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Immigrant Mexican Born Women and Intergenerational Dialogue in the United States

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Immigrant Mexican Born Women and Intergenerational Dialogue in the United States

A Field Project Presented to
The Faculty of the School of Education
International and Multicultural Education Department

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in International and Multicultural Education

by
Rosa Ramos
May 2017
Immigrant Mexican Born Women and Intergenerational Dialogue in the United States

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

in

INTERNATIONAL AND MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

by
Rosa Ramos
May 2017

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this field project has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

Approved:

________________________________________     _______________________
Instructor/Chairperson                      Date
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With profound admiration, love, and respect, I dedicate this work to my mother and father, Juanita Pérez de Ramos and Miguel Angel Ramos Tenorio. Their unconditional support and trust has given me the opportunity to feel freedom in pursuing what my heart desires. I also keep in mind my grandmothers—my elders—who live on in me, both in their advice, which I continue to heed, and by providing the inspiration for the person whom I strive to become.

Special appreciation to Belinda Hernandez Arriaga and Ernesto Hernandez Olmos, who supported me academically and emotionally throughout this project. They were my light of encouragement through every challenge.
ABSTRACT

Keeping intergenerational dialogue alive in Mexican immigrated families promotes cultural pride. Oral histories of elderly women in the family offer stories that foster culture and values as mothers and youth navigate their lives in the United States. Through the process of an intergenerational dialogue workshop developed in a Half Moon Bay community, common ideas and goals were shared to develop a manual. The focus of the workshop was to gather details about the knowledge that our elders, and mothers bring forth to share with their families. Community leaders participated in offering a safe space for women to foster confianza, or trust, as they honored and integrated their funds of knowledge into the dialogue.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

“Me llamo Rosa María Ramos Pérez, y soy nieta de Rosa Martínez de Pérez, e hija de Juanita Pérez de Ramos.” My name is Rosa María Ramos Perez, granddaughter Rosa Martinez de Perez, and daughter of Juanita Perez de Ramos.

In indicating my lineage, I express a profound sentiment that honors my connection to my roots. This statement is also a summation of all that has been lived, the scope of my personal history. This includes dialogues with my grandmother and mother, as well as with other women in my family, including my “tías” and my cousins. As a family, we collectively share the beauty of both our history and our ancestry. We have carried our history—embedded in our stories—with us on our journey to the United States. Like many women who cross the Mexican-American border, we bring all the beauty—and even the difficulties that we have lived—into a new country with new beginnings to form a new history.

Every year, Mexican women and their families make the journey to cross the Mexican-United States border. Per tabulations of the PEW Research Center, there were 55.3 million Hispanics in the United States in 2014, comprising 17.3% of the total U.S. population (Stepler & Brown, 2016, para.1). Women constitute a substantial portion of the Latino immigrant population in the United States. In 2015, approximately 51 percent of immigrants were female. The share has fluctuated slightly during the past three decades; women accounted for 53 percent of immigrants in 1980, 51 percent in 1990, and 50 percent in 2000 (Zong & Batalova, 2014, para.13). Additionally, among children ages 17 and younger, there were 17.1 million Latinos in 2010, comprising 23.1% of this age
group; there were 33.3 million Hispanics ages 18 and older in 2010, a 45% increase from 2000 (Passel, Cohn, & López, 2011, p. 2). Many Mexican women of all ages, from all walks of life, make the weighty decision to come to the United States. For the past few decades, my family members have been among the people who have made this journey.

Bearing in mind that the decision to move to the United States is taken with great consideration, there are many different reasons for leaving Mexico, reasons that vary from person to person and family to family. In the 1950s, my maternal grandfather paved my family’s way into the U.S. by participating in the Bracero Program. This allowed my grandfather to work in the United States temporarily. This would eventually allow my family members dual nationality or the ability to become American citizens.

My grandfather settled in Huntington Beach, California, and for a few years sent money to his immediate family who worked a ranch in Michoacán, Mexico. By 1975, the Mexican economy experienced zero per capita growth, real wages fell, and underemployment plagued 45 percent of the "economically active population” (Hernandez, 2009, p. 27). In this time period, most of my family made the decision to move, leaving my grandmother and some of my aunts behind to tend to the ranch. This ranch served as financial collateral, as well as a place that we could still call our own. Living on this ranch and striving to make it a success was a dream that made it hard for my grandmother leave Mexico. However, following in my grandfather’s footsteps, both my mother and father decided to move to the United States.

During the 80s my parents met in dental school, and afterward attempted to launch their careers near the ranch. There were, however, many competing dental offices in Morelia, Michoacán. This is the city where my father grew up, attended Dental School,
and, later met my mother. They then decided to place a dental office in the small town near my grandmother’s ranch, but quickly realized that many of the *campesinos* or people from the small town did not have money for dental work. Therefore, in the 90s my parents chose to reunite themselves with family that had already moved to Huntington Beach, California. Hernandez (2009) explains that the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) on January 1, 1994, further deepened the dependence of many Mexican families upon wages earned north of the border. NAFTA eliminated many trade barriers between the United States, Mexico, and Canada, creating a North American free-trade bloc that encouraged the mobility of capital, production, and manufacturing throughout the region. During this time, in the 90s, just about all my mother’s side of the family moved to southern California, hoping that this new life would provide lasting benefit to our family.

The biggest motivating factor for women in Mexico to immigrate is potential benefits to the family. For women, supporting or reuniting with family is the primary concern: 52% of undocumented Latinas said they came to the U.S. either to build a better life for their family or to reunite with loved ones (Guillen-Woods, 2013, para. 4). When I asked my aunt, Teresa Perez—who immigrated at a very young age—why she came, and why everyone followed, she responded “para buscar mejor vida económica y para buscar lo mejor para la familia.” Her response was “to find a better economic life and to find the best for the family.” They grew up knowing that life in Mexico on a ranch could not provide enough money to support the entire family, and this was the major reason to move away. She added that she understood all the difficulties entailed in coming to the United States. “Tuve que aprender una nueva cultura y conserver la mia a la vez” “I had to learn
a new culture and conserve mine at the same time.” This statement underlines much truth in our family history and in the family histories of others. Many of us hope that aspects of our lives—such as financial, educational, and environmental—will improve; however, for Mexican immigrant women, this has proven to be particularly difficult.

The terms Hispanic and Latino(a) are used interchangeably in the literature; therefore, the social historical context of these terms should be addressed. In 1976, the U.S. Congress passed the only law in this country’s history that mandated the collection and analysis of data for a specific ethnic group: “Americans of Spanish origin or descent.” The language of that legislation described Hispanics as “Americans who identify themselves as being of Spanish-speaking background and trace their origin or descent from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Central and South America and other Spanish-speaking countries” (Passel & Taylor, 2009, para. 15). As far as Latina, it is easy for women who were born in Mexico to identify this way due to Mexico’s geography as part of Latin America. Arzubiaga and Adair explain that the term Latino refers to a group which includes descendants of the inhabitants of territories incorporated by the United States, immigrants from several countries, and people of various educational levels, who speak different languages and engage in mutable literacies and cultural practices (2010, p. 301). The question of whether to describe individuals as Hispanic or Latino has been an ongoing quandary; however, some people, including myself, have no problem with either term. Officially, both terms are used by the U.S. federal government to describe this population, and many organizations, including the Pew Research Center’s Hispanic Trends Project, use the terms interchangeably in publications (Lopez, 2013, para. 1). In addition, the term Chicano(a) is also used for individuals born in the United States of parents with Mexican
heritage; it is important to note that, historically, this term had negative connotations. The term was taken up in the mid-1960s by Mexican American activists, who, in attempting to rid the word of its negative connotations and create a unique ethnic identity, reconfigured its meaning by proudly identifying themselves as Chicanos (Difference Between, 1997, para. 11). Terms are subjectively used by individuals as we choose how we personally want to identify ourselves; however, a problem arises when terms are used to negatively define an entire community.

