Mujerista and Womanist Teachers: 
What Happens When Latina Mothers Have a Voice in Education?

BY

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THESIS

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This dissertation is for my daughter, Tilly, for all the hours of dress up, sand castles, reading *Where the Wild Things Are*, running fast, chasing Mishi, and digging for worms that I missed.

And for Paul, for all the times he told me I could do this even when I didn’t want to hear it.
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Summary

This dissertation chronicles the educational narratives and lived experiences of five, non-traditional college students as they negotiate their identities as mothers, community activists, and burgeoning teachers. The research draws upon feminist theory, especially as characterized by black and Chicana feminist theorists and the framework of phenomenology. Using narrative inquiry through semi-structured and unstructured interviews, I tell the stories of the women as they develop into teacher educators as they voice their beliefs about how community activism informs their pedagogical philosophies. The narratives are framed by the context of hegemonic systems and educational policies that tend to disenfranchise and marginalize their funds of knowledge. As a qualitative study, the conclusions are that the participants’ epistemologies, or more appropriately, their ways of knowing, are necessary and too often absent from the dominant narrative. These ways of knowing are the basis of my suggestions as to how we can improve efforts, especially in teacher education programs, to legitimize the value of parental and community funds of knowledge in schools.
Chapter 1: Introduction

With a few notable exceptions, Latina youth, young adults, and mothers continue to suffer from a lack of attention about their experiences in educational settings. Even areas of study such as critical pedagogy or critical literacy do not often mean to signify what is going on in Chicana/Latina-controlled spaces of teaching and learning, whether in college classrooms, on the street, or at the kitchen table. (Delgado-Bernal, Elenes, Godinez, & Villenas, 2006, p. 3)

I met Martha, Belen, Paula, Pia and Marisol six years ago when I began working with them as their academic mentor. My job was to help them succeed academically in their bachelor's degree cohort in Bilingual Education. Looking back, I am sure that I appeared very suspect to them--a young white girl, driving a little sports car, thinking I was quite the expert in education and Latina culture. Because I had taught for four years, two of them in an urban, low-income Latino school, spoke Spanish and had spent a few years in Ecuador, I believed I was perfect for the job. And, because I lived in a beautiful apartment in a notoriously rough neighborhood in Chicago, I thought I had some understanding of living in “the hood.” The women were all older, low-income mothers, and I believed my experience working part-time in community colleges granted me knowledge of their needs. I was proud of my new role helping these women. I took any opportunity to explain my role in casual conversation with people I met. “I work with a group of low-income mothers in Logan Square who are striving to get their degree in education so they can teach within their own community.” To me, it sounded noble and altruistic. Eventually I entered into the doctoral program at University of Illinois at Chicago, which seems like a natural extension to solidify my expertise. A Ph.D. would make it official.
Quite frankly, it wasn't until recently that I reevaluated my ego and my notion of what *they* needed from *me* when it comes to how “helpful” I really am to these women. I do have something to say, but there is even more value in what they have to say. I’m just here to offer it and contextualize it within the curriculum field. I needed them.

After four years of working with these mothers, I discovered I was pregnant--unexpectedly--with my first child. It was during my pregnancy that I began to understand how much I didn’t know about these women’s lives. But, of course, it wasn’t until my daughter, Mathilde, was born that I became a bit more enlightened about the sacrifice, tenacity, suffering, strength and fortitude of these women, especially as they became my mothering mentors teaching me to swaddle more tightly, what baby wraps worked better, and why a baby swing can solve everything. Before my own introduction into motherhood, I didn’t understand the complications of being a student and a mother nor did I share subjectivities with their motivations for teaching. I believed, as I would explain to other educators and academics when asked about my dissertation, that the women were becoming teachers to “give back to the community in which they live.” Although that may be true, they needed much more intimate motivations to make it through such a difficult program. Some were doing it for their kids. Some were doing it for themselves. Some were doing it because someone told them they couldn’t. For them, teaching was a career goal, but activism was a personal goal. Activism was a part of their everyday lives and for some, a part of their cultural history. They saw teaching as an expansion of how they uplift and empower their community. The path to teaching, however, was not an easy course for them.

The challenges of becoming a certified teacher are trending toward major obstacles in the current climate of standardization, accreditation and teacher bashing. Today, becoming a teacher
means adapting to the ever-changing standardized curriculum and state and district requirements while sacrificing imaginative classroom activities and formulating one’s own identity as a teacher. Not only are the women becoming teachers in a hostile environment, they face the bureaucracy of the university system. For me, college was not difficult; it was mostly fun. I had the financial and academic support of my family, the social support of peers and I could even hold enough part-time jobs to pay for unnecessary stuff, such as a spring break in Acapulco, desired by the middle-class, 18-21 year-old undergraduate. These women, however, do not get the luxury of college life as I had it. There are class confirmations, financial aid paperwork, Socratic professors, multiple certification tests (seven in total, if passed the first time, which most did not), registration paperwork, and accounting errors, all while making sure food is on the table, children’s homework is done, and bosses are satisfied.

But this research is not a narrative delineating the difficulties of non-traditional, urban students going to college. This research attempts to portray the complexities of Martha’s, Belen’s, Paula’s, Pia’s and Marisol’s lives and histories as low-income mothers, community activists, and teacher candidates through the lens of a researcher who is both an outsider and an insider but who ultimately considers their narratives as important data in understanding the intersections that are needed among parents, communities and schools. These women are mothers, wives, volunteers, activists, and community leaders with life experiences that, I believe, need to be cherished and learned from as counter-narratives to a culture that sees urban parents as deficits standing in the way of teachers and principals trying to save their children from ghetto life. However, we, as academics, need to understand their voices through the bureaucracies that contextualize them. Through this research, I navigate and portray the meanings they make of the
tensions and contradictions in their careers, identities, ethnicities, citizenships, educations, roles and other curricula of their lives.

During the process of transcribing the interviews, offered in this research, I thought about why I am so compelled to document them. In many ways, they are counter-narratives to the statistics and acceptable practices that serve to categorize them as “at risk” college students or as “deficient” parents. It is easier for schools and policy makers to position parents as outsiders, as mere supportive entities to the real, inside-the-school curriculum. However, the women I stand with have decided to fight their way inside and become teachers, a job of sacrifice and dedication, and one I am no longer strong enough to do in our current environment of teaching bashing and union busting. They are enduring a great deal in this endeavor and the program that helped support them through the process. I am not writing to tout the program, however. In fact, the last thing I want is to create a sympathetic model that allows for others to replicate a program--that would obviate the grass roots, individualized empowerment from which this program originated. I think what draws me to work with these women is based on both the intensity of their stories and my own development as a teacher and empathetic human. In short, they give me hope for possibilities of education.

In 2004, I was fired from my job as a high school English teacher in a low-income suburb just west of Chicago. The politics and details surrounding the displacement are complex and emotional, to the point that it still leaves a lump of embarrassment in my stomach. I didn’t leave teaching feeling good, nor did I leave believing it would be the last time I would be in front of a classroom. I left angry. I had moved to Chicago from Boston, where, after completing my master’s, I taught for two years in a public school. Naively misunderstanding the rules of out-of-state transferring of certification, I eventually learned that I could not receive certification in
Illinois until I student taught in Illinois. After two years of teaching in Illinois, hundreds of phone calls, and dozens of trips to the regional Illinois State Board of Education office, I was extended the opportunity to join alternative certification program that would grant me provisional certification while I continued to teach. Believing I had found a way to teach, I accepted. Unfortunately, the teacher’s union had a different view. In a small room of the high school, I listened to the union head and superintendent, both white men in their sixties, argue my fate. Although I had administrative support, ultimately the union wouldn’t allow alternative certification program participants to teach because of the precedent that it would set. Upon leaving the meeting, the union representative confided to me, “Don’t take this personally. I just don’t trust anything that the administration supports.” And, just like that, I was fired.

The bureaucratic circumstances of my firing were frustrating and sad. I was angry with the situation of my departure because I believed that I had become a pawn in a larger struggle between two competing autocratic forces. In April, four days after I lay in my father’s hospital bed watching him take his last breath, I was officially released from teaching but allowed to finish out my year in the classroom. In those few months, I thought about the kind of culture the school created for kids. On a policy level, the town I worked for was famous for its corruption and mismanagement; most notably, at the time of my teaching, half of the school board didn’t even live in the community they were supposed to serve. Although I had long ago learned to find personal value in Latino culture and the Spanish language, most teachers I worked with saw both identifiers as deficits and obstacles to learning. Subtly veiled racist comments permeated faculty meetings, e.g., “There is no word for ‘due date’ in Mexican.” Deeply-ingrained low expectations of the students were prevalent; one teacher proclaiming her stance against developing into a college preparation curriculum: “We can’t expect that these kids are going to college.” The
cultural and economic rift between students and staff was powerful. The school where I taught maintained a colonial relationship between school and community by forcing inflexible, isolated, and hegemonic bureaucracy and curriculum. The poor education was a bureaucratic prism created by a “good ol’ boys” system and a vacuum that sustained apathy and small-mindedness.

My frustration fueled my desire to accept a non-teaching position that I thought would be short-term, but it has since become a focus for a new vision and meaning in my pedagogical philosophies. I was first hired as the tutor for some college students, and then the Academic Coordinator of a program whose core goal is to bridge the existing gap between schools and families. The disconnection between community and schools is thriving under policies in urban school districts such as Chicago, New York and Los Angeles, that uproot students from their communities and in teacher education curricula that, in my experience, focus not on a child’s life—that is an afterthought at best—but on instructional method and management of the classroom. In one community of Chicago, parents of school-aged children, led by a local community-based organization, recognized the need for school-family relationships and took it upon themselves, not only to invite, but also to encourage parents to be a part of the classroom through volunteerism. Led by Logan Square Neighborhood Association, an organization that recently celebrated its 50th year, partnered with a local university to create a organic pathway and support system for their parent volunteers to become teachers. ¹ A natural question grew out of this endeavor: given community members’ enthusiasm to become involved in schools, why can’t parents be teachers?

At first, supporting this program felt like a positive outlet for my frustrations with the school I had just left. I began to reflect on the meaningful gaps that existed between the teachers

¹ See Skinner, Garretón & Schultz (2011) for more detailed information on the history and development of the Grow Your Own program.
with whom I had worked and my students; very few of the teachers spoke Spanish, most of the Latino adults in the school were either secretaries or janitorial staff, the Spanish teachers were European, there were no PTA or parental committees of any sort, parents were systematically shut out of school processes (to see a teacher or administrator they had to make an appointment a week ahead of time), and although after-school activities existed, all students had to be out of the building by 3:15 (this was a rule I often ignored with the Poetry Club). The school was not a part of the community, but rather a separate, institutional interloper.

Martha, Belen, Paula, Pia and Marisol have reshaped how I imagine schools, and the people who are housed in them, should exist as community ecologies of parents, teachers and students. I use the term ecology as defined by Soo Hong (2011) in her study of parental engagement in schools in Logan Square. She explains that “Through an ecological view, we consider the multiple space within which parents may be involved (in support of children at home, in schools and classrooms, and within the broader community), the various groups and individuals they will connect with through their actions, and the stages of time and development across which parents will act” (p. 25). The spaces in which the women exist are not separated into public and private, nor do they exist in vacuums, but flow and influence within and throughout as ecologies. They don’t seek to teach to children but to advocate for the students and community they want to serve.

At the end of Subtractive Schooling, Valenzuela (1999) organizes some suggestions for how create “additive schooling,” rather than “subtractive schooling.” She writes, Additive schooling is especially about the maintenance of community, which includes improving home-school relationships, even if this means that the discourse gets politicized. When parents call for culturally relevant and sensitive curricula, the status
quo is sure to be threatened and possibly upset. However, if such disequilibrium translates into an infusion of people, technologies, and resources that are responsive to the demands of the community, progress will have occurred. (p. 270)

In informal conversations with practicing teachers and administrators, I often hear shadows of Valenzuela’s suggestions but only in a peripheral or imagined space--in the “ideal” world. Community engagement sounds good for schools but is forced to bow to the process of schooling rather than the engagement of education. Both major policy initiatives and research corroborate the merit of community-school relationships; even No Child Left Behind proclaims it in its doctrine (No Child Left Behind of 2001). However, lip service to community involvement often translates into a deficit model instead of a partnership. My school’s culture, for instance, was predicated on the belief that communities need help and can offer little to the progress of their children’s education. Schools often act as spaces of imperialism for people in need of saving, but end up becoming trapped in their own system. As policy-makers and administrators debate “what is best” for children, they apply standardized structures of curriculum, schedules and teaching methods believing that there is a one-size-fits-all strategy to rescue students from the perils of urban life, including the communities they call home. Instead, however, schools create structures isolated from the community culture and end up pushing children and their families further away.

After creating a rich narrative of one family’s experience with Chicago education, Chris Carger (1996) also laments the disengagement between school and community in Of Borders and Dreams: A Mexican-American Experience of Urban Education. She writes,

The involvement of diverse parents, illiterate parents, parents who for centuries have not had positive school-related experiences and images, presents a challenge for educators,
and yet is so crucial to reaching toward an education that is meaningful and humane. The assumption of deficiency on the part of minority parents calls for new understandings based on ethnographic research by teachers and administrators committed to excellence in education and able to recognize and focus on what is there rather than what is not.

(p. 146)

“The assumption of deficiency” seems an easy target for the teacher candidates in this research project. Their experiences mirror the statistics that caricature them: Many became pregnant in high school, some are drop-outs, some were, at one time, undocumented, most live under the poverty line, and all were told that college was not an option. From the white, Western perspective, the woman might be commended for their resiliency capital in becoming teachers in the face of such barriers. Becoming a teacher is never an easy course, especially as teachers find is more and more difficult to get certification and find a job, but the added difficulties of children, divorce, domestic violence, machismo, poor education, poverty, racism and language learning add new dimensions to teacher candidates’ experiences. However, resiliency in the midst of white, middle-class defined deficiency does not characterize them, it only marginalizes them. As Carger points out, it only locates “what is not” (p. 146).

What is there is rich and worthy. Tara Yosso (2005) outlines a critical race theory lens of “community cultural wealth” as: “aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial and resistant” (p. 69). I think these capitals directly apply to the teacher candidates in this study, but I would add the capital of conscious adaptability as they negotiate among their many roles as mothers, fathers, daughters, emerging teachers, students and reflect on how those different roles can complicate and provide richness to each other. If nurtured, celebrated and explored, the cultural community capital of the participants creates meaningful stories towards a new
understanding of life histories within the complexity of urban education. Their experiences don’t offer answers to the complicated question of what makes a good teacher, but certainly their experiences as insiders offer the more authentic possibility of building bridges with parents and creating a resource for local knowledge. In other words, instead of looking toward teaching outsiders how to “tap into” this local knowledge, perhaps the local knowledge holders can offer something to the schools as teachers.

I am personally invested in the candidates’ mission and fascinated by the phenomenology behind their personal goals. My research interest is in their lived experience that constructs their investment in education as mothers, students and teachers. Why do they want to be teachers? Why do they volunteer in schools? Why do they organize press conferences, protests and stroller marches when the school board tries to create policies that value the system instead of the community? How do they handle the various roles that are expected of them? How do they understand the transference of community knowledge into pedagogical knowledge? I want to learn from parental and community knowledge and how it shapes their teacher knowledge. I want to know and feel the complex journey, layered within family, culture and transnational identities, of these teacher candidates. I have learned much from my relationship with the teacher candidates and the community-based organization and I now regret all that I didn’t do for my high school students in the context of their lived “out-of-school” (Schubert, 1986, p. 159) and all instruction their families might have offered me. What I should’ve been asking is what Schubert suggests; “How can we defensibly advocate knowledge and experience as worthwhile for students whose current knowledge and experience we scarcely know?” (p. 160).

In her book, Con Respeto: Bridging the Distances Between Culturally Diverse Families and Schools: An Ethnographic Portrait, Guadalupe Valdés (1996) follows the case studies of 10
Mexican-American families and their relationships with schools and finds them, at best, lacking. In her conclusion, Valdés (1996) eloquently describes her concerns about traditional tactics of community engagement:

I understand that these efforts are well-intentioned, but I am convinced that if there is any hope at all of protecting young people from the dangers of life in urban ghettos, it is in the hands of the families themselves. It is with their resources, with their networks, and with their traditions...that they will be able to produce ‘good’ children. I worry, then, about these well-intentioned teachers...who might decide, for example to help children learn to read by involving them and their parents in the now-fashionable family literacy programs. I worry about family math programs and family nutrition programs, and toy-making projects, and health programs really designed to change the cultural practices of these very able and very strong families. (p. 202)

The women in my research are “very able” indeed. They offer multi-focal narratives as urban school graduates, community activists, parents and emerging teachers in the experience of urban education. Beyond the sphere of the “well-intentioned,” they are embedded in the authenticity of their lived experience of insiders while straddling the liminal space that is bi-cultural, transnational, and multifunctional. Perhaps instead of swooping in with programs and policies designed to teach communities the “right” way to raise their children, we—teacher educators, policy makers, school administrators, college peers—need to listen to what community members, especially mothers, experience as insiders and perceive as marginalized people. Ultimately, this work answers the call quoted at the beginning of this Chapter; I want to voice, “what is going on in Chicana/Latina-controlled spaces of teaching and learning, whether in college classrooms, on the street, or at the kitchen table” (Delgado-Bernal et al., 2006, p. 3). The research allows the
women to make meaning of the experiences as the flow among and within the spaces in classrooms, universities and kitchen tables.

The research attempts to listen to their lived experiences and the phenomenological essence that they voice. As explained in more detail in Chapter 3, data were gathered in both formal (interviews, dialogue journals) and organic methods (when I helped babysit or drive students to class when a car broke down). How the participants understand community and the loss of community in their lives is explored through interviews, participant observations, conversations, and authentic writing of the participants. The experiences and memories collide and intertwine with each other to synthesize a quilt of deeper understanding of their perceptions of community and what education could be. As the research developed, three lenses developed more clearly: (1) their personal experience as students and daughters informed their beliefs about education as a form of oppression and liberation, (2) their perspectives and epistemologies about classrooms as political and maternal spaces, and (3) the complications of activist teaching and mothering within a system of education that is devastating communities and delegitimizing the women’s local funds of knowledge.

There is a fourth issue that will be addressed again in the conclusion of this research; I am ultimately a researcher in this process, not a participant. I am all too aware of my outsiderness when working with these women. My position as outsider creates issues of concern to this project, but I see them not as limitations but as complexities. I am wary of my position as privileged, both as researcher and academic and as a white woman. Sofia Villenas (1996) warns of researchers who want to delve into the lives and experiences of the “oppressed,” but instead end up further marginalizing communities through their research. She writes, “By objectifying the subjectivities of the research, by assuming authority, and by not questioning their own
privileged positions, ethnographers have participated as colonizers of the researched” (p. 713). The women in this research share many experiences and subjectivities as Latina mothers living in the same community that I do not and will not ever share. I share their community and their ideas about what education could, but their struggles and success are still theirs, not mine. It is not enough to share their stories with the academic world. I also need to struggle, as Villenas suggests, with the “multiplicities of identity and histories of complicity” (p. 729) as researcher and authority figure. I also need to make room for the participants to co-construct their stories and the presentation of those stories as they want them to be told.

Employing strategies that a teacher would when researching his or her own students, I regularly reflect upon my subjectivity while inviting participants to “cross check” my writing and research. Unlike a school or public institution, the participants have no static physical space that defines their growth; instead, there are multiple spaces: schools in which they work, the higher learning institution where they take classes, community schools, homes, extended families’ homes, transnational homes, and, of course, their children’s schools. The vignettes will allow for the multiplicity of space, stories and capital that they bring. I hope that this research can create a representative space where the multi-faceted nature of their lives can intersect and be heard not as deficiency, but as affirmation. This research/research, insider/outsiderness creates a contradiction that doesn’t need fixing, but does warrant some attention. I don’t share their subjectivities, but as a researcher, I appreciate them. More importantly, however, as an educator and a mother of a child who will attend a public school, I think they need to be heard. Their voices are missing from the dominant narrative.

As Valdés (1996) explains in her own research struggle in writing Con Respeto: Bridging the Distances Between Culturally Diverse Families and Schools: An Ethnographic Portrait:
During the period that I have been attempting to write this book, the struggle has involved finding a voice with to write *con respeto y cariño* (respectfully and in friendship). The families and the children that I studied are, to me, not just examples of Mexican immigrants, but people whom I came to know and care for. I started out seeing them and relating to them as people who were part of my study, and somewhere along the three-year period of frequent contact, I stepped over the line, and they became a part of extended network of very special friends. (p. 13)

I have also “stepped over the line” from research to advocate for my friends and in many ways have become *my* mentors in motherhood, education, and social justice. I am humbled by what they have accomplished, and they are a testament to the possibilities that exist if teacher education programs recruit and support activist mothers of color into degree programs.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature informing this study begins with feminist thought, but more specifically Womanist thought. Womanist is a term coined by Alice Walker. Womanist is for Walker (1983), a “A black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mother to female children and also a woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female” (p. xi). For Walker Womanism was not another, different definition of feminism, but rather one that gave light to the African-American experience. Ana Catillo takes Walker’s ideas about Womanism and applies it to Chicana feminism. In Massacre of Dreamers, author Ana Castillo (1995) writes, “Eventually I hope that we can rescue Xicanisma from the suffocating atmosphere of conference rooms, the acrobatics of academic terms and concepts and carry it out to our work place, social gatherings, kitchens, bedrooms, and society in general” (pp. 10-11). For Castillo, Xicanisma feminism represents the amalgamation of cultural ancestry and womanist or mujerista activism. This literature review attempts to draw upon Castillo’s term in exploring the theories (“acrobatics of academic terms”) and praxis (“kitchens, bedrooms”) of activist mothering and feminist community activism as pedagogical practice. Xicanisma feminism offers a lens that blurs the line between women’s public and private spaces in a way that creates more fluid, living spaces. That is, the public, activist and educational work continually influences the private, maternal and community work and vice-versa. A Xicanisma feminist does not see these as separate spaces, but as having a symbiotic relationship. This review, then applies the lens of

2 See Alice Walker’s (1983) In Search of our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose for more detailed information on womanism.
Xicanisma to the motherwork and activism of burgeoning teachers. More specifically, this review asks, how can feminist community empowerment translate into community-engaged pedagogy? Historically, policy makers and researchers have implored schools to improve community-school relationships, and many academics and practitioners have pleaded for “authentic partnerships” (Anderson, 1998, p. 572), but generally urban communities are viewed as something in need of saving, not as assets to education. Activist mothering and feminist community empowerment, in the tradition of Ella Baker, upend the deficit model of power structure while criticizing the hegemonic borders of gender, language, race, document status, and power. Together, these disciplines can teach us about the partnerships of classroom and community.

The idea of Xicanisma as praxis was introduced to me by Paula, one of the women in this study. During a tutoring session, she talked of reading Gloria Ladson-Billings’ (1994) *Dreamkeepers* while feeding her one-year-old niece at the kitchen table. She told me how she recognized the lives of mother, student and teacher as intersections at that table. This literature review begins an academic dialogue that emerges from the informal conversations and lived experiences among Paula and the other teacher candidates. Xicanisma, in fact, brings together the elements of home, community, culture, identity and theory within a feminist framework and is, therefore, the best term for the multifaceted lenses these women invite.

The lived experiences of the women, coupled with the supporting literature, suggest a reimagining of communities, schools, and teacher identity and education. First, the traditional school-community relationship establishes a deficit model that views communities, especially urban communities, as destitute and in need of saving. The maintenance of the deficit models weakens the possibility of student support and community development, and it is therefore
important to reframe our understanding of community resources and the school’s role in the community. Second, in reframing the concept of parental and community relations with schools, we need to redefine our understanding of community activism and its possibilities to transform education. Community activism, especially within a feminist perspective, is not a common theme in discussions of education and communities, but the lens of feminist community activism can help inform schools on pedagogy and community resources. Finally, as the teaching workforce continues to fight for community insiders and non-traditional students to become a part of the teaching profession, schools of education need to reflect on current practices that shape teacher identity. In other words, how can teacher educators encourage candidates to learn from their lived experiences as community members, parents, and activists to become activist practitioners in the classroom?

This literature review documents four themes that intersect within the disciplines of curriculum theory, feminist theory, and ethnographic studies. The review is not intended to cover all possibilities within the topics, but rather to offer an outline of the major themes and voices while weaving together otherwise disparate conversations. First, I survey research supporting community involvement in schools. Within this topic, there is an analysis of literature suggesting that effective community engagement may need to be initiated by the community rather than the schools. Second, I look at feminist community activism in the tradition of Ella Baker, that is, activism that is womanist and grassroots. The third concentration is on literature regarding activist mothering including the motivation of mothers to incorporate activist politics in their identity as parents. Finally, the review touches upon the previous themes of feminist community activism and activist mothering as pedagogical practice. The review concludes with some essential questions and implications for schools, policy makers, and schools of education.
Parent and Community Engagement: Realities and Desires

The value of community, parent, and school networks are well established. Research enshrined in various state and federal mandates, such as teacher certification standards and No Child Left Behind, include community collaboration in their directives. Despite the strong support for school and community partnerships in qualitative and quantitative studies (Blank, Melaville, & Shah, 2003; Chavkin, 2000; Epstein, Sanders, Simon, Salinas, Rodriguez-Jansorn, & Van Voorhis, 2002; Fan & Chen, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Jones, & Reed, 2002; Jeynes, 2003; Policy Studies Associates & Westat, 2001), however, there is still a resounding call for better, more authentic community school partnerships—those in which both parent and community members have the same legitimacy as principals, policy-makers and teachers (Carger, 1993; Henderson, Johnson, Mapp, & Davies, 2007; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003; Schutz, 2006; Valdés, 1996; Valenzuela, 1999). Furthermore, research shows that both parents and educators want more collaborative partnerships, but schools are not developing them (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Drummond & Stipek, 2004; Epstein & Becker, 1982; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2002; Lopez, Scribner, & Mahitivanichcha, 2001; Pelco & Ries, 1999).

