard, understood, and enriched by the conversations that have only taken place in the Chicana/Latina Studies, which ranged from interrogating our own positions of privilege and moments when we may have been doing a disservice to students and their education. The notes depict my emotions, thoughts, and verbatim conversations; and a number of mini-essays present arguments pieced together from my lived experience, disciplinary knowledge, and course readings. In this essay, I synthesize these varied sources of data and explore the themes and patterns that emerge from them.

Mi breve historia

Through a pamphlet in the mail, I learned about the QuestBridge Match Scholarship which provides full-ride scholarships to low-income high-achieving students to attend top-tier universities. I first learned about the difference between private and public universities and curricular differences across liberal arts colleges and research universities. When I presented the letter to my school counselor, they discouraged me from applying and stated that my chances of receiving such a big scholarship were slim. After being accepted to the College Prep scholarship as a junior, I was able to visit my first university. Mi familia accompanied me in the long car drive to Stanford on Saturday at two a.m. to make it to the QuestBridge National Admissions in the morning. Once at Stanford University, I connected with admission counselors from top universities who provided crucial information on the application, financial aid, and admission process.

Attending a university with a full-ride scholarship meant that I could get an education debt-free and validate my parents' support and sacrifices. After applying to thirty-seven universities, to increase my likelihood of being accepted to at least one, I agreed to attend the university offering me a full ride before visiting the campus and doing further research. I flew from California to the Southeast, and stepped foot onto red cobblestones and I looked up to white marble buildings with beautiful pink and gray veining. I had the support of the QuestBridge network on campus and they became *mi nueva familia* (my new family). They connected me to faculty, administrators, and resources to help me thrive in all aspects of my health and education.

I began my academic journey with the goal of becoming a medical doctor, only to end up failing my prerequisites for medical school in my freshman year. By my sophomore year, I was enrolled in a Race and Ethnicity Sociology course which altered my perspective on my identity and introduced me to the terminology and frameworks that ignited my interest in sociology. I declared a Sociology and Spanish Studies double major and decided to apply to graduate school with the encouragement and support of the Sociology graduate chair. I applied to graduate programs in Southern California to be closer to my family and was admitted to the University of California Irvine.

Apoyo y Humanidad (support and humanization)

In my senior year at my undergraduate institution, I was uncertain about what I would do once I graduated. Being a first-generation college student, graduating college was a milestone that I did not envision reaching and had not planned what would come after. Through events sponsored by first-generation partnerships between faculty, administrators, and students, I was able to build a network with faculty who shared a FLI identity and advocated for FLI students. The chair of the Sociology department was the first person to take interest in discussing my post-graduation plans and he suggested I apply to sociology graduate programs. Obtaining a Ph.D. had been crossed off my list when an instructor in my junior year pulled me aside and explained that I lacked the skills to attend graduate school. The experience affirmed my incompetency and the stark differences between my peers who had been practicing their research skills since high school became more apparent.

Even though the department chair was a white man, I felt comfortable seeking his advice and support because of his FLI identity and there was a mutual unspoken understanding. I did not need to explain my hardships or have his sympathy. His courses were culturally relevant and in his sociological theory course he began with W.E.B DuBois to center the importance of his work in the conception of the field of sociology and its methodologies. This contrasted with my graduate school experience where the professor for Intro to Sociology Classical Theory prioritized White male scholarship who did little to acknowledge womxn and Black sociologists who were critical to the expansion of the field. Despite the push from the Latinx students and allies to include diverse scholarship, the professor remained unwilling and hostile.

My experiences have informed me of the pedagogical strategies I employ and the ways in which I mentor students. Teaching for social justice equates using humanizing pedagogy and apoyando estudiantes (supporting students). It means listening to students' needs and being cultural guardians (Flores 2017). To reaffirm, embrace, and validate students' diverse backgrounds and intersectional identities (Casavantes-Bradford and Morales 2019). This also presents an opportunity for students who are not Latinx to learn to engage with various cultures, learn about critical US history, and settler colonialism. For many students taking a Chicana/Latina Studies course or introduction to sociology is their first opportunity to engage with social research and engage in literature that breaks the binaries of traditional epistemologies including: testimonios, music, poetry, and art.

A student in my Intro to Chicana/ Latina studies course stated “I liked that she did help when it came to essays, but especially with preparing us for quizzes. I feel like she made the class discuss as well as the readings that we would do as a sort of exercise to get others to open up on their own interpretations”.

My student was referring to my practice of breaking down large assignments like a final essay into smaller ones to increase the opportunity for feedback and to encourage collaboration throughout the writing process. In a symposium held at my university in partnership with a CSU, Alberto Morales spoke about the importance of meeting students where they are at and the benefits of having them turn in a fully fleshed essay rather than a rushed assignment that students may not have gained anything from. Therefore, he encouraged us as instructors and future professors to think thoroughly about our course design and what we hope students take away once they step out of the classroom.

In another Chicano/Latino course a student provided the following feedback, “I really liked how our TA was able to build up on what students were saying. She was not just repeating our answers but giving us more insight and more things to think about whenever we had our discussion and was always willing to give us feedback on our major assignments that were useful”.

I ensured that for every discussion section I understood the readings, key terms, and created discussion questions to help start the conversation. I also paid attention to recurring themes and conversations that students were interested in and incorporated journal articles that addressed their interests to build their knowledge base and to provide definitions for terms that continued to come up including racism, gentrification, colorism, imperialism. They were included throughout the process of teaching and learning, and this fueled their confidence to share their ideas, critiques, and feelings.

Empoderamiento y Comunidad

At my undergraduate institution I was part of the 8.8% of Hispanic/Latinx students on campus and for the first time I was a minority in my class. Among the faculty and administrators, the majority were white and there were very few professors from Latinx backgrounds with the majority from in the Spanish or Comparative literature department. Through the classes offered in the Spanish department I gained critical frameworks for understanding my identity and culture. In a course about the US-Mexico border politics, I was able to bring in my personal experiences from my visit to my family in San Luis Rio Colorado. I first encountered Gloria Anzaldúa’s book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* and it shifted how I viewed theorizing differently from objective scientific epistemology.

I sought the Latinx Student Organization (LSO) to meet other Latinx students, but I found it difficult to find similarities. Most Latinx students on campus were international students and came from middle to upper class families who paid for their degree unless they earned a merit scholarship. I was more comfortable interacting with FLI students who understood not being able to afford going out every weekend and instead would suggest going for a walk at the nearby nature reserve or grabbing a coffee and snack with our meal plan. However, through LSO I was grateful for learning about different histories and cultures through food, music, and conversations. LSO had a physical safe space for students and many preferred studying or eating lunch there because people spoke Spanish, Spanglish, and in dialects that could not be used when speaking proper Spanish in the classroom; you could find a piece of home and comfort. The safe space and organization also served as an informal student-led resource center which provided crucial information to first year students and for more advanced students who had questions about majors and post-graduation careers.

At my current institution, there are many organizations that cater to Latinx students which address different needs, from financial to cultural and legal. Students may seek multiple centers at a time for various reasons including to meet other students and establish friendships, partake in cultural activities to connect, or reconnect to their heritage, and or to participate in discussions and activities surrounding issues of race, immigration, education, and injustice. Therefore, most students in the Intro to Chicanx/Latinx Studies course are active participants in multicultural organizations. By drawing connections between their personal experiences, course

content, and participation in multicultural organizations, Latinx students can validate their cultural identity and build a support network.

I recall a moment when a student explained to me why the MEChA (Movimientx Estudiantil Chicanx de Aztlán) changed their name to LaCRE (La Comunidad Resistiendo y Existiendo). They stated that courses in the Chicanx/Latinx Studies department had informed their critical lens and interrogation of the Chicanx movement. On MEChA's former Instagram account that has been inactive since 2021; their statement on September 30th reads, "Formerly known as MEChA (Movimientx Estudiantil Chicanx de Aztlán), we have decided to move past the organization's history of predominantly misogynistic, queer/transphobic, and Mexican/Chicanx-centrism in an attempt to center women, femme-identifying and QTPOC folks...Even the name itself, which includes the term "Chicanx" and "Aztlán," perpetuates the exclusion and erasure of non-Chicanx/Mexican folks and their entire history". Through my conversations with students, I learned how students synthesize course content and how it informs and shapes their identity inside and outside the classroom.

As a graduate student, the opportunities to participate in culturally affirming coursework and organizations are minimal. I am fortunate to have cohort mates who are Latinx and support each other as we go through important milestones in the completion of our master's and PhD requirements. Without their support and the mentorship from Latinx faculty in the Chicanx/Latinx Department, I would have dropped out of the program. As I grow in my role as a teacher and learner, I constantly seek culturally validating coursework and I find it in the Chicanx/Latinx Studies department. In my home department, I am met with skepticism in my efforts to move beyond traditional methods and theories that ignore the heterogeneity of Latinx communities and methods that bring minority voices and experiences to the forefront. This limits my ability to engage in meaningful research that benefits my community and affirms my cultural identity. Thus, Chicanx/Latinx studies fills in the gaps that my discipline has yet to acknowledge or accept.

Discussion and Conclusion

It is crucial that educational researchers continue to study FLI student experiences across HSI's, PWI's, and other institutions. This will allow them to better assess how to serve Latinx and other low-income underrepresented students, and to promote social justice in education across all types of educational settings and socio-political contexts.

My findings in this essay highlight the importance of teacher support and student involvement in multicultural and Chicanx/Latinx Studies courses to bolster academic success and provide enriching experiences to shape a student's identity and network. Social justice in education equals reciprocity and ensuring that all students have an equitable opportunity to succeed and have all facets of health met. Thus, it is important to recognize that students have various motivations for enrolling in classes, and it is crucial to tailor the content and activities to meet their needs. Whether they gain research writing experience or practice collaboration and managing skills, students can take these skills to other classes and continue to build upon them in their post-graduate lives.

The intersections of my research, commitment to service, and as an educator means that I will continue to place social justice in education at the forefront. As I make progress towards my PhD, I will seek opportunities that promote the research and service to student retention, success,

and learning. The equity gaps in education achievement for Latinx students and FLI highlight the importance of reaching beyond access to inclusion (Jack 2019). Admitting Latinx students into top HSI's and PWIs without fundamental support for students to remain connected to their families and cultural values throughout their time in college leads to increased cultural stressors and negative mental health outcomes(2017). Implementing culturally affirming pedagogies and resources that are specific to the intersectional identities of students is an important first step toward dismantling the oppressive and violent structures that have excluded and harmed so many Latinx and other underrepresented students.

I encourage anyone who has the opportunity to work closely with students of all backgrounds to listen to, validate, and learn from their stories. To provide students with the necessary tools to succeed, and create a welcoming environment where students are comfortable being who they are. Doing this will require you to continue to be reflexive and critical of your own positionality and pedagogical strategies, and to challenge yourself to evolve and adapt to the needs of your students. I urge you to continue these efforts, because they do not go unrecognized by the students you impact. I remain optimistic about the collective power of Latinx people and their educational allies, and our efforts to ensure social justice in education for all students.

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IMMIGRANT STORIES BEYOND THE PAGES: BRINGING PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES DEVELOPED BY IMMIGRANT K-16 EDUCATORS TO HIGHER ED POLITICAL SCIENCE CLASSROOMS

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Abstract

Reflecting on my current role as a doctoral student and educator, I strive to make a conscious effort to develop creative ways for students and myself to gain a sense of identity and learning. In this moment of reflection, I ask: How can pedagogical practice focused on identity and community developed by K-16 Black and Brown educators of immigrant backgrounds, be brought forth in higher education Political Science classrooms? I argue that educators of color can draw on pedagogies of care developed by black and other feminists of color to nurture university and college political science students' identity and community cultural wealth. I advance this argument while using autoethnographic reflection to weave in my personal experiences as a first-generation Guatemalan womxn educated by Black and Brown educators, and to explore how they have informed my current roles as mentor, Teaching Assistant, and student organizer. The purpose of this paper sits in the realization that the sense of belonging and social critique that is nurtured by Black and Brown educators of immigrant background in public K-16 classrooms can also hold a space in higher ed Political Science classrooms. I conclude that these pedagogical practices serve to develop students' sense of identity and consequently help them to begin their own journeys toward joy, and healing.

Keywords: educators of color, immigrant background, mentorship, critical celebrations, Political Science, social justice

Immigrant Stories Beyond the Pages: Bringing Pedagogical Practices Developed by Immigrant K-16 Educators to Higher Ed Political Science Classrooms

My fondest memory of my schooling has always been a picture of me taken by one of my teachers. I was smiling as I ran through a playground looking for my friends. In this photo, Ms. C captured what mattered most in the moment—me and my joy. It’s no surprise that she became the inspiration for my passion for education. While I knew from an early age that society was not accepting of my undocumented Guatemalan immigrant family (or other immigrant families), because of teachers like Ms. C., school has always felt like an exception to it all.

As I reflect on my K-16 education and my current role as a PhD student in Political Science, educator, and scholar, I strive to make a conscious effort to develop creative ways for students and myself to thrive, just as other educators did this for me. In this moment of reflection, I ask: *How can pedagogical practice focused on identity and community developed by K-16 Black and Brown educators of immigrant backgrounds, be brought forth in predominantly white higher education Political Science classrooms?* In answering this question, I argue that educators of color in Political Science can draw on pedagogies of care developed by black and other feminists of color to nurture students’ identity and community cultural wealth and inform their classroom practice. I use autoethnography to weave my personal experiences as a first-generation Guatemalan womxn, educated by Black and Brown immigrant educators who have informed my role as a mentor, Teaching Assistant, and student organizer, into this argument. After briefly discussing the literature review on pedagogies of care, community cultural wealth, and the role of identity in Political Science classrooms, I explore a range of positive classroom practices employed teachers and community organizers in my own life, before reflecting on my own evolving pedagogical vision and practice.

Literature Review

Teachers of Color: Engaging with Care and Community

To understand the pedagogical methods developed by Black and Brown educators of immigrant backgrounds, I look towards the work of Black feminist bell hooks. In her groundbreaking work *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks introduce us to critical pedagogies that center student learning, compassion, and trust. They root their practice in Black feminist pedagogies of care and critical analyses of race and identity. In this piece, hooks argues that “no teaching is politically neutral;” all teaching must therefore be done with intention and a conscious effort to sit with tensions brough forth by students and educators’ identities and biases (hooks, 1994). I also call on Patricia Hill Collin’s work on the “outsider within.” Collins defines this as “situational identities that are attached to specific histories of social injustice--they are not a decontextualized identity category divorced from historical social inequalities that can be assumed by anyone at will” (1999).

Moreover, there is a wide range of scholarship on student-centered pedagogies that are intentional about promoting care and healing for both educators and students (Willoughby-Herald, 2006; Reyes, 2020; Villanueva, 2013). Their close attention to student engagement and in caring for one another as an extension of community care practices is also reflected in the work of Tara Yosso, who examines community as a key source of students’ cultural wealth. For

Yosso, caring for students in community goes hand in hand with cultivating the cultural wealth residing in students' identities and cultural backgrounds. Cultural wealth is also understood to reside in parental involvement in students' education and community social networks. (Yosso, 2005). In schools that have a population of immigrant students, educators can also cultivate community cultural wealth by becoming resources for parents for legal and social issues, as well as by engaging with community organizations that help families (Villavicencio, 2021). Taking a different angle on what it means to care for students, Chezare Warren (2021) calls on teachers to help Black students see school as a site of hope and joy. Warren argues that while as educators cannot easily change the white structures and norms of schooling, we can change how we teach Black students about possibilities for their future, creativity, and community care (2021).

Throughout this essay, I will return to Yosso's notion of community cultural wealth as key to understanding the methods developed by Black and Brown educators of immigrant backgrounds that I have used in defining my own identity as an educator. I will also extend upon Yosso's theorization to more deeply explore how educator's identities can serve as resource for creating pedagogical practices that encourage student to critically engage with their identities and communities as a way of learning. In doing so, I acknowledge the work of Rita Kohli (2021) whose book *Teachers of Color: Resisting Racism and Reclaiming Education* pinpoints the emotional and psychological stress that educators of color endure while learning to become teachers, working alongside white professionals, and trying to protect their students of color. Kohli nonetheless emphasizes the role of teachers of color as protectors for students, from social harm but also from injuries caused by white teachers. Informed by these insights, this autoethnographic essay will highlight and discuss some of the many tangible ways that educators of color creatively navigate the white space that is education while drawing upon the wealth residing in their identities to provide care and community to students.

The Whiteness of Political Science Classrooms

Reflecting on my own educational experiences, and without trying to assume the intentions of the educators around me, I can't help but be reminded of bell hooks' observation that "no teaching is politically neutral." We know that the *Brown vs. Board* decision marked the de-segregation of U.S. public education, decreeing that students of color and Black students would be able to attend school with white students. We also know that creating racially integrated classrooms did not signify equitable teaching or teaching that reflected students lived experiences, especially for students of color. And higher education in particular remains a predominantly white space.

To fully grasp the Eurocentric norms that are embedded in higher education, I look towards the work of Cabrera, Franklin, and Watson's (2016), whose report *Whiteness in Higher Education: The Invisible Missing Link in Diversity and Racial Analyses* details the history of whiteness in higher education and the interpersonal and institutional consequences of this. They examine whiteness specifically as the main marker informing campus culture, climate, and ecology, thus centering white standards of education for all students. They conclude that higher education is and continues to be designed for White students in mind; thus pedagogies that engage with students of color are punished (Cabrera et al. 2016). Higher education's legacy of privileging whiteness is reinforced by administrators, faculty, and students' avoidance of discussions of race (Harper & Hurtado 2007). By continuously prioritizing whiteness, higher

education creates stressful and unwelcoming spaces for students of color, who experience daily microaggressions from their white peers, faculty, and administration (Sue 2010; Gildersleeve et al. 2011).

Political Science university classrooms reflect this as they also remain mostly a white space with predominantly white educators. This reality is reflected in an analysis of the American Political Science Association's (APSA)¹⁰ website in which there is no mention of how educators in this field can engage with non-white students. There is a section on "Incorporating Civic Engagement into the Curriculum" that holds syllabi and past projects created to teach tangible civic education; but when these resources speak of community engagement, they claim that it rests on creating productive citizens. However, the "citizen" that is being referred to in APSA's civic education page is one that is both politically active (through traditional forms of civic and electoral political engagement) and is economically productive. This implicitly raced, classed, and gendered definition of citizenship reinforces the notion that individuals' status and democratic worth is based on their paid labor (APSA, 2021). This is a message that is frequently echoed in the teaching in traditional Political Science classrooms.

Furthermore, the discipline's white-dominant culture also impacts faculty. As but one example, Anna Sampaio (2006) argues that finds that women of color faculty who deploy more engaged pedagogies, such as the one recounted by hooks, are often punished by colleagues and students who may oppose them. Sampaio concludes by calling for departmental engagement with faculty of color whose intentions are to employ community cultural wealth knowledge creation in their classrooms.

Like Sampaio, I want to create space in Political Science classrooms for students such as myself, who will benefit from culturally and racially aware pedagogical practices that push for social justice within our communities. As a first step in that direction, in the following sections of this essay, I will explore the pedagogical practices of my K-16 Black and Brown educators. By including not only my K-16 journey but also my experiences as an undergraduate student, I seek to show how the practices of Black and Brown educators of immigrant backgrounds working in a range of classroom contexts can be transferrable to higher education settings.

Traveling Back in Time: Black and Brown Educators from My Youth

In 2006, I was in Ms. C's class when she started playing music during our writing time. She prompted us to write a story influenced by the music. This became a repetitive task in which music became synonymous to creative writing. While listening to music and writing stories was not part of our standardized testing, it opened a new world for me. Three years prior, my mom and I had migrated from Flores Costa Cuca, Guatemala. During my time there, I was reminded by my friends and cousins of my Americanness as I was born in the United States. While I spoke Spanish, attended school, and went to church every Sunday my birth in the United States was the topic of choice for all who I met. The ability to transcend borders was my unwanted gift. In the 1990's and early 2000's, more and more rural Guatemalans started migrating up north, including my family. The Guatemalan Civil War from 1960-1990 had ended but the real war was

¹⁰ The American Political Science Association is the main Political Science Association in the United States.

starting¹¹. Social, political, and economic unrest forced thousands to start the harsh migration up north. My ability to cross borders to the promised land became a marker of what was to come—thousands of U.S. born children of Guatemalan migrants, the 1st generation that lived outside of the war and outside of Guatemala.

