

ABSTRACT

CRITICAL RACE METHODOLOGIES IN THE FIRST-YEAR WRITING CLASSROOM: CREATING AGENCY AND IMPROVING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT TO ADDRESS THE MARGINALIZATION OF LATINO/A STUDENTS

The marginalization of Latino/a students in the first-year writing (FYW) classroom is the result of the growing number of this student population and the institution's failure to acknowledge the role of cultural factors in impacting higher educational attainment. This study uses the theoretical framework of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and its subgroup Latino/a Critical Theory (LatCrit) in the FYW classroom through the use of pedagogical practices that create a culturally conscious classroom along with opportunities for repurposing students' funds of knowledge. Qualitative data were gathered, and three individual case studies were created using three Latina students from a FYW course at California State University, Fresno. Each case study demonstrates the need for redefining academic literacy in institutions of higher education in order to create access for Latino/a students. Additionally, when discussing prior knowledge, funds of knowledge must also be acknowledged in order to combat deficit-based approaches that negatively impact the learning and higher educational experience of Latino/a students. Conclusively, this study demonstrates that institutions and teachers of writing need to be culturally conscious in order to create equitable spaces in FYW that contribute to alleviating the marginalization of Latino/a students.

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IMPROVING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT TO
ADDRESS THE MARGINALIZATION OF
LATINO/A STUDENTS

by

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CHAPTER 1: THE CURRENT STATE OF LATINO/AS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Over the last two decades, we have seen an increase in the number of Latino/a students, who enroll in institutions of higher education (IHE). This may seem like a positive thing especially when considering the historical treatment of minority groups. However, when comparing postsecondary enrollment to degree completion rates, the data shows that although postsecondary enrollment has increased for Latino/as, the number who successfully complete a college degree is extremely low in comparison to other minority groups, such as African Americans who have a higher percentage of students completing a Bachelor's degree. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)'s report "Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups 2016," from 1990-2013, the number of Hispanic students enrolled in postsecondary institutions increased from 6% of total enrollment to 17% of total enrollment in comparison to African Americans who went from 10%-15% respectively.

When considering the increase in college enrollment for Latino/a students, we may be tempted to see that as a victory, one which is oftentimes used to demonstrate progress toward adding diversity to our college campuses and making a college education more accessible for everyone. However, enrolling high numbers of Latino/a students, despite the increase from recent years, is not enough. The numbers associated with degree completion tells us a different story regarding how much progress still needs to be made. For example, the NCES informs us that in recent years, between 2012-2013, 186,650 Bachelor's degrees were conferred to Hispanic students in comparison to 191,180 for African American students and 1,221,576 for White students. The disparity between these numbers worsens when looking at Master's and Doctoral degrees conferred for the

same groups (NCES). In observing the increase of enrollment in comparison to degree completion rates, we realize that although an increase in enrollment is a positive thing, we also need to ensure the students who initially enroll, actually complete their degrees. Only until these numbers begin to match up, will we be able to accurately assess the improvements made in higher education to provide access to minority groups.

One way to understand the low number of degree completion within the Latino/a population, requires an observation and analysis of the factors that impact such low higher educational attainment. This observation and analysis will be presented in this chapter along with an overview of the current state of Latino/as in higher education focusing on the current issues in place. Here I make the argument that low educational attainment and low degree completion rates result from the interconnection of various factors within the Latino/a community that clash with the culture of higher education itself, ultimately resulting in a difficult and arduous challenge for this group of students. In order to explain this clash of cultures, I use scholar James Gee's concept of tension from his article "Literacy, Discourse, and Linguistics: Introduction" as well as 20th century feminist scholar Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of *choque* from her book *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza* to illustrate the way Latino/a students experience and make sense of higher education. In addition, this chapter also includes a discussion on the theoretical framework of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latino/a Critical Theory (LatCrit). This framework will be used throughout this thesis to explain how my research contributes to the field of composition. Following this framework and my explanation for its use, I present the problem that prompted this thesis which focuses on the current marginalization of Latino/a students in the first-year writing classroom (FYW). My observation of this marginalization led me to pose research

questions to initiate my own research in order to provide solutions to this problem. Moreover, this introductory chapter provides a short explanation of the research methods I used to gather qualitative data for this study. This methodology is followed by a summary of the literature review, which includes the four themes of cultural consciousness, prior knowledge, funds of knowledge, and academic literacy. I use these to present the gaps in the current scholarship regarding how Latino/a students perform in, and respond to, writing instruction in higher education. This chapter ends with a summary of the remaining chapters that make up this thesis.

Understanding the Latino/a Experience in Higher Education

Understanding how Latino/a students experience higher education, calls for a discussion of the intersectionality of cultural factors that directly impact how these students navigate and balance the primary discourse community of their homes and the secondary discourse community of the university. Throughout this thesis, I will use David Gillborn's definition of intersectionality as explained in his article "Intersectionality, Critical Race Theory, and the Primacy of Racism: Race, Class, Gender, and Disability in Education." Here Gillborn refers to intersectionality as a term that "addresses the question of how multiple forms of inequality and identity inter-relate in different contexts and over time, for example, the inter-connectedness of race, class, gender, disability..." (278). This concept emphasizes that in order to understand social inequalities such as institutional racism, we first need to understand the ways in which various factors connect and interconnect to influence how Latino/a students navigate IHE. Gillborn's definition provides an activist component to this concept explaining the need for finding ways to challenge the status quo in order to bring positive change

for marginalized communities (Gillborn 279). Since a large number of Latino/a students are first-generation college students and/or carry some other cultural distinction with them when entering the university, it is critical to understand what occurs when both of these discourse communities (cultures) meet.

In this thesis, I discuss the tension that results when the discourse of the university and the cultural discourse of Latino/a students meet for the first time. Below I outline how some of these individual factors play a role in educational attainment for this student population in particular:

- Differences in native and/or home languages: Many Latino/a students speak English as a first language. A large number of them, however, learn English as a second language either in their homes or when they begin their primary education in the United States. Still others immigrate to the United States much later in their education and are first introduced to the English language in later years. For this reason, it is critical that we ask ourselves how learning English at an earlier grade, such as kindergarten, differs from learning English in a higher grade, such as 10th grade. It is clear these students can be more successful in learning to speak and write English when this is done earlier in their education. Furthermore, differences in language and variations of language can create difficulties in the way students perceive writing in academic spaces. This is extremely problematic when students feel obligated to let go of their native and/or home languages.
- College generation status: First-generation Latino/a students may have more difficulty navigating institutions of higher education, particularly the literacy and discourse of the academy. Although not

always the case, it is possible that first-generation Latino/a students may have less of a support system outside of school since their parents did not attend college. In being the first in their families to go to college, they find themselves having to figure out many things on their own and may experience difficulty adapting to the culture of academia. This is where many first-generation Latino/a students experience this cultural *choque*, discussed by Anzaldua, since they find themselves having to balance “two different worlds,” which can potentially impact their educational attainment.

- Socioeconomic status: According to the University of Wisconsin-Madison’s Institute for Research on Poverty, Hispanics “have poverty rates that greatly exceed the overall average.” In 2015, Hispanics were the second ethnic group mostly affected by poverty with a rate of 21.4 percent in comparison to Non-Hispanic Whites who were at 9.1 percent. With that much poverty, many Latino/a students have to work full time jobs or multiple part time jobs in order to help their families financially. This financial struggle and the pressures of such family responsibilities can negatively impact their academic success and degree completion.
- Immigration status: Although many Latino/as have been living in the United States for many generations, there are also large numbers who have been here for lesser time. Many students currently enrolled in IHE, have parents who were born in other countries and immigrated to the United States. Additionally, many Latino/a students also constitute the large number of undocumented students in college campuses across the nation. In chapter 3 of this thesis, I

provide a case study of an undocumented student (and DACA recipient) whose account demonstrates how the experiences of undocumented students differ from those who do not have to worry about being deported or being separated from their families.

These four factors provide a brief introduction to some of the challenges experienced by Latino/a students on their road to a postsecondary education. These are not meant to show unpreparedness or explain a lack of knowledge. Instead, I include these here to emphasize how the Latino/a experience differs greatly from other students. In my research, I use these challenges as a way to inform how such differences should be used to improve teaching practices in the FYW classroom.

In analyzing this diversity and intersectionality within the Latino/a student population, we see what Gloria Anzaldua meant by the coming together of two very distinct cultures, in this case, the home culture of Latino/a students and the culture of the university. Anzaldua refers to this phenomenon by writing: “Like others having or living in more than one culture, we get multiple, often opposing messages. The coming together of two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of references causes un *choque*, [emphasis added] a cultural collision” (100). This cultural collision, or *choque*, as Anzaldua refers to it, is oftentimes what occurs when Latino/a students enter the university. Their primary discourse community, namely distinguished by cultural factors such as those indicated in the bullet points above, proves to be very different from the culture of the university.

When discussing the “culture” of the university, I refer to its academic discourse that oftentimes clash with Latino/a students’ primary discourse. This is explained in David Bartholomae’s article “Inventing the University” where he focuses on the writing performance of students who find themselves out of place.

Bartholomae notes that students enter the university and are expected to not only navigate it, but also put on a performance that they know what they're doing, when in fact, many of them may go through the system feeling lost or out of place. Bartholomae maintains: "[Students] must learn to speak our language.... And this, understandably, causes problems" (4-5). Bartholomae's words correlate with Gee's concept of cultural tension and Anzaldua's *choque* and makes us aware that the culture of the university has not caught up with its diverse student population as demonstrated through the curriculum, conversations, and overall systemic ways that exclude these students in more than one way. For example, students at California State University, Fresno who wish to major in English must take two 4-unit courses of British literature, one 4-unit course in American literature, and one 4-unit course in world literature in addition to the required 4-unit Shakespeare course. The English major only requires one 4-unit course in "literature of diversity" which may give students the option of reading texts by Latino/a or Chicano/a writers. However, in most cases, these students complete their degrees without ever being exposed to such texts. This is an example of how institutional priorities may clash with Latino/a culture by omitting texts by Latino/a writers even today in the 21st century. The problem is that with the high number of Latino/a students enrolled in the university, it is shocking they are still underrepresented within the curriculum across disciplines. Furthermore, conversations in academic settings fail to incorporate topics, discussions, and narratives that Latino/a students are familiar with, but abound in those that are unfamiliar to this group of students, which can easily lead to deficit-based approaches to teaching. Deficit-based approaches focus on what students don't know. For example, this lack of knowledge of academic literacies or genres can be used to put together a curriculum to fill in the gaps for such students. However,

here I argue that in courses such as FYW, it is not that our students don't know how to read or write. It is not that they don't know how to respond to a text or identify what a text is about. Yes, in many cases, many students are not prepared for "college-level" writing; however, the truth is they know a lot more than they get credit for. The problem here is that they are repeatedly presented with texts and genres that they're not entirely familiar with, but are expected to know. For this reason, deficit-based approaches are problematic because they focus on gaps in knowledge which are ironically the direct result of a lack of effort from the institution to acknowledge what students do in fact know. It is the lack of familiarity with such concepts, that gives ground for the institution to create and implement deficit-based approaches to teaching and learning.

Similar to Anzaldua's concept of *choque*, Gee introduces the concept of cultural collision by discussing the tension that occurs when two distinct discourse communities meet. Whereas Anzaldua focuses on culture and Gee focuses on language respectively, both perspectives can be combined to help us understand why several Latino/a students, despite having high G.P.A.s and overall high aspirations for success when entering college, end up dropping out and never completing a postsecondary degree. In relation to this, Gee writes: "I argue that when such conflict or tension exists, it can deter acquisition of one or the other or both of the conflicting Discourses, or, at least, affect the fluency of a mastered Discourse on certain occasions of use" (8). Using Gee's words, what is deterred here, in the case of Latino/a students, is the acquisition of knowledge or the ability to become fluent in the language of the university. When Latino/a students struggle in college courses due to their lack of exposure to such conversations, they begin to fall behind. As mentioned earlier, this is where deficit-based approaches are formed. However, when we look closely, we come to see the

injustice here. To illustrate this injustice, I present the following scenario: A Caucasian male graduating from a “top” school has access to different educational opportunities in comparison to a Latina graduating from a low-income school district. If both students enter the university, is it fair to expect them to have equal knowledge of the same things? Clearly, we know that higher education is competitive, and students must push themselves to succeed, but is it fair to penalize one student even though they had no control over their socioeconomic status and/or cultural upbringing that directly influenced the kind of education they received? Tension arises between the Latina student’s primary discourse and the discourse of the university whereas such tension is non-existent for the Caucasian male from an upper-class, with college-educated parents. Therefore, the Latina student is faced with the reality of losing some of her cultural identity, falling behind in the university discourse, or completely dropping out due to the inability to ease such tension. Today, feeling marginalized while experiencing stress in attempting to assimilate into this “academic discourse,” leads many Latino/a students to the conclusion that dropping out of college may be the only alternative.

Because of this harsh reality, instead of solely focusing on what students lack and attributing this to the low degree completion rate which leads to a deficit-based approach to teaching, we can see this *choque*, or cultural tension, as the result of the institution’s failure to address how cultural and socioeconomic factors impact the learning experiences of Latino/a students. The rise in college enrollment, although it may seem like a good thing at first, may simply be the result of college initiatives to increase enrollment. At times, this number may also be high for degree completion due to institutional initiatives to increase graduation numbers without necessarily making any changes to the kinds of support and

resources provided for minority groups. The lack of institutional initiatives to meet the needs of Latino/a students who experience cultural tension and struggle navigating higher education, demonstrates how faculty, staff, and administration do not acknowledge the reality of *choque*. Instead, many of these initiatives are put in place to better the name of the university, so “said” university can claim they are a “Hispanic-serving institution” simply based on the number of “Hispanic” students enrolled. My argument is that institutions of higher education need to acknowledge *choque*. They need to understand how for Latino/a students, navigating higher education is about more than doing the work and getting the “A”; instead, this experience is impacted by a constant collision between their cultural discourse and the academic discourse and the choices these students need to make in balancing both. Without acknowledging that a problem exists, institutions feel no obligation to act.

Upon understanding the cultural collision (tension) that takes place between the primary discourse community of Latino/a students and the secondary discourse community of the university, we can now turn our focus on how we can take this and repurpose it to effectively meet the needs of these students. Instead of using deficit-based approaches in the writing classroom, we can begin by acknowledging the funds of knowledge of Latino/a students. In their book *Funds of Knowledge: Theorizing Practices in Households, Communities, and Classrooms*, Norma Gonzalez, Luis C. Moll, and Cathy Amanti define funds of knowledge as “the historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being” (133). These funds of knowledge can be a tradition, artifact, value, moral, or action. Providing opportunities for the repurposing of students’ funds of knowledge in FYW can allow for a more inclusive classroom that allows for equal

participation and interaction for all students despite cultural or linguistic identity. In doing this, we can begin to address some of the issues associated with low enrollment, and particularly with low degree completion, by acknowledging the need for cultural consciousness in the writing classroom. This cultural consciousness needs to come from teachers first. It is up to teachers to become aware of how cultural identity and intersectionality impact the way our students perform and respond to the coursework. Doing this, can help us begin to combat the marginalization of Latino/a students in FYW.

Although fostering cultural awareness is critical to resolving such issues, there are other factors that need to be addressed as well. Linguistic identity and its influence on literacy is also important to alleviate tension between students' primary discourse and university discourse. Therefore, understanding the linguistic identities and allowing for students' native and/or home languages in academic spaces creates opportunities to foster student agency and helps ease the tension described by both Anzaldua and Gee. In easing this tension, through the use of improved teaching practices, we can make improvements that impact Latino/a students.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latino Critical Theory (LatCrit) provide important lenses for addressing current issues of marginalization associated with literacy and *choque* or cultural tension in the classroom. In *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, provide an overview of critical race theory focusing on its origins as well as its development over the years and its influence on the creation of additional subgroups. Delgado and Stefancic note that CRT originated in the 1970s with a group of legal scholars who

observed issues of racism in society and sought to not only eliminate them, but also find ways to work against them in order to prevent it from continuing (4). In this way, CRT is said to have an “activist dimension” to it since it requires that we acknowledge social issues associated with racism and then work to find ways to improve conditions for all groups impacted by this. Similarly, Lindsay Perez Huber explains LatCrit as a subgroup (or extension) of CRT in educational research. In her article “Disrupting apartheid of knowledge: *testimonio* as methodology in Latina/o critical race research in education,” Perez Huber notes that LatCrit is “used to reveal the ways Latinas/os experience race, class, gender, and sexuality, while also acknowledging experiences related to issues of immigration status, language, ethnicity, and culture” (643). In other words, LatCrit emphasizes that when looking at Latino/a students and their educational attainment, we need to consider how all factors associated with race, gender, class, culture, legal status, and many others connect and interconnect to impact how these students perceive higher education, how they navigate the institution, and how they perform and respond to the classroom learning.

For this thesis, I use both CRT and LatCrit as theoretical frameworks to observe and analyze the ways in which Latino/a students perform in the FYW classroom. Understanding this interaction influences the course curriculum as well as the implementation of teaching practices that create transformational learning experiences for Latino/a students. Furthermore, these theories also work to contextualize the disparity between the number of Latino/a students and White students who successfully complete a degree. In collaboration, these theories demonstrate the factors serve as barriers to the educational success of Latino/a students.

Stemming from CRT, critical race theory in education informs us how understanding institutional racism allows us to ways to work against this, especially in educational settings. This is explained by Daniel G. Solorzano, from the University of California, Los Angeles, and Tara J Yosso, from the University of California, Santa Barbara, in their article “Critical Race Methodology: Counter-Storytelling as an Analytical Framework for Education Research.” According to Solorzano and Yosso, critical race theory in education is “a framework or set of basic insights, perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural and cultural aspects of education that maintain subordinate and dominant racial positions in and out of the classroom” (25). This framework and its methodology in education, as defined by Solorzano and Yosso, are used to support why my research is necessary in order to improve the learning experiences of Latino/a students in IHE. This framework consists of five elements that outline “insights, perspectives, methodology, and pedagogy” (25).

In this thesis, I use three of these elements as the foundation for the pedagogical practices I use to combat the marginalization of Latino/a students and, in this way, foster cultural consciousness, active engagement and agency in the FYW classroom. The three elements are as follows:

- Acknowledging the “intercentricity of racialized oppression” (Solorzano and Yosso 25). This focuses on factors such as race, gender, class, immigration status, surname, phenotype, accent, and sexuality and how these connect and interconnect in ways difficult to understand by outsiders.
- Challenging White privilege, rejecting “notions of ‘neutral’ research or ‘objective’ research, and [exposing] deficit-informed research that

silences and distorts epistemologies of people of color” (Solorzano and Yosso 26).

- Challenging “traditional research paradigms, texts, and theories used to explain the experiences of people of color” (Solorzano and Yosso 26). This is accomplished by focusing on lived experiences associated with race, gender and class and seeing these as sources of strength for this specific community.

These three elements are important when we consider the role and purpose of critical race theory in education. First, we need to acknowledge that institutional racism and marginalization are real, and negatively impact the higher education experience for minority groups. Because these elements are meant to work against current, traditional practices, they work to inform my argument by providing ways for teachers of writing to make changes that will improve the writing experience for Latino/a students. Furthermore, these elements influenced my course curriculum and prompted me to gather qualitative data to support my argument. CRT, LatCrit, and the methodologies that arise from these need to be applied in the writing classroom and the field of composition to resolve issues of marginalization related to prior knowledge and academic literacy.

Problem, Purpose, and Research Questions

Problem

In the present day, universities across the nation have seen an increase in the number of Latino/as that make up the student population (NCES). Despite their large presence on university campuses, many, if not most of them, experience marginalization as they attempt to step out of their primary discourse community and navigate a secondary discourse community. In addition, because Hispanics

have poverty rates that surpass the national average drastically, many of them come from some of the poorest, most disadvantaged neighborhoods and school districts that provide few resources for college readiness (Institute for Research on Poverty). One of these factors alone can be an impediment in the success of Latino/as' higher educational attainment. However, in discussing the intersectionality of this group, I emphasize that in the majority of situations, these factors interconnect to make educational attainment more difficult.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this research is to provide ways to effectively meet the needs of Latino/a students in the FYW classroom. As teachers of writing, we must ask ourselves, what kind of pedagogical practices can I implement in order to create a more inclusive classroom? What kind of effect is created by integrating texts written by Latino/a writers and discussing topics and experiences that resonate with the experiences of Latino/a students? In addition to inclusivity, my research also focuses on writing genres and how these tap into students' prior knowledge. IHE have set in place specific writing genres deemed fit to fulfill the requirements of "college-level" writing. But, is it possible that such conventional genres marginalize Latino/a students, particularly those who due to socioeconomic factors, have had little to no exposure to such genres? Most importantly, in order to combat deficit-based approaches and emphasize cultural sensitivity, how can we use students' funds of knowledge to create a culturally conscious classroom with student engagement and agency? With these questions in mind, I use the three elements discussed above to address such problems. In acknowledging the "intercentricity of racialized oppression" (Solorzano and Yosso 25), we begin to create an inclusive classroom that validates every student's experience.

Additionally, in challenging White privilege and rejecting “notions of ‘neutral’ research or ‘objective’ research, and [exposing] deficit-informed research that silences and distorts epistemologies of people of color” (Solorzano and Yosso 26), we provide students with a platform for sharing their knowledge and using their voice to combat academic discourse that work against them. Finally, this research is meant to challenge and demonstrate *how* challenging “traditional research paradigms, texts, and theories used to explain the experiences of people of color” (Solorzano and Yosso 26), can result in empowerment, agency, and the reciprocity of the transfer of knowledge in the writing classroom.

Research Questions

My research question(s) are as follows: How can we make the writing classroom a place of transformational learning as well as a space for empowerment and accessibility for marginalized students? How can we enable and transform Latino/a students’ orientation towards learning so that they place their focus on the experience of FYW as opposed to the grade/score they receive? How is knowledge transferred and how does the reciprocity of transfer influence the ways in which Latino/a students contribute to the classroom learning?

Approach and Research Methods

In response to my research question(s), I argue that in order to create an inclusive and accessible classroom, we must closely analyze course curriculum, assignments, and activities through the lens of critical race methodologies in order to ease *choque* and alleviate marginalization. Analyzing these together can transform Latino/a students’ orientation towards learning so that they focus on the learning experience of FYW and less on the grade. One of the problems we see is that many students perceive FYW as a class they need to take in order to check off

their lists and move on with what they may consider to be more important courses. Due to this perception, many students see FYW as a task or daunting experience. Such point of view then influences how they take in the course work which then results in a weary and unappealing experience for many students across the nation. Here I argue that we can strive to improve this learning experience in order to change our students' perspectives about writing. Instead of having them "write for the teacher" or "write for a grade," we need to create opportunities for them to engage in critical thinking and transformational learning experiences that tap into their "knowledges." This has the possibility of helping students begin to understand academic discourse and find ways to better navigate higher education. Creating a culturally conscious classroom is the first step in transforming students' perception of writing. In creating a culturally conscious classroom, I explain how students' funds of knowledge can contribute to the classroom learning and reciprocity of transfer.

In order to obtain the necessary data for this thesis, I conducted three case studies of a selected group of students from my English 5A/B courses at California State University, Fresno. CSU Fresno uses a directed self-placement method for all incoming freshman in place of a placement examination. Students have three options: English 10 (Accelerated Academic Literacy), English 5A/B (Academic Literacy) and English 5A/B (Academic Literacy) in conjunction with Linguistics 6, a course meant to provide further assistance and instruction language, reading, and writing. Because English 5 A/B is stretched out over two semesters, it is at a less accelerated pace than English 10 and is recommended for students who need more time or feel less comfortable or prepared for academic writing. CSU Fresno's first-year writing program recommends this class for students who "[H]aven't done a lot of reading and writing" or who "[F]ind reading and writing

difficult.” English 5A, which usually begins in the semester the student enters the university, consists of shorter writing assignments and ends with “more complex reading and writing.” English 5B, which most students take in the spring semester, builds on English 5A and focuses on “longer and more complex reading and writing tasks.” Due to its two-semester stretch, this option helps make the transition into college-level writing easier and is thus the option selected by most incoming freshmen.

The case studies I conducted consisted of two things. First, I began by collecting all writing assignments that my students had written in English 5A/B which reflected the objectives of my research topic. These writing assignments included major writing projects along with drafts, a midterm portfolio, a final portfolio, shorter writing assignments, Blackboard discussion board posts, in-class quick writes, group work, and reflective responses to class discussions. Additionally, I conducted two focus groups, one in the middle of the semester and one at the end of the semester. The questions I asked during these focus groups asked participants to reflect on how the work of the course had helped them feel included in the writing classroom (see Appendix F for a list of questions used). Each focus group consisted of four student participants (for a total of two focus groups) and lasted approximately one hour each. I also audio recorded these focus groups in order to incorporate students’ responses in my own research. Following these focus groups, I conducted three 30-minute one-on-one interviews with three (of the eight) selected students for individual case studies.

Review of the Literature

After reading the literature on the current conversations in the field of composition, I identified four critical themes that serve to contextualize my own

research objectives. These four themes, namely cultural consciousness, prior knowledge, funds of knowledge, and academic literacy, provide an understanding of the current state of Latino/a students in the FYW classroom. The conversations on this scholarship demonstrate how current perspectives, practices, and ideologies of academic discourse work against Latino/a students' cultural identities. I use the issues presented with each theme to create practices for my own classroom that respond to my research question and inform writing instructors how we can change what we do in order to create "space" and establish equity for minority students. Furthermore, the conversations in CRT and LatCrit intersect with these themes because they demonstrate the need for incorporating pedagogical practices that acknowledge the intersectionality that impacts how Latino/a students experience higher education and the FYW classroom specifically. The four themes discussed in the literature review are as follows:

Cultural Consciousness

Due to the overwhelming diversity that exists within the Latino/a community, writing instructors need a clearer understanding of the students that make up the FYW classroom. Factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, class, and language intersect in various ways within the Latino/a population currently enrolled in higher education. Cultural consciousness demonstrates the significance of acknowledging the differences that exist between Latino/a students from middle-class backgrounds whose families have resided in the United States for many years in comparison to Latino/a students who are first-generation, low-income, and possibly undocumented immigrants. Acknowledging these differences is reinforced by Octavio Villalpando in his article "Practical Considerations of Critical Race Theory and Latino Critical Theory for Latino

College Students” where he explains that the conversation on cultural consciousness and culturally-relevant teaching help us see how current issues stem from a lack of awareness (from instructors) on the identities of the students they serve. According to Villalpando, understanding the circumstances that surround the cultures of students is foundational to implementing practices that help students understand their value and place in higher education. The cases studies discussed in chapter 3 demonstrate how being culturally conscious has a direct impact in the way students respond to learning and choose to engage in the classroom and the influence this has on their confidence as writers.

