Seeking a *Mexicana/Mestiza* Critical Feminist Ethic of Care: Diana’s *Revolución* of Body and Being

Mia Angélica Sosa-Provencio

To cite this article: Mia Angélica Sosa-Provencio (2016) Seeking a *Mexicana/Mestiza* Critical Feminist Ethic of Care: Diana’s *Revolución* of Body and Being, Journal of Latinos and Education, 15:4, 303-319, DOI: 10.1080/15348431.2015.1134537

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/15348431.2015.1134537

Published online: 06 Apr 2016.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 178

View Crossmark data

Citing articles: 3 View citing articles
Seeking a Mexicana/Mestiza Critical Feminist Ethic of Care: Diana’s Revolución of Body and Being

Mia Angélica Sosa-Provencio

Department of Teacher Education Educational Leadership and Policy, University of New Mexico

Abstract

This Chicana Critical Feminist Testimonio reveals a Mexican/Mexican-American Ethic of Care and Testimonios of struggle and survival informing curriculum and pedagogy of one Mexican/Mexican-American female educator of predominantly Mexican/Mexican-American students. This work is part of a larger ethnographic study conducted through multiple methods. Findings here reveal Diana’s Ethic of Care, a (re)framing of social justice revolution/Revolución at the intersection of race, class, gender, language, and immigration status. As Diana (re)constructs and (re)claims her Mexican/Mexican-American identity, she likewise endeavors toward her students’ dignity and academic access. Findings have curricular, pedagogical implications for all educators serving marginalized youth and youth of color.

Keywords

Ethic of care; testimonio; social justice curriculum and pedagogy; Chicana/o, Mexican/Mexican-American; Hispanic

Indigenous like corn, like corn, the mestiza¹ is a product of crossbreeding, designed for preservation under a variety of conditions … the mestiza is tenacious, tightly wrapped in the husks of her culture … she clings to the cob … she holds tight to the earth—she will survive the crossroads.—Anzaldúa (1987, p. 81)

Traditionally black folks have had to do a lot of creative thinking and dreaming to raise black children free of internalized racism…. in our own little black neighborhoods, with schools and churches, in the midst of racism, we had places where we could undo much of the psychological madness and havoc wreaked by white supremacy …—hooks (1993, pp. 80–81)

Across the United States, from the Jim Crow South to rural and Spanish-speaking communities in the Southwest, there lives a legacy of Black and Spanish-speaking Mexican American, Mexicana/o classroom educators who carried the academic preparation of young people of color as an ethical calling for social uplift. Through a rigorous, nourishing curriculum and pedagogy rooted in healing and resistance, Black and Brown young people were given the tools to reclaim the dignity and self-love necessary to buffer the White supremacy that elsewhere threatened their bodies, minds, and spirits. Educational scholars have documented these histories of educators of color who wrapped their young people tightly in the husks of their culture within nurturing and protective communities of resistance within which young people living and learning at the perilous intersection of class and race could develop the means to heal from and resist the racialized cruelty of the outside world (Cross, 1998; Donato, 1999; Foster, 1993; Maestas, 2011; Milk, 1980; Siddle Walker, 1996, 2000). Within these school spaces, local educators of color fortified young people whom they deemed hermanas/os, and vecinos—kin, or community—through a critical feminist ethic of care framework that cultivated a strong sense of self and community and the academic tools necessary to overcome

Contact Mia Angélica Sosa-Provencio msosaprovencio@unm.edu University of New Mexico, MSC05 3040, 1 University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM 87131.

¹Mestiza/o and the more colloquial Mexicana/o signify a racialized identity at the intersection of Indigenous, Spanish, and African ancestry within the context of the 16th-century Spanish conquest of Mexico and the present-day Southwest. Although these terms may can never fully encapsulate identities whose essence is mutability and resistance of form, I utilize them interchangeably to describe the complexity of a hybridized, hyphenated reality not defined or limited along ethnic, racial, national, and political demarcations (Acuña, 1988; Anzaldúa, 1987; Córdova, 1994; Menchaca, 1999; Villenas, 2006).

© 2016 Taylor & Francis
the racialized physical and psychological violence daily raining down on their minds, bodies, and spirits. These educators of color teaching within a critical feminist ethic of care brought a consciousness of collective responsibility to their craft wherein the survival and uplift of their own people hinged on teaching with a sense of purpose beyond a mastery of content for mastery’s sake. These educators taught with urgency as the means to dismantle the social ills of racism, inferiority. They created hopeful schooling spaces that drew on the capacity, intellectual gifts, wisdom, and rich histories of students and their families, utilizing curriculum and pedagogy simultaneously as a healing balm and the battle armor necessary to resist the pain of invisibility, distortion, silencing, and physical brutality threatening to erode a collective body and being.

Today, communities of color continue to be in need of this critical feminist ethic of care and educators who embody it. Young people of color who find themselves on the margins of schooling continue to cry out for a healing, resistant, and historicized critical ethic of care that goes beyond the individualized, maternal, and emotive caring largely characteristic of the White feminist ethic of care that dominates the discursive and physical spaces of mainstream schooling (Knight, 2004; Noddings, 1992, 2003; Thompson, 1998; Valenzuela, 1999). I aim specifically to more deeply understand a Mexicana/Mestiza critical feminist ethic of care and the Testimonios, those underlying silenced, guarded stories of struggle and survival at the intersection of race, class, gender, and residency status which inform this ethic of care. I seek to identify a Mexicana/Mestiza critical feminist ethic of care to particularly serve the needs of Mexicana/o communities in order that local schools may become the spaces in which our young people may gain the knowledge, wisdom, and academic skills necessary to transform the inequitable structures within which we live and work. This work is informed by the wisdom and knowledge of Mexicana and Mestiza female educators and the Mexicana/o students and families they serve who still live in a world that relegates them—that relegates us—to an underclass of people whose race/heritage, culture, history, and language/dialect(s) remain subjugated and whose right to live, work, and gain access to an equitable, meaningful education in the United States is still hotly contested. Falling within a Chicana critical feminist framework, this work is part of a larger year-long study that seeks a Mexicana/Mestiza critical feminist ethic of care as embodied within the classroom curriculum and pedagogy of four Mexicana/Mestiza female educators who construct schooling as a site of hope for reclaiming history, voices, and the beauty of our face. Although this larger study involves four participants, this article focuses specifically on the particular Testimonios that nourish her work and the larger Mexicana/Mestiza ethic of care she embodies. I have chosen to focus solely on Diana in order to create the depth and specificity necessary to fully develop a conceptual understanding of this critical ethic of care and its tenets to better meet the academic and social needs of Mexicana/o students.