The writing sessions created by Ms. C became my place to vocalize this reality. Throughout my elementary schooling, I was in Bilingual classes and English Second Language class taught by Latinx womxn who were either immigrants themselves or were children of immigrants. It is imperative that I highlight that my hometown, an inner city in New Jersey, was home to many Caribbean and African immigrants along with a large population of Black Americans, with a growing number of Latin American immigrants, my family included. The identities of my teachers reflected the racial and ethnic makeup of our hometown. My teachers became a home away from home due to their active role in educating my parents in ways they could help me navigate schooling. For example, one of my K-5 teachers taught English classes in our city and taught both my mother and I English along with providing resources to extracurricular activities for me. To this day, my teacher still checks up on my mom.

As I reflect on the creative writing times structured by my teachers, I recall the work of Grace Player, who finds that by hosting creative writing spaces for middle school girls of color, they could open up locked-away knowledge in these students. Player coined the term *critical celebration* in order to describe pedagogical processes that encourage girls of color to view themselves as brilliant creators in educational spaces (i.e., schools) that too often punish them; however, when given space to explore and validate their identities, they can develop “critical insights toward solidarity across difference” (Player, 2021). By holding spaces of creativity and nurture and by focusing on my peers and our immigrant identity, my own teachers similarly taught me to center myself. Moreover, because they also worked closely with my parents and tried to provide them with resources that they needed, I came to see my teachers as an extension of my family. I saw them as practitioners of what Flores (2022) calls pedagogical “mother work.”

The work that Ms. C put in to create new opportunities for self-exploration for me through such mother work also reflected an embodied understanding of what Calderon and Urrieta (2019) refer to as a Critical Latinx Indigeneity. Ms. C practiced a pedagogy that centered indigenous students from Latin America by including non-Spanish languages, non-colonial cultures, and an embodied indigeneity that goes beyond mestizaje in the classroom. While the intention of Ms. C may not have been to practice a pedagogy of critical Latinx indigeneity, her efforts to center immigrant students’ identities (stemming from her own cultural closeness to them), it fundamentally changed how I saw myself in school.

The practice of centering on my family as part of my learning was once again done by my teachers in high school. I attended a STEM high school, the first of its kind in my town, as part of an initiative to introduce urban youth to the possibilities of STEM fields. One of my teachers, Ms. Q (the daughter of Caribbean immigrants), showed up for me in a way that some

¹¹ From 1960-1996 Guatemala along with several other Central American countries found themselves in political unrest between leftists’ groups and dictatorships, far-right regimes put in place by corporations and the United States. The Guatemala Civil War was between dictatorships placed by the United States government to deter growing guerilla unrest. Currently, Guatemala remains in social unrest with rise of femicides, gang violence, and continuous involvement of American corporations.

may classify as tough love. From the beginning, she constantly reminded us of the importance of math and of taking up space in career paths in STEM. Throughout my two years in her class, she would bring in new ways of learning to motivate us whenever we failed our tests. She would encourage us to experiment with new equations and ways of learning. Being in her class felt like a wave of hope and fun, even when we knew we were about to be chewed out for low test grades.

Ms. Q also encouraged us to revisit how we had learned math through our families. In her active role as an educator, she was vocal about the importance of parental involvement in the classroom. Her constant engagement with our parents showed me that her care went beyond the classroom. The patience and time she took to call parents surprised me because at that point, most high school teachers had already determined we were old enough to be treated as adults. By the age of thirteen, I had started working on weekends, so being treated like an adult by my high school teachers reinforced the notion that I was an adult. Yet, Ms. Q still looked out for us. She made it a point to stay in touch with our families, even if there was a language barrier. She made herself a part of my life, even if it was just the small things, such as choosing to buy shoes from my mom's business.

As I reflect on my time in her classroom and Ms. Q's pedagogy, I attribute it to her identity as a child of Caribbean immigrants, a native of our town, a first-generation student, and one of the few Black mathematicians in our district. Her lived experiences had a direct impact on her teaching style of being proactive with community. She embodied what hooks describes as teaching with as much trust and care for students as you have for yourself as an educator (hooks, 2014). By centering our families and through the commitment she had to our success, Ms. Q centered herself as well. She redefined, intentionally or not, what success looked like for someone from our town, for girls of color, for first-generation students, all while she also navigated a white education system. In this way, she, and other educators of color—specifically Black women—have been fundamental to my educational growth, as they have navigated the whiteness of our education system while at the same time maintaining care for their students.

While Ms. C and Ms. Q are only two examples, they powerfully embody pedagogies that center Yosso's notion of community cultural wealth, in which students' community (family, neighbors, peers, and educators alike) are seen as creators of knowledge. Even in the face of language barriers, being children of immigrants, or immigrants themselves allowed these teachers to see me and my peers as whole individuals and to focus on our learning, rather than seeing us just as test scores.

We were always here: Cultivating Community in Undergraduate Education

Carrying with me the pedagogical practices observed in my youth, I was a witness to and attempted to embody them myself as an undergraduate. I attended a state university in New Jersey that, while it was close to home, also enabled me to foster a new understanding of my identity and community. Throughout my time as an undergraduate, two pillars that sustained community for me were Professor B and student-led organizations.

Professor B was a professor in the Africana Studies department and one of the main leaders and advisor to a student-led organization, Galvanizing and Organizing Youth Activism,

that I participated in. As an immigrant from St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Professor B brought his identity and experience into his pedagogy. Throughout my undergraduate years, he was a constant figure in my life, inside and outside of academia. He assigned extra credit to his students if they attended our organization's events and engaged with the community work we were conducting. He ran an active Instagram that operated as an archival collection of student events, social gatherings, and academic endeavors.

During my four years as an undergraduate student, Professor B became part of my community network, as I relied on him for advice on academia and community organizing. In his practice of care, and in building a network connecting all his students and local organizations, he was persistent in centering student's well-being. He understood the limits of being a first-generation student and navigating the challenges of higher education, thus he was intentional in telling us when to take time away from organizing to focus on our studies.

The attention and care that I received from Professor B were juxtaposed with the everyday tension I felt as a Political Science major. In Political Science courses, I and those that looked like me and came from my community were no longer the center. We were spoken of as passive citizens, unknown beings, and as just another statistic. While some courses such as Urban Politics and International Relations spoke about race and identity as central, the literature given to us was not authored by people from minoritized communities. There was no intention to be purposeful or to center the communities spoken about.

Most of the Political Science courses I took also approached teaching through traditional forms of lecture and essay writing, requiring us to regurgitate what we heard and read. I learned to anticipate the syllabus and grew easily bored and tired of the same course structure. I found this teaching pedagogy reflected what Paulo Freire (2018) and hooks (2014) called the "banking system," in which students are fed information and tasked to repeat it back to educators. During those years, I questioned my ability to stay in the program. As I wrote essays, I wasn't retaining any of the information learned.

The deep-rooted, white-based pedagogical practices of Political Science became even more evident to me as I engaged with Black Studies and Latino and Caribbean Studies. The Latino and Caribbean Studies department allowed me to learn and thrive in ways that reminded me of my more positive K-16 education. In a Latino Literature and Culture course, our extra credit assignments were to write plays influenced by the assigned readings, poetry, and other creative writing styles. For a course on Latinos and Community, we had to create a community-centric project that involved either our home or school community or any of the organizations around the city. Learning about the Zapatistas and the Black Panther coalition proved to be integral to my understanding of politics; this influenced me more than my Political Science courses.

The main difference between these two departments was the presence of educators of color in Latino and Caribbean Studies, as compared to the majority White educators in Political Science. While I wasn't surprised by the whiteness of this department, it furthered a growing tension within myself as I considered how I was (or wasn't) shown care in both departments. I felt unseen and mostly ignored by the Political Science faculty. In contrast, faculty of color of immigrant backgrounds in Latino and Caribbean Studies pushed me to question and challenge discriminatory political and social structures, building on the common ground of our shared identities. As I reflect on these two varying experiences, I realize that one of the main differences

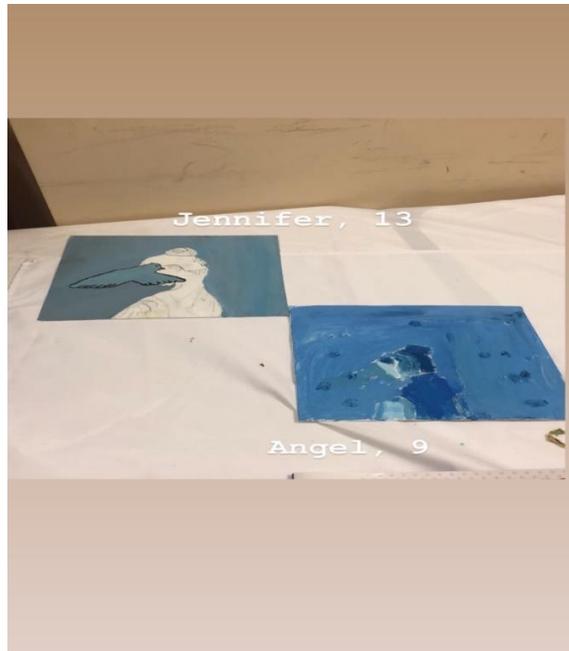
was pedagogical: the intentionality of educators of color who were committed to making learning impactful, and to helping their students reach that joy that I mentioned earlier in this paper.

As I navigated my educational journey through this lens, I found my sense of creativity and desire to explore new interests fulfilled by Black and Brown centered student organizations. I was part of the Latinx American Womxn Organization and Galvanizing and Organizing Youth Activism (G.O.Y.A.). In G.O.Y.A, I hosted monthly meetings to foster campus-wide political participation through interpersonal conversations with students, faculty, and friends from diverse backgrounds. My participation allowed me to reconnect with the joy that my past educators installed in me via writing, community engagement, and socializing. As the political chair of the Latin American Student Organization, I ran an event on demystifying the “American Dream” in which we practiced Player’s *critical celebrations*. I instructed my peers to reflect on what this concept meant for them, and what it meant for our families (Player 2021).

In student-led organizations, I found my identity as a child of immigrants being validated and centered in events created for and by us. With guidance from our advisors and educators of color from immigrant backgrounds, I found that my personal concerns due to immigration were centralized. My peers and I navigated our own status as students while simultaneously holding responsibilities for our family’s immigration status that reinforces a feeling of punishments for actions, we did not take part in (Rodriguez, 2019). As I reflect on the difference between these experiences and how I felt in Political Sciences classrooms, I realize that I hadn’t lost my joy because I wasn’t interested in my courses; rather, it was because of the active exclusion of bodies that looked like me in those spaces.

How did I become Ms. Mendez? Learning to Teach to Middle School Me

As an undergraduate, I had the opportunity to embody the pedagogy of care and intention I’d witnessed via my K-16 educators of color when I began to work with a local organization, LAZO’s America Unida. My job was to create Saturday workshops focused on introducing different art mediums to students, as a way of exploring their creativity and in the process processing traumatizing events. This program, “Art from Within,” ranged from 6-year-old to 15-year-old; thus the art that we did aimed to engage students of all ages. In practicing what I had learned in Ms. C’s class, I introduced students to an art form (painting) in which they were instructed to bring forth their own interpretation of a drawing. The picture below shows two different students’ interpretations of a single picture.



In encouraging students to interpret an image, I highlighted their own unique ways of interacting with the world. During our Saturday workshops, I also invited parents and fellow undergraduate students to participate and interact with my students. In providing a space for my students to process experiences at home and school, I always tried to center their identities as children of immigrants. To do this, I shared my own experiences with deportation, family separation, and being the only English speaker in the household. I also engaged in all the activities with the children. I practiced transparency and honesty, which are central to the ethos of the pedagogies used by my K-16 educators of color.

My desire to work with youth encouraged me to continue working with middle school students as a teacher's aide for English and Dual-Language classes. While I was teaching at a middle school in Harlem, New York, I was able to relive the joys of learning self-expression intertwined with education. In developing the interests of students for after-school programming, I recalled the joy that my past educators created in everyday activities for me. These joys allowed me to imagine new ways of learning, new ways of seeing the world. In creating these after school activities, my goal was to create new worlds of adventure for students in which they could see themselves. For example, my colleagues and I created an Anime Club, a Theater Club, and a Photography Club.

These clubs were organized around clear learning objectives, outlined in a style that most K-16 educators are familiar with, through "Students will be Able to" (SWBAT) statements. During my own schooling, every day my teachers recalled objectives and skills we, as students, could gain throughout the lesson. Writing my own SWBAT statements, I learned firsthand about the careful planning my own K-16 teacher had devoted themselves to. Although I realize this was partly to fulfill state curriculum objectives, it also reaffirmed that our identities as immigrant children and families mattered, despite a political climate that told us otherwise. In this case,

creating culturally competent curricula based on the lives of students not only served to centered their experiences, but also fulfilled state requirements (Subedi, 2008).

My ability to center my students' identities and show them different ways to interact with their families and communities was due in part to the closeness of our identities, as many of them were also Central American immigrants or the children of immigrants. I recall sharing with students about my parent's fight for legalization, which opened a dialogue on what it means to be a citizen, and the privileges in this status (Perez Huber, 2017). This discussion resulted in parents coming to me with questions, and I became a resource for them as they reached out to me for help with needs beyond that of their immigration status. My engagement with parents was also inspired by the pedagogy of my K-16 educators, who actively engaged with my parents by checking in about how they could help us.

The techniques I used both as a facilitator of Saturday workshops and as a middle school English aid, exemplify Victoria Gill's (2022) notion of *soul work* in which, by adopting an intersectional pedagogical approach, teachers help students to engage with society and start to heal. By centering my students and life experiences that at times mirrored my own, I was able to create moments of healing for them. I know that my work was only a small part of their education; yet our interactions opened opportunities to start seeing themselves as possessor of knowledge who were worthy of care as they struggle to survive in a society that seeks to silence them. By centering immigrant families and students in my workshops and middle school classrooms, I was challenging white standards of education.

Am I making them proud? Mentoring and Teaching at University of California- Irvine

After my time as a middle school educator, an invaluable lesson I have learned is that the work of teaching goes beyond the classroom and helping students to earn good grades. Although my middle school teaching work was cut short due to the COVID 19 pandemic, I continue to reflect on how I wish I would have done more for my students. I wish I could have provided them with more time to relax; more programs through which to explore life outside of school. A part of me will always want to go back and do more, but I have come to understand that I cannot. Is this part of teaching that will never go away? The desire to do more; the knowledge that you *can* do more, even when some things are out of your control? Does that ever go away?

Now that I am back at UC Irvine in person, focused on completing my Political Science PhD sitting with these hard truths has pushed me to find comfort and guidance in mentorship. As a participant in mentorship programs as an undergraduate and having benefited from mentors in my own life, I know firsthand that mentorship is an act of love and care. As a mentor for UCI's Competitive Edge Summer Scholar Program, my role was to aid incoming graduate students working on a summer project with department faculty. I also assisted students to set personal and academic goals for the program and transition to graduate school.

Currently, I am a mentor for the Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program, that sets up first-year undergraduate students with a mentor to introduce them to research in their discipline. I meet with my four mentees on a bi-weekly basis and discuss topics including networking, how to conduct research, and how research can change throughout the years. Following in the footsteps

of my K-16 educators, I situate my students' identities as the starting point for their research and other academic work.

All of my mentees are women of color of immigrant backgrounds; thus I encourage them to bring their unique experiences to the forefront in their research. I push them to look at their communities as carriers of knowledge and illustrate for them how research and the personal are intertwined. One of the other activities that I have my mentees do is to reflect and write down their mission and vision. This can pertain to their academic life, personal life, or both. In this activity, I prompt my mentees to self-reflect outside of possible limitations and explore new possibilities. The purpose of this activity is to practice what Animashaun and Sealey-Ruiz (2022) call *racial literacy*, a process that allows girls of color to “time travel” and redefine who they can be beyond their current temporal limitations.

I have also taken on a new role as TA at UC Irvine. Teaching undergraduate students has exposed me to new challenges and provided me opportunities to develop new practices. As I previously described, as a Political Science undergraduate student, I was never part of the classroom conversations, whereas as a Latino and Caribbean Studies student, my experience was always emphasized as important. With these two experiences in mind and informed by my middle school teaching experience, I first approached teaching undergraduate discussion sections with a desire to be trusting and transparent, but also with an air of skepticism, as I was encouraged to be professional and detached from student's lives. Nonetheless, serving as a Teaching Assistant for Dr. C and Dr. K has provided me with the space to practice teaching in a way that also centers the knowledge that university students have before they enter the classroom. Returning to bell hooks' call for teachers to be transparent and honest with students, I recall how my most influential K-16 educators were transparent with their students about their upbringing. They centered themselves in the classroom in a manner that did not minimize my experiences, but rather, allowed me to grow and learn from them as members of my community rather than as outsiders. In the same way, I now strive to show up in the classroom as authentic, caring, and community centered.

As I have continued to navigate higher education, both as an educator and a graduate student, I have relied on pedagogical practices I witnessed and then used in K-16 educational contexts. Below I list three of these pedagogical practices I have used in discussion sections at UCI, followed by comments from previous student evaluations that motivated me to reflect on how my teaching related to the pedagogies of my own former educators.

1. Interactive Group Activities

- a. “The interactive activities gave a more interesting and fun side to the class and encouraged me to open up and give my own opinion to the topics.”

Exemplifying one of the key takeaways from the practices of my K-16 educators, I have found that students like to work and learn from each other more than they are given the opportunity to do. I have thus developed interactive group activities by creating online breakout rooms and collaborative group reading tasks. I also facilitate class discussions by using questions developed by students. Ms. Q had similarly created assignments that encouraged us as students to make up new equations and processes to solve math-related real-life problems. She saw and encouraged us to see each other as sources of learning (Aguilar-Hernandez, 2020)

2. Using Multimedia- Film, Podcasts, Music
 - a. "...group activities were rough because people, including myself, wouldn't participate. Individual activities, on the other hand, held me accountable and forced me to actually pay attention throughout the entire discussion." Taking student's feedback, I started to incorporate multimedia-based tasks that students could engage with individually and develop their own interpretations. This reflects a practice from Ms. C and Dr. K, who both provided their students with guiding questions on a particular topic and tasked them with interpreting them through art..
3. Establishing expectations for each other and opening up about my own experience as an undergraduate (Casavantes and Morales, 2022)
 - a. "She was very understanding of my personal life as well and the school/life/work balance." "... very approachable and down to earth. I felt super comfortable talking to her and being in her presence." Educators of color throughout my life were always vocal about their own struggle in academia, thus I want to be honest and transparent with my students about my own struggles, inside and outside of school. Specifically for immigrant students or children of immigrants, this can provide reassurance that academia can be a space for them.

Although my classroom practice has been a work in progress, I strive to embody what I have learned from my K-16 educators: that community cultural wealth matters, and that students are beings that deserve care and love, no matter their age. Specifically, in my classrooms I aim to disrupt what students understand as being "academically successful," which only reiterates white standards of education and learning. By sharing my own journey through learning and unlearning in educational spaces, I hope to help my students to think of themselves as individuals capable of bringing their own experiences and knowledge into the classroom, even when interacting with traditional academic fields like Political Science.

It's Only the Beginning: What happens now?

As a discipline, Political Science remains largely taught with a focus on white standards and with white students in mind. However, in reflecting on the lessons of the K-16 immigrant and educators of color of in my life, and the skills I have begun to develop as an educator in my own right, I suggest the following practices that can be used in Political Science classrooms:

1. Create syllabi that include various content and modalities of learning, such as social media, art platforms, and projects that cultivate community engagement.
2. Set expectations for each other, both students and professor. Expectations must be centered on the desire for mutual healing and respect for one another and the communities we come from.
3. Assign work that will be hands-on for students. Let them explore mediums that they have an interest in or have already used in other assignments. Encourage them to go back to their communities to see if key themes of the course can be observed and analyzed in these spaces.

While these are only a few recommendations, I see them as a starting point for fellow TAs and professors in Political Science to use and build on. I want to take the time to thank and

applaud TAs and professors who are already using these practices in their classroom. I hope that we can continue to grow and encourage our students to revisit creative ways of expressing their identity, creating a new sense of belonging, and ultimately finding ways of healing that center themselves.

As I write this conclusion, I realize that this is what K-16 immigrant and educators of color have done for me; and that this is what I wish to bestow on Political Science university students of color. As a future professor in this field, I want to disrupt the white standards of education. I want to bring forth my future students' identities, with the intention of drawing upon our community cultural wealth to care for and heal one another. I want students of immigrant backgrounds to see their communities as practitioners of care and carriers of knowledge. I want to teach hope and empowerment. Like my former teachers, I believe that low income, immigrant, and other university students of color enter classrooms with a wealth of knowledge and feelings. I believe that by using pedagogies developed by immigrant and other teachers of color, current and future educators such as myself can use our classrooms as sites of healing and growth. I know that I alone will not fully change Political Science as a field; but I believe that I can change the Political Science classroom for my students. By embracing bell hooks' call to see teaching as a political act of resistance, learning and unlearning, I can practice a pedagogy that embodies the personal, values the community, and works toward liberation.

