

Chapter 5

Theorizing My Journey as a Latina Teacher and Scholar

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on pedagogies of the home and funds of knowledge, this chapter describes the journey of a Latinx teacher using written testimonio from childhood, teaching in K-12 schools, to working as a faculty member. Each stage of her journey offers a unique testimonio about the challenges and experiences of that stage. The chapter provides lesson learned based on the experiences that are discussed through the testimonios.

INTRODUCTION

The statistics in the United States indicate that Latinx populations continue to grow. While the number of Latinx students in U.S. schools continues to grow, the number of Latinx teachers serving Latinx children is a small percentage of the total number of teachers. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), there were 50.7 million students enrolled in U.S. schools in 2017. Of those, 48% were White, 15% were Black, 27% Latinx, and 6% were Asian (NCES, 2020). In comparison, the number of teachers in the K-12 teaching field are 79% White, 7% Black, 9% Latinx, and 2% Asian (NCES, 2020). The demographics in higher education are even more troubling. In 2018, Female Latinas made up only 3% of faculty in higher education and less than 1% of full professors (NCES, 2020). When thinking about teacher education faculty, there is a need to understand the challenges and opportunities that Latina faculty have experienced in the transition from teaching in K-12 settings to academia. This chapter will focus on exploring my journey from being a teacher to working as a professor in higher education.

Latinx students have been the fastest growing segment of students in higher education. At my own institution, Latinx students make up about 10% of the student population. While the number of Latinx students continues to grow, there is still cause for concern since Latinx students still lag behind in obtaining a four-year degree (Krogstad, 2016). Since many Latinx students are first generation college

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students, seeking out mentorship is important. Latinx students often seek out Latinx faculty mentorship to help them navigate higher education (Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Theories informed by experiential knowledge guide my analysis of my journey from being a teacher to a university professor. I will draw on *pedagogies of the home* (Delgado Bernal, 2006) and Funds of Knowledge (González et al., 2005) as I describe my journey from being a student, teacher, and now a university professor. I draw on Funds of Knowledge (González et al., 2005) to describe “those historically developed and accumulated strategies or bodies of knowledge that are essential to a household’s functioning and well-being” (p. 91-92). In this chapter, I identify the knowledge gained from families and communities that have shaped my way of thinking and being at each stage of my career. I also focus on the dimension of Delgado Bernal’s (2006) *pedagogies of the home* and her suggestions that Chicana/Latina students draw on dimensions such as bilingualism, commitment to the community, and spirituality to navigate institutions of higher education. Thus, my hope is to shed light onto how these *funds of knowledge* and *pedagogies of the home* have shaped my lived experiences and continue to guide my research, teaching, and service in the academy.

METHOD

For this chapter, I will use written *testimonio* to narrate and analyze my experiences from childhood, teaching in K-12 schools, to working at the university level. Testimonios are first person accounts that serve to give a voice to a personal experience while at the same time representing a collective of marginalized experiences (Latina Feminist Group, 2001; Pérez-Huber, 2009). In writing these testimonios, I am legitimizing my own knowledge about my experiences and considering how this knowledge is valuable and can inform research and practice. Women of color have used this method as a way to “theorize their own experiences of struggle, survival, and resistance, as well as that of others” (Huber, 2009, p. 644). This process of narrating one’s lived experiences has been described as healing and empowering (Huber, 2009). After each testimonio, I theorize the knowledge by reflecting on what lessons can be learned from my experiences and how these experiences can inform the journey of other Latinx scholars.

HOME

Growing Up in Jalpa

I was born in Mexico. A small town of about 700 people. I was the second child in my family. The first girl. I often begin my story by telling friends and colleagues that my family immigrated to the United States when I was eight, but my story begins long before that. I was born in Jalpa, Juan Aldama, Zacatecas. This small town is a farming town- mostly corn and beans in the middle of the desert. The town included a few stores, one school, and no medical facilities. Everyone knows one another and the community. My first memories are from attending kindergarten in a one room schoolhouse called “El Kinder.” Early

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