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Beyond Theoretical Sensitivity: The Benefits of Cultural Intuition within Qualitative Research and Freirean Generative Themes: Four Unique Perspectives

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Abstract

To address the benefits of cultural intuition on qualitative inquiry, we highlight four qualitative studies and examine how we, as Chicana scholars, embrace the role cultural intuition plays in our individual studies. In this article, we illustrate how cultural intuition informs our use of Freirean generative themes within our methodological approach. For an in-depth illustration, we each highlight one of the four tenets of cultural intuition and explain how that tenet advises our methodological tools - such as family photographs as archive, student-generated photographs, teacher-generated artifacts, and community archival sources - to create Freirean generative themes with our participants and highlight the wealth present in Communities of Color.

Keywords

Cultural Intuition, Freirean Generative Themes, Knowledge Holders and Creators, Chicana/o Educational Research

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Beyond Theoretical Sensitivity: The Benefits of Cultural Intuition within Qualitative Research and Freirean Generative Themes - Four Unique Perspectives

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To address the benefits of cultural intuition on qualitative inquiry, we highlight four qualitative studies and examine how we, as Chicana scholars, embrace the role cultural intuition plays in our individual studies. In this article, we illustrate how cultural intuition informs our use of Freirean generative themes within our methodological approach. For an in-depth illustration, we each highlight one of the four tenets of cultural intuition and explain how that tenet advises our methodological tools - such as family photographs as archive, student-generated photographs, teacher-generated artifacts, and community archival sources - to create Freirean generative themes with our participants and highlight the wealth present in Communities of Color. Keywords: Cultural Intuition, Freirean Generative Themes, Knowledge Holders and Creators, Chicana/o Educational Research

Necesitamos teorías [We need theories] that will rewrite history using race, class, gender, and ethnicity as categories of analysis, theories that cross borders, that blur boundaries - new kinds of theories with new theorizing methods.

(Gloria Anzaldúa, Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Cara, 1990, p. xxv)

Gloria Anzaldúa exemplifies our need, as Chicana scholars, to go beyond traditional education research theories and methods to document ourselves and communities as “knowledge holders and creators”. In this article, we, the four authors, highlight four qualitative research projects to demonstrate how we employ “theorizing methods” to “rewrite history using race, class, gender, and ethnicity as categories of analysis” (Anzaldúa, 1990, p. xxv). At the center of our “theorizing methods” is cultural intuition (Delgado Bernal, 1998) – a theoretical sensitivity that extends personal memory into the collective and community experience and empowers participants throughout the research process that includes engaging them in the data analysis. Cultural intuition informs our “theorizing methods” in four individual case studies with Communities of Color that includes Latinos/as who have been historically marginalized in the United States, or “who are subordinated because of their race, gender, and class” (Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998, p. 301). Thus, the purpose is to better understand those who are at the margins of society through a critical race feminist lens. In each of these studies, we employ our cultural intuition in order to involve our participants in describing their lived experiences through a Freirean-informed methodology of generative themes (see Freire, 2000).

The first case study outlines personal experiences as the leading tenet of cultural intuition, to examine how family insights to a segregated “Mexican school” contributed to the use of family photographs to uncover segregation in a city in California. The following case study delineates academic experiences as the focal point to highlight the dearth of higher education literature that fails to employ innovative techniques to better document the first-year

experiences of underrepresented students generally and Chicanas specifically in top-tier research institutions. The next case study acknowledges professional insights of a former classroom teacher, which contributes to the use of classroom and personal objects to document the stories of Chicana teachers. The final case study focuses on the analytic process of archival sources that contributes to the historical recovery of Chicana/os in South Central Los Angeles schools.

Our research paints a more vivid and complex picture of the dimensions of the challenges families, students, teachers and Communities of Color face in the United States, thereby enriching existing scholarship on this issue. Qualitative research—an interpretive, naturalistic approach to inquiry—allows us to capture in-depth understandings of people’s experiences, perspectives, and histories in the context of their personal circumstances or settings (Erickson, 2011). Taking into account the complex and socially-constructed nature of reality, our research projects acknowledge the benefits of having a variety of critical frameworks and innovative interpretative practices in one’s theoretical and methodological toolbox to better report everyday life from the point of view of those who live it. For the purposes of this article, we examine how we, as Chicana scholars, explicitly link the development of our cultural intuition and our research decisions through a central question: *how do we use and cultivate our own cultural intuition in our studies?*

We come from a strong lineage of critical race Chicana feminist scholars who have named and continually developed cultural intuition as an epistemological framework in educational research (Calderón et al., 2012; Delgado Bernal, 1998). Our focus makes our work personal, valid, and methodologically sound and cultivates a highly intimate “sixth sense” regarding our scholarship. In this article, we offer a brief overview of cultural intuition within critical race feminisms, describe how cultural intuition led us to the importance of Freirean generative themes as methodology, and present four qualitative case studies that highlight the intersection of cultural intuition and Freirean generative themes.

Knowledge Holders and Creators: Collective Experience and Community Memory

Cultural intuition has existed throughout human history. It is that feeling deep in the bowels of the human body telling you to pay attention, to *ponte águila*, or stay alert. Many may describe it as a gut reaction, a “sixth sense”, the subconscious response to one’s environment. The roots of cultural intuition in academia were born from decades of critical race feminist scholarship (Anzaldúa, 1987; Collins, 1991; hooks, 1989; Hurtado, 1996; Walker, 1982). Through her pioneering scholarship in Chicana Feminism, Anzaldúa (1987) provided much of the epistemological basis for cultural intuition within the Chicana/o tradition. She described *la facultad*, the epistemological center from which cultural intuition emerges, as “the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface. It is an instant ‘sensing,’ a quick perception arrived at without conscious reasoning” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 60).