These tenets, which I develop further within the research findings, include (a) a curriculum and pedagogy rooted within intergenerational Testimonios of struggle and resistance; (b) education framed as an ethical imperative toward recovering dignity and transforming inequities; and (c) a reframing of notions of revolution within a blurred and blended ambiguity, a mestizaje, which conceals and protects equity work on behalf of Mexicana/o students and their families. This Chicana critical feminist Testimonio seeks to address the following research questions: What is a Mexicana/Mestiza critical feminist ethic of care? What are the Testimonios of struggle, resistance, and survival that inform Mexicana educators? What pedagogies and practices do Mexicana (female) teachers of predominantly Mexicana/o students infuse into their roles as educators?

**Background literature**

More than 52 million Hispanics/Latinos, 17% of the total population, live in the United States, and this number is projected to reach 33% by 2050 (J. González, 2011; U.S. Census, 2014). Even within the
context of this growing population and in states where Mexican Americans make up the majority of the population, speak English as their native tongue, and live within their ancestral homeland of the Southwest, Mexicana/o students are underserved and undervalued within their schooling institutions, as is evident from low academic achievement and completion rates and disproportionate suspensions and expulsions (J. González, 2011; National Center for Education Statistics, 2011; New Mexico Public Education Department [NMPED], 2011; Valencia, 2011a, 2011b). These differential educational outcomes have brought some public attention to closing what has come to be referred to within dominant narratives as the achievement gap between Mexicana/o young people and their White peers. These inequities, however, represent something much deeper than that which is numerically evident: They represent the need to heal the brutality; cultural and linguistic shaming; and assimilationist histories of colonization, conquest, and peonage accomplished and perfected through schooling policies and practices aiming to solidify a subordinated economic class of people (Gomez, 2008; Valencia, 2011b). For Mexicana/o and Mestiza/o daughters and sons whose very DNA remembers the grief of cultural erasure, enslavement, second-class citizenry, social rejection, and colonization (Moraga, 2011), healing must come through a curriculum and pedagogy that challenge the paradigms of schooling that have long sought to erase and distort. Today, these historical social policies and practices of neglect, bodily control, assimilationism, and silencing enacted within all social arenas continue to be mirrored within the epistemologies and ontologies that constitute the blueprint of public schooling institutions, especially for those purporting to serve Mexicana/o students at the intersection of class and residency status (Acuña, 1988; Gomez, 2008; Menchaca, 2002).

Perfection of colonization, social inequity, and the role of schooling

For young people of color, schooling has endeavored to control the minds, bodies, and spirits of those deemed subordinate and inferior—those who stand apart from dominant, White, middle-class culture (Cross, 1998; Darder, 1995; Lomawaima, 1993; Milk, 1980; Smith, 2002; Spring, 2007, 2010). Within this social vision of schooling for social stratification and the perpetuation of inequities, students’ role is constructed as moving toward social refinement to “accept their proper place in society as a marginal class” (Lomawaima, 1993, p. 236). Mexicana/o students born on both sides of the U.S.–Mexico border have endured public education wielded similarly: as a ubiquitous arm of oppression, assimilation, and cultural degradation (Alarcón, Cruz, Guardia Jackson, Prieto, & Rodriguez-Arroyo, 2011; San Miguel, 1999; Valencia, 2011b; Valenzuela, 1999). For Mexicanas/os living and learning in the land of their birth though constructed as trespassers upon it (Baca, 1990), schooling has existed to clear away “backward cultural beliefs … inhibit[ing] them from embark[ing] on the process of social betterment” (G. González, 1999, p. 58).

It is the young inheritors of these educational practices who are today bound within an unacknowledged accumulated educational debt, a knowledge apartheid that is the result of these gross social inequities (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2006; Pérez Huber, 2009). Black and Chicana feminists maintain that if we are to pay back these accumulated educational debts owed to tens of millions of young people of color and their communities, we need frameworks of caring capable of healing heavy histories of colonization, conquest, subjugation, slavery, and ongoing degradation and criminalization for those struggling at the intersection of class, language, and residency status. Much as a unified sisterhood within the feminist movement has been critiqued by critical feminists of color for overlooking intersections of class and race undergirding gender politics, dominant constructions of schooling including curriculum and pedagogy and specific to this work’s notions of academic caring—ethics of care—have been similarly critiqued as devoid of dynamics of power and oppression (Collins, 2009; Delgado Bernal, 1998; hooks, 1994; Knight, 2004; Pesquera & Segura, 1993). Critical feminists of color critique the framing of care within White feminisms as a moral relativism, a “pre-act consciousness” whereby educators act, “not attempting to transform the world” but “allowing [themselves] to be transformed by it” (Noddings, 2003 pp. 28–34)—as an emotion that does not “posit one greatest good to be optimized” (Noddings, 1992, p. 21). Critical feminists of color charge us as educators to continue to look beyond these apolitical, interpersonal, and
feminized frameworks of care in the education of students of color (Blum, 1993; Gilligan, 1982; Larrabee, 1993; Noddings, 1992, 2003; Oakes & Lipton, 2003). This work is situated within this charge.