Among the issues that Mexican women have upon arriving in the United States are language barriers, securing a place to live, finding a stable job, and accessing resources—even aside from the fear deportation. While these are all issues that many women struggle to overcome, having to transcend negative stereotypes in day to day life is an additional problem that faces our immigrant community. According to Arzubiaga and Adair, the panethnic conception of Latinos in the United States requires individuals to carry the burden of representing a group that is anything but monocultural, a group to which is attached stereotypes that may be outside our definitions of who we are (2010, p. 301). Within various contexts of our lives, Latinos face categorizations that do not always favor us. Stereotypes have real-world implications for Latinos because assumptions about cultural/racial groups often serve as the linchpin for institutional racism (López Chesney-lind, 2014, p. 530). This is also a problem for our children, who experience significant damaging impacts in their educational experience. Yosso explains that too often educators perceive Chicana/o students’ culture and language as deficits to overcome instead of strengths to cultivate. Furthermore, primary curricula often exclude or minimize Chicana/o social and historical experiences and reinforce stereotypes (2005, p. 22).
Disregarding the culture and the roots of children creates a damaging dent in their connections to personal history and identity.

From a personal perspective, my family arrived from Mexico to a predominantly white community in Huntington Beach, California. Language was a huge factor for me, causing me to be negatively affected in academics. Understanding instructions from the teacher was difficult. Since both my parents worked hard to survive and were learning English themselves, homework was almost unachievable. I became increasingly shy and embarrassed with every assignment that was not turned in, and felt I did not want to be a bother to the teachers who already had a hard time understanding me. As a result, I spent countless recesses on a bench writing “I will do my homework” over and over as I listened to my fellow classmates play. As a child, I felt defeat and remained reserved in my early years in elementary school. Mexican immigrant students’ “quiet comportment” is not due to acquiescence, but rather to their feelings of powerlessness. A study used to understand the comportment of immigrant children demonstrated that, unlike the Mexican American students, the Mexican immigrant students did not feel that they could “openly defy school authority” because of their vulnerable status as immigrants (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 14). Coming to terms with these feelings has not been easy. In the early years of life one should be learning to trust teachers and adults as allies in one’s struggle; this is especially hard to do when a school does not have the resources to understand the culture their students come from.

There was a dearth of effective educational practices for English learners, international students, and low income students in my elementary school. Programs for English Language Learners (ELLs) are often devoid of academic content and leave little
room for the development of complex literacy skills, intellectual challenges, or critical thinking (Meador, 2005, p. 149). There was also a lack of understanding of the socio-economic conditions that the international students and/or low-income families struggled with. Yosso explains that there is a concept called the deficit model in which Chicana/o students and communities are blamed for lacking certain attitudes and therefore responsible for low academic outcomes. Although there is no evidence to support this concept, it remains prevalent in many settings, including academic ones (2005, p.22). Institutional belief in the deficit model negatively impacts young Latina/os struggling to learn a new language at school.

For young Latinas, stereotypes exacerbate the difficulties of coping with high school and lead to lower retention rates. In 2000, only 65.7 percent of Hispanic women ages 18 to 24 years had completed high school, compared with 84.7 percent of European American women. Of all Hispanic women continuing on to higher education, 49 percent will complete their bachelor's degrees (Meador, 2005, p. 150). Young immigrant children also suffer the consequences of academia failing to understand or dig deeper into cultural richness. Hidalgo explains that the eternally imposed classification of Latina/os as racialized ethnic group is a common element in a collective experience of oppression that shapes the Latina/o epistemology. The collective experience of oppression in the U.S. results from the historic subjugation and placement within the marginalized “other,” whereby Latina/o values, histories, and knowledge have been excluded, whereas the Eurocentric experiences have been depicted as the primary form of knowledge (2005, p. 381). Gonzales argues that schools fail to establish the kind of caring relationships that Mexican youth value. When teachers and administrators fail to connect with their
students’ style of dress, manner of behavior, or use of Spanglish instead of proper English, rather than bridging the cultural divide, studies found that schools are being programmed to view Mexican American youth as oppositional to academic success (Gonzales, 2015, p. 45). These perceptions affect the social and economic opportunities for children and young Latina/os at school, and affect mothers’ struggles to keep the culture intact.

**Purpose of the Project**

Studies have suggested that the importance of connecting Latina mothers to academic and career goals for their children is imperative for achieving successful outcomes for our youth. Mexican American mothers aspire to high levels of academic achievement for their daughters and tend to be the most significant factor related to their daughters’ achievements (Hernandez et al., 1994, p. 202). The goal as a community is for our children to reach their aspirations and create “una vida mayor.” The purpose of this project is to help attain this community goal through intergenerational dialogue, by remembering and maintaining our powerful identities as Mexican immigrant women of all ages. Through this dialogue, we can learn from our elders who show us a way of life so different from our experiences today, yet so significant to our future generations.

When Mexican-born women immigrate to the United States, engaging themselves in a community can be challenging and difficult to initiate. The move is from a community in which people are deeply rooted and where festivities, food, and people are connected, to a move to a place where it is highly possible that no one knows who they are. Powerful memories and stories are left behind, and there is a yearning to keep them alive. By coming together as Mexican immigrants we can converse and work to maintain our roots in the United States. We can transform our fate by building and rebuilding our
web of knowledge, our web of traditions and faith, calling and waiting for the structure to emerge into a web of influence and equilibrium in schools, between the genders, and among people of all races (Gonzales, 2015, p. 53). One way to make connections among immigrant Latinas and form a consciousness of resistance is through an intergenerational testimony of lived experiences and dialogue (Correa & Lovegrove, 2012; Dyrness, 2007; Olmedo, 1997).

By creating a manual for Latina leaders in their community, I would like to present a way to contextualize the richness of these stories. As part of this intergenerational dialogue, the manual will first consist of recognizing the importance of our indigenous ancestors who are also deeply rooted in ourselves. It will consist of taking traditions of our own past that pertained to separate communities across Mexico and making it our own here in the Unites States. Bringing light into our oral histories is a major factor in preserving and connecting to the past.

Intergenerational dialogue through the lens of Latino culture is highly important because stories from ancestors are passed from generation to generation. Especially in rural areas in Mexico, there were women—not so many generations ago—who did not know how to read or write. Therefore, the knowledge of Mexican-born women can be seen in the teachings of what each family considers to be morals and values, perceived by youth and reinforced through our elders. Grandmothers do not just hold onto knowledge; they actively educate in a manner unique to their contextual histories, as well as their ancestral knowledge base (Gonzales, 2015, p. 44). Mexican culture regards our grandparents as educators, and I argue that we need to remember this in order for our indigenous knowledge and culture to survive. The trauma of deculturalization through
subtractive schooling practices is a generational one; in other words, the struggle against
cultural erasure is passed down from generation to generation (Gonzales, 2015, p. 49).
Therefore, to heal from this generational trauma, we need our elders to remind us where
we came from, who we are now, and what teachings we want to pass down to future
generations.

**Theoretical Framework**

A common phrase that is seen throughout Critical Race Theory (CRT) writing is
“naming one’s own reality.” Advocates of CRT believe that categories of race have been
historically and socially constructed in the United States, and that the concept of race is
created and maintained by societal institutions such as families, schools, media, and
government agencies (Hidalgo, 2005, p. 380). Solórzano and Yosso explain that CRT
advances a strategy to foreground and account for the role of race and racism in
education, and works toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of
opposing or eliminating other forms of subordination based on gender, class, sexual
orientation, language, and national origin (2002, p. 25). Understanding that there is
systemic racism in our everyday lives helps us move forward, as it gives us insight into
what our fight to form our own identities is, while simultaneously helping us maintain the
essence of who we are as individuals. CRT offers us ways in which we can counter
destructive racist narratives. A branch of CRT, for example, uses counter-storytelling to
bring forth our voices as part of our fight. The counter-story is a method of telling the
stories of those people whose experiences are not often told (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002,
p. 32). Counter- storytelling recounts perspectives of some of the most marginalized yet
important voices (Yosso, 2005, p. 11). In allowing ourselves to counteract the narrative
given to us by outside voices and make our own personal stories, we can in turn take back our identity as Mexicanas. Another powerful way that we can counter outside rhetoric and stereotypes is through oral history. Olmedo explains that oral histories can also be used to reflect on the actual experiences of participants, to affect the ways they perceive the broader reality surrounding them, and to alter how they make decisions and take actions that assert control over their circumstances (1997, p. 554). However, to understand the function of counter-storytelling and oral history, it is important to discuss the knowledge that it serves to transmit to Mexican women and youth.

Part of this project is recognizing the value of knowledge that has been passed down from generation to generation. The term “funds of knowledge” refers to the “historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and wellbeing” (Moll, 1992, p. 133). The funds of knowledge that women can acquire from our older family members include not only cooking, sewing, and cleaning, but also the idea of having buena educación or “good education.” This is very important to Mexican families and it refers to having proper comportment that is socially acceptable within the community. Arzubiaga and Adair explain that parents’ teachings related to buena educación include the construction of polite and appropriate interpersonal courtesies related to “being respectful” and presenting oneself respectfully (2010, p. 305-306). These home pedagogies are also considered to be survival skills that young women acquire at an early stage in life to be prepared for when they leave the household and must fend for themselves.