The palpable chasm between research and practice may partly stem from the conflicting paradigms driving research and theories on community and school relationships, that is the binary of the traditional model of school-based, often deficit oriented, parent involvement and that of grassroots-focused, community-based engagement.

Traditionally, policy initiatives as well as educational research focus on school-controlled and managed parent involvement. One of the most thorough literature reviews on the topic of community-school partnerships is Henderson and Mapp’s (2002) A New Wave of Evidence: The
Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement, which is also a major reference for Section 1118 of No Child Left Behind (the section that calls for more parental involvement). Henderson and Mapp’s meta-analysis surveys a wide range of 51 “methodologically sound” studies about parental and community involvement. The data collected in the meta-analysis conclude that “[t]he evidence is consistent, positive, and convincing: families have a major influence on their children’s achievement in school and through life” (p. 7). Although this compelling analysis is particularly helpful in advocating for parent outreach, especially when presenting to policy makers, it is limited in its data, especially in how it defines “parental involvement.” In Henderson and Mapp’s description of parental involvement in the studies they reviewed, the authors look at only four types of outreach: face-to-face meetings, calls home when the student was having issues, calls home when the student was not having problems, and sending home helpful materials to parents. Each of these four constitute traditional, teacher-initiated forms of involving parents.

Joyce Epstein, arguably the pioneer in the field of theorizing and studying parental involvement in schools, created a framework for categorizing types parental involvement in a different way. In the context of Joyce Epstein’s et al. (2002) evaluation of the six types of parental involvement, “parenting,” “communicating,” “volunteering,” “learning at home,” “decision making,” and “collaborating with the community,” the studies analyzed by Henderson and Mapp are narrow (p. 8). However both Epstein’s and Henderson and Mapp’s evaluations frame their research as focused on school-based, teacher knowledge as the basis for how community should be involved, rather than advocating for community funds of knowledge. In fact, a major critique of these studies is that dominant community-school policy discourse embraces “a deficit perspective of the community as clients devoid of assets and needing
services” rather than a healthier, more effective community development perspective “promot[ing] a more inclusive partnership for community change that [sees] neighborhood residents as agents” (Keith, 1999, p. 226). For true partnerships to prosper, a grassroots, respectful culture must emerge through parents’ ability to serve as change agents (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2002; Moll, Amanti, & Neff, 1992; Schutz, 2006; Valdés, 1996; Warren, Hong, Leung-Rubin, & Phitsamay, 2009).

Partnerships promoting community development depend upon teacher respect and knowledge of social capital as a major asset to student achievement. Luis Moll and others report extensively on the power of social capital, or more specifically “funds of knowledge” in Latino households and schools (Moll et al., 1992). In “Funds of Knowledge for Teaching: Using a Qualitative Approach to Connect Homes and Classrooms” Moll et al. succinctly discuss their findings in implementing a qualitative approach to training teachers as social capital advocates in their classroom. They base their curriculum upon the belief that “funds of knowledge represents a positive (and, we argue, realistic) view of households as containing ample cultural and cognitive resources with great, potential utility for classroom instruction” (Moll et al., 1992, p. 134). Moll’s work goes beyond demonstrating the power of social capital as a resource that should be embedded in parental involvement to illustrating how teachers can successfully support household funds of knowledge in regular classroom curriculum and activities. In Moll’s initiative, the teacher participants are trained as qualitative, ethnographic teacher researchers who learn transparency about their own cultural baggage and, through questionnaires and interviews, about the educational experiences, home life, and cultural dualities of their students and families. Moll’s research is provocative because it offers a comprehensive school-community partnership through individual teacher initiative and because it furthers the call for addressing partnership
issues within teacher education. For this to happen, however, it would require a major dispositional shift for many teachers who would have to first agree that the communities they serve have valuable knowledge.

As a part of an initiative to encourage teachers to access these funds of knowledge that Moll emphasizes, Patricia Buck and Paul Skilton Sylvester (2005) researched a program that requires preservice teachers at the University of Pennsylvania to engage in qualitative research about community knowledge, especially in urban, low-income communities, and integrate what they learn into their personal, pedagogical education. This type of initiative, encouraging preservice teachers to learn from the communities they will work, is growing as universities are encouraged to develop more “culturally competent” teachers (Schultz, Jones-Walker, & Chikkartur, 2008; McDonald, Tyson, Brayko, Bowman, Delport, & Shimomura, 2011). The study and initiative seek to help the teacher candidates examine their fears and assumptions about the neighborhoods and to rethink their ideas about the communities representing a “culture of poverty.” Ideally, they hope for the students to eventually “view urban communities and their residents as reservoirs as strength, possibility, and talent…” (p. 222). This type of work is important and valuable but still asks how we can train teachers and student teachers about the community instead of how community members can do the training.

In response to the over-abundance of school and teacher-based models, researchers are turning towards community-based educational movements to learn more about successful, grassroots community engagement, authentic parent participation, and community-school partnerships. In his exhaustive literature review of both school-based and community-based educational relationships, Aaron Schutz (2006) goes as far as to say that school-based engagement strategies are, in general, failures; “[t]he field of education has developed few if any
effective, broadly applicable strategies or models for helping urban schools to further engage with their communities” (p. 716). Schutz’s review rejects the notion that schools hold the answers and instead looks to community-led initiatives. Schutz is not offering a panacea in a community-based approach, as he does recognize the limitations, but he is problematizing the “common sense” notion that community-school relationships need to originate in schools. His review includes some community-led initiatives and his estimation, “The most promising efforts to bring local neighborhoods and urban schools together emerge from the communities, not from the schools” (p. 726).

Mark Warren et al. (2009) published an article that thoughtfully researches three community efforts to create change in schools. Looking at three community-based organizations in Chicago, Los Angeles, and Newark, Warren et al. propose that community relational approaches to schools offer profound opportunities for the educational success of children. Like previously mentioned researchers, Warren et al. establish that current parent involvement in schools is weak in their isolation and even marginalization of communities and turn to community-based initiatives as progressive models. The study highlights the themes of building networks of collaborators, such as parents and educators, creating leadership opportunities for community members, and shifting the traditional power and culture dynamic from schools to communities.

These cases challenge us to think about new relationships between public schools and low-income urban communities. They ask us to go beyond the ‘within four walls’ mentality in which the school floats like a ship in a sea of community change. Instead, they suggest an approach in which schools and communities can learn from each other and can combine their efforts to link school improvement to community revitalization.
For Warren et al., it is the emphasis on the relationships developed by the community that offers the essential opportunities for change in schools.

In Soo Hong’s (2011) most recent book *A Cord of Three Strands: A New Approach to Parent Engagement in Schools*, she studies the work of the community-based organization, Logan Square Neighborhood Association, and their work in empowering local parents in the neighborhood schools. The study is especially important to this work because Logan Square is the same neighborhood in which the women in this study work, live, and serve. Hong (2011) uses an ecological and ethnographic framework to chronicle the narratives of parent volunteers, referred to as parent mentors, to suggest that for community-school partnerships to be authentic and successful, they need to focus on “mutual engagement, relationship-building, and shared leadership and power” (p. 10). Her work reframes parent engagement as not only necessary for schools to successfully educate students, but as a means to empower communities.

If we understand that authentic collaboration between communities and schools is necessary for student achievement and neighborhood school sustainability, we need a careful analysis of not only what works, but how it is grown out of a foundation of community action and funds of knowledge. Top-down, deficit models of parent engagement maintain a relationship in which schools control the community involvement: schools create the spaces in which parents are allowed to enter and schools decide when it is appropriate for parents to have a voice. Community-based initiatives, however, offer the possibility for collaborative and educational progress from the community perspective.
“Strong People Don’t Need Strong Leaders” (Baker, 1972, p. 345): Feminist Community Empowerment and the Traditions of Ella Baker

As education researchers turn towards community-based practices in learning how to meaningfully engage families in classrooms, historical practices and research on feminist community empowerment might help inform our understanding. Although women have played a vital role in community activism and larger political campaigns, such as the civil rights movement, they have not been historicized or documented as leaders or even influential figures inspiring change. However, the work of Ella Baker, along with contemporary researchers uncovering previously marginalized material, reveals that feminist activism is crucial in community empowerment as how women are redefined as leaders in the reclamation of women’s work in community organizing, and in the focus on “race uplift.”

The theme of empowering one’s own community, or as Ella Baker explains, “[t]he need for people to have a sense of their own value and their strengths” follows the theme of “race uplift” witnessed by many researchers working with community-based activism as cited in Payne (1989, p. 886). This literature review does not span the breadth of research on and history of community organizing as a whole, but rather it focuses on feminist community activism or activist mothering. Ella Baker’s grass roots work is respected and emulated by feminist organizers and researchers today. She did not consider herself a leader in the civil rights movement nor did she want to be a symbol of “salvation” (Baker, 1972, p. 347). In fact she warns against coveting leadership roles or the activist leaders themselves.

I have always felt it was a handicap for oppressed people to depend so largely on a leader, because unfortunately in our culture, the charismatic leader usually becomes a leader because he has found a spot in the public limelight. It usually means that the media
made him, and the media may undo him. There is also the danger in our culture that, because a person is called upon to give public statements and is acclaimed by the establishment, such a person gets to the point of believing that he is the movement. (p. 380)

Here, Baker claims that the leadership role is just one facet in organizing, but is in fact a dangerous temptation. “I have always thought what is needed is the development of people who are interested not in being leaders as much as in developing leadership among other people” (Payne, 1989, p. 892). The reconceptualization of leadership as empowerment of a community instead of a desirable position is a reoccurring theme among feminist organizers and researchers.

Dolores Delgado-Bernal (2006) suggests that feminist “leaders” in community empowerment exist outside of traditional definitions and are often in thankless positions. In analyzing the published historical accounts of the 1968 Chicano Student Movements, also remembered as the Blowouts of East Los Angeles, Delgado-Bernal found that women were not only marginalized in the history but often completely absent. Interviewing some of the women involved uncovered viewpoints that echo that of Ella Baker’s about women as leaders and feminist organizing. In fact, Delgado-Bernal suggests that the work of Chicana women in the 1968 Blowouts may serve as the basis for a new “leadership paradigm” (p. 149). She writes, “Through a cooperative leadership paradigm that recognizes diverse dimensions of grassroots leadership, we are able to move beyond the tradition of leadership and identify ways in which women offered leadership in the blowouts” (p. 160). For Delgado-Bernal, leadership among these women did not mean standing in the “limelight” but had five dimensions: “networking, organizing, developing consciousness, holding an elected office, and acting as official or unofficial spokesperson” (p. 149). Typically, it is the fifth dimension of “spokesperson” that is
thought of when one thinks of leaders, but, as both Delgado-Bernal and Baker assert, women reconceptualize and reclaim hegemonic definitions of leadership.

Ella Baker recognized that women, in particular, were vital assets to change. Partly because, as she put it, they did the things “that had to be done” (Payne, 1989, p. 890). In remembering the Montgomery Bus Boycotts, Baker explains, “All the churches depended, in terms of things taking place, on women, not men. Men didn’t do the things that had to be done and you had a large number of women who were involved in the bus boycott. They were the people who kept the spirit going” (p. 890). For Baker, women were the reason movements stayed alive. In her studies of low-income women activists in New York City and Philadelphia, Nancy Naples (1998) found similar sentiments among the women she worked with. “Their involvement in social protests, public speaking, and advocacy as well as grant-writing, budgeting, and other administrative tasks were viewed as a part of a larger struggle—namely, doing ‘just what needed to be done’ to secure economic and social justice for their communities” (p. 890). In other words, Ella Baker and the women in Naples’ work did not necessarily see themselves as radical activists in the midst of history making but as undertaking “caretaking and nurturing work” (p. 129). For the women documented in Naples’ work, what needed to be done was redefined daily as the need arose in their community and among their neighbors; it was the community that needed them the most, not the movement.

Ella Baker also believed in the promise of community empowerment and race uplift. Her intended contribution was to influence her people’s belief in themselves (Baker, 1972). For Baker, her people were powerful even in the midst of violent oppression. “The major job was getting people to understand that they had something within their power that they could use, and it could only be used if they understood what was happening and how group action could counter
violence…People have to be made to understand that they cannot look for salvation anywhere but to themselves” (p. 379). Race uplift does not seek to save communities “in need,” but rather to celebrate and emphasize the resources already embedded in the culture. Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) suggests that her culture has been sickened by the white, middle-class power structure. “The dominant white culture is killing us slowly with its ignorance. By taking away our self-determination, it has made us weak and empty. As a people we have resisted and we have taken expedient positions, but we have never been allowed to develop unencumbered—we have never been allowed to be fully ourselves” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 87). For Ella Baker and the women introduced by researchers, feminist community empowerment seeks to resurrect cultural power, to allow a people to fully exist in all the spaces they value, including the maternal space.

“We Most Often Learn to Question Patriarchy Rather than Deny our Mothers” (Villenas & Moreno, 2001, p. 672): Reclaiming Motherhood through Resistance and Othermothering

Within the framework of feminist theories and community activism, there is a focus on activist mothering. Activist mothers not only emphasize feminist, community-based motivation but work from the needs of their children and family. Nancy Naples (1998) defines activist mothering according to the mothers she worked with who, in turn, define activist mothering and “good” mothering as one and the same. It includes, “social activism, that addressed the needs of their children and community—variously defined as their racial-ethnic group, low-income people, or members of a particular neighborhood” (Naples, 1998, p. 114). She goes on to say that, “The term activist mothering highlights the community workers’ gendered conceptualization of activism on behalf of their communities, often defined beyond the confines of their families, households, and neighborhoods” (p. 114). For Naples and the women she works
with, activist mothering emerges from the essential practices of mothering of care and radiates to include not only family, but community, neighborhood, gender and ethnicity and therefore does not fit into traditional, middle-class definitions of motherhood, which often are limited and separate the public (work) and private (family) spaces. Understanding the motivation and performitivity of activist mothering allows for a better empathy of the impetus of community engagement in education.

Feminist activists of color have criticized the white, middle class definitions of feminism, womanhood and motherhood (Anzaldúa, 1987; Collins, 2000; hooks, 1984; hooks, 1994; Maher & Tetreault, 1997; Villenas, 2001). Writer and cultural philosopher bell hooks has argued that women of color are marginalized from seemingly liberatory practices that reflect classist and racist biases. hooks found that white, middle-class feminists led the fight for equality by arguing that motherhood was a barrier to success and needed to be shared by both partners. Black women, according to hooks (1984), saw motherhood as a type of motherwork directly associated to success, labor and libratory practice. “Historically, black women have identified work in the context of family as humanizing labor, work that affirms their identity as women, as human beings showing love and care, the very gestures of humanity white supremacist ideology claimed black people were incapable of expressing” (hooks, 1984, p. 134). hooks believes that motherhood is an act of humanist labor and therefore a political act. For hooks and Naples, motherhood is not a private act separate from labor and community, but instead it is the context from which women, especially mothers and caretakers, formulate and construct their political and activist consciousness (Naples, 1992; Naples, 1998).

In a participatory study of Latina mothers in North Carolina, Sofia Villenas found that the mothers not only redefined traditional notions of motherhood, but in fact criticized white, middle
class mothering practices. Although conventional beliefs about the Latina women supported a deficit model or what Villenas calls “benevolent racism,” she found that the mothers held very different beliefs about themselves (Villenas, 2001, p. 4). In other words, outsiders saw the mothers’ “plight” as single mothers in need of charity, education, and social services, while the women’s own “counterstories” suggested that they were not only well-educated mothers but in fact, in many ways, better mothers (p. 4). Within their “counterstories” the women defined themselves as well-educated, situated their own traditional family practices as superior to that of American, white women, and simultaneously critiqued traditional educational values as morally depraved. For the women in Villenas’ study, motherhood was an act of resistance to the “interlocking structures of oppression that publicly positioned them as social service ‘clients’ and as brown transnational workers who became targets of both benevolent and xenophobic racisms” (p. 22). However, motherhood was also an act of morality, like hooks’ humanism, in which they “claimed their dignity and educated identities in possessing and imparting to their children the most important kind of education—a moral one” (p. 22).

Activist mothering, therefore, maintains a sense of morality and humanity not only for one’s own children and the intersecting oppressions that hurt them but also for the community’s children. This is a practice often referred to as “othermothering,” a term developed by Patricia Hill Collins. “African-American communities have also recognized that vesting one person with the full responsibility for mothering a child may not be wise or possible. As a result, othermothers—women who assist bloodmothers by sharing mothering responsibilities—traditionally have been central to the institution of Black motherhood” (Collins, 2000, p. 178). Othermothering is the community practice of mothering and, for African-American mothers, is rooted in the times of slavery and within African culture. Collins describes the practice of
othermothering as woman-centered and community based and therefore aberrant of the traditional, private, nuclear family model that institutions, such as schools respect. Collins supports rethinking traditional models in order to resist and rethink community.

[T]hese understandings of woman-centered kin networks become critical in understanding broader African-American understandings of community. At the same time, the erosion of such networks in the face of changing institutional fabric of Black civil society points to the need either to refashion these networks or develop some other way of supporting Black children. (p. 183)

Collins’ work on othermothering, along with the traditions of activist mothering, upset traditional notions of parent and teacher relationships. Collins, Naples and hooks all suggest that motherhood may in fact be a community act of resistance and that mothers are an incredible resource to schools.

**Womanist Teaching and Mujer-Oriented Pedagogy: The “Other” Feminisms**

There is, of course, an abundance of literature about the practices and limitations of feminist pedagogy. However, this literature review will not attempt to encompass the entirety of the scholarship, but rather touch on some of the canonical texts and then focus on the intersections of pedagogy, motherhood and political activism. Even with its history as a marginalized discipline, the traditions of feminist criticism in all facets of scholarly frameworks have been important in changing some of the major hegemonic structures of academia and canonical theory. As William Pinar and Janet Miller explain, “Feminist thought to date operates in relative isolation from the other eddies of curriculum theory and practice, but its ripples will have profound. . . influence” (as cited in Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery & Taubman, 1995, p. 403).
Although I have identified with feminist criticism in my literary studies, I now understand my research was limited to the tendencies of white, middle-class feminism in the traditions of Simone de Beauvoir, Gloria Steinem, and Betty Friedan. I was comfortable applying the classical feminist lens to educational theory in contemplating a number of pedagogical and curriculum issues that bothered me. For instance, Madeleine Grumet (1988), Elizabeth Ellsworth (1993), and Janet Miller (2005) created a context for understanding the implications of teaching being a historically and socially “feminine” discipline. Or as Grumet (1988) evokes Julia Kristeva’s (1992) theories of post-Oedipal symbols, “the method of this discourse invites us to read the work of women in classrooms as a text of our repressions and compromises” (p. 20).

Although classical feminist theory is an important lens in understanding patriarchal systems of power and hegenomy it also has limitations, especially for this research. Through the writings of Annette Henry (1998), Patricia Hill Collins (2000), Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994), bell hooks (1984), Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) and other mothers of black and Latina feminism, I began to appreciate the intersectionality of feminism and other social science lenses such as African-American studies, Latino studies, indigenous studies and queer theory. These multi-layered theoretical lenses provide new insight into my research, the participants, and, of course, my own position as researcher.

As bell hooks (1984) declares in the opening of her book, Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center, “To be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside the main body. . .We could enter that world but we could not live there” (p. ix). The intersections among feminist theory and more marginalized theories informed my understanding of education, and much of educational theory and research supporting the marginalization of certain people, cultures and life experiences. During my studies, as I grew to define my position as curricularist, I was drawn to
the professors and theorists who wrote from, in, and within the margins, as space in which I am included as a woman, but an outside of as a white, middle-class American. However, as a researcher, I have to value that I am the outsider translating the participants’ feminism within the borderlands of their identities as women, mothers, community activists, feminists, and teachers. I want to identify myself within this intersection of feminist-mother-activist, academically and personally. As Ruth Behar (1993) explains about her purpose through the context of feminism in translated Woman, “My aim is to work the dialectic between Esperanza’s no-name feminism and my feminism of too many names, to go beyond the search for heroines on either side of the border” (p. 276). The participants and their relationship to education are far too complicated and interesting to limit their experiences to one view of feminism.

As this review has already posited, feminist, community-based activism is situated within the intersections of motherwork and politics, and does not reflect the binaries of labor/home, political/private and community/self. Essentially, activism and motherhood are inseparable. Some libratory theorists suggest that justice-based pedagogy is also positioned within such intersections because of its tendency towards familial culture keepers and the art of consejos (guidance) (Delgado-Gaiton, 1994; Villenas, 2001).

The framework for much of the feminist thought exposed by the actions of Ella Baker and the research of Gloria Naples is grounded in the feminist thought and action highlighted in black womanist and Chicana mujerista theories. In her book, Taking Back Control: African Canadian Women Teacher’s Lives and Practice, Annette Henry (1998) describes the lives and pedagogical praxis of African-Canadian teachers as “womanist.” Specifically, Henry explains that teaching is an act of womanism. She writes that historically, “Teaching was also a form of political resistance to challenge Eurocentric domination. For many, teaching was a means of race
uplift. Black women in Ontario fought in antislavery, abolitionist and anticolor-prejudice movements” (p. 81). Henry found activist and resistance themes echoed in activist mothering and feminist community organizing.

In their quest for liberatory pedagogy, teachers were motivated by their experiences as mothers, in their practice of othermothering the students in the classroom, and their desire for “racial uplift” of their students. Like activist mothers, the teachers found their practice to be transformative when informed by grassroots activism. However, their activism was not only situated in the classroom, but in the family and larger community as well. Henry (1992) writes, “The themes of solidarity, community, and responsibility are widely recognizable in these women’s community-based pedagogies, whether in their relationships with relatives or with their neighbors. Their Black womanhood also becomes a site of creative energy to resist oppression, a position for community empowerment, a site to take charge” (p. 397). The teachers in Henry’s study echo the themes introduced by Ella Baker and those of the activist mothers; they feel an authentic responsibility to fight for everybody’s child.

_Mujerismo_ feminism draws from theology and is concerned with the issues of classical feminism as well as the intersections of faith, peace, justice, and liberation. As ethicist Ada María Isasi-Díaz (1992), termed the “Mother of Mujerista Theology,” explains, “What moved us to create the terms mujerismo and mujerista was our experience in the struggle for our liberation as Hispanic women. We felt a strong need to have a name of our own. And as community, Mujeristas³ allowing ourselves to be inspired by one of the best expressions of the soul of our


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culture, our music, we birthed these terms” (p. 109). *Mujerista* educational activism, however, is not assigned solely to the classroom, but exists within the home as well.

For Latina feminists, family knowledge, especially as informed by the matriarch, serves to simultaneously maintain community and resist oppressive meta-narratives. Dolores Delgado-Bernal qualitatively researched Chicana students to better understand how they construct knowledge and consciousness as learned in the home. Her work problematizes accepted deficit models of cultural and social resources for Chicana students. She writes, “Chicana feminist pedagogies are partially shaped by collective experiences and community memory” (Delgado-Bernal, 2001, p. 624). According to Delgado-Bernal, there is a rich historical narrative of the home that is rarely captured in classrooms, but is negotiated and developed in mother-child relations. Sofia Villenas (2001) also found that mothers are often the culture-keepers as well as teachers of resistance especially in mother-daughter relationships. It is in the context of these relationships that daughters learn about social justice, community activism, and moral responsibility. Through *consejos*, storytelling, and modeling, the mothers offer conflicting positions to their daughters, one that maintains the patriarchy while defying the racial, gender, and classist intersections that tyrannize them. “The process of mothers and daughters teaching and learning the often contradictory lessons of being a *mujer de hogar* (woman who runs the home) while knowing how to *valerse por si misma* (value oneself) is complex and intertwined with class and racial oppression…in spite of experiencing subjugation under a patriarchal society, women also learn the art of resistance in the everyday” (Villenas & Moreno, 2001, p. 695). The *mujer de hogar* exists in both the classroom and the community as well.
Conclusions and Implications

The opening of this review invoked Castillo’s exploration of Xicanisma as a type of feminism rooted in culture and activism. More specifically, however, Castillo locates Xicanisma in the kitchens, bedrooms, laughter, tears, and life of the home, family, and essentially the mother. What then, can “kitchen” activism teach us about community-school collaboration?