Cultural intuition (Delgado Bernal, 1998) furthermore extends what Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin (1990) called “‘theoretical sensitivity’ – a personal quality of the researcher based on the attribute of having the ability to give meaning to data” (p. 563). The aforementioned scholars agree that such intuition comes from four distinct areas: (1) personal experience; (2) existing literature; (3) professional experience; (4) the analytical research process. Delgado Bernal (1998), however, made a key distinction between cultural intuition and theoretical sensitivity by “extend[ing] one’s personal experience to include collective experience and community memory” (p. 563), and further described cultural intuition as “a complex process that is experiential, intuitive, historical, personal, collective, and dynamic” (pp. 567-568). As such, cultural intuition is constantly evolving and often becomes infused

with “spiritual activism” - “spirituality [that] can assist us in challenging racism, sexism, homophobia, and other forms of material psychic oppression” (Keating, 2005, p. 243). Although not originally in the first description of cultural intuition (Delgado Bernal, 1998), spirituality has since been included for its significant role in nurturing this sight (Calderon et al., 2012; Delgado Bernal, 2001, 2008,).

As a collective, communal, spiritual, and dynamic process, cultural intuition is formed through lived experiences – past, present, and future. Chicana feminist epistemology (CFE), the theoretical framework for cultural intuition, insists that our lived experiences develop us – Women of Color, Chicanas, People of Color – as “agents of knowledge” (Delgado Bernal, 1998, p. 560). Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (1983) and critical race feminist scholars have written explicitly on the experiences of Women of Color and the particular ways that gender, sexuality, race, and class intersect to create our daily realities and material conditions. They named these “theories of the flesh”, that is, “where the physical realities of our lives – our skin color, the land or concrete where we grew up on, our sexual longings – all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity” (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983, p. 23). These theories of the flesh, our lived experiences, provide the scaffold for our cultural intuition to flourish as Chicana researchers.

Cultural intuition thus forms the framework for the four case studies in this article. This framework serves to highlight People of Color generally and Chicanas/os specifically as “holders and creators of knowledge” (Delgado Bernal, 2002, p. 105), and allows for a nuanced critique of naturalized concepts such as meritocracy and white privilege. Centralizing critical race feminisms approaches like CFE and cultural intuition, we are able to critique objectivity and the failings of traditional, liberal educational scholarship to explore the intersections of race, class, and gender within our lived experiences as researchers (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Solórzano, 1998). CFE welcomes and honors the researcher’s cultural intuition throughout the study. Cultural intuition thus provides a framework from our subconscious to speak with our conscious methodological decisions. We now turn to tools as well as techniques to incorporate artifacts such as family photographs, research participant-generated photographs, classroom and personal items, and community-generated archival sources that acknowledge the wealth present in Communities of Color. It is precisely because we honor our cultural intuition that we are able to bring these critical frameworks and innovative methods together to develop more candid, vivid, and nuanced scholarship.

Cultural Intuition & Freirean Generative Themes

The use of artifacts as central points of knowledge-building with our participants echoes a Freirean pedagogy of generative themes (see Freire, 1970)¹. Generative themes are rooted in the daily lives of people, in theories of the flesh, and can represent complex relations of power and experience, while also serving as entry points for discussion (Freire, 1970). This pedagogy involves generative codes, the “visual and/or material renditions - as in pictures, drawings, stories, articles, or films - of the significant themes or problems that have been identified” (Smith-Maddox & Solórzano, 2002, p. 70). Freire (1970) named themes “generative” because “they contain the possibility of unfolding into again as many themes, which in their turn call for new tasks to be fulfilled” (p. 102).

The Freirean pedagogical approach of constant meaning-making is central to our research processes. We never aspired to find one “true” meaning or interpretation of Chicanas/os’ lived experiences. To do so would be essentializing, rather than highlighting, the

¹ For more references on Freirean pedagogy and methodology, please see: Freire & Faundez, 1989; Freire & Macedo, 1995; Freire & Macedo, 2013; and Shor & Freire, 1987.

multiplicity of identities in a heterogeneous group (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Zavella, 1991). We valued artifacts as pieces of specific histories of the whole. Documents and photographs, among various other objects, served as entry points and emerged as rich pieces to engage in nuanced storytelling. In the proceeding pages, we each share how this practice played out in our specific research projects through the use of various artifacts. We argue that the particular ways we used artifacts are informed by different strands of our cultural intuition. Our cultural intuition drove us to use the artifacts as key elements in our methodologies. Meanwhile, our cultural intuition was simultaneously sharpened through the process of using and analyzing artifacts with our participants. The generative themes that have been created with our participants enabled each case study to honor Chicanas and Chicanos as holders and creators of knowledge through their lived experiences. While we have incorporated all of cultural intuition's four tenets into our research, for the purpose of this article, we have each identified the most influential tenet in our work as the unit of analysis for an in-depth discussion.

Personal Experience

Family Photographs as Embodiments of Community Memory (Michaela J. López Mares-Tamayo)

As my colleagues and I tease apart the four different strands of cultural intuition, I begin at home with the personal experiences of family and community. This section outlines personal experiences as a leading tenet to examine how family insights to a segregated "Mexican school" have contributed to the use of family photographs to challenge the majoritarian narrative of segregation in a California city.

My love for photography is due to my mother. Growing up, I witnessed time and again how she captured everything from the seemingly mundane to noteworthy milestones on film. She filled our home with pictures of loved ones, that I now view as a timeline of the López-Mares² family's establishment in the United States. The "López half" of our family settled in Pasadena, California during the early 20th century, while the "Mares half" grew up in the desert community of Barstow, California. While a little more than 100 miles separated the hometowns of my parents, they shared legacies of educational inequity. My research is thus rooted in the moments when I learned that both my maternal grandfather and my own father, Melquiades Mares, Jr., attended segregated Mexican elementary schools in their respective Southern California communities during the first half of the 20th century. Much as they supported my educational pursuits, I grew up with great respect for the brilliance I saw possessed by both of them. Thus, the revelations that my grandpa and my dad were somehow identified as "deficient" in their own local schools, as evidenced by their segregation during their primary years, first engaged my cultural intuition around the source of personal experience and community memory.