Funds of knowledge is a powerful framework in which to understand how our stories can carry a voice. By exploring funds of knowledge via an oral history approach,
educators can promote dialogue across generations while simultaneously challenging stereotypes. Using this as the basis for the project, I integrate storytelling through Mexican immigrant women’s perspectives as a form of creating a space of opportunity for sharing past experiences and teachings. The use of oral histories in dialogue with our elders gives our youth an understanding of historical agency, the choices made in the past that have led to specific consequences. Mexican grandmothers also resist their own erasure by the dominant culture when they use abuelita epistemologies to not only teach their grandchildren how to protect themselves against the subtraction of these epistemological legacies, but also teach them how to avoid being used as instruments of indoctrination (Gonzales, 2015, p. 52). Funds of knowledge are in this way presented and transmitted from the older generation.

The concept of funds of knowledge is prevalent in much of Latino culture and, once in the United States, this concept remains within our community. An important assumption underlying the funds of knowledge concept is that Mexican American families in the community know many things and have many skills; yet this wisdom is generally not recognized as relevant to the educational process with the schools (Olmedo, 1997, p. 550). Community members possess skills and knowledge that often go unrecognized because of poverty, discrimination, and difficulty communicating because of not speaking English (Olmedo, 1997, p. 570). However, there exist examples of women coming together and focusing on issues that matter the most to them. The funds of knowledge of a community are often found in the ways that the members organize themselves to deal with the difficulties imposed on them by economic and sociopolitical
realities (Olmedo, 1997, p. 570). Women are motivated to come together and tell their own stories for the future of their children.

In this project, the importance of critical race theory and funds of knowledge are paramount, as they frame the voices of the women and children that are present in the study. Olmedo suggests that oral history approaches can provide a way to ensure not only that history is not lost, but that the experiences of these individuals can challenge us to rethink old categories and inaccurate assumptions. In the process, mainstream history may also get redefined and made more complete (1997, p. 570). Opening an opportunity for intergenerational dialogue creates knowledge without boundaries. Correa and Lovegrove explain their testimonio as creating knowledge and theory through our experience (2012, pg. 350). Creating an intergenerational dialogue, and using our own voice do to so, gives us control over our story and the way that we see ourselves as important members of the society in which we live, the United States.

**Significance of the Project**

For many immigrant families, new surroundings bring forth struggles of adapting to new situations including finding ways to fit their culture into their new surroundings. This, as explained from the ecological pragmatism perspective, means that people do not do what they wish they could do but rather they do their best within a set of resources and constraints (Arzubiaga & Adair, 2010). Women of all generations have demonstrated that they can stay strong and empower each other even in the context of the United States, where traditions and lifestyles are so foreign.

As a community of immigrants from Mexico, we find opportunities to come together and in turn share stories and transform them as a way of healing and growth.
Latina women find ways to maintain a close support system that includes their friends, spouse or partner, relatives, people living in the home who are not related, and coworkers (Aranda et al., 2001). Additionally, Muñoz (1997) explains that for Latina/os, identity development includes work and love but also community: work and love are not solely individualistic needs, but have to be meaningful with a larger community context (p. 42).

Additionally, the knowledge contained within families has a major role to play in addressing new challenges to maintaining our culture in different environments. Olmedo conducted a study in which cultural capital was described as “evident” as family members used personal initiative, negotiated roles and responsibilities to create new patterns of relationships, and built on cultural values to create solutions to new problems (1997, p. 570). These cultural values are then taught within our families; however, the narratives that our elders bring hold an even broader significance than current survival, as they form a vital gateway into knowledge of the past while bringing forth an understanding of who we are today.

One way for our youth to understand the significance of what it meant to our families to move to the United States, and to understand the struggle implied in doing so, is through oral history. This can be an important experience for many youth who reject their elders or are ignorant of the kinds of decisions these elders made to reestablish their community in a new environment (Olmedo, 1997, pp. 554-555). The elders’ experiences, along with the ongoing struggles of our grandmother and mothers, can give us a perspective on our strength and resilience while preserving culture. According to scholars, grandmothers help families adapt to new contexts and new cultures while preserving sacred traditions and ways of knowing; they perpetuate the culture and values
that have helped to sustain their people for millennia (Gonzales, 2015, p. 43). Latinas, as mothers and as part of the community, have demonstrated that they themselves have taken the words of our elders and created a way to keep our culture alive. This highlights the need for Latina youth to connect through intergenerational dialogue—taking the wisdom from the past, incorporating it into the present reality of living in the United States, and using it to claim their own voice.

Additionally, because there has been cultural misrepresentation within many aspects of our lives as immigrant families, a space for healing can be created through community. Finding the means to heal from the many overbearing factors in the daily lives of Mexican immigrant women is, in and of itself, a form of resistance to oppression; this has been demonstrated through community and oral histories (Dyrness 2007, Correa, & Lovegrove 2012; Olmedo, 1997). Latinas who immigrated to the United States need to build community to empower each other and preserve their culture, language, and traditions as well as engage to develop an oppositional consciousness.

It is knowledge from our roots that forms part of the Latina identity. This wisdom passed on from generation to generation is necessary for the survival of our hearts and minds, and, ideally, for living a fruitful life. The importance of creating a space for this dialogue is that it allows Latinas to demonstrate that they themselves are also capable of creating knowledge. Intergenerational dialogue is important for Latinas because we are capable of our defining our own reality, interpreting it in ways that challenge epistemology.
Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this project, the following terms were used:

*Buena educación*: literally “good education,” represents an important cultural model for immigrants from Mexico that centers on “respecto” or respect (Arzubiaga & Adair, 2010).

*Cultural models*: are embedded in families’ practices and embody shared meanings and understandings about the way the world is organized and works (Arzubiaga & Adair, 2010).

*Oppositional consciousness*: a critical analysis of inequalities that links everyday experiences of injustice to a structural analysis of social inequality and to an awareness of collective forms of action (Kwon, 2008, p. 60).
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

I chose to facilitate a workshop for immigrant women from Mexico to have an intergenerational dialogue as a community to cultivate a positive identity though our funds of knowledge. This literature review addresses intergenerational dialogue as a means of transmitting wisdom among immigrant Latinas in a community. The first section addresses how misinterpretations of the Latino culture further oppression and how they apply to Latinas, particularly to the female immigrant. The second section highlights the importance of transferring funds of knowledge through storytelling and oral history to maintain our cultural richness and create our personal narratives. The third section addresses the importance of community in forging connections and developing oppositional consciousness through dialogue.

Misconceptions of Immigrant Latinas

The first few pieces that were reviewed include misrepresentations of Latino families in the United States. Immigrant Mexican families have been continuously culturally undermined, affecting many aspects of their daily lives. A prime example is within the educational system. Arzubiaga and Adair (2010) describe that immigrants and their languages have been marginalized through negative stereotypes in the United States, in part due to sociocultural, historical, and political influences. One way that Latinos are marginalized is through language and arguments that attribute the educational gap of Latinos to the language spoken at home (or the lack of English spoken at home). Arzubiaga and Adair demonstrate that these attributions have been misguided, drawing on studies that demonstrate how home language and cultural practices improve
educational outcomes for students. In the United States, the discourses about language and language policies serve the function of perpetuating the marginalization and domination of non-dominant groups including Latinos (Arzubiaga & Adair, 2010). In order to bring these misrepresentations of language and culture to light, two studies were conducted by Children Crossing Borders and Proyecto Educando Niños, Raising Children Project PEN (Arzubiaga & Adair, 2010)

Arzubiaga and Adair explain that culture uses language as a tool that is associated with certain groups and a hierarchy that is socially and politically constructed around individuals who classify and organize the ecological realities that surround them. For the Latino community, this means that it is also important to face the reality of the dominant language in the society in which they are living. In extreme cases where anti-immigration rhetoric has been manifested (seen for example in Arizona), many parents have decided to discontinue the use of Spanish because of their desire for their children to have better educational and cultural outcomes.