Understanding a critical feminist ethic of care

Within the legacies of critical feminist ethics of care within which I situate this work, caring is necessarily political, transformative, and rooted in the collective uplift of those struggling to overcome these forces of oppression in their daily lives, and young people of color on the margins of schooling loudly echo this critical feminist critique. In overt and covert ways many students of color, and particular to this work Mexicana/o and Latina/o young people, are crying out for rigorous and interconnected pedagogies with a critical understanding of their lived realities and the muscle to engage the whole of their multigenerational identities to transform an inequitable world (Delgado Bernal, 2006; Oesterreich, 2009; Olsen, 2008; Rolón-Dow, 2005; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999).

To answer this call for critical connectedness we look to resistant and healing ethic(s) of care infused with the resistance and intellectual legacies of communities of color. A critical feminist ethic of care answers this urgent charge to construct education as the practice of freedom for marginalized young people by validating the multiple identities and native ways of knowing these young people bring to the classroom (Asher, 2010; Darder, 1991; Godinez, 2006; hooks, 1994; Knight, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Nieto, 2002; Smith, 1993, 2002; Taliaferro-Baszile, 2010). A critical feminist ethic(s) of care seeks to cultivate critical communities of perseverance in classrooms that serve students and communities of color to challenge historical and current educational and social inequities that they and their families face (Anzaldúa, 1987; Delpit, 2003; Henry, 2006; Rolón-Dow, 2005; Villenas & Moreno, 2001; Yosso, 2005). Through liberatory pedagogies rooted in traditions of survival, uplift, and reclamation found within Black and Chicana critical feminisms, students and educators may together develop the buffers of cultural armor that will enable them to negotiate and ultimately thrive within and beyond the highly racialized and oppressive educational structures of schooling (Collins, 2009; hooks, 1994; Knight, Dixon, Norton, & Bentley, 2006; Oesterreich, 2007; West, 1993).

As the multiple intellectual and cultural legacies of students of color are often conspicuously twisted while simultaneously made invisible within the dominant White spaces of schooling (Darder, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Nieto, 2002), a critical feminist ethic(s) of care strips away the untruths that “continue to reproduce a conversation about [our] invisibility” (Taliaferro-Baszile, 2010, p. 491). It offers up “interstitial spaces between coloniality, patriarchy” within which lives and breathes a decolonizing “interruptive space of possibility” (Villenas & Moreno, 2001, p. 675) in which marginalized young people may thrive. Audre Lorde (1978) called for spaces of possibility, for pedagogies of reclamation in the lives of people of color, pedagogies with the power to “make me whole again/to love/the shattered truths of me/spilling out like dragon’s teeth/through the hot lies/of those who say they love/me” (p. 44). In the lives of Mexicana/o youth, too, cultural, linguistic, and racial subjugation continue to take a heavy toll on bodies, minds, and spirits both in and out of school. This work seeks a Mexicana/Mestiza critical feminist ethic of care for the academic preparation of Mexicana/o young people with the power to speak a healing truth to dismantle the hot lies (Lorde, 1978) of colonization, peonage, economic subordination, cultural inferiority, and linguistic shaming that have long threatened to limit and disfigure a People.

Calling for a Mexicana/Mestiza ethic of care

Anzaldúa (1987) similarly beckoned toward a theoretical and pedagogical grounding, a critical feminist ethic of care that constructs schooling spaces as potential sites of hope—as the healing balm to racial distortions that are killing us as Mexicanas/os and Chicanas/os slowly, “taking away our self-determination … [making] us weak and empty … we have never been allowed to develop
unencumbered” (p. 86). Manifested in the bulk of her life’s work, Anzaldúa called us as Mexicana/o people to come back to knowing and loving ourselves through a Mestiza consciousness that is itself a fluid, resilient, subversive, and oppositional epistemology rooted within our Indigenous, European, and African ancestry (Delgado Bernal, 2006). Within a mestiza consciousness of intersecting races, languages, nationalities, geographies, sexualities, and spiritualities lies the capacity to survive and thrive while navigating a complex matrix of opposing powers and realities (Anzaldúa, 1987; Darder, 1991; Delgado Bernal, 2006; Godínez, 2006; Knight et al., 2006; Villenas & Moreno, 2001).

Through this critical feminist Testimonio, I aim to answer this call to understand the means by which we as Mexicanas/os may come back to knowing and loving ourselves within the walls of our schools and beyond. This work seeks to identify and understand a critical feminist ethic of care as a Mexicana/Mestiza ethic of care that is particular to the needs, wisdom, and resistance legacies of Mexicana/o and Mestiza/o communities and the young people who continue to struggle for academic access within racialized spaces of schooling that refuse to see or validate us. The larger body of this work draws on the present lived realities of four Mexicana/Mestiza female educators whose curriculum, pedagogy, and physical presence in the classroom embodies this legacy of teaching as the battle for dignity, academic access, and uplift. I seek here to reveal and more deeply understand tenets of a Mexicana/Mestiza ethic of care and its rootedness within intergenerational Testimonios of struggle and survival in order to equip all educators with the understanding and means to create protective and nourishing school spaces wherein Mexicana/o young people may fully develop the academic wisdom and dignity to grasp a more hopeful future for themselves and their communities.

A Mexicana/Mestiza ethic of care challenges and reconstructs dominant notions of social justice revolution as it cloaks itself within an ambiguity and mutability in order to protect those who fight this still-contested battle on behalf of and with their Mexicana/o students and their families. The four female educators who participated in this study reveal a Mexicana/Mestiza ethic of care in which they, embodying the spirit of La Revolucionistas, or woman warrior, wage a battle for equity and educational access on behalf of Mexicana/o students that remains unrecognizable to those who have not the eyes to see Her or Her war. This article details the Mexicana/Mestiza ethic of care as manifested within the curriculum and pedagogy of Diana as she embodies the spirit of La Revolucionista who wages Her Revolución in plain sight beneath a protective ambiguous cover, a mestizaje, of blended, mutable realities that resist form and detection. La Revolutionista living and breathing within a Mexicana/Mestiza ethic of care reframes dominant notions of social justice revolution as Revolución, a battle waged beneath a mestizaje, the means of survival deeply rooted within the history of a Mestiza/o people never conquered (Jiménez, 2006; Rodriguez, 1996).