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WHERE IS THE LOVE? TOWARDS A PEDAGOGY OF RE-MEMBRANCE

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Abstract

Critical pedagogy researchers have persistently focused on a need for cultural relevance in their attempt to disrupt traditional pedagogical practices. There is also an acknowledgment of the past as a present reality for some, rooted in historical inequalities necessitating that care, empathy, and feelings be present in classroom settings. The inclusion of explicit temporal awareness, students, and students' affective and emotional reactions, however, has been understudied to date. As a result, I ask: what are the implications for students' emotional and mental well-being when educators engage in teaching practices that are absent of care, empathy, and love? In what ways does an educator's failure or refusal to acknowledge the impact of both past and present violence on students then impact their students' classroom experience as well as their motivation to politically engage in settings beyond educational institutions? Further, how can educators then mediate student responses and alleviate the ways in which pedagogical practices influence student's emotional responses? In this autoethnographic essay I argue that educators who wish to avoid the reproduction of harm against students or student disengagement must follow a loving ethos and engage in what I call a pedagogy of empathetic *re-membrance*. I draw upon ideas from critical, cultural, and intersectional pedagogical frameworks to propose my argument through the use of memory work, testimonio, and original Spanglish poetry. Most importantly, I intend to show that teaching practices that exemplify care, love, and temporal awareness may reinforce students' sense of agency, efficacy, and political empowerment.

Keywords: re-membrance, critical pedagogy, education, autoethnography, political participation

Where is the Love? Towards a Pedagogy of Re-membrance

Education and pedagogy are inherently political: they are shaped by political contexts and inform political action (Freire 1970, 1993, 2017; Niemi & Junn, 1998). In higher education, where educators may be committed to the awakening of student consciousness and post-graduation civic engagement, this assertion becomes even more crucial. However, in fields like Humanities, Social Sciences, or Ethnic Studies, where the context of knowledge being presented is deemed critical, violent, and political, Black Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) students may not arrive at the conclusion intended by educators seeking to increase political participation and civic engagement outside the classroom.¹² On the contrary, they may reach the opposite conclusion: disengagement, hopelessness, and cynicism to what they are learning. Feelings which ultimately prevent them from acting outside the classroom.

There's an obvious reason for this: the nature of history, especially for historically marginalized Brown and BIPOC students, is violent. Why would we assume that negative affective and somatic responses wouldn't be produced by exposure to emotionally charged violent or uncomfortable content? Some students may also be simultaneously living through similar experiences in their own lives. These realities can lead to students choosing to disengage both in and outside the classroom as a way to process and protect themselves from uncomfortable feelings or emotions. In light of this, I ask: what are the implications for students' emotional and mental well-being when educators engage in teaching practices that are absent of care, empathy, and love? In what ways does an educator's failure or refusal to acknowledge the impact of both past and present violence on students impact their classroom experience and motivation to engage in politics beyond the classroom? Further, how can educators mediate and alleviate the negative affective and somatic responses to painful histories and engage in pedagogical practices that empower students to become socially and politically engaged outside the classroom?

In the pages that follow, I argue that educators who wish to avoid harming or producing disengagement in students must follow a loving ethos and a combination of empathetic and temporally aware pedagogical practices. By engaging in what I will call a pedagogy of empathetic *re-membrance*, educators will be able to mediate the ways in which students react emotionally and process the information to which they are exposed to in the classroom.¹³ Specifically, I am advocating to center students' emotions and affective reactions, by *re-membering* the mind and body as *one*, prior to engaging in any kind of critical pedagogical

¹² As a political scientist, for the purpose of this paper I conceptualize political participation and civic engagement as both institutional and non-institutional methods such as voting, volunteering, or donating to campaigns, attending protests or meetings, civil marches, contacting local officials, organizing with local community members, belonging to grassroots organizations, etc.

¹³ The word re-membrance is used here as a play on word of the words: dismemberment and remembrance. To dismember (the body) is to cut off its limbs and/or parts. It is an act which exerts violence on both the body and person whom it's inflicted on. Remembrance is defined as the act of remembering something. Allen Tullos (1990) is among the scholars who discusses the theme of dismembering and remembering as embodied experience. Further, Roberto Lovato (2020) conceptualizes the word re-membering as the putting together of memories and historical facts long forgotten. Following both, I conceptualize re-membrance as a rejoining of emotions to the individual and disruption to the Cartesian mind-body dualism proposed by Rene Descartes (1952).

practice that could potentially be violent in nature to students' mental and emotional well-being.¹⁴¹⁵ This pedagogy also allows us to temporally "re-member" by acknowledging and allowing a reflection of how both history, or the past, and structural realities, the present, reverberate in students' lives. Doing so may allow students to leave the classroom committed to social, political and/or civic engagement.

Drawing from critical, cultural, and intersectional pedagogical frameworks (Crenshaw 2014; Freire 1970, 2017; hooks 1994; Ladson-Billings 1995; Yosso & Escobedo 2022), an ethics of care (Hill-Collins 1991; Noddings 1984), as well as my own experiences as an immigrant, first-generation Brown student, I propose that educators, especially those teaching violent, critical history must first and foremost approach their own teaching practices with love, empathy, and temporal sensitivity towards students.¹⁶¹⁷ To *re-member* the relationship between mind and body, the intellect and emotion, which has been dismembered and severed in classroom settings, love, trust and care must be present.

I also use autoethnographic reflections as a point of departure from which to suggest approaches and strategies that I intend to use in my own journey as a future professor of Political Science at a research university. I conclude that by engaging in an empathetic and temporally aware pedagogy, educators who aspire to teach for social justice *can* disrupt the notion that students must acquire all knowledge in a neutral, unemotional manner. More importantly, I intend to demonstrate that education can influence and prepare students to actively engage with each other and challenge the status quo through various methods of political participation.

Literature Review and Methods

While much of the research within critical pedagogy has focused on the need for a cultural relevance as a form of resistance in the classroom (Klug & Whitfield 2003; Ladson-Billings 1995; Ruday 2019; Scherff & Spector 2011), there is limited work on acknowledging emotions and affections as another way of knowing and form of resistance. Ladson-Billings (1995) asserts that her vision of a culturally relevant pedagogy is what is needed to address student achievement,

¹⁴ By violent, I am referring to the conceptualization of political violence which is defined by the National Institutes of Health as the deliberate use of power and force to achieve political goals. I further conceptualize violence in this case as the deliberate use of power and force by the institution of education and/or educators themselves, in order to achieve goals related to the politicization of students through the means of pedagogy which can be potentially harmful to students. The harm itself is not necessarily physical; it may be emotional and/or mental and may be inflicted by the disregard to account for emotions and affective responses to the content being taught which itself is usually violent as it depicts war, death, and other gruesome historical realities.

¹⁵ For further readings on political violence see Sousa (2013).

¹⁶ Due to the lack of scholarship on the operationalization of love, here I describe it as I conceptualize it to look like in a classroom setting. That is, first and foremost care for each other as human beings, respect for opinions of both teachers and students, mutual trust among each other, honest commitment to understanding differing points of view, and embrace of all emotional and affective reactions without judgment.

¹⁷ Due to the scope of this paper, empathy will be discussed through the lens of a few pedagogical frameworks. For further readings on empathy in the classroom see Hammond (2006), Cooper (2011), and Wynn, et al. (2022).

allow them to accept and affirm their cultural identity, and simultaneously develop critical perspectives. Her insistence on bringing the whole person into the classroom is great, but she does not specifically address emotions, thereby reasserting the separation of mind and body in a classroom setting.

Moreover, some critical pedagogical scholars have acknowledged that the past isn't always the past, and that the kind of violence students experience today has rooted historical inequalities (Crenshaw 2014; Freire 1970, 2017; Ladson-Billings 1995). Thus, the dire need for care, empathy, and feeling is inextricable from classroom settings (Cooper 2011; Hammond 2006; hooks 1994; Noddings 1984; Wynn, et al. 2022). For this reason, some scholars have acknowledged either the need to bring the mind and body into the classroom (hooks 1994) or the whole person into the classroom (Ladson-Billings 1995). To date however, the need to include students and their affective and somatic responses with temporal awareness into the classroom has been understudied. As a result, I draw upon these ideas in making my argument for a temporally aware, empathetic pedagogy of re-membrance.

Engaging with feminist epistemologies allows us to begin the process of re-membering students' bodies, hearts and minds through care and empathy, while simultaneously acknowledging the echoes of what they are living through in the classroom. Although it is not explicit in her work, Kimberlee Crenshaw (2014) has touched upon the theme of temporality; she argues that for most individuals, the intersection of their multiple lived identities does play out in different ways at the same time. Extrapolating from her critique, we can see that assuming all students in a classroom will be affected similarly by specific content or teaching practices actually serves to reinforce the same inequities critical scholars aim to abolish. However, Crenshaw's analysis doesn't specifically address the role of emotion in people's lives—or learning.

In order to fill in these gaps, I will draw upon existing critical, cultural, and intersectional scholarship as well as an ethics of care framework (Hill-Collings 2014; Noddings 1984) to reflect upon my own experiences as a learner in a range of higher education courses. I will demonstrate that educators who use a pedagogy of re-membrance—those who prioritize love and empathy within their classrooms and encourage critical reflections on injustice and the past alongside students' lived experiences—are able to mediate their students' reactions to painful or violent knowledge. They are also able to alleviate the potential harm or pain caused by a less thoughtful and caring presentation of course content. Through the use of memory work, testimonio, and original Spanglish poetry, I will also highlight the ways my own educators either exemplified a caring, loving and temporally aware teaching practice, or a lack thereof. Most importantly, I will demonstrate that faculty who taught in ways that acknowledged students' emotions and feelings and reinforced students' sense of agency and efficacy motivated us to engage in meaningful political action outside of the traditional classroom setting. In doing so, this empowered us to contribute to the (re)creation of a better world.

To Cry or Not Cry: Why Emotions Matter in the Classroom

Before beginning my analysis, it is important to explore the epistemic roots of the harm that teachers enact on their students as they dismember their bodies in a classroom. Educators who insist on only accepting a student's intellect and rationality, thereby depriving them of the opportunity to engage in affective behavior, are often guided by Eurocentric understandings of

the proper place and use of emotions in political life. Aristotle, for example, advised that emotions should be used in order to gain influence over others (Tabone 2020). Here, the prioritization of the use (or lack of) emotion when leading (or teaching) signifies their importance to the processes of ruling and other exercises of power. Plato, who conceptualized emotion as being one third of a tri-part of the soul, saw emotion and reason as polar opposites (Konstan 2006). That is, they are antagonistic to each other. This problematic notion remains central to the way that scholars view emotions to this day.¹⁸ As Marcus (2000) wrote, progress and democratic politics require less emotion and more reason.¹⁹ In other words, social advancement necessitates that emotion and reason maintain their place in a hierarchy, where reason exists above and dictates over emotion. Similarly problematic is Thomas Hobbes' view of emotions, and especially his belief that they are experienced by everyone in similar ways. According to Hobbes, it is only individual reactions that differ, and these are dependent on intrinsic and extrinsic factors, like one's education or social context.

“Chillona”

Chillona não llores mas

Stop being a crybaby

Que na vez que te vez mal?

How dare you expose you are sad

Porque no eres una niña normal?

Hush, hush now little darling

Tienes que aprender a disimular

You must adapt to this society

O atras te dejarán

Wipe your tears now

Y no las dejes escapar

Learn to think and act rational

Para que un hombre contigo se quiera casar

Ya chillona, don't you cry

Eres bella and that's enough.

¹⁸ The scope of this paper allows only a quick reference to few major views of emotions in political philosophy. For further inquiry on the beginning of empirical and scientific study of emotion as defined by Charles Darwin see *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872).

¹⁹ Marcus, “Emotions in Politics,” 221.

My father’s family nicknamed me “chillona” from a young age—the beginning of what would become a lifetime of gaslighting and attempting to control my emotions. They weren’t the only ones to tell me that I cry too much, however. This has been a constant reminder throughout my life in social circles, at work, and school. I used to believe the incessant need to have “control” over my emotions reflected my Mexican culture, but eventually I realized it applied more broadly to nearly all aspects of my life.

As revealed in my brief discussion above of Aristotle, Plato, and Hobbes, classical European literature and philosophy saw emotion—although subordinate to intellect—as one of the fundamental qualities of human nature.²⁰ Learning this allowed me to understand that my emotional reactions, especially those arising out of learning spaces like classrooms, were not unreasonable. It also granted me permission to seek answers for ways in which pedagogy played a role in the negative or positive learning experiences of students. That is, coming out of what Paulo Freire calls a traditional “banking education system,” one in which teachers being all-knowing, “deposit” information and knowledge *into* passive recipient students. I was expected to compartmentalize any emotions engendered during the process of being taught—even if the content was critical, violent, or traumatic. All of which is found in a variety of courses that are violent/traumatic for BIPOC students, including Ethnic Studies: an interdisciplinary area of study focused on racial and ethnic minority experiences and histories.²¹

Now, I want to be very clear: this is not an attack on Ethnic Studies, which has faced pushback by parents, educators, and citizens since its inception in the early 1960s and 1970s or any educator who engages in teaching a factual account of history. On the contrary, I approach this issue in the form of constructive criticism arising from my love for future generations and the world they will inherit. One in which they no longer have to fight for their right to learn their own history, nor suffer from doing so.²² Hence, my take is not so much about advocating for Ethnic Studies or critical teaching practice, but advocating for the students in those courses as well as others where students are confronted with similar information. It is no longer enough that specific content be taught, since a variety of scholars agree on the importance of teaching factual history relevant to students’ lived experiences as necessary to critical pedagogy (Delgado & Stefancic 2017; Gonzalez 2012; hooks 1994; West et. al 1995). What also matters is *how* that content is taught and the environment in which it is taught. This is what will truly make a difference in these students’ lives.

Pedagogy Without Empathy or Love

²⁰ Brader and Marcus, “Emotion and Political Psychology,” 165.

²¹ Nelsen, Mathew. (2020). *Educating for Empowerment: Race, Socialization, and Reimagining Civic Education*.

²² Existing literature on categorization of emotions (see Jasper 2011) exists. It is with this in mind that I conceptualize pain and suffering as varying degrees of emotional distraught. That is, similar to Jasper’s typology of emotions and feelings, I believe that pain and suffering can be differentiated by how long they last and are felt. Suffering to me is an ongoing and continuous state of being with an overall similar degree of intensity whereas pain can be an immediate reaction, with a much shorter lifespan. In other words, I see suffering as the consequence of unresolved, unmediated, and/or uncared for pain.

It is important to note that some of the topics covered in the fields mentioned previously will be violent or traumatic because of the nature of historical reality. Thus, if we are truly teaching history, we will not be able to remove the truth of this for students. We are going to have to grapple with the fact that to a certain extent, in certain topics, nothing will take the violence away. Yet, we can create a practice that is inclusive and aware of this fact. Being able to read the room as information is presented and received by students is an important skill to develop. Knowing when to take pauses and breaks for reflection will help alleviate the pain and/or discomfort that arise out of some violent/unpleasant history. But mediating this process requires empathy and love.

“Profe Knows Best”

Profe, profe turn that off

My panza twirls inside so bad

Siento que me voy a vomitar.

It doesn't matter if you say, “how sad”

Yo lo vivo en la realidad.

“Make sure you vote!”

They all declare

Porque no entienden

Voting is not fair.

Sin papeles aunque

We care

“la ley es la ley”

The system will say.

Pero l@s profes

Insist that voting's the way

Para que no se repite

The history they're teaching today.

Como quisiera que pudieran ver

The pain and suffering

De la que enseñan

Is still out there.

Pero no entienden

What they're doing to us inside

seen in class, until they felt forced to numb their feelings with alcohol, drugs-or simply stopped caring.

Perhaps being in my late twenties made a difference in comparison to peers in their late teen/early twenties, but having been through therapy for years by then, I knew there was something important missing within our classroom to help us with processing the content we were being exposed to. Especially when many of us came from diverse, working class, first-generation backgrounds. These histories not only hit home, they shook everything all up. Yet, most professors taught and behaved as if we were strangers to the material being covered, reminding us in a nonchalant manner to study for exams or get out and vote during election season if we wanted to see change. It mattered not if the material opened or reopened wounds for some of us. On the contrary, what mattered was that material was covered, and curriculum objectives were met. And that, for some “progressive” educators, they’d earned absolution from the guilt of no longer teaching “white-washed” history to students of color.

Where is the Love?

Traditional pedagogy portrays teachers as all-knowing in the classroom. Their responsibility lies in lecturing students so that knowledge is acquired by them without interrupting or questioning the teacher-student relationship. Not only is this approach hierarchical in nature, but it does not leave room for a true sense of understanding, mutuality, and reciprocity between teachers and students. Nor, importantly, does it allow space for students’ emotions and feelings, or for reflection on how their lived realities intersect with what is being taught in the classroom.

Critical, cultural, and liberation pedagogical scholars have thus called for a reimagination of education and teaching practices (Freire 1970, 1993, 2017; hooks 1994; Ladson-Billings 1995). Among them, Paulo Freire, bell hooks and Ernesto “Che” Guevara inform my own attempt at suggesting concrete teaching practices that are informed by a loving ethos and are relevant to students’ current day-to-day lives. This approach to pedagogy needs to be welcoming of critique, affective expression, and encourage students to process new information with empathy and care. Freire frames traditional teaching styles as a banking system in which educators simply distribute monotonous information to them. Thus, he provides a concrete critical pedagogical practice of how educators can provide a classroom environment which challenges students’ current indoctrination of being passive recipients of knowledge incapable of creating new knowledge themselves through dialogue.

Using what Freire calls “generative themes,” educators should engage different forms of resources such as images, videos, and sounds relevant to their students’ lives to elicit critical thinking from the students. In today’s age, these resources can include podcasts, movies, music, social media posts or memes, new reports, etc. This is helpful to encourage the dialogue needed in the classroom to allow co-creation of knowledge between students and teachers. It also allows students who would otherwise not necessarily relate to the material presented in the “traditional” banking system to engage critically since the material is now relevant to their daily lived experiences. Additionally, this is all the more crucial in courses where critical content is taught, because of the students’ experiential knowledge (which Freire acknowledges as important and necessary to the classroom) in the histories they are learning.

Following Freire's approach, bell hooks combines practical knowledge of the classroom with a deeper understanding and connection to emotions and feelings. Like Freire, she gears away from a traditional banking system of education and pushes for critical engagement and dialogue in the classroom. She is adamant about educators facilitating a classroom environment that allows students to be active participants rather than passive learners. However, she does so in a way that asks for a simultaneous active educator willing to embody themselves as a human being. That is, she rejects the assumed mind/body split in higher education where teachers and students are expected to only engage in behaviors relevant to the learning and knowledge without accepting individuals' physical needs such as breaks, the Eros, the erotic, and other affective states of being.²⁴²⁵

Instead, she acknowledges the body as essential to engaged pedagogy and learning and insists that by acknowledging the body we give permission to emotions and passion in the classroom. She accepts that "few professors talk about the place of emotions in the classroom [because] the underlying assumption is that to be truly intellectual we must be cut off from our emotions."²⁶ However, acknowledging that our mind and body are one in the classroom allows the disruption of conventional views as well as the notion that professors are omnipotent.²⁷ This is extremely important with any critical pedagogical framework, but even more in Ethnic Studies courses, as the material and content being taught can be deemed emotionally charged leading to intense emotions like sadness or anger.

Nonetheless, this is why following one of the fundamental tenets of revolutionary leader Ernesto "Che" Guevara's social pedagogy would help mediate, process, and acknowledge said emotions. Maintaining that "we must strive every day for that love for living humanity" since a "a true revolutionary is guided by deep feelings of love," Che's assertion of love was a guiding principle to the way he saw education.²⁸ Like hooks, he insisted that love for humanity is fundamental to the education of others and self. Moreover, similar to Freire, Che acknowledges that man (or the human being) is incomplete, and that dialogue is a necessity to a new form of education. Specifically, he deems persuasion, debate, and examples (including leading by example) as practical pedagogical methods. Success of these methods are obtained by constant self-reflection not just as educators but learners as well. In this sense, a basic principle of education for him reflects Freire's as well, "that you educate or instruct by learning from those who learn from or are educated by you."²⁹

²⁴ Eros is related to love and passion based on the definition of the Greek god EROS who was the god of love.

²⁵ The erotic is derived from Eros and defined by Audre Lorde (2017) as a "measure between the beginnings of our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings. It is an internal sense of satisfaction to which, once we have experienced it, we know we can aspire."

²⁶ hooks, bell. *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. 154-155.