Schools are undeniably in need of better partnerships with communities, and, up to this point, most school-led initiatives have failed. Community-based projects and people, however, offer meaningful possibilities. This review does not suggest ready-to-implement models for collaborative effort, but attempts to draw attention to some disciplines of feminist activism, activist mothering, and activist pedagogy in order to better inform our understanding of community-school possibilities. Ultimately, this literature review raises themes that have already been suggested by the women with whom I have worked and who have served as activist mothers dedicated to the teaching profession. The participants, in fact, seem to embody these themes in their actions, narratives and reflection of their life histories.

The intersections of these topics offer a framework for the stories of the women in this research as well as implications for schools, community-based organizations, policy makers, and schools of education. School communities that desire to educate the “whole” child academically, socially, and emotionally must connect with community members and the family. However, schools and policy makers must reconceptualize how these connections and partnerships take place. First, school leaders looking for collaboration may want to analyze and reflect on embedded power structures. Who decides how parents collaborate with schools? Who creates programs for parents and community members? Which parents are missing from traditional forms of involvement such as conferences and open houses? Why are they missing? Schools may
need to conceptualize non-traditional forms of community engagement that allow for parents and community members to network, collaborate, unite, and ultimately lead. For instance, traditional forms of school-community collaborations are created and directed by schools. However, even with the best intentions, programs often work from a deficit model that ignores and marginalizes community resources. Instead of helping save communities in need, how can schools allow for community members and parents to be the educators? Finally, not only do schools need to model better practices of community engagement, but they need to work with professional educators to do the same.

Beyond a lesson for schools and teacher preparation programs in higher education, this literature review lays the groundwork for how to think about how the participants in this research are conscious of their emerging practice in the framework of Xicanisma. Do they reflect upon how parents are involved in classrooms and which parents are involved? How do they connect with teachers or other parents who only exhibit traditional leadership models? Does the classroom allow for parent and community negotiation and collaboration? Are the teachers of their children aware of what mothers want for their children? What pedagogical methods, such as activism or consejos, are practiced in the home? How can familial, feminist, and cultural pedagogical practices be implemented in the classroom? Do the classrooms reflect traditional, competitive models of learning or do classrooms engage in collaborative, feminist models of leadership and activism? What does the community offer to classrooms in activism, knowledge and resources? But, perhaps most importantly, how can teachers partner with community members in an equal, authentic manner? To be clear, these questions are not ones that are answered in this qualitative work. They are the questions that guide, support, inform, and trouble the study as the women tell their stories.
Despite what the participants of this research imagine for schools and classrooms, they still have to learn within the confines of colleges of education. Teacher educators need to reflect on how they currently teach about communities for future teachers, how they utilize feminist activism and activist mothering into developing pedagogy, and how they are responding to a unchanging demographic in the teaching force. As policies and programs appeal for community-school engagement and community-based teacher candidates, teacher educators need to rethink what is assumed. Are they able to help teacher candidates use their own community knowledge and experience? As I have gotten to know the women in the community I serve, I have been continually impressed with their resiliency and dedication to the profession. However, I have become increasingly concerned with the limited degree to which candidates are encouraged to incorporate community activism, mothering activism and cultural equity into the practical aspects of their teacher preparation courses and fieldwork. In order to address these concerns, we need to turn to the community members themselves and listen to their lived experience and the meaning they make of their educational activism.
Chapter 3: Methodology and Frameworks

This research is situated within two essential theories, that of phenomenology and feminism, especially black and Chicana feminism. The theories value personal, intimate, dialogical, sensitive, and emotional storytelling and narrative. Therefore, the methodology relies on narrative inquiry thorough semi-structured interviews with participant reflection and reframing. This chapter outlines both the process of data collection and analysis as well as the theories and frameworks that informed the methods.

Interview Methods

Although I have known the participants of this study for almost a decade, I have only formally collected data over a three-year time period. It was not a sequential collection. I met with the women when we could, and interviews often had to be interrupted by children, husbands, work, pregnancies and sickness. The primary data collection was through interviews and observations, but often more organic conversations, encounters and dialogues informed my study. Observations and interviews took place in their homes, classes, local coffee shops and schools with which they work and volunteer. Interview questions were open-ended and were developed according to what was learned throughout the study. Both the scheduled interviews and observations were recorded with a digital recording device, and I completed all the transcriptions.

The interviews were intended to represent the phenomenological theory of knowing, understanding, and reflecting. Specifically, the methodology of interviewing follows the framework delineated in I. E. Seidman’s (1991) book, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research*. The
interviewees are not offering one view or discussing one idea. Rather they are voicing their knowledge through their telling of personal experience, life histories, cultural histories, and chronicles of learning. Seidman suggests merging life history with phenomenological assumptions based in particular on the work of Alfred Schutz. As Seidman explains, “In this approach interviewers use, primarily, open-ended questions. Their major task is to build upon and explore their participants’ responses to those questions. The goal is to have the participant reconstruct his or her experience within the topic under study” (p. 9). The interview process attempted to allow the participants to both respond and reconstruct.

To accomplish this goal, I began with the participants’ life histories, especially their educational histories, that is their experience in grade school, high school and so on. After life histories were recorded, more focused interviews were offered based on particular moments, ideas, stories, and so on derived from their oral histories. For example, after one participant talked briefly about being placed, misplaced in fact, into a special education classroom, I returned to interview her more about her understanding of this experience. Finally, a third interview asked the women to voice their understanding, or what Seidman says is to “make meaning,” of what they had already told me. For instance, one question I created asked a student to reflect on a comment she made about violence in her community in a class discussion of zero tolerance. I asked, “Given what you said about violence and anger, what does this say to you about you as a teacher?” This type of questioning asks students to voice the phenomenological understanding directly with me through the interview experience. It also invites students to participate in a Vygotskian (1986) experience of learning given that, “Experience teaches us that thought does not express itself in words, but rather realizes itself in them” (p. 251).
To be clear, the methodology of this study followed a line that often required me and the participants to circle back, rethink, and rewrite. Once students agreed to be a part of this study, I began with initial interviews with each of the women to learn more about their backgrounds, beliefs, families, histories, goals, etc. After transcribing these initial interviews, I worked with the participants’ schedules to set up times for observations in their teacher education classes with the permission of the professor. Some of the professors even supplied me with the class reading materials that they planned on discussing. I also conducted follow up interviews with each of the participants to reflect on what they discussed in the class and with their classmates. After these first observations and interviews, subsequent interviews followed a more organic thread as revealed in informally recorded conversations and discussions while we were addressing daily issues such as class work, time management, and other support that they may have needed. Finally, after transcribing all interviews and observations, all students were sent a copy so that they could review, correct, and reflect. I met with each of the students to discuss what they read in those descriptions and re-interviewed them about anything they wanted to continue to discuss.

All students signed the appropriate, approved documentation agreeing to the study, and the names and identifiable data, including names of educational institutions and family members, have been changed. However, because I was still an authority figure in the program with some power over their educational program, my identity as researcher and advisor was complicated at times, which is one of the reasons that I left the position. Leaving my official place as program director allowed me to become more active in the participants’ lives on their terms. I still acted as volunteer advisor when they requested, but it also opened up conversations that moved beyond what needed to get done and into their families, fears, hopes, ideas, or even just their
daily experiences. We became closer, and they wanted to spend more time reflecting and reconstructing their experiences as students, college students and community activists.

**Phenomenology, The Female Experience, and the Sacred Space**

Phenomenology, especially as theorized by Max Van Manen, advocates for a sensitive ecological process of research. But lived experiences, the details of their lives, situations, actions—the data—are not phenomenological description. Rather, it is the reflections and connections between pedagogy and the experiences of others that constitute phenomenological awareness. Van Manen (1990) describes his own phenomenological emergence in connections between his reflections on his parental and pedagogical life. He writes, “I reflect phenomenologically on experiences of teaching and parenting as a teacher or as a parent. In other words, I attempt to grasp the pedagogical essence of a certain experience” (p. 78). In other words, it is what, upon reflection, our lived experience can teach us about our multi-dimensional selves that constitutes a phenomenological experience. This research emphasizes both the lived experience through the personal narratives and the phenomenological essence through their reflection on their lived experiences as well as the connections that the women make to their teacher identities and community activism.

The process of the study is meant not only to offer some ownership to the participants, but also to mirror the complexities and fluidity of their lives as a constant negotiation between existence and reflection. It would be easier to dissect, almost scientifically, the participants’ sources into specific events or moments. However, women’s lives are a shifting mosaic of roles and responsibilities. As Mary Catherine Bateson (1989) argues, the representation of women’s lives is not a monolithic endeavor:
Women have always lived discontinuous and contingent lives...Historically, even women who devoted themselves to homemaking and childcare have had to put together a mosaic of activities and resolve conflicting demands on their time and attention. The physical rhythms of reproduction and maturation create sharper discontinuities in women’s lives than in men’s, the shifts of puberty and menopause, of pregnancy, birth, and lactation, the mirroring adaptations to the unfolding lives of children, their departures and returns, the ebb and flow of dependency, the birth of grandchildren, the probability of widowhood. As a result, the ability to shift from preoccupation to another, to divide one’s attention, to improvise in new circumstances, has always been important to women. (p. 13)

Because of the particular discontinuity of women’s lives, this inquiry calls for a constant dialogue with the participants as their perceptions and memories shift and flow among the different preoccupations of their lives. That is, it attempts to capture how they understand their experience and how it informs their pedagogical awareness and activist identity.

In the call for more Latina voices in curriculum studies and educational theory (Anzaldúa, 1987; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; Flores, 2000; Ochoa, 2007), narratives and lived experience research is not only a popular methodology but a necessary one. In her book, *Learning from Latino Teachers*, Gilda Ochoa (2007) describes the exclusionary practices in research and academia in curriculum and pedagogy theory. She posits that Latino/a teachers are virtually silenced in the conversations about what is and should be happening in schools and classrooms. She argues, however, that there are models based in black and Chicana feminism that support the demarginalization of these voices through narrative because it allows for five central issues:
The burgeoning body of scholarship (1) centers personal experiences as forms of knowledge, (2) believes in the importance of dialogue and storytelling where participants have the opportunity to frame the issues that concern them, (3) encourages the use of emotions as a way to validate what we know, (4) emphasizes writing in a accessible way for a wide audience, and (5) advocates for research that is social justice oriented. (p. 6)

The intersection of personal experience, storytelling, emotions, accessibility and social justice is the framework for this research. Narratives support multiple spaces, chronologies and epistemologies all at once.

In fact, the stories and experiences of Martha, Belen, Paula, Pia and Marisol reflect a new space for these intersectionalities to take place. In answering the call to arms from Gloria Anzaldúa (1990), for “new kinds of theories, with new theorized methods” (p. xxv). Drawing from Xicanisma, it is also called it the Xicana Sacred Space (XSS). In attempting create a new theorized methods, the space emerged “as a result of dialogic and collaborative tensions, intentions, and complexities . . . The XSS made room for freedom and for intense dialogue, creating an intimate circle for collective reflexivity; shared subjectivities; the transformation of identities; a source of strength, direction, and knowledge; a springboard for powerful research and community projects” (Soto, Cervantes-Soon, Villarrealemmete, & Campos, 2009, p. 756). In collecting and analyzing the narratives of these women, I embraced this so-called sacred space, even as an outsider/insider. I do not share their subjectivity or their reflexivity, but in the role of researcher, I can make room in the academic conversation for their voices in the dialogues around them.

I am vigilant of the complexities and contradictions of my insider/outsider status, so much so that in one conversation, a participant reassured me that I am the right person to be
writing their stories. I have never become acclimated to the position as outsider. However, narrative inquiry offers a space for my inquiry regarding my position of outsider, relationship with the participants, and personal reflection. Therefore, in the representation of their phenomenology, I alternate the representation between uninterrupted storytelling from the students with contextualizing in my own voice.

**Narrative Inquiry: Personal Domains**

My research is most appropriate in the qualitative methodological domain partly because of the generous possibilities of this approach. Educational qualitative research is a hybrid, multi-textual, multi-vocal, cross-discipline, personal and public discourse. I’m not embracing the term limitless to mean that this research is unfocused or overly romantic. It is very much grounded in *something*. It may be grounded in the framework or the method or even the voice of the researcher. It was defining my own grounding that unnerved me when I began preparing for my own practice in qualitative research. I have become so involved in the fight for the educational ideals I believe in that it is difficult to produce a product of inquiry that proposes to in fact, inquire without prescribing. Qualitative research methodologies, however, allow for me to represent my students while challenging the dominant cultures and bureaucracies that seek to define them.

Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (2005) attempt to encapsulate a broad definition of qualitative study, “Its essence is twofold: a commitment to some version of the naturalistic, interpretive approach to its subject matter and an ongoing critique of the politics and methods of postpositivism” (p. 10). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) further complicate the definition of contemporary qualitative research by citing a series of chronological, but fluid and overlapping
moments: “traditional, the modernist or golden age, blurred genres, the crisis of representation, the postmodern...space postexperimental inquiry; and the future...is concerned with moral discourse” (p. 3). There are core elements and scholars within each of these moments that are more appropriate to the program, the research, the phenomenon and the individuals I seek to serve. I will draw upon the traditions of canonical qualitative scholars while listening to the diversity of anthropologists and post-colonialists who began to question how society and cultures were represented. Congruent with recent trends in qualitative research, the postmodern and postexperimental period inform my research as a local, organic inquiry that demands that I locate myself and my work in a democratic society.

The qualitative methodology of narrative inquiry offers the most appropriate strategy for my research purpose. As Ming Fang He and JoAnn Phillion (2008) write, “One quality of narrative inquiry that distinguishes it from other forms of educational inquiry lies in understanding experience in its own terms rather than categorizing experience according to predetermined structures and theories” (p. 14). It is not in categories, but rather the margins, that the participants of my study live, love and work. They are embedded in the authenticity of their lived experience as insiders of their communities while straddling the liminal space of the bi-cultural, transnational, and multifunctional. Any research tradition that forces the researcher to define the categories and boundaries of the participants’ lived experiences would be disingenuous. Although my research attempts to represent the lived experiences of the participants, it must also define the dominant contexts within which they exist as women, Latinas, community volunteers and mothers.

Although narrative inquiry has a lengthy history in research communities, it became clear during my studies that it is currently a sexy methodology, although certainly not accepted by all
curriculum theorists and researchers. I was instantly attracted to the form when I was introduced to it through Ming Fang He. Like me, she began as a literature student, someone who was attracted to the story. Knowing that the work I wanted to perform with the participants was phenomenological in nature, narrative seemed the best outlet to represent the students' perceptions. As George Willis (1991) purports, “In its most basic form, phenomenological inquiry investigates the distinctly human perceptions of individual people and results in the descriptions of such perceptions which appear directly to perceptions of other people” (pp. 173-174). If I am taking on the role of quilt-maker in collecting and distributing the participants’ stories and lived experiences, narrative inquiry gives some space for the participants’ control in how their private lives become public. For the research to have any phenomenological congruence with the participants’ perceptions, the story must contain what Geertz (1994) termed “thick description,” which in narrative research could include uninterrupted data or contextualized details. The narrative creates a complex picture of the participants and framework, or, as Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot and Jessica Hoffman-Davis (1997) explain portraiture research, “The portrait, then, creates a narrative that is at once complex, provocative, and inviting, that attempts to be holistic, revealing the dynamic interaction of values, personality, structure, and history” (p. 11). Narrative inquiry is the research methodology that can represent the complexity of the participants within the subtlety of intimacy.

Narrative inquiry is also a form that animates the dilemma of living outside of the hegemony while still being controlled by it. In other words, the participants live and work within the dominant structure while resisting many of the rules it thrusts upon them. Narrative inquiry allows for the constant negotiation of this dilemma to be revealed. Narrative invokes the process of reflection on lived experience and phenomenology of experience. As Max van Manen (1990)
notes. “The aim of phenomenology is to transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence—in such a way that the effect of the text is at once a reflexive re-living and a reflective appropriation of something meaningful” (p. 36). Through narrative, the participants are given not only a voice in which to re-live their experience, but also the space to reflect on their own interpretations as they exist in the contexts that surround them. As explained by Joy Webster Barbre and the members of the Personal Narratives Group (1989), women’s narratives especially “whatever form they take, can be thought of as part of a dialogue of domination. Women’s lives are lived within and in tension with systems of domination. Both narratives of acceptance and narratives of rebellion are responses to the system in which they originate and thus reveal its dynamics” (p. 8). Telling the women’s stories offers a counter-narrative to the traditional research and dominant practices that serve to characterize them as powerless.

**Process and Product of Representing Insiders: “Risky Business”**

However, narrative inquiry, especially in the form of autobiography and biography is, as Madeleine Grumet (1988) warns us, “risky business” (p. 321). Not only will the participants’ stories become a part of the public domain, but the narrative will ultimately be controlled by me, the researcher, an outsider. In my graduate classes, I craved education research books and articles written by admitted “outsiders.” I wanted to know how they represented the participants of their study as well as how they understood their own position in the research process. Although I was often moved by the research I read, such as Greg Michie’s (2005) *See You When We Get There: Teaching for Change in Urban Schools*, Ruth Behar’s (1993) *Translated Woman: Crossing the Border with Esperanza’s Story*, or Chris Carger’s (1993) *Of Borders and Dreams: A Mexican-American Experience of Urban Education*, none of them offered a blueprint to
address my concerns about my outsideness. Each author described his or her individual journey in conceptualizing personal outsideness. Michie, for instance, describes entering into discourse with colleagues and family members about his positionality. For Behar (1993), she imbedded herself in writing her research. She writes, “Just as Esperanza had her models for what makes a story recognizable as a story, I, too have drawn from various models in translating out conversations into a text and becoming, myself, a certain kind of storyteller” (p. 14). Like the scholars before me, I am in the privileged position to give voice to the participants’ experience. That process necessitates reflection on who or what I become in the act of storytelling the lives of others. When am I offering authenticity to their subjectivities? When am I “othering”? Where and how am I limited in my contextualization of their stories?

I am conscious of the hyphen described by Michelle Fine (1998) in her chapter “Working the Hyphens: Reinventing Self and Other in Qualitative Research,” and want to place myself in the category of researchers that she describes as wanting their work to produce social change. She argues that most ethnographic work done in non-privileged communities or what Eve Tuck (2009) calls “damaged-centered” research falls into the “colonial analogy: the relationship between the researcher and his subjects, by definition, resembles that of the oppressor and the oppressed, because it is the oppressor who defines the problem, the nature of the research, and, to some extent, the quality of interaction between him and his subjects” (Fine, 1998, p. 135). I am from the privileged, othering position as white, middle-class academic/research and there is no way to alter that. But, as Fine suggests, I can both recognize that position and cross into the hyphen/border and value my relationships with the participants as important data in this work.

As Fine (1998) warns, however, crossing into the hyphen creates ethical contradictions, “that face researchers who step out, who presume to want to make a difference, who are so bold
or arrogant as to assume that we might. Once out beyond the picket fence of illusory objectivity, we trespass all over the classed, raced, and otherwise stratified lines that have demarcated our social legitimacy for publicly telling their stories” (p. 151). That is, although I can claim authority as an academic and maintain that my translation of their stories will help them be “heard,” once I have thrown away pretense of objectivity, my work is not as valid in the academic community. I am fully aware of my non-objectivity in this research and my desire to speak with the women instead of for them, so my voice is often a part of this work, but not the dominant voice. Rather, it is mixed in with the voices of the women so that we can, as much as possible, be a community. In the end, I am still the privileged voice, and there are tensions in those differences, especially as the women actively resist larger systems of power; this is an issue explored in more depth in the Conclusion.

To maintain some authenticity to phenomenological awareness and to give the participants co-control over their own “meaning making,” they had a voice in the transcription of the interviews and recordings of the observations. Participants were invited to read, view, comment on and delete any information they articulated during this research. Although there was no limit to the number of times that participants could edit the work, they were invited to read the study at least twice. Whenever possible, interviews were digitally audio recorded and, after transcriptions, the participants were shown the interviews so that they could have an opportunity to respond or revise any information from their stories or reflections. Participants were also shown the writing when I incorporated their narratives into the overall writing, and again, they were offered a voice in how they are represented.

There are a number of ways the stories of Martha, Belen, Paula, Pia and Marisol could have been presented in the dissertation so that the complexities of their lives were honored. But,
because I wanted the format to emerge through the process of the inquiry, I allowed for the representation of the format to be born from my personal and academic reflection on the interviews and conversations with the women themselves. In the end, it was clear from them that they were happy to have their stories heard and read, and so they were most comfortable with at least part of the representation being chronological in nature, especially the sections that delineate the personal and educational histories. As one participant declared, “I’m just so excited that someone is going to be reading my story.”

First, it is useful to explore the different ways the intersectionalities of their lives could have emerged. The study could have followed *geographical themes*, following the different spaces of the students lives in the university, the schools in which they are parents, the schools in which they work, the homes they have created, and the homes they have in Mexico. Each section could focus on how the candidates perceive their existence in each space and reflect on how they affect and are affected by those ecologies.

Second, the study could have been organized into the *differing roles* the participants take on as mothers, wives, college students, emerging teachers, volunteers and immigrants. Although the roles do not easily separate because they are often woven together, different chapters could highlight the dominant themes within each role. For instance, when discussing their roles as college students, we could have focused on some of the barriers to success in the university as well as the kinds of unique perspectives they bring to college classrooms.

Third, the study could have been organized by the *intersectionalities* of their lives to highlight how different parts of their lives influence each other. The themes might be activist mothering, parental teaching, non-traditional learning and bilingual-binational citizenship.
Organizing by intersectionalities would allow for a more natural flow to emerge in writing about multi-layered lives.

Most obviously, I could separate the different lives of each participant to create a *portraiture study*. This way, each participant could have focused on her story and the ways in which she wants to tell it.

Ultimately, the process of inquiry led to a combination of the different categories described above—it was how they formed their epistemologies of these experiences that drove the organizational structure of the work. The community space, home space and curricular space are not easily separated and constantly flow and influence each other. It does, in many ways, highlight the intersections of spaces, but within the context of their life histories. Beyond the intimate stories, however, there is also room in the work to contextualize the larger systems—educational, political, and economic—that actively repress, marginalize and delegitimize their experiences as valuable in the classroom. This work attempts to give the women a voice to speak back to those systems.

This study is about Martha, Belen, Paula, Pia and Marisol and their perceptions and lived experiences of becoming teachers. This study does not focus on the program that supports their journey, but rather, what the women can tell us about their development towards professional teaching degrees from the perspectives of community insiders. These women represent knowledge that is not currently a part of the dominant conversation about quality education and teacher “training.” In contemplating whose knowledge has value, I argue that the participants in the study may teach us about their worlds—the plastic-covered kitchen tables, one-bedroom, garden apartments, aging mothers still working in the aluminum factories, surprising births, sudden deaths, food stamps, Bibles signed by Pancho Villa, raising children with autism, *atole*
for lactation, supportive and abusive husbands, and all of the details of their personal Xicanisma feminism. These women know their communities and their children and, if we value community knowledge in education, then they can help us understand their unique perspectives of teacher education, its successes and failures.
Chapter 4: Analysis of Findings

It was morning in late June, and it was already hot. Pia warned me about how hot her home would be over the phone. She isn’t paid in the summer, so they can’t spend much money on anything. Air conditioning is one of the easier expenses to cut. Walking up to her porch, I can see the boarded-up windows on the foreclosed two-flat next door. Two doors down, there is another two-flat in the same condition. Inside, Pia’s apartment is impeccably clean. We sit at the kitchen table where the food has been placed on top of the green and aqua rebozo tablecloth. It’s clear that she’s been cooking most of the morning for our lunch, but she doesn’t mention the heat once except to apologize for it. She has folded napkins and set the table. While we snack on chilaquiles, homemade tortillas and chorizo-filled omelets, she whispers to me about her husband’s drinking habit and how it has gotten out of hand since she graduated. “My mother warned me about this,” she tells me.

Marisol and I meet in a public library near the university. She goes there for two hours every Monday and Wednesday because it makes the most sense for her complicated summer schedule of going to school, preparing for dinner, picking up her kids from summer school and day care, dropping them off with her mother-in-law, going to her second class, picking up the kids, and finally heading home. In the library, she gets some time to for schoolwork while her kids read and do their own homework. Naomi is 12 and Gaby is turning 4. I am meeting with Marisol to help her with a feminist analysis of Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper,” but we end up talking about her budget and how she can survive during student teaching. She was laid off from her job a year ago and her unemployment has just run out. She
lists the essentials: grocery bills, dog food, uniforms, daycare and so on. Her youngest daughter interrupts periodically to show us a book that she likes; she is particularly fond of books about ducks. She has also picked out some board books for my daughter as well. Together we try to make sense of the sacrifices and costs of student teaching. Marisol tells me it’s worth it to her but that she’s frightened for her family.

Martha lives on a busy corner in her neighborhood. She has lived in the basement apartment with her teenage son and elderly mother for 15 years. They share two rooms, a bedroom and a main room that acts as living room and kitchen. Her mother sleeps in the bedroom and she and Edward share the pullout couch. Earlier that week Martha had experienced a traumatizing event, and I had come over to keep her company and help make sense of the schoolwork she needed to finish. Her building has been put up for sale and will be turned into condos. Her landlord had requested that she be around to show the building to potential buyers. She hadn’t heard from her third floor neighbor for weeks and assumed that he was in Mexico visiting family as he often did in the summers. When she opened his apartment for the realtor, she found him. He had been dead for three weeks.