**Methodology of bearing witness: A Chicana critical feminist testimonio**

This is my testimony. I didn’t learn it from a book and I didn’t learn it alone … it’s not only my life, it’s also the testimony of my people … my personal experience is the reality of a whole people.—Rigoberta Menchú (1984, p. 1)

I have grounded this research within the decolonizing methodology of Testimonio, the authoring of individual and communal selves through the sharing of often untold and treasured stories of resistance to social oppression, domination, and survival, a methodology that recognizes that the right to voice and the authority to bear credible witness to one’s lived reality of struggle and survival is an essential avenue by which oppressed peoples may stake a place of dignity and equity within society (Blackmer Reyes & Curry Rodríguez, 2012; Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, & Flores Carmona, 2012; Latina Feminist Group, 2001; Menchú, 1984). This work is theoretically framed within Black and Chicana critical feminisms rooted in interconnected spiritual, intellectual, instinctive, embodied, historical, and cultural ways of knowing, consciousness/conocimiento, for the purpose of survival and uplift for communities living amid racial oppression and subjugation (Anzaldúa & Hernández-Ávila, 2000; Delgado Bernal, 2002, 2006; Henry, 2006; hooks, 1993, 1994; Lorde, 1978, 1984; Moraga, 1983, 2011; Trinidad Galván, 2006; Villenas, 2006). Resisting the perpetuation of racism, sexism, classicism, linguicism, nationalism, and heterosexism,
Black and Chicana critical feminist frameworks privilege suppressed, silenced realities (Collins, 2009; Moraga, 1983, 2011). Thus, the privileging of voice is essential, particular to this work the spoken and shared lived realities of U.S. peoples of Mexican/Mexican American descent perpetually marked foreign in the land of our birth (Gaspar de Alba, 1998; Menchaca, 1999, 2002; Nieto-Phillips, 2004; San Miguel, 1999). This Chicana critical feminist Testimonio is rooted within endarkened critical feminist epistemologies that seek to unearth the protected and often untold lived realities of struggle and survival of those whose experiences have been historically invalidated (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Dillard, 2000; Hurtado, 2003). This work seeks a deeply contextualized and nuanced understanding of the structures that create and maintain social injustices and the nourished resistance necessary to disrupt them (Collins, 2009; hooks, 1993; Moraga, 1983).

**Participants**

I utilized criteria sampling calling for female, Mexican/Mexican American educators within both a comprehensive public high school and a charter middle school who teach predominantly Mexicana/o students. I subsequently relied on chain sampling to achieve my goal of four participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2010). I selected four participants for this study because of the study’s rootedness within the collective sharing of Testimonios, which relies on intimacy and trust found in smaller numbers (Pérez Huber, 2009). I worked with four participants—Diana, Rosana, Priscilla, and Sylvia—who range from fully bilingual to English-dominant heritage speakers and who interchangeably self-identify as Mexicana, Mexican, Mexican American, and Hispanic.

Diana teaches sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade social studies and history in a dual language charter school along the southwestern U.S.–Mexico border region. She was born in Durango, Mexico, to Mexican-born parents. She moved to California before her formal schooling began and relocated to the city in which she now teaches during her high school years. Diana is a native speaker of Spanish and fully bilingual in Spanish and English. Although each participant’s curriculum and pedagogy reveals tenets of a Mexicana/Mestiza ethic of care, this article focuses on Diana alone in order to gain a nuanced, detailed understanding of how these tenets come to life, a level of detail unattainable through a more comprehensive telling of it. The workings of the tenets of a Mexicana/Mestiza ethic of care made visible through Diana though manifest within the curriculum and pedagogy of all participants are beyond the scope of this one article.

**Research site**

This research takes place in a mid-size city of nearly 100,000 lying 60 miles from the U.S.–Mexico border. Per capita income (2010) is less than $20,000, and 20.4% of residents live below the poverty line (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). I chose this site because of its proximity to the U.S.–Mexico border and its large Mexican/Mexican American population. According to U.S. Census Bureau 2011 estimates, the city’s ethnic breakdown is predominantly Hispanic (56.8%) and White (37.5%). The official public school has reported a 73.9% Hispanic enrollment with 14.2% English language learners (Anonymized District Office of Accountability, Assessment and Research, 2011), with more than 40% of residents speaking a language other than English at home.

**Data collection**

I have used multiple methods in this work: (a) two individual semistructured Testimonio interviews aimed at uncovering participant stories of struggle and survival, (b) five focus group interviews providing critically reflective methodological spaces for Testimonios to emerge (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012), (c) ongoing field observations, (d) my own reflective researcher journal, (e) photographic elicitation (Altheide & Johnson, 1998; Eisner, 1993; Oliver, 2003; Sanders-Bustle, 2003), and (f) participants’
ongoing reflections in order to communicate a growing consciousness/conocimiento (Anzaldúa & Lunsford, 2000).

**Data analysis**

“To take part in the ... revolution it is not enough ... you must fashion the revolution with the people. And if you fashion it with the people, the song will come by themselves, and of themselves.”—Fanon (1963, p. 206, emphasis in the original)

As this work is situated within the decolonizing methodology of Testimonio with the capacity to open spaces for self-empowerment and deeper understandings of institutional agency, participants were involved at multiple levels of data collection and analysis (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Delgado-Gaitán, 1993). According to Delgado Bernal (1998), foundational to a Chicana feminist epistemology is the equitable inclusion of Chicana and Mexicana research participants in the analysis of data, which allows “participants ... to be speaking subjects who take part in producing and validating knowledge” (p. 575). Within this work, participants were equitable creators of knowledge in the quest for their own deeper understanding of their practice.