²⁷ Idem. 138

²⁸ Guevara, Ernesto "Che." *Obras*. 382

²⁹ Turner Marti, Lidia. *Notes on Ernesto Che Guevara's Ideas on Pedagogy*. 63.

Opening the Door for Care in the Classroom

“Loving Care”

Na sé de dónde vengo

I’m not sure where I’ll go

Escribo en mi journal

Que Profe asignó.

“How does this shape your future?”

Pregunta al final

“Are you proud of your culture?”

“¿Qué harán con la verdad?”

This profe seems to care

De what we have to say.

Una persona amorosa,

They’re hard to find today.

Nos dice que aquí todos vamos

To build a better world.

Nos llena de energía

When we feel all alone.

En pláticas hablamos

Of things we want to do

Aunque seamos pocos

We’re hopeful to do good.

Building upon previous scholars’ framings of a pedagogical ethics of care (Noddings, 1984) and love, educators must approach teaching with compassion and empathy that is rooted in love, especially in classrooms where violent/traumatic content makes up the course. This can be practiced in different ways wherein love’s interpretation is subjective to the context of the learning experience. For example, Yosso and Escobedo (2022) suggest the use of storytelling through “counterstories” as a way to take lived experiences and an individual/student’s cultural references into account. If shared by both students and teachers in an environment that is free of judgment, empathetic and open to constructive criticism, students may walk out of the classroom feeling heard, validated, and loved.

During my undergraduate studies at California State University, Long Beach (CSULB), I had an amazing comparative ethnic studies professor who put these kinds of pedagogies into

practice. She held space and time during class to ask us how we were doing, how we were processing life (at the time the COVID-19 pandemic was well into its first year, changing lives drastically), and to check how the class was a current benefit for us. I specifically recall the Jamboard “check in” activities she’d have us participate in in the beginning of class.³⁰ Prompted by questions or statements such as, “*What was the highlight of your day/week? Name one thing that makes you happy you’re alive today. How are you feeling today? What is one way we can show up for each other during these difficult times?*” We then anonymously shared responses to the virtual whiteboard.

More than a check-in activity, these moments allowed us to see we were not alone and that there were many of us going through similar moments despite the solitude quarantine brought. It also created the opportunity to build community despite the limitations that online learning brought. There was no requirement in the course or university guidelines for her to do that for us, yet she understood many of us were struggling in dealing with external events and processing some of the gruesome information in class.

My teacher’s dedication to our emotional well-being allowed us to process our histories and not internalize any negative emotions that could potentially hurt our participation in other classes. Each day after having her class I felt hopeful about a present and future that otherwise terrified me. Whether she knew it or not, her ethos of love in the way she practiced teaching gave us the care and empowerment we needed as young undergraduate students learning awful histories (sometimes for the first time) all while living through one of the most critical public health emergencies in our lifetime.

This teacher understood that to teach from a culturally relevant, critical, and intersectional approach without centering the students themselves—and without empathy and care—is like going to community cleanups with non-recyclable garbage bags while ignoring the unhoused population living on the streets. Centering students’ emotions and affective reactions to the material being taught means accounting for them in the process of lesson planning. It requires teachers to plan for awkward moments and anticipate the unexpected. To allow space for various emotional responses, and to acknowledge them with genuine concern and an understanding that these topics may engender feelings that students may not understand themselves. It means including self-reflective activities and joining students by participating in them as well.

The Act of (Re)membering in the Classroom

As a junior in high school, I had an Advanced Placement English Language teacher who required that we have a writing journal, to self-reflect on the material we covered in class any way we wanted. She required the front and back of the journal to be a collage of everything that reflected who we were as human beings, and the pages inside to be our most sacred thoughts about anything related to the course. Although I threw away the journal long ago, I kept the front and back covers. In the front center were pictures of me as a child with my great-grandfather, the greatest love of my life. I also typed up and glued one of my favorite FDR quotes on the cover:

³⁰ Jamboard is a digital interactive whiteboard developed by Google to work with Google Workspace.

*“The ultimate victory of tomorrow is democracy, and through democracy with education, for no people in all the world can be kept eternally ignorant or eternally enslaved.”*³¹ The rest was full of more pictures, images of food, favorite song lyrics, apparel brands, and stickers I loved.

As I think back as to why I only kept the cover pages, I recall things I wrote and realize I subconsciously wanted to leave those memories in the past. Growing up in a poor working-class household on the west side of Long Beach, CA wasn't easy. My family faced a lot of financial and food insecurity, and for the majority of high school I relied on reduced lunch meals as well as my sophomore English teacher's free classroom pantry (she too taught me how care and love could be shown outside the limits of teaching—she always kept a stocked pantry in her classroom where I and others could stop by and help ourselves when we were hungry, no questions asked.) Race tensions were also high in our predominantly Black, Latinx, and Asian community. I was mugged several times as a teen. Add coming out as queer to very conservative Christian parents, and the pages of that journal filled up quickly with painful depictions of what I considered a miserable life at the time.

Our teacher wouldn't read our journals, unless we wanted her to; but once a week she checked that we wrote, or for the artistically inclined, drew in them. At the time we were reading books like *Grapes of Wrath*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and *The Scarlet Letter*. She understood these books were heavy, especially for teens going through the pain of puberty and young adulthood. She also knew that for some of us, these stories reflected a version of our own lived reality. By requiring us to have this journal, she allowed us to process everything in our own way, within our own boundaries. Although she never explicitly stated it, she cared and loved us enough to gift us the means to process emotionally heavy material as well as our own lives. This was the first time an educator allowed me to think and feel simultaneously—to rejoin and re-member my body and mind as one.

Towards Big Dreams

“Future Profe”

Un PhD voy a obtener

So I can teach

And lead the way

A mis alumnos cuidaré

With love and care

Les enseñaré

I hope to help them grow

And show

³¹ Roosevelt, Franklin D. (1941). “Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: F.D. Roosevelt, 1938, Volume 7”, 418.

Al mundo entero
Lo que es el amor
For our world
Y los demás
To open doors
Y quebrar walls.

To be an educator today is a privilege and gift. It is not bestowed on many people, and even worse, not many fully appreciate it. As a child I imitated my elementary school teachers, thinking someday I would have my own classroom and students, too. At the time, I was more interested in setting up cute cubicles and pretty pictures along the classroom walls. However, in my heart and soul I've always known I belonged among bright minds. Still, my goal of joining the academy as a political science professor who intends to challenge the status quo doesn't guarantee a prospective tenure-ship after I complete my degree. I worry about this, but not as much as I worry about the future of young, kind, bright students. The kind of world they're inheriting can at times seem frightening. It's hard to not despair, especially when you feel that power pushes back against educators who do critical and caring work. But in my opinion, the demand for these kinds of educators is at an all-time high.

In "Bridging Activism and Teaching in Latinx Studies," Lorgia Garcia Peña demonstrates the possibilities of foregrounding social justice as a clear goal in teaching. Her examples have helped me think through what a pedagogy of care means in relation to the university and surrounding community. As she accounts, Latinx students at Harvard University, an elite ivy league primarily white institution (PWI) that values itself on embracing student diversity, were nonetheless not supported or even given an actual Latinx Studies department. Despite resistance from Harvard's administration and a negative political climate which spilled into campus life, Garcia Peña was able to create a Latinx Studies course that provided space for students to come together, build community, and support each other. It was in these supportive spaces that students were given an opportunity to process the pain and fears many were living through during the Trump administration.

Garcia Peña offers a precise example of what holding space for the processing of emotions in the classroom looks like when she describes how she organized her class following the former president's election: "students came in holding each other; many cried. And for the first forty minutes of class, we allowed ourselves to feel fear, express anger, and to simply listen."³² Not many educators acknowledge political or current events, let alone provide classroom time to process them surrounded by peers. Garcia Peña's commitment to social justice, fueled by her love for her students, positions her as an exception. Yet, she should not be an exception. All educators should embrace their humanity and that of their students while teaching, especially during times of social or political struggle.

For years, I had a picture of a meme as my Facebook banner photo; it stated, "be who you needed when you were younger." It was a constant reminder of my desire to someday be a great

³² Garcia Peña, Lorgia. "Bridging Activism and Teaching in Latinx Studies," 509.

educator, mentor, and friend to students like me. To those of us who feel things deeply because our lives are lived deeply. To be a source of strength for those who've had their bodies, hearts and minds *dismembered* by society's norms and assumptions about the place of emotions and bodily sensations in the classroom. As I approach turning 30, I think I am finally ready to be that person. I have spent years *remembering* myself—putting back together the pieces of who I am so I can be whole. I have learned that I have to be part of the solution in a world full of injustice, to demonstrate love in thought and action in and outside the classroom.

Conclusion

Although the scope of this paper does not allow me to write extensively on the role of affect in learning, I nonetheless want to acknowledge that pain, discomfort, and other negative reactions are not the only emotions that may arise out of students' classroom experience. Joy, hope, and resistance are not mutually exclusive to anger, pain, and sadness. They can also occur temporally with each other. Even so, to date, these positive emotions and reactions of empowerment are what scholars have focused on in validating their pedagogical approaches (Ladson-Billings 1995; Freire 1970, 1993, 2017; Nelsen 2019; Nelsen 2021; Toscano Villanueva 2013; Pérez Huber 2017; Yosso & Escobedo 2022). I understand this focus: one has to prove that minoritized students will be empowered through a politics of positivity and recognition. For many years politicians and the media have framed Brown and BIPOC students as unintelligent or criminals or both, resulting in the need to prove that they are neither. As a Brown, poor, immigrant, queer cisgender woman, I have witnessed how several of these teaching practices played out firsthand. Yes, I, like many of my friends and peers, managed to survive and thrive—as many other students will continue to do. I have no doubt about that. Healing took a while, though, and I strongly believe this was in part due to the avoidance of the negative, uncomfortable, and too-often taboo feelings and emotions many of us deal with during our educational journeys. This is why I focus on them.

Through these autoethnographic reflections, I have sought to present a theoretical point of departure from which to begin crafting a pedagogy of remembrance, and to suggest approaches and strategies that I will make use of in my own teaching journey. I hope these suggestions will help other educators who teach in the social sciences, humanities, and other disciplines to engage with critical content more effectively in order to advance the cause of social justice. In doing so, I aspire to contribute to empowering a new generation of historically marginalized students to redefine traditional classroom settings while simultaneously engaging outside the classroom as active political participants in the (re)making of a just world.

I do not know if I will obtain a position as university professor someday; but I do hope that those with the title of an educator today reinvent their own pedagogical practices to center students' emotions and reactions to the content being taught. To teach critically and to be culturally relevant is no longer enough. Educators must also be empathetic and temporally aware of their students. To *re-member* students' minds, hearts and bodies means to pay attention to *how* critical knowledge is created, disseminated, and processed in the classroom. To educate with love for humanity at your core is the beginning of reinventing the ways we teach and learn with one other. For those committed to passing on a kinder, more inclusive, better world, my words shouldn't come as a surprise—for we hold on to love, no matter what. For those who may find

this essay's argument a bit "out there," I invite you to reconnect with your heart. Hopefully along the way, you join us all.

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INTERROGATING RAZA NARRATIVES: A STORY OF BELONGING, CONFIDENCE AND HOPE

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Abstract

As a doctoral student at a research-intensive public Hispanic Serving Institution and a Teaching Assistant in Chicana/Latina Studies, I have engaged in a constant process of self-reflection around how to teach beyond the assumptions and generalizations embedded in the ideologies of Chicanismo and dominant academic culture. In this essay, I use autoethnographic reflection in dialogue with Black feminist and radical theory to interrogate my educational experiences and identity, and to reflect on how anti-Blackness enters the Chicano/Latino Studies classroom. I argue that violence has been upheld within Chicano studies through its reliance on “Raza” narratives that are often used to uplift and empower students as well as to inform the disciplines’ vision of liberation and shape its educational methods. While these narratives may have at one point served to established a sense of belonging among Chicana students, I argue that notions of “la Raza” work against Chicana/Latina educators’ commitment to teach with social justice values in mind; to support our student’s critical skills development; and to uplift the varying experiences that these narratives tend to erase. In concluding, I explore alternative pedagogical methods that I have experienced in the classroom, that I now attempt to integrate in my own practice to articulate a more informed and empathetic praxis, rooted in the teachings of Black radical feminist and radical traditions, while promoting a critical commitment to social justice among my students, and especially Black and Afro-descendent students I may have in my classes.

Keywords: Standpoint theory, Centering and Decentering, Chicana Studies, Black Radical Tradition, Critical Pedagogy

Interrogating Raza Narratives: A Story of Belonging, Confidence and Hope

Despite a history of many Mexican Americans, the existence of Chicana/Latina Studies departments in American universities is the fruit of hard labor to find representation in the U.S. higher education system. But Chicano Studies relies on a set of racist and settler colonial-derived “Raza” narratives that inform the disciplines’ vision of liberation and shape its educational methods. While these narratives may have at one point served to uplift and empower Chicana students and establish a sense of belonging for them in academia, I argue in this essay that notions of “la Raza” work against Chicana/Latina educators’ commitment to teach with social justice values in mind; to support our student’s critical skills development; and to uplift the varying experiences that these narratives tend to erase. This means confronting one’s ability to link to whiteness for many non-Black Latina student.

As a doctoral student at a research-intensive public Hispanic Serving Institution and a Teaching Assistant in Chicana/Latina Studies, I have engaged in a constant process of self-reflection around how to teach beyond the assumptions and generalizations embedded in the dominant ideologies of academic Chicanismo. In this essay, I use autoethnographic reflection in dialogue with Black Radical Tradition to interrogate my life story, educational experiences, and identity, in order to reflect on how anti-Blackness enters into the Chicano/Latino Studies classroom. I explore alternative pedagogical methods that I have experienced in the classroom, and that I now attempt to integrate in my own practice. In doing so, I hope to articulate a more informed and empathetic praxis, rooted in the teachings of Black radical feminist and radical traditions, and promote a critical commitment to social justice among my students.

Raza Narratives: Embracing our Past?

The Raza narratives at the heart of academic Chicanismo rest on historic notions of racial mixture, known in Mexico and other parts of Latin America as “mestizaje.” Mestizaje as a term was first used to describe Mexicans’ national identity by José Vasconcelos, an elite bureaucrat (and supporter of the eugenics movement) during the turn-of-the-century Mexican revolutions. The “mestizo” identity was framed as a way of “whitening” Mexico’s population by promoting the myth of Spanish and Aztec blood being the foundation of the Mexican nation. Mestizo nationalism was thus first a project to erase both indigenous and African histories in Mexico; and later, in the US southwest, it became central to the ideology of Chicanismo, and the Raza narratives that informed it, during the 1960s. Raza narratives have thus naturalized colonial ideologies of anti-Blackness in both nations. What’s more, the idea of mestizaje continues to inform popular understandings of Mexican and Mexican American identities today. The phrases, “mejorando la Raza” and “viva la Raza!” are often used by Mexican Americans, in a literal sense, to refer to the processes of “whitening” oneself and one’s family through intermarriage with European origin people or through achieving the socioeconomic success associated with the American dream.

During my undergraduate journey at Eastern Washington University (EWU), I took several Chicano Studies courses, where I experienced the harm that can result from Raza narratives. When my Salvadoran friend and I took a Chicana course together, the professor forced the Chicana identify on her, describing her migration story and use of the Spanish language as a connection to Chicanismo. Calderon and Urrieta discuss how similar forms of

intellectual violence are experienced by indigenous students (2020). Raza narratives covered up the gender-based violence in Chicana communities. My Chicana friends were assaulted by men that used the narratives of la “Raza” to drive their own activism. At the same time, women activists were harassed for “not doing enough” to support the male leaders of Chicana student organizations. When I joined MEChA, I saw there how my women and queer peers overexerted themselves, only to endure repeated critiques by men in the movement.

Later, after learning about Chicana feminism for example through Gloria Anzaldúa work’s, I thought I’d found my place to feel empowered. I could have stayed there, without further critiquing the ideology of mestizaje; but conversations with my indigenous friends challenged me to consider that a mestizaje-informed vision of liberation was not helpful. In fact, it was actually damaging. Reflecting on these discussions, I realized that there is anti-Black violence embedded in Chicano’s complete ignorance of Blackness. I then had to reflect on the harm I had done to Afro-Latina people. Once, in the bathroom, I’d heard one of my Black colleagues speak in ‘perfect’ Spanish on the phone. When I asked her where she learned the language, she replied by checking me. “I’m from Honduras. Soy Garifuna.” I had never been so embarrassed. I’d said something racist and hurt someone. This is where I learned that maybe there were times I should just shut up, listen, and learn from what I hadn’t personally experienced.

Of course, I apologized, but it wasn’t enough, without doing the work to challenge how I came to the assumptions I had about my Afro-Honduran colleague. I had learned about an idealized and deified Chicana history but not the nuances of the varying Latina or African American histories and their resistance traditions, which the Chicano movement had drawn so heavily upon. I had not learned about Afro-Latinidad. These omissions in my education were forms of intentional violence that occur when the centering of one experience is used as a focal point for liberation movements, rather than incorporating other communities’ knowledge to frame a more inclusive model of resistance. Histories are not separate from one another.

In my own educational journey, I am having to confront my own bias; but I want to work on the development of critical skills to find new ways of navigating the privilege that comes with my own linkage to whiteness. Through study and discussion, I have realized that it is important to not conflate people’s experiences or generalize them. I have learned from López Oro (2020) about their refusal to only identify as Garifuna and not as Latina or Afro Latina, since to do so erases part of their identity and experiences (2020). In the same way, I’ve learned not to use the term “Mexican” and “Latina” interchangeably, because I want to make sure I honor individual experiences. In my classroom as in my life, I do not want to speak for others, but through me with others in mind.

Self-Reflection and Confrontation: The Pedagogical Contributions of Black Feminists and the Black Radical Tradition

It wasn’t until I had the privilege to take courses in Africana studies at EWU with Dr. B that I really had to face the contradictions of Chicana studies. Her course on Black Women and Black Feminism challenged what I thought I knew about liberation and helped me see how Raza narratives communicated assumptions and generalizations that erased a more complex understanding of racial power dynamics. My engagement with Black Feminism and Black

Radical Traditions has continued at the University of California, Irvine as a doctoral student. I have learned from participating in the critical race theory reading group, in courses on race and ethnicity with Dr. P, and in my Black Digital Humanities class with Dr. W and Dr. M. I've learned from the literature we studied, but from their teaching styles. I witnessed and experienced an empathy I have not felt in other courses. In those courses I felt treated with grace and love. Even the simple breaks provided during class were provided with intention, in order to allow my majority-Black colleagues to rest from studying and reflecting on histories of enslavement and equally painful contemporary issues, before rethinking whether and how records related to these topics should be digitized.

Questions I asked in these courses were key to helping me develop a new critical lens. I was supported to go to conferences such as the National Conferences of Black Political Scientists (NCOBPS), Dr. W and Dr. M taught us professional skills to access financial support to attend. They used the class space to teach publishing skills. These practices are part of their broader commitment to a pedagogy of care, intention, and self-reflection.

Therefore, before I explore the dangers of centering the notion of *mestizaje* as an ideology for liberation or as the basis for critical pedagogy, I want to ground this work through the practice of self-reflection developed by Black feminist and radical scholars. Looking inward, I think about Patricia Hill-Collins' (2002) argument that Black women's historically intimate relationship with both the structures of white supremacy and the consequences of violence within the Black community has allowed them to develop a dual Insider/Outsider perspective that promotes critical self-reflection. I turn to James Baldwin, who writes about his own experiences with the Nation of Islam Brotherhood's racially exclusive mythmaking to interrogate the parallel dangers of Chicana "Raza" mythmaking, and how it has become a way to replicate oppressive systems for self-sustaining purposes (1963). To move toward praxis, I ground myself within bell hooks work in *Teaching to Transgress*, where she talks about the burden put onto Black students during the period of midcentury school integration and the consequences of their incorporation into a Eurocentric education system that promoted the separation of mind and body (1994).

I extend on Baldwin's observations to critique the violence of the *Raza* narratives embedded in key Chicano Movement documents, including the Plan de Santa Barbara and poems by Corky Rodriguez. Through them, I see how the notion of "Raza" has been used to create a sense of belonging; I can trace how and why it was adopted within the movement, and why it has, until now, not been adequately interrogated. I sit with the reality that the notion of *mestizaje* has informed how ideas of race have operated within the Mexican nation, the Chicano movement, and now in the Chicano/Latino Studies classroom.

But I recognize the fine line between self-reflection and appropriation. For example, in many Chicana pedagogies, notions of the importance of care work have been adapted from bell hooks' conceptualizations. hooks talk about the burden Black students and educators had to take on during the integrationist movement to then have to adjust to learning in a way that created the mind and body split (1994). But the new meanings assigned to hooks' work often loses their intentionality in this new context. Care work, as theorized by hooks, is needed in Chicana Studies courses; but what has been done to think about Black and indigenous students that fall inside and outside the Mexican experience? Empathizing with my Black comrades only through the adoption of their ideas is an act of violence against the labor of love that went into their work,

and only using them for my own benefit is dehumanizing to those who have been “Blackened” (Hartman 1997).