The three vignettes above offer some situational context to the everyday lives of Martha, Belen, Paula, Pia and Marisol as well as to my relationship with them as both researcher and advisor. They merge stories from all five women in some way to create a inclusive description of authentic moments. As explained in Chapter 3, research transpired in a variety of spaces, both literally and metaphorically. Therefore, the presentation of the multi-layered, intersecting spaces captured here attempts to give authentic voice to those phenomena.
The analysis of this research is organized into three themes that can be characterized as chronological. The first theme, “Unimagined Territories: Personal and Educational Journeys,” chronicles the educational life histories of the women in this study. Whenever possible, the narratives are uninterrupted to allow them to read as stories. The stories are also organized so that each woman can voice her story as a whole before moving on to the next participant. The second theme, “‘We Can Teach That: Teaching as Maternal and Political,” connects the women’s interpretation of pedagogy and teacher identity to their political selves. Framing their voices within the feminist theories of mujerista and womanist feminism, the section examines how, for these women, the educational (public) space is connected with the maternal (private) space, especially in how they understand advocating for their community as a political, activist phenomenon. This section balances my voice with theirs to help create space for their epistemologies in academic conversations. The third section, “The Assault on Local Knowledge: Redefining ‘Quality’ Education through Community Struggle,” contextualizes the women’s activism within the larger structures that pretend to value community and parental involvement and knowledge, but in action constitute the attempt to destroy those same communities. The section highlights the very personal and local consequence of school reform and teacher education reform, especially in Chicago. In general, this section is dominated by my voice as I contextualize the women’s actions as community-based activists as they resist the systems that have been created to silence them as mothers, Latinas, and community members.

**Unimagined Territories: Personal and Educational Journeys**

The day that I began a serious attempt to write this dissertation was June 6th, 2012, the day that the Chicago Teacher’s Union (CTU) opened up the “Authorization to Strike” vote to all
its union members. It was also the day after Governor Scott Walker, the governor who infamously attacked and devastated teachers unions by severely limiting their collective bargaining rights, survived the recall election. Instead of diligently typing away, I was constantly checking blogs and social networks to search for news and updates about what the results were. Thanks to a new state law, known as Senate Bill 7, for teachers to go on strike, it would require at 75% yes vote, something that, according to CTU President Karen Lewis (2012), had never been done before. That morning, in a radio interview, Lewis was discussing the strike authorization and how the dissent came about:

The problem is that we have gone from a management system that has less and less to do and less and less understanding of what actually goes on in a classroom. They sit down, they have spreadsheets, they make all these decisions, but they have no clue because they have never done this work. So, quite frankly, we don’t have a lot of faith in management. They make very bad decisions. People we know all over the system are starting to feel empowered now to really complain about some of stuff that’s going on. So, what we have is a system full of people that have been extraordinarily oppressed since 1995.

That day, I became distracted by supporting the educational coup and obsessive about reading the vitriolic conversations in the blogosphere instead of concentrating on writing what I imagined to be a dissertation that lauded the efforts of five driven, community-informed mothers to become public school teachers. The disconnect between my two priorities was oppressive. I was sitting down to write about the talents of these women as future teachers, while helping to send them into a divisive, anti-teacher system that was about to go on strike. How can they be prepared for this system that “extraordinarily oppress[es]” teachers? But, of course, struggle,
especially in the act of resistance, was something these women were very familiar with, even in their attempts to get college degrees.

The act of formal education has not been easy for any of the women in this study. Based on their ethnic identities as Latino/a, atypical ages as college students, low-income status and responsibilities as mothers, they already faced a difficult battle—at least according to the statistics. As Patricia Gandara and Frances Conteras (2009) explain in *The Latino Education Crisis: The Consequences of Failed Social Policies*:

Even those [Latino/a students] that do attend college remain much less likely than other groups to complete a four-year degree or continue on to graduate or professional schools. Significantly, the pool of Latino students who graduate from high school prepared to attend competitive colleges and universities is extremely small. For example, only slightly more than 50 percent of Latino students graduated with their high school class in 2005, and only 54 percent of these graduates went directly to college, compared to 73% of white students. Of the 54 percent who went on to college, most enrolled in a two-year institution. In the same year, only 7 percent of bachelor’s degrees were awarded to Latinos.” (p. 196)

Recently, according to the Richard Fry of the Pew Hispanic Center (2011), there have been signs of improvement for Latino/a students enrolling in college. However, much of that surge focused on 18-24 year old students, not on non-traditional students (Fry, 2005). There is no statistical definition of a nontraditional college student (Hornm & Carroll, 1996), but most researchers agree that age is a common factor. Other factors may include (1) enrollment status, that is whether they enroll in college right after high school and continue in college full-time or part-time, (2) job status, whether or not they are financially independent from their parents, (3)
dependents, (4) single parenthood, and (5) lack of a high school diploma. So, given the multitudes of factors, about three-fourths of college students are in someway “nontraditional” (Choy, 2002). Factors that define a non-traditional student have generally been considered “risk” factors (Hornm & Carroll, 1996). The vast majority of nontraditional students don’t graduate.

Nontraditional students are much more likely than traditional students to leave postsecondary education without a degree. Among students seeking a bachelor’s degree, 50 percent of highly nontraditional students were no longer enrolled (for any degree) 3 years later, compared with 12 percent of traditional students. Similarly, among those seeking an associate’s degree, 62 percent of highly nontraditional students left without any degree, compared with 19 percent of traditional students. Even minimally nontraditional students seeking a bachelor’s or associate’s degree were more likely than their traditional counterparts to leave. (Choy, 2002)

The demographics of the women in this research seem to mirror the statistics of non-traditional students. All of the women have dependents, one woman is currently a single mother and two were at one time single mothers. All are older than 24, all are financially independent from their parents, and none of them went to college after high school or receiving their GED. The narratives they tell of their lived experience in their educational history present a more complicated, complete picture of how they came to college later in life, which was related to values, finances, and most essentially parenthood, and not to skill, ability, or intelligence as some might suspect.4

When I was a high school teacher in a mostly Latino high school, I didn’t know these statistics in hallway conversations let alone administrative meetings. It wasn’t really talked about. I hadn’t read Jonathan Kozol’s (1991) breakthrough description of low-income black and

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4 For more information, see Mike Rose’s (2011) Blog.
brown education compared to generally white, suburban education. I hadn’t reflected on why and how there might be a difference between black and brown graduation compared with white students; I just knew there was a difference. So, I was naively surprised when my high school students reported that I was the first teacher that even talked about college in my classroom. Or, when I tried to argue with a student to just try to fill out the FAFSA only to discover the student was undocumented and couldn’t receive federal financial aid. Or, when I did successfully help a student get into a major university and receive scholarships to pay for most of her tuition, only to receive a call from her father who was extremely aggravated that I had pushed college when there was no way he was going to let her go and leave her family behind. These were my experiences and the experiences of my high school students and not statistics, but they spoke to the general patterns of challenges that face students of color, especially Latina students. “The odds are against them. Compared to the general population, fewer Latinas finish high school or enter college; they are twice as likely to be pregnant in their teens or early 20s; and they are at considerable risk for domestic abuse. Young Latinas have high rates of attempted suicide and are more likely than the general population to live in poverty” (Markey, 2011, p. 10). The experiences of Latinas and the success and failures of education are important and warrant attention if we want to continue to understand the complex issues that face their educational processes and challenges.

For Martha, Belen, Paula, Pia and Marisol, they were acutely aware of these realities and lived in a world in which college was not an authentic option in their lives. Some were aware of the option; some were not. But none of them were able to attend right after high school. There is no one reason for this situation, one that most would call a failure on the part of the educational program. Guadalupe Valdés (1996) summarizes and critiques three arguments that are used in
analyzing the educational failure of Latinos—the Genetic Argument, the Cultural Argument and the Class Argument—that essentially lay the blame of failure somehow on being Latino and/or being poor. Valdés contextualizes the statistics of failure through these three frameworks, but finds them limited in how they explain failure. The Cultural Argument is born out of perceptions of poverty, difference, language and values. As Valdés (1996) explains, “Those who subscribe to this position maintain that children succeed in school only if their many deficiencies are corrected and they are taught to behave in more traditionally mainstream ways in specially designed intervention programs” (p. 17). This same deficiency argument tends to turn to parents as being the bearers of failure for not being involved or not valuing education. Finally, the Class Argument, especially when overgeneralized, shifts the blame to poverty and, more fundamentally, to poor people. In many ways, the Class Argument explains how the system legitimizes inequality in schools because of the view that poverty is a deficit in education that schools cannot overcome and it is ultimately up to the students to accomplish something. As Valdés notes, “The genius of the system resides in the fact that although the cards are clearly stacked against them, students come to believe that they are in fact given an opportunity to succeed. They leave school firmly convinced that they could have done better, perhaps achieved as much as their middle-class peers, if only they had tried harder or worked more” (p. 18). The Class Argument highlights how many low-income students end up believing that they are limited in what they can do not because a political economy has made it more difficult for them but because they failed.

Beyond the arguments highlighted by Valdés, there is also some evidence that John Ogbu’s (1993) “dual frame of references” theory, to some extent, can help to contextualize the eventual academic success for the women in this study. The original theory posits that
immigrants have less academic achievement with each successive generation. That is, the first generation tends to have more success than second-generation immigrants, who do better than third generation immigrants, and so on. He attributes this to the phenomenon of new immigrants pitting themselves against the limitations of “back home” in order to focus on success in their new country. In the narratives of the women in this study, there is some evidence of dual frame of reference, but the “back home” isn’t always their home country, but rather representative of their families or other systems. In her book *Learning from Latino Teachers*, an ethnographic portraiture of Latino teachers and their experience, Gloria Ochoa (2007) spends a chapter discussing the sacrifices the teachers made to get a college education. She argues that there are other ways for Latinos to experience dual frames of reference to help motivate them to succeed academically. For some of her participants it was background. For others it was just one parent. In other words, it was a resistance to someone or to becoming someone that helped for this dual frame of reference.

The narratives that follow however, are not meant to feed into these arguments about why Latinos do not succeed academically rather they are the lived experiences that may mirror, counter, modify, or even transform what researchers and theorists tell us about them. I highlight these arguments, or perhaps they should be called fallacies, because they echo what I hear from teachers, colleagues, and even administrators and politicians when discussing educational issues and students of color—that is, it is the student’s fault. The women in this study trouble these explanations.

For Belen, college was a non-entity. College was not expected of her from anyone, not her family or her teachers. She never really thought about it as an option nor did she feel like she had the resources to enroll and succeed.
I was really focused on, you know, let’s finish high school. There was never a huge push on going to college. They never went to high school; my parents just did middle school and that’s it. In Mexico, that’s it. They didn’t do anything else. So, it was just finish that [high school] and that’s it. The other piece was how was I going to afford it? I didn’t want to go through loans and all that. I did two years at Merrill High School and my first two years were at another school. I don’t even remember Merrill having students in AP classes or doing college courses, so college wasn’t really talked about.

Belen’s experience with college silence seems to be a common occurrence among many Latino youth. Many studies attribute this to low expectations of Latino youth (Bohon, Macpherson, & Atilles, 2005; Brown, Santiago, & Lopez, 2003). After high school, Belen found a job working as a bank teller and eventually met her husband. She didn’t think about continuing her education until she began advocating for her oldest child. She had been volunteering in his school when she ran into a problem with his teacher.

Actually, I was going to complain about one teacher that works in my son’s school, and I walked into the [main] office. She was being really rude to parents, so I walked into the office and it was like 10 people in line. I just looked at the table they had inside the office and they had all these flyers that said, “Do you want to be a teacher?” and all that. So, I was like, standing in line and I picked it up. They were taking forever that I finally just walked out, but I walked out with a flyer. They didn’t have it posted on doors or anything like that, just inside the office. I didn’t even get to complain about [the teacher] because I was like in line for 15 minutes and they had all this stuff they had to do, so I was like, just forget it. I walked out. Then, I went to the meeting that they had and here I am.
Belen’s return to school was motivated by the opportunity that she was offered and the anger she felt about how the teachers in her school were treating parents.

Paula’s experience was very different from Belen’s. Getting her education was something that her parents wanted for her, but she took a different path before deciding that for herself. Paula had her first child as a teenager after dropping out of high school. She talks about being a “disobedient” girl who, although very sure of her intelligence and abilities, fell in love at sixteen, ran off to Chicago, and focused all of her energy on her boyfriend, Danny. The birth of her daughter, however, disrupted her self-identity.

Here I am at seventeen and a half and thinking, wow, this is okay. Then, I got pregnant. I had my daughter at 18. Danny was just one of those boys, those men, that was just really attached to his mom. His mom had a heart condition and was really depressed that her son was so far away. When my daughter was nine months, we had gotten into a big fight. And he said, “I gotta go.” And he jumped on a Greyhound and left. I cried and begged, and he said, “If you want to come with me, you can, but I can’t be here anymore. I will send you the money when I get out there.” And, he left us.

Suddenly, Paula found herself in a space that revolved around surviving as a single, teenage mother. Finishing her high school diploma was no longer a priority or possibility. For Paula, that moment represented a very important decision in her life. She could go home with the boy she was in enamored with, the boy that up until the birth of her daughter was her world. Or, she could try and figure out a new life in a new city for her and her infant daughter.

However, it wasn’t long after her boyfriend left that she met her now husband. With the support of a new, more stable partner, she found some room to finish her high school degree.
I was working anywhere I could; I was trying so hard to keep the apartment by myself with my daughter. I worked at the megamall and other places, and it was income. I was doing it and I was only 19. I met my husband two months later. He moved in and we’ve been together ever since. I took my GED—I didn’t even study for it, I didn’t take no classes; I just took it. I was just going for it. And I went and took it and I passed. I thought, ‘Okay, I got my GED, I’m going back to school.’ I went to Morton College and they said, ‘Okay, you need $500 to take a class.’ I thought, what? I didn’t know. I knew I had to pay something and thought maybe some financial aid. But nobody told me how to do that. My husband said, ‘We don’t have the money for that right now. Why do you want to go back to school anyway? You’re going to leave me because you’re going to find some educated person.’ And it went on like that for a while. It wasn’t until the first time we got separated that I said, you know what, I’m doing what I was told I shouldn’t do. So, I registered for classes and paid for it out of my pocket. Shortly after that, I heard about the [teaching] program and signed up and here I am.

Paula liked to say that she got where she was by being “disobedient.” For her, it was an act of rebellion to finish school—not because her parents discouraged it, but because after becoming pregnant as a teenager, Paula believed she was viewed as a stereotype, another Latina, single, teenage mother. For her, the catalyst for going back to school was the separation from her husband, who at that time, saw her education as a negative attack on their marriage, an attitude that is a common occurrence for some of the women in this study and is discussed in more depth later in this chapter.

Marisol was born in Mexico but her parents moved to the United States when she was three-years old. They moved to a Puerto Rican-dominated neighborhood in Chicago in the 70s.
She attended an elementary school with a bilingual program, but was one of the only Mexican children in the classroom. She remembers a very migratory childhood, moving from one home to another and living with other families that she can no longer remember.

When we arrived, it was a basement; some family allowed us to stay there. I remember the little school that was a daycare and I remember going there. And from there we moved, I think it was two blocks away. I don’t even know the street. Something happened where someone burned an apartment, something with the electricity and we had to move out. From there we…we must have moved so many times, and that’s what caused the schools to keep us back. When we finally arrived at Miller school—I graduated from there—they said that because we had moved more than three or four times, we had missed a lot and they held us back.

There is much research on the fact that student mobility has a negative correlation with academic success (Hartman, 2002; Kerbow, 1996). Of course, that correlation makes sense—getting used to new routines, new adults, new peers and recreating a context of learning can all be difficult for youth. There is also evidence that student mobility is positively correlated with family income levels, the lower the income, the more chance the family will move around a lot (Kerbow, 1996).

It is unclear if Marisol was held back because of her academic skills or because of the school’s expectations and perceptions of her abilities and her family. As she remembered,

They wanted to do further testing because for some reason, my mom…well, when I ask her about these things, its hard for her to tell me, because of her English. She might not have understood what they were saying. And there was that issue back then where parents, they weren’t aware; it’s true now, but back then it was even worse.
For Marisol, this was one of her first memories of her mother attempting to be an advocate for her education, but not being able to fully understand what the school was doing to her child. Marisol’s perception is that her mother was essentially shut out from being a part of her children’s education, a phenomenon that Marisol, and most of the other women in this study, experience as mothers themselves and is explored later in this chapter.

Marisol also remembered being a part of the bilingual education system at a time when the Chicago Public Schools were scrambling to get a functional system in place as opposed to a system in which bilingual teachers were inventing the job as they practiced and through conferences and networking. It wasn’t until 1976 that Illinois added a language component to the certification process and finally, in 1985, “further demands were made on bilingual teachers when the state identified five areas of knowledge—assessment, methods and materials, theoretical foundations, cross-cultural studies, and second-language acquisition—that all bilingual teachers needed in order to obtain approval to teach in a bilingual program” (Sakash & Chou, 2007). With the establishment of state standards and the implementation of federal funding, institutions of higher education worked to create certification programs for bilingual education and endorsement for English as a second language. But even after establishing standards and licensure for teachers, Chicago still couldn’t keep up with the influx of Spanish speaking students, especially when it came to hiring qualified practitioners. This trend continues today:

The number of Latino students in the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) is growing rapidly but the number of Latino teachers, though a developing presence, does not keep pace. In just 12 years, 1992 to 2004, the CPS Latino student population grew 9%, from 29% of
411,582 students, to 38% of 426,812 students. By contrast Latino teachers increased only 4%, from under 10% in 1992 to 13.2% in 2004. (Sakash & Chou, 2007, p. 42)

Marisol experienced a fledging bilingual program that couldn’t even find Spanish-speaking teachers to hire.

Marisol remembered being aware of her entrance into a system that wasn’t prepared to serve her or her family.

The implementation of bilingual education programs were just getting flooded with kids and so, at the time, Miller was predominately African-American, and it still is I think, but there are a lot more Latinos. So, when we got there, they were trying to have my mom—she understood that—I don’t know if they tested us or how it happened, but my sister and I were supposed to go into second [grade], and I was supposed to go into third, but I did it twice and then because [my sister’s] English wasn’t that developed, I guess, they kept her in all Spanish. With me, almost nearing the end, I think it was the beginning of the year and they tested me, they tested three or four of us and they moved us out to all English classrooms. So, I went from all Spanish to all English classrooms. And, that was such a horrible experience for me.

The cultural shock of moving homes and then classrooms was amplified by being forced to spend all day in an English-only classroom. English-only classrooms have been a part of the American education system since the country’s founding and have a reputation for being a systematic form of colonization, sometimes very brutal colonization such as in its original implementation as a part of the Indian Peace Commission. English was a vehicle for domination and decimation under the guise of “civilizing” (Spring, 1995). Unfortunately, we haven’t progressed much further in our attitude about English’s superiority and a patriotic representation
of American values. Bilingual education theorist James Crawford explains, “The eloquence [of the English language] shines in our Declaration of Independence and Constitution. It is the living carrier of our democratic ideals” (Crawford, 1992, p. 114). Critical theorists argue that the English-only movement, in general, is an oppressive, essentially racist, structure rooted in the political economy:

In targeting the Hispanic population, the English-only movement reinforces the divisive effects of capitalist stratification, thereby diverting the resentments of those who are on the bottom rung of the ladder. For example, the English-only movement places first-generation Latino immigrants at odds with those Latinos who have been in the U.S. for more than one generation, and who are thus further along the process of assimilation and English language acquisition. Second- and third-generation Latinos are acculturated to view new immigrants as a threat to their attempts to establish themselves in American society, as a large component of this attempt is learning how to speak, read, and write English. The victims are diverted from the economic causes of their insecurity. The victims are then blamed and blame others who are being victimized by the economic structure. (Hartman, 2003, p. 192)

Clearly, Marisol’s experience transitioning from a poorly conceived bilingual classroom to an English classroom where she was not wanted and possibly seen “as a threat” was and is not uncommon.

Marisol’s memory of her English classroom experience was, to put it lightly, unconstructive. She vividly recalls the teacher physically and emotionally marginalizing her in the classroom because Marisol didn’t share the cultural language with her peers.
The teacher didn’t want anything to do with me. She was white and we were in the mobiles outside,⁵ so I just—the worst of worst experience I remember was not being able to go out to play. Whenever you were done with your work, you were allowed to play with games. And I remember like it was yesterday, the game *Sorry*. I didn’t know how to play it. So, I just felt out of place, so [the teacher] said, “Well, if you don’t want that free time, you can go sit at your desk.” I didn’t know how to play. I didn’t know! I remember *Chutes and Ladders* because my dad used to work for Playskool, the company that made the toys and I remember that vividly, but I didn’t know how to play. I didn’t know the rules. So, out of frustration, I spoke out—that’s how I am naturally, so I just said something and she sent me to the office.

The segregation Marisol experienced both before the bilingual classroom and within the classroom is a position that researchers and educational historians have coined “The Mexican Room,” a reference to a place where Latino children in the early twentieth century were sent because they needed “special” help that other, usually Anglo children, didn’t need (Powers, 2008). The public segregation is clearly something that is now considered illegal, but is still very much happening within the structuring of English-only classrooms (Gandara & Orfield, 2010).

Marisol’s reconstruction of her experience being sent to the principal was actually quite positive. “To this day though, I don’t remember the principal’s name, but I remember her being African-American and she was so understanding of me that I never got in trouble with her. I

⁵ The mobiles that Marisol experienced are the trailers that some Chicago schools use if the school is overpopulated. When Marisol’s community experienced an influx of new immigrants in the 1970s, the trailers were introduced to house students temporarily. Most of the schools in her neighborhood still use these trailers.
remember asking my mom, so what happened? And she would say, oh they just called me and said they want to keep you in the office.” I don’t want to overanalyze this one moment in Marisol’s memory, but for her, it felt like there was a shared experience with this African-American, female principal that day. For Marisol, the principal seemed to understand what she was going through.6

Eventually, Marisol found a place in what Frank Smith (1987) calls the “literacy club.” She found acceptance into learning and informal education through reading books—whatever books she could get her hands on.

I eventually fell in love with reading and just took off with it. But, my mom, I guess in her ignorance, didn’t know about the library and books and library cards, so it just so happened that when my parents purchased the house where she still lives now, there was a lot of Harlequin books. There were a lot of them, and those are not for kids. Those are adult books. But, you would be surprised how many I read. That was what was available. They weren’t my mom’s; they were the owner’s. She left all this. And she left these Presley cassettes because my mom had just bought a cassette player. We didn’t have one before. We had an eight-track, so that was new to us. That’s when I would just read and read and read. I would be up until one or two in the morning just reading. I liked reading. That was my thing. I think I started liking it because my dad—he had a business card and someone had written their name on it and he liked the penmanship. He showed it to me and he said, ‘I would really love for you to write like this,’ and I don’t know if that was

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it, but it was a way of finding acceptance or attention from my dad. So, I wanted to write. That was the beginning. For me to push myself because if I wanted to write I needed to know how to read and the reading came from the pictures in the books. I loved looking at the covers. But, I didn’t have the discipline to come home to have ‘homework time.’ So, if I was bored, I read. If it was summer, I read.

Marisol’s identity as a reader probably left her unchallenged in the school she was attending. For her remaining years in primary and secondary school, she ended up keeping to herself, supporting her family, and eventually going into the workplace right after high school. Like for Belen, college was not expected, talked about, or even considered. Instead, Marisol dedicated herself to her job as receptionist at the local community-based organization and to raising her daughter. Eventually, the community organization where she worked involved her in educational issues in the neighborhood, and she realized that she wanted to be a bigger part of that change by becoming a teacher.

Pia was the most recent immigrant of the five women, having moved from Mexico when she was 19 years old. In fact, her parents sent her here to get her away from the man who is now her husband. “We met in Mexico. He was my next-door neighbor. The marriage was my choice. They sent me to the United States not to marry him. He followed me. It was sweet at the time. I met him when I was 13.” Pia already had a technical degree in social work from Mexico, but that degree did not count towards any certification or higher education in the United States. For her to get credit for higher education, she would have to start over, something that for a while was impossible under the constraints of her marriage and family structure, which was clearly oppressive. To help mend her relationship with her husband and to try and save her marriage, Pia
started to attend counseling. It was, in fact, her struggle for independence and respect that led her back to school. As she explained:

The first day in counseling, [the counselor] asked me, ‘Do you think you husband loves you?’ I said ‘Yes.’ He said, ‘How does he show you that he loves you?’ I didn’t find any reason, any way, anything that he showed me. Not flowers, not cake, not respect, nothing. It was the first session. The last session, he said, ‘What are you going to do? What will be your decision?’ I said, ‘Well, I’m going to stay. I’m not going to divorce him.’ And he said, ‘What are you going to do for you?’ And, I said, ‘I’m going back to school.’ And he said, ‘How?’ And I said, ‘Well, I’m a social worker from Mexico.’ I have a degree over there, but it didn’t count here. I have a side of me that I was always advocating for everybody even when I didn’t know how to do it for me. So I said, ‘Well, I’m going’ and he said, ‘You’re going to have problems with that,’ and I said, ‘Yeah, but I don’t care.’ I don’t care.