Arzubiaga and Adair uses Children Crossing Borders focus groups to show how ecological pragmatism works for Latinos and their use of language in the United States depending on their exact location and their environment. In an area such as Columbus Junction, Iowa there was a loss of Spanish from newcomers who were mostly Mexican due to a predominantly white environment and a lack of interest of bilingual programs through schools. Parents presumed their children were better off speaking mostly English. However, in other settings, parents realized the benefits of both learning English in school and maintaining Spanish at home. In every case, parents appear ecologically pragmatic, or aware of the resources and constraints of where they live; they balance
these notions with the language needs they foresee their children will have later as adults (Arzubiaga & Adair, 2010).

Arzubiaga and Adair (2010) reference Proyecto Educando Niños (Raising Children Project PEN), a study that also disproved misconceptions surrounding immigrant Mexican culture. In the Phoenix metropolitan area, university participants interviewed and made observations of 26 families during home visits over a period of nine months. They examined how parents engaged with their children and created cultural pathways for them through a variety of everyday activities. The study explains that misconceptions about non-dominant groups are made in part due to associations between economic poverty and cultural poverty. It also gives light to the rich cultural practices that parents engage in to demonstrate appropriate cultural models to their children—cultural models tied to the idea of buena educación or “good education.” Showing respect and good manners is associated with polite behavior, which is modelled by family members and the community. For example, the term groseros (rude) was used to teach young children though storytelling about acceptable behavior that delineates the cultural model of a “buena educación.” Both Children Crossing Borders focus groups and Proyecto Educando Niños take on misconceptions around language and cultural practices and refute them through solidarity and dialogue.

Similarly, Meador (2005) looked at how sociocultural misconceptions affect Mexican immigrated adolescents in high school. Meador explains that the hegemonic ideology that measures academic performance in terms of English proficiency and participation in school sports is rooted in the small-town definition of what it means to be American (2005, p. 161). The study demonstrated how difficult it was to be a young
immigrated female considering teachers and student’s definitions of what it was to be a good student. The cultural ideal of the good student promoted in this setting placed popular American girls at the pinnacle (Meador, 2005, p. 160).

Meador (2005) explores the sociocultural dynamics of the schools and examines the power relations between and among teachers and Mexican immigrant girls. From 1998 to 1999, interviews were performed in an ethnographic study of 20 immigrant junior high girls who had been in the United States for three years in two separate schools in the River Valley School District: Ruby and Silverton. Interviews were conducted on teachers' and students' views of their school experiences. What the study determined was that teachers had a perception of the character of a good student that Mexican immigrant girls had to face. The good student as described by teachers was an athlete, male or female, who had a large group of friends; typically, this was not the case for Mexican immigrant girls. One teacher stated, "The fact that they are not Anglo and that they are girls, certainly they have things stacked against them from the start. So, there are two things to overcome." These two "things" emanated from the small-town focus on high school sports teams and the hegemony of white male athleticism (Meador, 2005, p. 153).

Language was also used by teachers as an indicator for academic success; Mexican immigrant girls would have difficulty proving themselves in this arena, as well. Mexican immigrant girls were often seen as having low ability based on their quiet demeanor and varied attendance patterns (Meador, 2005). Certain behaviors and characteristics were misinterpreted as a negative demeanor, while the rewards for good behavior—such as grades and privileges—were filtered through a set of beliefs that Anglo teachers held about Mexican immigrants; these involved motivation, absenteeism,
family support, and educational potential (Meador, 2005). Therefore, immigrant Mexican girls often displayed their social identities by mimicking popular American girls’ behavior; this attempt to conform to the cultural ideal sometimes led to a rejection of their ethnic identity.

Race, class, and gender together were explained to be a form of triple oppressions that young immigrant Mexicanas face in schools. Meador (2005) suggests that the cultural ideal of the good student mediates the possibilities for these students' successful participation in school, and shows how difficult it is to integrate schools socially and academically. This study provides insights into the different ways in which young Latinas may have a difficult time accepting their own identities because of teachers’ stereotypes.

Still focusing of misconceptions of immigrant women, the following critique examined how a woman’s gender expression is policed within Mexican culture. Hernandez-Truyol (2003) explains that sex, culture, language, and sexuality make Latinas into multiple aliens, living lives as a traveler—or type of foreigner—within their own culture, as well as in their reality as an immigrant. These parameters are used as a tool of oppression in which conforming to their role in the Latina/o culture results in invisibility, marginalization, and subordination. Within the Latina/o culture, women are expected to exhibit typically gendered and sexualized behavior within the family. The authors explain that, for Latinas, this clear and rigid delineation of the borderlands of proper conduct embeds a male vision of cultural, gender, and sexual identities; privileges the master narrative; and predefines and preordains the content of and context for Latinas’ journeys (Hernandez-Truyol, 2003).
Hernandez-Truyol (2003) has a strong feminist critique and demonstrates that Latina identity is highly composed of male-defined female role normativity. In a world made in a man’s image, a woman is only a reflection of masculine will and desire. The author references sociologists, philosophers, and a legal scholar who identify the male as the standard of humanness and the female as less than that standard; this makes Latinas an underclass within their own communities.

Seen through a Latina feminist lens, women exist as tools, instruments, and vessels that allow for the fabrication of a Latina image in which she does not consent. This fabrication comes from the dominant male position in the family, church, and state. It explains that in Marianismo, a context acquired through the Catholic religious mandates, Latinas are constructed in the image of the Virgin Mary. This in turn perpetuates subordination due to the idea that women are supposed to be pure and self-sacrificing. Machismo, or cultural expectations of men, frame them as strong, authoritarian, independent, and brave—qualities that women are not supposed to exhibit. Women who defy the cultural shackles may be viewed by the male dominated and identified establishment as loud, overly aggressive, and ill-suited to be advocates (Hernandez-Truyol, 2003). This piece of literature is different in that it explains how sometimes our own culture may work against women creating our own voice. However, I argue that by examining different forms of oppression, we can create dialogue around issues, gain knowledge, and give each other examples of the powerful women in our lives who have overcome obstacles.
Knowledge from our Grandmothers

The following piece of literature explains the relationship between mothers’ and grandmothers’ academic aspirations for their daughters. Hernandez, Vargas-Lew, Martinez (1994) focused on a case study from a random sample of 17 Hispanic mother and daughter dyads that used a self-reporting questionnaire for mother, daughter, and grandmother triads. The subjects were first year participants in the Hispanic Mother-Daughter Program (HMDT) of the University of Texas at San Antonio. One of the services provided by the HMDT was that mothers and daughters were taught to seek opportunities, negotiate individually and as teams, and provide mutual encouragement for progress towards goal attainment (Hernandez et al., 1994, p. 197). Career and education aspirations were measured and it was found that grandmothers wanted professional and paraprofessional careers for their granddaughters. Mothers aligned their answers with their daughters’ own career objectives and wanted them to attain a professional career. Daughters wanted to at least attain a baccalaureate degree, or even go on to become doctors, nurses, lawyers, etc.

The study suggest that Mexican-American mothers are instrumental in the formation of educational aspirations. When asked, “Who encourages/ed you the most to do well in school?” most mothers and daughters credited their mothers; however, most grandmothers indicated they had little or no support” (Hernandez et al., 1994, p. 197). Additionally, the results of this study suggested the consistent perception of, and positive regard for, maternal support, both in terms of aspiration and perceived importance of education (Hernandez et al., 1994, p. 202). A critique on the article was that it did not touch upon how grandmothers functioned as support systems for their granddaughters.
The next piece of literature focuses on the importance of abuelita (grandmother) epistemologies on hierarchal educational practices in the United States. The author demonstrates how the grandmother used abuelita epistemologies to navigate this tension and resist the assimilative pressures felt by her granddaughter at school by consistently modeling, at home, a love for Mexican language and culture (Gonzales, 2015, p. 40).

Gonzales (2015) begins by explaining that the Mexquitic peoples experience of deidentifying their indigenous upbringing as a result of colonization, makes it very difficult to connect to our ancestors; this process of de-indianization was an outgrowth of being forced to conform to their captors’ ideologies. She explains that through stories and personal narratives there can be a creation of oppositional consciousness and a further healing of the ruptures created by conquest. Stories expose common history and heritage that is often undermined by geopolitical constructs such as the U.S.–Mexican border, which prompts the entombment of precontract identities under nationalistic discourses meant to supplant them (Gonzalez, 2015, p. 41). Since our culture has been subjected to this oppression, it is important to have a discourse at home that provides a base of resistance, and our abuelita’s knowledge is the base of our fight.