Therefore, as I consider my own evolution as an educator, I continue to reflect within my teaching methods the reality of anti-Blackness in the curriculum. My commitment is to acknowledge the experiences of Black and Afro-descent students to lighten the emotional burden they take on in Chicana/Latina studies that incorporate the embracement of *mestizaje*. As a Mexican American, I provide useful skills as an educator that can be potential towards manifesting empathy. Hartman theorizes the problems of non-Black people developing empathy for Black people, only when they are prompted to situate themselves within the Black experience (1997). So, I make the argument to focus on the violence cause by anti-Blackness and caution to think of the violence one causes or can cause not because we see ourselves in the place of our Black students but because we see them.

Praxis: Student to Teaching Assistant to Future Faculty Member

As the daughter of Mexican migrants, I grew up in a predominantly white community in Eastern Washington and went to both high school and earned my undergraduate degree in predominately white institutions. What kept me in these spaces were teachers and professors that led me to ethnic studies, and teachers that shared their stories as undocumented immigrants. Those spaces offered an alternative reality where Chicana and Latina people existed not just as numbers, but as people. When I had so little to cling to, spaces that discussed racial injustice and social movements helped uplift me from states of depression. But within those spaces I faced contradictions that pulled me back into spaces of non-existence. Many times, the critiques we learned in Chicana Studies classes were not applied to other marginalized communities. To recognize the harm this has done, Chicana people and especially educators must look inward, not just as a community touched by oppression but as enactors of it.

So then, how does one teach a *lo Latiné* while honoring the intentions of Black feminist and radical traditions? How do I teach those who have heard the same awful things my Mexican immigrant father said about Black people and other racial minorities—and even about other members of our community?

Now that I am a graduate student and Teaching Assistant, I have used my new agency within Chicana/Latina Studies courses to insert new narratives into the discussion space, to uplift my students, and to inculcate self-reflection skills. To reshape Raza narratives in the classroom takes a lot of learning—and unlearning. It is a continuous confrontation. I know my own experiences, but I know that my history is not separate from those who have come before or stand beside me now. I’ve learned that those with whom I may not share an affinity can become targets of Anti-Black structures. And I’ve realized that my words can be used to create harm for other minoritized people, since in non-Black learning spaces I have a responsibility to caution introductions of other experience to not repeat a cycle of overgeneralizing experiences.

My commitment to a pedagogy that centers social justice and Black feminist thought shapes everything from my planning to what I do within the classroom. On the first day of class, I introduce myself without generalizing or playing into stereotypes that reinforces Raza narratives. I have created a list of academic, student life and emergency resources for students

that I include in my syllabi so students can find what they need in one place. I do this because students might not trust me enough to begin with, or even throughout the course of our time together, to ask me for help. I recognize that my body can itself engender distrust, as I am a representative of the violence that can be embedded in academia. I believe that if my body represents potential violence, I need to confront that to find creative and different ways to assist students. I hope to lighten the burden of my Black students through these practices.

In my lesson plans, I use group exercises to expose students to different perspectives. I do guide the learning environment, making clear that intolerance will not be permitted in my classroom. But just as I come into the classroom with assumptions about the characters of others as an undergraduate, I know my students now do the same. I don't want to reaffirm these kinds of assumptions, but I recognize that my students have been shaped, as I was, by both dominant educational culture and the ideology of Chicanismo. I plan to meet students in the middle, to challenge assumption building processes together. When I present scholarship that does promote mestizo/Raza narratives, I walk with caution, explaining the entirety of its origins and countering those narratives by sharing histories of Mexicans who have Black ancestry. I am always cautious when I bring in those experiences to individualize them but also talk about broader structures of anti-Blackness.

I am careful to talk about humans without dehumanizing them. I have been in classes where violence in Mexico and the US were simplistically contrasted and then compared with the violence of the transatlantic slave trade. This was a gross interpretation of the violence that has occurred in both nations. As a Teaching Assistant, I have offered students alternative and more humanistic ways of understanding anti-Blackness in Mexico and the U.S. I do debriefs after discussing emotionally heavy topics, as we do have to study the realistic outcome of capitalistic heteropatriarchal systems.

I use other mediums, such as poetry and music, to expose students to different perspectives on the problem of mestizaje. When discussing the history of the Mexican diaspora, I might play the song *Tres Veces Mojado* (three times a wetback), by Los Tigres del Norte; or to talk about anti-Blackness from the understanding as it manifests in Puerto Rico, Tego Calderon's song *Loiza* (2009; 2015)³³. I have shared poems by Ariana Brown that discuss her experiences as a Black Mexican and the love she has found with her Black peers (2021). Another practice I incorporate in my own classes is to have a single writing assignment that students work on throughout the entire course. This allows me to spend time guiding each student and providing them with feedback. Students were able to sit with literature longer and develop their projects with more extensive guidance. I've developed these practices and skills with encouragement from Dr. C, a Latina professor who has taken the time to care for my development as an educator with me and my students in mind. They have helped me access different forms of support for students beyond my limited resources, by providing funding to organize study sessions outside of office hours. This has given me the liberty to provide snacks and allows students to come to a space where they are not expected to have shaped specific questions in advance, but rather to drop in when they need help or want to brainstorm with TA guidance.

³³ *Tres Veces Mojado*, is a song written to discuss the hardships of Salvadoran migration to the US and brings up the contradictions of Mexico's anti-immigrant violence against Central Americans. *Loiza* is a reggaetón song discussing the problems of mestizaje as conceptualized in Puerto Rico, and the violence of the police system that has affected Afro-Puerto Rican people.

Discussion and Conclusion

What is Chicana studies? What is teaching a *lo Latiné*? Scholars have developed a range of Chicana and other Latina pedagogies that work to dismantle the violence embedded in hierarchical top-down teaching approaches. As a field, Latina/é Studies has begun to confront the dangers of centering *mestizaje* as a basis for community empowerment, and for Mexican America Studies to consider how the myth of *Aztlán* has harmed and erased indigenous communities in Mexico and the U.S. Southwest. But what is the responsibility of those of us who will become educators? We might work in communities we are not familiar with. All these areas have their histories. We will have different students. As educators, when we enter spaces, we need to be attentive that we come with our own experiences in facing and overcoming violence; but we need to remember that thinking our story applies to everyone is dangerous to students who have different lives.

There are practical ways we can avoid causing this harm to our students, such as learning about the histories of the lands we live on and the indigenous communities that reside there. Reflecting on the role of anti-Blackness in the outlook of our own communities and the other communities to whom our teaching is so important. Furthermore, we must recognize the work that has been done by others to reinvent an educational system that has encouraged the separation of our minds and bodies. Most importantly, as Chicana and Latina educators, we must recognize that those that benefit from *Raza* narratives have helped to create that mind/body split hooks has critiqued.

Raza narratives have empathized with colonial tradition. They empathize with a mythology of indigenous identity that overshadows the histories and struggles of indigenous communities today. The step further we need to take is to confront that *Raza* narratives were created in part to erase the violence of the transatlantic slave trade within Mexico. I thus conclude that the *Raza* narratives that are used to empower students are grounded in an ideology empathetic to whiteness; and that desire to remain linked to whiteness needs to be pushed from the Chicana/Latina Studies classroom.

Through Black feminist theory, I have learned more about myself than even in my Chicana studies courses, where I realize I myself have been a participant in the reproduction of oppressive structures. From Black feminists, I learned about care work; I learned about teaching horizontally. I learned about intersectionality. I learned about mythmaking, and the shades of gray between danger and security. All these lessons helped me learn about myself. I learned that we, as Chicana people, need to confront our own colonial history, which is rooted in policing the speaking of Spanish, whitening oneself as a path to social mobility, and the strict performance of heteropatriarchal gender roles. These very structures are core to recreating the *Raza* narratives which erase the histories of class struggle, indigenous oppression and Black enslavement, the legacies of which are still present in our classrooms.

In this essay, I have reflected on how notions of “*la Raza*” work against Chicana/Latina educators’ commitment to teach with social justice values in mind. Building on lessons I’ve learned from Black feminist and radical traditions, I echo scholar Jordie Davies, who challenges us to critically reflect on how we understand the U.S. racial order as a process of triangulation and discuss the direction of resource hoarding that creates linked fate divisions to move toward

coalition building and construct a linked fate that resist anti-Blackness (2022). I therefore want to end this essay with a call to action to non-Black Chicax/Latinx faculty, present and future, at both Predominantly White (PWIs) and Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs). Instead of taking center and decenter from Hill-Collins, I propose self-reflection through constant acknowledgement and decentering mediation for non-Black educators and students alike: as a form of self-confrontation that acknowledges our own struggles but also how our ability to escape anti-Black violence tempts us to choose to empathize with and link ourselves to whiteness; as well as a method for creating curricula and pedagogies with the intention of minimizing the harm caused by anti-Blackness.

Those who aspire to teach for social justice a lo Latiné must reflect both inwardly and outwardly about what it means to resist through teaching. In order to support our student's critical consciousness and build new solidarities, we as educators must each negotiate how to balance empowerment through cultural pride, without romanticizing Raza narratives or a flawed "mestizo" identity that situates itself in whiteness.

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VIEWING STUDENTS AS A WHOLE: A REFLECTION ON MY K-16 JOURNEY

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Abstract

For educators, crafting a social-justice teaching practice can be challenging. Reflecting on our own K-16 journey can help us develop a pedagogical approach that centers students and sees them as whole persons, not just as test scores or bodies that you see once a week. To that end, this essay uses autoethnographic reflection as well as poetry to help uncover a teaching approach that centers students, while also being critical of standardized testing, the power of educational institutions and traditional teaching approaches.

Keywords: pedagogy, autoethnography, K-16, student centered education, English learners, standardized testing

Viewing Students As a Whole: A Reflection on My K-16 Journey

The first time I became aware of the work of Paulo Freire was on a warm fall afternoon at a community organization teach-in. I liked the format of that teach-in. We all just sat in a circle and talked about different things that we found interesting about Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Doing this kind of discussion made it possible for everyone to participate in any way that they liked, and it was okay for people to be wrong and ask questions, which was something that throughout high school I was not exposed to. This was the first time I learned about the work of Paulo Freire; but it was not the last time Freire would make an appearance in my academic life.

Inspired by Freire's critical pedagogy, this autoethnographic essay will look at some of the ways that the U.S. K-16 public education system fails to see students as whole individuals and fails to meet their multiple overlapping educational needs. Specifically, I will use memory work and poetry to explore my experiences as a low-income, undocumented Latinx immigrant and English learner student with dyslexia. Key moments in my K-16 journey will be addressed, starting in fourth grade, when I first entered the US school system; then during ninth grade, when I saw the impact of standardized testing on students like me, and how these forms of testing fail to address the language-learning needs of low-income immigrant and other ELL students. The final time period discussed in this essay will be my community college journey, where I found my voice as a writer and scholar in Chicana Studies courses. I will conclude with a discussion of the teaching approach I now employ in my own discussion sections now that I am a graduate student and a TA.

Literature Review

Research on the impact of standardized testing on English-learning students mainly focuses on the misdiagnosis of English-learning students (De Valenzuela et al., 2006, Fletcher & Navarrete, 2003). The limited literature that analyzes the negative impact of standardized testing on English learning students is critical of the cultural and classed norms that underly these tests and argues for alternative assessment methods that center students' strengths as well as their cultural and linguistic needs (Kraimer & Fabiano-Smith 2017). However, there is little research to date that looks at the under-diagnosis of English learners with learning disabilities who underperform on standardized tests, and the long-term negative impacts of students not getting the learning accommodations that they need. This essay therefore aims to bridge the gap between the literature on English learner/learning disability mis- and under-diagnosis and the negative outcomes of standardized testing on ELL students with complex needs, while also adding to the growing literature that is critical of standardized testing.

No puedo leer eso; no sé leer inglés

One of the main moments of my academic journey that I keep on revisiting again and again over the years is my fourth-grade experience, the grade at which I first entered the US school system. There were a lot of firsts in my fourth-grade experience that I would never like to repeat as an educator in my classroom.

Popcorn Read

Green and pink was the color of my fourth-grade social studies book. There were a couple of pictures on the front cover. That was all I was able to see at the time. I was not able to read anything, because I had just arrived in the US a couple of months back and was still learning the basics of English. Social studies class was the first time that I came to know what popcorn reading was. I remember my teacher very well, and her happy customer-service voice. One of my classmates said my name and another one of my classmates explained to me what popcorn reading was in Spanish. A couple of my other classmates mentioned to the teacher that “she doesn't know English” and “she just got here.” But my teacher with the customer service voice did not care, even when multiple classmates voiced that there was no possible way for me to read in English. There was no way of stopping her from making me read out loud. I remember trying really hard, but I could not sound the words out. I was used to reading in Spanish, not English. Some of my classmates whispered some of the words to me. Time seemed to slow down, and there was no way to make it move faster. Ever since, I have never liked to popcorn read, because it always takes me back to fourth grade. Whenever I hear that we are going to popcorn read, for some reason, the words always seem to slow down. I start to read the paragraph in advance just in case I am chosen. But every time I popcorn read, time still seems to slow down, and I travel back in time to a time I don't ever want to go back to.

The approach to teaching that my fourth-grade teacher was using is what Paulo Freire references as the “banking concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the student extends only as far as receiving, filing and storing the deposits” (Freire, 1970, p. 45). In my case, the banking approach that my teacher was using came in two forms. The first was that I was no longer in a Spanish-speaking country, and English was the language that was used. My teachers wanted me to dive headfirst into reading in English because that was the language in which the curriculum was taught. My teacher felt that I needed to immediately start to learn to read English, and one of the ways that she thought I would learn was just by making me read out loud to the class even when I did not know how. She also did not listen to the students; their suggestions and insights did not matter. She was a teacher who had a degree from an institution of higher education that gave her the authority to teach students, even if she was not well equipped to support students that were new to the English language. My classmates shared their knowledge with our teacher, but the teacher did not pay attention to them. Instead, she used the power she had over us to make me read. To make me understand that I was now in a country that was English-speaking and that all of my school materials were going to be in English.

A One Size Fits All Approach to Education Helps No One

In this section, I will touch on my own experiences being an ESL student during the No Child Left Behind Era.

Ninth Grade Was Supposed To Be Different

After standing in a long line to get my class schedule for ninth grade, I was happy to see that I was not in double English, double reading, and double math classes like I was in Jr. High. In eighth grade, I had worked hard to get good grades in both math and science class to get recommended by my teachers to take a class higher than that of incoming freshmen. When I looked at my schedule and saw that I only had a “regular” English class, I truly felt that I was at the start of something new. I no longer had to take double classes; I could take fun electives. Because when I was in Jr. High, I didn't have any electives. It was all supposed to be different. But all those nice thoughts came crashing down in my first-period class, the science class that I had worked so hard to get into. Someone from the office came to get me from the class. As I heard my name mentioned, I grabbed all my stuff, put it in my backpack, and took the popular vampire book of the 2010s that I was reading for fun in my hands. I walked out of Biology class with the people from the office and walked to the classroom where I was going to take another reading class. I remember feeling like no matter how hard I tried, there was no way for me to ever just be enrolled in regular classes. All because I'd scored low in English and writing on a standardized test. As I walked back into the ELL room and took my seat, the teacher asked about the book that I was reading. They said that I could give a small summary of the book, and that would count for credit instead of the book quizzes we were supposed to take.

Throughout my education journey, I felt that no matter how hard I tried, even if I had recommendations from my teachers to take higher-level classes, my test scores always caught up to me. I was placed again and again in English learning classes that never got to the reasons I placed lower in some areas than others. These classes reflected what Freire calls “the lovelessness which lies at the heart of the oppressor's violence, even when clothed in false generosity” (Freire, 1970, p. 19).

On paper, placing students that have low scores in the English section of the standardized test might in remedial classes might look like a good idea. In reality, just placing students in a class and having them learn to make outlines and take quizzes on books they have already read just helps create data that shows that the school system is doing something to help students, when in reality, they are not. When ELL learners like me were pulled from our mainstream classes and taken back to remedial classes, we were not asked how we felt about our test scores or if we even though those tests were accurate or fair. Or even asked if we thought there were barriers to our learning that needed to be addressed in order for us to score higher on standardized tests. We were all just numbers, not individuals.

My seven-year community college journey

Community College helped me build my foundation as a scholar. I would not be the scholar that I am today had I not started my higher education journey at my local SoCal community college. I started as a Psychology major, became a student and community organizer, and finished as a Chicana Studies major. I feel that my scholarly foundation was built in community college because I was allowed to experiment, something I was not able to do during my K-12 journey. There were more people that truly cared about my educational journey and

wanted me to succeed, another thing I didn't really feel I had earlier. Or maybe people thought they cared; but I was not helped in a way that allowed me to voice my opinion and discomfort. Community college, and my journey from psychology to Chicana Studies major, gave me a different idea of what education could be..

Autopilot

While looking at my transcripts while I was applying to graduate school, I came to the realization that I could only remember some of the classes that I took in community college. I could count the classes I remembered on two hands, which is weird, because I spent seven years in community college. But then I realized that I was not there to learn in some classes; I was there to just pass or drop the class. Fourth and ninth grade “me” were making the decisions for me in those classes, not present-day “me.” Fourth-grade me looked away from watching cable cartoons, and ninth-grade me looked up from the book they were reading, and now they were in charge. When the feeling that I felt in those two grade levels were felt again, they knew how to respond. Fourth and Ninth grade me made executive decisions on when we were going to drop classes and pretended to go to them so my parents wouldn't get mad; we would just walk around downtown while drinking coffee. Or if we were going to stay in the class and pass. In the classes that we decided to stay in, we went to office hours, participated, and got As, Bs, and Cs. But we didn't learn anything. Because we were not there to learn; we were just there to pass the class.

I enrolled in community college because that was the only place I got help enrolling. Growing up undocumented, my parent and I did not know how to fill out college applications. The college aid that was offered in high school was focused on helping US citizens enroll in college. The California Dream Act, which provides financial aid for undocumented students to continue their postsecondary education, had not been put in place yet. One of my Dad's coworkers was taking classes at a local community college, and he said that he could get us an appointment with a counselor. We booked an appointment while I was still in high school, and in the summer of 2012, I started to take classes. In that same year, the California Dream Act was enacted, and I was able to get financial aid.

Not everything went smoothly in community college. There were still some lingering aspects that I was used to from my K-12 journey, such as being required to take placement tests, and scoring below what was considered “college level” English. Some classes that I was taking were modeled after the Banking Model, but there was also something different that was going on in my community college. By that time, I was used to feeling the feelings I'd felt both in fourth and ninth grade. After years of navigating the K-16 school system, these feelings helped me assess what learning environment I was in and what way I should act. For the classes that made me feel like I was back in elementary or middle school, I knew how to act. I was not there to learn; I was just there to pass the class. This is why I don't remember a lot of the classes that I took over the course of seven years.

Like many low-income students, I also struggled financially as a college student. While I was a psychology major, the books that were assigned were very expensive, and I was not able to buy all of the books that I needed for all my classes. I had to rely on the copy that was put on

hold at the library. Every so often, the professor changed the page numbers that we had to read, or changed the homework assignment the night before it was due. There was no way for me to do the new assignment the night before class; I did not have access to the book. But the professor just assumed that everyone had the money to buy the book and therefore could do the assignments at any time. Here again was the feeling of no matter how hard I tried, I would not get the grade I was working on getting. When student voiced their concerns to the professor, she just brushed it off and shared a story about how much she had suffered in school. She talked about her upper-class parents paying for her disability therapy and how, if she'd made it, so could we. There was no reflection on how her actions might have affected students' learning outcomes; there was no accountability on her end. After feeling the same feelings that I was used to, I knew I would not pass this class. The day I dropped that psychology class was the day I decided to change my major to Chicax Studies.

The 2016 presidential elections came around, and I then realized that I had spent four years at my community college—which brought forward again the feeling I felt when I was an ELL student. I again felt that I had missed the mark. I had not transferred out of community college in two years, as expected, and I was unhappy with my major. But even while having all these feelings, something kept me from dropping out. The care that people showed me during this strange time period in US history was the thing that helped me not drop out. While there were unfriendly spaces on campus, there were also some welcoming ones. People in those friendly, kind spaces showed something that Freire calls “true solidarity (1970, p. 25).”