Focus groups served as a site for data collection and equally for data analysis—focus group meetings were recorded, transcribed by me as a researcher, and provided to participants for further analysis. Focus group meetings served as an opportunity to collectively identify emerging themes that were initially and reflexively utilized to code and analyze data collected within this study. Participants and I conducted data analysis within emerging themes and continuously contextualized and crystallized across all other data sources within the research phenomena (Luttrell, 2010a, 2010b). Analysis was likewise achieved within participants’ and my own experiential and cultural knowledge and against community epistemologies and knowledge gained through dialogue with community members beyond the scope of this research (Cervantes-Soon, 2012; Latina Feminist Group, 2001).

Trustworthiness and ethical principles were scrupulously endeavored through responsibility not only to these participants involved in the study but also to the communities in which they are situated (Smith, 1993, 2002; Villenas, 2006). Part of the trustworthiness of my work lies in continued reflection on myself as a researcher, including the particular intersectionalities of identity that collectively create the ever-present insider–outsider positionality coloring my work in unique and infinite ways (Villenas, 2009). I self-identify as a Chicana, Hispana, and Mexican American female whose very body exemplifies the mestizaje of my Spanish, Indigenous (of Central and Northern Mexico and the Southwest), Anglo, and African ancestry. I come from a middle- to working-class upbringing, and my particularly situated identity as a bilingual, native-born, light-skinned, and English-dominant U.S. Chicana/Mexicana has manifested itself in both marked and subtle ways. My family has longstanding geographic ties to both sides of the U.S.–Mexico border region, and I grew up less than 30 miles from where I conducted my research.

**A Mexicana/Mestiza Ethic of care: From a people marked to a people sealed**

Each day through a curriculum and pedagogy fortified with the tenets of a Mexicana/Mestiza ethic of care, Diana fights for dignity, equity, and educational access on behalf of her Mexicana/o students and their families. During one brief and hushed conversation that takes place at her desk in the 7 min between her sixth- and eighth-grade history and social studies classes, Diana shares with me what lies at the heart of her work and what it means to be a Mexicana educator for Mexicana/o students:

They have that person to relate to ... They come from the same neighborhoods, we have had the same struggles ... maybe they’re first generation or not, but who are still at the bottom of our society and going to schools where the don’t identify ... aren’t acknowledged or recognized, aren’t able to succeed ... always pushed off to the side.
Diana’s words give form to the world her Mexicana/o students face, irrespective of residency status. She describes point by point a world that challenges her students’ mere presence within U.S. schools and society, relegates them to second-class citizenship, denies them connection to their culture, negates their inherent worth, and ultimately inhibits their academic potential. Diana knows this world by heart as a bilingual, Mexican-born female of working-class background raised predominantly in the United States. It is this wisdom, her Testimonios of struggle and survival, that nourishes her curriculum and pedagogy. Diana brings a deep wisdom and critical social justice consciousness to her craft, but it is within the layers of what she shares next that the full breadth of the Mexicana/Mestiza ethic of care she embodies can be seen. Within this aforementioned discussion regarding the inhumanity, subjugation, and lack of cultural connection Diana’s Mexicana/o students face, she shares with me the perilous contours of a battle fought visibly by one Mexicano educador, an associate superintendent within a neighboring district. Diana relays his fight:

He used to be an associate superintendent … and maybe like 10% of the staff in the district were [Mexicana/o] and 95% of the student population was Mexicano, Latino … he started to recruit Latino, Hispanic, Mexican background professionals and he went from 8% [or] 10% to 43% [or] 46% … they got rid of him because of what he was doing after they ran him off that he realized that his rights were being infringed upon because he wasn’t violating anything and it was too late to do anything about it.

Evident in Diana’s cautionary tale is the reality that challenging the racial hierarchy of public education by shining light on the underrepresentation of Mexicana/o education professionals, even in districts with predominantly Mexicana/o students struggling for educational parity, is still a necessary though contested act. Diana’s words illuminate the profound understanding that lies at the heart of a Mexicana/Mestiza ethic of care: The more visible the battle is, the more vulnerable it is to outside attack.

Through Diana’s Testimonios and across all of the data that came forth within this research, the deep wisdom of La Revolucionista, woman warrior spirit who battles within a Mexicana/Mestiza ethic of care, slowly emerges. The urgency of revolution for dignity and equity is not enough to bring transformation. This urgency must give life to an array of covert tactics that elude detection. Nurtured in this knowledge, La Revolucionista gives life to an armory of amorphous and unidentifiable weaponry with the power to sustain the viability and sustainability of this still-dangerous war.

It is this subversive and elusive battle, this Revolución hiding in plain sight, that forms tenets of a Mexicana/Mestiza ethic of care. Within the Mexicana/Mestiza ethic of care that informs the curriculum and pedagogy of Diana’s classroom, the spirit of La Revolucionista fights for Her³ Mexicana/o students’ sense of self and educational access; however, She will not allow Her battle to be detected by those who would seek to destroy it. Instead, La Revolucionista wages war within a Mexicana/Mestiza ethic of care beneath the blurred cover of mestizaje (re)incarnating and (re)imagining familiar notions of the war for social justice. Within the following findings, I detail the ways in which the critical text of Diana’s Mestiza body and being is transformed into the obscured weaponry of healing resistance against the racialized, economic, and linguistic oppression that imprints the lives of Mexicana/o students. Within a Mexicana/Mestiza ethic of care, Diana brandishes her body and being to seal her students beneath the curative banner of their shared Mexican and Mexican American heritage. In so doing, Diana embodies the spirit of La Revolucionista, fighting daily to create spaces wherein Mexicana/o students may cultivate the dignity, self-love, and educational means necessary to grasp the quality of life that they deserve and that so often escapes them.