The article explains how the relationship that we have with our abuelitas is under researched and seeks to examine why elderly wisdom has not been recognized, but instead dislodged from its traditional place. The role of abuela as educator, tradition keeper, and cultural warrior lives on despite more than 500 years of conquest and de-indianization (Gonzales, 2015, p. 41). Drawing on indigenous knowledge, Gonzales explained that Native American grandmothers honor their traditional ways while also teaching their grandchildren how to adapt and blend their cultural traditions according to
changing needs and changing environments (Gonzales, 2015, p. 44). With colonization, the balance between men and women was disrupted, and a significant facet of that disruption was the displacement of the sacred and venerable role that grandmothers played within the family unit (Gonzales, 2015, p. 49).

It further explains when the grandmother is in the home, she can teach her granddaughter about Mexican culture, thereby teaching her to value herself and her roots. Two major themes that the author describes are her grandmother’s choice in music and her preparation of food as a form of education. Her grandmother would listen to rancheras and corridos. Gonzales argues that corridos exist in a realm of performance in which sociocultural realities are communicated to and by communities that do not need to read and write. She presents tortilla making as a form of critical consciousness. Tortilla making originated with Mexico’s indigenous population and is filled with symbolism and meaning. Rolling the tortilla into a perfect circle and cooking it gently on the comal is an act that has been repeated throughout our ancestral heritage (Gonzales, 2015, p. 45).

Hernandez-Truyol presents a feminist critique of culture and Latina identity that emphasizes the idea that the female’s role in her house is highly composed of a male-defined normativity. Hernandez-Truyol describes it as a world made in a man’s image; woman is only a reflection of masculine will and desire (2003, pg. 58). This gives the Latina community another motivation for creating a dialogue in which to formulate our own identities and reconstruct our own image of what it means to be Latina in a new age. Grandmother epistemologies are grounded in relationships with all aspects of life, and thus call for students to unite with their elders and the natural cycles of life (Gonzales, 2015, p. 53).
Mother’s Fight for Young Latinas

To demonstrate how women have identified issues in their environments and overcome obstacles together through a variety of creative means, I want to focus on cases in which Mexican women have paved the way by creating potential solutions.

A different study took apart the misconceptions, negative images, and oppression often experienced by Latinas in the school setting and provided an example of maternal participation that came about through solidarity. Dyrness (2007) examines the process in which women came together as a community to challenge dominant views of home-school relations and turn their homes into sites of radical resistance. The study presents aspects of the author’s dissertation research on the role of parents in the school reform movement. Centered in Oakland, California, the Design Team for United Community School conducted a case study: 90% of teachers that founded the school were white in a predominantly Latino neighborhood. Dyrness involved herself with the Spanish speaking Latino immigrants as a graduate student ethnographer and translator. She became a cultural broker between parents and teachers, and became the friend and confidante to parents who spoke Spanish in an organization called Madres Unidas (Mothers United).

This program was developed because many issues throughout the school minimized Latino voices and participation. Parents had few opportunities to talk amongst themselves regarding the unfair handling of questions that the community had posed to the principal. Once parents began to take on more leadership roles, teachers would work to censor questions and critique by placing negative sanctions on the parents who voiced them (Dryness, 2007, p. 260). Overall, parents were excluded in the planning process of a new small school that claimed to be community based.
As a result, Dryness (2007) conducted a study of Madres Unidas to examine in detail the actual process of coming together as a community of women. The author focused on three aspects which contrast dramatically with the spaces for participation provided by the school: (1) the use of personal experiences as the starting point for all learning and community building; (2) the view of education as a collective undertaking, in which relationships based on trust (confianza) and solidarity are the conditions for participation and growth; and (3) a critical analysis of school practices and discourses that maintain the subordination of Latino parents and students with the goal of interrupting these practices and reasserting Latino parent voice in the school (Dryness, 2007, pp. 262-263). Madres Unidas functioned as a participatory research project in the creation of fair and community-based knowledge sharing; this team of mothers investigating reform at their children’s school used participatory research to better inform themselves. It also served as an ethnographic study of three years in which interviews and the examining of key documents and newspapers on small school movements took place. The researcher attended city-wide meetings and district meetings, was a participant-observer following the Design Team of United Community School’s weekly parent-teacher meetings, and conducted one formal interview with each parent leader and teacher leader. The Design Team was created as a participatory research project composed of five mothers seeking to deepen evolvement in their children’s school.

Madres Unidas created an educational and safe space in which to reflect on their experiences. The women shared their personal experiences with each other, thereby creating community through connections, learning from each other, and building upon “confiaza” or trust with each other to foster relationships. These relationships then led to
collective healing, self-recovery, and the creation of a place in which to come into solidarity and participation by also coming up with ideas for taking action against inequality. Storytelling was key to the functioning of the group and illustrated how personal experiences—a key aspect of critical race theory—were central to the delineation of personal reality and validation of individual experiences of school practices. The women conducted a critical analysis of school practices and discourses that maintain the subordination of Latino parents and students, with the goal of interrupting these practices and reasserting Latino parent voice in the school (Dyrness, 2007). Through these actions, the mothers were able to develop a ‘critical consciousness’ of their reality, a central goal of Popular Education and participatory research because it enables action for change (Freire, 1970, 1973).

They drew strength from one another by sharing stories and realizing that they were not alone. This collective undertaking differed from their experiences in mainstream institutions in that their meetings were now taking place in a home, a site in which they shared mutual affirmations of support. Radical resistance at home was used as a place to foster education for Latina mothers, which also opened a unique pedagogical space for parents to seek greater goals for their children’s education. It created the opportunity for Latina mothers to engage in social critique, to articulate and sharpen their own analyses of educational inequality (Dyrness, 2007, p. 269). Madres Unidas became a place for personal healing, reforming wholeness, and further transforming structures at that margin.

Another study explores the concept of funds of knowledge that Latina women transmit to young Latinas through oral histories. Olmedo (1997) introduces the term
funds of knowledge to describe a way of transferring skills and knowledge that is culturally accumulated across time and in community and is useful to the functioning and wellbeing of the home, individual, and community. Oral history in this study functioned as a project to help teachers and students explore their funds of knowledge though a classroom investigation in which immigrated young Latinas interviewed their elders about the roles they had taken in the migration process. Participants in a two-year intergenerational study were videotaped and audiotaped; interviews were conducted with five families of women brought up in extreme poverty in Puerto Rico, investigating what it meant for them to come into the United States. Oral history is valuable in these investigations because it focuses on the actual experiences of participants, the way they perceive the broader reality around them, and the way they make decisions and take action to assert control over their circumstances (Olmedo, 2007, p. 554).

The author also emphasizes “confianza” or trust as a way to build networks within Puerto Rican culture. Confianza is explained as an approach to earning credit or trust in “la sociedad” or society. Puerto Rican women would become bankers, as they could manage money for family members. The system worked because of the closeness within the family network, the confianza that existed on the part of the extended family, and the initiative and leadership skills exercised by the women in the network (Olmedo, 1997, p. 561). Oral history was used as a form of recounting the reality and honoring the humanity of lived experience, not just facts written down by scholars. Having young Latinas investigate their family histories as parallels to textbook learning creates a personal relationship towards history.
Although there are differences in the histories of Puerto Rican and Mexican immigrants presented in the study, oral history also serves the immigrant Mexican women. In exploring a family's funds of knowledge via an oral history approach, dialogue can be promoted across generations, difficulties of economic and sociopolitical realities can be explored, and the creative ways in which the community and women in particular adapted to their new environments can be highlighted.

The next piece of literature is focused on bringing together immigrant mothers to experience culture as a form of resistance and to take action in the face of cultural tensions in the schooling of their children. Yosso (2005) argues that there are unequal conditions and discriminatory practices that follow Latina/o students throughout their education; these include a lack of available resources, low quality English Language Learner programs, less experienced teachers, and low academic expectations of students. The United States experiences cultural tensions regarding ideal language usage. Too often, educators perceive Chicana/o students’ culture and language as deficits to overcome instead of strengths to cultivate (Yosso, 2005, p. 23). In this study example, some teachers regarded students’ utterances of a certain word or phrase as lack of confidence. Also, people equated speaking English with being American and reprimanded students who spoke more Spanish. Yosso (2005) presents an ethnographic study that utilized counter-stories to recount the perspectives of Chicana/o parents, one of the most marginalized groups at Southside Elementary School. Narration of a graduate student documented the experience of three meetings with Chicana mothers. Stories were told of students “volunteering” to do activities around school—such as stomping boxes or working in the cafeteria—without informing parents, while white students
remained in class and learning. There was also a lack of communication from the school with the Chicano parents. A parent group was formed called “Madres por la Educación” or Mothers for Education. They raised issues of bilingualism, standardized tests, extra academic enrichment, and cultural experiences of their children.