The day that Trump got elected was a weird day. It felt like I was in a movie. I was scared that DACA was going to be taken away and I was going to get deported. At the transfer center which also doubled as a cultural center (I was always there hanging out and doing my homework, so the people that worked there knew me), they asked me how I was doing, and if there was anything that they could do to help me. They also asked me if I would do a workshop about the current state of DACA to see how they could better help undocumented students. This, to me, showed true solidarity because they took students' feelings into account and wanted to create an environment in which people felt truly welcomed.

Another group of people that asked if I was okay after Trump's election were professors that I knew because they were student club advisers. Some of them were in the staff senate, and I had conversations with them. They were kind people whom I felt approached their teaching with kindness. Some of them had been first-generation Latinx college students who were also student organizers. They knew about the not-so-nice side of academia. They made me feel like I could be an organizer as well as a scholar. I am not the only student whose life was changed by these kinds of displays of solidarity from faculty. In their article *Bridging Activism and Teaching in Latinx Studies*, Lorgia Garcia Peña notes that after Trump got elected, her professors also created this important space for students to share their feelings. (2021, p. 504). By 2016, I wanted to be in classes organized around these kinds of pedagogies; I wanted to study with professors that saw me as a full person. I wanted to be in a place where I felt that I would grow as a scholar. After some reflection, I decided to change my major to Chicax Studies.

I took my first Chicax Studies class, with a professor I knew from being a student organizer. I thought they were kind, and their approach to teaching was different than the one that I was used to. I learned about Chicax/a/o poetry that uses Spanglish, something I was used to speaking but did not know could be used in an academic setting. As hooks notes, this

professor knew that we needed English, “the oppressor’s language,” to speak with one another; but they “nevertheless also reinvented, remade that language so that it would speak beyond the boundaries of conquest and domination (1994, p.170).” Learning in this class that there was more to writing than just knowing when to add a colon or a semicolon gave me my voice as a writer, and I now write poetry.

In Chicana Studies classes, I also became aware of scholarship that analyzes structural problems, which can help community organizers in changing legislation or confirm that what they have experienced in their lives outside the classroom is not just in their heads. This kind of research, to me, is activist research, even if others might not see it that way. For me, one key piece of activist literature was *Second Chances for All: Why Orange County Probation Should Stop Choosing Deportation Over Rehabilitation for Immigrant Youth*, written by Victoria Anderson et al. and published by UCI School of Law Immigrant Rights Clinic 2013. This publication helped me understand that I could still be an activist in academia. It brought together both scholarship and activism. Another work of activist scholarship that I was exposed to while in Chicana studies was *Still Falling Through the Cracks: Revisiting the Latina/o Education Pipeline* (Perez Humer et al. 2015). This study helped validate my feeling that there was something getting in the way of Latinx students accessing higher education.

It took seven years for me to transfer out of community college and get an A.A. degree. Changing my major to Chicana Studies helped me see a different side of academia: one that inspired me to go to graduate school to be a professor, just like the ones that helped me find myself as a scholar.

Conclusion

Throughout this essay, I have reflected on the ways that the K-16 system failed to meet my needs as a learner. As a result of these failures, until recently, I always saw myself as more of a talker than a writer. I always thought it was because I was just better at learning the spoken part of English compared to writing English. Words were never my friend; grammar did not come naturally to me, and at times it was hard to read if I was not given enough time. If I had been asked where I felt I needed help, I would have said reading and writing. But I was never asked; and so, test after test, I always scored low in writing and reading. But it turned out that I was not bad at reading and writing. I needed learning accommodations, because it turns out that this entire time, I had undiagnosed dyslexia.

As a community college student, although I finally began to learn, I still struggled financially. This is a topic that often does not get addressed: how expensive higher education, even community college, can be for low-income people. The cost of tuition, books, and the lost hours of work time leads many low-income students to take out student loans and have debt they can't pay in their lifetime. But as bell hooks notes, “During my college years, it was tacitly assumed that we all agreed that class should not be talked about, that there would be no critique of the bourgeois class biases shaping and informing pedagogical approaches (as well as social etiquette) in the classroom. (1994, p.178).” But we as educators need to address class in our classrooms. We might not be able to change tuition fees, but we can make the class materials we assign affordable. A pedagogical approach that is based on caring and is student-centered needs to address the fact that not everyone has the same financial means. It also means taking time to

express true solidarity for marginalized students like undocumented immigrants, whose struggles outside the classroom make it more difficult for them to learn.

I started this essay with a reflection on the first time I was exposed to the work of Paulo Freire. That is because, now that I am a PhD student, he continues to guide my approach to pedagogy. I draw on Freire and what I have learned from the failures of K-16 public educational institutions to shape my own teaching. As a TA, in my discussion sections, I want my students to know that it is okay to ask questions and not to be scared to be wrong. We are all learning something from being in class, both my students and me. I do not walk into my discussion sections thinking that I know everything and that if I got through my undergraduate education, so can my students. Rather, I believe that there is a lot that we as educators can learn from our students that can help shape our teaching approach. When we walk into a class knowing that we can learn something from our students, this can help increase communication between us. One way that I specifically try to increase communication is to ask students what they want to get out of the class or discussion section. I ask if there are topics that they hope to learn about and topics that they might already know. Asking these kinds of questions can help us shape our classrooms to meet the needs of the students.

I also do not use the banking model to shape my teaching style. I use what Paulo Freire calls “problem-posing education,” which works to nurture students’ critical consciousness by intentionally rejecting “communiqués” in favor of teacher-student communication (1970, p. 52). At times students might not be used to the problem posing approach, and they might not want to share their opinion or ask questions. In that case, one approach that I use is reading the room. Let’s say, for example, an essay is due in two weeks, and once the class is reminded of the due date, the class environment changes. It gets quiet, and students do not want to make eye contact. Clearly, something has happened. No one is saying anything, but the mention of the essay caused some discomfort. At this point, you can ask the students if they are feeling worried and if they would want to have time during the discussion section to work on their essay, and also have a writing workshop. Sometimes students say a lot without saying anything.

Apart from using the work of Paulo Freire as the foundation for my teaching approach, I also look at the work of bell hooks, who is mentioned throughout this essay. hooks also helps address topics that might not come up directly in the classes and discussion section that we teach but that we still have to keep in mind. In *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, hooks notes, “the unwillingness to approach teaching from a standpoint that includes awareness of race, sex, and class is often rooted in the fear that classrooms will be uncontrollable, that emotions and passions will not be contained” (1994, p. 39).

Guided by hooks, my teaching approach sees students as whole persons, not just as people that I see once a week for fifty minutes. My students have a life before and after they leave my discussion sections; these, at times, do not get addressed in academia. These other parts of life can impact the way that students learn and participate in your class or discussion section. I take this approach of seeing students as a whole because, throughout my K-16 journey, educators and educational institutions did not see me as a whole person. I felt that I was just a test score to them. I do not see my students as test scores—or even just as students. They are caregivers, workers. They have hopes and dreams, and those dreams should not be crushed by a school system that still is too often modeled after the banking model of education. The model student that higher education shapes itself to serve is a model that many students cannot

fit into. Our classroom environments can and should address the needs of our students that too often get overlooked.

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EDUCATION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE *A LO LATIN@*: AUTOETHNOGRAPHY, CRITICAL LATINX PEDAGOGIES AND THE PREPARATION OF FUTURE LATINX FACULTY

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Introduction

From January to March 2023, I taught a Chicano/Latino Studies Graduate Emphasis seminar entitled “Education and Social Justice *a lo Latin@*: Lessons from Chicax/Latinx Studies” at the University of California Irvine, where I am a professor of Chicano/Latino Studies and History. The doctoral students in this seminar, representing a wide range of Humanities and Social Sciences fields, spent twelve weeks engaged in a process of collaborative autoethnographic research and writing aimed at exploring the diverse ways that US Latinx scholars, educators, and activists, past and present, have understood the relationship between education and social justice. In dialogue with one another and scholars of critical pedagogy and Chicax/Latinx Studies, they also interrogated their own experiences as students, TAs and instructors and articulated their own visions of what it means to “teach for social justice” in the higher education classroom. Selected essays produced as a result of this seminar are featured in this special edition of the *Journal of Education and Social Justice*.

In this essay, I will describe the historical, theoretical, and methodological foundations, course design and instructional/assessment strategies that made up the Education and Social Justice *a lo Latin@* seminar. My intention in writing this essay is to briefly *tomar la palabra*, taking the metaphorical floor to establish a shared conceptual frame for the autoethnographic essays that follow. At the same time, however, I will advance an argument about the unique power of autoethnography as a pedagogical tool for preparing Latinx and other underrepresented future faculty to teach for social justice while simultaneously confronting persistent structural inequalities that position them as different and unequal in the academy.

Education and Social Justice a lo Latin@: The Freirean Foundations of Chicax/Latinx Studies

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968), Brazilian educator Paulo Freire offered a radically new analysis of the relationship between education and social justice,³⁴ critiquing traditional “banking” approaches to education that treated students as passive empty vessels to be filled with knowledge by powerful, all-knowing teachers (Freire 2000). Freire’s counter-vision of a horizontal learning model, in which teachers and learners participate in the co-creation of knowledge while developing their own critical consciousness, has become the basis for the multiple critical pedagogies that have emerged in the past fifty years (Giroux 1992; hooks 1994;

³⁴ For the purposes of this essay, I define social justice as the achievement of full participation for all in a society that provides equal access to freedom, security, opportunity, and dignity (Bell 1997; Young 1990; Fraser 1997; Barry 2005; Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2007). Both an end goal and process, social justice requires collective commitment and effort to identify and dismantle structures of inequality and oppression; to provide remedy to communities that have been harmed by historical and structural injustice; and to provide recognition and access to marginalized and excluded peoples.

Ladson-Billings 1995; Kumashiro 2002; Cochrane-Smith, Shankman, Jong et al. 2009; Huber-Warring & Warring 2006; Jennings 2019). In the United States, critical pedagogy's evolution over the past half century has been intertwined with the multiple trajectories of various American social movements, including Black, Chicana/Latina, Asian, Indigenous, feminist and LGBTQ+ civil rights struggles as well as the more recent undocumented immigrant and disability rights movements. The diverse pedagogical visions and approaches that have emerged from these intersecting social movements are nonetheless unified by their insistence that the pursuit of social justice cannot be separated from the practices of teaching and learning; by the centrality they place on the cultivation of students' critical consciousness; and by their commitment to empowering students to work together to create a more just society (Giroux 2007, 25-42).

Deeply influenced by Freirean pedagogy as well as by global decolonial and African, Asian, and Indigenous American activist traditions (Pulido 2006), Chicana and Latina scholars and students since the 1960s have also understood education as a vehicle for social justice. During this decade, educational activism became one of the flashpoints of a growing Chicano Movement, which Jorge Mariscal (2005, 3) defines as a mass political and cultural mobilization "dedicated to a wide range of social projects, from ethnic separatism to socialist internationalism, from electoral politics to institutional reform and even armed insurrection." Following the East Los Angeles High School Blowouts and the founding of the first Chicano Studies department at CSU Los Angeles in 1968 (Muñoz 1989), militant Mexican American youth came together across the southwest with the goal of transforming American public education at both the K-12 and postsecondary levels. Adopted in March 1969 by the First National Chicano Liberation Youth Conference, the Plan Espiritual de Aztlán³⁵ asserted a radical new identity for Chicana people as an oppressed indigenous people converted into an "internal colony" by the U.S. imperial conquest of northern Mexico in 1848 (Muñoz 2018, 32). As part of their broader struggle for political, economic, and social justice, the authors called for community control of schools and the development of curricula emphasizing the unique history, culture, and linguistic traditions of Chicana/indigenous peoples in the southwest (Acuña, 2011).

The same year, the Chicano Coordinating Council on Higher Education released *El Plan de Santa Bárbara*, the seminal document which laid the foundation for the establishment of Chicana/o Studies programs at the University of California Santa Barbara and other universities and colleges across the United States. In addition to demands for an academic major focused on Chicana history, culture and politics, the Plan also called for the recruitment of Chicana faculty and students; funding to support Chicana and community-centered scholarly research and publication programs; academic support and other resources for Chicana students; and educational outreach to local Chicana communities. By the 1980s, Chicano and/or Mexican American Studies programs had been founded at 19 University of California, California State and University of Texas campuses (Muñoz 1984, 5-6). In line with the tenets of Freirean pedagogy, these academic programs advanced a vision of higher education as central to the

³⁵"El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán," accessed online on March 24, 2023, at: <http://clubs.arizona.edu/~mecha/pages/PDFs/ElPlanDeAtzlan.pdf>.

development of Chicana critical consciousness and as a powerful vehicle for collective mobilization.³⁶

A similar process of Latinx activism explicitly linking educational and social justice was simultaneously taking place in the Midwest and Northeast. Building on the earlier activism of Nuyorican educators and social workers, including Dr. Antonio Pantoja and other founding members of the educational organization ASPIRA, the Black and Puerto Rican Student Community staged a successful campaign demanding the establishment of the School of Black and Puerto Rican Studies at the City College of New York in 1969. State funding was also allotted for Black and Puerto Rican Studies in the City University of New York (CUNY) the same year. By 1973, Puerto Rican Studies programs and departments had been created at 17 CUNY campuses and units (Cabán 2003, 11-12). Like their counterparts in the southwest, Puerto Rican Studies faculty and students understood the founding of their discipline in Freirean terms, as part of a broader political struggle in which education served as a vehicle for advancing social justice for Latinx, Black and other racialized communities.

Since the 1980s, as US Latinx communities have grown larger and more heterogeneous, Chicana/Latinx Studies programs have been created at universities across the US, and programs in Central American, Cuban, and Dominican studies have also been established. As the years have passed, internal ideological and theoretical fissures and the discipline's continued marginalization within an ever-more precariously underfunded higher education system (Hurtado, 2005) have caused it to drift away from class-based critiques (Darder & Torres, 2003)—and arguably, especially in more elite research-intensive universities, away from its early emphasis on activism. More positively, Chicana/Latinx Studies has also moved away from the cultural essentialism and nationalism that characterized it during its formative decades, as scholars and students alike increasingly acknowledge the extraordinary diversity of US Latinx communities *and* the strategic value of pan-Latinx solidarities (Aparicio 1994; Gutiérrez 2006). The discipline has also benefited from a shared process of critical self-reflection to eradicate legacies of racism, sexism, homophobia, and other forms of oppression within the field (Garcia 1989; Arredondo et al. 2003; Katerí Hernández 2003; Hurtado 2005; Aguilar-Hernández 2020). As part of this, Chicana scholars have begun to grapple with the complexities of their relationship to indigenous communities in the southwest, and specifically, to the way that new understandings of the history of settler colonialism disrupt the central narrative of the Chicano movement—i.e., that Chicana are an “indigenous” and colonized people (Pulido 2021; Tuck & Yang 2012).

As an intellectual and political project, Chicana/Latinx Studies nonetheless continues to be animated by its Freirean pedagogical legacy. We see this in the discipline's commitment to the production of community-centered scholarship that challenges distorted representations of Chicana/Latinx histories and cultures while recovering, interrogating, and elevating the lived experiences of poor and working class Chicana/Latinx peoples, as well as in many of its faculty's dogged dedication to culturally relevant teaching and learning practices that challenge the Eurocentric epistemological foundations of the academy. Most importantly, we can see the discipline's Freirean legacy in many Chicana/Latinx faculty and students' ongoing participation

³⁶ Chicano Coordinating Council on Higher Education, “El Plan de Santa Bárbara: A Chicano Plan for Higher Education,” accessed online on March 24, 2023, at: <https://learning.hccs.edu/faculty/jesse.esparza/history-2328/document-analysis-review/8-el-plan-de-santa-barbara-a-chicano-plan-for-higher-education/view>.

in the struggle to secure equitable access to higher education for Chicanx, Latinx, and other minoritized youth.

Teaching for Social Justice a lo latin@: Autoethnography, Critical Latinx Pedagogies and the Preparation of Future Latinx Faculty

As Chicanx/Latinx Studies has grown and evolved, the number of scholars seeking to articulate distinctly Latinx visions of what it means to teach for social justice in the higher education classroom has also expanded. Chicanx/Latinx scholars and educators have produced a body of critical Latinx pedagogical scholarship that, like Black, indigenous, feminist, and queer critical pedagogies, understands the classroom as an inherently political space. What makes this critical pedagogy Latinx is its reliance on culturally specific concepts, registers, practices, and affective dispositions to dismantle hegemonic power structures in postsecondary teaching and learning (Aguilar-Hernández 2020; Calderon & Urrieta 2019; Cruz 2019; Ochoa & Lassalle 2008; G. Ochoa & E. Ochoa 2007 2009; Salinas 2017).

Notwithstanding their distinct concerns and priorities, most critical Latinx pedagogies understand education as an embodied (Reyes et al. 2020), non-hierarchical, collaborative, and critical consciousness-building process (Delgado Bernal 2020, 161-162; Rendón 2009; Burciaga & Tavares 2006). They emphasize the importance of authentic, vulnerable, and caring relational practices that foster a sense of belonging, solidarity, and collective wellbeing, as expressed through the shared Latinx values of *comunidad*, *convivencia* y *cariño* (Duncan-Andrade 2006; Newcomer 2018; Valenzuela, 1999; Villanueva 2013; Bernal et al. 2006; Galván 2006; Pérez Huber 2017; Urrieta & Villenas 2013). They share the goal of helping Chicanx/Latinx college and university students, regardless of background, to feel welcomed--*entre familia*--in the learning environment (Casavantes Bradford & Morales 2022). Moreover, because so many Chicanx/Latinx students carry what Villanueva (2013) and Garcia (2019) call the inheritances of intergenerational and intersecting traumas—including but not limited to experiences of war, violence, and forced migration; anti-immigrant hostility and racial discrimination; undocumented status; and linguistic and cultural dispossession—many critical Latinx pedagogies insist on the need to approach teaching as a healing and even spiritual craft (Figueroa 2014; Pérez Huber 2017; Villanueva 2013). However, this emphasis on affect, emotion and spirit in no way forecloses an explicit commitment to social justice. As Pérez Huber (2017, 377) asserts, “working within a space of *convivencia* means working together with communities in a collective struggle for liberation.”

Despite the importance they attribute to culturally relevant instructional practices, Chicanx/Latinx scholars have nonetheless been conspicuously silent about how to prepare future faculty to teach for social justice *a lo Latin@* in the higher education classroom. To be fair: they are not alone in failing to think seriously about the pedagogical training of graduate students. Despite the proliferation of future faculty preparation programs at colleges and universities across the U.S. since the 1990s, relatively little has been written to date about graduate pedagogical development in general (O’Loughlin 2017).³⁷ This dearth of scholarship is

³⁷The few studies on graduate student pedagogical development include Baiduc et al. 2016; Chandler 2011; Chism 1998; Kearns et al. 2010; Marincovich 1998; Miller 2010; O’Loughlin et al. 2008; Lederer et al. 2015; Shannon, Twale, and Moore 1998; and Tice et al. 1998.

consistent with research intensive universities' persistent concern with preparing graduate students for research, rather than teaching, careers. This is despite research demonstrating that graduate teaching assistants who have participated in some form of pedagogy training are more student-centered in their teaching beliefs and practices (Douglas et al. 2016), and those with more pedagogical training and experience are also more likely to find employment in academia (Bettinger et al. 2015). Notwithstanding calls for more empirical research dating back several decades (Abbott et al. 1989), we still know very little about the content or actual outcomes of graduate student pedagogical training (O'Loughlin et al. 2017).

We know even less about how to prepare future faculty to teach social justice. Although a growing body of literature illuminates the structural barriers to minoritized, first generation and low income university student success (Amani & Santamaría 2018; Garcia et al. 2021; Whitcomb et al. 2021), in the aftermath of the Black Lives Matter movement and the COVID-19 pandemic, higher education scholars are only beginning to address the urgent implications of persistent social injustice in the US for the pedagogical practices of current faculty—let alone for the training of future scholar/educators. As a result, most of what we know about social justice pedagogical preparation has focused on pre-service K-12 teachers (Adams et al. 2007; Baldwin et al. 2007; Capper & Theoharis 2006; Cochran-Smith et al. 2009; Enterline et al. 2008; Huber-Warring & 2006; Leake & Stodden 2014; Whipp 2013). The more specific question of how to prepare underrepresented future faculty to teach social justice in culturally relevant ways in the higher education classroom has yet to be considered in any systematic way.