Pia’s perspective shows us that, like Paula, she felt that her continued education was in direct contradiction to what was expected of her in her marriage. Pia resists the seeming machismo, autocratic control of her identity and decides to go to school for herself and her children.

Pia began attending college for herself, first taking English as a Second Language classes at a local, private—and very expensive—school. She did well there, but she felt very uncomfortable. “If I had stayed there, I couldn’t have the chance, I’m not sure if I would be there. My first concern was that I was the only Hispanic there, only Polish [people]. I didn’t have nobody to talk to. I felt so weird, but I decided to go for early childhood. I decided to go for it.” She explained that she originally went for an early childhood degree because that is what many of her peers were studying. Pia had heard about another school whose demographics served a
Latino community. “And I found St. Agnes, and they were surprised. They were like, if you are there, why are you coming here? And I told the teacher, you know, I feel really good here with, at that time I think I said, ‘my people.’ It was good.” It was important for Pia that her classmates shared her experience as Latinos. She felt more confident with “her people.”

However, balancing her home life and school was extremely difficult for her. As she explained, it was totally up to her to do it all. She had no support from her husband. That also meant that the accomplishments in school were something that she was not only proud of but something she could own.

When I graduated from St. Agnes, the day of the ceremony, we came back home and he went to hug me, and I stepped back. I was holding my diploma, my very nice paper and I said, ‘Stop there. No. This is mine. I did it without you. Because you didn’t help me with my kids.’ My kids had to wait for me. At 10:30, I was here at Argyle, my last class ended at 9:30. He didn’t cook them dinner. I had to come home at 10:30 to see my kids there, waiting for me at the top of the stairs, with him sleeping. Waiting for me because they wanted me to check their homework.

For Pia, earning a degree was an act of independence in her marriage. She told me that her children still have vivid memories of that time.

My daughter cried because she had to present my story on stage not long ago. She cried. She said, mom, I hated it. I didn’t want you to go to school. I remembered I had to stay outside because I didn’t want to fall asleep instead because I wanted you to check my homework. [My husband] was sleeping. It’s understandable at some point because he had to wake up at 4 in the morning. I made sacrifices for my kids. So, from that day when I told him it was my paper, it was my degree, he woke up.
Like Paula, Pia seemed to experience a dual frame of reference that established her husband as someone that motivated her to succeed because he didn’t want or support her endeavors.

Martha and her family moved to Chicago from Mexico in 1970 when she was two years old. She began her early childhood education at the local elementary school, a school in which she would later become a parent volunteer when her own son, Edward attended the school. She vividly remembers the pre-K. “I did state pre-K in the trailers. We didn’t have a classroom. So, in the summer we felt like chicken nuggets and in the winter we felt like sardines—shivering, shivering. Our graduation, we had caps and gowns made out of crepe paper.” For her mother, however, public school was not something Martha could continue. She’d experienced the educational system in Mexico, where, in her mother’s eyes, the only quality education was one you pay for. For that to happen, however, it meant that her mother had to sacrifice the time as parent in order to earn a second income.

I was in walking distance from the neighborhood school, but for [my mother] it was best to go to Catholic school. For her public school was something worse. I’m glad to say I proved her wrong. Edward went to public school, and she always argued with me about it, but I wanted to do something different. I saw it as something from the community. Education is how you teach them to learn, as a parent. It was tough when my dad died because he was the one who went to the school and meetings. He was the one who was known in school by my teachers. They thought my mom wasn’t as interested in my education, but she was the one working for it. She busted her ass for me. He died and left her every single bill he had. She still found a way to get [his body] to Mexico so his kids could say goodbye to him, which for me makes it very difficult to say hello to the man. I
haven’t been there for years and years and there is no way we are going to make it now. I feel bad about that.

Her father had 15 other children to take care of financially. So, his paycheck was spread out equally among his three families. Martha’s mother’s paycheck, however, was for Martha’s school. Martha’s family was extensive, but her daily life revolved around the family of three—her mom, her dad and herself.

Dad came here before mom, and Dad was married in Mexico. He had split from the wife, found mom, lived with mom, but still had a family to take care of. He had 7 kids before me. With that one. He was married three times. I have 15 half brothers and sisters. We met during the funeral, but that’s it. I know I have one in Illinois somewhere, but he’s a brother from another mother, so he’s very different. Recently I found some nieces on Facebook. That’s about it. They saw my graduation pictures. It’s a mix in Mexico and Brownsville, Texas. So, there were 7 from one marriage, 2 from another and the rest were outside of marriage. But, he was a responsible man so he was a very broke man. Any money he made was split everywhere, so mom always had to take the lead on everything, so she thought Chicago was far enough away from Durango and we could do what we wanted. But, the man died broke. He never saw price tags. He never complained about not having money—he always found a way. He worked in Brach’s candy. He was a mixer. He used to mix the candy. I remember that place; I was there many times. He smelled like caramel or mint. He was a big man, so his belly was always covered with sticky stuff, but you could always go into his pockets and find candy. I didn’t know my mom. We didn’t have any connections until my dad passed away. Dad was the one that would take me to school, and take me to the ballpark, or the beach. Mom was working.
Mom’s money was for my school. She was saving and saving for private schools for me. It was based on her idea that school was something you paid for.

Martha admitted that she had a unique experience compared to her peers. For most of her childhood, her father played the role of parent in her eyes while her mother was gone before she got up and home only in time for dinner and bed. When her father died, however, her mother took on both roles and Martha suddenly became another adult, even at 13. She explained,

He died July 5th in 1979. I remember we were in Mexico for my birthday to bury him.

She was left without knowing the language or the routines, so we had to start over. I don’t remember childhood afterwards. I just don’t. I had to be an adult. I don’t remember anything but working. At 13, I was a receptionist at a medical center. I don’t even think it was legal. I would go to school and come and work from 3-6:30, every day.

Martha had to become a responsible adult quickly. She felt that the time before her father died and after were two different lives.

When I asked Martha if she was placed in a bilingual classroom, she laughed and told me that “Yes, they did. But it was special ed.” Martha thought the school didn’t know what to do with a bilingual student whose mother didn’t speak any English, so they resorted to a special education class instead.

I was never in any bilingual program. They would tell my mother, ‘Don’t speak to her in Spanish because you are confusing her.’ But that was like saying don’t speak to your daughter at all. I’ve been interpreting for her all my life. I remember making up words because I didn’t know how to say them in Spanish until I heard them on television. They put me in the Special Education classroom because I spoke Spanish.
After listening to Martha’s story, I couldn’t help but be reminded of Mike Rose’s (1989) chapter in *Lives on the Boundary* retelling his own educational experience, particularly when his placement tests were mixed up with another student’s. As he tells it:

The other Rose apparently didn’t do very well, for I was placed in the vocational track, a euphemism for the bottom level. Neither I nor my parents realized what this meant. We had no sense that Business Math, Typing, and English—Level D were dead ends. The current spate of reports on the schools criticizes parents for not involving themselves in the education of their children. But how would someone like Tommy Rose, with his two years of Italian schooling, know what to ask? And what sort of pressure could an exhausted waitress apply? (p. 24)

Martha’s experiences, as well as her parents’ understanding of what was happening, were very similar to Rose’s. The difference of course that there was no mix up for Martha: her Spanish language was determined to be a deficit, akin to mental retardation. But Martha knew something wasn’t quite right with the placement.

I remember thinking that [the other students] didn’t know as much as I did but figured I was there to help them. I remember the teacher asking to speak with my dad about tests that I had to take. I don’t remember what they were called, but I remember it was easy. They gave me another, harder test and then another one. All in a couple of days. I guess that was when they realized I had been placed in the wrong place, so they moved me to the advanced group. Suddenly I was getting this much harder work. My dad would just do what they told him. I think this was middle school. I guess my grades started going up very fast. I know that before my dad died, he got to see perfect attendance and perfect grades. I remember because he took me to the White Sox. He was a big fan.
The experience of moving to an inclusive classroom was the first time she had experienced what it meant to be challenged in school. This experience helped to inform her later when she had to advocate for her son’s education, which is discussed later in the chapter.

Martha was sent to Catholic school for the secondary level. Her mother continued to work at the factory, so Martha went to school, came home, did her homework and made dinner for the two of them. She does remember the school fondly, but also a time that she was both vulnerable and she learned. It was in high school that she learned about to be an adult and how to connect with all sorts of people, not just the ones that looked like her.

I hadn’t been exposed to African-American students before. I had seen them around the neighborhood but had never talked to them. I was afraid of how to talk to them or get to know them. I remember there was a group of girls that invited me to sit with them. From the get-go, it was clear that we were all the same. From then on, I had no worries. But, I did everything on my own. I did all the paper work, ‘Ma, sign here. Ma, sign this.’ At the time that I was most vulnerable, I had to give up my old life. I decided I had to do it all myself. I did it for my mom.

For Martha, supporting her family, especially her mother, was a priority over getting an education, but it was something she desired and continued to think about even when she wasn’t allowed to continue.

At the private school, college was encouraged, and, according to Martha, the nuns went out of their way to help her apply to college and scholarships. But, in the end, it didn’t turn out the way she planned.

I gave up going to college for [my mom]. Mom lived with someone while I was in high school. Junior and senior year the violence got out of hand. He was violent towards both
of us. So, I was looking for a way out. I wasn’t going to college because she wouldn’t sign the paperwork. She didn’t want me to go. I got into [a large university far away from home]. I had a full scholarship. I did all the paperwork on my own, but I needed parental permission. I didn’t get it. So, I did the next best thing. I enrolled in cosmetology school. I figured I could handle two years. It was a way to work and get some money. That is where I met Ramon, my first husband. I was 17. He became a security blanket. He was the father figure I needed. So, I got out, moved in with him, and had a year of hell. Then, once he cheated on me, I moved back home. There I got rid of mom’s boyfriend. I told her she needed a better life. I sacrificed what I wanted to do, so this should be her sacrifice. We spent a long time going through some tough situations. I divorced and went back to doing hair and nails. I was the manager. Lots of responsibilities, but not much money. Then, the doctor’s office asked me to come back and be a receptionist. Then, I met the butcher who worked next door to the doctor’s office—Edward’s dad. When Edward came, I was 24.

After her divorce, moving back home and having Edward, Martha focused her priorities on paying the bills and taking care of Edward.

I started volunteering on my own at Edward’s school and at the end of the year, I saw all these other volunteers got to go on a boat for the end of the year celebration. I was like, why don’t I get to go on a boat? They didn’t know that I was volunteering on my own, so they invited me to be a part of the mentoring program. They thought I was an assistant. So, every year, they had me going to different classrooms and different grade levels and every year they nagged me to go to back to school. They told me about this program they opened up at a community college for teacher’s assistants and told me, this is your
entrance. But, I was worried about tuition and they told me loans would help. So, I started at a community college. I didn’t know how to apply for financial aid or anything. I went as long as I could pay, but when I didn’t have any, I stopped going. I did the semesters to get 6 credits, and that’s it. That’s when they called me about this program. I got the phone call and met [the director]. She made it sound like it would be fine and talked about it so nicely. I kept on thinking, ‘Who is this dizzy white bitch? What does she know about me?’ I haven’t been in school in about 20 years. She sees potential in me? Please! I couldn’t believe her. I talked to my mom, and she thought I was crazy. She said, ‘When are you going to graduate, in a wheel chair?’ She said it would be a waste of time. She said, “Right now, you are taking care of your son and that’s enough.” But, I was doing that, but I was also taking care of the rest of the kids at the same time. She was like, “you don’t have what it takes.” But I figured I had been dealing with kids all my life! I was raised with babysitters with all these all these other babies. I had to be babysat by a lot of people with a lot of other younger kids. For my mom, it was always money that was the issue. I still had loans from cosmetology school.

Paula, Pia and Martha all had to defy intimate patriarchic forces, their husbands, boyfriends and mothers’ boyfriends, as an impetus for continuing school. It wasn’t “back home” that shaped their dual frame of reference, but men. For them, it took the motivation of proving themselves, getting away from particular men, or most essentially, offering more for their children. For instance, Marisol and Belen spent years in school without teachers or their family expecting much more than high school degrees. Martha eventually made the journey back to college alone, caring for her mom and son. Paula and Pia, however, felt that at some point their husbands “woke up,” as Pia describes it, and may not have been supportive, were at least accepting of what
they were trying to do. Here, it seems that these three women took feminist action in advocating for their individual agency against personal oppression in order to own their education. The transition from becoming educated to developing into educators, however, became something for their children, an important aspect of womanist and *mujerista* ideology.

**“We can teach that”: Teaching as Maternal and Political**

In Chapter 2, I referred to the term *womanist* that Alice Walker and Patricia Hill Collins describe as a part of black feminism. It is a term that was born out of the struggle and celebrations unique to African-American women but is also useful in contextualizing how the women in this study explain their ideas about pedagogy, especially in how they want to relate to the students. Tamara Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002) enters into the discussion of feminist theories of care in our classrooms (Grumet, 1988; Noddings, 1984; Valenzuela, 1999) by suggesting that a womanist tradition can offer a unique perspective of what Black teachers can offer children. She sees the womanist tradition as both political and maternal and that teachers who embrace womanism exhibit three characteristics: “the maternal, political clarity, and an ethic of risk” (p. 72). I think those characteristics are important lenses for thinking about how the participants imagine education’s possibilities in their words, action, and pedagogical philosophy. They see the classroom as a maternal space and their teaching identity as political, and putting themselves in that position puts them at risk. Intersecting with womanism is the *mujerista* tradition, which “refers to a Latina-oriented ‘womanist’ sensibility or approach to power, knowledge, and relationships rooted in convictions for community uplift” (Delgado-Bernal et al., 2006, p. 7). In representing the perceptions of Martha, Belen, Paula, Pia and Marisol, womanist and *mujerista* pedagogy explains that teaching is political, risky, maternal, and values the community.
Informed by their own experiences in education, the women in this study were aware of the social and political economy that challenged their potential success. There were also cognizant of teaching as an act of political activism. In fact, being an educator as political action is part of their cultural and historical identity. Although more is needed, there is some limited research on Black female teachers as historical political action makers in their capacity as teachers (Crawford, Rouse & Woods, 1990; Collier-Thomas, & Franklin, 2001; Olson, 2001) during the civil rights movement and as teachers in segregated schools. The feminist history of resisting a fascist political economy and Eurocentric oppression differs somewhat for Latina women with the complexities of *machismo*, documentation and language. Although there were certainly a history of female teacher activists during the civil rights movement (Donato, 1997), there is also much evidence of the international struggle of Latina teachers such as in Chiapas, the birthplace of Mexican democratic labor dissent (Cook, 1996; Vargas, 1998). The act of teaching is political in both African-American and Latino/a histories, and Martha, Belen, Paula, Pia and Marisol see this identification as something they want to continue.

Teaching as political is also part of womanist and *mujerista* pedagogy. As Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002) explains,

Thus, womanist teachers readily demonstrate their political clarity: With their students, both in deed and in word, they share their understanding of society, an understanding that does not shy away from the reality of domination nor from the existence of resistance struggles against oppression. In essence, loving students means discussing such insights with them, not withholding knowledge from them. (p. 80)

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7 As an example of one black woman’s connection of activism and teaching, see information about Septima Clark, especially in Jacqueline Rouse’s (2001) chapter in *Sisters in the Struggle*. 
As part of the professional education process, the women were able to contextualize their womanist/mujerista philosophies as a part of what will emerge in their pedagogical practice.

In an evening middle-school teaching methods class, I observed Pia take part in the activities and discussion about teaching social justice in social studies classrooms. Pia had talked to me earlier in the semester about how uncomfortable she felt in this class and wanted me to come with her one night. She discussed that she was one of the few older students in the classroom, and although there were many other Latino students, they were “so young.” She often felt her comments and ideas were “dismissed” or “not listened to” in small groups and she felt embarrassed by her accent. “That was the more intense class I ever had. The fact that we were working in groups so, of course, that forced me to talk. When I was able to talk, they said no to whatever I said. That was normal.”

The class that I observed was focused on issues of immigration and social justice. The students participated in an activity in which half of the class played the role of townspeople that wanted to implement “anti-immigrant” policies such as English-only classrooms, checking for citizenship status, laws against renting to undocumented workers, and so on. The other half of the class represented the new, working-class immigrants who were coming to a town hall meeting to voice their concerns. Given that at the time I observed this class, Arizona had recently enacted SB1070, the strict anti-immigrant law, it was a timely lesson. After the activity, small groups met to talk about how they would engage students in activism in their own social studies classroom. Pia and the other students, all younger than her, went around the group explaining what ideas they had about activism. The other students mentioned ideas such as, donations for Haiti, letters or pen pals to “poor countries,” and mock elections. Pia, however, had a long list of ideas that included stroller marches with parents, protests on schools testing policies, letters to
alderman about community issues, field trips to the History Museum to understand the history of activism in Chicago, and trips to the Chicago Board of Education to see the “power players.” Pia was excited about her list. After Pia finished explaining her ideas, the other students where quiet until one young girl spoke up to say that it was “illegal” to take students on protests. Another student agreed and said that the principal would never allow that. A third argued that “they are little kids; we don’t want to expose them to that” and that, “we shouldn’t impose our values on them.” Pia was disappointed, but not surprised. She told me later, “They think they know so much. I think it’s age. I feel the same way with my kids. My daughter, and now the follower, my son. They said, oh no mom, this is not the right way. That was the way it was in Mexico when you were young. Now it’s different.”

For Pia, teaching activism to her students is paramount to teaching, and she clearly worries that the younger generations with whom she takes classes echo the dominant discourse of justice-based education, that is that social justice is “new tool for enforcing political conformity in schools of education” (Leo, 2005). Despite politically charged rhetoric about social justice as a liberal agenda meant to indoctrinate kids, social justice-based education has been an accepted curriculum choice. For the women in the study, education and its relationship to justice was never something they had to learn, it was a part of their familial and cultural history.

Pia, for instance, was continuing a theory of activism that she learned in her family, especially from her grandmother.

My mom was an activist, not only my mom but my grandma. They were against the main party in my city. They were a small group of people, poor people of course…they were
trying to support this candidate [Salvador Nava Martinez]⁸ from the other side, the left, the PAN, and the PRI was in charge. It was a small group of people supporting this doctor who always had a line of people outside his office because he offered free or very cheap health care to poor people. The kind of professional we don’t have very often. So, they were supporting him. My mom took me to the meetings in my neighborhood. They were organizing. They were supporting the people. My mom cooked for the supporters. I was not too little. It was the late 70s, early 80s in San Luis. That was the time when I learned how to fight for something. I didn’t understand the cause, but I got really excited about el pueblo unido. I’ve known that phrase since I was little. So, [in the U.S.], when I’m walking with my kids in a march for immigration, I cry because I remember it all from when I was little. And I saw for the first time when I was marching last year for May Day⁹. I saw my son marching next to me and screaming for immigration rights and I cried because I saw my mom walking with us. It’s just amazing. That is the point. I

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⁸ PAN (Partido Acción Nacional) was the National Action Party and PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional) was the Institutional Revolutionary Party. Salvador Nava Martinez was from San Luis and was famous as a social justice activist. He was “a veteran opposition leader who fought against Mexico’s authoritarian system of one-party rule for more than three decades. He was dubbed ‘the Mexican Gandhi’ by the opposition press (“Salvador Nava Martinez,” 1992).

⁹ May Day, or International Workers Day, has, in the more recent past, been a day in which Chicago Latinos converge to rally for immigration reform and to protest treatment of undocumented workers.
connect this a lot with education. Activism is there. We can also teach that. To fight, to ask for your rights.

Her grandmother and mother’s work for progressive democracy was Pia’s introduction to social justice as political theory and action; it was also her first experience feeling the strength of community empowerment. In her description of her family history of activism, Pia contextualizes her own beliefs about how education is an act of resistance, for her and the students that she will teaches.

Earlier in the literature review, I highlighted the term “Xicanisma.” There is a both a classical and womanist feminist context of the stories of these women, the histories that they carry, their personal struggle for education, their values as mothers, and of course, their desire to fight for children. All of which occurs in a patriarchy—the patriarchy of machismo, of motherhood, of the female workforce and education. Each of the women describes various aspects of the lives in which they have had to fight, sometimes even physically, because they were women. Pia’s identity as mother-activist did not come from a vacuum though; it was part of a cultural, familial history passed from grandmother, to mother, to daughter.

[My grandmother] died when I was two, but you know the stories. My mom kept telling us that they were working on this underground printer, hiding and making flyers for this political candidate, Salvador Nava, because he was in prison. It was a big moment. So my mom still remembered that. When we were like six or seven, they announced on big trucks with the bullhorns, so my mom took us outside of the house to make big noise to show all the support.
In telling her story about her memories and retelling the oral history of her grandmother, I interrupted Pia with a question about who was missing from her stories, “What about your dad and your grandpa?”

“No no no no no. It was the women. Not the men.”

Pia was following the tradition she learned from the matriarchs in her family, which empowered Pia to fight for her children and community in the U.S. Of course, despite the inspirational activism she learned, there are contradictions too. Her mother and grandmother were passionate in fighting for the democratic rights of their pueblo and country, but, most of her life, believed in and enforced traditional gender roles.

So, yes, there is a history of women fighting in my family. Now, my mom, she just got separated from my dad after 45 years, just recently. It feels weird. She used to not approve of how I acted in my marriage. She would say, ‘Don’t say that to him. Don’t cause trouble.’ The company I used to work with, I traveled with them. So, she would say, ‘You have to be careful because [your husband is] going to get tired.’ And I would say, ‘Fine! Let him get tired.’ So, I didn’t tell her all my problems—real big trouble—I had the first 10 years of my marriage because she would not support me because it was my fault. Until I was a little bit fierce and I talked to my mom and told her everything. Maybe six or seven years ago, I talked to her and that helped me a lot. She didn’t say nothing. But now, I listen to her and her feelings; I hear my voice. She says, ‘you know what, he has to respect me because I am a good mother. I was a good wife. I am a good woman. So he has to respect me.’ I don’t think [my husband is] going to change. But, I’m happy. I don’t have to ask for permission, which was the main thing. When I got married,
he would expect me to ask for permission and I had a lot of trouble. I passed through a lot, a lot. During my pregnancy, my honeymoon, everything.

Pia did feel like she has reached an understanding, or connection even, with her mother. They can be activists in their communities and in their homes.

In her analysis of the mother-child relationships and language socialization, Norma Gonzalez (2006) highlights two immigrant mothers. In one interview, Gonzalez analyzes a similar dichotomy in the way one woman describes her father’s control over her.

Señora Hernández’s narrative, despite her overt resistance and rebellion to her father, his influence continues to pull at her as his voice echoes his refrain that ‘una mujer acomediada, dondequiera cabe’ (a woman who accommodates, is useful, fits in anywhere). His own words, however, are reinscribed into a form of resistance against him, because it is precisely her meticulous work habits that allow her to achieve an economic independence that enables her to escape his control. (p. 203)

I can’t help but be reminded of Señora Hernández when I think about Pia and her mother. Her mother and grandmother modeled independence and resistance; she situated Pia’s life and passions in the political space, but for a long time, when it came to marriage, she encouraged Pia to acquiesce and tread carefully. As Pia described in a paper she wrote for a women’s study class,

I received my grandmother legacy when I was a child, when I understood that the term woman was equal to abnegation and submission. Of course I was a good girl educated in a private school and with the qualities we as girls were expected to have. I didn’t talk back to my parents; I never confront my father’s violence against my mother. I only
suffered it. In both of my parent’s families, women were expected to serve, respect and be responsible of their children’s education.

Pia eventually decided not to listen to the advice of “abnegation and submission.” After counseling sessions, she saw her personal education as a liberatory practice. She explains, “I went to counseling. We went once together, but he left me there. But, I decided I still wanted to go. The last day of my counseling, I decided to go back to school. That’s why I’m talking to you right now.” For Pia, education was an act of resistance to her husband in the same way she sees community empowerment through resistance against oppressive political systems, and, as she made clear, she hoped to impart the same passions in her children and students.

Paula also learned about justice from her mother, but it was in protecting her mother that she began to stand up for her, and eventually wanted to stand up for everyone.

I think that when I was in Texas the whole justice thing kind of kicked in because I see how they were still very much racist over there and treated us very differently than they treated the white people and especially my mom. My geometry teacher lived right across the street from me. Our mayor lived right next door to us. So we had a lot of people who were professionals and then here you had these Mexicans who come from out of nowhere and buy this tiny little broken down home and start fixing it up and making it look nice and it’s like, okay, do you think you can just come and be a part of this when everybody else around us had brick homes and beautiful landscape. So here’s this one banana house (that’s what I called it) sitting in the middle of all these beautiful houses. So for the people in the community it’s a big eyesore. So it was always just, . . . ’y’all are really good people. If ya’ll would just do this or if y’all would just push a little harder to do that. I was like, ‘Why can’t just be accepting of who you are?’ We’re hard workers. We don’t cause trouble. She
said, “You know I thought your father was and I would be protected.”  Here she was this 15 year old girl and her own mother did not accept her into her home. So, she went to live with some strange woman. She didn’t even know that my aunt. She live in the projects, picked cotton and strawberries and worked the fields like every immigrant that comes here. So growing up when her and my father when their marriage was really rough and we started getting older she sought that protection from us. We became her friends. We were her best friends. We will always protect her. Once we got old enough, we became her protectors and I saw how they talked to her and how they would say stuff. I knew what they were doing was wrong.