Delgado Bernal (1998) wrote that personal experience "goes beyond the individual and has lateral ties to family and reverse ties to the past" (p. 564). I most immediately drew on the experiences of family members to understand the ways that segregation manifested for Mexican-descent people in the Southwest. This was a necessary starting point, given the relative obscurity of Chicana/o educational history in scholarly literature and the national

² This section does not use pseudonyms for family or individual names. Participants allowed for the use of their given names as a sign of pride in having their stories and those of their relatives documented in academic text. This research is also consistent with the works of Chicana/o historians such as Vicki L. Ruiz (1998) and Francisco E. Balderrama and Raymond Rodríguez (2006), who incorporated data from oral history interviews with their parents as pieces that illuminated the larger social histories under study.

imagination (Donato & Hanson, 2012). The absence of a federal mandate meant that the educational segregation of Mexican-descent students was the result of powerful local district policies (González, 1990; San Miguel, 1986). Whereas my grandfather had already passed by the time I undertook this research, the presence of my father and his siblings who had attended the segregated Clark Street School in Barstow provided me with the opportunity to learn more about that structure from those who had experienced it themselves. I therefore recruited my father's side of our family as participants who could provide a foundational source of information for my dissertation on segregated Mexican schools. My two central research questions asked: (a) In what social and economic context did children of Mexican descent attend elementary school in the early 20th century in Barstow? (b) How did children and families of Mexican descent in Barstow mitigate and resist local deficit frameworks that reinforced their educational segregation? The process of answering those questions has been driven by knowledge mined from the Mares family archive.

While my father told me on numerous occasions what it was like growing up in his desert town, that history became more concrete once I saw the family photographs from his childhood in the 1930s through 1940s. Both he and his sisters immediately began to find and share with me various pictures that captured their school-age years in Barstow. The images ranged from the personal to those taken in an institutional setting. Furthermore, they simultaneously complemented and complicated archival data found in institutional archives. As complementary images, the Mares family photographs added texture to the Mexican-descent community in that place. The railroad is typically the backdrop for the multiracial population and history of Barstow (Keeling, 1976; Moon, 1980). Yet the scenes of the Mares siblings at home and with their parents show that while a majority of Mexican men did indeed labor on the railroad (US Census, 1930), they were more than just workers; they were family and community members, too. The neat appearance of the children and sharp dress of parents Melquiades Mares and Micaela Lara also complicates a dominant discourse related to Mexicans' hygiene. For example, Barstow school officials felt the need to place a stationary washstand in the "foreign...bungalow in order to facilitate the instruction of cleanliness" ("Grammar School Notes", 1924). This assumption that Mexican youth had to be taught lessons of hygiene that were absent in the home rings false when juxtaposed with the multiple images of the Mares family's presentable appearance and respectability.

School photographs in the Mares family collection further bolstered my research work. These continue to be particularly valuable given that the leading national archives of American public school photography are "full of holes" when it comes to Students of Color (Margolis, 1999). Thus, pictures of the Mares children and their classmates are priceless documents of the evolution of segregated schooling in Barstow. Photograph 1 shows Raúl and Mario Mares amongst the first row of children whose sign indicates that they were in "Barstow 2-3rd Grade, 1933".



Photograph 1. "Barstow 2-3rd Grades 1933". Photo courtesy of Mares family collection.

What is not stated on that sign is that they were the “foreign” students who constituted the separate bungalow at the main Waterman School. What is easily seen (and further corroborated in oral history interviews) is that the class is entirely of Mexican-descent, with the exception of two Asian-descent students who still fit the “foreign” designation. Likewise, the first grade class picture of Melquiades Mares, Jr. simply reads “Barstow School 1st Grade 1941”, when in fact he and his classmates were already attending the segregated campus of Clark Street School. Where the official record is silent at worst, misleading at best, the Mares siblings have spoken themselves and their peers back into history. They have labeled the backs of photographs with the names of the Mexican-descent boys and girls who attended school with them. They share memories about walking to school with their friends, and living in the same neighborhood together. I look at these photographs and see the faces of the actual children who grew up and went to school while Mexican in Barstow, California.

Personal experience continues to be the root of my cultural intuition. I immediately engaged my lateral ties to my family to construct knowledge around the existence of a segregated Mexican school in Barstow during the first half of the 20th century. My father and his sisters became the conduits for community memory. Conversations and oral history interviews with my dad and aunts showed that, unlike industries, families reveal and speak to the experiences of the people who made that community themselves. One way in which that community memory of educational segregation has been preserved is through the keeping of family photographs. In sharing their photographs and their memories of their family, classmates, and school, Mares family members (a) validated an important chapter in local history that others have overlooked, and (b) humanized students and a community who were otherwise portrayed as deficient by the majoritarian discourse. My own blended role as the Mares family scholar/researcher (Chávez, 2008) also meant that working with the photographs was a continuous process of engaging and nurturing my cultural intuition. These visual artifacts initially inspired me to want to know the larger story of what my family and their counterparts experienced as Mexican-descent residents in their respective Southern California communities. This desire led me to dig deeper into institutional archives to find any traces of the stories that the pictures, in part, capture.

As I further engaged in this research, I asked more questions about what the local context of Chicana/o segregation looked like in the early 20th century. I systematically drew from existing literature and my professional experience as a student of Chicana/o and Ethnic Studies and critical race theorist to piece together historical themes of segregation and resistance in a reflexive way so as to constantly “verify or falsify [my] assumed interpretations”

(Chávez, 2008, p. 491) rather than take them for granted. I further nurtured my cultural intuition as I analyzed the data from institutional archival sources, such as Census data and local print media. These sources allowed me to triangulate the data found in the Mares family archive, while also revealing the majoritarian discourse that my research disrupts. My cultural intuition, anchored in my personal experience as the descendant of segregated Mexican-descent children, led me to undertake this project. I cultivated this unique viewpoint by always keeping the faces of the Clark Street students in mind and doing the necessary intellectual and archival work that created the space for their stories to be told.

