

Chapter 17

Are You the New Dishwasher?

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ABSTRACT

The authors are roses in the concrete jungle that is academia, and their journey here was completely unexpected. Yet here they are, a Mexican American second generation inner-city at-risk student and a Mexican immigrant migrant student, trying not only to survive but to thrive. They began as K-12 public school educators and that will always guide their work and research in bilingual and multicultural education; they maintain a committed resolve to always remain true to that. They have an unwavering passion for their students and that is what has motivated them to continuously strive to make a positive impact and revolutionize education in the small ways that they can. Their journeys into higher education were a surprise to even them, but as they walk their paths, they are constantly reminded that it is for that very reason that their existence here is critical.

INTRODUCTION

Tupac Shakur introduced us to a tale that depicted a rose growing from a crack in the concrete; it defied nature and learned to walk, despite not having feet, and acclimated to breathing fresh air. Although this has been the soul story of many a rose, it has also made the exceptional into the expected. Buried seeds everywhere are now told to develop the grit and resilience to find the cracks in the concrete. Less commonly, though, is there a conversation about why the concrete exists in the first place. Yet here we are, a Mexican American second-generation inner-city at-risk student (Denise) and a Mexican immigrant migrant student (Delia), in our current concrete jungle that is academia, trying not only to survive but to thrive (Love, 2019). Our journeys here were completely unexpected and paved with one concrete barrier after another. During each season we found ourselves as seeds, felt the pressure of the concrete, and finally found the support to break through and move on to the next season. We share our stories with the hope of negating the misconception that finding a crack and breaking through is the only way, and

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with the intention of moving conversations from breaking through to breaking down concrete barriers in order to change our entire ecosystem.

Dos Mujeres, un Camino

When we met we immediately connected as former K-12 classroom teachers, brand-new doctoral students, and women of Mexican heritage in a place we never imagined we would be. The more we talked, which we would do a lot of once we met, we realized that we connected through more than just career and culture; we had been *dos mujeres en un camino*. Two women on the same path we started down as children, when we had no idea of the dreams we had yet to conceptualize nor the boundaries we would face trying to achieve them.

Denise

As the proud granddaughter of Mexican immigrants, I was raised to hold our culture and our language near to my heart. Whether spending my summers at the Nuevo Leon *hacienda* that my grandmother grew up at, or in Mexico City walking the same path that my great-aunt walked as she marched against the 1968 Mexico City Olympic Games, every time I set foot on Mexican soil I felt a deep connection to my ancestors, the very core of who I am.

My grandfather completed the eighth grade in Mexico and my grandmother earned her GED after immigrating to the United States, and they made it very clear that the pursuit of education was to be the norm in our family. After her divorce from my father, my mother enrolled in university to pursue her degree in accounting. I witnessed firsthand the opportunity that an education afforded both my mother and my father; once teenage parents, they went on to respectively complete a bachelor's degree, a certified public accountant license, and a master automotive technician license and lead incredibly successful careers. My understanding of the importance of education was further perpetuated by the love I have for reading, which was fostered by my grandmother from a young age.

I have always loved school. Each day I could not wait to meet my grandmother by the tree she waited at, to walk home with her and tell her all about my day. In the first grade I met Mrs. Williams, a teacher who would change my life. She was a beautiful, Black, veteran teacher who had an uncanny ability to convince every student in the class that they were her absolute favorite. Mrs. Williams gave me the confidence and support I needed to speak up in class and participate in lessons; her room was a family and I felt secure of my place in it. Paris and Alim (2017) suggest that trusting student-teacher relationships that foster feelings of belongingness are a foundational component of fostering student success, but this relationship was particularly impactful for a six-year-old who was navigating her way through a new school and a rapidly changing family dynamic. A low socio-economic student from a non-traditional family, who struggled with mathematics, I was not what the educational system would have considered a safe bet, and I was labeled an at-risk student. However, it was the acceptance and belongingness that I felt in Mrs. Williams' class that helped me to hold on to my love for school and learning, especially during times when school did not necessarily love me back.

From that point on I continuously searched for spaces that validated who I was and the contributions I could make, just as Mrs. Williams did. As a child on the southwest side of San Antonio I was surrounded by the lure of gang culture, but despite my longing to be nothing more than a thin-eyebrowed *chola*, my mother and grandparents were too strict to allow that, and so I spent the next 18 years just looking

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