Prior Knowledge

For the purpose of my research objective, prior knowledge refers to the knowledge students have accumulated throughout their formal education as well as within their primary discourse communities. This is explained by Mary Jo Reiff and Anis Bawarshi in their article “Tracing Discursive Resources: How Students Use Prior Genre Knowledge to Negotiate New Writing Contexts in First-Year Composition,” where they note that when entering new writing situations in higher education, many students find ways to repurpose prior knowledge. According to Reiff and Bawarshi, although some students are successful at doing this, there are also many who are not. In each case, the outcome is influenced by various factors (316). For Latino/a students specifically, home literacies, native and/or home languages, and their experiences prior to entering higher education impact the kind of prior knowledge they have as well as how much of this can transfer to academic discourse. Instructors and institutions have the responsibility of aiding in the transfer of prior knowledge. Additionally, Reiff and Bawarshi emphasize that the teaching of genres is effective in helping students understand how the rhetorical

situation impacts their writing which enables them to better repurpose this knowledge for future writing. This is because genres help students revisit prior learning and analyze how they've used specific writing skills in the past.

Understanding how prior knowledge works and how it varies from student to student informs instructors of the importance of teaching explicitly and scaffolding to create agency and equitable space in the classroom for Latino/a students. The qualitative data I gathered in chapter 3 helps us better understand how and why it is important for teachers of writing to acknowledge students' prior knowledge. Even if a lot of this may not transfer directly, we still need to ask ourselves, how can we use students' prior knowledge to more effectively serve them?

Funds of Knowledge

Funds of knowledge is defined as “the historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being” (Gonzalez et al. 133). This concept includes the knowledge and skills inculcated within Latino/a students' primary discourse communities. Oftentimes this cultural knowledge is suppressed throughout their K-12 education, ultimately, making these students believe that they “know nothing,” that they are “not prepared,” or that they do “not belong” in higher education. To combat deficit-based approaches oftentimes used in academic spaces, these funds of knowledge provide insight to the ways Latino/a students perform and what influences such performance. My research presented in chapter 3 responds to the importance of acknowledging funds of knowledge so that we can begin to create equal access to higher education for all students.

Academic Literacy

A large number of Latino/a students enter the K-12th system with English as a second language and experience difficulty in transitioning into a new language, whether they are fluent in their first language or not. Even Latino/a students whose first language is English, may still have other languages spoken at home which may impact the way they speak, read, and write in academic settings. Additionally, being a first-generation college student may also mean that literacy in “standard English” is not consistently or effectively practiced at home since the home literacies of Latino/a students may be in a completely different language. These differences create gaps in the academic literacy of these students, many of whom are placed in ESL courses. Despite the efforts of such courses, these usually continue to widen the gap between home literacies and academic literacies, and are not always successful in meeting the needs of students, leaving them unprepared for college level writing. Tom Fox’s book *Defending Access: A Critique of Standards in Higher Education* presents his research on the institution’s definition of academic literacy and the access to higher education that comes with this. His research informs us how this definition contributes to the marginalization of Latino/a students in IHE.

Overview of Chapters

This thesis is composed of a total of five chapters including this introductory chapter. Chapter 2 is the literature review, written as a mixed-genre, which focuses on four themes critical in helping us understand the circumstances that impact Latino/a students’ educational attainment. This chapter is a mixed genre in the sense that it interconnects conventional “academic writing” that informs us on the current conversations in composition while using personal narratives, to substantiate the issues demonstrated through the scholarship in each

specific theme. The qualitative data I gathered for this thesis is presented in chapter 3 as a response to the themes in the literature review. Furthermore, these case studies informed the coursework and practices in my first-year writing classroom. This discussion, analysis, and reflection is provided in chapter 4. Chapter 5 of this thesis provides further recommendations, suggestions, and further implications for teachers of FYW at the university. Attached to these five chapters are five appendices (A-E) that provide specific detail on the assignments, class work, and discussions I implemented in my English 5B course. Additionally, Appendix F provides a list of the questions I asked during focus groups and one-on-one interviews.

The purpose of chapter 2 is to provide a review of the literature on some of the current conversations regarding specific themes that impact the experience of Latino/a students in the FYW classroom. I present an in-depth discussion of cultural consciousness and culturally responsive teaching, prior knowledge, funds of knowledge, and academic literacy as a way to present gaps in the current scholarship. These gaps demonstrate how the current scholarship fails to address the experiences of Latino/a students in FYW classrooms. Furthermore, this chapter is written as a mixed-genre using scholarship from the field of composition as well as the theories of critical race theory (CRT), and Latino Critical Theory (LatCrit) in conjunction with my own narratives growing up as a Mexican-American, Latina and Mixteca in the United States. Through these narratives I demonstrate how the themes addressed in the literature review impacted my early years in education and have eventually followed me in my years as a graduate student. This mixed-genre chapter demonstrates how the current scholarship in composition does not adequately address the intersectionality that exists within the Latino/a community in higher education. My decision to use this approach was because I wanted to

demonstrate how my cultural values, language, and indigenous roots influence who I am both in and outside the classroom. These components are inextricable to my identity as a student, and thus, in asking students to suppress these, we create a bigger problem that contributes to widening the gap of accessibility.

Chapter 3 presents the qualitative research that demonstrates how the implementation of pedagogical practices that lean on cultural consciousness in the FYW classroom aids in alleviating the current marginalization of Latino/a students by creating agency and student engagement. This qualitative research is further discussed with three individual case studies on three Latinas (Noemi, Isabel, and Cecilia) from my English 5B course from the spring 2017 semester at CSU Fresno. Through their writing, focus groups discussions, and one-on-one interviews, these students provide their own accurate accounts of how reading texts by Latino/a writers, using critical race methodologies in the FYW classroom, and freely discussing their experiences as Latina students allowed them to gain agency, find their voice, and realize their significance and potential in the classroom and the university. This data demonstrates that integrating texts by Latino/a writers, using writing assignments that provide students with opportunities to write about things that matter to them, and acknowledging and repurposing their funds of knowledge is beneficial in helping them feel welcomed and validated as a valuable contributor to the classroom learning

Chapter 4 presents a discussion and analysis of specific pedagogical practices I created and implemented in my English 5B course in the spring 2017 semester. Each of these practices was created using CRT and LatCrit as frameworks. Each practice includes a description of the assignment or activity, a discussion of its critical methodology element, and its application to the current scholarship in composition. After discussing these pedagogical practices in detail,

I explain how the case studies I present in chapter 3 relate to these practices and, most importantly, the implications I've considered as I continue to work with first-year writing students.

In the final chapter of this thesis, I provide further suggestions and recommendations that take into consideration the theoretical frameworks discussed in chapter 1, the themes presented in chapter 2, the three cases studies conducted in chapter 3, and the pedagogical practices compiled in chapter 4. Additionally, in chapter 5, I provide the overarching links that address how the current conversations in the field of composition do not fully address the intersectionality and funds of knowledge of Latino/a students. Overall, these recommendations demonstrate how the teaching of writing can be restructured to alleviate the marginalization of Latino/a students.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Latino/a students constitute the largest minority group enrolled in universities across the nation. Despite their large presence on university campuses, many if not most of them, experience some kind of marginalization as they attempt to navigate higher education. The difference in both environments is impacted by various cultural factors, which impact the experiences of Latino/a students as they attempt to traverse through the world of higher education. Some of these cultural factors are as follows: for many Latino/a students English is their second language, a large majority of them are first-generation college students, home literacies differ greatly from the academic literacy of higher education, and finally, several of them are low-income coming from some of the poorest, most disadvantaged neighborhoods and school districts that provide few resources for college readiness. In order to improve the educational attainment of Latino/a students, it is first necessary to understand how these factors work to impact their experience in IHE.

As indicated, the theoretical framework presented in chapter 1 serves as a lens for addressing the clashing of cultural factors experienced by Latino/a students in higher education. I focus my overall discussion using the three elements of Solorzano and Yosso's critical race methodologies in order to address the current scholarship in composition. In presenting this scholarship, I analyze how IHE fall short of creating transformational learning experiences for minority groups and, in this way, continue to deny access while upholding the dominant versus inferior complex in academic settings. These elements from critical race methodologies in education work together to achieve the following: "[acknowledge] the "intercentricity of racialized oppression"; "[challenge] White

privilege, [reject] ‘notions of ‘neutral’ research or ‘objective’ research,’ “[expose] deficit-informed research that silences and distorts epistemologies of people of color”; and “[challenge] ‘traditional research paradigms, texts, and theories used to explain the experiences of people of color’” (Solorzano and Yosso 25-26). Within this theoretical framework, the issues in composition studies outlined in this chapter lie within the themes of cultural consciousness, prior knowledge, funds of knowledge, and academic literacy.

In this chapter, I present a review of the literature in composition focusing on the four themes of cultural consciousness, prior knowledge, funds of knowledge, and academic literacy. In presenting and discussing these four themes in detail, I demonstrate the current gaps in the scholarship, which helps us understand the problem of marginalization experienced by Latino/a students in academic settings. Identifying these gaps, demonstrates how my own research is a contribution to the field. This contribution is further discussed in chapter four of this thesis. This review of the current literature will demonstrate how Critical Race Theory and Latino/a Critical theory can be used as models in the composition classroom in order to create a more inclusive classroom and more effectively support all students.

Purpose and Overview of the Literature Review

Today’s colleges and university campuses look very different in comparison to when the university was first established. Although that may seem like an obvious observation, this prompted my research due to the fact that in a time when college classrooms are as diverse as our nation is, the institution has failed to fully acknowledge and address such cultural differences, which has resulted in the current problem minority students face with marginalization and

lack of access. For this reason, culturally responsive teaching is relevant as a way of creating space in higher education for Latino/a students and other minority groups. Much of the current scholarship that addresses minority students leans on conversations from the 20th century that discuss the emergence of African American students in higher education. Scholarship such as that presented by Tom Fox in his article “Basic Writing as Cultural Conflict,” discusses literacy and discourse differences between African American English and the “standard English” upheld by the institution. Other conversations like the one carried out by Jessica M. Vasquez in her article “Ethnic Identity and Chicano Literature: How Ethnicity Affects Reading and Reading Affects Ethnic Consciousness,” explains how Chicano/a and Latino/a literature improves the learning of Latino/a students in literature courses. However, the conversation of cultural consciousness in the FYW course is one that still needs to be addressed in a more effective manner. The issues I have outlined in chapter 1 regarding the cultural factors that impact the educational attainment of Latino/a students serve as a framework for the themes analyzed here.

The scholarship presented in this chapter provides insight into the experiences of Latino/a students in higher education in connection to culturally responsive teaching. Despite the significant contributions made by scholars in the field, a current gap exists in composition which has led to the overgeneralization of Latino/a students as a homogenous group. Furthermore, this overgeneralization means IHE have failed to acknowledge the intersectionality of the Latino/a student population. Additionally, another gap in the scholarship exists with the way academic literacy is defined in the FYW classroom which works to keep Latino/a students marginalized. In observing the ways in which academic literacy emphasizes one way of writing over another and upholds “standard English” over

other languages and dialects, it becomes clear that the problem of “access” that kept African American students out of higher education in the 1970s continues to be a problem today impacting African Americans, as well as Latino/a students and other minority groups.

In chapter 3 of this thesis, I present three case studies which respond to the issues in the current scholarship analyzed in this literature review. My research contributes to the field of composition by demonstrating how the clashing of multiple cultural factors impact the educational experience and attainment of Latino/a students as they navigate higher education. Using the three elements of critical race methodologies presented above, I seek to raise awareness to the challenges embedded within culture that invariably impact the Latino/a experience. Furthermore, this literature review will help teachers of composition understand the importance of being culturally conscious in order to acknowledge all students. In this way, teachers working with Latino/a students can do their part in empowering students for success. Finally, my response to this literature review brings awareness to the importance of redefining what academic literacy is in order to create access for all students.

For this literature review, I discuss and analyze four themes: cultural consciousness, prior knowledge, funds of knowledge, and academic literacy. Cultural consciousness refers to the importance of being mindful of the diverse cultures that make up the writing classroom. In observing cultural diversity, individual factors such as race, ethnicity, language, gender, and socioeconomic status need to be acknowledged. Culturally responsive teaching is a pedagogical practice that seeks to form a culturally sensitive space in academia. I use Reiff and Bawarshi’s research on prior knowledge to inform how all students, irrespective of culture or language, enter the classroom with some kind of knowledge. This prior

knowledge may benefit some, hurt others, or do both, yet it is up to the writing instructor to create opportunities for such knowledge to be used effectively. The explicit teaching of genres provides such opportunities. Nicole Gonzalez et al.'s concept of funds of knowledge adds to this prior knowledge by demonstrating how knowledge goes beyond that which is learned in a student's formal education. Latino/a students' rich culture provides them with various forms of knowledges that they continue to use as they navigate higher education. The topic of academic literacy continues to be a conversation that sparks debates since our nation's historical timeline provides various instances of when "college-level writing" or "standard English" worked to deny access to minority groups. For this reason, all four themes are essential in demonstrating current gaps in these conversations in the field of composition. The gaps discussed in this chapter will prompt my contribution to the field as further discussed in detail in chapter four of this thesis.

As part of the conversation on each theme, I integrate personal narratives from my early years in education up to my experiences as a graduate student at California State University, Fresno in Fresno, California. Since the objective of my thesis is to demonstrate how the cultural and linguistic identities of Latino/a students oftentimes clash with the discourse of the institution denying access to these students, I decided to weave my own narratives into each theme as an example of resistance writing to demonstrate how agency is created *when* students are given opportunities to use their funds of knowledge and cultural experiences in their own writing. With this mixed-genre, I sought to demonstrate how creating access to literacy requires we acknowledge the diversity in culture and language. Just as I told my students, I too realized that my own narrative would not be accurate without using my native language. Furthermore, since I myself teach FYW, both at the university and community college, it was important for me to

understand, through first-hand experience, how the cultural tension experienced by many of my students can have a detrimental impact on their education unless we create opportunities for them to repurpose their prior knowledge.

Cultural Consciousness

Colonization is the act of taking over a land and erasing the culture and language of its native inhabitants. We see this phenomenon occurring with Latino/a students entering higher education only to restrict their cultural and linguistic identity to the point that they begin to lose a sense of who they are. Our history books are filled with accounts of colonization happening all over the world, yet such accounts are not fully accurate. Colonization did not end with Christopher Columbus or Hernan Cortez. In fact, its legacy lives to this day as we see cultures and languages being ignored, suppressed, and literally erased in the public education system as well as institutions of higher education in the United States. I refer to this phenomenon as *una muerte cultural*, a cultural death. *Es esa muerte cultural que me motiva a descubrir mis raíces indígenas. Raíces que me llevan a mi gente que ocupaba la tierra Mexicana antes que los Españoles.* This cultural death motivates me to discover my indigenous roots. Roots that take me to my people who occupied the land long before the Spaniards arrived. This land is known as La Mixteca, an arid, mountainous region which covers the western half of the state of Oaxaca. Here in this region, inhabit los Mixtecos, my ancestors, who happen to be the third largest indigenous group in México. We call ourselves *Nuu Savi* which translates to “People of the Rain,” *Gente de La Lluvia*. Unlike our neighboring states, most of our blood is indigenous, which has left us living in marginalization, poverty, and discrimination throughout history, and in the present day. Our own government did not watch out for us. Over the past decades, large

groups of Mixtecos have migrated to the Central Valley pursuing the “American Dream” as a form of survival, only to continue to live in oppression by working long hours in the fields and facing educational barriers.

My father’s first language was Mixteco. My grandmother never learned Spanish. After leaving the municipio of Juxtlahuaca, my father had to learn Spanish to communicate with others. My father was displaced from his culture. After marrying my mother and having their first three children, my parents decided to settle in Culiacán, Sinaloa. Miles away from their pueblo of San Miguel Cuevas in Juxtlahuaca, Oaxaca, they slowly began to lose a part of their culture, especially when they chose to not pass their native language down to their children. Today, I speak the language of the colonizer. My Mixteco tongue was taken away from me, ripped away from its roots before I even had the opportunity to decide for myself who I wanted to be. *Mi lengua Mixteca está perdida. Nunca es tarde*, I tell my parents, while at the same time agreeing with them when they say *Ya estás muy grande*. Is it truly ever too late, to acknowledge and become immersed in one’s culture? Is it ever too late for us to acknowledge the cultural and linguistic identity of an individual or group of people? My earlier statement of colonization not ending with Columbus or Cortez can be seen in our educational system today. Today, I call it marginalization and a lack of access to educational attainment. My parents tell me I’m too old to learn Mixteco. I have to settle with speaking Spanish instead of the language my grandmother spoke. Today, I am shocked by the similarity I see in classrooms where students are not allowed to express their linguistic identity. In fact, just like my parents suppressed their indigenous tongue, today we see Latino/a students doing just that and losing their native language. The curriculum of the classroom does not resonate with their own

cultural and linguistic experiences leading to *una muerte cultural* which in some cases takes a drastic turn on students' educational attainment.

Intersectionality is more than recognizing the clash of cultural factors. In fact, intersectionality begins with acknowledging the differences of a community. Most people who know me simply see me as Mexican or Latina. In fact, the term Latino/a is simply used to homogenize all peoples from Latin America. Nationalities, languages, religious faiths, spiritualities, and traditions are not acknowledged. The problem in not acknowledging these diversities leaves Latino/as in one group while disregarding the various factors that make them unique and, which in turn, have a huge impact on educational aspirations and attainment. Today, our college campuses are more diverse than they've ever been. Unfortunately, a larger number of our students get clumped into such ethnic groups that omit the individuality and intersectionality of who they are. This is where cultural connectedness comes into play. Here I refer to the article "Ethnic and Urban Intersections in the Classroom: Latino Students, Hybrid Identities, and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy," where Jason Irizarry defines cultural consciousness as: "a framework for understanding the fluid nature of culture and the variety of ways that members of a cultural group express their cultural identities" (27). While being culturally conscious consists of knowing and acknowledging the differences amongst individuals based on race, ethnicity, language, beliefs, class, gender and any other factor that impacts how an individual or group of people establishes their own identity, the concept of being "culturally connected" emphasizes the need for understanding *how* these factors *interconnect* within cultural groups. For instructors working with Latino/a students, it is easy to ignore this diversity and thus continue the cycle of marginalization. Here is where my frustration begins. I demand that our cultural

experience be read, acknowledged, and validated. It is important for everyone to understand that not all Latino/as are the same. Cultural connectedness is important so others can see that while I am Mexican-American and Mejicana, it is equally important that you know I am also Mixteca. So, don't suppress the richness of my culture. Do not erase the only language my grandmother spoke during her 96 years of life. Do not ignore the diversity that is me. I call this resolution, cultural consciousness, *una consciencia cultural que aprecia le diversidad que trascende nuestras vidas*.

How does being culturally conscious of this intersectionality within IHE aid in fostering inclusion and engagement for all Latino/a students? Juan C. Guerra discusses this in his article, "Emerging Representations, Situated Literacies, and the Practice of Transcultural Repositioning," by emphasizing that Latino/a students be acknowledged as valuable contributors to the classroom learning. This, however, requires that educators acknowledge the present marginalization and find ways to fix the problem. What we see today is that in most cases students are told that they need to become part of the dominant group even when given no resources or pathway to do so. To be culturally conscious, Guerra calls for transcultural repositioning, which is making shifts in "cultural, linguistics, and intellectual terms" (15). This means that cultural intersectionality needs to be addressed in order to bring changes to current issues regarding cultural, linguistic, and intellectual identity. Unlike assimilation, transcultural repositioning offers students a way to be creative and create possibilities for their own success as they form an identity as Latino/a university students. One way of doing this is by providing students with opportunities to incorporate their native languages in the writing classroom. This is also about allowing students to create their own cultural identity. Instead of categorizing all "brown" students as a homogenous, Latino/a

identity, why not ask students how they identify culturally and linguistically? Validating the lived experiences of Latino/a students, creates a “connectedness” from the part of writing instructors which is critical in improving educational attainment since this helps us be more informed of who our students are. However, understanding such experiences may require more than simply knowing how a student identifies racially and ethnically speaking.

When considering the educational attainment of Latino/a students IHE, being “culturally connected” with the experiences of this community is critical in creating a more welcoming and accessible “space” as well as providing more opportunities for academic success beyond the classroom. In his article “Practical Considerations of Critical Race Theory and Latino Critical Theory for Latino College Students”, Octavio Villalpando presents a discussion on the key elements of CRT and LatCrit which collectively work to respond to issues in education by insisting on the need for cultural consciousness. Villalpando presents an overview of both theoretical frameworks by explaining how these can be used as lenses to accurately perceive the “patterns, practices, and policies” (42) that influence racial inequality in education. Recognizing these is key to being conscious of the cultural differences within the Latino/a population in IHE. Additionally, CRT and LatCrit consider the Latino/a experience, by carefully observing how sub-factors such as language variation, immigration, identity, phenotype, and sexuality (Villalpando 42) interconnect and complicate the Latino/a identity, which can negatively impact the Latino/a strive to attain a higher education (Villalpando 43). This means that being culturally conscious is a matter of understanding *how* these factors intersect from different directions to further complicate the situation of this group.

My own path to attaining a higher education demonstrates the intersection of such cultural factors. I am one of eight children. I watched my five older

siblings live according to the cultural and religious expectations set in place by my father, the head of the household. Having no formal education of his own, my father was not able to understand the importance of years and years of schooling. *Con que sepas escribir tu nombre, eso es suficiente* my father would tell us. After all, if he was still alive and healthy, it seemed he hadn't missed out on much. My grandmother insisted my father pull us out of school so we could start working to help out with the rent and bills. My cultural upbringing had already decided my future for me. I would graduate high school, get a job to help with the rent and bills, get married, and have as many children as God would give me. If I could find myself a good husband to submit to and bear him many children, I would make my parents proud. This, in my culture, was the default for "success," being an honorable daughter as well as a good wife and mother. It's not rare for me to find other Latinas, Mejicanas and Mexican-American women with similar experiences. We are bombarded with cultural expectations as a result of our gender, religious beliefs, parents' education, and socioeconomic status that make it difficult for us to be something "different." My Nana married at 16 and had 12 children. My Abuelita married at 16 and had 10 children. My mother married at 17 and had 8 children. I am 26, I am not married, and I have no children. In my culture, marriage seems difficult at my age, or as my sisters tell me, *ya se me paso el tren*. My child-bearing days are gone. *Cuando te vas a casar? Vas a estar bien grande para tener hijos* are the words I usually hear. In fact, had I given in to such expectations and cultural pressures, I would not be writing this right now. However, most individuals outside the Latino/a community are not aware that in 2017 Latinas are still having to decide whether to become wives and mothers in their late teens and early 20s or pursue higher education while sacrificing their child-bearing years. How can we understand that this still happens? We can begin

by being culturally connected and acknowledge that not every student walks the same path to obtain a degree in higher education.

Furthermore, being culturally connected also requires a culturally responsive curriculum in the FYW classroom which validates the experiences and diverse identities of all Latino/a students. Such culturally responsive curriculum works by integrating the cultural identities of Latino/a students in the readings, topics of discussion, and writing assignments using a culturally responsive pedagogy which provides them with opportunities to write about their own experiences and identities. This is important because we need to consider *how* this affects our students' perception of knowledge, the classroom, and writing as a whole. Fostering this cultural consciousness and implementing such pedagogies allows teachers to know more about our students which helps us go from perceiving them as a group, to perceiving them as individuals, from receptacles, to critical thinkers and holders of knowledge. In doing so, we also come to a greater understanding of our students' needs, which then impacts our curriculum and teaching practices.

Culturally responsive teaching. In her book *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice*, Geneva Gay defines culturally responsive teaching as “using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant and effective for them.” One way of making this learning “more relevant and effective” for Latino/a students is through the incorporation of texts by Latino/a writers in the FYW classroom. This argument is supported by Jessica M. Vasquez in her article “Ethnic Identity and Chicano Literature: How Ethnicity affects Reading and Reading affects ethnic

consciousness.” Regarding cultural consciousness, Vasquez notes that “[S]tudents from privileged classes find their attitudes, tastes, and behaviours validated by the teachers, curriculum, and educational system at large, leaving non-privileged students...excluded or marginalized on campus in much the same way as their communities are devalued in society” (904). With this, Vasquez demonstrates the need for such texts as a way of aiding in creating inclusive classroom learning. Vasquez’s study demonstrates how Latino/a students’ reading and discussion of texts by Latino/a writers helped them gain confidence in having their cultural experiences validated through these discussions. This act demonstrates “cultural connectedness” because in assigning such readings, teachers provide opportunities for Latino/a students to discover their cultural capital, which they referred to as “ownership of the text’ meaning that they were finally the ones with the inside knowledge, which flowed into a new-found sense of ethnic validation” (909). In addition to becoming aware of a community of writers who shared their lived experiences, these students “also located a literature of which they felt a valid and valuable part, giving them confidence” (910). Through this study, Vasquez notes the active classroom participation by Latino/a students as a result of being engaged with texts by Latino/a writers. She concludes this to be a way for students to express their new found social value: “In the context of discussing a Chicano text, Latinos felt socially valuable, personally justified and were therefore inclined to claim space and speech” (911).

This act of integrating texts by Latino/a writers who share similar experiences to these students is further discussed in Steven Schneider’s article “Teaching Culturally Relevant Literature.” Here Schneider provides a definition for such pedagogy quoting Joan Parker Webster who defines this as “literature in which students ‘can see themselves...represented accurately and respectfully’.”

Webster's definition is an example that demonstrates the need to expose current narratives and research that "silences and distorts epistemologies of people of color" (Solorzano and Yosso 26). A non-Latino writer will not produce an accurate account that fairly acknowledges the struggles of the Latino/a community. Schneider shares his decision to integrate texts by Mexican-American writers in his classroom, situated in a border community, because such readings and discussions appealed to students' interests as well as cultural knowledge and thus, contributed to their academic success.

The practice of integrating culturally relevant literature is critical in fostering inclusivity and improving learning experiences in the writing classroom. However, Gay mentions that a culturally responsive teaching pedagogy also involves using "performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant and effective for them." Here we see Solorzano and Yosso's argument of using critical race methodologies to challenge "traditional research paradigms." This practice is demonstrated by Irizarry when he makes a significant point referencing Gay's research. He states: "A culturally responsive teacher has an understanding of how learning style can be influenced by culture and teaches to the diversity of learning styles present in the classroom, thus validating students' cultures" (22). In demonstrating cultural consciousness, Irizarry's research supports the need for teachers to implement practices in the classroom that address the hybridity and intersectionality of cultural identities. This is important because as Irizarry informs us, the rise in students of color in classrooms means we now have many students with teachers who cannot relate to them due to a disconnection in cultural knowledge and identities (22). Moreover, Irizarry echoes the foundation of CRT and LatCrit as follows: "Students' strength of ethnic or cultural identity varies depending on a variety of factors including

length of time spend in the United States (particularly for immigrant or migrant students), how their culture is viewed in school, and other variables such as gender and social class” (23). This is important when we consider that Latino/a identity consists of multiple ethnic groups all which are impacted by the factors mentioned above.