Existing Literature

The Need to Recognize Familial-Cultural Practices as Assets and Resources for Educational Resilience in Higher Education Research (Janet Rocha)

The previous case study focused on the development of cultural intuition through personal familial experiences to acknowledge collective memories regarding school segregation. This section builds on the significance of collective memory through the delineation of academic experiences. My academic experiences precisely influence my research's employment of a multiple-methods approach to qualitative inquiry, to better document the candid, rich, and varied accounts of first-generation college women's first-year experiences. Multiple interpretative methods are certainly not new; however, such studies have rarely been conducted in higher education. In this section, I argue that higher education literature has fallen short with the employment of innovative techniques—visual methodologies, including photo-elicitation interviews—to better document the first-year experiences of underrepresented students, in general, and Chicanas, specifically, in college. Photo-elicitation interviews—or the insertion of photographs into a research interview (Harper, 2002)—is the focus in this section.

Invisible Realities in Higher Education: Often Ignored. I turned to my cultural intuition to acknowledge and honor my family as they have played a pivotal role in my persistence in an oftentimes hostile environment—my undergraduate career. When I felt *less-than* my white counterparts and *unworthy* of being at a prestigious university because of my working-class background, I thought back to my mother's *consejo*—advice—one that she emphasized throughout my siblings and my childhood:

Mija, la educación es la llave para sus futuros. Les va abrir muchas oportunidades y nadie podrá quitarles su educación. Nosotros queremos lo mejor para ustedes. Tu papá y yo no tuvimos la oportunidad para ir a la escuela. Aquí, la educación es la llave para abrir sus sueños.

[Sweetie, education is the key to your futures. It will open many opportunities and no one will be able to take your education away. We want the best for you all. We did not have the opportunity to go to school [My dad has a third grade education and my mom completed high school in Mexico]. Here [in the U.S.], your education is the key to make your dreams a reality.]

I valued my mother's wisdom when I encountered the unknown world of academia. As a child of immigrant parents and a first-generation college student, this predominantly White, prestigious, and upper-class world did not reflect my own experiences.

As I strove to continue through the higher education pipeline, I applied my mother's modeled work ethic and aspirations to my own hardships at the university as I sought to

navigate an unknown world. Against the odds, I was resilient. My mother's words of wisdom were symbolized in family photographs I displayed in my dorm room, helping me maintain a strong connection to my pre-college community. These photographs allowed me to focus on my mother's *consejos* and her desire for me to succeed in life. Her words proved to be my salvation in a hostile educational system not designed for students of color. My college years were academically, socially, and emotionally difficult. However, those experiences inspired my research interest on the lived experiences of students of color in postsecondary education. As demonstrated by the four case studies in this article, the lessons we have learned from our homes and communities are filled with a wealth of knowledge that is vital to our work. My cultural intuition tells me that *familia* plays a crucial role in students' educational attainment. Based on my own undergraduate and familial experiences, something deep inside of me—my cultural intuition—pushed me to explore this phenomenon beyond the existing literature. My research makes the invisible visible by allowing groups and individuals who have typically been silenced to share their subjective experiences and provide snapshots of their daily realities in the first year of higher education.

College Students of Color: Make the Invisible, Visible. My engagement with the literature on college retention and persistence has varied from an undergraduate honors thesis and independent studies to the graduate-level dissertation. There is a dearth of higher education literature that employs innovative techniques to better document the varied accounts of first-generation college students' experiences and perspectives of college life. Traditionally, these types of studies tend to rely on surveys in order to understand college retention, persistence, engagement, and satisfaction (for examples, see Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996; Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008). The lack of innovative methods in higher education can be explained by the overrepresentation of quantitative studies in this field (see, for example, McDonough & Fann, 2007).

There is, of course, a benefit to what is learned from quantitative and survey data. The Chicana educational pipeline provides a snapshot of current educational realities for Mexican-heritage students who are underrepresented in higher education (see for example, Covarrubias, 2011). We learn that few low-income students of Mexican-heritage enter the post-secondary educational pipeline and even fewer graduate. I argue that there is an urgent need to produce textured accounts of the lives of first generation Students' of Color to gain greater insight into how to support these students' transition and persistence in college.

If institutions of higher education wish to maintain higher retention, satisfaction, and graduation rates among underrepresented students, including Latinas/os, it is particularly imperative to understand and document their university experiences. Students' cultural assets and resources can significantly affect their educational aspirations and attainment (see Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Delgado-Bernal, 2001; Yosso, 2005). My work provides a critical and descriptive narration of the pre-college practices carried among Chicanas in higher education. As a trained social research methodologist, I am both theorizing and developing new and robust methodologies for studying college access from a cultural perspective.

Collective Experience and Community Memory: Meaningful Artifacts. I have exercised my cultural intuition during a six-month exploratory study that looked at the first-year college experience among Mexican American women. I recruited four women that self-identified as Mexican American and, at the time of the study, met the following characteristics: (1) from a low-income family (determined by students' Free Application for Federal Student Aid); (2) first-generation college students; (3) children of immigrants; (4) American born; (5) incoming first-year students; (6) living in residential housing. I investigated the following research question: *What role does family play toward the college-going experiences among first-generation college students during their first-year at a research institution?* Here, I

present a photographic snapshot captured by Anita³—a first-generation college first-year, biology major and the eldest of three siblings. This photo illustrates the benefits when a digital camera is handed to the participants to document their perceptions as first-year students in higher education and generate themes important to the participants' lived experiences. Photo 2, generated by Anita, allowed her to capture her dorm room and draw attention to a personal-meaning artifact, located on the top shelf of her desk, to explain the role her family plays when she encountered academic challenges:



Photograph 2: Anita's Dorm Room

My family is very close and [they are] very important to me because like I said before, if you don't have that support, like you can't...Like what happened with me when I failed chemistry—I could have totally dropped out. These experiences I can't share with my family because I am the first one [to go to college]. But I have my parents and they keep pushing [me], 'You have to keep going.' Like [in my dorm room], I have a portrait of my parents. I have that—that's the one [question] about what reminds you of home. I wake up and I see it and I say, 'I got to keep going.'