Madres por la Educación, or Las Madres, followed the ideas of Paulo Freire, taking the notion of critical pedagogy and applying it to their own communities, where they addressed their situations through praxis, verbalism, and activism. Through dialogue, and using examples from the history of reform to create community, they could handle issues such as racial discrimination, segregation, and the creation of equity in their children’s school. The women also used Freire’s teaching as a point of reference and reasoning in addressing incidents they encountered in school. The group also talked about cultural wealth and the marginalization of knowledge that people of color have in a society in which the upper and middle classes dominate the mentality surrounding culture. The awareness of white students’ position as role models encouraged these women to talk to their own children about embracing their Mexican cultural wealth (wealth meaning the total extent of an individual’s accumulated assets and resources).

The following study explored the experiences of immigrated Latinas to the United States and argues that if educators are to understand their students, cultural epistemology is necessary. Hidalgo (2005) begins by explaining that there are misunderstandings of Latino culture that often become accepted as “truths” in mainstream society. However, these misunderstandings have been demonstrated to be incorrect and it is important to strive for validation and recognition of real Latino experience and knowledge (2005, p. 376). This essay explains that oppression is a collective experience within the Latino
culture and uses critical race theory to explain the idea of race as a form of perpetuating these stereotypes. The study explains that the maintenance of familialism, shared cultural values, and resistors are ways in which the Latina/o community preserves its heritage in its transition, whether from Mexico or Puerto Rico. One measure of a Latina/o epistemology is the incorporation of core values into the research framework; the shared values developed from Latina/o histories, customs, languages, practices, and experiences are foundational in the creation of knowledge (Hidalgo, 2005, p.384). The author uses collective experiences of different families that resisted oppression in their moves to the United States with the support of the family and community.

The following literature focused on creating dialogue in the wider community through performance as testimony. Correa and Lovegrove (2012) is a study of another example of gathering women together in community and building connections between Latinas. In the performance two women, one of Puerto Rican descent and a Chicana, demonstrate similarities within their cultural backgrounds. The article explains that Latinas face a loss of culture and identity though mainstreaming colonial practices leading to situated knowledge that is fixed into dominant cultural paradigms. Through examples in their play, identity is explained to be formed through a complex hybridity and cultural assimilation of what it means to be white. For example, overt jokes that might seem innocent to white youth were confusing and painful to the protagonist of the play. This project was a collaborative performance testimonial in which lived experiences that are both deeply embedded in identity and represent collective realities function as both theory and method. Correa and Lovegrove explain that sharing collective experience with the audience creates connections and the performances allow the
demonstration and recognition of internal oppression and the psychological damage generated by the questioning of Latina authenticity (2012, p.305). They also explain that identities are contested through the language and frustrations that come about when Spanish is lost.

Summary

The literature presented demonstrates that immigrant women of all ages have found ways to fight for their identity, participate in their children’s education, and maintain aspects of culture that remain significant in determining who we are as individuals while giving us a special place in the United States. It highlights the reality that, although we have a different culture, our knowledge is still meaningful, and can potentially offer solutions that contribute to the greater good of our new community. The literature also demonstrates the ways in which Mexican grandmothers are part of the fight to keep our ancestral knowledge alive and transmit it to our young Latinas today.

There is a gap in the literature regarding ways that the elderly can, in turn, benefit from Latina youth. We know that Latina mothers’ motivation for seeking a better quality of life comes from the desire to improve the lives of their children. However, how can the grandmothers, in turn, benefit from their relationships with the youth? I mention this because, having lost both my grandmothers at a very young age, I would have loved to have had the opportunity to tell them how significant their knowledge is to me now, to let them know that their voices are still present in my memory and are still guiding my future. My wish is to someday pass the knowledge that I have retained on to my own granddaughters, regardless of where we live.
CHAPTER III
THE PROJECT AND ITS DEVELOPMENT

Description of the Project

This project presents a manual that facilitates the development of an intergenerational dialogue among youth, women, and elders who currently reside in the United States after emigrating from Mexico. This manual was written for community leaders, facilitators, and supporters who wish to create further solidarity in the Latino community. It is intended to be an accessible resource to work in true partnership with youth; encouraging dialogue through oral histories, and testimonios, and to ultimately inspire young Latinas to encourage and foster positive identity. This workshop was organized as a practice for open dialogue between families and community to build connections through stories. This familial and communal dialogue highlights the funds of knowledge seen in the Mexican culture. A workshop has been developed to witness the stories within a community in Half Moon Bay, CA. Celebrations, cultural traditions, as well as themes observed in the dialogue of the workshop supported the creation of the manual.

The manual is organized in the following sections:

- Steps on developing trust with Latina mothers and the community.
- Observation on the workshop through application of funds of knowledge.
- Reflections necessary to address each individual funds of knowledge.
- Findings on Pasando la Palabra according to the experiences of the participants of Half Moon Bay.

Determined to do this work, I asked for support from seasoned activists within their Latino communities. In this process, Belinda Hernandez Arriaga, a Licensed Clinical Social Worker who has a long history of working with Mexican families to
address psychological issues, offered much of her support. Additionally, Ernesto Olmos, an elder and indigenous healer, offered ancestral and traditional insight to the workshop. I include myself as a student and active participant in the process of developing the workshop and as a witness to the stories of the participants.

**Facilitators**

The facilitators’ professional experience and knowledge about solidarity gave me an understanding as to how they work in community engagement. Through conversations and planning with them, I could create a framework for the project. Belinda Hernandez Arriaga focused her work efforts within the Latino community, particularly those that are undocumented, who suffer from chronic human rights violations and children who are challenged in school and in the community. She has worked to strengthen community identity and activism by promoting cultural arts in the community of Half Moon Bay. Additionally, she developed a grassroots organization called Ayudando Latinos A Soñar (ALAS), which provides Ballet Folklorico, Mariachi and student leadership as well as community building.

Ernesto Hernandez Olmos is native to the state of Oaxaca, Mexico and comes from a place of embracing culture in the United States across Northern California as a space of healing. Through workshops and performances, he gives way to ancestral practices that can be seen through his paintings, dance, and custom clay instruments. He is an enthusiastic and inspirational teacher that works alongside the Latino community to allow for us to bridge a connection between our ancestral past and our present life.
Participants: The Community of Women and Children

Half Moon Bay is a town in which some of the population is Mexican-born Latinos. The largest Half Moon Bay racial/ethnic groups are white (61.6%), followed by Hispanic (31.5%) and Asian (4.2%) (Half Moon, 2010). In 2011, Belinda began forming a grassroots group of parents who would bring their children to Ballet Folklorico classes two times a week. Her vision was to begin building trust, in order to then develop a long-term cultural center that would allow for a space of healing. She developed ALAS as a grassroots project organized along with the parents. Tonantzini is the program under ALAS that also embraces the Latino culture though folkloric dances typical to various states in Mexico.

Building trust was a significant consideration in working with the community, as many of them have issues of trauma history and immigration status that were impacted at the time. Thus, I identified the need to work with a group of women that had already built of level of confianza with Belinda Hernandez Arriaga. Through her, I had their permission and access to develop the workshop for her community in Half Moon Bay.

Development of the Project

Being brought to the United States from Mexico as a young child proved to be a difficult. As a family, we balanced maintaining customs and beliefs and learning a new American lifestyle. At a young age, I was required to act and speak a certain way with my family, and expected to drastically act another way at elementary school. Learning social rules and a language at a young age was confusing to my teachers and me, especially since I was one of only a few Spanish-speaking students in school. I quickly became the “other” and never felt like I belonged. However, during my summer breaks, I
stepped away from the confusion of what my life became and visited my grandparents in Mexico where I had a place in the world, roots, and stability. I was “someone” rather than the “other” in school. This feeling continued as I grew up and moved through different stages in my life.

After I graduated college in 2008, I found myself working with children and their families as a Bilingual Service Coordinator for an Arizona Early Intervention program. As a coordinator, my obligation was to explain the program and their rights and more importantly, to listen to their concerns and try to develop familiarity and trust. What I learned and what I thought beautiful from these women that were predominantly from a Mexican origin was that there were many diverse backgrounds and lifestyles within each family system. I came to realize; many women have concerns for their children that were parallel to those of my mother and family members. They expressed strong interest in their child’s education and raising their children to be bilingual in the United States. They worried about the image of being Latino within the school system and if their background had an impact on their children’s success.