Assuming a homogenous identity for such students is problematic because it can result in teachers failing to see the values and practices that matter the most to our students because they stem from their cultural identities (Irizarry 23). Irizarry also addresses practices on the appreciation of linguistic diversity as a component of the classroom as well as pedagogical practices that provide opportunities for students to voice their opinions regarding cultural oppression. Regarding linguistic diversity, the author notes the importance of “[S]tudents want[ing] those aspects of their culture that are important to them affirmed” (Irizarry 25). The question is, how does this look in a writing classroom? A strong analysis of current pedagogies can convince us that the course curriculum does very little to represent the diverse students we serve. Incorporating counterstories or testimonios in the classroom is one way to allow students to do this. Solorzano and Yosso define counterstories as “a method of telling the stories of those whose experiences are not often told (i.e., those on the margins of society)” (32). This genre works against institutional racism and promotes the need for a racial reform. Similarly, in her article “Disrupting apartheid of knowledge: testimonio as methodology in Latina/o critical race research in education,” Lindsay Perez Huber notes that testimonios have been used to tell the stories of marginalized communities with the goal of bringing awareness to these problems and creating change. Perez Huber provides this definition for the genre of testimonio: “a verbal journey of a witness who speaks to reveal the racial, classed, gendered, and

nativist injustices they have suffered as a means of healing, empowerment, and advocacy for a more humane present and future” (644). Such genres that ask students to relate their own experiences to larger conversations from course texts or current events allows for critical thinking and cultural validation.

Conclusively, CRT and LatCrit emphasize that cultural consciousness requires acknowledging the diversity that exists within the Latino/a population due to the various countries, cultural practices, languages, and diverse worldviews involved. As Villapando notes: “It is important to understand, for example, whether Latinos students may be coming from regional or local farm-working families who are likely to have a vastly different economic experience from middle-class Latinos” (47). Instead of using a “one-size-fits-all” approach, we need to acknowledge the diversity of culture within this group so as to serve them more effectively in the classroom. This diversity of culture establishes the need for “cultural connectedness,” which uses culturally responsive teaching to validate the cultural capital that students bring to the classroom. Irizarry stresses that “Instead of being seen as deficient and being punished for being who they are, students in classrooms with culturally responsive teachers are free to share those parts of their identities that are not usually represented in the classroom and use them as tools for learning” (25). Allowing students to openly share how they identify, culturally and linguistically, can enhance their learning while acknowledging that their race, culture, socioeconomic status, and language are an inextricable part of who they are. This affirmation works to repurpose students’ knowledge and use it for their own benefit and success.

Prior Knowledge

Throughout my years in K-12, I was always the smart kid in class. I got straight A's, or mostly straight A's, my peers copied my homework, and I was always the one to get the assignments done first. For the most part, I would say that the knowledge I learned in first grade helped build a foundation for what I would later learn in second grade. Second grade did the same for third grade, third for fourth, and so on. By the time I got to eighth grade, I had participated in the Spelling Bee every year and had six trophies to prove my triumphs. Even though each grade consisted of different, longer assignments, the K-12 curriculum was set to transfer knowledge from one grade to the next. Many of my friends struggled as we moved on to the next grade. They complained the work was hard, while I used the knowledge gained in the previous school year to help me understand the new material being presented. Entering college, however, was somewhat of a different experience. Although some classes such as art history and introduction to biology, simply called for memorization of the facts, other classes such as English and psychology proved to be a little more challenging. In these classes, I was being asked to think critically, something which I rarely, if ever, was asked to do my previous years in the public education system. In my English 1A class at Fresno City College, I attempted to make use of my prior knowledge for a literary analysis and ended up getting a "C." I was shocked. I had never received a "C" on a writing assignment. This grade made me question my intelligence and my writing ability. How was I supposed to know how to do this assignment if I had not been explicitly introduced to it previously?

Fast forward six years later to my first semester teaching, and I see many of my students asking the same question. I had a particular student who would approach me after class almost every class session and ask the same questions I

had already addressed when explaining the assignment. She never asked any questions during class even after I asked the class “Are there any questions about this? Is this clear?”, and all students nodded their heads in agreement. At first, I thought she was simply too shy to ask in class, yet her shyness was not able to explain why it seemed to me she never understood an assignment. From the start, it was clear to me that she was a returning student, so it made sense that many years of being out of school had an impact on her learning and her ability to refer to her prior knowledge and adapt them to current writing situations. However, after speaking with her one day after class, she informed me that she had not gone through the traditional K-12th system as I had gone through, or as many of her peers had gone through. In fact, she had immigrated to the United States much later in life and had completed a high school equivalency certificate (GED) in place of a high school diploma. Her prior knowledge from her home country was very different from what many of my other students had been exposed to. This student needed explicit instructions of the coursework, and much of the information she learned in this writing class would be repurposed for future writing situations.

As the previous scenario indicates, this specific student knew a lot of things when she entered my class. However, a lot of her prior knowledge could not easily transfer into a college writing course. There are also other cases, like that of my primary and secondary school classmates, who due to their inability to successfully grasp the knowledge of one academic year, struggled in the next grade with the new material being presented. Despite the cultural factors that keep Latino/a students out of IHE, it is important to realize that those currently in the university have all entered with knowledge accumulated throughout their years in public education, and most importantly, from their primary discourse

communities. Whether this knowledge transfers easily, if at all, it is important to realize that some knowledge is still there. In their article “Tracing Discursive Resources: How Students Use Prior Knowledge to Negotiate New Writing Contexts in First-Year Composition,” Mary Jo Reiff and Anis Bawarshi address how students make use of prior knowledge when entering new writing situations. Reiff and Bawarshi mention that all students make use of prior knowledge, some by “breaking down their genre knowledge into useful strategies and repurposing it” and others by “maintaining known genres regardless of task” (312). Having said this, the authors assert that all students find some way to make use of their prior knowledge, although not all may be as successful at doing so. When we take this into consideration, we must reconsider the resources that are available in order to ensure all students understand and are capable of repurposing this information. Some of the questions instructors should ask themselves are “what previous experiences and resources do they [students] most draw on and why? What experiences and resources do they hold onto most persistently, and which do they relinquish more easily, and why?” (Reiff and Bawarshi 313).

Additionally, we also need to consider that prior knowledge for Latino/a students consists cultural knowledge inculcated upon them from birth and which continues to shape them by providing them with the tools they need to survive in a society where they have to deal with issues of racism, sexism, and classism (113). In response to this, Solorzano and Yosso’s research, indicates the need to “challenge White privilege” and expose “deficit-informed research” (25). It’s not that Latino/a students, or struggling students in general, don’t know anything, it’s simply that their prior knowledge differs from that of the student who is not struggling. Reiff and Bawarshi note that one of the ways we can use prior knowledge to the advantage of students is through the teaching of genres. The

authors define genre as: “typified and recognizable rhetorical actions based in specific rhetorical situations” (Reiff and Bawarshi 318). When used appropriately in the writing classroom, genres can help students understand writing conventions more clearly, recognize, and make the connections with prior knowledge, and find ways to successfully adapt to new writing situations (Reiff and Bawarshi 314). Thus, whether they’ve done the exact assignment before, or something similar, students are able to reflect on what they *already know* and use that in each new writing situation. Reiff and Bawarshi establish that “previously acquired skills and knowledge will take different shape and be applied differently in new contexts” (316). The thing is, more students than are actually aware make use of prior knowledge in new writing contexts, although many of them do not know they’re doing it, unless explicitly prompted to do so. Presenting genres in the FYW classroom can both trigger and guide students to recognize how they have used specific writing skills in the past, and, therefore, this can help them understand how they can use them once again. Similarly important, both Reiff and Bawarshi note that the confidence level of students has a large impact in the learning that occurs and how they choose to use prior knowledge in new writing situations.

When we consider Latino/a students’ low confidence in their writing abilities, we can see why addressing prior knowledge in the writing classroom is crucial to their academic success. In *Agents of Integration: Understanding Transfer as a Rhetorical Act*, Rebecca S. Nowacek poses a question that arises in the field of composition: “How exactly do students use their prior knowledge to learn new genres?” (97). This question is particularly important because instructors need to be aware of the students that enter their classrooms and the prior knowledge they bring with them. Writing knowledge is not something which is acquired in one sitting, or even throughout one semester. Thus, possessing

positive prior knowledge and being able to use it in a new situation and setting, demonstrates a student's ability to make use of that knowledge to their advantage. Nowacek reminds us that teaching genres explicitly, can ensure such information is retained and reused over the course of the semester and throughout a student's college career. The goal is to use prior knowledge that leads to students "act[ing] as an agent—seeing the connections for and [sell[ing] their ideas] to [other] students" (Nowacek 125). What then can instructors do to support and scaffold genre knowledge? Essentially, Nowacek suggests they can provide students with "opportunities and reasons to discuss their understanding of antecedent genres" (126). Helping students dig into their memories and bring back their prior knowledge helps them determine how to reuse their prior knowledge accordingly.

Funds of Knowledge

When I began first grade in August 1998 in a predominantly white school, right away I noticed I was different. I looked different that many of my peers. My parents looked very different from most of the other parents. Neither my parents nor myself knew any English, so in this way, we were different from everyone else. From my first day of being immersed in this new environment, I became completely aware of the vast differences that existed between both "worlds," one world being my home and the other being my elementary school. The languages spoken in each were different. The food consumed in each was different. In fact, during my first year of school, I ate very little for lunch because of how unaccustomed I was to the foods served in the school cafeteria. My first 5 years growing up, all I knew about food were my mother's *tortillas de harina*, which she made for us every morning, along with *frijoles recién hechos*, and *huevos batidos*. My house was very different from my classroom. At times, I wondered what any

of my classmates or my teacher would think if they stepped foot in my house. My family and I lived in a tiny, 1-bedroom house. The bedroom had a closet in between which separated it into two separate sections. My mom used old bed sheets as curtains to serve as doors between both sections creating the illusion that we had two bedrooms instead of one. One “bedroom” was shared by two of my uncles who lived with us. The other “bedroom” was shared by my four sisters and me. Because the space was so small, and because we were poor, we did not have any beds. Instead we slept on the floor. This way after waking up every morning, all we had to do was fold our blankets and stack them on top of each other leaving space for us to play, do our homework, etc. In the living room, instead of having couches, like most families, we had an old metal bunk bed which my parents had purchased from the thrift store. My oldest brother slept in the top bunk, and my little brother and sister shared the bottom bunk. My parents slept next to them on the floor. Going to school was basically entering a different world for me. For this reason, the entire time we lived in that tiny house, which was from 1st to 10th grade, I got used to balancing my existence in two separate worlds, the world that existed in my home and the other world that was my school. I never really knew how to transfer one over to the other. At school, I spoke English as a means of survival and in order to fit in and do well academically. I learned things and took in ideas that were very alien in my household, considering that Spanish and Mixteco were the languages spoken in my home and my father had no formal education of his own while my mother only had a third-grade education. Even my three older siblings, who were in their teens when I started first grade, had a limited primary education in Mexico before coming to the United States, at which time my father decided they needed to work to help pay the rent and bills. This ability to balance two-separate world, however, got more challenging when I

started college at Fresno City College in August 2010. Being the first one in my family to go to college, I had to figure many things on my own. I myself experienced this *choque* which Anzaldúa explains. At home I am a passive, obedient, traditional Mexican daughter. At school, I am an active learner and an outspoken contributor to learning. I like to challenge conventions and traditions within the educational system. With my professors and colleagues in the master's program, I talk about teaching pedagogies, institutional racism, and marginalization, citing scholars such as Paulo Freire and Geneva Smitherman. However, after a long day on campus, teaching two classes a day and working on my research, I need to go home and have conversations about the upcoming birthday party or the never-ending *quehaceres de la casa*. In a way, I cease to be an educated graduate student and English instructor, and instead I become a *buena y responsable hija*, honoring my parents and understanding that every choice I make impacts my entire family. It was, and still is, no easy task. Thankfully, I was able to cope with *choque* and find ways to balance both worlds without completely falling apart.

Today, a large number of Latino/a students experience a similar struggle of balancing two worlds much like I did as a child and still continue to experience. Jason Irizarry emphasizes that in addition to being culturally conscious, we need to integrate students' cultural knowledge in the writing classroom to be used as "tools for learning." This pedagogy, known as funds of knowledge, is defined by Gonzalez et al. as: "the historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of *knowledge* and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being" (133). When we consider the significance of these funds of knowledge, we can understand the purpose they serve in the writing classroom and why this is critical to improving the learning experience of Latino/a students. One way to

explain it is that the knowledge students accumulate from their homes is inextricable from their identity and, in this way, impacts their academic performance. Attending a predominantly White school and having only White teachers my first 10 years of school, I would make the argument that most of my teachers did not “get me.” What I mean here is that because we had two separate, and very distinct, cultures, they were not able to understand where I was coming from or why I acted the way I did. I wonder if any of my teachers thought I did not have a dad since not once did he attend a parent-teacher conference or open house. It was always my mom because my dad, perhaps due to his own lack of formal schooling, assumed it was enough for my mom to go. As long as we didn’t cause problems at school, he didn’t see a reason to be invested or ask questions. The knowledge I accumulated from home followed me every day. However, I had to figure out a way to keep that locked inside me during school hours. For Latino/a students like myself, traditions, language, food, and our very own names cannot be separated from our identities. For example, prior to starting first grade, I was known as Lupita. This was the name my family used to refer to me. This was the only name I knew and responded to for the first seven years of my life. When I started first grade, I became Guadalupe. During the first couple of days at school, I would write Lupita on my assignments, but after my teacher made a comment in class about how she didn’t know who Lupita was, I knew I had to start spelling out Guadalupe on every one of my papers. After school, I became Lupita again, and I felt comfortable being able to express myself as such. Perhaps, if my teacher would have taken the time to ask me if I preferred to be called Lupita or why I was called Lupita when my school records said Guadalupe, then I would have had a different, more positive experience starting first grade.

Adding to this conversation, C. Alejandra Elenes and Dolores Delgado Bernal refer to these funds of knowledge as community cultural wealth in their article “Latina/o Education and the Reciprocal Relationship between Theory and Practice: Four Theories Informed by the Experiential Knowledge of Marginalized Communities.” According to Elenes and Delgado Bernal, this is significant in the education of Latino/a students because it demonstrates how “students draw on their diverse linguistic and cultural resources to function in schools and society” (69). This can be seen in instances when students rely on their knowledge of the Spanish language in order to help them understand what they’re reading in English. The authors emphasize that a way for Latino/a students to succeed academically is by being given opportunities to be led by their own culture and diversity in their learning. For example, unlike their White counterparts, many Latino/a students continue to live at home during their first years in college. Thus, language and culture continue to impact them on a regular basis. The skills and values they learned at home still influence how they perform in school. This then becomes a conversation on acknowledging why our students do certain things a certain way.

In his article “Funds of Knowledge at Work in the Writing Classroom,” Chris Street shares his application of funds of knowledge in his writing classroom closely discussing the importance and benefits of this pedagogy. Due to the vast difference that exists with the discourse of the academy and the discourse of Latino/a students’ households, Street notes that students’ funds of knowledge oftentimes “conflict with the teaching practices and curricula of school” since such schools “facilitate the exclusion of students and parents by establishing activities that requires specific majority culturally based knowledge and behaviors about the school as an institution” (22). These practices, in many cases, lead educators to

adopt deficit-based approaches focusing solely on these “unreconcilable differences.” However, in supporting Gonzalez et al.’s research, Street demonstrates how, in situations where teachers are not physically able to go into their students’ homes, funds of knowledge can still be brought to the classroom through writing. Street notes that in having students “write about their household funds of knowledge ‘teachers [can] academically validate the background knowledge with which students come equipped’” (23). Furthermore, repurposing funds of knowledge in the writing classroom also illustrates the reciprocal transfer of learning because students are given opportunities to teach their cultural capital to their teachers and peers. As Street writes: “They [his students] became my teachers, allowing me a unique glimpse into their lives outside of school. In doing so, I found myself learning many important lessons about the cultural and familial resources of my students” (24). This is an example of exposing “deficit-informed research” as discussed by Solorzano and Yosso; instead of making assumptions about the behaviors of our students, we should seek to understand how their culture influenced these behaviors. In my own experience, growing up in a conservative household, my father always taught us to keep to ourselves and not act in such a way to draw attention from others. This was especially emphasized in outside settings such as school, church, or other public places. This had a direct impact on my behavior in school. I focused on getting my work done and keeping my grades up. I also learned that commenting in class, although the teacher encouraged us, was not necessary. There was no need for me to “show off” (as my father called it) how smart I was. In my experience, this didn’t affect me as much in elementary school, possibly because my grades showed I was still learning. However, had I had low grades, it is possible my teachers would’ve assumed I was so quiet because I didn’t know the material. The skills I was taught at home were

the ones I used to help me function in school even if they weren't always beneficial.

Additionally, students' funds of knowledge also aid in helping them gain access to academic literacy that is essential to college success. In demonstrating the benefits of funds of knowledge, Street writes that "Becoming literate means taking full advantage of social and cultural resources in the service of academic goals" (24). In his case, this helped him get to know his students on a more intimate level and eventually prompted him to find ways to better approach them. In working with first-year writing students, we should ask ourselves what knowledge and skills, influenced by culture, our students use to function in secondary discourse communities. Like Street, we can use that information to inform the kinds of assignments we assign our students or the kinds of conversations we have in the classroom to ensure we don't create additional barriers to their success.

Moreover, understanding funds of knowledge is also a way to validate Latino/a students and affirm their valuable contribution to the classroom learning. This is supported by Dolores Delgado Bernal in her article "Critical Race Theory, Latino Critical Theory, and Critical Raced-Gendered Epistemologies: Recognizing Students of Color as Holders and Creators of Knowledge" where she writes the following: "Although students of color are holders and creators of knowledge, they often feel as if their histories, experiences, cultures, and languages are devalued, misinterpreted, or omitted within formal educational settings" (106). The author refers to these students as "holders of knowledge" to emphasize their funds of knowledge and the contribution they make to the classroom learning (108). Moving away from deficit-based approaches, seeing students as "holders of knowledge," instead of focusing solely on what they lack, is essential to improving

the state of Latino/as in IHE. Clearly, there is new material to be learned when entering new academic settings; however, instead of seeing students as empty receptacles waiting to be filled with the information we throw at them, we should see students as contributors of knowledge. This perspective can make students more willing to take the information we give them if we help them understand that all information is beneficial in helping them “become agents of knowledge who participate in intellectual discourse that links experience, research, community, and social change” (Villalpando 113). Linking one’s lived experiences and funds of knowledge with the discourse of the academy is imperative in creating a “space” for Latino/a students in academia. The best way to empower them is by giving them opportunities to experience this new community so they can see how they can contribute to the learning using what they already know. Solorzano and Yosso’s research helps us understand how funds of knowledge are critical in moving away from distortions and negative stereotypes of Latino/a students that deny access to higher education.

The three elements presented in chapter one focus on finding ways in which we can help Latino/a students challenge traditional ways of learning and conventional academic genres which were established without such students in mind. When we begin to move away from such paradigms, we are able to see how much our students do know. Furthermore, and most importantly, in repurposing their funds of knowledge, we enable our students to see for themselves how much knowledge they already possess, which in fact also works as a motivation for even more learning.

Academic Literacy

If you were to meet me for the first time and heard me speaking Spanish, you may be tempted to conclude that I don't speak English, or I don't speak it very well. You may also conclude that even if I speak English, my writing and reading are probably not that good since, after all, English is my second language. I've had people make such assumptions about me in the past based on the color of my skin, my nationality, or my appearance in general.

On April 1999 in Easton, California, I was a little Mexican girl nearing the end of first grade. When I first started, eight months earlier, my English vocabulary was limited to the words I picked up from watching PBS every morning. I started school with the label "English Language Learner" on my record because my parents indicated Spanish was my first language and was the only language spoken at home. At school, I did not know how to communicate with my teacher since she was White and spoke only English. I am sure I was the first "Guadalupe Remigio" she had ever had in her classroom. She had probably had several Kellys or Samanthas. The last names "Smith" and "Davis" were popular in my school. My classmates looked at me funny. My skin was dark brown in comparison to their peachy, light complexions. Even the other three "Mexican" kids in my classroom could pass as White. I was the brown girl who spoke no English and kept to herself quietly taking in new information with the passing of each day.

When April came around, my teacher selected me and another classmate to represent my class for the first-grade Spelling Bee. I wasn't exactly sure what that meant. Explaining it to my parents was just as difficult. *¿Qué es eso?* my mom asked. *¿Porqué tienes que ir? ¿Y qué vas a hacer?* my dad wondered. I wasn't exactly sure either. All I knew was my reading and writing were advanced in

comparison to my peers. My vocabulary of the English language was grand, and I had mastered how to spell each word I was introduced to quite well. My teacher knew I had a good chance of winning, which I eventually did. I am not sure how many noticed it, but I would like to tell you that on that day, April 1999, a little Mexican girl who knew no English eight months ago, won the first-grade Spelling Bee. She defeated all her peers who spoke English from the day they were able to form words. She defeated the kids whose parents read to them in English every night in order to fill out the weekly reading logs while I read to myself because my parents did not know how to speak, read, or write English. Even their Spanish literacy was limited considering my papa did not go to school for a single day in his life and my mama completed a third-grade education in Mexico. Sometimes, when I didn't have a book to read at home, which was often the case, I would make up the title *The Brown Dog*, *The Fun Dinosaur*, *I Can Read*. Simply put three words together and you can make up any children's book title.

My academic literacy was impressive, contrary to what scholars have labeled as a deficit for "ELL" and "ESL" students like myself. In fact, I believe these labels and being placed in these courses, at times, stunt the literacy growth of students who speak English as a second language. Because I was not pulled out, but was instead completely immersed in the classroom, I was able to take in vast amounts of knowledge everyday allowing me to grow at the same rate as my English-speaking peers. However, because even to this day several Latino/a students do not get such opportunities, and instead, many of them get placed in ESL courses throughout their K-12th years where they are oftentimes taught at a lower level in comparison to their peers, they ultimately end up graduating from high school with reading and writing levels that are not adequate for university reading and writing.

In his article “Basic Writing as Cultural Conflict,” Tom Fox focuses on the discourse of the academy, which creates cultural conflict for minority students. Fox discusses this using the focus of basic writing in IHE, and how the structures and pedagogical practices of these institutions work to emphasize a deficit gap, which keeps minority students out of such institutions. This exclusion is the result of the institution’s narrow view of literacy and their focus on “academic English” as the dominant language. Fox notes that such narrow views “tend to reduce writing to a set of discrete skills to be learned, especially the countable ones such as punctuation and spelling” (66). Because many minority students are non-native English speakers, they are more likely to encounter difficulty in grasping all the rules associated with “academic writing.” Failure to grasp such skills leads IHE to conclude that minority students are deficient and in this way, not prepared for college writing.

Adding to this, Fox presents a discussion of David Bartholomae and Patricia Bizzell’s take on the topic of exclusion and cultural conflict. According to Fox, Bartholomae “describes the academy as having ‘peculiar’ ways of knowing, ‘specialized’ discourse, giving the impression of a large distance between what students know and all they need to know” (qtd. in Fox 69). Similarly, Bizzell adds that “basic writers learn the conflict of world views ‘immediately and forcefully when they come to college..., when they experience the distance between their home dialects and Standard English and the debilitating unfamiliarity they feel with academic ways of shaping thought in discourse” (qtd. in Fox 70). Along with Fox, these scholars’ research demonstrates the cultural conflict that minority students experience when entering the discourse of the academy. When these students (many of whom are first-generation, immigrant, non-native English speakers) encounter the institution’s views on academic literacy, they experience

discomfort in being told: “We write a different ‘English’ here, forget what you know” (Fox 70). In many cases, this leads to the suppression of students’ native and/or home language because they are forced to believe that such languages interfere with their ability to fully grasp the conventions of “standard English” (Fox 71). Fox’s analysis of academic literacy as a form of denying access to minority students, demonstrates the importance of acknowledging Latino/a students’ inextricable cultural identity in order to resolve issues of institutional racism and cultural oppression. This further supports Solorzano and Yosso’s call for challenging “traditional research paradigms, text, and theories” (26), used to make generalized assumptions about these students as a way to justify why they are not prepared for the discourse of higher education.

Fox refers to this phenomenon as a *Clash of Cultural Styles* in which student’s cultural identities, knowledge, and ideas acts as a barrier to their ability to effectively communicate with “academic English” (72). This “clash” is in every way created by the institution’s inability to understand students’ funds of knowledge. Instead, IHE insist on upholding a narrow definition of academic literacy, traditionally put in place to benefit White students. Fox’s research highlights how such misunderstandings lead to poor performance and, in this way, excludes minority students. Fox writes:

Among them are educational practices which foster the belief that large gaps exist between what students know and what students need to know; these practices, in turn, stem from mistaken ideas about the value and characteristics of both students’ discourse and academic discourse and, in this way, excludes students of color by making them believe that they “really do not belong in the university because they are different.” (81)

Essentially, Fox argues that what is needed are practices that “Legitimize the cultural discourses students bring with them” and “challenge the notions...that those discourses are somehow inadequate to do academic work” (82). Students’ funds of knowledge and critical race methodologies thus serve to address this issue of cultural conflict with the objective of challenging marginalization.

Scholar Juan C. Guerra discusses his own experience as a Latino and the struggles he faced (largely influenced by academic literacy) in trying to create his own “space” in the classroom. His research supports the theoretical framework of critical race methodologies that informs us of the need to implement changes that “[challenge] White privilege,” using the narrow definition of academic literacy as a starting point. Furthermore, this also connects to the importance of rejecting “notions of ‘objective’ research” (Solorzano and Yosso 25) since such research fails to fully account for the diversity within the students we serve. In echoing Fox’s concept of cultural clash, Guerra refers to the current education system as a system of oppression “that benefits those who already have and continues to disadvantage those who still have not” (12). This is because the institution’s view on academic literacy discriminates against non-native English speakers. Guerra emphasizes understanding the difference between a dominant language and a marginalized one (14) and providing Latino/a students an opportunity to improve their academic literacy by meeting them where they are. This calls for a new perspective for the institution and teachers regarding what constitutes academic literacy and how this definition needs be inclusive of all students. A more inclusive definition requires an understanding of the intersectionality of Latino/a students’ identities and experiences as well as realizing that although home literacies do not always transfer effectively, this does not imply a student does not belong in higher education.

Adding to this conversation of the inextricable aspects of a Latino/a student's cultural identity, Victor Villanueva discusses literacy as a memory which lives in the mind for the extended period of one's life. In his article "*Memoria* Is a Friend of Ours: On the Discourse of Color," Villanueva writes: "to keep alive the memory of assimilation denied, a truism turned to myth, to try to hold on to, maybe even to regain, that which had been lost on the road to assimilation" (9). Here, Villanueva mentions "assimilation" to note how students of color have traveled on a journey to be part of this new discourse community. Yet, even while trying to assimilate, this *memoria* is still present reminding them of the literacy of their first language, in Villanueva's case, Spanish. In discussing literacy, Villanueva's account demonstrates the presence of two discourse communities clashing with each other in his attempt to assimilate, while holding on to his primary language. As Villanueva states: "English is the only language I know, really. Yet Spanish is the language of my ear, of my soul. And I try to pass it on to my children. But I'm inadequate" (10). With these words, Villanueva emphasizes that language is critically and inextricably embedded in his own culture as a Latino. As a result of this, language cannot be separated from culture. They are both interconnected so that even with the passing of time and the introduction of new literacies and languages, one's native language remains a part of the individual within his or her memory. When referring to such *memoria*, which creates literacy, narratives, and discourse, Villanueva demonstrates how this is critically important as a way of telling and validating the experiences of communities of color. The memory that is embedded in their minds is their way of holding on to such stories that then become foundational to their academic literacies. These narratives are important because as Villanueva notes: "The narrative of the person of color validates. It resonates. It awakens, particularly for

those of us who are in institutions where our numbers are few” (15). Villanueva focuses on the importance of discourse communities, the academic one as well as the cultural one, since literacy within communities of color goes beyond the practice of reading and writing. Instead, Villanueva points out that literacy is in the mind, that is in the very being of these individuals. The author demonstrates how both literacies are important since the *memoria* of our literacy is necessary to maintain our cultural identities. For this reason, *memoria* needs to find its way into classrooms in order to acknowledge the diversity that currently exists in education.