Anita's own photo of her dorm room captures a family portrait displayed on her desk. By building conversations around such photographs—the generative theme on familial influences on college persistence emerged—we begin to gain a more layered understanding of the particular role that family plays in Anita's college-going experiences. Anita wakes up, sees the family portrait on her desk, and tells herself, "I got to keep going," especially when she fails a class. Such elicitations are important to examine, as they help call into question those of previous scholars (e.g., Tinto, 1993) who argue that undergraduates must separate themselves both physically and emotionally from their family and pre-college communities in order to fully immerse themselves in college life. This separation asks students to adopt the institution's dominant cultural code or norms in order to succeed, be satisfied, and persist. As illuminated in the pilot study, these three women acquired new norms and behaviors in order to persist, but they also retained their family and cultural ties. This methodological approach helped capture

³ All names in this section are pseudonyms.

such phenomenon by allowing the participants to take control of the camera and be creative with the documentation of their first-year experiences.

In sum, my experiences with the literature helped identify participant-generated photographs as an innovative method to open a window to the participants' private domains, which is more difficult for survey data and traditional interviews to access (see, for examples, Collier, 1967; Harper, 2002; Wang & Burris, 1997). Ultimately, photographs offer a closer look at what and whom participants consider important (Harper, 2002). More importantly, these meaningful artifacts illuminate our collective experience and community memory. The participants and I—as first-generation college students—specifically utilized various meaningful artifacts served as a strategy to help maintain a strong connection with important aspects in our lives: family, community, and cultural roots; this in turn contributes to their survival in postsecondary education. While this case study examined Chicanas during their educational trajectories, the next case study complements the importance to better understand Chicanas' navigation through the higher education pipeline because it serves as a gateway to achieve and begin their professional lives.

Professional Experience

Listening to the Stories of Chicana Teachers through the Physical Memories of their Lives (Elexia Reyes McGovern)

Throughout this paper, we tease apart the different strands that develop our cultural intuition as Chicana educational researchers. At times, all four strands come together - weaving a braid where parts make the whole. In this section, I unbraided my life to focus squarely on the development of cultural intuition through my professional experiences as a classroom teacher. The stories of Chicana teachers are my research. These stories represent whole generations of cultural and historical memories that document the complex work of teaching and learning with Students of Color. As a former classroom teacher, my research design directly includes teacher-participants to provide nuanced and asset-based understandings of teaching and learning.

I strategically and purposefully center Chicana teachers as Women of Color, as “knowledge holders and creators” (Delgado Bernal, 2002). As a former teacher in the shadow of the neo-liberal culture that has come to dominate and privatize public education throughout the world, these stories speak back to the empire. While dominant ideology insists we measure teacher effectiveness and student learning through one-dimensional methods of standardized tests, research has long documented that teaching and learning cannot be summed up by standardized tests (Au, 2009). Teaching is highly complex and intellectual work (Giroux, 1988), and amid challenges are the daily successes. My own story tells me that teaching and learning are more than standardized assessments and neo-colonial versions of schooling.

My familial and spiritual experiences led me to my love of story and teaching - and to recognize stories as pedagogical tools. I come from a family of storytellers and educators, entrenched in Catholicism, uniting my Mexican and Irish families in lives of service to people. Nightly, I listened to my father's stories of magical dolphins off Ireland's coasts, and daily, to my mother's life stories filled with moral teachings. As I grew to critique the Church, my faith became rooted in the principles of Liberation Theology – a political movement that understands the Church's teachings in relation to freedom from unjust economic, political, or social conditions. A lover of stories and freedom, I became a History and English teacher in Boston where I looked towards diverse storytellers from my students' cultural background to shape my curriculum. It is within story that seeds of resistance and imagination are born. “Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and malign. But stories can

also be used empower and to humanize” (Adichie, 2009). As a teacher and educational researcher my cultural intuition has lead me further down the path of story.

Based on my own experiences as a teacher, I specifically recruited Mexican-heritage teachers from Southern California, who had been in the class more than 7 years and who described their teaching as political, moral, and spiritual work, through a flyer that I emailed to specific teacher list-servs that worked with large numbers of Latina/o teachers (i.e., Bilingual Education organizations, Mexican-American teacher organizations, etc.) and to school districts with a large number of Latina/o teachers. I ultimately recruited 11 Chicana teachers from Southern California through this highly selective participant-sampling technique, which also included a pre-interview screening process where I filtered for teachers who reported using culturally relevant approaches as defined by Ladson-Billings (2004) and who described their students in asset-based language⁴. As I began the research project, I was left with a dilemma - how do I invoke the teacher-storyteller? Building from Chicana educational scholarship (see Burciaga, 2007, Perez Huber, 2010) and my professional experiences, I incorporated artifacts into the interview protocol - allowing participants to identify meaningful artifacts, provided the opportunity for the storyteller to shape the interview, framing their life story through Freirean generative themes.

My interview protocol gave the teachers the power to choose cultural artifacts to describe different parts of themselves: self-identity, schooling experiences, family, teaching life, and political identity. My cultural intuition, as a former classroom teacher, told me that these areas in teachers’ lives formed their political clarity in becoming a teacher. The artifacts served as the source of generative themes for our interviews and were ““visual and/or material renditions...of the significant themes or problems that have been identified” (Smith-Maddox & Solórzano, 2002, p. 70) in the teachers’ daily lives. I will now present one story to demonstrate the value of using cultural artifacts to bring the stories alive.

Ms. Romero⁵ & the Transfer Poster. Artifacts symbolize much more than a material object and a single story. Artifacts spark stories about community and family. In this next story, Ms. Romero, a veteran secondary teacher of 12 years, describes her schooling experiences through family photographs from her college graduation.