As a step addressing this omission in the scholarship, I detail below my efforts to provide critical and culturally relevant pedagogical training for Latinx-identified or allied graduate students at the University of California Irvine. I argue that social justice-focused pedagogical development, while desirable for all future faculty, is especially important for Latinx and other underrepresented and graduate students. The reasons for this are twofold. First: like the young activists, students and scholars who established the field of Chicana/o Studies in the 1960s, many of today's future Latinx faculty aspire not only to be research scholars, but also to teach for social justice *a lo Latin@* in the higher education classroom. As active participants in the political and civil rights movements of their era, they see teaching and mentoring other Chicana/Latinx, URM and first-generation low-income university students as part of a broader struggle to empower and uplift their communities. Second: providing targeted pedagogical development to Latinx and other underrepresented future faculty is a way of recognizing that, regardless of their predispositions or training, a range of structural forces will conspire to task them with disproportionate responsibility for teaching and mentoring URM students (Garcia Peña 2022; Griffin 2020; Harris et al. 2017; Hurtado 2005; Pittman 2021). It is therefore imperative that we prepare underrepresented future faculty to teach for social justice in ways that are individually meaningful and sustainable—even as we also prepare them to recognize and resist their positioning as different and unequal in the academy.

Although this training will necessarily draw on a range of critical pedagogies, I argue that autoethnographic research and writing represents a powerful tool for preparing future faculty to teach for social justice *a lo Latin@* in the higher education classroom. As a research method, autoethnography interrogates the unique experiences and perspectives of an individual while linking them to social, cultural, and political issues within a specific context (Lapadat 2017; Sparkes 2000). Seeking to engage readers emotionally as well as intellectually, its tone is deliberately personal, reflective, and affective, often incorporating memory work, the analysis of

meaningful artifacts such as photographs and personal objects, as well as more literary styles of writing, including journal excerpts, transcriptions of dialogue and poetry (Onyx & Small 2001). Although proponents of more traditional scholarly methods have criticized autoethnography for being self-indulgent and individualistic, autoethnography done well goes beyond storytelling through the careful collection and analysis of data (the author's experience and ideas) in conversation with scholarly literature, systematically drawing upon their personal and subjective knowledge to demonstrate gaps in existing knowledge, build new theory or advance new arguments (Duncan 2004; Holt 2003).

Emerging from and contributing to postmodern reimagining of what it means to conduct qualitative inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln 2005), autoethnography challenges the epistemological foundations of Eurocentric scholarship—its presumed detachment, objectivity, and separation from its research subjects. Instead, it allows historically excluded and marginalized individuals who might previously have been the subject of traditional ethnographies to tell and assign meaning to their own stories (Duncan 2004; Russel 1998). Functioning as what Alarcón et al. (2011, 370) called “theory in the flesh,” it offers “fertile ground for interrogating dominant theoretical stances and hegemonic paradigms, and furthering social justice aims (Lapadat 2017, 589; Denzin 2003; Holman Jones et al. 2013).”

Education researchers have recognized autoethnography's efficacy in generating crucial insights about the processes of educational policy making and provision—and particularly, its utility in exploring the often-unspoken beliefs, values, assumptions, and intentions that shape teachers' pedagogical practices (Anteliz et al. 2023). However, its power as a pedagogical tool in preparing future faculty members remains largely unrecognized. While self-reflection has been a recognized part of teacher preparation since the mid-1980s, and more recently has played a role in some future faculty preparation programs (Brookfield 2017; Kearns et al. 2010; Miller et al. 2010; O'Loughlin et al. 2008), its scope is narrower than that of autoethnographic inquiry, most often focused on helping pre-service educators evaluate the efficacy of specific instructional strategies in order to improve their practice. More critically minded scholars have demonstrated that reflective writing can be used to serve social justice aims as a tool for developing students' critical race consciousness (Ladson-Billings & Tate 1995; Kolb & Kolb 2008; Powell and Kusama-Powell 2010); however, the transformative power of short, one-off reflexive writing tasks is necessarily limited. Missing from these approaches is autoethnography's deep and sustained exploration of the intersection between the self and the social which is so crucial to understanding the experiences of marginalized peoples.

The practice of rigorous autoethnographic research and writing positions Latinx and other underrepresented students as protagonists in their own stories, and by extension, in history and society. Unlike “share your story” exercises that ask historically excluded students to produce narratives of the hardships they've endured for the consumption of white, middle class and progressive audiences—often as a prerequisite to their admission to higher education programs or to the awarding of “diversity” scholarships or fellowships—autoethnography reinforces writers' critical self-reflexivity *and* agency. It goes beyond the kind of superficial and performative sharing that fixes first-generation low-income students of color in a state of permanent victimization, providing them with a method through which to draw insights and knowledge from the struggles and traumas they and their families and communities have endured.

Moreover, autoethnography's resonance with other critical Latinx and Chicana/Latina feminist methodological and pedagogical approaches, including the use of 'pláticas' (informal talks) and *testimonios* (Delgado Bernal et al. 2012; Pérez Huber 2009) as legitimate sources of knowledge, means that it also aligns with culturally specific ways of knowing and relating to others that inform the practice of many Chicana/Latinx scholars, educators, and students (Delgado Bernal 2020). By centering their marginalized identities and epistemologies and designating their histories and contemporary lived experiences as legitimate focus of scholarly inquiry, the practice of pedagogically-focused autoethnographic research and writing symbolically validates Chicana/Latinx graduate students' presence in higher education classrooms and encourages them to see themselves as possessors and producers of diverse forms of knowledge. It thereby contributes to the creation of a learning environment in which future Chicana/Latinx faculty can feel safe to engage in critical self-reflection of their own emerging teaching practice and develop their critical consciousness, while retaining the sense of cultural integrity that will allow them to confidently make use of their individual social capital and funds of knowledge to empower and uplift their students. (Mariscal et al. 2019; Moll et al. 2005; Vélez-Ibañez & Greenberg 2005; Yosso 2005). Therein lies its unique power as a tool for preparing future faculty to teach for social justice *a lo Latin@*.

Education and Social Justice a lo Latin@: Snapshots from the Seminar.

The Education and Social Justice *a lo Latin@* seminar was designed as a ten-week course that introduced doctoral students from a range of disciplines to the historical and theoretical foundations of the discipline of Chicana/Latinx Studies as well as the emerging scholarship on critical Latinx pedagogies. During weekly three-hour classes and in the two weeks following its conclusion, seminar students participated in discussion focused on readings that introduced them to the historical and theoretical foundations of Chicana/Latinx Studies and explored the historic centrality of educational advocacy/activism within the discipline. They also participated in a structured process of individual and collaborative autoethnographic research and writing tasks. These included completing a weekly seminar participation log in which they took notes on class discussions; completing weekly Reflexive Journal writing tasks in response to prompts designed to encourage them to think deeply about the relationship between social justice and education; and engaging in paired and group read-and-respond sessions that challenged them to expand upon what they'd written in Reflexive Journal entries after sharing and engaging in critical conversations with peers. Throughout the quarter, students also gathered, discussed and archived other sources of autoethnographic data related to their experiences as teachers and learners, including syllabi/section lesson plans; statements they'd written on their educational background, experience, philosophy or goals, for grant applications or employment applications; teaching journals or logs; notes taken during pedagogical workshops/trainings; student, peer or faculty evaluations of their teaching; and email exchanges or social media posts related to their teaching.

Seminar students also co-organized a symposium around the theme of "Thriving in the Academy: Chicana/Latinx Perspectives," welcoming a group of first generation, low income Latinx undergraduate students from CSU-Dominguez Hills to UCI for this daylong event. In preparation, they created mini-lessons based on topics and themes from their research, drafting lesson plans that explicitly described how each instructional activity demonstrated their vision of what it means to teach for social justice *a lo Latin@*. After meeting with me, students revised

and then taught their lessons at the symposium; received student feedback via Google Form; and completed a post-symposium written reflection on what they'd learned from the process about the challenges of turning critical pedagogical theories into practice. As a culminating assignment, students drew on course readings and the data set they'd generated to write and revise autoethnographic essays on self-selected topics exploring the relationship between education and social justice *a lo Latin@*.

In the following pages, I will draw upon excerpts from my own weekly teaching journal, notes taken during seminar, and excerpts from student discussions, anonymized Reflexive Journals and seminar participation logs in order to highlight how this collaborative autoethnographic research and writing process helped students to articulate their own vision of what it means to teach for social justice in relation to their own discipline, current instructional roles, and future aspirations as Latinx identified or allied scholars/educators.

Week One:

After the seminar's first meeting, I wrote the following in my teaching journal:

"All of the seminar students are first gen and identify in some way with the umbrella identity category we call 'Latinx,' although that included students of Chicana/o/x, Mexican immigrant, Mexican American, Central American origins, from both the West Coast and East Coast; from disciplines ranging from Political Science and Urban Planning/Public Planning to Spanish literature, with History, Sociology also represented. First year PhD Students to postdocs, mature students who had years of teaching experience, in the K-12 system and in popular education (prison education programs) before entering academia, as well as those that have never been a TA and so have a harder time thinking of themselves as educators."

"...In explaining why they'd signed up for the seminar, many expressed a strong commitment to teaching and education and a desire for questions of pedagogy to be taken seriously. They shared personal stories, about fathers and grandfathers and mothers who had named them, and this warmed up the room. Still, as students of color often are, especially those from first gen, low-income backgrounds, they were reserved; cautious, observing everything, reading the room for cues: will this be a friendly space? Will I be seen; will my identity and experiences be treated with respect? Taken seriously? Is this a space where I will be asked to compete and perform and wear a mask, or can I be authentic and vulnerable here? Can I admit to not knowing, to being uncertain or unsure?"

"...We then had a thoughtful discussion of the week's readings, about the origins and evolution of the discipline of Chicano/Latino Studies. Students expressed respect for the fact that the discipline was created largely through the struggle and activism of young students but were eager to move into discussing the situation in higher education for low income, first gen Latinx students today. They expressed frustration and disillusionment about what they considered to be the broken promises of higher education, the pathway that was supposed to lead to mobility for our communities, but (in their eyes) often,

because of its high costs today, left students deeply in debt and sometimes without a degree or preparation that truly served their needs... They feel used, their brown faces put on university pamphlets to showcase the institution's diversity, even when they aren't nurtured the way they hoped to be as students. They don't feel that the institution or most faculty care about their success."

"At the same time, here they are, earning PhDs, because they have their own individual hopes for mobility and a career that is meaningful AND lets them live decently. They feel confused and guilty about these conflicting desires; the desire to make meaningful contributions to the struggle for social justice, but also their desire to want to have a nice home and reliable car. As Irene put it, "I want to have my cake and eat it too. And even throw it away if I don't want it." They expressed frustration and a belief that white students don't have to deal with these ethical and political struggles, the challenge of reconciling self and individual desires with collectivist values, the commitment to community that is so characteristic of Latinx cultures."

After our seminar discussion, students also completed their first Reflexive Journal Task:

Journal entry #1: What does the term "social justice" mean to you? Write in simple, concrete, and affirmative language. Don't describe justice by listing the injustices you oppose; instead, describe in specific terms what you think a "just" society looks like.

- Andrea [a queer cisgender Guatemalan American woman and daughter of undocumented immigrants] wrote:

"Social Justice is a society that is inclusive, respectful, and representative of folks. Open to various understandings of things (ideas, ways of life, cultures) and interpretations while moving away from ill-intent narratives of superiority and neglect. An acknowledgment of the variance and differences that exist and their values to society."

- Carolina [a straight cisgender Mexican American woman from southern California] wrote:

"Social justice means people's individual rights are respected. Peoples' basic human needs - such as clean water, healthy food, clean air, fair housing, family, love, clean peaceful community, safety/safe conditions in any space, quality education, access to fulfilling work/jobs and life - are met. Also, being accepted as one is - religion, race, ethnicity, language, sexual orientation, etc. Basically, having access to the elements necessary to live a happy fulfilled life. Life liberty and the pursuit of happiness truly applies to all. The systems and social structures are designed to meet peoples' needs. Society, governments, and individuals collaborate to create safe spaces for communal wellbeing, guarantee fair access to resources, etc."

Week Three: Excerpt from ACB Teaching Journal

“Today the class was super animated. Talking to each other easily—laughter, familiarity, teasing. Starting to feel like familia.”

During seminar, students participated in a paired read-and-respond activity, where they shared their Week Two Reflexive Journal entries in response to the following prompt:

“Reflecting on your own educational journey to date, 1) Describe an incident in which you experienced some form of injustice in a higher educational setting, and the effect this had on you/others the classroom community/larger environment. Then, 2) Describe a moment when your teaching or other interaction with others in a (higher) educational setting produced—or failed to resist/remedy— some form of injustice. How did this impact you/others?”

- Alejandro [a straight cisgender Chicano man, from southcentral Los Angeles] shared his entry with his Julia [a straight cisgender Mexican American woman from Washington State]. He described an incident when, during a meeting with his undergraduate advisor, the professor cast doubt on his aspirations to attend graduate school and shamed him for not understanding the difference between qualitative and quantitative research. The following is excerpted from his journal:

“This meeting, in retrospect, has had a deep impact on my trajectory. Maybe this professor viewed the Cal State System as incapable of producing “research” oriented students; maybe he did not have the time to provide me the advising session I needed. Whatever the case was, it impacted the next few years of my life... Things “worked” out for me but only because I had people around me who were in grad school and could pass on some “game” (advise) on what was to come in pursuing a degree after my undergrad.”

After engaging in critical conversation with Julia, Alejandro wrote the following (excerpted from his seminar participation log):

*“-the educator there did not do his job
-as an educator, we need to be mindful of the resources we can share w/ our students
-everyone is capable of fulfilling their goal”*

After reading what I wrote and with the conversation Julia and I had, it was underlined that many of these professors have a certain standard for you folks and depending on how you come across to them they will talk to you/treat you in a different manner. Both of these experiences above were unpleasant for me but writing about them and reflecting were helpful. At this point, as a 3rd year, having taught and mentored and beginning to learn how to navigate the doctoral journey, it is much easier to reflect on these experiences and see the professor’s limitations, lack of support but also unwillingness to be supportive. Dr. L could have directed me towards a resource without having to do a lot of labor; after all, CSULA is an HIS... It is these choices that were made at the moment that negatively impacted me at the time and now serve as examples of something I do not want to mimic. After talking with Julia, I felt calm, validated, and even supported.

Later, as students were discussing a reading about the role of the idea of *mestizaje* (“racial mixing”) in the formation of Latin American and Latinx identities—a notion that has increasingly come under attack for its tendency to erase the existence of Black and indigenous Latin Americans—I transcribed the following discussion (students were also taking notes in their seminar participation logs):

Lilia [a queer cisgender Chicana woman]: “What do we do with scholarship and ideas stemming from “bad people?” Do we only teach what isn’t problematic? If not, how do we teach it? Do we evaluate, judge, or let students do that for themselves?”

Andrea: “Yeah, as TAs, we try to speak with students, not to students. We all went through K-12 being talked to; we’re so used to it. Sometimes we do it, too.”

Belén: “Yes, I think we need to talk about the ugly and the beautiful. We need to let them talk with each other. And speak with intention. Show them how to do this. Don’t say, “that’s dumb.” Tell them why you disagree.”

Irene: “As far as I’m concerned, all these people (gestures towards the photocopied article on the table) are problematic. We can’t hold them up on a pedestal. The thing for me is, as colonized people, we need to make choices. Do we keep using theories given to us by oppressors, or do we start creating our own frameworks? Create our own tools? (Pauses). But how do we do that if everything is built up from the past? Are they even really “our” tools?”

Later, during a collaborative read and respond task, the students were deep in conversation with one another. I overheard the following:

Irene: “Just representation alone doesn’t matter. You can talk a good game, be a token boy...they bring up their identity as a way to get hired, but they don’t live it. It’s just a label. I’ve had straight up white professors be there for me, when the queer of color professor who supposedly “represented” me did nothing. I’ve seen what it means to educate, not just in the classroom (recounts a story about a white woman professor who mentored her as an undergraduate). After graduation, she took me out for lunch, and she asked, “what do you need from me now? I’m going to be your mentor for life.” I sobbed for hours at home after that. I didn’t have that before her. I want others to have that. I mean, sure, we need to be represented. We matter. But how do we use it, run with it, for good?”

Andrea: “Right. Skinfolk ain’t kinfolk. I was taught mostly by black women.”

María José [identifies as a queer cisgender Chicana woman]: “That’s a beautiful example of what we can aspire to. Why not be that, in places where they don’t have that?”

Week Five:

During this week’s seminar, I met with teaching pairs to review students’ mini-lesson plans, discuss the challenges of turning critical pedagogical theory into practice, and provide suggestions for revision. Following our meeting, Julia wrote the following:

“After meeting and reflecting on the feedback, Quique and I first discussed our pedagogical goals and SLO’s. We had just read the cultural wealth reading and we were previously discussing the pedagogies we use in our classroom, and it was helpful in clarifying what our goals are and what we hope students get out of the lesson. Therefore, we were better able to organize our lesson and make our transitions smoother from Quique’s historical context to my empirical evidence. We then edited our interactive Jamboard activity by reframing our questions to better fit our topic and we deleted the introduction Jamboard activity. I added a slide where I asked students first what they think affects SES mobility and I then followed with another slide listing some factors. I also created a lesson plan to keep record of what we were planning to say and to make sure that our topics segued nicely. This was the most helpful in helping us give each other feedback and collaborate in creating SLO’s and the jamboard activities.”

Following our meeting, Belén wrote:

“As I was contributing to our lesson plan and working with Lilia, we had various ideas we worked with. We thought we had it figured out, [but] after meeting with [you] Dr. Anita I realized that it’s very important to consult/discuss/ collaborate with multiple people about a subject to bring you back down to your lesson’s purpose... Talking about our Learning Objectives...really helped Lilia and I organize, specify, and script our lesson to be more engaging. Our goals transitioned first to talk about history in the physical site. Furthermore, I transitioned my goal from assisting students to be self-reflective to nurturing critical thinking skills. During the discussion and as we talked about our goals and talked through our project I took vigorous notes in hope to not miss feedback to better our teaching goals...

During the weekend, Lilia and I revised our thematic questions to narrow down the connection between Anaheim and community history/knowledge. We changed how we would engage students in our lesson to make learning more lateral than vertical learning direction. Through the lesson we engage directly with our students 3 times, to introduce the topic, think and point exercise, and think pair share exercise. The first two are short and all are based on individual observations where contributions are not right or wrong answers but highlight different knowledge, student knowledge.

...We met on Wednesday to script our lesson slide by slide. We wrote in a wrap up, finishing the lesson on the note of agency.”

During our subsequent seminar discussion on the politics of language, I transcribed the following (they were also taking notes for their seminar participation logs):

Quique [a straight cisgender man who identifies as “Chicano,” son of immigrants]: “I really like his [gestures towards a photocopy of one of the seminar readings] idea of writing in Spanish as a form of resistance...I want to write in Spanish, but I’m also aware this leaves out others, that it marginalizes indigenous Latinx folks, some Afro-Latinxs, but, if Spanish is the only thing that connects us, it does have a function. I know I sort of contradicted myself, but I’m fortunate my parents maintained Spanish; I can navigate in Mexico, I can talk to my grandparents. I know that American schools erase our culture and languages. I plan to make sure the next generation has this power.”

Belén: “Our people don’t always speak Spanish, and there’s a reason for that. When I publish in English, it can validate the. There’s violence against non-Spanish speakers in our communities; we police each other. Spanish is still a colonial language, but can we use it with intention, just like we use English?”

Lilia: “I was reflecting on how we could mix English and Spanish in the classroom, to make it feel more comfortable. Hearing Spanish, Spanglish, feels welcoming. It disrupts the idea that you have to have perfect grammar, never misspell a word.”

Carolina: “In the Spanish department, if you can’t write in a certain register, they suggest you write in English. It’s contradictory; Spanish in the US is a minoritized language, but we also want it to be ‘respectable.’ But if I write that register my parents will be alienated. Am I responsible for writing for everyone?”

And then later, discussing a reading on Chicana feminist pedagogies:

Carolina: “I enjoyed reading about *cariño*...I think of myself as a second mom in the classroom. I know some people try to fight stereotypes, but I embrace bringing feminine energy into the classroom. When I taught high school, some students forgot and called me ‘Ma.’ I took it as evidence I created a safe space, made them feel cared for.”

Alejandro: “I think embracing the care work pushes against the idea that only women are prescribed as care workers. I think the authors suggest that everyone can do it. How about we take this thing those raised as women deploy and extend it—so women don’t get burned out?”

Quique: “My goal is always to elevate the stories and voices of women. Ethnic Mexican women are often left out or framed as passive, but Mexican moms, moms in general, are the ones that encourage academic aspirations and achievement through care.”

María José: “I was shy to say it earlier, but I’ve been playing with the idea of ‘queering motherhood.’ Can other kinds of people practice motherhood, embody it in the classroom?”

Carolina: “The figure of the father is also important. And who fills that for our students? Many students who go to jail are from fatherless homes. There’s masculine care needed too, to balance.”

María José: “I have a visceral desire to push back because I’m afraid of being hyperfeminized. Why can’t I be the father?”