Similar to Villanueva, James Paul Gee discusses the concept of language and how this is connected with literacy in his article “Literacy, Discourse, and Linguistic Introduction.” Gee writes: “‘Language’ is a misleading term; it too often suggests ‘grammar.’ It is a truism that a person can know perfectly the grammar of a language and not know how to use that language. It is not just *what* you say, but *how* you say it” (5). Gee’s interpretation of language is significant when we consider Fox’s discussion of literacy and how the narrow definition of literacy, as established by the institution, has worked to deny access to minority students. In this way, much like Villanueva, Gee emphasizes that language is connected with culture. As he notes: “It is not just how you say it, but what you *are* and *do* when you say it” (5). In discussing discourses, Gee defines these as “ways of being in the world; they are forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes” (7). Furthermore, Gee explains that the discourse community of the university can be extremely different from the primary discourse community of many students depending on their upbringing. Gee refers to the discourse of one’s home and culture as a primary discourse, whereas the discourse of the institution is called the secondary discourse. Ultimately, Gee adds

that the encounter between both discourse communities results in tension or conflict because of these differences as well as the individual's attempt to master one discourse over another. Additionally, Gee makes a point that "Discourses are not just ways of talking, but ways of talking, acting, thinking, valuing, etc." (10) and, in this way, explains the need for the concept of academic "discourse" to be expanded to include other things besides reading and writing in "standard English." For Latino/a students, discourse, as Gee notes, is applicable in various areas of their lives and is thus critical beyond the FYW classroom since it influences every act. Understanding this is important as we seek to make changes in the classroom that connect students' several discourses.

Conclusion

When we look at Latino/a students in higher education, there are various things we need to be aware of in order to help them succeed. The four themes discussed and analyzed in this chapter work to inform us how the things we teach and the ways we teach writing may contribute to the marginalization experienced by minority students. This marginalization varies from campus to campus and such issues may not apply to all Latino/a students. However, in seeking to create equitable spaces in the classroom that transform the learning experience of our students, it is important to acknowledge that cultural factors have a huge influence in the way Latino/a students perform. Being culturally conscious, understanding that students are not empty receptacles, realizing that students may respond differently due to their culture, and redefining what academic literacy is all work together to empower students through writing and create agency in the classroom.

In the following chapter, I present three case studies on students from my English 5B course at CSU Fresno. I use qualitative data I gathered from working

with these students to formulate a response to the four themes presented in this literature review. The account of each student provides insight to current issues in academia while also helping us understand our role as teachers of writing. Finally, each case study motivates us to consider new ways to teach writing that provide skills for academic success, while also sending out the message that the cultural backgrounds of students is not to be used as a way of explaining who will succeed and who will fail. Instead, we can acknowledge these differences and use them to help students become valuable contributors to the knowledge that comes with a higher education.

CHAPTER 3: THREE CASE STUDIES: THE NEED FOR A CULTURALLY CONSCIOUS CLASSROOM AND THE REPURPOSING OF STUDENTS' FUNDS OF KNOWLEDGE

In an effort to demonstrate the factors that impact Latino/a students' educational attainment, I spent time working closely with eight Latinas in my English 5A/B courses during the 2016-2017 academic year at California State University, Fresno, a Hispanic-serving institution. English 5A/B is a 2-semester option that fulfills the first-year writing requirement at CSU Fresno. In English 5B, I considered the current issues outlined in the literature review and structured the course to make room for three elements of critical race methodology in education that serve as foundations to addressing the current marginalization of Latino/a students in FYW classrooms. These three elements included "Acknowledging the 'intercentricity of racialized oppression'"; "Challenging White privilege, rejecting notions of 'neutral' research or 'objective' research, and [exposing] deficit-informed research that silences and distorts epistemologies of people of color"; and "Challenging 'traditional research paradigms, texts, and theories used to explain the experiences of people of color'" (Solorzano and Yosso 25- 26) Cultural consciousness in the FYW classroom is the first step in acknowledging the inextricable ways in which race and culture impact Latino/a students. It also provides a way to challenge White privilege and conventional paradigms and texts used in FYW and higher education as a whole. Understanding the prior knowledge of Latino/a students helps us expose deficit-based research that lead to assumptions that students "know nothing." The funds of knowledge of Latino/a students exposes distorted epistemologies of this group and instead makes them agents of learning. Redefining academic literacy is important since it leans on notions based on objective research that fails to consider how culture and

language impact how Latino/a students learn to speak, read, and write “standard English.” Such perception of academic literacy disregard home literacies and in this way, creates barriers to access and academic success for these students.

In English 5B, one of my goals was to determine and apply practical methods in the classroom that work to make the first-year writing classroom an accessible and equitable “space” for marginalized students. I also sought to create a space where orientation was focused on the learning as opposed to the grade, and most importantly, where the deficit-based approach to teaching was replaced with the contribution of students’ funds of knowledge. As a response to the literature review and the current scholarship in composition, the research that I conducted for this thesis will contribute to the field by filling in the gaps on academic literacy and prior knowledge. Through this qualitative data, I seek to demonstrate how the elements of CRT and LatCrit need to be implemented in the FYW classroom in order to make literacy accessible and combat deficit-based approaches by seeing students as holders of knowledge and repurposing such knowledges in the classroom. These case studies demonstrate how the Latino/a identity influences the way students perform and respond to the classroom learning with the ultimate goal of raising awareness for the need to redefine what academic literacy is when we consider the diverse home literacies of students. Understanding these concepts is critical in improving the experience of Latino/a students in higher education.

The three case studies that follow demonstrate how writing is a way of giving a voice to marginalized communities by challenging “privilege” as well as traditional paradigms of writing and literacy. Each student provides testimony to the importance of cultural sensitivity in the classroom and how that upholds the intersectionality of the Latino/a community. Furthermore, repurposing prior knowledge and funds of knowledge empowers students to succeed in their

educational attainments rather than focusing on the things they lack which oftentimes result from circumstances that are beyond their control. These students' experiences and thoughts on academic literacy raises questions on why the curriculum of writing courses fail to represent them by upholding practices established to work against Latino/a students and deny them access to a higher education. Each case study responds to the themes of cultural consciousness, prior knowledge, funds of knowledge, and academic literacy using Solorzano and Yosso's critical race methodologies as a framework. The testimony of these students brings awareness to the need for a transformation in the writing classroom that makes learning an inclusive and contemplative practice.

Methodology

I recruited eight of my own students from my English 5A/B courses from CSU Fresno's first-year writing program. After teaching English 5A during fall 2016, I selected a handful of students whose writing and cultural experiences could bring some kind of contribution to my own research questions and objectives for this thesis. At the start of the spring 2017 semester, I sent out an email to eight students who I selected to gather data for my research. I personally approached these students the next day, and all but one, responded right away that they would be available and interested. I provided students with a copy of the "Informed Consent for Educational Research" form approved by my thesis chair. As a group, I explained the form in detail to all research participants and informed them of the importance of their participation in this research project.

After receiving consent from all research participants, I began by collecting all of their writing assignments, both formal and informal (low-stakes). These included major writing projects along with drafts; a midterm portfolio, a final

portfolio, shorter writing assignments, Blackboard discussion board posts, in-class quick writes, group work, and reflective responses to class discussions. During the middle of the semester, I conducted my first focus group with four of the research participants. We met for one hour at which time I asked them four of the eight questions I had created for focus groups. At the end of the semester, I set up two meetings to meet with both groups once again for a 1-hour focus group where I asked them the remaining four questions. All eight questions focused on the topics of cultural identity, motivation to pursue higher education, high school literacy, prior knowledge, their thoughts on the English 5B curriculum, and the importance of culturally-relevant teaching in higher education.

All eight students I selected identified as Latino/a or a specific nationality within the Latino/a spectrum. Since my English 5B course consisted of 19 female students and 3 male students, this impacted my research group so that all eight of my initial participants were female. After analyzing their writing and responses to focus group questions, I selected Noemi, Isabel, and Cecilia (three of the eight original participants) for individual case studies. From the beginning, Noemi stood out as a hard-working, dedicated, and active classroom participant. She was the student who sat in the front, always asked questions, and was oftentimes the only one making comments or responding to questions regarding a reading or lecture. Despite her being one of my strongest writers, my reason for selecting her was more based on her humble attitude, thoughtful reflection, and honest writing. Noemi was not scared to share her own opinions and was very open about sharing with me and others who she was. For her, navigating higher education was definitely a challenge at times, but not one she didn't feel confident in overcoming. Unlike Noemi, Isabel was more reserved. She was the student who sat in the back of the classroom with great ideas and much knowledge which she often kept to herself.

As a Dreamer, Isabel experienced challenges that most of her peers would never have to deal with, and despite the political tension experienced across the country, she continued to hold on to her aspirations of completing her degree in agricultural education and becoming an ag teacher. Finally, Cecilia was the one student in my classroom whose participation was more prevalent than most students. She possessed a very giving and helping attitude, particularly in group activities. Cecilia experienced *choque* having to take care of her ill mother every day which at times conflicted with her school work. However, she had a very positive attitude and worked hard to excel despite these challenges.

Case Studies

In addressing the issues situated within cultural consciousness, prior knowledge, funds of knowledge, and academic literacy, I concluded that understanding how intersectionality works within the Latino/a community is critical in helping us alleviate current marginalization. In these case studies, I use Gillborn's definition of intersectionality as a term that "addresses the question of how multiple forms of inequality and identity inter-relate in different contexts and over time, for example, the inter-connectedness of race, class, gender, disability" (278). I use this definition in order to bring awareness to the complex, overlapping, and interconnecting factors that impact the Latino/a identity and experience in higher education. Oftentimes, research and demographic data tend to categorize "Latino/s" as one group made up of individuals bounded by similarities. Although I fully acknowledge such similarities, the qualitative data I gathered and the case studies that follow demonstrate how differences surpass similarities within the Latino/a community. I point to this in to help us understand the need for respecting and validating the experiences of *each* student instead of using models

such as the deficit-based approach to explain why Latino/a students tend to not do well in higher education or end up dropping out. In conducting these case studies, I learned the following:

- Cultural consciousness requires we acknowledge the intersectionality of the Latino/a identity which creates a sense of pride in who they are and where they came from. Acknowledging this leads to empowerment and agency. Cultural sensitivity is critical in creating positive learning experiences, which in turn, motivate students to continue their educational pursuits.
- Prior knowledge is not always transferred easily, but when we are explicit with our teaching and create opportunities for students to apply some kind of prior knowledge to a new situation, this allows for transformational learning and contemplative acts.
- Students' funds of knowledge are inseparable from their parents' funds of knowledge. Family serves as an inspiration to Latino/a students' writing as well as a motivation for wanting to excel academically.
- Academic literary needs to be redefined to represent the students we serve. We must ask ourselves: "In omitting texts by writers of color, what message are we sending to our students of color? How does this influence their learning and overall success in higher education?"

Noemi

Although Noemi was born in the United States, she identifies as Mexican American since both her parents were born in Mexico. In several class discussions,

as well as her writing, Noemi often interchanged between calling herself a “Mexican-American” and a “Mejicana.” She is very well in sync with her native culture and Spanish is her first language. Although Noemi is a first-generation college student, she is not the first one in her family to attend college. Her older brother attended CSU Fresno for two years before dropping out due to *choque* (cultural pressures and tension) which targets a large percentage of Latino/a students in higher education. I mention this because in addressing intersectionality, it is important to point out how Noemi’s life is in many ways similar, but also in many ways different, from how Latino/a students are often stereotyped. Although Spanish is her first language, this did not negatively impact her learning of the English language. In fact, she acknowledged in her literacy narrative in English 5A how Spanish aided her in learning to speak English as well as transfer this into her writing skills. Noemi was one of my strongest students both in her writing and contribution to class discussions. I would like to think of her as a leader who was not afraid to take advice from others and used that to improve her own skills.

Cultural consciousness. Taking AP English courses in high school and being a naturally active student, Noemi did not struggle academically with high school English. However, when we bring cultural sensitivity into the picture, she became aware of the lack of cultural consciousness in her public school where 90% of the student population identifies or is categorized as Latino/a. When asked about the kinds of writing she did in high school, Noemi responded: “A lot of the prompts that we read were based off books. And so, a lot of the books that we were reading weren’t at all Latino, written by a Latino or Latina. I don’t think it transfers into the writing assignments.” This reminded me of Jessica Vasquez’s argument on the way texts transfer to writing and further demonstrates the need

for incorporating texts within the curriculum that resonate with the Latino/a experience.

When discussing cultural sensitivity in the writing classroom Noemi told me that she enjoyed the cultural writing that made up English 5B. As a Latina, Noemi was in disbelief that a teacher would actually care to read about her own experiences or her cultural upbringing that shaped her into the person she is today. In seeing writing as a form of resistance and combat for oppression and marginalization, as noted by Solorzano and Yosso, Noemi came to see how writing was significant beyond the classroom and how literacy surpassed acts of reading and writing. She wrote in her final portfolio: “5B was the semester that really helped me get to know myself better, and I was able to express myself a lot better to other students and to teachers as well.” In fact, the use of native languages in the construction of the testimonio was beneficial to many of my students. I was shocked that out of all 22 of my students, 20 spoke a language other than English. This was the first time in her formal education that Noemi was given the opportunity to share her lived experiences using the language in which these occurred. I found this to be a powerful and active form of resistance, resistance to the marginalization and institutional oppression of students of color as well as resistance to learning methods and writing conventions that disregard the cultural experiences that impact how students develop before entering higher education. Noemi wrote: “Having the ability to use different Englishes, give an opinion and my own thoughts on a social topic...has given me a new perspective on writing.” Her decision to use Spanish instead of English in the dialogue of her testimonio, supports Solorzano and Yosso’s argument on the need of challenging traditional forms of learning and writing.

Despite the research on cultural consciousness, this concept continues to be left out of conversations used to inform the pedagogical application of the writing classroom. It is problematic that students like Noemi, graduating high school in 2016 who attend schools where 90% of the population identifies as Latino/a, are not represented in the classroom curriculum. To this problem, Noemi's response is one that continues to trouble me: "I feel like a lot of the educational books that we're provided, don't provide Latino writers, and I'm not sure why that is. I'm not sure if it's because there's very few, but those very few have done, have a lot of beautiful writing out there that should be shown to students. That will help them."

Prior knowledge. My English 5B class was focused on the teaching of genres as categories of writing that consist of specific guidelines and conventions determined by the writing situation. The first major writing project was a counterstory/testimonio which asked students to choose a specific account from their own lives on the topics of racism, sexism, or classism as way of bringing awareness to this social issue. I introduced the genre of the counterstory/testimonio by first introducing students to Solorzano and Yosso's critical race methodologies. We looked at various examples of this genre and broke down these texts in order to analyze how each author wrote his or her testimonio. This being a new genre, and one which is rarely introduced in FYW, I anticipated several students would struggle with grasping the purpose of it as well as the conventions. Noemi, however, was thrilled to be given the opportunity to write and share her story:

[B]eing able to write that, was very like heart opening that a teacher would actually listen to this and read it and consider it and see it as something that will help them get to know their student better as

well as help them experience a new type of writing that is very different from the rest of the writing that we did because that was very personal. We were able to write the way we wanted, and we could explore with new languages and put them into the writing as well.

As part of this genre, I introduced a lesson on “Different Englishes” where we looked at three authors, Amy Tan, Gloria Anzaldua, and Zora Neale Hurston in order to analyze how and why authors used native languages or variations of the English language in their own writing. This enabled students to see the rhetorical choice of integrating native languages or dialects of the English language within one’s own writing. With the counterstory/testimonio, I encouraged students to incorporate their native and/or home languages into their narratives. Noemi was one of the many students that took this lecture in consideration. After submitting her first draft of her testimonio, she went back and revised vigorously, and during the process; she made it her priority to rewrite her dialogue in Spanish. Leaning on the prior knowledge I knew she had with the Spanish language, I encouraged her to write her dialogue in Spanish in order to “bring her narrative to life.” Noemi was excited at the opportunity to incorporate her native language into her writing. When I asked her of her decision to use Spanish instead of English, she told me “[T]he language that I experienced that whole situation was all in Spanish. I think that Spanish has had a huge part of it that if I didn’t incorporate it, it wouldn’t have been the same writing if it were just all in English.” Despite this being a new genre, it consisted of certain things that connected with Noemi’s prior knowledge, that of her native language. With the readings and class discussion on “Different Englishes,” Noemi was able to take that prior knowledge (Spanish) and repurpose it for the writing situation at hand.

In relation to Reiff and Bawarshi's perspective on genre, I realized that introducing writing assignments by situating them within the rhetorical context of specific genres, helped students like Noemi better understand how writing in itself is a rhetorical act and how it allows us to write in different ways depending on the situation. When we moved on to other conventional genres such as evaluations, summaries, and the argumentative research paper, Noemi understood that these genres needed to be written differently from her testimonio. Some of the more conventional genres were ones she had been exposed to in high school, and which she could somewhat recall. However, the testimonio, letter to the editor, and blog entry were other genres that although new, she was able to pick up because they required her to write about that which she already knew, herself. More importantly, using Spanish in her testimonio made her writing that much stronger and her experiences as a Mexican-American much more real. Because Noemi's cultural upbringing, coming from a Mexican household, included experiences with sexism and her father's machismo, she was able to write her testimonio with few problems. When I interviewed her about this genre, she responded: "From this piece of writing, I learned that it is beyond okay to be free and break away from the formalness of academic writing. Writing is personal, and it is an act of bravery for many." In Noemi's case, her ability to repurpose her prior knowledge into a new genre was possible with the readings and discussion that helped her realize how she could do this. These kinds of opportunities helped her grow as a writer, characterized by her boldness and readiness to put her ideas on paper and be able to support why they're important. This is something that was true for every genre of writing we did in both English 5A and 5B. However, the rhetorical strategy of using native languages became more applicable in English 5B with the writing of counterstories and testimonios for which Noemi made it a point to tell me that

because Spanish was her first language, the language in which she's experienced some of the most critical moments of her life and the language of her mother, that she "felt like it was important to have it in [her] writing."

Funds of knowledge. Noemi attributes her strength and bold attitude to her mother, a victim of domestic violence, who went against the rules of her own culture and religion that state women should be submissive at all times and make divorce an act of social disapproval. Coming from a 1-parent household impacted by domestic violence, Noemi learned early on that higher education was key to her success as a Latina and as a woman. When I asked her about the role her family played in her pursuit of higher education, Noemi told me,

My mom learned quickly that we needed to do things on our own. And that we needed to, or that I needed to, be more prepared with my studies and have a career and be financially stable, so if I were to ever come across the same situation that she did, hopefully not, that I'd be better prepared how to control a situation and not leave without anything.

I categorize this parental support that transfers into values and morals placed upon children as an example of funds of knowledge. Noemi's mother was not able to receive a formal education because, as she informed me, her grandfather believed girls should not go to school. Yet even without a formal education, her mother still taught her things that helped prepare her for life as a college student. Words from her mother that stay with her to this day, and which she attributes as a motivation for her continuously dedicated efforts to school, are "una floja trabaja doble" which she took to mean "if we did not put 100% the first time, we would have to work on it again. If you want to get it out of the way, and you want to succeed,

then you better do it right the first time.” As a result of her mother’s experience with domestic violence, Noemi learned skills and values that she applied to her work in school.

Academic literacy. Academic literacy, as established by the institution, differs greatly from the home literacies of many Latino/a students. Noemi, for example, experienced literacy as a child in the Spanish language. Her mother read books to her in her native tongue. As a result of starting kindergarten speaking limited English, Noemi was pulled out from home room every week to help her with her English. Noemi admits that instead of helping, this impacted her learning so that instead of improving, she fell behind. With the topic of academic literacy, I bring back Tom Fox’s research on how this definition denies access to minority students. Fox informs us on this by stating: “We write a different ‘English’ here, forget what you know” (70). This demonstrates what many students like Noemi are told, even before entering higher education. In being made to believe that their native language interferes with their ability to grasp the English language, Latino/a students are forced to suppress their native and/or home languages. Regarding her ability to speak Spanish, Noemi told me:

When I speak Spanish, sometimes I forget words. I say things backwards, or it just doesn’t sound right sometimes. I try my hardest, but then sometimes I feel it transfers into my writing in the way that I can’t find the right words to say when I’m writing it in English, and I think of what I want to say or there’s a saying in Spanish, but it just doesn’t transfer right into writing.

She wouldn’t be the first student to experience this. In fact, many Latino/a students lose all, or parts of their native language, since American education asks

them to fully immerse in the English language, leaving no room for other languages except within the space of their homes. “My mom says, ‘se te esta yendo. It’s leaving. You’re forgetting words. You’re saying things differently. You’re not saying the proper words’” Noemi added. Fox’s research on academic literacy emphasizes that the constant misunderstanding of languages leads many to conclude that students who speak a second language are “unprepared” for academic discourses. However, I would argue that perhaps one of the reasons why many of these students don’t participate in the academic discourse is because their K-12th experience was made up of a curriculum that excluded them and left them with nothing to relate to. Noemi’s experience with high school English supports this lack of representation: “We were exposed to a lot of poems and readings that definitely didn’t resonate with Latinos at all. In my experience, at least, I didn’t think that they did. We analyzed a lot of different authors’ writing, a lot of different poets. But I never felt like it connected to us, culturally speaking to Latinos.” This lack of representation experienced by Noemi, connects to Solorzano and Yosso’s argument in support of critical race methodologies since not incorporating home literacies and writers of color contributes to the growth of “deficit-informed research that silences and distorts epistemologies of people of color” (25). As teachers of writing, we must ask ourselves how the exclusion of writers of color impacts the learning experience and writer identity of our students. Here I incorporate Gee’s idea that since language is connected with culture: “It is not just how you say it, but what you *are* and *do* when you say it” (5).

Isabel

Isabel identifies simply as Mexican. As an undocumented student, and current beneficiary of President Barack Obama’s executive program Deferred

Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), Isabel has struggled to feel accepted in this country. Although her work and contributions to her education may demonstrate otherwise, Isabel reveals how being undocumented continues to be the most extreme form of marginalization so that she feels hesitant to add “American” to her identity as a result of the constant oppression she has faced in her attempt to assimilate to the American way of life.

Isabel speaks English the majority of time, but still practices her native language at home with her parents as well as with Spanish-speaking friends. She is the first one in her family to attend university, but not the first one in her family to go to college. Her three older siblings have either an Associate’s degree or a certificate from a 2-year college. In fact, one of the benefits of DACA was giving her the confidence to take on something bigger since she was given an opportunity that her older siblings weren’t: “I knew that after that [receiving DACA], I couldn’t just settle for going to a community college. I had to try for more.”

Cultural consciousness. Cultural sensitivity, as the name implies, is about being aware and respectful and most importantly, acknowledge individuals and groups of individuals for who they are. In looking at CSU Fresno as a Hispanic-serving institution and in analyzing the data I gathered from my English 5A/B courses, I came to see, from my students’ responses, that it is very common for us to put labels on people or make assumptions about someone solely based on how they look. This prompted me to ask the questions: “Do we as instructors, know who our students are? How mindful are we of the students we serve and the factors that impact their educational attainment?” I asked each research participant why they thought it was important for students to be given the opportunity to share, through words and writing, about their cultural upbringing and identity.

Isabel responded: “Whenever we use labels to put ourselves in a category, people begin to make assumptions on who they think we are.” This is true even within the Latino/a community. For example, in looking at the 22 students that made up my English 5B course, it’s easy to assume they are all Latinos. Interestingly enough, when I asked my students in class how they identify, I received a handful of responses: Mexican, Mexican-American, Chicano/a, Mejicano/a, Latino/a, Hispanic, and Blaxican. Seven labels in one classroom alone. Yet, I did not put those labels on my students, rather I gave them full control in deciding their own identities. We must ask ourselves how omitting such groups out of the course curriculum, discussions, and course texts, negatively impact our students. When the curriculum is not representative of the students in our classroom, we must ask ourselves, how does that impact their learning and what does that tell them about their place in higher education?

In order to get a sense of what my students had already experienced, I asked them to tell me a little bit about their high school English classes and the kinds of texts they read in those classes. Of the several books they listed, only one of the titles mentioned was written by a Latino/a writer. Isabel’s response to the question, “what books did you read in high school English?” demonstrate her lack of enthusiasm or interest for such readings: “We read that 1984 or 18 whatever, that book. I know we did that senior year, and then we did, um I don’t know what that book is called, oh *Into the Wild*. We read that. So, it wasn’t really. I guess, just like the basic, what you have to read... White writers.” The fact that students like Isabel are aware that the default reading list is “White writers” made me upset, especially when we’re referring to a high school like the one Isabel attended where approximately 85% of the student population is of Latino/a origin. This is also problematic when we see how texts impact class discussions and active student

participation. Isabel told me that in her classes she wasn't really involved: "I guess it was just nothing about the conversations that we were having that made me want to be involved. It was just kind of, 'I'm here because I need to be here.'"

Unlike her experience in high school English courses, Isabel demonstrated her desire for learning and improving her writing skills in my class. She was motivated to improve her writing because now she saw it as something more than a task to be completed upon the instructor's request. She came to see writing as an act of empowerment that served as a platform to voice her ideas and opinions on specific conversations. When describing what she liked about the class, Isabel wrote:

We all got to have these conversations about the things that *mattered to us* [emphasis added]. It was either about immigration status, field workers, and all these things. It made it really easy just to say something and know that everybody else feels the same way or similar to you. So, I really liked, I liked that we got to choose the writing topics specifically because even if you didn't want to say it out loud, like you could express it in your writing.

She emphasized that this was extremely important particularly in a class like ours where a majority of the students identified as being part of the larger Latino/a community.

Prior knowledge. The genre of the testimonio was beneficial in my English 5B class in that it gave me a deeper understanding of who my students were. Furthermore, and most importantly, it gave my students the opportunity to share personal things about themselves with the objective of bringing awareness to social issues embedded within larger conversations of racism, sexism, and classism. At

first, this genre appeared to be difficult by many of my students including Isabel. Through her high school experience, Isabel had never been asked to write about herself. Instead, her English classes asked that she write analytical essays on books she either did not understand or find interesting. Since she had no previous knowledge of this genre, Isabel struggled with finding a topic. When we first talked about this it seemed she wanted to talk about issues experienced by farmworkers, using her family's experience as the narrative. However, she later changed her topic in order to write about her experience as the Latina president of her FFA chapter, a national organization predominantly made up of Caucasian students. After sharing her testimonio with her peers, I asked Isabel what she thought about the experience. She told me that her peers were very supportive of her testimonio even though at first, she was nervous and skeptical of how they would respond. "Are they actually going to believe me or are they going to think that I'm just saying this?" she asked herself. She was glad that in the end she was able to share her story, not only through her writing, but also verbally. Having taken multiple honors classes in high school, and being a smart student herself, Isabel was able to quickly grasp writing assignments such as the evaluation and argumentative research paper. On the other hand, she struggled with the testimonio and blog responses both examples of non-conventional genres. Rebecca S. Nowacek notes that genres can help students understand writing conventions more clearly and recognize and make connections to prior knowledge. This helps students find ways to successfully adapt to new writing situations (Nowacek 314). In the end, Isabel was able to understand the writing conventions for the testimonio, but she struggled at first due to a lack of prior knowledge with that specific genre. Through the introduction of genres that asked students to tap into their prior knowledge, reflecting on who they are and what factors have influenced

who they've become, students like Isabel were able to see how writing can create agency in the classroom. When asked about her experience in English 5B, she responded: "I liked that we got to choose the writing topics specifically 'cause even if you didn't want to say it out loud, like you could express it in your writing, and it was your own, so I really liked that."