Ms. Romero is a home-grown teacher (Irizarry, 2007). She was born, raised, and teaches in South Central Los Angeles. She points to these experiences as a central part of her pedagogy. Ms. Romero shows me photographs of family during her college graduation celebration. Earlier in the interview, she explained changing cultural and familial culture by not having a *quinceañera* (a cultural practice among some Latina/os and Latin Americans that celebrates a girl’s fifteenth birthday), and, instead, waiting to host a college graduation celebration. As she shows photographs from the salon where her graduation celebration was held, Ms. Romero narrates: “This was my *quinceañera*, but revisited. It was about celebrating academics and my wish to go beyond high school” (Interview, June 12, 2012).

As she flips through her college graduation photo album, she stops at one photo of her large family and friends, and recalls that this photo is on a poster, used by a university program to recruit and retain community college transfer students - the majority of whom are low-income, first generation, Students of Color, like Ms. Romero. She describes discovering the poster, see photo 4, through her family network.

⁴ Assets-based refers to a perspective that sees the knowledge, skills, resources, and potential that Latina/o students bring to school (Yosso, 2005). This stands in stark contrast to dominant deficit ideologies of Latina/o communities that assumes inferiority, pathology, and at-risk (Valencia & Solórzano, 1997).

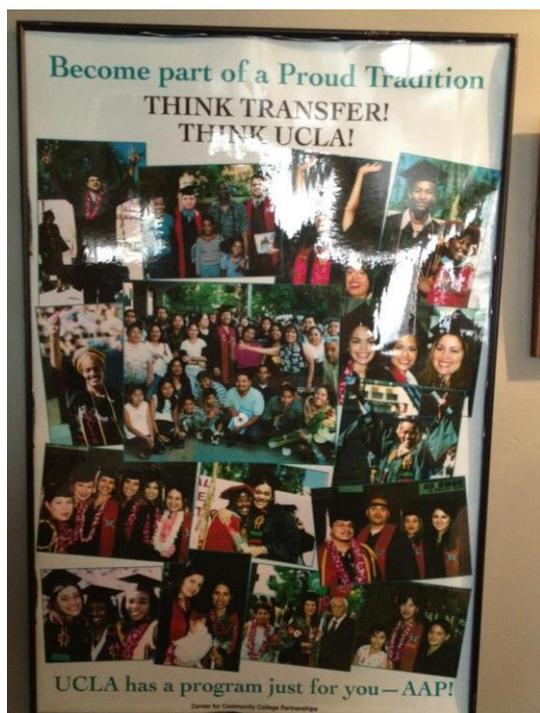
⁵ All names in this section are pseudonyms.

There's this huge picture for transfer students. It's my contingency of family and friends. This is how small worlds work, a cousin said to my mom, "Oh, I've seen your family. We made posters for UCLA".

My mom's like, "What are you talking about?"

He said, "I have the originals, so I'm going to bring you one". And so sure enough he brought us one, the full poster size. It's different pictures of Raza Grad and the African American graduation and a few other things"

(Interview, June 12, 2012).



Photograph 3: Recruitment Poster

Ms. Romero explains that this poster is a symbol of academic perseverance and excellence for her family, as it hangs proudly in her parents' living room, and serves as a model for a larger community. This poster, in fact, is also strategically posted in Ms. Romero's classroom - offering visual encouragement for high school Students of Color to "see" themselves in college, and by providing visual navigational skills from community college into a 4-year university. In this way, Ms. Romero's family photo becomes part of the "navigational capital" (Yosso, 2005) that high school Students of Color utilize in their pursuit of higher education. This artifact extends from the Romero family by becoming part of a communal memory among Students of Color.

Some Concluding Words on Story. Artifacts tell stories, our stories in becoming teachers - the continual process of "becoming". Different pieces of our identity are exposed - our family stories, our reasons for being teachers, the student stories that keep us in the classroom year after year. Behind each physical memento is a story waiting to be told. My cultural intuition propelled me to explore the life stories of Chicana teachers who see teaching as a political, moral, and spiritual act. Analyzing artifacts with Chicana teachers has sharpened my cultural intuition, which is the heart of how I understand and collectively create knowledge with the participants through storytelling. Stories are the meaning in our dynamic human lives.

They breathe with us, growing us into cultural and historical beings. We carry our ancestors' stories, their trauma and resilience, and we re-shape their stories into our present, informing new realities. Within individual stories emerge patterns - creating a rich, vibrant, and dynamic culture. Our culture is the lifeblood that runs through our veins and into lesson plans as we transform through teaching and learning. This is I know through my professional experiences as a Chicana teacher.

ANALYTICAL RESEARCH PROCESS

Recordar es Vivir [To Remember is to have Lived]: Activating our Cultural Intuition in the Analytical Research Process (Lluliana Alonso)

The previous sections have focused on three distinct strands within cultural intuition. This portion will build on this work as I focus on the way my cultural intuition has been fostered throughout the analytical research process as a student in high school, college, and graduate school. As a junior in the Theater & Film Academy (TFA) at Thomas Jefferson High, our class was assigned to create distinct documentary film projects on a topic of our choice. From documenting low-rider culture to philosophies of the game of basketball to confronting gender stereotypes, my peers all had exciting and interesting topics lined up. Meanwhile, I struggled to choose a topic. My film teacher suggested not over-thinking this and perhaps exploring the surrounding community as a subject. It did not take long to realize I did not know much about the surrounding neighborhood even though it was all I knew. I had walked through its streets almost everyday, learned to add and subtract in its schools and called it home my entire life; yet I did not know much about those who came before me, who also made South Central LA their home.

A classmate and I decided to explore the history of South Central LA as our documentary topic. Through a series of interviews with former African-American jazz musicians, archived video, and photographs, we quickly learned about the jazz scene that thrived along Central Avenue, a main artery of the neighborhood in the 1930's and 40's. The elder jazz musicians remembered South Central LA as the "Black Hollywood." With a camera in hand, we were able to recover a piece of our neighborhood's musical history. This new found knowledge later became complicated as I learned about the ways racial covenants enforced segregation. Confronted with the racial realities of the past, I set to locate what that meant for Chicana/os. My intuition told me that surely Chicana/os had to have lived and work alongside the African American community in South Central LA. Hence my dissertation research is an extension of the documentary film I made over 10 years ago but with a more focused lens on recovering the Chicana/o community in this same neighborhood to understand how they experience schooling.