Racism was extremely present for Paula in Texas. As she grew older and moved to Chicago, she looked first to law, the most obvious way to fight what she saw as the biggest systemic problem: criminal justice.

I wanted to become a lawyer, which is what I wanted to be first, I think mainly it was because I’ve seen a lot of injustice within the community within our own people from the police. So I would see how they would purposely harass Latino men in our neighborhood, young men who never seemed to get a fair shot for anything. And when I came back to Chicago after all that I did, I still wanted to go to schools so I started to go to night school. And I figured, okay, I could really do this. When it really kicked in is when my sister started working for the police department. I was 19 years old with an 18-month-old baby and Orlando [my now husband] was still very young and I used to see how the cops would harass him and his friends constantly, these people hanging out on the corner. For us, I mean I couldn’t drive on 26th street without getting pulled over and when they see him with me, right away they wanted to know if he was carrying a gun or if he was dealing drugs or
something. I used to get so frustrated. I’m like, I have my license, I have insurance, I have my papers, but these cops would pull us over and they would be like harassing us. Of course, I would always open my big mouth and it would get me in more trouble. So, I thought lawyers could help. I’m going to be a lawyer. I’m going to stand up for these people that are getting arrested unfairly. They would always try to bargain for information. So they would be like, “Oh look what we found.” “Hey, yeah, you found it.” “Oh yeah, well this is going to be yours if you don’t try to find me a gun.” And all the guys would be like, ‘what are you talking about?’ A lot of our friends got arrested. Things were either planted on them, and they were told, “if you don’t find me something better, then you got to go to jail.” And it was right in my face. Many of them thought that the Latino community was just garbage because, in their eyes, we don’t contribute enough and we don’t try and better ourselves. So, I knew I had to do something to turn this around.

It was when her daughters became old enough for school that Paula began to shift her thinking about where she could fight injustices. She saw education and, more importantly, advocating for her children as the best avenue for social justice.

When I asked Paula to talk about what motivates her, what keeps her fighting such huge battles; she was very clear with her answer, her kids:

I think the biggest thing for me is that if I don’t go out there and I don’t keep fighting then my kids won’t be able to be where they need to be. My kids are a huge factor in the need to be what I am. I don’t just do it for myself. It’s for my kids. I want them to know that they have a voice and they can use it whenever they want, regardless of all the injustice that you see that surrounds you, whether that’s with a nephew, whether that’s with the people that treat us the way that they do because of our skin color. But now my
daughters know that I back them up. My son knows that I can back them up and I want them to be able to do that same thing. Know that just because you are brown doesn’t mean that you cannot go out there and advocate for other people who are not in a position you’re in, that have the support that you have and that their parents might not be able to do that for them, because we all know that the Latino population will continue to increase and at one point in time we are the majority and I think that’s the reason why we’re still have so much resistance they don’t want to see us get to positions of power where we can make things really change in a positive way. Because once we get into a position where we can change things it’s not going to look so good for privileged people. Everything is about whether or not you have money. Well we can’t get up to that level ever if you don’t give us the opportunity. If we don’t fight and resist them holding us back. So the biggest factor for me is my kids. I think that the more I continue to fight this fight and the more that I continue to sit there and challenge them in that way because now I know, right. Now I’ve gone through there being a teacher. I work now and I’ve been in schools, I’ve seen it. I can say this is what I know is right and this is what I know is wrong, but I can go back into that and say, “I’m going to have to challenge you on that.” And you know what, now my daughter can sit in her classroom and say, “I’m going to have to challenge you on that,” and they do and they don’t like it and they get detentions or they get kicked out of school because of it, or kicked out of class because of it. And it’s just like I’m just doing what my mother has taught me to do and my father has taught me to do, which is to question. You’re not right because you’re a teacher, but I can question you now because I know that I have a voice. So I think if we go back into that
system and say that to all of our kids that little by little we start breaking away of what is mainstream or I’m right and you’re wrong, I’m big, you’re little.

For Paula, it was advocating for her children that started her journey into activist teaching, but it was also the fact that she wanted to be a role model to her children, and the children in her classroom.

Marisol voiced this contradiction of resistance and compliance when talking about her relationship with her mother:

I come from a mom who babied my brother and saw what happened and the things she allowed from my dad. It reminds me of my women’s studies class. We read this story about how women are against machismo but yet, they are the ones who create this within their homes. They are men, so it’s okay, but for women, they have to be on their best behavior. The ‘good girlism’ mentality. The girls are good and for men it’s okay, go ahead. So, I finally got that. I still feel that about my mom. I told my mom ‘Had I committed a crime, had I gotten incarcerated, had I done this, how would you have been with me? Would you have done what you did for my brother?’ She always defended him from my dad. My dad was law in our home. If you did something, you got it. And, it was painful, and it didn’t matter if you were the oldest, the baby, the middle, the girl, boy, you got it. But, for some reason, my brother tended to get it a bit more. Once we were getting older, it was getting harder. So my brother, seeking his attention, I guess, always got the bad side of him. There was tension between my mom and dad with the bills, or the alcohol, so my mom I guess, felt a need to protect or even overprotect, which I know wasn’t done with my sisters or me.

10 Her brother is currently serving a prison sentence.
Both Pia and Marisol saw justice as something they had to fight for in their homes, both as daughters and wives, as well as something to fight for in the community. For them, this was the lesson they want to teach their children, especially their daughters.

The five women in the study often talked about their dedication to being mothers coming before everything else, including their husbands, work, and, of course, their own education. Their children range in ages, but all the women have at least one child in a public school, and so their experiences as parents in the school system actively inform their own teacher education. The women were, in fact, recruited into the teaching program because they served as parent volunteers in their children’s schools—an act that introduced them to community-based organizing, a strand that will be discussed later in this chapter. But what does their understanding about motherhood teach them about pedagogy?

First, it’s important to set motherhood in the context of the political and cultural economy in which these women work and learn. To put it simply, culturally, economically, and politically, motherhood is not valued in American society. Before I move forward with that point, I want to make clear that I am saying that, first, as a mother myself. The political economy promotes its devaluation of mothers most obviously through workforce policies, especially maternity leave. The U.S. is one of only five countries that does not require some sort of maternity leave; the other four are Lesotho, Liberia, Swaziland, and Papa New Guinea. In Chicago Public Schools, the union contract offers no maternity leave, only unpaid leave for up to twelve months for teachers, and that is only if you are tenured and working at a union schools (Chicago Public Schools, 2002). In many charter schools, there is no maternity leave offered at all. Of course, the possibility of motherhood was a determining factor in why teaching was historically a “female” profession—that is, teaching children was considered “preparation for motherhood” (Arum &
Beattie, 2000). In some ways this is still the life order of teaching as a profession: Become a teacher for a few years and then start your family. The teaching profession is still mostly (76%) women (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). However, what if motherhood helps prepare you for teaching instead of the other way round? What do mothers know that can help them when they teach? In fact, one of the reasons I find myself engaged in Latino communities is because of their often-explicit elevation of mothers. It seemed, to an outsider, that motherhood was lauded in Latino communities. The participants made it clear to me, however, that my perception was myopic. Despite the celebration of *Dia de las Madres* and the deification of *La Madre*, their authentic experience of Latina motherhood was as fierce advocates for their children, an identity they associate with the responsibility of teachers.

As Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002) argues, the second premise of womanist teaching is to see the classroom as a maternal space; she highlights the work of Marva Collins as a prime example of womanist pedagogy. Marva Collins was the founder of the Westside Preparatory School in Chicago. Collins taught for 15 years until she realized that disabled, “problem” children were not only underserved, but completely ignored. But, her work in fighting for children’s right to education came from her lens as a mother. “The search for a school for my own three children opened my eyes: the public schools had a monopoly on poor education . . . I couldn’t escape the problem, as a teacher or as a mother. These parts of my life were inextricably woven” (Collins & Tamarkin, 1982, p. 73). In Beauboeuf-Lafontant’s analysis, this perception that teachers need to love the children in their classroom as they would their own is situated in womanist thinking. It is important to say that the “love” that both Collins and Beauboeuf-Lafontant discuss should be defined as being essentially maternal love, that is, deep, binding love and care. Womanist teachers legitimately care for their students as “othermothers.”
The importance of care in the classroom has been theorized by many feminist scholars (Grumet, 1988; Noddings, 1984; Valenzuela, 1999), but womanist pedagogy problemizes some of their arguments about how mothers are situated as teachers and mothers. Madeleine Grumet (1988) argues in describing her celebrated feminist piece *Bitter Milk: Women and Teaching*, that women who teach make this passage between the so-called public and private worlds daily . . . They go back and forth between the experience of domesticity and the experience of teaching, between being with one’s children and being with the children of others, between being the child of one’s own mother and teacher of another mother’s child, between feeling the form, family and colleagues. (p. xv)

Womanist and *mujerista* teachers, however, may not experience this chasm between their identities as teacher and mother; they seem to exist in both spaces at the same time. It is also important to listen to feminist scholars who critique the traditional white middle-class feminism as one that positioned family roles as part of the oppression—part of what held women back. This view is very much alive today (Slaughter, 2012). Women are still expected to be part mother and part worker, but those worlds are seen as separate, and priority to one deteriorates the other. Theorist bell hooks (1984) points out that for many women of color, however, family is the *least* oppressive structure: “Despite sexism in the context of family, we may experience dignity, self-worth, and a humanization that is not experienced in the outside world wherein we confront all forms of oppression” (p. 37). Hooks’ perspective may show why, for these women, there is a more organic flow between motherhood and teacherhood.

For Paula, it was during student teaching that she felt that her understanding as a Latina mother/*mujerista* is something that she could offer as a teacher. The womanist/*mujerista* teacher does not necessarily see their students as “children of others” nor do they see themselves as
“teacher of another mother’s child,” but rather partners in motherhood an education, a partnership described later in this chapter. Two important studies foreground this possibility. First, Lisa Delpit (2006), in her groundbreaking work, *Other People’s Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom*, highlights the disturbing disconnect between white teachers and their students, especially in urban settings, and further suggests that this chasm of disconnect is at least part of the reason children of color are often viewed as struggling, especially in reading and writing. She argues that part of this disconnect exists in relation to the “codes of power” that are enacted and recreated in schools and the inability to communicate and mediate through these codes. She acknowledges that many well-meaning teachers say that they want “the same thing for everyone else’s children as I want for mine.” But, that it is not that simple. As she explains:

> To provide schooling for everyone’s children that reflects liberal, middle-class values and aspirations is to ensure that maintenance of the status quo, to ensure that power, the culture of power, remains in the hands of those who already have it. Some children come to school with more account remnants of the culture of power already in place—“cultural capital,” as some critical theorists refer to it—some with less. Many liberal educators hold that the primary goal for education is for people whose children are already participants in the culture of power and who have already internalized its codes. (Delpit, 2006, p. 28)

Therefore, for Delpit, for a teacher to want the “same thing” for her students as she wants for her children means understanding the culture of power of the students and students’ parents, which makes the womanist/mujerista epistemologies, or funds of knowledge, particularly important in pedagogy.
Pia discussed her empathies for her students’ parents trying to do the best for their children. She is also concerned with how she sees other teachers, who are not mothers, may not sympathize with the students’ and parents’ experiences. She described one situation to me,

The other day one of the kindergarten students came late and the other students were like, ‘Natalie why are you late?’ And she said, “Oh because my parents were arguing.” And she had some tears and the teacher is like, “Oh okay, okay.” She was not very sensible about that. I didn’t like it. I mean I’m very concerned about the emotional aspect. I’m very concerned and that can be resolved you know. I’m a mother. If the students are sick I am very concerned. I am like okay, no, this is not okay. She is sick so we have to… And other teachers are like, ‘Oh he’s fine.’ You don’t force a child with temperature waiting for a parent or somebody to contact at home, to do work, do not force a student to perform. You can’t.

Although Pia is concerned about how teachers empathize with their students, she is also careful to not judge or blame parents for what is happening at home. “I know that it’s hard for those parents to come from work, really tired. Many of them work the night shift and help students with homework. I tell you this because I was in that situation. I had to work until 1 o'clock at night, 1 AM cleaning office and come back and be ready for school.” Pia’s memory as an office cleaner working nights is fresh when she works with students and parents. She reminds herself not to judge why the parents sent a sick child to school, but instead, to work with parents, however they can be involved.

Marisol also directly connects her beliefs about what motherhood is to what she wants her classroom to look like. During an educational philosophy class, I observed Marisol be a part of a discussion of punishment and especially zero tolerance policies in schools. The students had
read Gloria Ladson-Billings’ (2001) chapter, “America Still Eats Her Young,” and Marisol responded to a quote that sparked a memory:

Are our children more violent? Indeed they are, because we are more violent. Our children are just that—our children. They did not arrive from some other planet. They are the products of the world we created. They have seen more assaults, murders, and rapes than any previous generation. Should we lock them up and throw away the key to solve the problems we thrust them into? Zero tolerance is a simplistic and cruel response to a complex problem that requires careful thought and action. (p. 79)

Marisol responded to Ladson-Billings’ assessment of how communities view violence and childhood from the context of memory and motherhood. In class, she said:

I remember in my neighborhood, the police were very harsh. They wanted to show their power. If you were a troublemaker, there was no help. I remember that I was angry and sympathetic. But, as a future educator, I need to be open and accepting of the background and experiences of my students. Growing up, it was fear-based in my family, especially from my father. I don’t want that for my daughter—to fear me. It’s really about creating a culture of respect when I think about my kids. I think about what I want my classroom community to be.

For Marisol, her imagined classroom space mirrors her home space; what she wants for her children is what she wants for her students. She sees the classroom as an extension of her maternal space.

Later, when I had a chance to re-interview her, I asked Marisol to talk more about her response.
I connect that to my childhood. You would think that it was more respectful, but it wasn’t from my dad. My mom had very little patience. She worked. She was the breadwinner. She was the provider. She fed us. She dressed us. She did everything above and beyond.

So, when it came to the nurturing part, there was no time for that. She had four kids she had to feed. We all had different needs. We all wanted certain things. Because of that, I didn’t want that for my kids. I wanted my kids to be able to come to me and say, ‘hey mom, I messed up. I did this.’ I would never tell my parents that. It was already drilled in me that we had to be on our best behavior. Adults were to be given the ultimate respect whether they were right or wrong, so it was never…I could never defend my actions.

For Marisol, her experiences and critiques as a daughter and her own definition of motherhood helped shape the experience she wants to create in her classroom.

Marisol emphasized that she believes her experiences and epistemologies as a mother directly inform what she understands about education, pedagogy and even school policy. In her words, motherhood is valuable as knowledge.

I feel that my experiences as a parent have opened up a different door than if I had gone, for example, right after high school, if I had gone to become a teacher, it would be different. I probably would have pulled some things from my own childhood and my own experiences as a student, parenthood really gives it that value, that strength…my being with my kids and seeing how totally different they are. Even though the age that I had them was so different. I remember thinking I had it down with the oldest, but the youngest taught me so many things, it’s a learning curve. I’m always learning from them and they way they relate to me and their dad.
Marisol articulated that her funds of knowledge come from her home life as a daughter, sister, mother and wife. But, she also draws upon her experience in school as a Mexican girl in a Puerto Rican neighborhood and eventually in an African-American school. Her own funds of knowledge don’t essentialize a group or automatically guarantee her empathy for students of color, as Norma Gonzalez (2005) warns us. However, her epistemologies of motherhood teach her to learn from her children and her experiences in order to be a better mother and a better teacher to students who may share her experiences.

For Martha, she learned not only how to mother, but how to advocate, which she transferred to the students and parents in the classrooms in which she volunteered. Upon reflection, she says that she has been a teacher her entire life. But, it was her son’s febrile seizure that offered Martha that possibility. Edward had his first of many febrile seizures at 18 months. Most mothers have heard of febrile seizures, and many new mothers worry about them when their children get sick; I know that I did. Ultimately, however, the vast majority of febrile seizures are scary, but benign. A very small percentage (about 2-5%) of children can suffer brain damage from longer lasting or more frequent seizures (National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, 2012). Edward was one of them.

Edward was diagnosed in first grade with LDs. The school didn’t have speech therapist, so I had to look around and call and see who could help. The school actually used the therapist that I contacted for about ten other kids. Then, when they moved him in second grade to special ed., I saw a major decrease in what he could do. So I got him out. He needed to be challenged every day. Then, I saw that some teachers knew how to challenge and some teachers didn’t care about challenging. So, I decided that regardless of what he was taught in school, I would reinforce what I could at home and push him
further. At home, it was a mini-school: flashcards, sounds, memory games, puzzles—anything that was interactive that I could make up to keep him engaged and learning and entertained. I wasn’t very techy. So, at the time I didn’t know about computers, but I could tell he was good at them. So, a friend of a friend gave us a computer that was basically a relic. But, he loved figuring out things on it. To this day there are things he can do on a computer that I still don’t understand. He may not be able to read and write as well as other students, but he knows computers.

In this short synopsis of how Martha learned to educate her own son, she covers a variety of objectives emphasized by teacher education programs: engaging children in hands on learning, using rhythms and patterns to reinforce concepts, learning about what types of learning your students respond to and so on, all, of course, without a teacher degree. In fact, because of the amount of support Martha believed her son needed, she had to put off any degree whatsoever. She believes that if it hadn’t been for her son’s disabilities and her struggle to advocate for him in a school that didn’t know what to do with him, she might not have ended up in the education field at all.

If he hadn’t needed all that he needed, I don’t know if I would be here right now. My point of being in his school was always to help the teacher if he did snap into another seizure. But, when I got there, I realize that the teachers needed more than that. Edward was doing okay, but I also saw all these other students that needed help. I remember asking parents if their kids had been tested for certain things. A couple of these parents who had no idea and no clue that their children might be needing something else really took a step forward and really faced facts and the kids got their help. Some of the parents got offended and said, ‘just because your kid is stupid, doesn’t mean mine is.’ So, I’ve
dealt with both. For a very long time, I blamed myself for his condition. I thought about all the ways I couldn’t stop the fever from happening. Maybe I did something during pregnancy. There’s all those things you think about when you are stuck in a hospital for a week with a kid who has an IV strapped to his hand and is walking to the elevator because he wants to go. There is no other experience that will humble you more. My mom sometimes tells me, “don’t you regret that you haven’t done more with your life?” But I am amazed with what I have done after everything I’ve been through. I’m amazed. I don’t regret it. Eventually I want to look at speech therapy. I know I can do it. He’s living proof. He started Pre-K without language. Education has always been a part of my life. I feel like I’ve always been a teacher.

Martha connected her transformation as mother to her positionality as a teacher. She saw her child as needing advocacy, but also realized that every child needed advocates, as did the parents. Martha, and the other women in the study, eventually learned that their skills as activists, mothers and advocates were valued by the local community organization, leading them towards the teaching profession.

Martha, Pia and Paula’s experiences advocating for their children and themselves position them as *mujeristas*. However, they see this advocacy as something that they have an obligation to undertake as teachers. To return to Beauboeuf-Lafontant’s (2002) characterization of the womanist teacher as political, maternal and risk-taker, we can see elements in all of women’s stories. They also, in the tradition of Ella Baker, begin to upend the established power structures by using what the patriarchal structure saw as deficits to empower their lives and their children’s lives. The third theme continues to look at this phenomenon of using their “deficits” as empowerment for the community and the challenges and complexities that it creates.
All the women began the bachelor’s degree program towards teacher certification. Some had college credits, and some did not. As explained, the program they were a part of grew out of a grassroots, community-based initiative that valued parents and believed that parents are an important part of the classroom. So far, the research presented in this work has attempted to complicate and add depth to that value. The educational histories of these women, their lived experiences as students in urban classrooms, their epistemologies as mothers, and their conviction that teaching is a political act all support the idea that their voice is important and necessary, especially in teaching children in a community that shares their cultural identity. They are from the community, in the community, and for the community. Their community voice, however, is under attack. This section presents the context of community and how, according to the women, it informs their beliefs about activism and social justice. However, the section will also position their values as resistance to the general direction of school policy and curriculum, especially in Chicago. If, as the previous sections argue, their voices and epistemologies have value in schools, they will have to fight to be heard.

All the women in this study engaged in some sort of community organizing before starting their teacher education. It was, in fact, part of the requirements for acceptance; community activism was also required while they were actively seeking a degree. As a part of that activism, they were engaged in a community-based organization that was highly involved in the community schools, especially in engaging parents. Martha was a volunteer in her son’s school and eventually became the director of the parent mentor program in a local middle school.
Pia worked as a teacher’s aide and for a bilingual education rights campaigns. Marisol was a volunteer in her daughter’s schools and worked for the local community-based organization part-time. Belen was a parent mentor and literacy ambassador in her children’s school and was elected onto the Local School Council (LSC), the governing body of the neighborhood schools in Chicago. LSCs are explained in more detail later. Paula volunteered in her daughters’ school and eventually became more actively involved in Chicago social justice campaigns as she went further in her degree. The women identify themselves as community activists becoming teachers, so they entered into their degree program believing in the power of community organizing.

The program grew from a community-organizing model of the parent organization, Logan Square Neighborhood Association (LSNA), and follows the theories and models of Saul Alinsky. LSNA’s work with schools became especially important in Chicago in the late 1980s with the formation of LSCs, which are made up of teachers, parents and community members and have the ultimate say in hiring the principal for the school. In other words, LSCs give some authority to the community in deciding who runs the neighborhood school. LSNA realized in helping campaign for the creation of LSCs that parents and communities needed more leadership roles in their children’s school. At the time the local schools were severely over-crowded because there was a huge influx of immigrants, especially from Mexico, and, at the same time, the schools lacked Spanish language speakers and Latinos in general on staff. Eventually, LSNA began its award-winning program, the parent mentor program, an initiative that the women in this study are all associated with in some way. The parent mentor program deserves some attention here because it ultimately led to some of the questions that this research attempts

11 See more about LSNA’s history and conceptual framework at www.newcommunities.org/cmadocs/LSNAindicatorsstudy.pdf.
to explore: What if parents became teachers? What knowledge could they offer? What could they change? Ultimately, a community based organization was asking questions that education scholars should have been exploring.

The parent mentor program is presented and ultimately celebrated in Soo Hong’s (2011) recent book, *A Cord of Three Strands: A New Approach to Parent Engagement in Schools*. In her ethnography of the parent mentor program, she describes the roles of parents as “bridging the gap” between community and schools, a gap that has been heavily documented (Carger, 1993; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003; Noguera, 2001; Schutz, 2006; Valdés, 1996; Valenzuela, 1999). Hong asserts that parent mentors can successfully bridge the gap between schools and the community through induction, integration and investment. She argues that the LSNA model helps support school and community investment so that there can be an authentic partnership between people who essentially want the same things for the children of the community.

In one chapter, Hong (2011) focus on the possibility for these parent mentors transforming into certified teachers by highlighting three important assets that parent mentors offer: their experience in building relationships between parent and teacher, their lived experience as community members, and their “mind for activism.” She argues that the parent volunteers’ development as leaders in the parent mentor program helps inform their identity as teachers, a lens that this research highlights through the narratives about activism and motherhood. As Hong explains, “However, for the candidates who are featured in this study, the school and home communities are one and the same—one that is full of already existing connections, relationships, and local knowledge” (p. 68). The community-based model of relationship-building constitutes the bridge that can offer meaningful partnerships between
schools and communities and, according to Hong, the transition from parent mentor to teacher creates this organic bridge.

So, if we understand that parent involvement in schools is important for school and student success, programs like the parent mentor program are essential. And, if we value the local knowledge of the parents such as Martha, Belen, Paula, Pia and Marisol, local knowledge which the research here attempts to expand upon through the lens of womanist/mujerista feminism, it is a natural endeavor to support them in their ambitions to be teachers, especially if we nurture and value that knowledge in the process of their teacher education. The logic is easy, but the process is not.

Although the women in this research have learned to “make meaning” out of their experience and believe that their epistemologies as mothers and community members have value, they still exist in a system whose policies and actions send a different message. On top of this, the women are often uncomfortable trusting their own authority and identities as burgeoning teachers. Furthermore, as I will discuss later, even with lots of support, the passage to becoming a teacher has become increasingly difficult, especially for people of color. It is in fact authority, as cultural knowledge holders, as mothers, as teachers, with which the women feel the most uncomfortable. Two summers ago, I worked closely with two of the students, Martha and Belen, while they volunteered as teachers in a social justice summer camp. The purposes of the summer camp are three-fold: (1) to give teacher candidates an opportunity for reflective and authentic teaching practice in their community and (2) to give the students in Logan Square community and local elementary schools the opportunity for applicable and self-motivated learning while they are out of school and (3) to allow teacher candidates to transform community-based social
justice teaching. The experience was powerful and important in their teacher development, but it also helped the candidates work out some of the fears they had about their own teacher identity.

Both Martha and Belen were committed to identifying their classroom and pedagogy as socially just, especially as they saw it working in their community. In defining social justice, Martha believed that justice happens when a student is not only critical of his or her world, but of the community they live. She sees justice grounded in “where you are.” Martha explained,

Social justice is a way of thinking—a hard way of thinking. Everything you put into it actually has so many parts. Educating children regardless of disability or where they come from—you have to see them as a mind to succeed to open up to their surroundings, their environment. You have to be central in their world—it’s part of teaching. If you’re not critical to your world—you’re not a teacher—otherwise you’re just respecting what’s been done. You have to teach what is going to be constructive, critical and workable from where you are.