Storytelling as funds of knowledge. Being marginalized as a result of being undocumented and living in fear of deportation did not stop Isabel's parents from using storytelling as a medium of communication and teaching. During an interview at the end of the semester, Isabel shared with me some of the struggles she experiences being undocumented. For this reason, she saw the writing done in English 5B as a way of releasing some of the frustration she felt. She also saw this as an opportunity to be vocal about a topic as controversial as illegal immigration without necessarily having to "talk" or reveal her own status. Isabel shared with me how her parents used storytelling in their household. Her parents would tell her:

You're here so you have these opportunities. Imagine if you were back home in Mexico like what life is like. It's not like we were part of this city in Mexico it was like unos de los ranchos. Say, at this age you would be doing this. You probably wouldn't have gone to school anymore after a certain point. You probably would've been home cleaning, doing this. So, it's more like take advantage of all these opportunities.

The storytelling used by Isabel's parents resonate with me. Growing up, my parents would tell me the exact same thing. Even to this day, my father doesn't cease to tell me stories about how he grew up and how blessed I am to have the

opportunity to pursue higher education. The persistent spirit that drove Isabel's parents' storytelling is what influenced her writing, particularly in English 5B.

Isabel was one of the shy and reserved students in my class. Although she would make some comments during class discussions or activities, for the most part, she kept to herself and worked closely with two classmates she felt comfortable with. Her writing, however, was a different story. Feeling marginalized because of her undocumented status, Isabel felt that writing was the medium by which she could be vocal about her opinion on controversial topics such as racism, discrimination, and illegal immigration. In her final portfolio reflective cover letter, Isabel wrote:

Before this class all the writing that I did was purely for academics, and I would only try to meet the basic requirements. I have learned how my writing contributes to the bigger picture, how to use counterstories/testimonios, and how to use different Englishes to make my writing my own. I have been able to write about topics that go so much more than for my grade. I learned about the importance of the bigger picture.

Academic literacy. The question of how prepared, or unprepared, students are for college reading and writing is a question writing instructors often ask themselves. In fact, all three students in these case studies were asked to write a literacy narrative their first semester in college in order to reflect on how the literacy practices they were introduced to in high school transfer over to college writing. Like the majority of my students, Isabel felt that high school hadn't adequately prepared her for college. The reasons for this are many. However, for Isabel specifically, her experience with academic literacy was not a very positive

one because of the texts she was assigned to read in high school. When asked if she participated in the classroom conversations, Isabel replied: “I wasn’t really involved” Reading George Orwell and Jon Krakauer did not exactly appeal to her interests as an undocumented Latina coming from a farm working household. Because, as Noemi pointed out, in high school English, the writing prompts usually stem from the assigned readings. Having to read books by White male authors isn’t necessarily impactful for an undocumented Latina student.

When Isabel first started my class, I soon realized she was one of the shy students who sat in the back, and although attentive, made little effort to participate in the class discussions. When working in small groups, she was more willing to participate. Furthermore, her exposure to writers of color in our English 5B course, helped her realize that she had something to contribute to the learning of the class. Isabel’s writing in the various genres we did in class demonstrate her very opinionated voice. She had opinions, she made arguments, she supported her ideas, she was open-minded. As English 5B came to an end, Isabel had demonstrated growth, not only as a writer, but as an individual. She was more confident in her ability to write and share personal information about herself including revealing her status as a DACA recipient in her blog post: “With DACA I also became a DREAMER. I will always be changing I do not plan on staying the same, although I am grateful to be a DREAMER I want to be a U.S Citizen one day.” In her case, Isabel told me she now realizes that had she been introduced to Latino/a writers as a high school student, she would feel more on board with the literacy of the institution. She believed this made a huge difference in the student she could’ve been, talkative and actively participating, as opposed to the student she currently is, more reserved and willing to participate only in small groups or through her writing. Her words on the importance of literacy that acknowledges

the experiences of Latino/a students were: “Having something that I can put my say into it makes it more, me be more attentive, me wanting to participate as opposed to having something that’s kind of generic not really provoking anything because that makes you want to be like more attentive.” Using her testimony, I argue the need for changing the academic discourse beginning with a student’s K-12th education up to their completion of a college degree. This brings us back to Fox’s discussion on access versus equity. Despite equity being upheld as the overarching theme of an American education, equity falls short of truly providing a fair learning experience for all college students. Additionally, as a result of such injustices, we are brought back to Fox’s discussion on access and how the literacy of the academy, in many cases, denies such access to minority students.

Cecilia

Unlike Noemi and Isabel who prefer one label, Cecilia had no exact preference as far as ethnic identity goes. Even though she always checks “Hispanic” or “Mexican American” on forms, for a long time she simply referred to herself as “American.” Today, she has come to embrace a more open-minded, fluid identity: “[A]s the years went by I learned to embrace my Mexican culture and I identify myself as Mexican American, Hispanic, Mexican; or a Chicana and Latina.” Her father was born in Los Prieto’s, Salamanca, Guanajuato, Mexico and her mother was born in the city of San Francisco. Her maternal grandmother was born in Chihuahua, Mexico and her maternal grandfather in Peru. Cecilia’s first language is English. In fact, she didn’t learn Spanish until she was in fourth grade in order to communicate with her cousins. Today, she is able to read Spanish, while writing in Spanish is still “a little more complicated” for her. Like many Latino/a students, Cecilia is the first one in her family to go to college. Her older

brother and sister got married quite young and began working “regular jobs” right away. Cecilia credits her father as the one who has motivated and supported her the most in her pursuit of a higher education.

Cultural consciousness and stereotypes. The kinds of writing we did in English 5B were meant to emulate the kind of practices I argue should be implemented in FYW. Beginning with the counterstory/testimonio, I wanted to give my students the opportunity to write in a non-traditional genre using both narrative and research to get their message across. Other assignments, such as a reading and response on “Different Englishes,” short paper on stereotypes, and blog entry on self-identity all demonstrate ways in which we can make the classroom a culturally conscious setting, creating a welcoming place with accessible learning. Regarding such assignments, Cecilia wrote in her final portfolio: “I really like this type of writing [referring to the various genres] because instead of teachers waiting to get to know their students through only their writing skills; it allows them to get to know them through one of their personal narratives.” To this she added: “The freedom of writing really helped us shape our own identity as a writer.” Cecilia enjoyed writing in different genres, whether they were conventional academic genres or not. I saw her put a lot of effort and dedication to her papers. Spring 2017 was a hard semester for her being her mother’s caretaker. Cecilia would finish my class around 9:15 am, drive back home to care for her mother, and come back to campus a couple hours later for her 12 pm class. Despite the many responsibilities she had and the challenges she faced as a Mexican-American student, Cecilia enjoyed working on these writing assignments and, for this reason, put a lot of effort into each one of them. During our interview, she brought up how she enjoyed reading Gloria Anzaldua’s chapter

on *las culturas que traicionan*. She also commented on the number of students in our English 5B class who knew how to read Spanish: “We all connected. I really liked it because, in most English classes, it’s just straight up English. Presenting texts that were in Spanish, presented the culture. I felt that I could relate to it. I felt more comfortable with it.” Cecilia’s comment reflects how being culturally conscious should influence the kind of texts we put into the course curriculum. This example of cultural consciousness reflects Solorzano and Yosso’s words that critical race methodologies seek to challenge traditional texts “used to explain the experiences of people of color” (26). Students can read a historical account by a White writer on the experiences of Latino/as in the United States. Yet, as an outsider, how accurate is this account? Does it effectively present these experiences, or does it distort them? How do texts like Anzaldua’s work to accurately reflect the Latino/a experience?

As we talked about the importance of acknowledging the cultural backgrounds of Latino/a students in the classroom, Cecilia’s response was simple: “It’s just a form of respect.” Her words impacted me because they made me think about my 22 Latino/a students who on more than one occasion told me that their high school English classes’ reading list was pure White authors. If acknowledging cultural diversity is a form of respect, then what is the effect of omitting Latino/a writers? Are we telling our Latino/a students that the writing of such authors is not “good” or that it is not “appropriate” for the writing classroom? Cecilia’s writing demonstrated how cultural consciousness through texts, discussions, and assignments is important because of the affirmation it brings to Latino/s students, many of whom are first-generation college students or experience other challenges as a result of *choque*. Cecilia commented on the importance of incorporating texts by Latino/a writers, by stating: “It would make

them [Latino/a students] feel comfortable because they are actually seeing that people do care where you come from, who you are, and what you're about.”

Ultimately, it is about improving the experience of Latino/a students in higher education and alleviating marginalization by helping them to not feel isolated but instead helping them feel a part of the institution.

Prior knowledge. Although the genre of the testimonio was a new genre to all students, there was a difference in how students responded to this writing assignment. Because they were used to writing academic genres that asked them to critically analyze texts, many students struggled with identifying a topic for their testimonio. Even though we went over critical race methodologies, looked at examples, and broke down the key features, students like Cecilia had difficulty writing within the categories of racism, sexism, and classism. Living in a place as diverse as the Central Valley, most likely had an influence on their experiences, so that several of them felt they had never experienced such discrimination in the past. This difficulty can also be due to the fact that many of them had never been asked to write on such topics; as a matter of fact, many are told not to write about these things. Even in some college classrooms, these topics are not discussed, which, in fact, only makes the problem worse. Something interesting I noticed was that the few students who struggled with coming up with a topic for their testimonio were those with a lighter skin complexion, whose first language was English and/or who had a parent who spoke English as well. For her testimonio, Cecilia wrote about how the divorce of her parents affected her and her brother growing up. Her narrative, although a powerful one, did not fit within the categories of racism, sexism, or classism. In cases like this, I asked myself if my students were in fact that sheltered from such discrimination or if they felt hesitant

to write about such experiences due to their own ideas that such things must not matter. This may help explain why no one had previously asked them to write about this. With this genre, I learned that students need to be given more time and more of a push to encourage them to deeply reflect on their own experiences so that they don't find themselves questioning whether such narratives matter.

As explained in the literature review, repurposing prior knowledge effectively and adapting to new writing situations successfully, depends on how we help students' dig into their memories. This helps us understand the importance of ensuring such concepts are introduced much earlier in the students' life. If Cecilia had been taught to critically question her surroundings and experiences as a "Mexican American, Hispanic, Mexican; or a Chicana and Latina," then she'd probably feel more adequate to share her testimonio without fear of it being accepted as accurate or important.

Life values as funds of knowledge. When I asked Cecilia what she learned at home (funds of knowledge) that she felt she could transfer into the university, her response was focused on life values and morals. In the "Mexican" culture, hospitality and giving are big. Cecilia noted how in her household she was taught to be polite and give to those who came to her for help. Her parents would tell her "Tienes que saludar." Preparing a meal and offering drinks to all visitors were also required any time someone stopped by. Generosity and respect are two values which she brought with her to the university and which she feels has helped her excel academically. In Cecilia's case, her example of funds of knowledge did not directly affect her writing; however, it did affect her performance in school. Cecilia was a student who worked well with others. During our peer-review workshops, she worked hard to provide her peers with effective feedback. Other

students leaned on her for support and feedback on their writing. In this way, she was a leader whose desire to give and help those around her was due to the values she was taught in her home.

Academic literacy. In discussing academic literacy, Cecilia's high school experiences were very similar to Noemi and Isabel's. In fact, the only book she read in high school written by a Latina author was *House on Mango Street*, and that was probably due to the fact that it was for a Spanish class. In her English courses, all assigned readings were Caucasian or African American authors. The only exception was junior year, when she was given the option of selecting a book of her choice for a book report. Cecilia selected *Like Water for Chocolate* by Laura Esquivel. Cecilia demonstrated her fascination for this book in comparison to the other texts she was assigned primarily because as she stated: "Knowing that it was a Hispanic author that wrote this book is just great, but then also connecting it to my background." By this connection, she was referring to her cultural roots. Cecilia began a conversation with her grandmother regarding some of the themes and scenarios described in the book. She said: "I went to ask my grandma. I was like, what was happening during this time and stuff, and so she would just tell me stories about it, and it's good to know where you come from that way when people ask you, you know, you could not only defend yourself but also inform them of how it was for your people and stuff." The fact that she could relate to this book helped her understand the importance of reading texts about the cultural experiences of people from Latin America: "It's kind of like having our voice to show people who we really are." Her own experience with reading a Latina writer relates to Fox's argument that what is needed are practices that "Legitimize the cultural discourses students bring with them" and those which "challenge the

notions...that those discourses are somehow inadequate to do academic work” (82). Cecilia’s response also resonates with Solorzano and Yosso’s argument that we challenge White privilege, which is reflected by omitting Latino/a writers. In fact, during these interviews, all my students pondered and reflected on why they were not introduced to Latino/a writers in high school. Were these authors’ writing “not as good” as White authors? Is it a belief, as Fox notes, that the discourses of these authors are “inadequate” for the classroom? The problem we have here is one of linguistic and cultural perceptions of inferiority or inadequacy which contributes to the marginalization of Latino/a students whose languages, narratives, and cultural experiences don’t always fit in with those of the institution.

Implications

In conducting these case studies, I learned a lot from the writing I collected and the responses these students gave me. From the accounts of Noemi, Isabel, and Cecilia, I learned that being culturally conscious is at times not seen as something important for students in K-12th. I say this because although the reading list for all three students did not include texts by Latino/a writers, they didn’t exactly see this as a problem at the time. However, when I asked them the question, and they reflected on their high school experience and compared it to the texts we read in English 5B, they were then able to see how that was an issue. I learned that students are trained to not question the educational system, their teachers’ instructions, or the texts or work they are assigned. Instead, they must do what they are told when instructed to do so. This is problematic because as Solorzano and Yosso emphasize, a one-size-fits all take on teaching writing is a form of discrimination since it fails to acknowledge the inextricable cultural

factors that influence the way Latino/a students take in new material and how they make sense of it.

On the conversation of prior knowledge, Reiff and Bawarshi's research does not address how students' native and/or home languages are an example of prior knowledge that can be repurposed in the FYW classroom depending on the writing situation. This rhetorical move was made by many of my students in their testimonios which helped them better understand how language is a rhetorical act that can also be used in academic settings. This was new to me especially when I realized that many of my students understood Spanish and used this knowledge to their advantage as we read Anzaldua's chapter.

Gonzalez et al.'s definition of funds of knowledge as: "the historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of *knowledge* and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being" (133), may make it a little hard for us to understand how we can apply it to the writing classroom. Yet, as I closely observed and talked to each of my students, I realized that their funds of knowledge are everywhere. For Noemi, this was rooted in the advice and encouragement her mother gave her to pursue higher education. In Isabel's case, her parents' storytelling was their funds of knowledge which also served as motivation for her to continue to do well in school and take advantage of the opportunities she was given in this country. Cecilia's funds of knowledge were the simple acts of giving and offering which influenced her participation in some of the classroom activities in English 5B. In responding to Gonzalez et al.'s research on having teachers visit the homes of their students, I argue, why not start in the classroom? Since the classroom is the primary setting for every act of learning, every exchange of ideas, every conversation critical to their success, what can we as teachers of writing, do to incorporate our students' funds of knowledge in the

classroom? One of the things I learned from my students, and which I think is critically important in creating agency and access to fair learning, is the way students choose to identify culturally. Giving students the power to identify the way that feels comfortable for them is extremely important, and teachers need to understand this. With Latino/a students, because language cannot be separated from culture, this is equally important. When assigning Anzaldua's chapter to my English 5B students, I made the wrong assumption that my students wouldn't be able to understand her writing because of the large amounts of Spanish text she includes. Much to my surprise, 20 of my 22 students were either fluent in reading Spanish or were able to read and understand some of it. The Spanish text alone was very different for them especially because of the way Anzaldua integrates this in her chapter. My students loved reading her because they were able to connect with much of what she was saying regarding language, culture, and traditions. My students taught me that while for some of us cultural identity can be defined by one word alone such as "Mexican," for others, cultural identity can be a lot more fluid and can involve various labels that include (or omit) ethnicity, nationality, race, and gender.

In working with a large number of Latino/a students in English 5B, I came to see how Fox's discussion on literacy and access is extremely important to understand. Even though Noemi is a U.S. citizen and Isabel is a DACA recipient, they both learned English as a second language, at around the same time when they started school in the United States. Cecilia, on the other hand, spoke English as her first language and learned Spanish later on while living with her cousins after her parents' divorce, as a way of adapting to a new environment. As a result of their language, home literacies, and schools they attended from K-12th, all three of them experienced some kind of challenge in learning academic literacy during

elementary school. While in high school, academic literacy was presented to them as a reading list of White authors. Their high school curriculum sent out a message that in order to read and write “good English,” it was important that they be exposed to authors such as Shakespeare and Orwell. This message also implied that writers of color were not assigned because, for whatever reason, their texts were not adequate to prepare students for the literacy they needed to do well in high school English, pass AP tests, much less succeed in college English. Yet, despite any difficulties they started with, Noemi, Isabel, and Cecilia completed English 5A/B as some of the strongest writers and individuals.

Introducing texts by writers of color such as Gloria Anzaldua demonstrates how texts that go beyond the “canon” are necessary in order to send out the message that Latino/a students do have something to contribute to the learning of the classroom. In fact, this demonstrates the need for changing the academic discourse because, what is the benefit of having a classroom full of receptacles? Are students really learning, if they are just taking the information in, or doing the readings, but not really making connections or engaging with the texts? We can begin by making sure that the texts we incorporate in the classroom appeal to the students we are working with. As Vasquez’s study shows, perhaps this can help us have more students who are active learners because maybe then they will have something to say just like my students did. I saw some of these connections made by my students in class when they raised their hands and commented on how Anzaldua’s content on *las culturas que traicionan* resonated with their own experiences growing up, speaking more than one language.

On the conversation of access, Isabel’s response regarding the literacy she was exposed to in high school really stood out to me. She stated: “I want to be part of this conversation. I want to say what I want and then have somebody give me

feedback on it and then keep going back and forth.” Her overall response was that she feels had she been introduced to texts by Latino/a writers in high school, then maybe she would’ve felt more motivated to participate in seen herself represented by the course curriculum. In my English 5B class, I came to see how she truly was a smart student and was motivated to do well. However, what oftentimes happens is that students are not given the opportunities to be a part of the classroom learning. What we need to do as teachers of writing is create space for our students by exposing them to texts written by Latino/a writers. Perhaps, then they’d be more attentive in class and more engaged because they would actually have something to say. We have scholarship that proves the benefits of being an active learner in the classroom. If we are aware of that, then the next question is, what are we doing about that? Are we creating space in our syllabi, in our course readings and assignments, in our classroom conversations and activities that provide opportunities for Latino /a students to engage? We should not continue the passive learning that makes up a lot of high school English classes. Instead, we need to find ways to ensure that the academic discourse respects the cultural diversity of the classroom. Reading lists that omit Latino/a writers and assignments that ignore the cultural richness of our students, or make assumptions about their languages, only contribute to this lack of access as stated by Fox.

Conclusion

The qualitative data that I gathered from my English 5B course and the case studies I compiled have a lot to teach teachers of writing since we work with a diversity of students. I argue that teachers of first-year writing, both at the university and the community college, need to be more mindful of the students they serve. This is obviously something that should also be practiced in K-12th

classrooms. Because knowledge is accumulated over many years, elementary and high school teachers can also find ways to make literacy accessible and build culturally conscious classrooms that further prepare students for higher education. We need to know who are students are. We need to be informed about the challenges they face especially those that are such an inextricable part of their cultural identity. For example, all my students experienced some tension with parents or families not fully understanding what they do in college. Because CSU Fresno is a Hispanic serving institution with a large percentage of students from Latino/a descent, it is more than likely that all FYW classrooms on our campus will include some Latino/a students. The truth is, with the large number of Latino/a students graduating high school and enrolling in higher education, we will continue to see diversity in our classrooms. The research I gathered adds to the current scholarship because it demonstrates how the inextricable aspect of the Latino/a identity directly influences the way students perform in the writing classroom and the way they react to the readings and conversations of the course. I challenge all teachers of writing to see every student for who they are as individuals. Instead of making assumptions, we need to get to know them first.

The following chapter provides specific pedagogical practices that I created for, and some which I implemented in, my English 5B course in order to create a culturally conscious classroom. My end goal was to create agency as well as increase student engagement. In chapter 4 I also provide my reflection on how these pedagogical practices worked and what I would change in future situations.

CHAPTER 4: PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES TO ADDRESS THE MARGINALIZATION OF LATINO/A STUDENTS IN THE FIRST-YEAR WRITING CLASSROOM

When considering the current pedagogical practices in the first-year writing (FYW) classroom and how these, in many ways, contribute to the marginalization of students of color, I realize there is an urgency for change in the way students are informed about writing. FYW programs in institutions of higher education (IHE) need to implement transformational and inclusive practices that acknowledge its diverse student populations and, in this way, ensure that learning occurs for all students. In this chapter, I explain, analyze, and justify the implementation of specific pedagogical practices which I structured in accordance with Solorzano and Yosso's critical race methodologies in education model. These practices are representative of both CRT and LatCrit and serve as examples of how these theories can be applied to the current scholarship in the field of composition. When implemented in the FYW classroom, these practices serve to answer the research questions that are the foundation of this study: 1) How can we make the writing classroom a place of learning as well as a space of empowerment and accessibility for marginalized students? 2) How can we enable and transform Latino/a students' orientation toward learning so that they place their focus on the experience of FYW as opposed to the grade/score they receive? 3) How is knowledge transferred and how does the reciprocity of transfer influence the ways in which Latino/a students are able to contribute to the classroom learning?

These specific practices were created both before the start of, and during, English 5B in the spring 2017 semester. Each practice was created with the cultural identity of and the academic performance of the students in my English 5A course in the fall 2016 semester in mind. Additionally, this chapter also

demonstrates how these pedagogical practices respond to the case studies provided in chapter 3 with the purpose of bridging the current gaps in scholarship and improving the experience of Latino/a students in the writing classroom. In the end, I reflect on how my students responded to these practices and provide implications for the future.

In this chapter, I will specifically outline and explain why such transformational pedagogical practices in the FYW classroom are necessary to combat the current marginalization experienced by Latino/a students. When applied effectively, these practices work to provide equal access to academic literacy as well as provide opportunities for repurposing the prior knowledge of Latino/a students using cultural consciousness and funds of knowledge. Tom Fox argues for transformational policies that increase access for students of color to successfully navigate higher education. By providing historical accounts of the “problem” that kept African Americans out of these institutions, as well as by discussing more current issues, Fox presents a well-structured critique against standards that continue to keep students of color on the margins. In his critique, Fox writes: “[C]entral to the arguments of those resisting access are claims that literacy, pedagogical, and scholarly standards are lowered as a consequence of increased access” (2). This resistance, described by Fox, was the opposition to admissions for African-American students in IHE, which also resulted in marginalization for those who were already part of these institutions. I would like to point out that this resistance to an “increase of access” to higher education remains to this day, especially as we see more students of color enrolling in IHE, hence the purpose of my research.

Similar to Fox’s research, today we see Latino/a students who, irrespective of class, legal status, gender, or generational status, face marginalization in

composition courses. Whereas Fox argued for the improvement of these spaces for African American students, I make the argument that today the Latino/a population continues to be underrepresented in large numbers, which works against the educational attainment of these students. Despite the struggles the Latino/a community has faced over the years, today, the number of them currently enrolled in IHE is greater than in recent years; however, the number who complete a degree still lags in comparison to other minority groups. In looking at the factors that contribute to this low number, we are able to get a better understanding of the issue of marginalization with the hope of finding a way to alleviate this problem. In doing this, we can consider new practices that work to create transformational learning experiences that result in students feeling accepted, engaged, invested, and motivated to complete their degrees.

The First-Year Writing (FYW) Classroom as the Setting for Transformation

First-year writing consists of one or multiple courses required by institutions of higher education to expose students to academic genres and teach them the essentials to successfully write at the “college-level.” Because writing at such level is critical to a student’s college retention and degree completion, the writing classroom is the “space” where students of marginalized communities can be taught how to write academically and repurpose their prior knowledge. For this reason, the FYW classroom needs to be founded on cultural consciousness and allow students to use their funds of knowledge to navigate higher education.

The foundation for creating this space and increasing literacy access in the writing classroom is the repurposing of the funds of knowledge Latino/a students bring with them into the university. Validating the experiences of these students can be interpreted as a sacred act when we compare it to the oppression lived by

such marginalized communities throughout history. Because Latino/a students, historically speaking, have endured situations of discrimination and marginalization, there is a sort of “sacred” aspect to acknowledging the potential in these students. Dolores Delgado Bernal notes the reality and impact of such marginalization and oppression when she argues the following: “Although students of color are holders and creators of knowledge, they often feel as if their histories, experiences, cultures, and languages are devalued, misinterpreted, or omitted within formal educational settings” (106). As Delgado Bernal notes, IHE have not done enough to establish positive relationships with its population of non-White students. How then can these institutions expect students to learn and thrive if they are asking them to sit in classrooms where the history and experiences of their families, ancestors, and communities are distorted or completely ignored? Why are these institutions surprised with the number of minority students who drop out since they themselves are not doing enough to ensure these students feel accepted? In order for these students to realize their potential as “holders and creators of knowledge,” we first need to make sure that they remain a part of the university.

If we seek to diminish marginalization, we must implement pedagogical practices that validate and accurately acknowledge the lived experiences and cultural and linguistic identities of all students. Acknowledging the presence and impact of Latino/a students in the FYW classroom calls for an increased awareness that will move us to create equal access by establishing such spaces. In order to establish “sacred” spaces in FYW, I use Laura Rendón’s theory of *sentipensante* from her book *Sentipensante (Sensing/Thinking) Pedagogy: Educating for Wholeness, Social Justice and Liberation* which outlines contemplative practices that use students’ funds of knowledge to create

transformational learning experiences that move away from deficit-based approaches and instead seek to validate the experiences and identities of Latino/a students. Beyond the more common contemplative practices associated with meditation and mindfulness, Rendón notes that such practices for contemplation can also include: “[V]arious kinds of ritual and ceremony designed to create sacred space and increase insight and awareness” (70). Contemplative practices are appropriate for the writing classroom because they are useful tools that provide Latino/a students, and students of other marginalized communities, with opportunities to reflect and deeply “analyze” their experiences as both individuals and community members and, in this way, create agency that results in classroom inclusion. Furthermore, in presenting the need and benefits of such practices, Rendón asserts: “[D]iverse forms of contemplative practice could be effectively employed as tools that allow students to engage more deeply with what was being learned, to complement and embellish intellectual learning, and to foster the acquisition of knowledge from the course material, as well as to connect with inner wisdom” (69). When we see the “rituals” and “ceremonies” of Latino/a students as sacred practices for the purpose of tradition, we can understand how creating such “sacred space” in the writing classroom is necessary and possible to successfully meet the needs of all students.