Alejandro: “How can we be more conscious about how we prescribe gender roles—and the labor of care? How do you extend the network of care from the school to the home?”

Carolina: “Thinking about HSIs [Hispanic Serving Institutions]; my mentors were always Chicano males. I got care and cariño from them. This challenges gender norms but also highlights the role of faculty. How do institutions show care?”

Alejandro: “They hire Latinx faculty.” (laughter)

Week Seven:

Following the Thriving in the Academy Symposium, students absorbed the feedback students provided on their mini-lessons and reflected on what they’d learned from attempting to design and teach a lesson based on their vision of teaching for social justice *a lo Latin@*. Exemplifying the critical self-reflexivity and sense of agency that are produced via rigorous autoethnographic inquiry, Quique wrote the following:

*“...Of the eight people that shared critical feedback, four comments stood out to me. First, one respondent stated that “laying out [the] learning objectives at the beginning would help audience members better understand the connection to the theme.” I agree with this statement, as Julia and I did not share the SLOs with the students and led to a bit of confusion for the audience members. Furthermore, another participant said that “the beginning felt a little too much like a history lesson.” This comment definitely hit home as I recalled the many times that historical lessons were nothing but dates and names, which I had replicated in my mini lesson. One student also shared that they wished to have had more time to elaborate on the information taken in by them. Lastly, the final comment elaborated on how we could have made it “less of a lecture” and “more of an engaging exploration.” I strongly agree with this comment, the idea was to share ways of teaching that push against the banking method and allow students to bring their insight, knowledge, and perspective into the conversation... the “Thriving in the Academy: Chicax/Latinx Perspectives on the Higher Education Journey” symposium humbled me on the process of being an educator and provided a new perspective to teaching, a perspective that will allow me to grow and continue to learn on this road in my educational journey. The comments left on the survey highlight the gaps of my teaching experience, but these are spaces that can be filled with more practice. I walked into that symposium with an open mind and came out with information that has changed my view on how to teach from a place with care, love, and respect. Key ingredients that are crucial to my development as a professor who emphasizes teaching social justice *a lo Latin@*.”*

Conclusion

During the last three weeks of the quarter, students in the Education and Social Justice *a lo Latin@* seminar finished first drafts of their autoethnographic essays; met with partners to interview one another about their papers and suggest ways to strengthen their writing; and participated in a collective feedback and revision workshop I led online. As the seminar drew to

a close, I reflected on how this initially reserved and cautious group of aspiring future faculty had increasingly come to rely on one another to navigate the intellectual, emotional, and cross-cultural challenges of engaging in a long-term collaborative autoethnographic research and writing process. Through this process, we created a collective teaching and learning environment characterized by *convivencia* and mutual care, co-producing and sharing knowledge while supporting each other in developing our teaching practice and holding each other accountable for maintaining a consistent weekly reading and writing practice. Through our practice of autoethnographic methods, all of us—me included—were guided to reflect deeply on the challenges of turning critical Latinx pedagogical theory into practice as we attempted to articulate and embody our distinct understandings of what it means to teach for social justice *a lo Latin@*.

At the end of the quarter, we celebrated the teaching and learning *comunidad* we had created with a potluck meal of Cuban *arroz y frijoles negros*—Profe’s recipe—followed by a buffet of sweets provided by the students. Alejandro brought *pan dulce* from a local Mexican bakery; Lilia, homemade heart-shaped pink chocolates, topped with multicolored sprinkles. Carolina, whose husband is Iranian-American, brought Persian sweets left over from her family’s Nowruz festivities. And then, as a final nod to Irene’s bold declaration during Week One of the seminar—*I want to have my cake and eat it too. And even throw it away, if I don’t like it*—we carefully cut a large slice from an elaborate dulce de leche berry cake and tipped it ceremoniously into the trash.

Returning to my teaching journal now, I re-read my Week One entry, dwelling on the initial thoughts I’d jotted there on the unique power of autoethnography as a pedagogical tool for preparing Latinx future faculty to teach for social justice:

“Where, Irene seemed to be asking, is the self in all of this critical theory? Andrea echoed the question, asking “will we have a chance to reflect on what these concepts, like social justice, have meant to us personally, and on our OWN experiences in higher education?” It was so gratifying, because their questions led us organically to a discussion of autoethnography, and how it can provide insights that other methods of scholarly research can’t get to. By accessing the self and locating it in the nexus of community and social structures, it allows us to critically reflect upon and offer arguments on injustice and the struggle for social justice in higher education in ways that speak to how these processes are actually lived—not just in abstract and theoretical spaces, but in the day to day lives of real people, and in the complex ways they try to negotiate their own desires and needs and the broader political aspirations. Why does this matter? It matters because this is where most people live their lives—not in theory, but in practice, the daily practice of trying to be a self-in-community. And this is where change is located and lived as well. As a result, not only does autoethnography promise to tell us more about the complex ways these things are lived—it offers a way out of the elitism and theoretical absolutism that is paralyzing our scholarship, teaching, and activism, stifling their creativity, and harming their sustainability. It also makes these necessary discussions more accessible and more relevant—more credible—to the people on whose behalf we claim to write and teach.”

Unlike the more narrowly focused forms of self-reflection that are common in teacher preparation programs, autoethnography’s deep and sustained exploration of the intersection

between the self and the social makes it a uniquely powerful tool for the preparation of social justice-oriented future faculty. Its resonance with critical Latinx and Chicana/Latina feminist methodological and pedagogical approaches also aligns with culturally specific ways of knowing and relating to others that inform the practice of many Chicax/Latinx scholars, educators, and students, validating their marginalized identities and epistemologies and designating their histories and contemporary lived experiences as legitimate focus of scholarly inquiry.

The practice of autoethnographic research and writing validates Chicax/Latinx graduate students' presence in higher education classrooms and encourages them to see themselves as possessors and producers of diverse forms of knowledge. It can thus contribute to creating a learning environment in which future Chicax/Latinx faculty can safely develop their own critical consciousness and engage in deep self-reflection of their own emerging teaching practice, while retaining the sense of cultural integrity that will allow them to confidently draw upon their unique social capital and funds of knowledge to empower and uplift their students. This, I have concluded, is autoethnography's superpower as a tool for preparing future Chicax/Latinx and other underrepresented faculty to teach for social justice—*a lo Latin@* or otherwise.

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DEAR Black Girl



10 things
to know
at 10

GIRL POWER

Here's how to make your
dreams a reality!

Always
BELIEVE
In Myself

KNOW THE REAL DEAL ABOUT YOUR
MEAL!

'I'M SPECIAL BECAUSE...'

FUN QUIZ INSIDE

'Dear Black Girl,
What's happening to me?!'

PUBERTY

"I AM MY SISTER'S KEEPER"

CULTIVATING healthy
friendships founded
on girlhood!

V.RHODES x C.EVANS

FOR BLACK GIRLS BY BLACK GIRLS



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TEENAGE DREAM

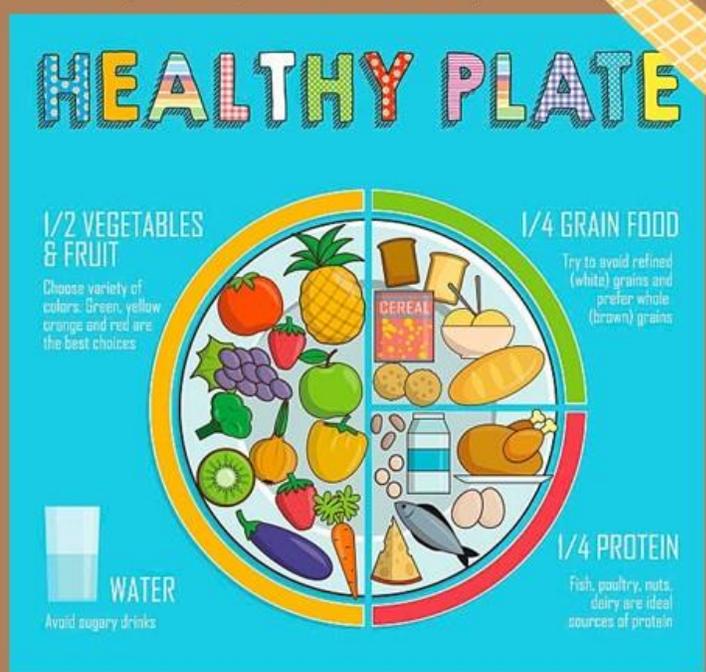
Periods: What You Need To Know!

The body's hormones shift before a period arrives. The body receives messages from hormones. The uterine (or womb) lining thickens as a result of these hormones. This prepares the uterus for the attachment of the mother's egg and the father's sperm, which will result in the development of a baby. The lining disintegrates and bleeds if the lady is not successful in getting pregnant. Every month, this same procedure takes place. Because of this, the majority of girls and women have menstruation once every month (Cleveland Clinic, 2023)

THE "P" Word

Although while it can be challenging to separate cause from effect, early puberty might have negative effects, especially for females. Girls who experience puberty earlier than their classmates are more likely to have sadness, anxiety, substance addiction, and other psychological issues (Stickle, 2013). Girls who receive their periods early may also be at a higher risk of developing breast or uterine cancer in adulthood.

Nobody is aware of the risk factor, or more likely, the mix of risk factors, that is causing the age drop or the obvious racial and gender disparities. Although it appears to be a factor, obesity cannot fully account for the shift. Researchers are also looking into additional possible factors, such as stress and compounds present in some plastics (Stickle, 2013). What can you do? Love your body and eat well.



Fun facts

Healthy eating can help!

Ance is normal!

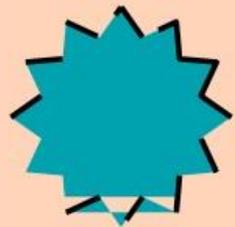
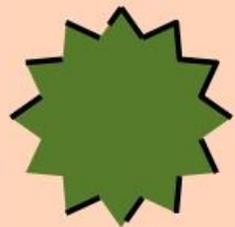


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**FIGHTING FOR
FEMALE FREEDOMS**



**REPRODUCTION
RIGHTS FOR
EVERY WOMAN**



i FIND OUT MORE

V.RHODES x C.EVANS



Work Hard, Play Hard

Achievement, Work, & Careers



BLACK WOMEN BUSINESS OWNERS

49% are between the ages of 35 to 54

50% use personal or family savings to start their business

38% have a firm three years old or less

37% have a Bachelor's degree or higher

46% have their business income as their only source of income

64% work less than 39 hours a week on their business

77% are a first time business owner

58% own a business in the other service or health care and social assistance industries

Dear Black Girl may your dreams reflect all the beauty that you are and not what the world tells you to be! We've all heard the phrase 'Girls go to college to get more knowledge.' But do you know how important your goals and achievements are to your development and future? With the pressures of school and social life, here are some tips to help you set and succeed in goals that are true to YOU!

Believe. Achieve.

According to McGraw Hill, the expectations of parents and other figures can make us question who we are and what we desire to achieve (Stickle, 2013). However, the opportunities are endless! The real question is not what can, or should you do, but what motivates you intrinsically?

Who will you be?

Once you separate other people's expectations from the desires that you wish to achieve, you will be one step closer to whom you dreamed of becoming (JSTOR, 2023). However, hard work is necessary. Psychologists at the American Psychological found that adolescent girls develop faster and can dedicate themselves to meaningful work that can enhance their lives as emerging adults and beyond (PsychNet, 2023). Though your environment has a major impact on your story, it does not determine your success— you do!

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The background features a white central area surrounded by abstract, overlapping shapes in shades of blue, purple, pink, and green. A thin yellow line meanders across the top and right sides, while a thin purple line is visible on the left. The overall aesthetic is soft and artistic.

Dear Black Girl,

Anything
worth having
takes time.

Never Give Up!

V. RHODES x C. EVANS

Note to

S **e** **e** **f**



I AM...

The Creator of My Reality

Dear Black Girl, Be Yourself!

V RHODES x C EVANS



Note to self

Identification is our perception of who we are as people and as members of particular social groups (Buckley & Carter, 2005). Our identities are not just something we make up for ourselves; they also develop in reaction to internal and external events. Every one of us selects an identity to some extent, but identities are also shaped by contextual factors outside of our control (Promoting Self-Esteem Org, 2023)

With time, identity evolves and becomes more complex.

Self-identity is how we describe who we are. Our sense of self-worth is based on our sense of self. In adolescence, among other social situations, the way we view ourselves varies in reaction to peers, families, and schools (Buckley & Carter, 2005). Our sense of belonging is shaped by our self-identities.

Dear Black Girl, though there are scientifically many factors that may influence who you are, you define who you are! As your personality and emotions will expand as you grow, embrace who you are in every season.

When you embrace yourself, you can show up as the best version of yourself!



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V. RHODES x C. EVANS



"More Than A Woman"

Gender Roles and Stereotypes

WHAT ARE GENDER ROLES?

Gender roles in society means how we're expected to act, speak, dress, groom, and conduct ourselves based upon our assigned sex. Girls and women are generally expected to dress in typically "feminine" ways and be polite, accommodating, and nurturing. Men are generally expected to be strong, aggressive, and bold (2020).

HOW DO GENDER STEREOTYPES AFFECT PEOPLE?

A stereotype is a widely accepted judgment or bias about a person or group (2020). It sometimes can be overly simplified and not always accurate. Stereotypes about gender can cause unequal and unfair treatment because of a person's gender. This is known as sexism(2020). The four basic stereotypes are known personality traits, occupations, physical appearance, and behaviors.

Camri Evans 3/19/23

References:

THE IS YOURS

Checklist to a life you desire:

01

Lifestyle:

Prioritize self care and one on one time with yourself. The main key to self love is learning who you are and loving her. Make that time for yourself, you deserve it sis! (Killoren, 2020)

02

Peers:

Surround yourself with those who are supportive and bring positive energy. It is always great to enjoy good company. However, remember to create safe boundaries for yourself within these relationships.

03

Romantic Relationships:

As you allow yourself to form a meaningful bond with someone, make space for self love within your relationships as well. Doing so will help you maintain boundaries and protect yourself (Killoren, 2020). Never put your worth in someone else's hands. You are the prize, don't settle for anything less than that!

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Killoren, C. (n.d.). Self care vs. self love: How to love yourself in a relationship. Relish. Retrieved

Discover Your Own Ways to

"FIND YOUR LOVE"

one's level of awareness and enjoyment of one's body.

Sensuality

skin hunger
stimuli
sexual responses
body image
fantasy

Sexualization

flirting
messages/images
seduction
sexual harassment
incest

Intimacy

caring /sharing
vulnerability
self disclosure
trust
reciprocity

Values

the use of sexuality to control and/or manipulate others

the experience of closeness with another

Sexual Health and Reproduction

intercourse
anatomy and physiology
STI's
contraceptions
abortion

Sexual Identity

biological sex
gender identity
gender expression
gender role
sexual orientation

focuses on the attitudes and behaviors related to the sexual and reproductive systems as well as the sexual

how we perceive ourselves as sexual beings

Dear Black Girl

Connect



Dear Brainy Black Girl,

Embrace your genius! School is cool but bullying is not. Do not be afraid to express your love for knowledge. Tune out the background noise and focus on your dreams. The only opinion that matters is yours. Keep learning Professor Brainy!



Dear Sister's Keeper

You are both right! Sisterhood is what you make it. Try approaching your sisterhood from both love and loyalty- it will only grow. Friendships with other young ladies can empower us all. Love on your sister and continue to be her keeper!



Dear Green Girl

We all love sweets here and there, but vegetables are what will keep you healthy and strong. All things are good in moderation so try to find a healthy balance. It is not illegal for your mother to encourage a healthy lifestyle, try it out! You will thank her for it when you are healthy in the future. Veggies also taste YUMMY! Try a smoothie Green Girl!



Dear Lover Girl,

AWW sounds like you have a crush! Feelings are normal so no need to fear. You may be a bit too young for marriage, but this black girl sees nothing wrong with you crushing. Try having a conversation to see what you all have in common then let it flow from there. whether he likes you back or not, you are still BEAUTIFUL! Try a friendly tennis match to serve up some love!

Is it really cool to love school? I have all As and I even get to keep the class turtle for a week. my dream is to become a food education professor in Africa! However, my classmates called me. a 'nerd' or 'geek'.

How do I stop getting teased for loving school?

Signed 'Brainy Black Girl'



Dear Black Girl,
Our friendship is falling apart! My bestie and I had an argument about what 'sisterhood' is. She says that sisterhood means love but I believe it is loyalty. Was I wrong?

With Sisterly Love,

'My Sister's Keeper'

Hi Black Girl!

Green Girl here and I have the ICK! I love ice cream and candy, but my mom is making me eat more vegetables. I do not like them! This feels like a violation of my rights, doesn't it? Do I really have to eat my veggies?

With Sweet Dreams, Green Girl



Dear Black Girl,
I think I am in love. The guy from my tennis team is the most beautiful being I have ever seen. I think about him all the time and I cannot seem to get him out of my head. Am I in love? What if he doesn't like me back? Should I just ask him to marry me? Dear Black Girl, I have NEVER felt this way before- HELP!

In Love, Lover Girl



Body & Mind Self-care Exercise

Start Small

You can start from small goals to big ones, from just a simple walk day to a full spa-day. Your choice!

Reminder

It can be a long journey, but in the end it will always be worth it and will train you to get used to a new routine



Go Meditate



Tidy up
your space

Keep & write a
gratitude jar

Start to set
boundaries



Make a daily
routine steps

www.reallygreatsite.com

BIOGRAPHIES

Guadalupe S. Cisneros Arroyo (They/ Them) is a second year Ph.D. student in the Department of Global and International Studies at UC Irvine. Their research looks at Latinx/a/o involvement in far-right movements in the US while also drawing from the history of eugenics, fascism, and colorism in Latin America.

Anita Casavantes Bradford is Professor of Chicano/Latino Studies and History and Associate Dean for Faculty Development and Diversity in the University of California Irvine School of Social Sciences. An award-winning teacher and mentor, she is also a scholar of immigration, race and ethnicity, foreign relations, critical refugee studies, and childhood. Her latest book is *Suffer the Little Children: Child Migration and the Geopolitics of Compassion in the United States* (University of North Carolina Press 2022). She is also the author of *The Revolution is for the Children: The Politics of Childhood in Havana and Miami, 1959-1962* (University of North Carolina Press 2014), and has also published essays in *Diplomatic History*, *Journal of American Ethnic History*, *Latin American Research Review*, *Cuban Studies*, *U.S. Catholic Historian*, the *Journal of the Society for History of Children and Youth*, and *Inside Higher Ed*.

Jes Torres Behravesh is a doctoral student in the department of Urban Planning & Public Policy at the University of California Irvine and the 2022 Gilbert G. Gonzalez Paper Prize Awardee. Her work focuses on the impact of humanitarian visas on public perceptions of deservingness and assumptions of fraud for immigrant crime victims in the United States.

Angelica Garcia-Macias is a political science student at the University of California-Irvine and a recipient of the APSA Minority Fellowship. They are from the small town of Rock Island in Washington's Wenatchee Valley. They are the eldest daughter of a Mexican immigrant, farmer and farm working family.

Giovanna Itzel is a doctoral student in the Political Science Department at UC Irvine. She was born in Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico and came to the United States at age 6. Raised during immigrant rights movements and social justice protests in Southern California, she is determined to continue being an advocate of historically marginalized communities of color. Her research focuses on the influence of emotions and non-institutional political participation methods, like protests, on group identity, mobilization, and belonging.

Geidy Mendez is a PhD student in the department of Political Science at the University of California-Irvine. She is a 2021 American Political Science Association Diversity Fellow and former middle school teacher's aide. Her research focuses on socialization patterns between different generations of Latinx communities and how interactions with immigration policing can inform their emotional reactions and political views.

Julybeth Murillo is a third-year sociology doctoral student at the University of California Irvine School of Social Sciences. She received a bachelor's degree in sociology and Spanish from Emory University. She is interested in Latinx migration, race and ethnicity, and education.

Carina Saiidi Padilla is a doctoral student in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at UC Irvine. She was born and raised in Los Angeles but spent a few years of her childhood in Mexico, where she developed strong roots and appreciation for Mexican culture. Carina was previously a high school Spanish teacher in Los Angeles inner city schools serving predominantly Latino students. She hosts a podcast and YouTube channel to help students and teachers analyze Spanish

literature. Carina's research focuses on addictions, trauma, and the healing power of storytelling in Mexican and Latinx literature.

Pedro Enrique Puentes is a PhD student in the Department of History at the University of California, Irvine (UCI). He was born and raised in South Central Los Angeles to Mexican parents from Torreón, Coahuila, Mexico. His current research focuses on parent advocacy in Los Angeles Public Schools after the *Mendez v. Westminster* (1946) decision.