¹I capitalize Her and She when referring to La Revolucionista to highlight a unified spirit across participants. I in no way aim to distance this work from each of the participants who embody Her: They are La Revolucionista and She is them, never to be extricated.
Diana’s sello: La revolucionista’s seal for body and being

For Diana, the battle on behalf of her Mexicana/o students’ humanity and rightful place in this country is waged through her body in the form of a dime-size circular scar on her upper arm from a smallpox vaccine she received as a child in Mexico. She explains the significance of this small scar by recounting a conversation between an Anglo and a Mexicano student:

They brought it up today, ‘cause I was wearing this short sleeve … “Oh miss, you have one of those?” And one of our only Anglo kids was like, “What is that? What happened?” And he [Mexicano student] was like, “Nah, man, it’s cuz when you’re born in Mexico they give you this shot. My mom and my dad have it … and my uncles have it” … and he [Anglo student] was like, “Ugh. That’s weird. Does it hurt?” …

The words of these students illuminate a critical literacy that Diana and her Mexicana/o students possess in their consciousness and on their flesh: Bodies born and raised in the United States around Diana’s age or younger do not bear this scar. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, individuals born in the United States received their last smallpox vaccines around 1980 when the World Health Organization declared the disease eradicated; developing countries still administer them, as the disease is still considered a threat (Vinzant, 2001). Diana’s body and the bodies of her students are imprinted on within the context of a Mexican-born identity, but as Diana allows her upper arm vaccination scar to be visible to her students, she gives them the means to defy the shame and distortion heaped on a collective Mexicana/o Body marked Foreign Other in the United States.

Diana’s corporal imprint laid bare within her classroom disempowers U.S. distortions of the marked status of a collective Mexicana/o body and being, a status perhaps best represented by her Anglo students’ reaction to Diana’s scar as strange, potentially painful, and just plain “Ugh,” distasteful. Through the weapon of her vaccination scar worn conspicuously on her Mexicana body, Diana binds herself to her students and their families beneath a common identity and experience. The power that Diana’s Mexicana body and being hold in La Revolucionista’s war of healing resistance comes into sharper focus as Diana continues:

I’m proud, like I show them my scar, I’m not ashamed, I don’t hide it, I don’t cover it up. They know where I’m from … They feel like, you’re one of them … anyone that’s Mexican, they will have it, they’re going to know where I’m from, it’s not like I’m, “Oh, no, I got stung by a mosquito” … that’s who I am, that’s where I’m from … there’s nothing that’s going to change that, it’s not going to keep me from doing what I want, it’s not going to change my person … I tell my students, … el sello, tengo el sello [I have the seal].

In her words, “el sello, tengo el sello,” Diana’s Mexicana/Mestiza body is no longer marked but sealed—anointed as sacred, healed, and set apart. In reconfiguring this stamp on her flesh, Diana (re)claims her body and the beauty of her Mexicana being. In so doing, Diana seals her Mexicana/o students in body and being as well. Within a Mexicana/Mestiza ethic of care, Diana’s upper arm imprint is reincarnated into a blazing emblem of pride, belonging, and inspiration to fulfill one’s capacity. Diana will not accept that this imprint mars her flesh or her future. In declaring “that’s who I am, that’s where I’m from,” Diana’s flesh (re)emerges as a seal of truth over her Mexicana identity, a birthplace and being never inextricable, one that she would never negate or reduce to the passing sting of a mosquito. Diana bears her seal not as a scar but as the means of dispelling the shame of marked status that she and her students carry as Mexicanas/os living and learning in the United States.

La Revolucionista warring within a Mexicana/Mestiza ethic of care protects Her Revolución by obscuring Her weaponry: Herein, Diana’s individual vaccination scar is transformed into a curative seal of shared Mexicana/o membership beneath which Diana and her Mexican-born students find resistance and healing. As Diana holds up her own sealed Mexicana body and being, her body becomes an undetectable weapon through which La Revolucionista inoculates young Mexicanas and Mexicanos against the psychological disease of second-class citizenship. Within a Mexicana/Mestiza ethic of care, Diana’s body becomes an arm of spiritual warfare, a critical text that speaks back to powers that strive to circumscribe a collective Mexicana/o body for its own purposes (Gomez, 2008; G. González, 1999; Knight et al., 2006).
In the following three sections, I further develop the ways in which the spirit of *La Revolucionista*, through the body and being of Diana, wages a concealed, subversive *Revolución* equipping *Mexicana/o* students to survive and thrive beyond the protective walls of Diana’s classroom to ultimately emerge healthy and whole (Baca, 2002; Moraga, 2011). Through the curriculum and pedagogy of a *Mexicana/Mestiza* ethic of care that offers a curative banner of shared *Mexicana/o* identity, cultural connectedness, and the academic tools to transcend the status of victim, Diana as *La Revolucionista* seals her own and her students’ bodies and beings as sacred, set apart. She wages a war of healing resistance against the shame and denigration exacted on *Mexicana/o* bodies and lived realities, a *Mexicana/Mestiza* ethic of care with the power to ultimately offer them up as *A People Sealed*.

**Finding healing, dignity under a banner of shared Mexicana/o identity**

Diana’s students continually seek knowledge of their shared *Mexicana/o* heritage through repeated questioning into her birthplace. Diana laughs, recounting how many times she has told the very same students that she was born in Mexico: “The kids know where I’m from, they know I’m not born in the U.S. ... sometimes they’ll still ask me “Oye, miss, usted es de México?” This repeated questioning is a ritual seemingly signifying more than one answer to one question: Perhaps Diana’s students, by hearing their teacher repeat that she too was born in Mexico, seek a solace in belonging that Diana sorely lacked in her own schooling experience. What Diana does know for certain is that her students feel valued when they are recognized within their *Mexicana/o* identities. Diana consciously works to make her students feel comfortable with who they are and where they come from.... los chuleo [I endear them] ... they’ll wear their boots, their alligator, whatever ... I tell them they look great, they look sharp so they’re not ashamed of it, so they get excited someone noticed, recognized ...

In these words lies a *Mexicana/Mestiza* woman warrior with the power to heal the shame Diana’s students experience and to seal them beyond the reach of the subjugated status they and their families carry as U.S. *Mexicanas/os*. Within a *Mexicana/o* ethic of care, *La Revolucionista* transforms the markings heaped on the Brown *Mexicana/o* body and being, warring beneath a *mestizaje* of mainstream notions of the revolution for dignity. She wields Diana’s body as the covert weaponry of a subversive *Revolución* with the power to “actually transform our experience, change our lives, save our lives” (Moraga, 1983, pp. xviii–xix). Diana offers herself as a curative balm against the invalidation and invisibility she felt as a young *Mexicana*, for *La Revolucionista* within Diana’s *Mexicana/Mestiza* ethic of care is never far removed from the little girl in the photograph, the “little Brown girl” with the pink *Ballet Folklórico* (*Mexican folkloric*) dress she introduces to us in our third focus group.