For this study, I have taken Laura Rendón’s definition of “contemplative practices,” focusing on the “ritual” and “ceremony” aspects of it in order to create sacred spaces for Latino/a students in the FYW classroom while also providing further insight and awareness regarding the learning experiences of Latino/a students. Because FYW is a required course at the college and/or university level, it is a practical place for building this “sacred space” that will enable Latino/a

students to realize their valuable contributions to higher education and, in this way, increase retention and degree completion for this group.

The pedagogical practices I describe below deal with historical narratives, linguistic identities, cultural impact, stereotypes, and funds of knowledge as a way to ensure the course curriculum includes Latino/a students in the classroom learning. In establishing and carrying out a more inclusive culture in the writing classroom, we can make it possible for Latino/a students to realize the knowledge they possess and their ability to share this knowledge with others as a contribution to the transfer of learning.

Pedagogical Rationale

I structured the following five pedagogical practices according to Daniel Solorzano and Tara J. Yosso's critical race methodologies in education as well as Laura Rendón's theory of *sentipensante*. These practices move away from deficit-based approaches and instead focus on the repurposing of students' *funds of knowledge* as well as having a cultural conscious classroom in order to create transformational learning experiences, provide opportunities for active engagement, investment, and motivation, and demonstrate the reciprocal transfer of learning. These are done by being aware of students' prior knowledge as well as reinventing academic literacy in order to create a more inclusive classroom. When implemented in the writing classroom, these practices transform the learning of Latino/a students resulting in active participation and agency. I use three different elements of critical race methodologies in education as explanations to support the implementation of these practices in FYW courses. The three pedagogical practices I describe in the remaining pages of this chapter do the following:

1. Acknowledge the “intercentricity of racialized oppression” (Solorzano and Yosso 25) by focusing on factors such as race, gender, class, immigration status, surname, phenotype, accent, and sexuality which connect and interconnect to influence the experiences of Latino/a students.
2. Challenge White privilege by rejecting “notions of ‘neutral’ research or ‘objective’ research, and [exposing] deficit-informed research that silences and distorts epistemologies of people of color” (Solorzano and Yosso 26).
3. Challenge “traditional research paradigms, texts, and theories used to explain the experiences of people of color” (Solorzano and Yosso 26) and instead use nonconventional approaches to validate the experiences and strengthen the Latino/a community.

These three elements demonstrate how the current conversations in the field of composition can be improved when we apply theoretical frameworks such as those associated with CRT and LatCrit in order to alleviate the marginalization of Latino/a students. Here I must point out that these practices are important because they demonstrate how the current conversations in composition regarding prior knowledge and academic literacy can be improved when combined with cultural consciousness and funds of knowledge.

Moreover, I would like to point out that these pedagogical practices were created both before the start of and during the course the spring 2017 semester. For this reason, not every pedagogical practice presented in this chapter was implemented in my English 5B course. When discussing each practice that follows, I explain those that I applied in my classroom and how the three case studies from my qualitative data relate to them. Additionally, with the practices I

did not apply in my English 5B course, I provide a reflection and analysis of how they can be applied in both university and community college writing courses.

Pedagogical Practices to Foster Agency and Student Engagement

Writing Critical Race Counterstories and Testimonios

Critical race counterstories and testimonios are two examples of non-traditional genres that consist of personal narratives that lead to a larger conversation or argument on a social issue. This argument is supported by conducting research and using credible sources to support one's claim. I implemented these genres in my English 5B syllabus as the first major writing project. In creating this specific writing assignment, I wanted to come up with an assignment that would create access to academic literacy by acknowledging the diverse cultures and lived experiences of my students while also teaching them academic practices and skills necessary for college writing, such as engaging in scholarly conversations and integrating and synthesizing quotes into their writing. With critical race counterstories and testimonios, I asked my students to reflect on their own lived experiences and situate these within a larger conversation regarding an issue associated with racism, sexism, classism, or nativism. In reading Solorzano and Yosso's research and connecting them to the current scholarship in composition, I determined it was necessary to use these genres as way to present Latino/a students with an example of resistance writing while also giving them the opportunity to engage with writing that moves away from traditional academic genres. I made this choice after reviewing and analyzing the current conversations on academic literacy with scholars such as Tom Fox and James Paul Gee and prior knowledge as discussed by Mary Jo Reiff, Anis

Bawarshi, and Rebecca S. Nowacek. My decision for this assignment was also influenced by reflecting on the kinds of writing my students did in English 5A and their response to genres oftentimes set up to limit literacy access to students of color which directly influences marginalization. As a result of the knowledge I gained from reading my students' counterstories and testimonios as well as due to the knowledge and agency they gained from this assignment, I recommend that this writing project be assigned early in the semester to provide students with an opportunity to feel validated and acknowledged as part of the university.

One of the challenges I encountered in creating this pedagogical practice, is that I wanted to ensure that, while I was exposing my students to new genres that tapped into their prior knowledge and allowed them access to learning, I was still fulfilling the requirements for FYW as set up by the first-year writing program at Fresno State. With this "unconventional genre" I determined possible ways to teach students skills that align with rhetorical writing. Students can still analyze these texts from a rhetorical lens in order to emulate such conventions in their own writing. For example, when I presented in this genre to my students, we began by reading an example of a testimonio titled "La Chicana: The Focus on One Woman's Story" by Minerva S. Chavez. I assigned this for homework and asked my students to read using a rhetorical lens. The next day we discussed it as a class analyzing the rhetorical situation and what rhetorical moves the author made to effectively meet the requirements for this genre. My students were able to learn audience, purpose, context, and genre while also taking notes on how they could use this example as a model for their own testimonio. Additionally, in discussing writing and research as a conversation, analyzing testimonios such as Chavez's allowed my students to see how published authors write testimonios as a response to a larger, sometimes controversial conversation, and most importantly to present

an accurate account of their own narratives. This reading helped my students understand the importance of context and how every writing situation is prompted by something.

Furthermore, in observing my own students, I see this genre as a writing assignment that works to create “space” in the classroom for marginalized students. Many of my students had not been allowed to write about themselves in high school. This is particularly true for my students who were enrolled in Advanced Placement (AP) English courses since most of their writing consisted of analytical essays and responses to assigned readings. In seeking to create “space” in the classroom for all students, the context of this genre allowed my Latino/a students to write about topics such as racism, sexism, and classism, which are oftentimes left out of the classroom, but which should in fact be discussed because of the ways they directly impact our students. From reading Noemi, Isabel, and Cecilia’s testimonios, I saw how this genre provided a platform for them to use their own experiences and voice their opinions on these topics as way to bring awareness to current social issues. This genre ultimately served to create agency in my English 5B course and helped my students see how writing is situational and in this way important to their lives.

Critical race methodology element. Critical race counterstories and testimonios align with Solorzano and Yosso’s third element of critical race methodologies in education (as presented above) which seeks to challenge “traditional research paradigms, texts, and theories used to explain the experiences of people of color” (26). This genre challenges such traditions that inaccurately present the accounts of people of color while ignoring significant aspects of such experiences that deal with the impact of racism, stereotypes, and discrimination. In

giving Latino/a students the opportunity to write about their own lived experiences, students are able to be a voice for their own communities and explain the social issues they face in being part of a minority group. This, however, requires students to have an audience beyond their instructor and peers. As part of this writing project, students needed to find an outside audience to address. Such audiences can include institutions of higher education, a specific business or employer, a magazine or newspaper, or an online blog to name a few. With Noemi, Isabel, and Cecilia, I asked each of them to individually reflect on their own experiences growing up. As per the guidelines for this genre, I asked them to choose a topic that specifically impacted communities of color. One of the activities that we did in class with this assignment required students answer the “Who cares?” question. I told my students that while their testimonios were important and worthy to be told, because they are writing to raise awareness about a social issue, it was necessary they convince their audiences about the importance of such issue. For example, with Noemi’s testimonio on machismo and domestic violence, I asked her “who do you think needs to be part of your audience? If you were able to present this to a group of people, who would you say, needs to hear your message?” In asking her these questions, I wanted her to target a specific audience and then revise her testimonio accordingly so as to effectively deliver her message.

The genre of the counterstory/testimonio is significant to Solorzano and Yosso’s research in that it is written from an inside perspective as opposed to that of an observer. For that reason, the need for an outside audience is important in order to empower students, challenge marginalization, and validate students’ lived experiences. Thus, students’ counterstories and testimonios need to be written in order to attract and persuade a specific audience. As Solorzano and Yosso note,

counterstories and testimonios are used within the field of CRT to give a voice to groups who have been historically marginalized and oppressed. This pedagogical practice is beneficial because of its storytelling component that aids in providing validation to the experiences of Latino/a students by situating their experiences within a larger conversation as a way to draw attention to issues of racism and discrimination. Despite current research on such topics, we must ask ourselves how much of it is written from an outsider perspective as opposed to an insider perspective. In giving my students, as insiders, the opportunity to write about this, they were given the power to write an accurate account about “the intercentricity of their racialized oppression.” Furthermore, this practice contributes to the construction of agency in the FYW classroom and gave my students a voice, which I am hopeful they will continue to use to overcome similar challenges within their communities.

Application to composition. This writing project serves various purposes in the FYW classroom in improving the experiences of historically marginalized groups. Primarily, this assignment provides students with the opportunity to repurpose their *funds of knowledge* by having them reflect on the values, beliefs, and traditions inculcated upon them in their homes. Additionally, students have the opportunity to contemplate on the cultural factors that have influenced their lived experiences and formed their identities. Part of repurposing their *funds of knowledge*, includes unearthing historical narratives of their parents, grandparents, and ancestors. Such historical narratives help students find their voice and gain agency in their own learning. This is supported by Mariana Pacheco and Kimberly Nao in their article “Rewriting Identities: Using Historicized Writing to Promote Migrant Students’ Writing”, when they note that discussing historical narratives in

the writing classroom enables agency because it gives students the opportunity to explore their own histories and in this way, realize the potential they have in bringing change through their writing (30). For Noemi, Isabel, and Cecilia, writing their testimonios provided a platform previously denied to them. For Latino/a students in general, this genre does the same by exposing them to a new genre beyond traditional, academic, genres established to privilege the voices of non-minority students.

Another significant benefit of critical race counterstories and testimonios applicable to the writing classroom is that they help establish accuracy and authenticate the realities of the lived experiences of Latino/a students and, in this way, contribute to the formation of a collective identity. In doing this, it demonstrates the need to implement non-traditional writing genres in the classroom as a way of convincing students that writing goes beyond “academic college writing.” In order to demonstrate how the transfer of knowledge is the reciprocal, this allows students to contribute to the classroom learning by giving them the opportunity to write about and share their own knowledge(s). Here we also have an opportunity to allow students to reflect on their prior knowledge, which is any knowledge they’ve accumulated throughout the years in formal education settings. Clearly, as Reiff and Bawarshi note, prior knowledge is critical in writing situations. Here I argue, that this genre helps combat deficit-based approaches because instead of focusing on what students *don’t know*, we teach them that they in fact *do know* a lot of things. We need to take a moment to consider how this type of mentality can positively influence the way our students see themselves and how this perspective can impact their learning and participation in the classroom. This type of writing is a critical step toward addressing the problems that currently impact the experiences of students of color

because as Solorzano and Yosso explain: “Methodologies that dismiss or decenter racism and its intersections with other forms of subordination *omit and distort* [emphasis added] the experiences of those whose lives are daily affected by racism...” (31-32). In bringing awareness to this oppression, this writing project creates a “sacred space” in the writing classroom by validating students’ experiences and acknowledging their presence and contribution to the classroom learning. This validation results from helping students lean on their prior (formal) knowledge as well as their funds of (cultural) knowledge. Through this act, we show students how they don’t have to completely change who they are in order to fit into the world of academia. Instead, students are empowered when we show them that they can be themselves and acknowledge their cultures and still excel in academic settings.

In fulfilling one of the goals of higher education, through this genre, students become engaged “citizens” who use writing as an instrument for activism and social justice. This demonstration supports the notion that the teaching of writing should be done in such a way that transfers beyond the university classroom. In adding to this concept of transfer within the field of composition, I argue that both CRT and LatCrit recognize that effective learning that results in agency involves having students “participate in intellectual discourse that links experience, research, community, and social change” (Villalpando 113). Thus, in having students become “storytellers” who use writing as a method for advocating for social justice and policy change, we see students contributing to the classroom and outside community by becoming agents of their own learning and taking these skills with them. These are the kinds of explicit changes we need to make in the field of composition. We need to teach students that writing is an act that transfers beyond FYW, and this begins with such writing assignments that invite students to

become agents by providing them with a platform where they can freely express who they are. Furthermore, this writing project is also a way to move beyond “meaningless” writing assignments that keep students disinterested since they are unable to see how such writing applies to their lives outside the writing classroom. Writing to larger audiences or for a “significant” purpose, as is the case for this project, aids in creating motivation for writing, dedicated performance, and transformational learning.

After conducting the focus groups and one-on-interviews, I reflected on what I would do differently next time using this genre. As mentioned in chapter 3, being that this was a new genre for all my students, some of them struggled to come up with a narrative that they could then connect to a larger social issue. Providing more examples of counterstories and testimonios would have helped students see the various ways in which they can structure their narratives. Furthermore, a previous assignment such as conducting a short family interview may have helped students gain more knowledge of their parents’ or possibly even grandparents’ experiences with these topics. Incorporating this as part of the testimonio can be helpful in unearthing the prior knowledge and funds of knowledge necessary to write an effective testimonio.

A Reading and Conversation on “Different Englishes”

This pedagogical practice consists of three assigned reading and a class discussion on languages, dialects, variations of the English language, and students’ linguistic identities. I assigned my students to read texts written in “unconventional” English which included excerpts from Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, written in a southern English dialect; Amy Tan’s “Mother Tongue,” which includes portions of what Tan refers to as “broken”

English; and Gloria Anzaldua's "How to Tame a Wild Tongue" written in variations of Spanish, English, and Nahuatl. Students read these texts for homework along with reading questions that asked them to critically consider the rhetorical situation of each text while specifically analyzing the authors' use of language. The next day, we had a class discussion on the themes of language, culture, and identity pertaining to the three assigned readings. This discussion kept students actively engaged with quick writes and individual and small group responses. I asked students to reflect on their own experiences with language and how this influences their learning. This discussion took place after students had submitted their first draft for writing project one. I decided to have this discussion in order to help them see how language influences our writing and how they impact our overall message. After our discussion, I encouraged students to apply some of these rhetorical moves in their own testimonios in order to present accurate accounts of their experiences.

Critical Race Methodology element. This class discussion on "Different Englishes" and their influence on one's individual and collective identity aligns with Solorzano and Yosso's second element (as presented above), which seeks to challenge White privilege by rejecting "notions of 'neutral' research or 'objective' research, and [exposing] deficit-informed research that silences and distorts epistemologies of people of color" (26). The readings and class discussion on language use and linguistic diversity along with its impact on identity gave students the opportunity to reflect on their (or their parents, grandparents', etc.) native tongues and language variations and consider how this has influenced and continues to influence their academic literacy. Our discussion on "Different Englishes" challenges White privilege because it gave students the opportunity to

reflect on how their linguistic and cultural identities can positively influence, instead of deter, their performance and success in FYW. Additionally, in having students themselves write about their own experiences with language, we move away from objective research on this topic by creating opportunities for first-hand testimonies. Noemi was one of the students who incorporated Spanish into her testimonio because she was convinced it was the only way to accurately narrate her testimonio. Furthermore, this practice is important because it allows students to see how they can use writing as a platform to voice their opinions, create arguments, establish claims, and advocate for social change (demonstrating transfer). This is important in combating the deficit-based approach because it allows instructors to see all that students do in fact know. If we are to challenge, current institutional and classroom practices that work to benefit White students while marginalizing Latino/a students and other minority groups, then we need to provide students with an avenue to do this.

Application to composition. There are two purposes behind this pedagogical practice on how it can be applied to current composition scholarship. First, because such texts written by writers of color, move away from the canonized literature students are traditionally exposed to, introducing these texts serve to validate texts written by writers of color, in this way bringing more representation of the Latino/a community in the classroom. This is something we need to be attentive to especially when we consider that even today in 2017, when the Latino/a population is at the highest percentage (of the nation's population) it's ever been, our students are still not being exposed to such literature in their K-12 years nor their years in higher education.

Secondly, the content of such texts focuses on topics that students of color find relatable considering their cultural, racial, and linguistic identities. This is where we give our Latino/a students the opportunity to become experts. As Jessica M. Vasquez notes, this is how we create ways for our students of color to participate, to engage, to comment, to be validated and recognized for their knowledge and contribution to the classroom. Whereas this may sound insignificant, I was able to see how students in my English 5B course were transformed when they were introduced to Gloria Anzaldua because in many ways she was much more relatable than any other writer they had read in their first 12 years of schooling. Her use of Spanish, Nahuatl, and Spanglish, in relation to her talk on *culturas que traicionan* and the *untamed wild tongue* of those who speak more than one language, inspired my students to speak up and explain how they connected to Anzaldua's experiences and way of writing.

Finally, in seeking to improve the learning experiences of Latino/a students and emphasize the reciprocal transfer of knowledge, this pedagogical practice creates opportunities for Latino/a students to share (through their writing and in class discussions) their *funds of knowledge* regarding language use and preference. This is critical because it gives instructors an opportunity to learn how language impacts students' literacy and academic performance. This is also a way to repurpose prior knowledge in the classroom beyond what is currently being done, and is in this way influential in helping teachers of writing reflect *and* act on further pedagogical changes to effectively meet the needs of Latino/a students in FYW.

Furthermore, this lesson on "Different Englishes" was beneficial in increasing classroom participation for Latino/a students since students are more likely to participate in class discussions when exposed to relatable texts and

conversations. Solorzano and Yosso's second element is thus applied to composition because it improves the current scholarship on prior knowledge. With this practice, we can see how prior knowledge is in many ways correlated with funds of knowledge when we speak of Latino/a students whose language and culture, as Victor Villanueva echoes, is in every way inseparable from their identity and thus their performance in academic settings. Our conversation on "Different Englishes" allowed for the repurposing of students' *funds of knowledge*. Since traditional K-12 settings tend to leave out texts by writers of color, this results in a disengagement by students of color who feel disconnected from white, male authors such as William Shakespeare or Arthur Miller. Although this argument has been made before, when we consider such disengagement, we must ask ourselves, "How will Latino/a students respond to texts by writers of color, such as Rudolfo Anaya, Sandra Cisneros, or Junot Diaz whose texts focus on detailing life experiences similar to theirs?" Equally important is the question, "How will this impact the learning and retention of Latino/a students in higher education?" Yes, we have many Latino/a students who excel academically, graduate from college, and succeed, but what about the large percentage of those who don't? How do we respond to those students who begin college with high aspirations, only to drop out, like Noemi's brother whose experience demonstrates *choque*. What can we say about Isabel's older siblings who only went to community college and stopped short of a baccalaureate degree, perhaps as a result of inaccessible academic literacy? The truth is, both the institution and teachers of writing need to do more in order to ensure every student, irrespective of race, ethnicity, or legal status, is provided with equal access to learning and fair representation in academia. This problem is further explained in "Bridging Rhetoric and Composition Studies with Chicano and Chicana Studies: A Turn to

Critical Pedagogy,” where Jaime Mejia points out how the curricula of high schools and colleges hinder educational attainment for Latino/a students (43) because they fail “to incorporate our students’ ethnic identities and cultures” (51). At this point, it is important to realize that while the student population has changed dramatically, the pedagogies of the classroom and the texts used, have made little progress to benefit students of color that now make up a larger percentage of the student body in university campuses across the nation.

Because I found this discussion to be helpful for my students, one of the changes I would make in the future is incorporate other texts in addition to Hurston, Tan, and Anzaldua. I think it’s important that students see and understand language diversity because even though several of them chose to write in “standard English,” they all admitted to speaking in another language or a variation or dialect of English outside the classroom. Most importantly, all my students who admitted to speaking another language also made it clear that speaking another language is as much part of their identity as speaking English, and whereas they perceive both to be equally important to their identities, they are at many times hesitant to speak their “home” language because of the way they are perceived by others. Noemi shared in class by stating: “When I speak Spanish, people tend to not take me as seriously as when I speak English.” Similar to Noemi’s experience, I myself, despite holding three associate degrees, a Bachelor’s degree, and almost done with my Master’s degree, I still sense that when I speak my native tongue, I am seen as “uneducated” or just another immigrant.

As a result of that, I decided to incorporate this lesson on “Different Englishes” in my classroom in order to encourage my students to find their voice and establish an identity when writing their testimonios. No student should be

perceived as “uneducated” or not be taken seriously simply because their first language is not English. If a testimonio is supposed to be an accurate account on and individual’s life, how can that occur if we leave out dialogue and languages specific to our culture? This is exactly the argument made by Noemi who felt that using English dialogue would be tantamount to her not being fully honest about the way her and her mother experienced domestic violence. Because Spanish is the language of her mother, she would be in many ways leaving out many truths from her lived experiences. In the same way, because today many Latino/a students speak another language (or language variation) besides English, in asking them to suppress their “home” and/or native languages, we are asking them to display an inaccurate image of who they are and in this way, we make them believe that the only way for them to succeed academically is by ignoring those things that have shaped who they are.

Overall, as I reflect on this discussion, in doing this assignment in the future, I would make it a requirement that students incorporate other languages or “different Englishes” in their writing. This may be a little difficult because even though some students may speak Spanish or another language, that doesn’t necessarily mean they know how to write it. This is where the family interview mentioned above comes into play. Having a conversation with their parents about these topics may be helpful in providing rich dialogue and vivid details throughout their narratives. However, despite challenges, I strongly advocate for this because through Noemi, Isabel, and Cecilia’s testimonios, I realize how this can help students be more honest about their own accounts and in this way challenge “neutral” and “objective” research that has for many years silenced and distorted the Latino/a identity.

Reading, Questioning, and
Responding to Stereotypes.

This pedagogical practice consisted of reading Judith Ortiz Cofer's memoir, *The Myth of the Latin Woman*, along with individual and small group responses to the text's themes and key ideas. After having my students read this text, I had them to a 5-minute quick write asking them to reflect on their own experiences with stereotypes. At the end of class, students wrote a short, in-class reflective response to the text. Following this lesson, I assigned two writing assignments: a short essay that analyzes and responds to a selected quote from Cofer's memoir and a blog entry discussing individual and collective identities as a way to reject and diminish stereotypes and assumptions.

Critical Race Methodology element. This pedagogical practice supports Solorzano and Yosso's first element of critical race methodologies by acknowledging the "intercentricity of racialized oppression" (25). Because stereotypes focus on the labels and assumptions made about a specific group of people, this assignment was meant to combat such stereotypes by demonstrating how identities are complex and thus cannot be determined simply by a label or definition we place on others, or assumptions we make about a group of people. Complex identities are the result of the intercentricity of various factors such as race, gender, class, immigration status, surname, phenotype, accent, and sexuality which connect and interconnect to influence and determine individual and collective identities. In reading Cofer's memoir, which focuses on the stereotypes of Latin-American women, a lot of my female Latina students made comments regarding the ways they could relate to the text. I saw a lot of participation from my students with this specific reading because stereotypes are a problem that has been with us for many years and continues to be promoted through social media.

In talking about stereotypes, students had the opportunity to reflect on their own identities in order to understand how their own intersectionalities serve as a way to contest stereotypes. Furthermore, through the blog writing, we were all able to learn more from each other as a class. We were able to see how irrespective of our similarities, we are in many ways different and unique.

Application to composition. I assigned this reading and created this discussion in order to give my students the opportunity to enter a conversation which is oftentimes avoided in educational settings. I sought to teach my students the intercentricity that exists in social institutions such as the FYW classroom in order to help me answer the question “How can we make the writing classroom a place of learning as well as a space of empowerment and accessibility for marginalized students?” A current problem I see in education is that in a lot of cases, students are categorized into groups that oftentimes fail to acknowledge the diversity that exists in the classroom. For example, when specifically addressing the Latino/a student population, we need to address the diversity within this group and acknowledge how ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, and generational status contribute to educational attainment. For this reason, this conversation on stereotypes is significant in helping students understand how such factors impact how they view themselves and how they view others in order to create an inclusive learning environment. This activity was a way to create cultural consciousness in the classroom by helping students see that even if we look similar, we are all unique in our own ways. I saw this uniqueness in Noemi, Isabel, and Cecilia. Although all three of them have parents who originated from Mexico (and Peru for Cecilia) and may be perceived as Latinas by many, Noemi sees herself as a Mejjicana, Cecilia is open to a more fluid identity, and Isabel strongly prefers to

simply identify as Mexican even though the United States has been her home for more than half of her lifetime. All three have had different experiences at home and going through the K-12th public education system and despite all three of them taking the same English 5A/B course at CSU Fresno, Noemi and Cecilia feel more confident about achieving their educational aspirations, whereas Isabel along with nearly 800,000 students from the Latino/a community, will face more difficult challenges as Dreamers. It is clear that today all three of them have different factors that impact their lives. Conclusively, allowing my students to write about their own experiences and opinions on cultural stereotypes helped me understand more about who they were and increased my cultural consciousness which helped me to create a more inclusive classroom.

Moving Beyond Academic Genres into “Writing That Matters”

This pedagogical practice is one that I created during the semester and therefore did not apply to my own English 5B course. I created this after reading Nancy G. Barron’s article “Dear Saints, Dear Stella: Letters Examining the Messy Lines of Expectations, Stereotypes, and Identity in Higher Education,” which got me to think about the ways Latino/a students experience and navigate higher education. In seeking to redefine academic literacy as well as help students repurpose their funds of knowledge, I created this assignment in order to do just that.

This lesson consisted of reading and annotating Nancy G. Barron’s article to be followed by a 5-minute in-class quick write regarding students’ response to the text. Secondly, I designed a small group activity focusing on genre as well as a short writing assignment following the lesson. The post-lesson writing assignment focuses on the genre of personal letter writing and gives students an opportunity to

discuss the challenges they face in academia due to the impact of culture, race, ethnicity, class, and gender among other factors.

Critical Race Methodology element. This reading and writing assignment fulfills the third element of Solorzano and Yosso's critical race methodologies in education which focuses on challenging "traditional research paradigms, texts, and theories used to explain the experiences of people of color" (26). This assignment is critical because it focuses specifically on the challenges faced by Latino/a students in higher education. In order to successfully address my research questions, it is important to come back to the current problem in academia. As previously stated, this problem of racism and discrimination is for the most part ignored by the institution and teachers who fail to address these and reject conversations regarding the lack of literacy access to students of color. These same individuals insist on the idea that "equality" and "fair distribution of resources" is a reality simply based on the diversity of the classroom. However, what they fail to realize is that a large percentage of our students of color, notably Latino/a students, will begin college, but will not graduate in comparison to their White counterparts. For this reason, having students themselves write about the challenges and the marginalization they face in IHE, can serve to raise awareness that can potentially begin conversations that will lead to classroom and institutional changes.