Martha also recognized that teaching what she believes is important doesn’t just happen because she wants it to. She understands that administrative and parental investment is essential.

You can learn a lot of stuff but if you learn something that will go on in the community, then you are teaching. This doesn’t happen as much because of policy. First, the administration has to let it happen. We’re so used to a routine, so used to this narrow road. There’s other ways of getting to the same place. Going off the main road. Sometimes society, even me, is afraid to do that. I find myself teaching in…look I’ve lived in the same ten block radius for 47 years. It takes on a whole other dimension. It’s more comfortable to be with what I’m familiar. The risks I can take here---I don’t know of any other teachers that have gone through that. I feel, at least here, I’m a little closer to
being one of the students, seeing through their eyes. That parent [I worked with], he felt comfortable—he thought that if he could trust me, he said that he understood that I was a parent and con razon, entiendo que haciendo (with good reason, I understand what you are doing). What would help social justice teaching is if parents were a part of this.

Martha states her conviction that teaching means being critical of one’s world and one’s subjectivity in it, however in the same breath, Martha admits her fear of the risks she might need to take to truly be a justice-based teacher. She already recognizes the fight social justice requires and the fact that it may cost her the job that she has spent so long pursuing.

I observed both Martha and Belen’s mistrust of their own authority as teachers, as culture bearers throughout their camp experiences. In observations, it was clear that both Martha and Belen did not easily cross the border from community authority to teacher authority. The women often mistrusted their own ideas and reactions; they in fact seemed disconnected with their ways of knowing, including their cultural knowledge. At one point, Belen passed by the boys’ bathroom on her way to the office and saw a sixth grade boy from the other class coaxing a younger female student to follow him into the bathroom. She was instantly uncomfortable with the situation and told her son to run and get me. When I found her, the girl had left, never having entered the bathroom and the boy had gone back upstairs, but Belen had not said anything to the boy. She told me the situation, and when I asked her why she didn’t talk to the boy, she was clearly uncomfortable. “I’m not a real teacher,” she told me.

Martha and Belen also voiced some distrust of their own cultural knowledge as Latinas and community members, despite the fact that they believe more Latinos were needed in schools as teachers and administrators. More teachers of color have been long demanded by progressive educators and scholars Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994), Lisa Delpit (2006), and Michelle Foster
(1997) have even provided us with rich accounts of teachers of color, reminding us why we have to keep fighting to diversify the profession, while encouraging us to continue to critically examine the obstacles they face. The number of Latino/as in education is growing but remain underrepresented, holding only 6 percent of teaching positions in the United States (Feistritzer, 2011). For Martha and Belen being Latina in endeavoring to teach Latinos is not necessarily a predetermined asset. In fact, at first Martha labeled it as somewhat of a burden:

Being a Latina getting ready to teach Latino kids is a bit of a burden because, at least in our Mexican culture, in what I know, La maestro siempre tiene la razon. She’s always right. No puede tener la razon si la educada es la maestro. (I can’t be right if the teacher is more educated). So, I might get stuck in thinking I’m always right when it’s just not true. We need to research, we need to update, we need to keep with technology, keep up with the stories. To have that authority, or to say, I think I know more about that than you—it makes it a lot harder to involve the parents, to get them to come in and sit with you.

When I spoke with Belen about being Latina and how this might inform her pedagogy, she had trouble articulating something because, as she revealed later, she was afraid of offending me, “Well, how can I say this? Like at [the university], if I had to talk to….I don’t want to name a certain…a non-Latino, yeah, if I had to talk to a non-Latino, I didn’t feel as comfortable. It’s easier now, but I think it is more comfortable talking to someone who shares your experiences. So, I know that that person may have had experiences with immigration, with racism, and especially with the language and it’s just more comfortable. So, if I am working with Latino kids, they may feel more comfortable talking with me.” Later, when I emailed the transcripts of
the interview to her, Belen called me to apologize. She explained that she didn’t mean to sound that way, to say those things to me. I was sad that she felt the need to explain herself to me.

Paula also talked about navigating the boundary between not being a “real teacher” and her cultural knowledge as a Latina. For her, it became especially difficulty during her student teaching. She student taught in a Latino-dominated, dual-language elementary school outside of her community. She was placed with a cooperating teacher who was described to her as being “very good.” However, her experience working with a white, Spanish speaking cooperating teacher and a non-Mexican Latina professor was complex. As Paula explained:

I realize now that I think she was more afraid of me than I was of her. The reason why because she tried to go and relive the experience that she was doing when she was in the Peace Corps in Nicaragua. So then when she met me I really did feel like she was threatened by me only because…and not because I was so scary or knew everything or whatever. I just felt that she could never be Latina. She saw how the children reacted differently to me. They were real cool with me from day one. I talked to them like I talked to my kids. Both in love and strictness. That was something she can’t do. If you are not a Latina, you don’t carry that experience. No. So I would see a lot of times that she would try and bring me down, in my planning, because she couldn’t bring me down in any other way. She looked down at me even though I was in the honors program and in the scholar program, she was another person who though, “Oh, you are going to get your master’s after this. Oh, and a PhD? You think you will be able to do that?” Look, my sister has a saying, if you can’t build them up, then don’t break them down. I always felt that push back from people. The ones who saw that I was trying to go beyond their expectations. Then, she got the support of the university professor, so it was worse. It was like they didn’t want me to
get to a point where I could get great at who I am and they would have to stand in my shadows. They always tried to keep me “here” [she holds palm at chest level]. Don’t get from “here” to “here” [she holds her hand above her head]. You can dream. Dreaming is great. But, right now we need to just be here to master this. But don’t think you can get up there because only people like us can get up there. And it was funny to me because this university professor from Chile was white, with colored eyes, the other professor is the same way, she’s blond. No, because she thought Latino teachers weren’t as good. She said it. You would never hear that from a brown or black teacher. But, she still had a skin color that gave her privilege. So you can’t tell me what you think you know because you’re sitting in this classroom for six years when you didn’t go through what I went through and the actual experience. You had the privilege to be able to have some teachers tell you about social justice and you are in your classroom and you’re learning about it. You might even have kids that fit the profile that you learned about and you can tailor your curriculum to it. But even then, you are not doing a very good job with it. I was really trying to do it, bringing in our experiences and trying to bring in what was going on in like, Arizona, and she was doing it from a different perspective. It was more like let’s just look at the law but, not, let’s look at the people and how it’s affecting the people, real people. We could teach about how it can affect your family and what do we see going on here in Chicago. So in that sense I just kind of feel she was really though she had to scrutinize everything I did because I wasn’t the expert. But, she’s not brown. I am. And I know what the kids are seeing. And what they see and what they want to see and what they hear and what they don’t want to hear. Quite frankly, you can stand up there and you can dance all you want but you can never be a part of what we have. You can’t relate to your students when you are sitting there
talking about your trips to all the nice places you go and taking your kids to water parks and you were over here and over there. Wow that’s great, but where does that put me with my parents? My parents must be shit. They can’t take us to places like that. They can’t do that for us. That has always kind of bothered me growing up too, but I would hear teachers talk about. A teacher needs to be everything. She has to build a curriculum that they kids can relate to. And something that can say I get it because she gets it. She use to live in this neighborhood. I really bonded with one of my students when I shared that my nephew had been arrested. This situation is unfair. The other family didn’t press charges, but she was white. And now he’s in jail. So, I shared that experience with one of my students because he was from Guatemala and was getting into a lot of trouble. He thought it was a game. But I sat down and said, you know what, you have to understand; you have to be twice as good as everyone else. You have to know that they system is out there to break you. They really do try to break you. I felt after that after that day, he was like “Hey, Ms. Paula” and we would sit down and talk and have conversations. And then at the end we had some trust. Even though I knew I couldn’t go into his house and fix everything that was hurting him, I felt like I could get to him a little bit, and that he understood it coming from me. He understood I wasn’t perfect and did have similar experiences as what he experienced.

In listening to Paula’s experience, I hear remnants of Anzaldúa’s poem, “To live in the Borderlands means you.” Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) writes, “The dominant white culture is killing us slowly with its ignorance. By taking away our self. To survive the Borderlands you must live sin fronteras be a crossroads.” Martha and Belen, along with the other women in the program are constructing the meaning of border pedagogy. They are the personification of the authentic partnerships between community and school, the bridge that Soo Hong describes, imagining their
teaching identities as offering authentic, community-based partnerships that reject deficit models. They transcend the joining of activism and curriculum expertise and are, in fact, the activists coming into their pedagogical expertise.

The women also express their belief in the importance of relationship-building with the parents as a form of solidarity and social change. Drawing from what they learned from the community-based organizations training and from their own experience being parents shut out of their children’s education, they hold parent knowledge, involvement and transformation in high esteem.

Martha, for instance, often talked about how she believes social justice and activism are an essential part of education, but she also strongly advocates the idea that parents have to be involved in the activism for it to matter. Martha sees community engagement not only as part of social justice education, but how you define it. Martha tells me in one of our conversations, “Well, yes, but I thought that teaching was about helping the kids and therefore it was about helping the community. But, I understand now that it is more direct. It is about inviting parents, getting kids to help their community, it is about all of that, not just the kids in the classroom. The community has to be inside the classroom and the kids have to be outside the classroom.” In describing a confrontation with a father she had seen every night waiting in his car to pick up his child, she describes how she mediates this insider/outsider status that parents feel:

The parents were so afraid to ask if they could stay. I was shocked and then the next day when they did stay and we were all playing and I got into the group and told them to go ahead and read and I was surprised that Mr. Sanchez said, you know, Hi Maestra, no pienso que era tan acesible. Y yo, “Por que?” “Mi senora me dijo vamos a quedarnos y le dije, no le enojar la maestra.” Y yo, “por que me va enojar?” Y el, “sabes que somos
de Puebla y en Puebla, las maestros, para verles necesita hacer una cita.” Y yo, “aquí no! Quedarte si quieres. Puede aprender inglés igual que los niños.” (Hi Teacher, I did not know it was so accessible. And I, “why?” “My wife told me we are going to stay, and I told her, do not anger the teacher.” And I, “I will get angry?” And, “you know that we are from Puebla, the teachers, you need to make an appointment to see them.” And I, “not here! Stay if you want to. You can learn English equal to the children.”) He thought because of his English, because he’s from Mexico, normally this wouldn’t be okay. He stays out there and parks from the time that the kids are dropped off until the kids leave. He doesn’t come inside the school. Me pregunto, que, hay clases de todo? (He asked me, what classes do they offer)? And I told him how they have everything here. I told him, ‘Just come in and inform yourself.’ I guess he was afraid; I mean, his dialect was really strong, maybe he is newly here. But I was glad he was there. I mean his wife seemed really happy. They were into what they were doing. I thought it was shocking. He came on the field trip too. It was nice to cross the border with parents, that frontera (border). With so many new Mexicans coming, how many are shut out of schools?

For Martha, her connection with this father signifies an important issue. She believes that it is common for parents to feel shut out form schools both because of cultural understandings of the role of maestro/a and because schools don’t always know how to invite parents to be a part of the conversation. Because of her involvement with LSNA and the parent mentor program, she saw the school as having open doors that can involve parents in their children’s education and can offer important resources to parents through GED classes, citizen classes and ESL. For her, schools often create yet another frontera that parents can’t cross, but she wants to create the bridge for them to feel more comfortable in that crossing.
Marisol often refers to her own experience as a parent as a catalyst for why she believes there has to be a partnership between teachers and parents. She explains that she has often felt shut out of her older daughters’ educational experience. It has been hard for her to make it to traditional spaces for parent involvement (parent-teacher conference night, report card pick up, open houses) because of work schedules and geography. Her oldest daughter goes to a school miles away from home because Marisol endeavored to get a better education for her daughter than the local school could offer and because of the way that childcare needed to work out. This scenario is a growing issue in Chicago because of school choice policies, which will be discussed a bit more later.

Marisol also believes that her volunteer work and role as parent gives her direct insight into the disconnect between schools and community. As she bluntly explains, “I think we have to get over this belief that parents can’t educate their own children.” Marisol believes the chasm between parent and teacher to be very prevalent:

My experience with my kids and my being in the classroom as a volunteer, I see that there is such a lack of exchange between educator and parent. You can’t get any further than parent and teacher…that’s it. And, until that communication happens, the education is very limited. Sometimes it is so oppressive and frustrating that…look, I understand that many of us work and that there could be a language barrier, and even educational or economic difference, and it’s happened to me and I feel guilty as hell because I’ve had to miss report card pick up, but I can’t. So, I understand that and that’s why, with my daughter for instance, I’m learning that those notes are so important.

To illustrate, Marisol described a recent experience with a non-communicative teacher. Marisol was working during the day and then went to class in the evening until about ten at night. She
knew there was no way to get an appointment that would work for both her and the teacher, and at least that year, there was no listed email address or phone number for the teacher. So, Marisol followed a detailed plan that had worked in the past when she needed to connect with at teacher. She writes notes to the teacher and attaches them to her daughter’s agenda, a book the teacher checks every day. But, like any parent, she expected a response:

That tells me that you care for my kid, as an educator, there’s that side, and then there’s the parent side. For example, I went through an issue with Naomi this year with her science teacher. I sent information through her, and I don’t like that, but you also have to consider age. I tell her, if there is ever an issue with your grade, with your paper, with a misunderstanding, you need to make that connection first and whatever happens, whatever arrangement, then bring it to me. Then, my second step, if it’s not resolved, is let me write a note, so I write in the homework journal, “such and such, could you please clarify, I didn’t really understand.” I always give the teacher the benefit of the doubt. She’s the teacher. Sign my name. Didn’t get any response. She did not tell my daughter anything. So, here comes the second note. So, I’m calling on the third time. Then, I’m meeting her. So, I’m thinking, maybe she wants to talk personally. I appreciate that too. But, when I finally got there and we sat down to talk, it didn’t go anywhere. I didn’t get her to answer any of the questions. So, in those situations, I feel like I lose what I’ve learned about education and parents, etc., because my blood is boiling. It’s my kid, you know. So, I have to go to the principal and it finally gets fixed. Which is frustrating.

Marisol has developed the resources to reach out to teachers, even when they aren’t listening. This was an action that, in her perception, her mother didn’t know how, or was afraid, to do. However, she also recognizes that parents may not be the first priority for teachers, not
necessarily because of want to ignore them, but because the system of education is teaching professionals a very different set of values, one that comes in direct conflict with significance of parent and community knowledge as an asset to learning. As Marisol explained,

My experience as a parent with teachers is, I don’t know, maybe they feel threatened. But, they can take it out on your kid. I hate that. Once you have that kid in your classroom, how can you go back? You can’t. In the early grades the communication is still happening. In third grade, it gets a little harder because there is a lot more at stake. Testing and whatnot. So, if it comes down to whether or not this teacher can get your kid to test well by the end of the year, then guess what, they might keep their job. And that sucks. A lot of these teachers are so full of pressures that it’s creating a tension with parents.

Here Marisol expressed her empathy for the obstacles teachers face to keep their job but remains frustrated that those obstacles get in the way of communicating with parents.

The experiences of Martha, Belen, Paula, Pia and Marisol pose a direct challenge to traditional top-down models of school and community partnerships. The women do not enter the teaching force in order to save a community from itself, but bring their community expertise into classrooms. However, it is not as simple as training culture-bearers in pedagogy; one cannot merely take a community leader and send them through a teacher “training” program. For Martha, it’s about trust. Last night on the phone, she spoke about the problems she was having in her job as a parent coordinator. “That barrier between the outsiders, often white teachers, and us, that’s very very hard to crumble.” The women also challenge social justice teacher education. In Cochran-Smith’s theory of justice-based teacher education, she argues that teacher candidates need to learn about and invite community. But, how to we help the community members trust in
their knowledge? How can we deepen our understanding of what it means to teach in a socially just manner? As Martha explained, “There is so much knowledge that we have to tap into that sometimes it’s overwhelming, and it’s about trust. Trust in ourselves and the established experts trust in us.”

The “established experts trust in us” is something that warrants some attention because the system that the experts have implemented and are continuing to develop supports the dismantling of community power and parental knowledge in schools. More specifically, there are three systems at work that essentially create policies that not only marginalize parents, but ultimately made it nearly impossible for women like Martha, Belen, Paula, Pia and Marisol to obtain a teaching degree and practice critical pedagogy in community schools. First, they face an ever-narrowing scrutiny of teacher education “accountability”, especially in standardized testing that will continue to “whiten” the teaching force. Second, the standardizing of testing has made Latino schools even more vulnerable to school closings and takeovers. And, third, the closing and consolidation of neighborhood schools continue to push parents out of schools and disempowered community members out of school decision-making. The rest of this section contextualizes some of the authentic, local consequences of these actions and explores how some of the women are responding to them.

The road to becoming a teacher has become increasingly more difficult, especially for candidates of color. Generally, the path to becoming a teacher follows a similar pattern at the baccalaureate level of higher learning institutions. There are two years of general education, a year of professional education, a semester long internship, and a semester of student teaching. However, for non-traditional students, like the women in this study, this pattern is a challenging endeavor. First, the women go to school part-time, usually at night, taking two or three classes a
semester instead of five, so what would normally take four years can take eight to ten. Second, most of the women had full-time jobs to negotiate. In the beginning of their educational career, this was flexible. They worked during the day and attended classes in the evening or on weekends—a schedule that worked well for their jobs and school, but often caused tension at home as they missed dinners and homework help. However, this convoluted combination of jobs and school did not work out during student teaching. Student teachers abide by the same schedule as their cooperating teachers. They are in the schools before the first class, and they stay until their cooperating teacher leaves, often around four or five, and even later if there are activities or conferences. This schedule means that the students can’t work while they student teach, creating a fairly complicated situation for the women and their families.

Marisol talked about how the finances work in her family, “My unemployment benefits are gone, the extension benefits. We were stretching it. I would receive $517 every two weeks, so $1000 helped. We counted out groceries, gas and the little extras. But now, that’s gone. Whatever he gives me, because he’s also fixed. It just sucks. If he gives me more time, that takes time away from him working. Just because of where we live, it kind of messes everything up. I don’t know what we are going to do. I applied for some part-time jobs.”

Pia, on the other hand, had been working as a teacher’s aide, known as an Educational Support Personnel (ESP), in a Chicago public school for seven years. She loved the school, the principal, and, of course the students. She was incredibly nervous about the logistics of taking a “student teaching leave of absence” for a semester. She had saved up enough money to keep her family afloat for the sixteen weeks of student teaching, but that was it. She had to be able to walk back into her ESP position or get a teaching position in the middle of the year. However, there was no guarantee that either of these scenarios would happen. The Chicago Teachers Union has
stipulated in their contract that ESPs should be granted a leave for student teaching, but that is without pay and only they only continue to receive health insurance if they paid the full premiums. When they are ready to return, they would be able to walk back into their previous job “if the position were open.” For a while, Pia contemplated not finishing her degree because she was so nervous about the possibility of being unemployed.

For Martha, staying afloat financially was always a problem, but even after graduation, she wasn’t sure if she could make it. The summer after her graduation, I met with Martha to help her work on a standard cover letter so she could begin looking for jobs in the fall and discovered that she had not yet received her certification paperwork. I was concerned given that once a student graduates, it can take up to two months to receive official certification. However, for Martha, it just wasn’t possible financially. Initial certification costs $100 and each endorsement—she had achieved four—cost $50 each. As she explained, “Every time I managed to save the money, something came up. First it was the car, and then Edward’s school needed a down payment. Now I’m working on saving it again.” For these women, the financial burden of college was made easier through the program they studied with; it provided grants and forgivable loans for both tuition and books. However, between the costs of licensure tests, certification registration and, even the cap and gown, getting a degree was incredibly expensive.

Even if they can work out the balance of budgets, schedules, school, and work, they still have to overcome all the same challenges (classes, graduation requirements, student teaching applications, and so on) that every teacher candidate must, except with one added twist: a certification test that the vast majority of people of color fail. In an effort to seem more rigorous in standards for teaching, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) decided to revamp its so-called Basic Skills test for students studying to be teachers. It’s a test created by testing
conglomerate Pearson that is supposed to show minimum 11th grade skills in Language Arts, Reading, Math and Writing. ISBE gathered a group of experts to create new, higher cut scores for the test, and after the panel made recommendations of scores, ISBE decided to make the cut scores even higher. To this day, there has been no explanation as to how they came to the cut scores that they did (Cantu & Finson, 2011). The outcomes for teacher candidates were abysmal. After a year of the new test, 63 percent of test takers failed it. For teacher candidates of color, the results were even worse; 87.4 percent of Latinos failed it, and 92.5 percent of African-Americans failed it. It seemed that the already low amount of teachers of color is doomed to get lower. To make the situation worse, ISBE imposed a lifetime limit of five tries, meaning that if a candidate hadn’t passed the test after five attempts, they could never take it again, and ultimately never be a certified teacher in Illinois. The women in this study were lucky. They took the Basic Skills test before the cut scores were changed to impossibly high rates. Passing, however, did not come easy even then. Martha and Belen had to take the test three times. Pia took it twice. All of the women went through hours of workshops and tutoring to prepare for the exam in the first place. However, as one can deduce, only a handful of the remaining women in the program have passed the new test and many are running out of attempts. To be precise, only about 40% of the cohort members have passed the test, and many of them are almost out of tries, which essentially means they will never get Illinois certification.

Once the women overcame the challenge of this one test, created the environment in which they can economically survive while student teaching, and mastered the mountain of paperwork that is necessary in receiving a certificate and applying to work in Chicago Public Schools, the second largest school system in America, they are still faced with the same challenges that are facing every CPS employee—challenges that have become bitter, angry, and
divisive and have led to the impending strike that is facing Chicago in the fall of 2012. But, that is not my biggest worry for these women. My biggest concern is that they are fighting the total destruction of community connections to schools. The policy makers and Chicago power brokers have initiated reform movements in the name of teaching accountability and educational quality, but with consequences—often devastating consequences—that have very local, personal effects for these women and the children and communities for which they are advocating. They have a very difficult fight ahead of them, but they have been fighting for a long time.

In the name of accountability, equality and standardization, CPS uses testing to systematically attack communities like the one these women are from. The use of high stakes testing within the Chicago area has been highly contested, challenged by a variety of groups in the Chicago educational community including teachers, professors, students and families (Au, 2009; Cooper & Randall, 2008; Greenlee, Hudspeth, Lipman, Akua-Smith, & Smith, 2008; Lipman & Person, 2007). In 2004, Chicago adopted Renaissance 2010, a plan formulated by Chicago Mayor Richard Daley and implemented by then Chief Executive Officer Arne Duncan (Brown, Gutstein, & Lipman, 2009). The plan’s strategy uses NCLB’s regulations regarding underperforming schools to close 60 public schools and open 100 new schools, usually as charter or contract. Despite the fact that the Renaissance 2010 plan was by many accounts a failure, CPS has expanded the Renaissance 2010 plan and renamed it New Schools for Chicago, in order to close more schools, open more charters and continue its mission, “to radically improve outcomes for children by shaking up the public education system” (New Schools for Chicago, 2012). When I describe the plan as a failure, I mean it in every capacity,\textsuperscript{12} but if we look at

student test scores alone, the catalyst for closing, reconstituting or turnaround the neighborhood in the first place, the plan has failed. “Scores from the elementary schools created under Renaissance 2010 are nearly identical to the city average, and scores at the remade high schools are below the already abysmal city average, the analysis found” (Banchero, Germuska, & Little, 2010).

The effects of this phenomenon have citywide and even nation-wide consequences, especially since the creator, Arne Duncan, was named Secretary of Education. However, for the women in this study they have to mediate the very personal and local outcomes as mothers, activists and new teachers barely entering the field. The neighborhood in which they live is incredibly vulnerable to the “shake up” for two reasons, the continued loss of students because of gentrification and the housing crisis and test scores. As Martha explained:

The numbers are getting so much lower because of housing. The economy has hit housing so hard, especially those who are making ends meet. Rents are going up hundreds of dollars. People are not getting notices—it just happens and two or three families are living in one place. So, lots of families opt to live on the Southside where it is a lot cheaper to live. There goes our kids. A lot of the kids from the new families have little kids, so they aren’t in the middle schools yet. A lot of the parents don’t understand the differences between a charter school, or Track E school or alternative school, there are so many differences; it’s hard to stay informed and keep up.

Martha’s description of the “new families” is a reference to the gentrification in her neighborhood from mostly white newcomers. Many of these newcomers have younger children who are just beginning to attend a few neighborhood schools, but many of the families send their
children to selective, lottery-based, or tuition-based schools instead of their neighborhood schools.

If a school’s standardized test scores are low, they are in danger of being closed under the New Schools for Chicago plan. The schools in Martha, Belen, Paula, Pia and Marisol’s neighborhood struggle with raising test scores, especially with high numbers of low-income and ESL students. However, test scores are a major impetus as to why a school might be closed or taken over. To make things worse, Illinois decided that no matter the how much English a student had, the student had to take the regular ISAT test. Before the change, ESL students took a test called the IMAGE test that only tested their development in English. Now students, no matter how much English they could read, had to take the same test as everyone else.