As I worked with Mexican-born mothers and grandmothers I constantly made connections with my own family stories of immigration. Connecting with various customs and knowledge was easy. As I began building relationships and continued to talk to them, I realized we all were determined to create a better future for the children and youth of our community. My mother once told me that one of the biggest reasons she brought me to the United States was so that I could obtain an education and lead a better life than what they had, and hopefully continue for generations to come.
This combination of personal experience and further graduate work solidified my decision to pursue a project that could be used for Mexican women. Creating a brighter future for our female Mexican youth through empowerment and positive identity formation is a collective result that motivates us. Furthermore, as a basis of my research, I wanted to peruse my own exploration of maintaining positive identity through Mexican funds of knowledge.

Development of Trust with Participants

Initiating a project with a woman who participated in the ALAS program was facilitated through Belinda. She explained that many of the women arrived from Mexico to the United States feeling isolated and had a strenuous process of building trust with the people that surrounded them. Belinda therefore arduously worked to build and maintain a community of women where they felt *confianza* with each other. New to the community, establishing a connection with the Mexican woman from ALAS in Half Moon Bay is described in the following details:

1) Familiarizing myself with the Participants: I attended the Noche de Mexico for one of the biggest presentations of the group in the community. Many families gathered together to see their children dance, listen to mariachi, have food, and socialize. I introduced myself to some of the mothers that evening and shared my background and intention to facilitate an intergenerational dialogue workshop.

In the coming months, Belinda mentioned the intergenerational dialogue workshop and asked if they would like to participate. The response of the women was overwhelmingly positive and by the time I came to make a more formal introduction they were already open toward the idea of participating in a dialogue.
2) Meetings with Facilitators: Belinda introduced Ernesto Olmos to me when we gathered to talk about the intergenerational dialogue. I was invited to participate in art projects and listen to music with the community Golden Gate Fields on a weekly basis. We slowly had conversations about family and community and further began preparing for the workshop.

3) Invitation to the Participants: A week before the workshop, I visited the women during their children’s ballet folklorico rehearsal. Belinda brought canela or cinnamon tea, and introduced me. A group of about 20 women were present and I spoke to them briefly in Spanish about the workshop and its intention. I also touched on the importance of family and community in my life to understand my identity as a Latina in the United States. I proceeded to distribute flyers describing the time and location of the workshop. The flyer can be seen in the Appendix A. There was an agreeable tone from the mothers and although the project was aimed for the women in the community, fathers that were present were also enthusiastic about the project.

4) Belinda reminded the women about the project regularly and they registered on a sign-up sheet.

The Workshop and Application of Funds of Knowledge

The day of the workshop, participants gathered together, en la Casa de Belinda. Women brought their daughters to participate in the conversation, who ranged from teenagers to elementary-aged children. The workshop highlighted demonstrating the framework of Mexican funds of knowledge and methods used to create the space of dialogue.
• **Introduction con Café**: as women came to Belinda’s house they were greeted with coffee and food. The women took the opportunity to converse, laugh, and tell brief anecdotes. During this time, Ernesto prepared the living room with wind instruments, copal, and feathers; materials that honors indigenous ancestors.

• **Cantos de Bienvenida (Welcome Songs)**: As the women proceeded to the living room, they took a seat in a circle while traditional Mexican songs played. One of the songs was “De Colores” which many of the women sang and encouraged the younger children to participate as well.

• **Sage Blessing**: As the copal was burned, the women were invited to free themselves from preoccupations and to center themselves in the room. By doing this, they would be able to concentrate with on what they were going to say. Each of the women accepted the blessing as Ernesto approached them with the sage.

• **Música Ancestral (Ancestral Music)**: The women were invited to close their eyes and listen to ancestral music and sounds.

• **Pasando la Palabra (Passing the Word)**: Ernesto proceeded by explaining the importance of a talking stick. The stick was beautifully decorated with colorful feathers. It was explained that our ancestors used it so that everyone in the room would have an opportunity to speak though their hearts and minds without interruptions. The women were invited to speak freely as our ancestors did. Ernesto began by passing the talking stick to me. I asked the women if they could share their story of immigrating to
the United States from Mexico. The room was silent for those who spoke, and there were hardly any interruptions as the women shared a brief story. There was a high school student that was invited to participate with the talking stick and as well as some of the children who were willing.

• **Voces de los Niños (Voices of Children):** The children were given an opportunity to share dialogue through art. Each child would receive materials to make a talking stick: various kinds of yarn, feathers, and a wooden stick. This was also used as a part of integrating the children in the dialogue, to give them an opportunity to speak with the talking stick and recognize the importance of their own words.

• **El Fuego (Fire):** This ceremony was done outside; Ernesto and some of the men prepared the fire as the children were finishing their art project. The women and children then gathered and were given instruments that the children took and played with freely. They sang many traditional Mexican songs around the fire, including children songs.

• **La Despedida (Farewell):** Reflections from the families and feedback of the workshop was given as the families said their farewells.

**Dando Voz al Silencio (Reflection of Silent Group Processes):**

Without words or directions there were natural actions and roles that the participants assumed, which helped to aid the process of the workshop. For instance, during *Pasando la Palabra* the children sat in the circle and observed silently and curiously as their mothers spoke. Also, due the prolonged time with the talking sticks, the children were invited to play outside freely while the mothers spoke. While they were
leaving the living room, some of the older children would remind the smaller ones not to speak too loudly until they all were outside. There was also a moment where the teenagers carried the responsibility of taking the children to a nearby park. Another element was the role that the men took in preparation of *El Fuego*. The men that attended remained outside as the women spoke but automatically assisted Ernesto by building the fire. As the fire ceremony proceeded, the men would place lumber to keep it going as the women sang, and the children participated and played.

**Findings on Pasando la Palabra:**

As the women passed the talking stick, the atmosphere was of profound respect of listening to each other. As the women spoke, many common themes arose from the dialogue:

- **Embracing their Culture:** All the mothers were concerned about the future of children. They talked about the importance of setting aside a space where they could see their children raised with knowledge of their root culture while living in the United States. They expressed the importance of embracing their ancestry, culture, and history that the families hold so dearly in a new environment.

- **Isolation and Membership:** Many of the mothers spoke of the feeling of loneliness before they became part of their new community. One community member shared a problem growing up as a second-generation Latina. She had felt ostracized and embarrassed about her history because of an incident that happened where other Latino community members isolated her unjustly. However, once she began coming to ALAS for her children, she saw how warmly the community embraced her and now is more involved with activities. Also, many of the women
mentioned coming from different states of Mexico with vast differences in community activities and celebrations. Ballet Folklórico was shared as an example of Mexico that encourages dancing, yet each state differs in various styles of choreography, music, and garments. It seemed that the closer the women were from neighboring states, towns or cities, the easier they seemed to connect and relate to each other.

- Gratitude: The women from the ALAS program expressed appreciation and shared how thankful they were to receive support specifically for their own children. They were also grateful for Belinda for facilitating.

- Adoptive Parents: Parents that adopted children with a Mexican heritage believed it was important for their children to have a strong cultural connection. They shared how the Mexican women participating in ALAS helped the adoptive parents feel a sense of welcome and belonging to the community.

**From the Workshop to the Project**

The workshop was a unique feature, because every community varies profoundly. Therefore, it is necessary that the facilitators of the workshop understand that the dynamic of this intergenerational dialogue will vary. The facilitators who choose to use the manual should be flexible to the ideas, experiences, and funds of knowledge that each participant brings forth.

The project is included in its entirety in the Appendix B.
CHAPTER IV
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMENTATIONS

Conclusions

Mexican born women struggle through language barriers and stereotypes in addition to the day to day struggles of living up in the United States. They strive for a better quality of live and education for their children. When support of family and community is involved, children as well as women are able to develop a positive identity. Therefore, intergenerational dialogue within Mexican born women help facilitate this positive identity across ages. An example of positive identity is through recognition of funds of knowledge. Elders pass down and demonstrate ways in which they have endured in the past while maintaining their heritage. They keep our history alive by passing on teachings, culture, and values on to youth.