Application to composition. As noted with Solorzano and Yosso's critical race methodologies element, I created this pedagogical practice in order to contribute to the conversation of academic literacy in the field of composition. The purpose of this assignment is to allow students to partake in writing that extends beyond the FYW classroom. Political writing or argumentative writing for the

purpose of social justice aids in supporting the concept that writing is more than what is considered “academic writing” and can thus lead to empowerment particularly for marginalized communities. While I fully agree that in FYW, students need to learn how to write in “academic” genres, I also make the argument that it is equally important that they be given opportunities to write in non-traditional genres in order to help them realize how writing applies to different writing situations, particularly those outside FYW. Furthermore, my argument is also supported by the fact that in increasing access and creating more inclusive classrooms, it is also important that we provide more representations for Latino/a students who, despite their presence in academia, have been extremely underrepresented in higher education.

One of the benefits of this writing assignment is that it exposes students to a non-traditional genre which is substantiated by its very content. Students are able to see how writing can serve to express the challenges they encounter in higher education. In other words, they can use their writing to instigate change. Here I make the argument, that just as Fox argued for providing access to higher education and literacy for African American students in the 1960s and 70s, today, with the growing number of Latino/a students and especially with the large number of Dreamers in our college campuses, it is imperative that we find ways to create access to academic literacy for them as well. This is how we can apply CRT methodologies to current theories in composition, by finding ways in which we can challenge conventional “paradigms, texts, and theories” which were established to keep students of color out of such spaces. In demonstrating this element of CRT methodologies, this practice can show students how their writing can be used as a tool for empowerment which allows them to see how their very

words and literacy are necessary in order to challenges those things that work against them.

Barron's article published in *College Composition and Communication* is a text that we can use to show students how their narratives are just as significant as that of a published writer's. The challenges addressed in Barron's letters depict the very challenges faced by Latino/a students today. Unfortunately, these challenges are more complex than most realize, and when ignored, can have negative impacts on the educational attainment of these students. Here I would like to revisit Anzaldúa's concept of *choque* because what Barron discusses is many ways just that. CRT and LatCrit note that individual factors such as language variation, immigration, identity, phenotype, and sexuality (Villapando 42) and most importantly, the intersectionality of all these factors are significant to the Latino/a experience. In some cases, it requires that we reflect on these factors in order to begin to realize how they can negatively impact our experiences. For example, many of my students who were not exposed to writers of color did not see that as a problem while in high school; however, once I asked them this question and especially when I asked them how, if it all, this negatively impacted their learning, all of them began to see how that was a problem that needed to be addressed. If Latino/a students are left to figure why such texts aren't introduced to them in K-12, then that alone shows the underrepresentation experienced by this community. This reading and letter-writing assignment acknowledges the diversity of our classrooms and helps students see that we want to know how to make learning more accessible to them. This form of reflective writing encourages students to tap into their prior knowledge and helps them explain to their audience how academic literacy can be more accessible. Additionally, this practice is similar to all

previous ones because it is an opportunity to explore the rhetorical situation and the structures within genre that help writers effectively present their ideas.

Moreover, this pedagogical practice, which moves beyond academic genres, is beneficial because it helps students see how writing skills and conventions are helpful and useful and serve a greater purpose than simply passing a course. This is a problem that is true for all students; therefore, it is up to teachers of writing to do more to present writing as a transferrable skill. If we seek to transform students' orientation toward learning that emphasizes the actual learning experience as opposed to a letter grade, then such pedagogical practice can help in doing that especially when we invite students to write about things that matter to them and issues that affect them as college students and marginalized individuals.

In addition, this pedagogical practice, which reflects Solorzano and Yosso's third element of critical race methodologies, contributes to the field of composition because it serves to show students that even non-traditional genres have much to offer in academic settings. As Anne Beaufort discusses in her book *College Writing and Beyond: A New Framework for University Writing Instruction*, the emphasis on grade is oftentimes the result of having to deal with college writing that is perceived as artificial or meaningless due to its limited audience and purpose. This limited audience and purpose is seen in writing commonly assigned in the FYW classroom which limits learning and confines students to a set of unappealing writing assignments that will not transfer outside the classroom. A lot of my students responded the same way when they compared their experience in English 5A and English 5B. Since English 5A was my first semester teaching in Fresno State's first-year writing program, I was still learning the ropes of teaching and the majority of readings and assignments were more in

line with “academic genres.” In English 5B, however, in order to gather qualitative data for this thesis, I integrated various pedagogical practices as explained in this chapter that sought to create a culturally conscious classroom that challenged the current scholarship of the composition classroom (see Appendices A-E for details). I noticed more interest and motivation in English 5B because my students were excited to write about things they’d never before been asked to write about and read texts that challenged the literature they were exposed to in high school. In turn, my students’ writing improved from the previous semester and became more engaged and complex. My point here is that if we are to gain students’ interests, then we must demonstrate other aspects of writing that acknowledge other discourse communities to positively affect how students respond to the classroom learning (Beaufort 38).

Although I did not get the opportunity to incorporate this assignment in my English 5B course, there are some recommendations I can make. This assignment is specifically important when we consider the current scholarship on academic literacy and prior knowledge. After working with Noemi, Isabel, and Cecilia, I realized that there is still a great need for integrating texts by writers of color. The reality is that this need will be true for as long as our classroom continue to increase in diversity. Although this lack of texts by writers of color is a problem I experienced when I was in high school, I was honestly shocked to see how this is still occurring in 2017 even in schools where the majority of students are of Latino/a descent. In seeing how my students came to appreciate writing in comparison to their high school experience, I now realize that we all need to realize how the texts we present to our students is critical in helping shape their opinions about what academic literary is as well as how and why this is important. The problem is that in omitting texts by writers of color, we are sending out a

message that purposely excludes communities of color and renders their writing and narratives as not academic. With articles such as Barron's, students are able to use their writing to challenge tradition and in this way, bring cultural consciousness into conversations of academic literacy.

The Role of Formal Education and
Funds of Knowledge in Shaping
Students' College Literacy

Similar to the previous assignment, this pedagogical practice is one that I created during the semester and therefore did not apply to my own English 5B course. This assignment which is meant to be a major writing project was inspired by the literacy narrative I assigned my students in English 5A in the fall 2016 semester. I found the literacy narrative to be a good genre to start the semester with because it gave students an opportunity to reflect on their experiences with reading and writing as a way to make conclusions about what they anticipate they will encounter in college English. In creating this pedagogical practice, I decided to add the funds of knowledge component to it because I wanted students to specifically see how their experiences in K-12th education are not the only influence over the way they experience literacy. Instead, I envisioned students looking in their homes and reflecting on how their families, home literacies, language, culture, and traditions also affect how they come to see and understand literary in higher education.

As the title indicates, this writing project is a literacy narrative which asks students to reflect on their identity as readers and writers in relation to their lived experiences and cultural practices. This genre provides Latino/a students with the opportunity to reflect on the role their *funds of knowledge* play in shaping their educational attainment, specifically their literacy development. An additional

component to this writing project consists of a short 3-minute presentation where students bring one artifact from their K-12 education and one artifact from their cultural education that demonstrate how these influenced their learning and literacy.

Critical Race Methodology element. This writing project aligns with Solorzano and Yosso's second element of critical race methodologies which challenges White privilege by "[exposing] deficit-informed research that silences and distorts epistemologies of people of color" (26). Instead of focusing on deficit-based approaches which emphasize the things Latino/a students lack, this writing project does the opposite by emphasizing the cultural knowledge and prior knowledge these students enter the university with and which plays a role in their literacy development. In this way, this writing project works by rewriting the epistemologies of Latino/a students and repurposing their *funds of knowledge* and prior knowledge as a way to contribute to the classroom learning while coming to a conclusion of what literacy is.

Considering the goal of this assignment, this pedagogical practice is important in helping us better understand the inaccuracies that exist with deficit-based approaches which make empty assumptions using a student's race, language, or education to determine if they will succeed in higher education or not. The problem with such approaches is that they exclude prior knowledge that differs from academic discourse as well as funds of knowledge in order to justify why such students are behind. Instead of this, I argue that we repurpose such knowledges in the classroom and give Latino/a students the opportunity to be part of the classroom and share how their funds of knowledge impact their literacy.

Application to composition. “Writing Project 1: How Education and Culture Influenced My Literacy” is meant to support the reciprocal transfer of learning by demonstrating how Latino/a students possess knowledge that can be a significant contribution to the classroom in educating their teachers and classmates. In connection to CRT, LatCrit, and the objectives of my study, this writing project is significant because, similar to other genres, it provides students with the skills they need to be successful with “college writing” while simultaneously repurposing their prior knowledge and *funds of knowledge*. By entering a conversation on the impact of a formal education and cultural education, students can see how both are equally important in influencing their educational attainment. In many cases, I would argue that many students have never even contemplated the effects of the latter because in K-12th settings they are asked to leave behind their culture and language because these are oftentimes believed to stunt their learning.

The importance of this kind of practice which asks students to reflect on cultural and formal education is supported by C. Alejandra Elenes and Dolores Delgado Bernal. The authors refer to this knowledge as “cultural wealth” and note that “students draw on their diverse linguistic and cultural resources to function in schools and society” (69). For example, when students first enter the educational system, this “cultural wealth” is the only knowledge they possess, their own understanding of how the world works. As they begin to gain knowledge in school settings, this “cultural wealth” may be pushed aside, yet still exists, sometimes being used only at home. Both Elenes and Delgado Bernal emphasize that academic success is impacted by students’ ability to use this “cultural wealth.” In this way, Latino/a students’ academic success is impacted once they realize they hold knowledge which they can contribute to the classroom learning. I consider

this pedagogical practice to be powerful in helping counter “deficit informed research” that negatively impacts the Latino/a educational attainment.

Due to time constraints, I did not get the opportunity to do this assignment in my English 5B course. However, I assigned it to my students at Reedley College this fall 2017 semester. This fall semester I am teaching three English 1A classes at Reedley College, a community college in Reedley, California, a small agricultural town with a large number of Latino/a students. At Reedley College, English 1A is a four-unit, transfer-level English course which all students need to take and pass in order to receive an Associate’s degree and/or transfer to university. It could be considered the equivalent of Fresno State’s English 5A/B although many of the students enrolled in English 1A are not writing at a “college level.” I assigned this as the first essay of the semester to my three classes consisting of 30 students each. In the beginning, many of my students had difficulty putting their literary narratives together because they were not used to writing about themselves. Incorporating dialogue and vivid details was difficult for them. Writing in the first-person as opposed to the preferred third-person point of view, was in many ways challenging. However, in writing this essay, they learned many positive things about themselves. Almost 90% of my students acknowledged the role their families, parents specifically, played in their experiences as a reader and writer. Many of them pointed to specific advice they received from their families to *echarle ganas a la escuela y ponerse las pilas para salir adelante*. I encouraged my students to incorporate dialogue in other languages as well, and although a majority of them used Spanish dialogue, I also had a student incorporate Mandarin in her literacy narrative.

Going back to the conversation of cultural consciousness, this particular student, although she identifies as Latina, taught me that Spanish is not the only

other language spoken in Latino/a households (this is often a generalization). For this student, Mandarin was her grandmother's first language, and being that she grew up with her grandmother, it was important to her to provide an accurate account of her home literacies in discussing how this has transferred over to her experience with academic literacy at the college level. For the most part, my own understanding of my students' linguistic identity was limited to Spanish (and its variations) as well as indigenous languages. In this way, through this pedagogical practice, I too learned many things about my students that helped me build a better rapport with them and also find ways to better meet their needs.

Conclusion

Three of the pedagogical practices discussed in this chapter were implemented in my English 5B, first-year writing classroom at Fresno State to alleviate the current marginalization experienced by Latino/a students. These practices were designed to increase participation and foster inclusiveness for Latino/a students who would otherwise be disengaged from the classroom learning. Since my English 5B class at Fresno State consisted of 19 students who identified as either Latino/a, Hispanic, or Mexican-American, I was able to see how incorporating such practices, which differed from the writing they did in English 5A, helped them see writing as a rhetorical act and one which gave them a voice and agency. Furthermore, the last practice which I was able to incorporate into my course curriculum at Reedley College, where approximately 90% of my students are of Latino/a descent, also helped me better understand how the current scholarship as discussed in the literature review, are in some ways problematic because they fail to fully address how the inextricable cultural identity of Latino/a students influences their educational attainment. All pedagogical practices convey

elements of Solorzano and Yosso's critical race methodologies and illustrate how such theoretical frameworks can be applied to composition in order to provide more positive and transformational learning experiences for Latino/a students in higher education.

After creating these practices and based on the results I received from my students, I established four conclusions for future implications in the writing classroom and the field of composition as a whole:

1. In order to fulfill the educational objectives of first-year writing, we first need to ensure that all students feel like they are part of the institution. Instructors of FYW need to promote a classroom culture that embraces cultural differences and recognizes that due to those differences, it is of the utmost importance that all students are fairly and equally engaged and acknowledged.
2. A transformational learning experience is possible when we put more emphasis on the learning process and less on the results of such learning. This can be done by incorporating assignments that ask students to tap into their prior knowledge in order to help them understand that writing is a skill that is continually being learned throughout one's lifetime. This is why revision was heavily emphasized with my English 5B students and is something I also emphasize with my students at Reedley College. In giving students writing assignments that target outside audiences beyond the teacher or their peers, we can also convince them that writing is a learning experience and that every writing situation is influenced by rhetorical moves which we make in order to effectively address our audiences.

3. Cultural consciousness and inclusivity can be fulfilled by introducing non-academic genres and having students write and share about their own experiences that have shaped who they are today. Furthermore, instead of putting labels on our students, we should take the time to ask them what they prefer to be called in order to give them the power of establishing their own identities.
4. Students' *funds of knowledge* need to be used in the FYW classroom. Instructors need to do their part in helping students unearth this knowledge and critically consider how they can use it in new writing situations as well as figure out what connections can be made between them. Laura Rendón argues for the importance of allowing students to bring “who they are” into the classroom when she writes: “They [students] appeared comfortable sharing stories about their families, cultural experiences, and ups and downs of life. In this fashion, the classroom served as a way to invite not only the expertise of the professor but also the voice of the students” (84). For this reason, such teaching moments where Latino/a students are able to step in and share their *funds of knowledge* are possible if texts written by Latino/a writers are integrated into the course curriculum and readings and discussions focusing on racism, discrimination, culture, and identity are implemented in the classroom.
5. Learning that goes both ways is possible when instructors begin to see themselves as classroom facilitators as opposed to dictators. Instructors need to acknowledge that while it is their job to teach students how to write, they also need to be aware that there may be instances when students will be the ones doing the teaching. For

example, during a teaching moment, students may comment on something or provide examples to further expand the knowledge on a specific topic and offer a clearer explanation than the one provided by a textbook or website. In this way, we are able to see how the transfer of learning can go both ways leading to a rise in student participation and active engagement.

In implementing these practices, my goal was to effectively reach every student in my class, particularly those who identified as Latino/a. After reading and analyzing the current scholarship in the field of composition and being informed by Critical Race Theory and Latino Critical Theory, I was inspired to create pedagogical practices that address the current issues with cultural consciousness, prior knowledge, funds of knowledge, and academic literacy in the FYW classroom. After seeing the ways my students responded to these and the overall progress they made by the end of English 5B, I am confident that incorporating such practices are effective in enabling agency, improving their literacy skills, and making it possible for more of them to successfully complete a university degree.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND FURTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

There is a lot of current scholarship that discusses the state of Latino/as in higher education. I use some of these sources for my literature review where I specifically focus on the themes of cultural consciousness, prior knowledge, funds of knowledge, and academic literacy in order to demonstrate how the experiences of Latino/a students in first-year writing (FYW) relate to these conversations. It is clear this student group has slowly been making their way into institutions of higher education for the past decades. The unfortunate truth is that as the numbers show, some of them will graduate with a 4-year degree, while most will drop out. Looking closely at the statistics on the rate of degree completion for Latino/as and having myself experienced the challenges that come with obtaining a higher education, is essentially what prompted me to write this thesis with the objective of bringing awareness to this institutional problem and providing recommendations to teachers of writing about what we can do in the FYW classroom to ensure success for all our students.

Coming from a Latino/a household myself, I have vivid recollection of the various instances in which I felt like dropping out of college seemed like the only thing I could do at the moment. Even today, seeing my parents working in the fields still brings feelings of guilt upon me as I strive to balance my familial duty along with my desire for a career and a stable future. How much more helpful would I be to my parents if I already had a full-time job? What about the other expectations my parents have for me such as marriage and starting a family of my own? These cultural expectations and pressures have been a constant reality since I started college in August 2010 and although I have become somewhat better and balancing things in life, they continue to be a part of me even now as a graduate

student. Similar to my own experiences, cultural expectations and pressure directly impact the educational attainment of many Latino/a students today. As Latino/a students navigate the world of higher education, these expectations and pressures can become overwhelming and cause many to drop out. Unfortunately, a lot of this is ignored by non-Latino/as due to the way Latino/a students are perceived by others. The institution's failure to address such issues in many ways contributes to the low number of degree completion rate within the Latino/a community.

The focus of my research for this thesis was to improve teaching practices in the writing classroom by creating deep learning experiences as a way to be more inclusive of Latino/a students. Having taught first year writing for three semesters at a Hispanic serving institution such as Fresno State, has made me realize the need that exists in the FYW classroom in order to address the marginalization of and lack of access to learning for Latino/a students. It is equally important to provide recommendations for improving teaching methods and current practices that are better suited to meet the needs of this specific group of students. Some of these improvements can be made by integrating texts written by Latino/a writers that discuss topics and experiences that these students can find both relatable and interesting. Furthermore, the use of genres such as counterstories and testimonios both which arise from CRT and LatCrit, are meant to move away from the traditional "essay" genre and other forms of writing created to fit the needs of white students. These traditional genres tend to leave Latino/a students on the margins due to their inability to comprehend the conventions associated with such genres. We should also note that although such genres may not necessarily provide an easier transition for Latino/a students, it can tap into prior knowledge and funds of knowledge while also working together to address some of the issues with what constitutes academic literary.

Furthermore, acknowledging and repurposing the funds of knowledge is the main objective of this research as a way to inform educators in IHE of these factors and how creating agency in the FYW classroom can help Latino/a students learn more effectively. Additionally, the reciprocal aspect of transfer is demonstrated through these funds of knowledge as we move away from deficit based approaches and begin to focus on what Latino/a students contribute to the classroom learning by using that which they already know. By asking our students to reflect on their writing

In response to my research question(s), I propose we accomplish this task by enabling and transforming Latino/a students' orientation towards learning so that they focus on the experience of first year writing (FYW) and less on the grade. This is definitely a difficult task to do considering our grading system and our students' obsession with grades. However, I would like to argue that one of the ways we can do this is by structuring our classes in a way that appeals to the interests of our students and one in which our students are actively engaged with the course material. We must ask ourselves how texts and assignments that represent the students we serve keeps students engaged in comparison to texts and assignments that do the opposite. If we can keep our students actively engaged in the learning, then perhaps we can begin to transform their orientation.

Additionally, grading contracts like the one used by the First-Year Writing program at California State University, Fresno is another thing we can implement in our courses since it helps create accountability in our students instead of having them focus on points they need to earn to receive a specific letter grade.

Another significant focus is on drawing attention to the funds of knowledge of these students and how this contributes to the classroom learning and reciprocity of transfer. We can better the experience of these marginalized

students by implementing the following: repurposing prior knowledge into funds of knowledge. When focusing on Latino/a students specifically, language and culture are two things we can use in the classroom to tap into their prior knowledge. As emphasized earlier in this thesis, students may not know everything about a specific subject or genre, but they know something. In being culturally conscious, we must be mindful of how our students' culture and language has shaped them and influenced their early years in education. We must ask ourselves, what do they already know and how can I use that knowledge to their advantage in the writing classroom? The testimonio I assigned my English 5B students is an example of that since students were able to use their prior knowledge and funds of knowledge through other languages as well as the content of the dialogue they incorporated into their narratives. By transforming the content of the classroom to include writers of color that these students can relate to and becoming culturally aware of the differences in cultural and linguistic identities, we can enable Latino/a students to gain more knowledge from these deep learning experiences that are meant to create a more inclusive classroom.

Teaching English 5A/B at CSU Fresno, a Hispanic serving institution gave me the opportunity to closely work with and interact with Latino/a students every week. Reading my students' writing as well as having conversations with them exposed me to the similarities between their own experiences and mine. Yet, even with the many similarities, each of my students had a different testimonio to share. Reading their testimonios not only helped me know my students better, but also helped establish a deep sense of respect and admiration for them. A lot of them were first-generation college students or the first ones in their families to go to college. A couple of them confided in me regarding their undocumented status. Some of them had ill parents they cared for while others came from single-parent

households or had at least one parent in the prison system. Going into this research project, I had preconceived notions of who my students were. Because they “looked” Latino/a, I assumed many of them had similar experiences to the ones I had as an undergraduate student.

The key findings of my research gave me a deeper sense of understanding of who makes up the Latino/a community within higher education. The conclusions I made are what guided the pedagogical practices I discuss in detail in chapter 4. Throughout my thesis, it is clear how Solorzano and Yosso’s critical race methodologies in education served as the foundation for this my research objectives. Through the literature review, case studies, and pedagogical practices, I sought to find ways in which we can make space for Latino/a students in the FYW classroom by acknowledging their inextricable cultural identities and challenging ideologies such as White privilege as well as conventional texts and theories that fail to accurately depict the narratives of people of color.

My goal is that by presenting these conclusions and making this contribution to the current scholarship, institutions of higher education will begin to closely observe the reasons that lead to Latino/a students dropping out. In some cases, the desire for educational attainment may not be enough. In such cases, I present the question: What can institutions, faculty, and administration to help lower such numbers? My research is specifically focuses on the responsibility of writing instructors to create safe spaces for students on the margins.

Because first-year writing is a required course for all incoming students at CSU Fresno, I concluded that the FYW classroom would be the appropriate setting to do this. I am hopeful the current scholarship in conjunction to the case studies I provide in chapter 3, will compel FYW instructors to act on such

marginalization and instead replace it with agency and a feeling of acceptance into the discourse community of the university.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: OVERVIEW OF PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES
TO ACKNOWLEDGE AND VALIDATE CLASSROOM
DIVERSITY

Overview

In the appendices that follow I have included writing assignments and activities that lean on cultural consciousness. Each writing assignment gives students an opportunity to use prior knowledge and funds of knowledge in order to create their own identities as writers as well as gain agency in the writing classroom. The use of genres such as the literacy narrative and counterstory/testimonio gives students an opportunity to write about themselves and explain how their cultural backgrounds have influenced their experiences as students, writers, and individuals. Shorter writing assignments as well as course readings, expose students to writers of color who write about topics that resonate with the Latino/a experience. Students' responses to these assignments are included in chapter 3.

Content

- Writing Critical Race Counterstories and Testimonios & a Reading and Conversation on “Different Englishes”
- Reading, Questioning, And Responding to Stereotypes Using Judith Ortiz Cofer’s The Myth of The Latin Woman
- Moving Beyond Academic Genres into “Writing That Matters”
- The Role of Formal Education and Funds of Knowledge in Shaping Students’ Literacy

APPENDIX B: WRITING CRITICAL RACE COUNTERSTORIES
AND TESTIMONIOS & A READING AND CONVERSATION
ON “DIFFERENT ENGLISHES”

This writing project is a non-traditional, mixed genre with two components to it. Students begin by writing a personal narrative discussing their own lived experiences in relation to racism, sexism, classism, and nativism. This “mixed” genre consists of a personal narrative that sets up the conversation leading to an argument that is supported using credible sources to support one’s claim. Students are exposed to the rhetorical situation of this genre by reading and analyzing examples. Following their understanding of this, students will have an opportunity to write a counterstory/testimonio of their own.

Detailed Summary

The writing prompt for this pedagogical practice follows:

“Through telling critical race counterstories, we humanize the struggles and injustices faced by People of Color within academic research, calling attention to racist structures, policies, and practices in education” -Huber 167

Testimonios are “A verbal journey of a witness who speaks to reveal the racist, nativist, classist, and sexist injustices they have suffered as a means of healing, empowerment, and advocacy for a more humane present and future” -Huber 170

Writing Project #2: Critical Race Counterstories and Testimonios

Consider the struggles and/or injustices you have experienced as a result of racism, nativism, classism, sexism, etc. Write a counterstory/testimonio where you tell your story with the purpose of calling attention to and advocating for social change.

Summary & Purpose

For the past couple of weeks, we have spent time reading texts such as Jonathan Kozol’s “Fremont High School” and “The Name of another article” that discuss social issues that directly impact specific groups of students. All authors focus on issues that directly impact the lives of students of color and their academic performance. Additionally, Minerva S. Chavez’s “Autoethnography, a Chicana’s Methodological Research Tool: The Role of Storytelling for Those Who Have No Choice but to do Critical Race Theory” takes a different approach by discussing similar issues, but through the art of story-

telling. Chavez writes in the genre of critical race counterstory, connecting her personal experience to a larger social issue as a way to bring awareness to the factors that negatively impact these specific communities.

For this section of the course, we will be focusing on understanding critical race counterstories and testimonios as personal narratives with the purpose of advocating for further research and political and social change, particularly in the sphere of higher education. This genre is significant in giving us an opportunity to practice critical thinking skills such as analyzing, synthesizing, interpreting, and evaluating the experiences of these writers.

Questions to Consider

- What struggles, or challenges, have you experienced?
- What was the cause of these struggles/challenges?
- How do they connect to racism, nativism, classism, sexism, etc.?
- What is the larger social problem that influenced your situation?
- What claim(s) can you make based on your life experiences?
- What social change are you advocating for/calling attention to?

Learning Outcomes

After completing Writing Project #2 students will:

- Become familiar with the genre of counterstories and testimonios
- Consider the rhetorical situation (writer, topic, purpose, audience and genre, and other factors that influence this)
- Analyze and question the rhetorical situations of counterstories and testimonios as written by other writers in order to understand how texts are part of a larger conversation
- Understand how to think critically to connect narratives with research
- Conduct research and evaluate sources to integrate in their own writing and support their claim(s)
- See their own writing as a response to a conversation as well empowering and influential in bringing social change
- Realize how writing is a process as they undergo multiple drafts and revision

Specifications

- 5-7 pages
- Double spaced
- Times New Roman
- 12-point font

- 2 outside sources minimum
- MLA/APA format
- Works Cited/References page
- Author's Notes

---End of writing prompt

Activities Leading to Writing Project

2

As with all major writing projects, there were various activities involved to introduce students to this new genre.

On day 1, students were provided with a handout that explained the genre of counterstories and testimonios. This article described in detail how these genres came to be, what was their purpose, and how they are being used today. Students read individually and then discussed with their groups their findings. Following that, the class reconvened and an overview of this was written on the board with students taking notes of this. Students were assigned a mini topic proposal to be due next class.

On day 2, students turned in mini topic proposals. Here students identified the “story” they would be focusing on and why such “story” is worthy of being told. Additionally, students had to select a larger social issue connected with their “story” and do some research in order to advocate for change. On this day, students were provided with an example of a counterstory written by Minerva Chavez and asked to identify some of the “moves” made by the author in structuring her counterstory. Students read this individually. We then discussed this as a class. Every student shared with the class the “social issue” they would be focusing on for their writing project. For homework, students were assigned to write an annotated bibliography of 1 source where they summarize the key ideas

of the source AND explain how that source is helpful for their paper and how they will be using it.