While Pia was in the midst of her college classes, she worked hard to fight against these changes. Her son was still young and she packed him up in the stroller and went marching with many of the other mothers in her neighborhood. They held a press conference, spoke to reporters, and called state legislators and the Illinois school board. She understood the impact that this kind of change would have on their community schools, leaving them vulnerable to CPS takeovers, which would take away all community voice in the process. As community-organizer Jitu Brown, and researchers Eric (Rico) Gutstein, and Pauline Lipman (2009) argue, “For affected communities who have longed for change, Renaissance 2010 has been traumatic, largely ineffective, and destabilizing to communities owed a significant ‘education debt’ due to decades of being underserved” (p. 12). The change remained, however. All students would have to take the test, even if they did not understand the language it was in. Logan Square is in an especially vulnerable position as they are losing student populations opening it up to the prospect of the
fragmentation and possible destruction of her community as neighborhood schools are replaced by selective schools more attractive to gentrification.

Pia’s fear about what might happen to their local schools has already come true. Last year, the first neighborhood school was closed and “consolidated.” The process happened quickly and with the resistance of parents, including Belen, who was at the protest described by local reporter Mark Brown (2011):

The signs they carried, and the chants they sang, were in both English and Spanish, though Spanish was clearly the language of first choice.

As irritating as I found the noise-making devices, the thought came to me only later that the Spanish-speaking residents of this city have an especially difficult time getting their voices heard, and sometimes a little amplification is probably necessary.

The parents were on hand to protest the proposed consolidation of Avondale Elementary and Logandale Middle Schools on the North Side, which they knew nothing about until the Chicago Sun-Times’ Rosalind Rossi broke the story last month. By Wednesday afternoon, it was a done deal, having been approved by the Chicago Board of Education along with six other consolidations of varying unpopularity.

So much for the public process with six months advance notice promised by a different CPS leadership team a year ago, after another batch of school maneuvers outraged the affected parties. School closings and consolidations are always going to cause discomfort, but CPS seems to have a particular ability to make a hash of things by running roughshod over communities while ignoring the wishes of parents.

The women in this study believe they are committed to being teachers in a classroom and activists in education. They also understand that they are going to have to bring even bigger
noisemakers if they are going to be heard, a very risky endeavor as employees of the same system that they would be resisting.

The latest threat from the board involves a neighborhood middle school in which Martha was heavily involved. For the last three years and into her student teaching, Martha had served as parent mentor coordinator for the middle school. She continued to serve as coordinator while she looked for her job and became very involved in the process of fighting to keep the school out of the hands of the military. She told me about the process of how they learned what was being decided about their children’s school. “They had a meeting that no one was aware of that the closing of Alcott was brought up and everyone agreed that it was cool and who brought it up was the Alderman. So, he wants a military school instead.” When Martha and other Alcott advocates learned what was happening, the first action she took was that of an activist. With the support of the community-based organization, she helped to organize the parents and community members and they took to the streets, holding a rally outside the school in question. This protest was slightly different than the first two. This time, they were proactive. They hadn’t received anything official that said what, if anything was going to happen to Alcott, but instead of waiting for the news, showing their resistance and losing, they decided to get their voices heard first.

The protest did not fall on deaf ears. The rally forced a response from CPS, who denied rumors of closing or reconstituting, but didn’t not say whether or not it was on the table or happening in the near future. Martha and the parents she works with are now pitted between two powerful offices, the Alderman and CPS:
So, the CAO\textsuperscript{13} of the district said that for this year we were safe, but we had to come up with a plan to show CPS that we knew what we wanted Alcott to be and before we would give it up to a military school, they would ask for 7-12\textsuperscript{th} grade. So, we’ve been having meetings to see different models of school, but we haven’t heard anything new. The principal is leaving to another district, but they haven’t hired anyone new. So, the school basically has no administration. We are registering kids without really knowing if we are opening and when because we may become Track E. I was thinking we could be a science and math academy, which would be totally different.

Here, Martha made clear her frustration with the position that she has been put in, but is also resolute in her job in getting kids the education that she believes they deserve. She has gone to weekly meetings to hear different experts talk about the various foci that they could adopt. She’s listened to experts on social justice, science and math academies, arts academies, small schools, and more. After hearing the plan, Martha and her team will have to write the plan together. However, she feels caught in the middle of a process that is using her:

> We were told from Brizard’s [the recently fired Chief Operating Officer of CPS] office that this is what we needed to do to combat what the Alderman wants. We don’t have any power as a community to control what happens to our school, but we can at least show that the Alderman is going against what the community wants by creating a different plan. It is like a power play between CPS and the Alderman. The parents don’t know that they have the right to say no or yes. We’ve been on television already; we’ve marched.

\textsuperscript{13} The CAO is the Chief Area Officer, and they act as team leaders of CPS schools in each of the city’s designated areas, which are composed of multiple neighborhoods.
Although reconstituting the school into a military school would allow it to remain a neighborhood school, Martha still felt like that disenfranchises what parents want for their children.

The teachers don’t want a military school. What bothers me about a military school is that I think it only fits certain type of student and it may not fit the community. All of our kids are struggling; it won’t be an open policy. They are going to pick and choose. I would never want Edward in a military school. I think a military school would show one way how to discipline yourself, but that is something you can show a student in any way through art, through music, through chorus, ROTC, social justice academies, job training—a lot of things they could do, even bring martial arts into a school or sports, even yoga! All these programs have been tested through our community programs, so it’s not like they would be new.

When Martha talked about the community programs that have already been tested, she is talking about the programs that she has already helped to initiate with the community-based organization. In other words, the community has brought in many of the programs that CPS is suggesting they pilot in order to save their own school. Martha worries that she is fighting against decisions that have already been made about her school.

The women in this study believe that justice-based activism, entrenched in parent and community partnerships, is essential for their teaching to be successful. However, the women will also be working in a system that is enacting policies that delegitimize their values as mothers and community members. They haven’t yet been able to practice their authorities as “real teachers,” but they imagine a teaching as a space to continue to practice activism, something that definitely puts them at odds with the system policies and “at risk” as employees.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

I want to begin the conclusion of this work with celebrations. During the process of this study, the women were still imagining their classrooms and work. They discussed what they hope to be in their future identities as educators. They were reflecting on their life narratives and “making meaning” in the connections of their experiences to what they were learning in their teacher preparation program and from the community-based knowledge that was encouraged in the program. They have yet to implement their hopes in the classroom. That will change, however, in the very near future.

This year, all of the women have graduated, with honors, and began the job hunt in a very difficult market. Currently Chicago Public Schools is flooded with out-of-work teachers, despite the large number of retirements (Harris, 2012). However, Martha, Belen, Pia and Marisol all received teaching positions beginning September of 2012. Not only that, but one week into their new positions, they were able to participate in one of the most monumental education activist movements in recent history, the Chicago Public School teacher strike. Pia received a job as a first-grade bilingual teacher in the school in which she had been a teacher’s assistant for the last seven years; it is quite literally, her dream come true. Marisol and Belen got jobs in a local school teaching second and third grade, respectively. As the principal who recently hired them explained, “Our school is enriched greatly because of these teachers. They are critical members of our staff. They make our parents feel welcome, they provide excellent academic support to our children and they work hand-in-hand with fellow teachers and assistants to provide the very best education possible for our students.” Martha, who has finally been able to afford her certification registration fees, has been offered two jobs and is in the lucky position of deciding
which one she wants. And Paula, well, Paula took my job. What’s more, she was recently accepted to the Ph.D. program at a local university.

There is a lot to celebrate. But, I’m not being honest if I leave it that and fail to write into the tensions that still exist within the context of my outsidersness and the systems that we are all beholden to. I remain in my relationship with these women and this research both as an outsider and insider. I’ve left my job as academic mentor in the program that they graduated from and have taken a full-time teaching position at a community college. I got to see these women graduate, but I was not sorry that I left the job. I still believed in what the program was doing, and all the women readily admit that they probably wouldn’t have made it this far without the program’s support. But, it became a corrosive and discouraging environment to work. I stopped believing we could do it.

The institutions that funded the program were growing more and more antagonistic about success and failure rates. They wanted large numbers of graduates, not stories of cultural capital and community partnerships. And ultimately, all of the challenges that face non-traditional teacher candidates of color, especially the Basic Skills test, was/is not going allow that to happen. My job began to look more like an accountant and less like a mentor and tutor. So, I left. I’m still very much in contact with these five women, and in many ways our friendships have grown since I have been able to serve as volunteer mentor when they need it without the pressure of what my job requires or doesn’t require. We spend more time talking about our children and meeting each other for play dates and dinners. Recently, we marched in a housing campaign in our neighborhood and the women helped me create a social network-based organization to help save a local beach in my mostly low-income neighborhood. However, we still live in very different realities, both economically and culturally.
Sofia Villenas discusses some of these complexities in exploring her identity as insider (Latina, woman) and outsider (privileged, academic). Villenas (1996) attempts to theorize her role as a researcher-sympathizer and potential colonizer. She also researches from the hyphen (Fine, 1998) and makes some suggestions on how to do this successfully, the most important of which is to invite the “multiplicity of identities” (p. 728). She writes, “Herein I find the key: to resist ‘othering’ and marginalization is to use our multiplicity of identities in order to tolerate and welcome the contradictions and ambiguities, as Anzaldúa (1987) writes, so that in our quest for liberation, we also dismantle the categories and the conquering language of the colonizer” (p. 728). As a white woman, I am even more of an outsider than Villenas, and as the women become more privileged in their education as college graduates, there are contradictions and complications in both my and the women’s identities. Through this research, I have learned about some of the ways I acted as colonizer, but have strived to write into the hyphen, instead of just having “awareness.”

For instance, when praising the program and the students to people who doubted their merits, I often said that I would want any of these women to be my child’s teacher. I said that before I had a child and after. But now we are preparing to find a school for my daughter, and although the statement is true, I would still want any of these women to be her teacher, it is unlikely that I will enroll my daughter in the schools in which they teach. In general, the schools in which they teach are under-resourced, lacking in playgrounds, libraries, arts, language, and sometimes even teachers. They are generally segregated schools in which my child may be the only only-English speaking white student. And, most egregiously, they can be dangerous. In the school in which Belen and Marisol teach, kindergarteners must pass through a metal detector on their way to class. As a privileged academic, I am well-versed on the ins and outs of the Chicago
Public School system and will have a better chance than many less-resourced families to get my daughter into a selective or magnet school, where she will get more resources than most neighborhood schools. The contradiction, of course, is that the women in this study are more knowledgeable of school systems now, and some also enroll their children in selective or lottery schools, instead of their neighborhood schools.

Although I live the same community with the women, I am one of the “new families” that Martha discusses; I am a gentrifier. In the process of buying a house, I realized that I was what realtors call “an urban pioneer,” which is a realtors’ euphemism for gentrification. I want to live in the neighborhood, but not in the same way that the long-term community members want. I am involved in community political action, but I don’t share the history and cultural knowledge and identity of the community the way that they do. I know this, but I must also realize that this is my deficit. This is an important way of thinking; there are many “new” families that feel some guilt about their presence and how it disrupts the community. But, it is important to recognize that this shouldn’t be yet another way of seeing the community as “damaged” (Tuck, 2009). Although I get to enjoy many of the resources that the “new” families bring to the neighborhood, I also don’t know the secrets of the community—what time is best to get fresh bread at the panadería, which of my neighbors is a famous folkloric dancer, or where I can get a cup of atole to increase my lactation.

I am indeed a white, privileged academic and, at the beginning of the research, I thought acknowledging that was enough. However, I have to acknowledge that I also engaged in deficit thinking. I thought that I wanted to tell the stories of these women to show their struggle, perseverance, and resilience—and I do—but not so that they are perceived primarily as damaged or victimized. It is not just what they “went through” that is important. It is not the barriers they
had to overcome. Rather, it is how they think and perceive what teaching and education should be that is the story that I want to tell. I realized listening to Paula describe her cooperating teacher, she could’ve been talking about me. Paula explained, “But we’ve met a lot of teachers like that, teachers like that wanted to really embrace Latino culture. They can’t be like us. They ain’t got the same thing. She’s not brown, I am.” My identity, especially in how I perceive these women and their community, has transformed through this research. I am a bit more aware of how my deficit thinking happens under the cloud of guilt and liberal thinking. It’s important that I make clear here that their maternal, cultural, and local knowledge isn’t just important, it fundamental in community schools. Their absences would be the deficit.

The women’s life narratives, epistemologies, activism, and funds of knowledge add to the growing body of literature that attempts to answer the call to arms in proclaiming the lack of research and theory about Latinas and education (Anzaldúa, 1987; Castillo, 1995; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006, Delgado-Gaitán, 1994, González, 2006; Valdés, 1996; Valenzuela, 1999; Villenas, 2001), critical theory and “Xicanisma” feminism (Anzaldúa, 1987; Castillo, 1995; Flores, 2000; Soto et al., 2009) and motherhood epistemologies in teaching and learning (Collins, 1990; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; Flores, 2000; hooks, 1984; Naples, 1992; González, 2005). Their stories don’t offer a panacea for education’s problems and complexities, but there are some next steps for research and clear suggestions for action that this inquiry can offer.

There are a lot of research possibilities that this study does not cover, ones that I am eager to see emerge. First, there is the question of how the women’s funds of knowledge can be fostered in teacher education programs. Although there is a nascent body of literature on Latino and bilingual teachers and teacher activism, we don’t know enough about how teacher education programs can develop community knowledge and activism in the insiders they enroll. There is
sparse research on how we can help outsiders gain understanding of the communities in which they work, but less on how we can help insiders use what they already know. A second possibility is to study the stories of teacher-mother activists’ children. How do their children understand their mothers’ epistemologies and public action? How does it inform their own beliefs about education and their relationships with their mothers. And, finally, the most essential question of all, and one that I hope to follow one day, is what actually happened in the classrooms of Martha, Belen, Pia, Paula and Marisol. How did they create community activism in their classroom, school, and community? How did their relationships with parents progress? What was the reality for these women? Ultimately, that is the next step in my journey with these women.

The intersections of feminisms, life histories, phenomenologies, and community activism of these women offer many possibilities for future policy, research and teacher education. But there are three general ideas that are most clear to me in this research, probably because they are repeated by all of the women in some way. They insist on (1) an increase of Latino/a teachers and administrators, (2) a focus on parent and community knowledge in schools and classrooms and (3) an alignment of pedagogy and activism.

I am not the first researcher to call for more Latino/as in education. There is a lot of research that talks about why this is so important, especially in supporting Latino/a youth. The women in this study agree. Their life histories and educational histories suggest that they felt disengaged and marginalized by many of the white teachers that they experienced. For some, this feeling remained throughout college. Even when they encountered well-meaning, Spanish-speaking teachers, some of the women recognized the limitations of what could happen in the classroom because the teachers will never share the subjectivities of oppression, anti-
immigration, racism and so on. The numbers of Latino/as is low, but the increasingly demanding requirements of teacher candidates will likely exacerbate this. If the current trend continues, the current “growing” number of Latino/a teachers will not only plateau, it will decrease. The call for more teachers of color needs to be supported through policy change and teacher education programs that value the cultural knowledge of their pre-service teachers.

Along with a push for more Latino/a teachers, there needs to be a renewed focus on parent and community engagement and maternal/paternal knowledge. This has to be an investment made from all educational avenues: teachers, teacher educators, administrators, and policy makers. In the environment of classroom management, mandated curriculum, and standardization of curriculum, there is little room for development of relationship-building skills and researching funds of knowledge of the community. However, this development in teacher candidates is essential. Research informs policy and many policies emphasize the need to work with communities and parents, but the actions taken by schools and school districts don’t often support this belief beyond the limited, traditional forms of engagement. For substantial, authentic partnerships to take place, it is often left up to the communities and community-based organizations. Policy makers have the potential to be investors in these partnerships and to invite and collaborate instead of control how and when engagement happens.

Finally, there needs to be a space for activism in teaching. The women in this study repeated the idea that they loved the students the way they do their own children, and therefore advocated for their rights. It was important to teach their students that they have a voice and can speak up when they are being oppressed. Pre-service and practicing teachers need to know that an identity as a teacher-activist is valued and important in supporting students. Democratic and
critical pedagogy, especially in marginalized neighborhoods, can help empower entire communities.

There is a fourth suggestion, offered by Paula. Her ultimate dream is that she and all the members of her program open up a school. She explained, “You know what, because we can have a community school with community teachers and then have those kids go through the same process, not necessarily to become teachers, but go to the community school and then to the university with community professors. Where we have all of the same values and principles and learning and everything that we value as a group, as a cohort, as a community, as parents, as educators, and teach them. Can you imagine where we would be in 15 or 20 years if we start a school?” Paula is determined to make this last suggestion become a reality. And, if it does, I will definitely be sending my daughter to that school.
Chapter 6: Where I am From Poems

Early in my research when I was still getting to know the women in this study, they participated in a type of icebreaker that I commonly use in gatherings and in my classes. At the time, the women and I were still getting to know each other. I was young and not yet a mother. They weren’t yet my friends. So the poems they wrote didn’t “make meaning” for me until recently after reflecting on their life experiences and how they have contextualized them in pedagogy, community, and motherhood. The poems are all entitled “Where I am From” and are adapted from George Ella Lyons “Where I’m From” (Lyons, 1999). The activity asks participants to read her poem, discuss it and then create their own identity poem filling in the blanks that tell their own life stories. The lesson is a form of “transformative education” meant to uplift, celebrate, and reflect. As Alma Flor Ada and F. Isabel Campoy (2004) explains, in Authors In The Classroom: A Transformative Education Process,

The set of interrelated principles that we call Transformative Education serves as a way of thinking about the world and understanding relationships between teachers, students, and families. It is also a tool with which we can continually examine and learn from our own experience and practice and thus further our own growth. In this sense, the goal of Transformative Education can be understood as inner transformation, as well as facilitating transformation in students’ lives and in the life of society as a whole. (p. 10)

Re-reading these poems, I realize that I have definitely crossed the line from researcher to advocate. I am worried for what lies ahead, but confident in their resiliency to implement what they imagine their classrooms to be.
Martha

I am from Gomez Palacios Corpine. I am from Coca-Cola and Kool-Aid. No water.

I am from the smallest room in my house with my ten pillows. I am from the rose and the water lily that always keep on reviving.

I am from Barbie’s and cut out dolls, from Ritz crackers with peanut butter and cherry kool-aid.

I am from the smell of perfumes, aftershave lotion and baby lotions.

I am from the Jasmine, Gardenias and Rose bushes in the windows.

From we are only going to stay for a few years and gather money, then go back to Durango and open a family business.

I am from a Catholic belief, which has helped me through my toughest times.

I am from strict upbringing and vacations for two months nowhere, where the Ramos and Marquez and Martinez, Villareal and the Vegas come together for a two-hundred person party for three days.

From the persecution of the government of Chihuahua which lead the family to Gomez Palacio Durango because the Marquez Martinez family where robbed, threatened, and terrorized.

I am from Gomez Palacio Durango a little town in the middle of the dessert and chicarrones freshly made, sandias, and tunas.

It starts in a ranch but it just keeps on going. You can go to sleep, wake up and they’re still there.

It’s breakfast, then lunch and dinner and you can go back to sleep, wake up and they’re still there. You can hear them. Playing all night.

The only thing that changes is the music.

It’s wild.
I am from photo albums full of pictures, memories, history which are stored in an old suitcase which are never seen, because they are the properties of my mother now and one day they will be my inheritance.
Paula

I am from Arnold Anzaldua born and raised in Brownsville Texas.

Who chuckled every time he caught me or my sisters munching and would sneak up from behind and say “you like this country don’t you”.

My father who will forever have his daughters back till the day he dies.

I am from Maria mí feisty madre que siempre nos acuerda, que

“Ustedes son nacidas en este país no te dejes!” Y conste que no se nos olvide que en este mundo no somos nada sin mi Padre Santo Dios.

I am from my three sisters who just happen to be my best friends, the best examples I could ask for and the softest shoulders I can cry on.

Que todas juntas somos unas desmadrosas.

I am from the banana house everyone made fun of because it was yellow, but it was still the most beautiful house on the block.

I am from waking up and walking to school and smelling the carbon monoxide from cars and factories that surrounded the Chicago air. Thank God for emission testing!

I am from going camping every weekend with my family from the time I was two weeks old and learning how to make moms famous hobo pies.

I am from the yearly family vacations going to Texas, and spending hours visiting el tío de tu tío del primo de tu abuelo etc.. according to mi ama.

Del Rancho de mi abuela in Harlingen, Texas, lleno de árboles de diferentes frutas, y el canal que al despertar no metíamos a nadar, y no salíamos hasta que cayera el sol.

I am from eating big fat ham sandwiches with Doritos, in front of the T.V.
I am from watching what real television was: 321 Contact, After School Specials, and 3 hours of Saturday morning cartoons followed by Soul Train.

Not all this reality bull shit there is on TV today.

I am from the Bi-Centennial Year 1976.

I am from house music, break dancing, neon leggings, wristbands, headbands, well you get the idea, and I couldn’t leave out aqua net and the infamous peacock hairstyle, (Ah you know what I’m talking about *no te hagas*)

I am from being the one who should be a lawyer because of my big mouth and for my “just for arguments sake” attitude.

To becoming a teacher where I could advocate for our children our future leaders of America, and argue how they need better education plans.

I am from learning that “you are of God, and He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.” John 4:4

I am from Chicago, Illinois. Chicana original!

From big fat homemade *tortillas de harina, con papas y huevos* and *calditos de pollo y 7-up* and Vicks all over your chest when we were sick.

I am from never forgetting almost losing my sister, my daughter, my 3 nephews, my niece, her two dogs, and myself to a horrible car accident (es we were all in the same car; we’re Mexican enough said!).

From watching my sister a young helpless mother fight the fight of her life and walk again.

I am from being so hungry because my mouth had to be wired shut to compromising and learning that the summer *carne asadas* taste just as good all blended up.

I am from almost losing my mom to Cancer.
and watching my old man sit in a barbers chair next to her and shave his head bald when she lost
her hair.

From learning what *in sickness and in health, til death do us apart* really means.

I am from thanking **God** daily for giving me the honor to be a part of this family for it is because
of them I am who I am today.
Belen

I am from picture boxes, Febreeze and lavender.

I am from the vanilla candles and tranquility.

I am from the limas and the granadas.

I am from traveling on a yearly basis and family orientation,

From Antonio and Ruiz and Castellanos.

I am from the grilling at the park and Friday night take out.

From los muertos en la noche te van a jalar los pies and el cu-cuy.

I am from catholic religion, praying every night and confession.

I’m from Jalisco, Mexico, carnitas and pozole.

From the grandfather everyone feared when he was a soldado.

I am from traveling with my family from Daytona Beach to Cabo San Lucas, watching my kids eyes open wide as we land at the airport.

From the smell of a new place the smiles and laughter as we splash each other at the pool.

I from running in the sand and taking pictures in the ocean.
Marisol

I am from memories of my country
from where I was born, yet I don’t know
I am from “are you Mexican?” since most of
my childhood friends are Puerto Rican
I am from Humboldt Park, hardcore, you know
I am from wanting to belong to my Raza
yet I am who I am no matter what
I am from embracing three cultures of which I respect
Because I am from a country with endless opportunities,
Because I am from my Boricua husband, irreplaceable with a big heart,
And most of all I am from two beautiful girls who I forever love ‘till I die.
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Curriculum Vitae

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EDUCATION

Dissertation: *From the Neighborhood Into the Classroom: Stories of Community Mothers Studying to be Teachers.*
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EMPLOYMENT


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Professor, The Center for Interamerican Studies, Teaching English as a Foreign Language Program, 2009-2011.

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Study Abroad Educational Program Coordinator, Centro de Estudios Interamericanos, Cuenca, Ecuador, 2003-2006.


Associate Project Manager, Argosy Publishing, Boston, Massachusetts, 2001-2002.

Adjunct Professor, Quincy College, Boston, Massachusetts, 2000-2002.

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Volunteer Mentor, Gardiner School, Boston, Massachusetts, 1999-2000.

PUBLICATIONS


AWARDS AND PRESENTATIONS


“‘But I'm Not a Real Teacher’": The Voices of Community Organizers Becoming Teachers,” Bergamo Conference on Curriculum Theory and Classroom Practice, Bergamo Conference Center, Dayton, Ohio, October, 2009.

“Gothic Irish Woman,” American Irish Studies Conference, Notre Dame University, South Bend, Indiana, April, 2005.


Conference Secretary, Graduate Conference for Irish Studies, Boston College, Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts, 2000-2001.


PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS and APPOINTMENTS

American Educational Research Association
- Division B Curriculum Studies
- Division D - Measurement and Research Methodology
- Division G Graduate Students and New Scholars
- Grassroots Community and Youth Organizing SIG
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COURSES TAUGHT

Bilingual and ESL Assessment
Internship and Student Teaching Seminar and Supervision: Bilingual Education (K-9), English and Spanish (6-12)
Methods of Teaching English
Methods of Teaching English as a Second/Foreign Language
Methods of Teaching Reading in the Content Areas 6-12
Methods of Teaching Reading: Elementary
Theoretical Foundations of Teaching ESL and Bilingual Education
Bilingual Education Foundations
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