Most contemporary history of South Central Los Angeles, a Southern California community located just south of downtown Los Angeles, has largely focused on the African American experience. This has been mainly due to the recognition that South Central LA has been the "largest black community in California since the 1900's and was one of only two substantial African American centers in the West" (De Graaf, 1970, p. 324). The multiracial roots of this community in the early half of the 20th century as "quite possibly the most racially and ethnically diverse urban area in America" consisted of African Americans, Mexicans, Japanese, Jews and ethnic whites living alongside each other (Flamming, 2005, p.99). Yet, the presence of Chicana/os in this same neighborhood has been rendered invisible in historical accounts. Gloria Miranda (2006) has argued that Chicana/os settled in different parts of Los Angeles and adjacent communities since the turn of the 20th century, moving eastward across

the Los Angeles river, while others followed the railroad tracks southward towards Watts and beyond, into adjacent communities. Yet in the historical records, Chicana/os have largely been historicized solely in the context of East Los Angeles.

My first attempt to recover any traces of the Chicana/o community began at the LAUSD Arts & Artifacts Archive, an institutional site of educational Los Angeles history. I went there looking for old Jefferson High yearbooks to get a sense of the student population during the 1930-1949 time period. I quickly discovered this institutional archive did not hold such yearbooks. The archive had a vast collection of other schools' yearbooks from various parts of Los Angeles, but none from any neighborhood schools in South Central LA. I knew the historical recovery of Chicana/os was not going to be easy, but compounding both the marginalization of this group of people and the neighborhood, made locating valuable archival material harder than I thought.

Determined to find old Jefferson High yearbooks, I remembered what my parents always used to say to me: "*Mija, lo poquito que tenemos, lo tienes que cuidar*" ["Honey, what little we have, you have to remember to take care of it"] which applied to everything my parents were able to provide for us, as a reminder to honor the hard work it took to acquire it. These words rang true as to why I decided to step back from the institutional archives and into the community. I asked myself who else would recognize and honor the value of a working-class community than the people from that community themselves. It was back at Jefferson High where I found an almost unbroken collection of school yearbooks and student newspapers dating back to the early 20th century. A school librarian had begun preservation efforts at the turn of the century, preserving an impressive collection that documents snippets of students' academic lives and is illustrative of the social and cultural vibrancy of South Central LA.

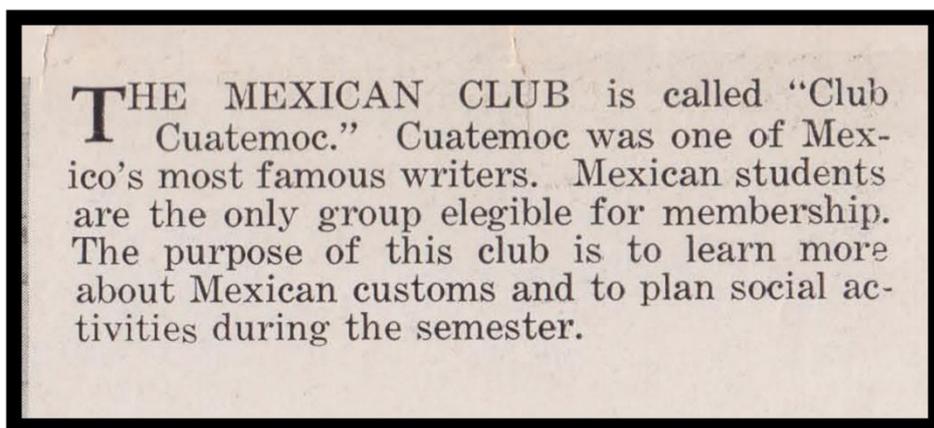
The school yearbooks have been an invaluable asset in finding the Chicana/o student population. They have served as a window into the past. Yearbooks have allowed me to see the faces of students and match their names to their academic pathways and extracurricular activities. These are the experiences of Lylia Carbajal⁶, a graduating senior in the Winter of 1931, who studied stenography and was part of the Secretarial Efficiency Club while a student in Jefferson High, and Anita Duran, also a graduating senior that same year, who was in the "Literary, College Preparatory" track and involved in the Spanish Club. Students' academic trajectories as illustrated in the pages of old yearbooks are a source of knowledge in understanding how they might have experienced schooling. Yearbooks have not only allowed me to recover individual student trajectories but have been significant in tracing the development of the Mexican student club at Jefferson High. An official "Mexican Club" picture debuted in the yearbook of 1937.

⁶ As part of an educational history, I drew from archival sources and in doing so, as a point of accuracy, I want to honor the stories and names of the actual students who lived those experiences without employing pseudonyms. This is a practice among educational historians, as evidenced by the work of Pak (2002).



Photograph 4. “Jefferson High Yearbook Photo of Mexican Club”. Photograph courtesy of Jefferson High Library.

As seen in photo 4, there, a group of about 60 students posed, smiling at the camera. The description noted, “The club was originated for the purpose of creating deeper interest among the Mexican in this school. It’s [*sic*] primary object, naturally, is to serve the school and to unite and bring together the Mexican students of Jefferson.” Organizationally, students took on leadership roles ranging from President of the club, to historian to school newspaper reporter. The next year, in the 1938 yearbook, the “Mexican Club” renamed itself “Club Cuatemoc” [*sic*], as seen in Photo 5.



Photograph 5. “Description of Mexican Club in 1938 Jefferson High Yearbook”. Photograph courtesy of Jefferson High Library.