Diana shares this photograph with our research group to communicate the rootedness of her ethic of care for *Mexicana/o* students. Another research participant asks, “Who is this?” Diana laughs, “That’s me! ... in grade school in second grade ... The little Brown girl. I told you! I’m the little Brown girl, all slicked back.” Diana brings her hands to her hair, pushing it back tightly to mimic the “slicked back” hairstyle worn in traditional *Ballet Folklórico* dancing. Through Diana’s physical body in this photograph, *La Revolucionista* warring within a *Mexicana/Mestiza* ethic of care wraps Herself tightly within Her Mexican heritage, birthplace, and Her own Brown skin. It is a naming and (re)claiming of *Mexicana/o* descendancy (Del Valle, 2002) with the power to dispel the shame, invisibility, and marginalized status that Diana knows she and her students carry as members of a *Mexicana/o* community living and striving in the United States.

*La Revolucionista* wields the weapon of Diana’s body as a physical *Testimonio* that “comes to represent a larger space than [her] flesh” (Danticat, 1994, p. 236). Embedded in Diana’s words and in her curriculum and pedagogy is a *Mexicana/Mestiza* ethic of care of deep consciousness of the racial and sociopolitical battleground that U.S. *Mexicanas/os* confront. Herein, Diana’s body and being
offer her Mexican/Mexican American students a cultural salve for the pain of subordination they and their families bear beyond the walls of her classroom. Ultimately, it is the “little Brown girl” and the *Testimonios* of stripped cultural connectedness that follow that informs Diana as *La Revolucionista* today. It is this little Brown girl, conspicuous and isolated, who today fortifies Diana as *La Revolucionista* and Her covert Revolución to seal and heal the shame *Mexicana/o* students feel and to bring them back into pride and dignity, their birthright.

**Con El Nopal en la Frente: Dispelling Shame Through Cultural Connectedness**

I was the only *beaner* in my class … *con el nopal aquí* [with a cactus on my forehead] … seriously, from my freshmen year to my senior year … I didn’t look like a single person in the classroom … *no me identificaba* [I didn’t identify]. Nobody. But I did just as well … *Batallaba* [I battled].—Diana

Diana describes standing on the outside looking in at the intersection of her race/ethnicity, class, gender, and language in her high school honors English class. Her *Testimonio* contains a cutting description of a distorted and exaggerated Mexican girl caricature. Diana was perceived as a “*beaner*” with a cactus, a *nopal*, conspicuously marking her forehead, not even a human girl but a cartoon, ridiculous and foreign. In the following *Testimonio*, Diana reveals the roots of her knowledge of the struggle Mexican/Mexican American students face in having to separate themselves culturally. Diana shares,

*[In] this town … Spanish can be almost taboo … I didn’t speak Spanish at all at school and neither did any of my classmates even though you saw them get picked up in *las troquitas* [work trucks], their dads with their *sombreros* … I couldn’t identify with my community … in class I was … trying to say something in Spanish, *aver si ellos me contestaban y no* [to see if they would answer me in Spanish and no] … like, “I don’t speak Spanish at school, *oh my God, how embarrassing*” …

In this *Testimonio*, Diana relays the message she and her *Mexicana/o* peers internalized deeply, even as it created losses in their lives and separated them from one another: Your academic and social survival hinges on denying the whole of your *Mexicana/o* identity, no matter the cost.

Though Diana had mostly White teachers and classmates, she recounts the strength and connectedness she found in her high school Spanish teacher, who was a *Mexicana* from Chihuahua: “A lot of what she lives is what we live and what we do … she understood my dad and my mom’s situation.” This connection was significant to Diana as she worked her way through the “sweat and tears” that constituted her schooling and the pain of living a schooling identity that excluded her family and her culture and caused her and her peers to denounce their language, denounce their heritage, and separate themselves from one another. When I ask her what it would have meant to have more *Mexicana/o* teachers to see herself in, she answers, “I wouldn’t have been that shy girl going through school … I would’ve developed my person—my personality I have now … comfortable around my community … I’d be a completely different person …” and today she works to heal this disconnectedness in her students. Today, Diana as *La Revolucionista* utilizes her presence as a *Mexicana* to seal the fractures she and her peers experienced not so long ago, the fractures her *Mexicana/o* students still experience. Nourished in her *Testimonios*, Diana’s “Brown girl” presence as a bilingual, Mexican-born, culturally rooted, and formally educated *Mexicana* woman stands as a deadly weapon within *La Revolucionista*’s unseen war to educate young people within the beauty and complexity that they inhabit as *Mexicanas/ os*. In the following section, I outline another facet of *La Revolucionista*’s war to seal Her *Mexicana/o* students’ bodies and beings. Through the curriculum and pedagogy of a *Mexicana/Mestiza* ethic of care, Diana’s students are emboldened and anointed to transcend the lowered expectations, perceived inevitability of failure, and victim status they carry as U.S. *Mexicanas/os*. 
**Conquest debates and transcending the status of victim**