On day 3, students submitted their annotated bibliographies along with the article they selected. They were provided with a handout on evaluating sources and asked to evaluate their source in order to decide how useful of a source it would be for WP1. For homework, students were asked to research the Henry Madden Library (HML) databases and find another article that discusses the topic or a similar topic to the one they have selected for WP1. Students will use the handout provided to write an evaluation of the article.

On day 4, students will work individually to create an effective thesis statement for WP1. After they have completed this, they will work with a partner, share their thesis and give/receive feedback. I will provide students with examples of effective thesis statement.

On day 5, students will bring a completed outline with their thesis statement and main points of discussion. They will share this in groups with the purpose of getting ideas on how to expand their points of discussion.

On day 6, students will bring a complete draft of WP1 for peer review workshops. After workshopping their papers, students will write a revision plan for the revisions they plan to make.

On day 7, students will submit a revised introduction and conclusion. Students will be provided with a handout on what they “must” include and what they “can” include in their introduction and conclusion for their counterstory/testimonio.

On day 8, students will bring revised sentences for WP1.

On day 9, students, will submit a third draft for WP1 and prepare a (5 minute) “talk/overview” of their project to share. Students will be put in groups of

4. Class will reconvene. We will discuss what was gained from WP1. Students will write an in-class reflective response on how WP1 provided them with agency and helped in forming their identities as students of color in the university.

Research Objectives

The genre of counterstories and testimonios serve as an improved teaching practice, particularly in relation to ethnic and race studies due to their origin in Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latino Critical Theory (LatCrit). As a counterstorytelling methodology meant to give individuals of color an opportunity to tell their narratives from their own perspectives and in an accurate manner, writing in this genre, gives individual writers an opportunity to gain voice and agency. Through this writing project, writing becomes a real skill that is transferable outside the classroom because it comes to be seen as a medium of communication, particularly for historically marginalized groups.

This writing project is meant to be used as a genre that counters the traditional, academic genres used in first-year writing, many which oftentimes leave Latino/a students on the margins. This is because the structures and guidelines for “academic” writing oftentimes requires students have mastered skills and possess a sense of prior knowledge regarding what is appropriate and what is not appropriate for academic settings.

Moreover, this writing project provides inclusion for such students to share their cultural identity by writing about their experiences, which leads to active engagement in the classroom since students are given a voice in being able to write about themselves and the issues that they have established as worthy to be discussed because of the ways it impacts them and their communities. This is significant when we consider how many students of color have been suppressed

from using their voice throughout their K-12 education. Furthermore, this also allows for a sense of ownership and pride in their “stories” and their writing.

A Reading and Conversation on “Different Englishes”

As we continue working on counterstories/testimonios, it is important to analyze how the art of effective storytelling is closely linked with language and how this is used. Whereas language in academic writing often refers to word choice and vocabulary, you will notice that in the genre of counterstories and testimonios language goes beyond that to also include actual languages for specific regions and groups.

For today’s lesson, we will be looking at how writers use language, that is variations of English, code-switching, Spanglish, broken English, and languages other than English as rhetorical moves to effectively present their primary accounts in an accurate manner. Because language is closely connected to identity and translation oftentimes leads to a loss in meaning, the use of *different Englishes* is significant in validating narratives.

The purpose of this assignment is to read, analyze, and assess the use of different Englishes by three different writers, all being part of minority groups. Students will respond to specific questions which ask them to assess the effectiveness of using different languages. Additionally, these readings along with the writing responses will serve two purposes. One, they will foster a classroom discussion on linguistic identity and the significance of this in how students see themselves and how they perform academically. Second, these readings and activities will also serve as a model to demonstrate students how they can integrate this rhetorical strategy of different Englishes and the larger concept of Linguist identity in their own counterstories and testimonios for writing project 1. Because a component of this writing project is personal narrative, it is critical that students

are able to develop their narratives using vivid detail and dialogue. Integrating different Englishes will help students see another aspect of the non-traditional aspect of the genre of counternarratives and testimonios.

Detailed Summary of Lesson

This lesson consists of 3 assigned readings, a Blackboard discussion post, and a class session which focused on discussing the key ideas presented in all 3 texts. Students did a series of short writing responses in class in order to engage with the key themes of the texts.

Homework

Students were assigned three texts in three different genres. The texts were Amy Tan's "Mother Tongue", an excerpt from Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and an excerpt from Gloria Anzaldua's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. All three texts were categorized as "Different Englishes". Students were asked to read and annotate these texts and post a discussion board post on Blackboard of at least 250 words. The forum asked students to do the following: "After reading excerpts from Anzaldua and Hurston's books, and Tan's short story, take a minute to reflect on the way(s) in which the authors demonstrate their use of the English language and/or what language means to them in relation to their identity".

In-Class Discussion and Writing Responses.

A PowerPoint presentation was prepared and presented in class discussing some of the key themes of the readings. This lesson consisted of key ideas and direct quotes for students to write down, a 10-minute response, a short video titled "Our Spirits Don't Speak English", and 3-minute individual writing prompts to

respond to. The writing responses were meant to guide the class in conversation regarding the key themes in the texts they were asked to read as well as to provide students with the opportunity to share some of their personal experiences with language, identity, and writing in public education and higher education.

During the last 15 minutes of class, students worked in groups of 3 to come up with a collective response regarding the key themes presented in all 3 texts and how such themes are important to consider and discuss in the writing classroom. All individual and group responses were collected.

Title: Different Englishes

Slide 1: Metalinguistic Awareness

- Definition: To intentionally think about the ways that we use language.
- Questions to Consider: How do you use language? Who are you comfortable or uncomfortable speaking with? What or who influences how you speak? In what language(s) do you feel comfortable speaking?

Slide 2: Writing Prompt

- Think of the differences between the language you speak at home and the languages you use with friends, teachers, employers, and so on.
- Write a response that reflects on the various languages you speak. If you speak only one language, consider the variations in the ways you speak it- at home, at work, at school, at church, etc.

Slide 3: Our Spirits Don't Speak English

- Native American boarding schools forced Native Americans to assimilate and convert to Christianity by learning English and losing their native tongues.
- Response: How would you feel if you lost your language? Have you ever felt that you lost or you're losing your language? Have you ever felt that you had to hide your language? Has it felt that by hiding your language you're also hiding (some part of) your identity?

Slide 4: Mother Tongue

- Tan refers to this as a language which is “Perfectly clear, perfectly natural” and a language which “helped shape the way [she] saw things, expressed things, made sense of the world” (651).
- Furthermore, she notes that “language spoken in the family, especially in immigrant families which are more insular, plays a large role in shaping the language of the child” (652).

- Response: How do Hurston and Anzaldua demonstrate their use of their mother tongue in their own writing?

Slide 5: Zora Neale Hurston and Southern dialect

- “Listen, Sam, if it was nature, nobody wouldn’t have tuh look out for babies touchin’ stoves, would they? ‘Cause dey just naturally wouldn’t touch it. But dey sho will. So it’s caution” (Hurston 64).
- “She wasn’t petal open anymore with him. She was twenty-four and seven years married when she knew. She found that out one day when he slapped her face in the kitchen. It happened over one of those dinners that chasten all women sometimes” (Hurston 71).
- Response: What is Hurston’s purpose in using Black English in her novel? How would Hurston respond to Tan’s definition of the mother tongue and its importance in the individual’s life?

Slide 6: Gloria Anzaldua and identity in language

- “For a people who are neither Spanish nor live in a country in which Spanish is the first language; for a people who live in a country in which English is the reigning tongue but who are not Anglo... what recourse is left to them but to create their own language? A language which they can connect their identity to, one capable of communicating the *realities* and *values* true to themselves—a language with terms that are neither espanol ni ingles, but both” (77).
- Response: After reading an excerpt from Anzaldua’s writing, how important do you think her mother tongue is to her? How does she demonstrate her refusal to assimilate to the dominant culture’s language?

Slide 7: A different form of English

- Tan: “our language of intimacy, a different sort of English that relates to family talk, the language I grew up with” (650).
- Anzaldua: “We needed a language with which we could communicate with ourselves, a secret language” (77).
- Hurston’s switch between standard English and folk speech.
- Response: In your own life, how has this intimate, secret language—this different form of English—shaped your experience(s) with the conventions of the English language in K-12 and now in college? How have they hindered or benefited your writing?

Slide 8: Group work

You will work with 2 other students and answer the following questions. Be sure to refer to the texts.

1. How is agency demonstrated in these different texts? Consider both the content *and* the “moves” made by each author.
2. How do these authors use their “mother tongue” in their own writing and why is this important? Consider the intended audience.

3. How do you relate your own language(s) to your own identity? Be specific. Why is it important to acknowledge these different Englishes in the classroom? How does this improve the learning experience of students of color?

Research Objectives

“Different Englishes” serves as an improved teaching method in the first-year writing (FYW) classroom by fostering agency and in this way helping to alleviate the current marginalization of Latino/a students. Through language and the variation within these languages as depicted and described by the authors, Latino/a students, as well as other students of color, are able to relate to such topics and experiences. Active engagement is seen in students who are able to relate to the conversation, and in this way, are motivated to participate by asking questions and most importantly making comments to contribute to the class discussion. Cultural consciousness, prior knowledge, and agency are all present in the discussion of *different Englishes*.

This lesson is significant because it provides Latino/a students with much insight regarding how they identify and the role they play in the university. Through a classroom discussion on this topic, students are able to see how their peers identify linguistically and how they demonstrate this in everyday life. Sharing these values can help other students feel more confident about their use of a language outside of academic English. Additionally, in being able to do this, students are able to see their own languages and identities being validated. This is particularly important during a time of constant discrimination and the suppression and cultural erasure of languages outside “academic” English, particularly, within the space of the university.

In connection to CRT and LatCrit, such texts written by writers of color (Chinese American, African American, and Chicana), provide students with

narratives written by individuals whose experiences these students find relatable. These experiences focused on language and identity are similar and in some cases identical to the variations in languages spoken by such students and their experiences juggling two cultures. These readings and class discussion work to present the need for cultural awareness in the classroom, demonstrate the urgency of changing the content of the classroom, and enable students to repurpose their prior knowledge within the boundaries of the university classroom to improve how they learn to think critically.

APPENDIX C: READING, QUESTIONING, AND RESPONDING
TO STEREOTYPES USING JUDITH ORTIZ COFER'S THE
MYTH OF THE LATIN WOMAN

This lesson consists of one assigned reading, an in-class quick write, a class session focused on discussing the key ideas and concepts from the text, writing responses to the text, and two post writing activities which ask students to further reflect on and connect with the larger conversation presented by the text. Students participated in a reading analysis, reflective writing response, small group writing activity, short essay response, and a blog entry with this lesson.

Detailed Summary

A detailed summary of this pedagogical practice follows:

Quickwrite. Class begin with a quickwrite regarding the concept of stereotypes. Students will respond to the following writing prompt based on their own personal experiences and prior knowledge:

- “What are stereotypes? Draw on your own experiences. How have you (or your community) experienced stereotyping on the basis of age, gender, ethnicity, religion, even dress? How have such stereotypes impacted you?”

Students write for 5 minutes. I will call on volunteers to share their responses. Students will continue thinking about this question as they engage with the reading text.

Reading and textual analysis. Following the quick write, students will read Judith Ortiz Cofer’s *The Myth of the Latin Woman*, a memoir from our course anthology. Students will pay close attention to the vivid details provided by Cofer in her discussion of stereotypes. Students will consider audience and purpose and how these are influential to Cofer’s choice of content and examples. In their groups, students will write an analysis of the text by responding to the following questions.

1. **Summary:** Write a few brief sentences summarizing what the selection was about.
2. **Purpose:** What was the author's main purpose? What does Cofer intend for her audience to do?
3. **Audience:** Who does Cofer intend to reach with this memoir? Why? How do you know this?
4. **Strategies:** How does the author achieve his or her purpose? Jot down notes and examples about the rhetorical techniques the author uses to reach her audience.

Students need to provide textual evidence to support their responses. Although students are working in groups, they each have to submit individual responses.

Reflective Writing. After completing their textual analysis, I will pose the following question(s) to students to get them to reflect on the text as well as on their responses to the text. We will discuss these questions as a class. Then students will have 5 minutes to compose a reflective response.

- **Personal Reflective Response:** What did you think of this text? How can you relate to it? How did this text impact you? What stood out? What did you learn? In your opinion, what do you think leads to stereotypes regarding specific groups of people? What kind of negative things can result from these? How can these be prevented?

Homework. Students have two writing assignments as homework to continue the conversation regarding stereotypes and identity.

Short Essay Response

Read the following lines from *The Myth of the Latin Woman*:

“Mixed cultural signals have perpetuated certain stereotypes—for example, that of the Hispanic woman as the “Hot Tamale” or sexual firebrand. It is a one-dimensional view that the media have found easy to promote. In their special vocabulary, advertisers have designated “sizzling” and “smoldering” as the adjectives of choice for describing not only the foods but also the women of Latin America” (Cofer 878).

Write an argument explaining whether you agree or disagree with this assertion as it applies to the media today. You may work with Cofer’s example of Latin American women, or you may choose another group to consider in terms of stereotypes that the media promotes. Support your opinion with evidence from your experience, observation, or reading. For example, how does the media portray and promote in the stereotypes of African American males, individuals of Middle East descent, recent immigrants, etc.

Blog Entry: “My Identity”

There are numerous ways to identify and express this identity. Who are you? How do you identify yourself to others? Who are you to your friends, to your family, to strangers? Who are you at school, work, or other locations such as church or the gym? What about race, class, gender, sexuality, religion? Are any of these categories important to how you view yourself? If so, which ones and why? If not, why not? Think about your identity. How would you describe yourself? What does this description say about you? What is the history of your identity? Have you changed? Have you always been the same? Answer as many questions as you’d like.

Research Objectives

“Reading, Questioning, and Responding to Stereotypes using Judith Ortiz Cofer’s *The Myth of the Latin Woman*” serves as an improved teaching practice in the first-year writing (FYW) classroom to alleviate the current marginalization of Latino/a students. A discussion on stereotypes is significant because in most cases students are not given the opportunities to share who they are and how their own identities impact the way they are stereotyped or the way they see such stereotypes. By discussing individual and collective identities students are able share their funds of knowledge and demonstrate the reciprocal transfer of learning. By having students read, discuss, and write about topics and conversations they can relate to, Latino/a students can see their experiences validated. Furthermore, these writers can serve as role models for students. Cultural awareness, prior knowledge, and agency are all present in the discussion of stereotypes.

The purpose of this lesson on stereotypes is to provide Latino/a students the opportunity to enter a conversation which they can relate to and which appeals to their interest. Furthermore, by introducing texts written by Latino/a writers, Latino/a students who have not been exposed to this will be able to see that texts by Latino/a writers and non-academic genres are also critical in academia.

In connection to CRT, LatCrit, and the objectives of my thesis, such texts written by writers of color, particularly a memoir, provide students with narratives written by individuals whose experiences students find relatable. The experiences of these writers regarding the various stereotypes assigned to groups of people by those outside such groups are critical because of the effects they can have on such groups. This text, class discussion, and writing assignments present the need for cultural awareness in the classroom, and most importantly, understanding the intersectionality that impacts the experiences of Latino/as in higher education.

There is a critical need for transforming the content of the writing classroom to be more inclusive of and validate the experiences of Latino/a students. Overall, this lesson fulfills the objectives of my thesis because it helps Latino/a students feel welcomed and acknowledged in the writing classroom by giving them the opportunity to share their funds of knowledge.

APPENDIX D: MOVING BEYOND ACADEMIC GENRES INTO
“WRITING THAT MATTERS”

Overview

As we near the end of the semester, students will complete one final writing assignment that will give them the opportunity to implement agency by writing for a purpose and with an extended audience in mind. At this point in the semester, students have been exposed to different genres, both academic and non-traditional. Students have written for various purposes and with multiple audiences in mind. This last reading, activity, and writing assignment will give students the opportunity to apply the writing skills they've gained in order to construct writing that uses rhetorical strategies to make a statement that draws awareness to critical issues that impact their educational attainment.

For today's lesson, we will be looking at an article by Nancy G. Barron. This article is unique for two reasons. In this article, Barron shares with us three personal letters she wrote to depict the challenges and barriers she faces as a woman of color in higher education. Reading this article will help students realize that writing is not limited to the writing composed within the classroom. Instead, writing is a skill that is used as a tool for empowerment and social change. Similar to the counterstory and testimonio, letter writing can be used to address concerns one may have regarding the factors that determine whether we succeed or not. Additionally, students will select their audience for this writing assignment. Writing beyond academic genres becomes writing with a purpose, writing about a topic that matters, and writing for the means of using one's writing abilities to bring about positive social change. Students will have to think about the topic and medium they choose to use to deliver their message across. In preparing for this, students will have to anticipate possible objections to their claims in order to write a persuasive message.

Brief Description

This lesson consists of one assigned reading with reading questions, an in-class quick write, an in-class group activity, and a post-lesson writing assignment.

Detailed Summary

A detailed summary of this pedagogical practice follows:

Pre-Lesson Homework.

Students will read and annotate “Dear Saints, Dear Stella: Letters Examining the Messy Lines of Expectations, Stereotypes, and Identity in Higher Education,” by Nancy G. Barron. This article focuses on “potential problems Latino students [particularly, Mexican-Americans] encounter in higher education based on individual and group identity” and how this relates to their educational experiences. Barron writes this article in the form of a personal letter using language and examples related to the Latino/a experience. I will provide students with reading questions to help them engage with and understand the key points outlined by the author.

Quick write.

On the day the reading is due, students will come to class and complete a quick write on their response to Barron’s text. This will help students get their thoughts on paper and will also help with the discussion to follow.

Small Group Activity.

Students will break up into groups of three and discuss their responses to the reading questions, which was completed for homework. Additionally, they will work as a group to answer the following questions on genre and the rhetorical moves used by Barron. A detailed response should accompany each question.

1. What is genre? What is the purpose of genre? Why is it necessary to use different genres? How do you determine which genre is appropriate for each writing situation?
2. Consider the genre used by Nancy G. Barron. How is this significant to the conversation she is entering? How effective would the author have been had she written this text as an academic essay? A different genre?
3. Who is Barron's intended audience? Is it simply the three recipients of her letters? How do you know this?

Post-Lesson Homework.

Over the next two class sessions, students will be writing two letters regarding their experiences in higher education in relation to culture, race, ethnicity, language, class, and gender. I will pose the following quote from Barron's article:

- “[T]he messages from most of the Anglo mainstream especially in higher education is that full monocultural monolingual assimilation is what we should all do; yet from what I’ve seen, those who try to assimilate are never fully accepted” (18).

Students will think about how they relate to this quote. They will then use the following questions as a guide to write a letter emulating those written by Barron (they can write to a friend or family member, living or non-living, or deity regarding their experiences in college. This first letter will serve as a draft to get students to start generating ideas and start thinking about the effectiveness of the choices they make to present a clear message. Students will then take the same prompt and write a separate letter addressing the institution. The second letter will

be the crux of this assignment. Students will select a specific member, university president, educational board, university chancellor and write to this person regarding their college experience as a student of color. Students will specifically address how the structures of the university keeps them in marginalized spaces. Moreover, students in writing this letter to ask the institution to implement some kind of change that seeks to better the experiences of such students.

Questions to consider:

1. Do you feel accepted in the university?
2. What cultural factors impact your educational experience? How?
3. What do administrators and educators need to know about the experiences you've lived while trying to navigate higher education?
4. What role do cultural factors play in your performance in first-year writing?
5. What kind of support do you need to be successful in college?

Research Objectives

This pedagogical practice serves to create agency in the FYW classroom for Latino/a students by giving students the opportunity to write about material they “already know”. This is an assignment that can be assigned later in the semester to give students the opportunity to transfer the knowledge they've gained regarding the rhetorical moves of academic genres into a genre that can also transfer outside the classroom and most importantly, one that gives them the opportunity to write about topics that concern them. Additionally, with the goal to make literacy more accessible and transfer writing outside FYW, the practice of letter writing shows students that writing is significant in the “real world”. This is a good introduction to FYW because it teaches students reading and writing strategies such as reading

critically, annotating, analyzing, interpreting, summarizing, evaluating and responding to the text. These are all skills critical to college success.

Furthermore, this assignment is also a good way to end the semester by demonstrating how the skills they have gained in this course can be applied to situations beyond first-year writing, particularly situations that have to do with topics that matter. With this assignment, students can see that they need to learn all the skills previously mentioned not only to succeed in their college courses, but also to be able to express themselves and share their ideas with others in the “real world”. This real-world application is seen here because this assignment will give students room for a larger audience that is not the teacher or peers. Instead, students will send these letters to administration. Students can see how writing does not have to be a “chore” or a daunting requirement they must get out of the way. Instead, students can come to appreciate writing and in this way, be motivated to learn more. This pedagogical practice fulfills the cultural awareness, prior knowledge, and agency aspects of my research objectives.

This reading and writing assignment serves as a contemplative writing practice and connects to my thesis because of the reflection component and the opportunity it provides for Latino/a students to tell things for how they are based on their own experiences. The questions I have posed for this writing assignment are questions that many times, students don't really take the time to reflect on. Furthermore, the following statement quoted by Barron is similar to the points I pose for my own research: “Justices should refer not only to distribution, but also to the institutional conditions necessary for the development and exercise of individual capacities and collective communication and cooperation” (25).

In connection to Critical Race Theory (CRT), Latino Critical Theory (LatCrit), and the objectives of my thesis, this reading and writing assignment

fulfills one of the elements of Solorzano and Yosso's critical race methodologies in education which focuses on challenging "traditional research paradigms, texts, and theories used to explain the experiences of people of color" (26). This writing assignment is critical because it focuses specifically on the challenges faced by Latino/a students in higher education. To effectively address the questions I present for my own research, it is first important to realize that there is a current problem in academia. This problem is for the most part ignored by White scholars and educators who fail to address issues of racism and discrimination in higher education. These same individuals resist discussions on the lack of access to students of color and insist on "equality" and the "fair distribution of resources." Having students themselves write about the challenges and marginalization they face, can serve to raise awareness regarding this problem.

APPENDIX E: THE ROLE OF FORMAL EDUCATION AND
FUNDS OF KNOWLEDGE IN SHAPING STUDENTS'
LITERACY

This writing assignment is a literacy narrative which consists of having students reflect on their identity as readers and writers in relation to their lived experiences and cultural practices. Students will reflect on how their K-12 education and their cultural education has impacted who they are as reader and writers. Most importantly, students will identify how these “educations” prepared them for academic writing. As part of their presentation of their literacy narratives, students will bring one artifact from their K-12 education and one artifact from their cultural education that demonstrate their most significant influences.

Detailed Summary

The writing prompt for this pedagogical practice follows:

Writing Project 1: How Formal Education and Cultural Education Influenced My Experience with Literacy

Reflect on your current state as a reader and writer and how that was shaped by your formal education and cultural knowledge. Write a literacy narrative in which you focus on critical aspects of your high school education and cultural knowledge that influenced you and prepared you for college level writing.

Summary & Purpose

The purpose of this writing project is to have you write a narrative that focuses on the knowledge you gained from your high school education in conjunction with the knowledge you gained from your family and culture. Most importantly, you will analyze how these specific “knowledges” prepared you for college level writing by explaining their direct influence.

In order to write this assignment, you will think about what you know about college writing and what you think is necessary to be a successful writer. Additionally, to situate your narrative, you will engage in a conversation with our course text regarding what college writing entails. This writing project will give you the opportunity to write about some of your strengths as a reader and writer based on the aspects of your formal and

cultural education that have influenced you. Moreover, this will make you aware of the challenges you may face with college writing and how to successfully overcome these.

Tasks

For this writing project, please select two key moments from your high school education and two key moments from your cultural knowledge that impact your identity as a reader or writer.

1. Write an essay that discusses these key moments in detail and explains how they influenced you.
2. Explain why these are important and how they prepared you for college writing using the course texts regarding what college writing entails.
3. In discussing your strengths as a writer, discuss the resources you need to continue to grow and be successful in college writing.

Questions to Consider

- What book or writing assignment in high school had an impact on you?
- What teacher(s) played a key role in your growth as a reader and writer?
- How did high school English prepare you for college writing?
- How is high school English different from college English?
- What do you wish you would have been exposed to earlier?
- What aspect of your culture influenced your academic growth?
- How did your family influence your performance in school?
- What resources do you think you'll need to succeed in this class?

Specifications

- 3-4 pages
- Double spaced
- Times New Roman
- 12-point font
- MLA format
- Quotes/examples from course texts
- Works Cited page
- Attach Author's Notes to your drafts

---End of writing prompt

Research Objectives

“Writing Project 1: How Formal Education and Cultural Education Influenced My Experience with Literacy” serves as an improved teaching practice

to alleviate the current marginalization of Latino/a students by relying on the repurposing of students' funds of knowledge. With this writing project, students are asked to contemplate on how the "things" they were taught by their parents, families, and communities had an impact on their performance and development as readers and writers. By focusing on the influences of both formal education and cultural knowledge, Latino/a students can see how both sources are critical to their success. Funds of knowledge, cultural awareness, and agency are all manifested through this writing project while still giving students the opportunity to practice and develop skills that will prepare them for the kinds of writing they will do in FYW and other courses.

Writing Project 1: "How Education and Culture Influenced My Literacy", connects to my thesis by addressing the reciprocal transfer of learning and demonstrating how contributions made by Latino/a students can not only help them but can also serve to educate teachers on the students they are serving.

In connection to CRT, LatCrit, and the objectives of my thesis, this writing projects fuels is significant because it fulfills several requirements for what constitutes as college writing while simultaneously repurposing funds of knowledge. In requirement a conversation on the key moments of both sources, students can see how their funds of knowledge is just as important as the knowledge they gain through a formal education.

APPENDIX F: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about yourself and your identity as a Latino/a student.
2. Tell me about your decision to pursue higher education.
 - a. What kind of support did you receive for this decision from your family and friends?
 - b. from teachers, counselors and other school administrators?
3. Do you feel that your high school English courses provided you with writing assignments and texts that resonated with your experiences as a Latino/a?
4. Were you encouraged and/or willing to participate in your high school English courses in a way that made you feel included and accepted? How did this impact your learning and/or motivate you to pursue a higher education?
5. Think about your cultural background and upbringing as a Latino/a.
 - a. Do you feel or have you felt some form of conflict or tension between your cultural background/identity and the academic culture of public schools and the university?
 - b. Have your experiences as a Latino/a student easily transferred into higher education?
 - c. Have you been acknowledged and respected in the academic world in a way that makes you feel like you are part of the university?
6. What prior knowledge (not taught at school(s)) would you say you possessed entering the university? Think about the “things” you were taught at home, that is in your primary discourse community.
 - a. How do you think this prior knowledge can be repurposed in the writing classroom?
 - b. Why, in your opinion, is it important for you to be given the opportunities to do that?
7. What has been your experience in English 5A/B?
 - a. Do you feel this course has done something to make sure you feel included and acknowledged in relation to your cultural identity as a Latino/a student?
 - b. If so, how?
8. Why do you think it’s important that classrooms focus on acknowledging and respecting the cultural backgrounds and experiences of Latino/a students?
 - a. What kind of impact do you think this has on their overall college career?