According to the yearbook description, their new name was in honor of “one of Mexico’s most famous writers.” The name change encapsulated a developing identity grounded in an unsure past, given the misrepresentation of Cuauhtemoc, an Aztec ruler as a famous writer and the misspelling of his name. The club’s identity development also coincides with the shift in faculty sponsor, as Ms. Josephine de Rojas, the only teacher of Mexican descent, took on this role. The description of the club’s purpose had also shifted, “to learn more

about Mexican customs and to plan social activities during the semester” (Jefferson High Yearbook, 1938). Membership to “Club Cuatemoc” was solely based on Mexican heritage. By 1939’s yearbook, the club was now “El Club Cuauhtemoc” with the correct spelling of the ruler and recognizing he was “an Indian patriot of Mexico” and not a “famous writer.” The club’s description noted meetings were “wholly conducted in Spanish” and its purpose was “to learn more about Mexican literature, music, and art” (Jefferson High Yearbook, 1939). Yearbooks have allowed me to trace the development of the Chicana/o student club at Jefferson High and highlight it as a source of cultural wealth and youth activism.

Utilizing the wealth of information found in these often unrecognized primary sources provide a new approach in doing educational history of Chicana/os. Furthermore, school yearbooks in conjunction with U.S. Census Population Schedules can yield rich data that draws on student life trajectories to re-center them as holders and creators of knowledge in the archival research process. Specifically, my approach to the research data continues to be shaped by my parents’ *consejo* (advice). Drawing from their sage advice embodies the “complex process that is experiential, intuitive, personal, collective and dynamic” in activating and cultivating my cultural intuition to piece together the stories of the students of Jefferson High (Delgado Bernal, 1998, p. 568). Nurturing my cultural intuition, through the analytical research process, informs how I recover and honor the experiences of Chicana/o youth to historicize educational opportunity.

Conclusion

Cultural intuition encompasses four areas of our lived experiences as Chicana educational researchers: our personal and collective familial and communal experiences, our experience with existing literature, our professional experiences, and our processes in how we engage with our participants and the analysis. For clarity’s purpose, we unwove these four different strands to describe how each individual aspect of our cultural intuition were activated and developed by including artifacts. The identified artifacts in each case study initiates critical dialogue and reveals the significant realities among Communities of Color as knowledge holders and creators (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Freire, 1970). Participant-generated artifacts serve as a methodology of generative themes, which captures the significant realities within Chicana and Chicano communities (e.g., families, students, teachers), everyday social-political realities that influence people’s lives (Freire, 1970). Our cultural intuition promotes a reciprocal dialogue between participants and researcher, and “develop[s] [our] power to perceive critically *the way [we] exist in the world with which and in which [we] find [our]selves*” (Freire, 1970, p. 83, italics empathized in original text) within families, students, teachers and community archival sources.

As argued earlier, we never aspired to find one “true” meaning or interpretation of Chicanas/os’ lived experiences. Instead, we purposefully utilized artifacts as pieces of specific histories of the whole, serving as entry points and emerging as rich pieces to engage in nuanced storytelling. In the first three case studies, *the* participants identify artifacts relating to their social worlds and provide insight into the everyday moments of their lives. The artifacts, combined with the participants’ narratives, challenge normative views and majoritarian stories that fail to capture how Communities of Color navigate life. The fourth case study, on the other hand, *the* researcher drew upon community-generated archival sources that included high school yearbooks, and relied on her cultural intuition to help recover and honor the experiences of Chicana/o youth from an urban setting. In fact, this method of “generative” themes preserves the specific realities encountered by families, students, teachers, and other communities by enabling a collective approach to: (1) identify common themes through critical dialogue; (2) create an analytical perspective from which to relate their situations to root causes; and (3)

develop solutions and strategies for change and transformation. By acknowledging our cultural intuition, we are honoring our collective experience and our community memories.

The first case study acknowledged and honored family history via photographs to challenge the majoritarian narrative of segregation in a city in California. In the second case study, the researcher incorporated photo-elicitation interviews to acknowledge how students of color persist through their first-year experiences since such innovative techniques are rarely employed in higher education research. The third case study acknowledged the professional insights of a former classroom teacher, which contributed to the use of classroom and personal objects to document the stories of Chicana teachers. The fourth case study utilized high school yearbooks to recover and honor the experiences of Chicana/o youth to historicize educational opportunities in South Central Los Angeles, in conjunction with federal records, such as U.S. Census, to paint an even more complete picture of the life trajectories of these students.

In this article, we discuss the benefits of cultural intuition on educational research. Each case study examines and demonstrates how our cultural intuition informed the use of artifacts as central points of knowledge-building with our participants: families-, students-, teachers-, and communities of Color. As educational researchers, our cultural intuition informs our research. First, we design studies that *humanize* the participants and their experiences through our theoretical and methodological approaches. Second, we argue that this “sixth sense” honors our participants and their lived experiences as knowledge holders and creators, echoing a Freirean pedagogy of generative themes. Finally, these social justice approaches honor People of Color as knowledge holders and creators, which is rarely seen in traditional educational research.

Although the objective of this article is to provide in-depth exemplars to “theorizing methods”, these four case studies are limited to school segregation, higher education, teacher education, and community history research. Other marginalized communities in educational settings are not addressed like veterans, (dis)ability, and LGBT. Taking into account that cultural intuition is broad, and there are many ways for this concept to be applied, we tried to combat this challenge. There is no official blue print on how to engage with your cultural intuition in research. For this reason, we provided four unique perspectives/methodologies, and highlight the *power* of our individual approaches. Cultural intuition is not meant to be generalizable, but each researcher must find their individualized approach. This processes can serve as a blessing and a curse, and therefore we provided a possible blue print on how that *process* looks like in archival and qualitative research.

As the case studies demonstrate, artifacts are the key elements in our research processes. Our cultural intuition allows us to value artifacts as pieces of specific histories of the communities in which we are invested. Participants are involved throughout the research process. We work *with* communities that have been historically marginalized in the United States. We make the invisible, visible. We reclaim and share with the world our collective experience and community memory—past, present, and future. In all, the artifacts continuously engage and generate the cultural intuition that we nurture as Chicana researchers. The four qualitative research projects served as examples to how educational researchers can embrace their cultural intuition (Delgado Bernal, 1998) and employ “theorizing methods” to engage with ground-breaking, innovative research in a diverse array of areas in education. This individualized approach empowers both the researcher and the researched.

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