... [As] a family of immigrants ... you're almost expected to fail.—Diana

Within the curriculum and pedagogy of Diana, who teaches within a *Mexicana/Mestiza* ethic of care, lies the covert mobilization of *La Revolucionista*’s war to transcend the expectations of failure and second-class citizenry that threaten to circumscribe Mexicana/o young people and their families. Diana’s *Testimonio* as a Spanish-dominant, working-class, Mexican-born female illuminates her firsthand knowledge that Mexicana/o students are “always pushed off to the side ... ‘Oh, those are the bilingual kids’ ... [they’re] going to carry ... that label ... with them but they’re capable of rising above that bar.” In these words is *La Revolucionista*’s war hiding in plain sight. Diana’s expertise in dismantling the marked status she herself felt as a young Mexicana emerges in a group activity she conducts every year with her seventh-grade state history classes during their unit on the Spanish conquistadores. For the upcoming *Conquest Debates*, Diana has her students divide themselves into three groups who will each represent the (a) Spanish conquerors/explorers, (b) King and Queen of Spain, and (c) Indigenous Peoples of the Americas. Their assignment is to defend their role within the Spanish conquest and to determine which group is most to blame for the resulting occupation. Students may not simply find fault with other groups but must present historical evidence to support their actions and come to terms with their own responsibility. Diana explains, “Everybody wants to be the native peoples because usually they’re just shown as victims who didn’t do anything wrong ... the ones being attacked ... but why didn’t they fight? Why didn’t they resist?” Diana says she values this activity because it equips students to, in her words, “step up and defend themselves. That really does speak volumes to whether you’re a victim or not”; in her words I can hear a collective of voices echoing across time, *if we posture as victims we will be victims* (Anzaldúa & Hernández-Ávila, 2000; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983).

In Diana’s class, *La Revolucionista*’s war lives and breathes: Diana’s Mexicana/o students will not see themselves or their families as victims, nor will they posture as such. “I don’t cut them any slack, no one cut it for me ... I had to work twice as hard to do the same type of work.” Within Diana’s words, a *Mexicana/Mestiza* ethic of care takes shape. Today, she refuses to allow her students to carry their Mexicana/o identity as a scar that inhibits their capacity. Through Diana’s classroom curriculum and pedagogy, and exemplified here within the Conquest Debates, *La Revolucionista* fights to ensure that young Mexicanas and Mexicanos are not marked but sealed, anointed in bodies and beings beneath a collective dignity cultivated in resisting the workings of a society that invalidates your experience, intellect, and future. Herein, *La Revolucionista* brandishes high expectations as a healing balm to seal the bodies and beings of young Mexicanas/os and their families marked less, incapable, and expected to fail. Within Diana’s *Testimonios* of schooling bearing the sting of circumscribed inferiority resound *La Revolucionista*’s battle cry audible only to those who have the ability to perceive it.

**Conclusion**

This research reveals that *La Revolucionista* unleashes a multiplicity of advanced, imperceptible weaponry that protects and emboldens Her *Revolución* hiding in plain sight. As Diana (re)claims her Mexicana body and being within its complexity and survivability, *La Revolucionista* seals young Mexicanas/os beneath a banner of shared Mexicana/o identity, nurtures a cultural connectedness they lack elsewhere, and equips them to transcend their perceived status as victims. *La Revolucionista* and Diana are one and the same, waging a blurred, ambiguous *Revolución* that a Mexicana/Mestiza ethic of care demands amid the spaces in between (Villenas & Moreno, 2001, p. 675). Diana as *La Revolucionista* fights for the sanctity of her students’ culture, language, residence status, academic success, and sense of self through a multiplicity, duality, and ambiguity that is her Mestiza birthright. We as Mestizas/os have long relied on our ability to hide in plain sight by reconfiguring, blending, and bending visible realities (R. Rodriguez, 1996). It reverberates...
a “continual[ly] creative motion” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 80) of dual consciousness with the power to deconstruct narrow paradigms that would keep Her, La Mestiza Revolucionista, in a bound and rigid existence. The Mexicana/Mestiza ethic of care revealed here and the educators who embody it are the inheritors of this means of survival “people of mixed race, people who have Indian blood, people who cross cultures, by necessity possess” (Anzaldúa, 1996, p. 54). Even as Indigenous and Mestizo men and women, masons, sculptors, and artists were ordered by Catholic clergy to build churches and cathedrals out of the very stones of their destroyed temples, their spirits would not be conquered. Upon altars, within the foundation of the churches, and into the “very heart of the Christian sacred” (Wake, 2010, p. 99), men and women hid their Revolución to protect their spiritual inheritance. They laid stones carved with the faces of gods and goddesses in a manner that expertly concealed them. Just as Christian clergy attempting to extricate Indigenous spirituality were halted by their inability to identify them (Wagner, Box, & Morehead, 2013; Wake, 2010), neither will those without the eyes to see La Revolucionista see Her war. Diana as La Revolución conceals her war from those who may threaten it and in so doing lives to fight another day. In ways seen and unseen, Diana reconfigures notions of social justice revolution for her Mexicana/o students. Diana as La Revolucionista builds a “footpath of knowing back to the village of our forgotten” (Moraga, 2011, p. 87), infuses Her as a path of knowing by which Mexicana/o students may find dignity and a rightful Place to Stand (Baca, 2002) as the inheritance of A People Sealed.

**Scholarly significance**

The Mexicana/Mestiza ethic of care revealed in this research may arm educators of all gendered, cultural, racial, linguistic, and class backgrounds with the spirit of La Revolucionista to recognize the critical urgency of waging revolution on behalf of young Mexicanas/os and all those on the margins of public schooling. Likewise, these findings provide all educators who desire to be part of La Revolución with the wisdom to give life to the subversive, amorphous weaponry necessary to ensure the viability of this dangerous war. In an educational era of increasing standardization, educator deprofessionalization, and high teacher turnover, a Mexicana/Mestiza ethic of care provides a Mestiza conocimiento (Anzaldúa, 1987), a critical consciousness to reframe, conceal, and hone tactical strategies on behalf of students who need it, who need us, the most. This ethic of care has implications for how Revolucionista educators of all backgrounds may move from seeing Mexicana/o students marked by oppression to seeing them in the power and beauty that are their identities as A People Sealed. Within the consciousness of a Mexicana/Mestiza ethic of care, all Revolucionista educators may cultivate schooling spaces for Mexicana/o youth in which self-love, belonging, cultural connectedness, and intellectual and resistance legacies become the husks (Anzaldúa, 1987) within which they are tightly sealed.

**References**