Becoming Elders

In this process, the elderly women carefully listening to their daughters speak and contributing their knowledge and experience. They sat down with the younger children and assisted them with their art projects, singing with them. We observe our elders for knowledge in our family and our community to inspire words of traditions and love in the United States where Mexican customs have a potential to be lost. Therefore, there is a much greater effort to use your own funds of knowledge to empower, create, and heal. Intergenerational dialogue is a powerful healing voice that must continue, it is not one, but many that keep our traditions and memories alive for all generations to come. We will all grow older and it is critical that we each can learn and embrace the same traditions, values, and customs we had previously seen from our elders.
Recommendations

As an evaluation of this project, it is important to mention that there are additional facilitators and participants who bring such vast and rich backgrounds.

Latinas from various origins of Latino America that migrate to the United States have similar stories of survival and endurance that may be shared across communities. Facilitators that wish to use the manual may find ways to incorporate and honor the funds of knowledge used by participants who originate from various countries in Latino America. These participants are able to use this dialogue because of similarities in cuisine, language, certain traditions shared across Latino America; yet, can be used to admire differences such as music and dance. The manual can further serve as a tool to bridge connections between immigrant women from Mexico and immigrants from across Latino America.

Additionally, areas where community engagement may flourish such as churches, social services, and even the educational system and that may have resources to bring together women may find it useful to use this manual. Women themselves tend to gravitate in such places and develop friendships themselves. However, as community leaders, there could also be an intent to bring families together in a way that honors their story and their funds of knowledge. Intentionally creating a safe space for dialogue shows a commitment to the betterment of communities and a willingness to serve.

Finally, as an observation to the process in developing this manual, I noticed various fathers that were willing to participate and engage in the conversation. Male participants as sons, fathers, husbands, and grandfathers may also be encouraged to share their own stories and experiences that wish to join an intergenerational dialogue without
compromising women’s safe space. Fathers who express interest in the welfare of their families and community should also be encouraged to share their story.
When my family moved to the United States, my parents made sure that I spend time in Mexico over summers. They wanted me to engage with my grandparents both in the country and the city. Because of this, my grandparents enlightened my identity as they were a living witness to my roots. Conversations with my grandmother is an endearing memory. She would wake up early making a fire in her outside kitchen, my grandmother would make clapping sounds to spread the *maza* and make her large tortillas. With a cool, crisp air in my face, I would wake to her singing or whistling a ranchera. My mother and my aunts would make salsas to later join my grandmother and eat freshly made tortillas. We would surround ourselves in the coziness of the kitchen to talk and tell jokes. She often talked of memories of her family as they now became my fondest moments. These memories are part of our history.

I still continue to see the women in my family gathering around the kitchen table, talking, and laughing. Although far away from Mexico, the family remains strong and united, even at our weakest moments. Coming together was our place to heal even as a child. Being home with family was the only place at that time where I could find knowledge that was true, good, and purposeful. It was where my language and my skin color did not matter. By receiving this buena educación from my elders and family, I gained a significant head start—a source of strength—in my childhood. This project is very meaningful to me because, as a Mexican immigrant myself because I understand the importance of creating a space of healing and hope through dialogue, and encouragement for immigrant children, women, and elders. We need this not just in our families, but in a context that can extend and reach to others who need support.
People from all over Mexico bring to the United States their own unique memories of a place where there is an abundance of cultural richness. Trying to keep this alive through storytelling is critical to preserve and remind ourselves of the high value that our backgrounds play in our lives.
REFERENCES


http://www.pewhispanic.org/2016/04/19/statistical-portrait-of-hispanics-in-the-united-states-key-charts/


APPENDIX A

Flyer distributed as part invitation to the Mothers of the Program ALAS
LA CASA DE BELINDA
906 SALVADOR ST.
EL GRANADA, CA

PLÁTICA Y ARTE SOBRE LA IMPORTANCIA DE MANTENER VIVO NUESTRO PASADO.

MANTENER NUESTRA CULTURA EN SOLIDARIDAD

EMPEZAMAREMOS CON PAN, CAFÉ, Y CHOCOLATE. FAVOR DE TRAER ALGÚN PLATILLO PARA FINALIZAR CON COMIDA Y MÚSICA

MARZO 2, 2013
9:00AM-12:00PM
CUENTOS DE NUESTRAS VIDAS

PARA MAS INFORMACION POR AVER LLAMAR:
Rosa María Ramos
(480) 648-7894
APPENDIX B

Intergenerational Dialogue Manual for Mexican Born Latinas
Intergenerational Dialogue: Manual for Mexican Born Latinas

By Rosa Ramos
INTERGENERATIONAL DIALOGUE

This manual provides a rich framework using funds of knowledge and multicultural lenses to address the process of intergenerational dialogue and community building with Latino families.

WHY INTERGENERATIONAL DIALOGUE IMPORTANT AND HOW CAN WE KEEP PASSING IT ON?

Helps to build and strengthen identity of Latinos in the United States
To preserve culture and traditions
To reduce isolation
Preserve indigenous knowledge, history, memories, and traditions which are passed on through intergenerational dialogue

HOW CAN WE CREATE SPACE FOR INTERGENERATIONAL DIALOGUE TO HAPPEN IN OUR COMMUNITY

Where do we begin?

The two most important pieces are inviting participants that are interested in being part of community and empowering community facilitators to engage in this process.

Community

It’s best to build this dialogue in communities where there are programs already existent in the community and a relationship of trust has developed.

Facilitators

Identifying facilitators that have already the expertise and drive to bring individuals together with the tools and resources they have can aid an intergenerational dialogue.

From our experience, in order to understand established community maintained so connected with each other the main facilitator would be a base to aid an intergenerational dialogue between the women in the community.

1. Familiarizing with Participants
2. Meeting with Facilitators
   a. To design a workshop plan that works well in the particular community
   b. To establish an area or ways in which the participants can have an area of confianza, or trust.
   c. Prepare and gather materials necessary
3. Invitation to the Participants
4. Reminder of the Workshop to Participants
1. Introducción con Café: This form of informally welcoming each person that came with offerings of a light meal and coffee.

2. Canto de Bienvenida (Welcome songs): consists of singing traditional songs from the women’s childhood as they sit together making a circle in the living room.

3. Sage Blessing: Ancestral practice of blessing each one of the female participants. Sage is used to center one’s mind and clean any mental uneasiness. It is used to balance a person in that particular moment in time. Each of the women would receive a sage blessing with a feather from a facilitator in order to center ourselves into the environment.

4. Musica Ancestral: Incorporates ancestral music that allows is also to further center the participants and facilitators in preparation for the dialogue.

5. Pasando la Palabra (Passing the Word): Participants sit in a circle where everyone listens attentively giving a profound respect to what others say without interruptions. In order to give way for speaking to a talking stick or a feather is passed along in a circle. This is a protocol used by our ancestors to pass along feather represents the spirit of truth. Our choice in words should be respected as long as our own actions give it meaning as well. Elders and the community will know through an individual’s actions if you can count on their palabra (word).

6. Voces de los Niños (Voices of Children): Mothers and their children have an opportunity to share time though and art activity. Each child would receive materials to make a talking stick: various kinds of yarn, feathers, and a wooden stick. This was also used as a part of an integration of children in the dialogue, have an opportunity to speak with the talking stick. It also helps them recognize the importance of speaking truth.

7. El Fuego (Fire): Participants sit along the fire where people may have a discussion or closing ceremony. Fire represents knowledge, wisdom, and brings forth power of a natural element. Our ancestors used this as a form of attaining and sharing knowledge as well.
8. **La Despedida (The Farewell):** During this time, participants can share what was meaningful to them about the day and say a word of gratitude of departure for the group. It is a time to close and have a *ceremonia* of farewell.

**REFLECTION**

After the group process, it is important to come together as facilitators to look at the process and themes shared by the participant. It is also important to recognize the unspoken elements that occurred in and outside of the group. How were others interactive together? What roles that people took on with one another. How did people naturally develop and share their funds of knowledge? This is critical as it gives voice to those that were present in the group and it honors the process that evolved.

**GRATITUDE**

Just as the group burned copal and ended the process with a *ceremonia* of fire, each of you can create what you choose for your group to begin sharing and healing. This manual offers some ideas of what we have learned that works in our own project. It is powerful to use your own funds of knowledge to empower, create, and heal. Intergenerational dialogue is a powerful healing voice that must continue, it is not one, but many that keep our traditions and memories alive for all generations to come. One day, we all become elders, it is critical that we each have the opportunity to learn and embrace our elder’s traditions and values as we continue our lives’ in the United States.