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# Journal of Critical Scholarship on Higher Education and Student Affairs

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Volume 5

Issue 3 *Promoting Access & Critical Literacy:  
Working Within, Beyond, and Against the  
Academy*

Article 8

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2020

## Building Bridges: Epistemic Violence and Mother–Daughter Pedagogies from the U.S.–Mexico Border

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### Recommended Citation

Gaxiola Serrano, Tanya J. and Serrano, Elvia (2020) "Building Bridges: Epistemic Violence and Mother–Daughter Pedagogies from the U.S.–Mexico Border," *Journal of Critical Scholarship on Higher Education and Student Affairs*: Vol. 5 : Iss. 3 , Article 8.

Available at: <https://ecommons.luc.edu/jcshesa/vol5/iss3/8>

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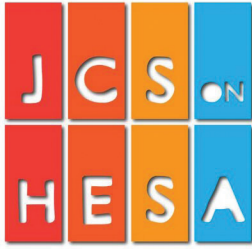
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### **Cover Page Footnote**

We are grateful for the critical support and feedback offered by Dr. Socorro Morales for this essay.



Volume 5, Issue 3

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## Building Bridges Epistemic Violence and Mother-Daughter Pedagogies from the U.S.-Mexico Border

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### — Abstract —

Living in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, residents have intimately learned about the impact of the militarized policing of the physical border on their lives. While not often discussed, the policing transcends the border institution and targets the ways of knowing of People and Immigrants of Color. This essay features pláticas between two Mexican women educators from the border, la frontera, to challenge epistemic violence on the lives of U.S. Chicanas/Latinas. Intergenerational pedagogies of a mother-daughter dyad from the Tijuana-San Diego region serve as exemplars of the survival and resistance found in the borderlands. The narratives highlight their unique experiences, one as a Mexican mother and preschool educator in Mexico, and the daughter as a first-generation professor working within the realms of academia in the United States. The authors, a mother and a daughter, offer their lived realities stemming from the border to humanize their epistemologies and build bridges across mothers–daughters, P-20 schooling, and the U.S.-Mexico borderlands.

Keywords: mother–daughter pedagogies, U.S.–Mexico borderlands, epistemology, P-20

ISSN 2377-1306

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*I remember when my mother made the decision to go back to work in Tijuana, Mexico as a preschool teacher. Initially, it didn't make sense to me. She had worked so hard to learn English, get her bachelor's degree from Mexico validated in the United States, and secure a job at a preschool close to home in San Diego. Yet, my mother chose to leave that behind in exchange for a long work commute, which included crossing international borders and earning a lower pay—all to work in Mexico rather than in the United States.*

The epigraph that opens this essay is part of Tanya's reflection of her mother Elvia's decision to leave her U.S. job and return to work in Mexico. Living in the U.S.–Mexico borderlands has intimately taught us—its residents—about the impact of the militarized policing of the border on our lives (Bejarano, 2010; Hernandez, 2010; Rosas, 2006; Sabo et al., 2014). Policing transcends the border and targets the ways of knowing of People and Immigrants of Color. We,<sup>1</sup> a mother (Elvia) and daughter (Tanya), share our experiences as Mexican immigrants to the United States and educators in P–12 and higher education, respectively, on both sides of the U.S.–Mexico border. This lived experience as Mexican educators, immigrants, and a mother–daughter dyad places us in a unique position to emphasize the practices of epistemological violence that take place in schools and border geographies, while also centering the mother–daughter pedagogies found within these spaces. Aligned with the focus of this special issue, our narratives actively emphasize the epistemic violence found in P–20 schooling by augmenting the voices of People and Immigrants of Color and placing them at the forefront of knowledge production. Because promoting non-dominant epistemologies across P–20 schooling is of utmost importance to us,

<sup>1</sup> The term “we” is used throughout this essay to depict our collective voice as authors. At times, the individual voice will be used together with a name identifier to highlight a singular author's voice.

we incorporate and draw from Chicana/Latina feminist epistemology (CLFE). This theoretical grounding shapes every aspect of this essay—from its incorporation of the Spanish language, use of a plática methodology, and focus on mother–daughter pedagogies and epistemic policing from the U.S.–Mexico border. In centering culturally situated epistemologies such as CLFE to highlight our experiences, we engage in a conscious political move to work within, beyond, and against the academy.

Through the use of pláticas and reflections, we discern how even in border regions, the ways of knowing of Mexican immigrant women do not fit the rigid constructs of U.S. education (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016). In our pláticas, we explore the material realities attached to the policing of knowledge and how we have developed pedagogies from experiences of oppression shared between us—a mother and daughter. Examples include pláticas in which Elvia shares with Tanya incidents at work that made her feel devalued as a professional in the United States even after many years of professional experience in Mexico. Elvia's narrative on the reasons behind her U.S. job departure birthed teachable moments for Tanya, which she now embodies as a faculty member. The mother–daughter pedagogies transcend all aspects of our lives, including our roles as educators that seek to produce more authentic scholarship capable of validating the epistemologies of People and Immigrants of Color. We open this essay by providing a brief review of prominent scholarship situated within Chicana/Latina feminist epistemologies, which include border epistemologies and pedagogies of the home among mothers and daughters. Next, we discuss the methodology of pláticas that we use in this study. The ensuing discussion explores our experiences with epistemic violence and mother–daughter pedagogies. The goal of this essay is to amplify the epistemological violence we face(d) as educators in the U.S.–Mexico borderlands, while also centering intergenerational mother–daughter pedagogies and providing possibilities for resistance across institutions of education and

border geographies. With respect to practitioners and scholars within higher education, we argue for the importance of acknowledging the epistemic violence that runs rampant in educational institutions, while also holding space and validating the resistance waged every day by People and Immigrants of Color as a result of their ways of knowing. Thus, we invite you to follow us on this journey as we disrupt systems of oppression that seek to silence People and Immigrants of Color in academic spaces.

### Chicana/Latina Feminist Epistemologies and Pedagogies

Exposing the practices of epistemological policing in the U.S.–Mexico border and across P–20 schooling first requires us to outline fundamental concepts to this conversation. Epistemology, defined as the production of knowledge, considers how people and communities create knowledge (Delgado Bernal, Elenes, Godinez, & Villenas, 2006). We can also interpret the policing of the epistemologies or ways of knowing and the knowledge production of People and Immigrants of Color as an act of violence. While we commonly understand violence as a physical act, some forms of harmful and violent acts can take a more figurative understanding, including epistemic violence. Spivak (1988) allows the reader to conceptualize epistemic violence as an “orchestrated, far-flung, and heterogeneous project to constitute the colonial subject as Other” (p. 24–25). Through the process of Othering, or asserting People and Immigrants of Color to the margins of society, colonial models of knowledge construction remain pervasive in the United States (Spivak, 1998). While we do not presume that all violence is or looks the same, we do contend that “Chicana/Latina feminist writings forefront the violence perpetrated on the minds-bodies-spirits of Latina/os within oppressive K–16 institutional structures” (Knight, Dixon, Norton, & Bentley, 2006, p. 39). Understanding that violence can manifest differently and target the minds, bodies, and spirits of Chicanas/os/x, Latinas/os/x, and other People and Immi-

grants of Color is of critical importance to this essay as history has revealed the complicity of educational institutions in promoting scientific racism, language genocide, assimilation, and white supremacy—all forms of epistemic violence (De Walt, 2009; Wilder, 2013; Wright & Tierney, 1991).

Scholarship following a Chicana/Latina feminist tradition reimagines holders of knowledge through an epistemic lens that acknowledges the strengths of Chicanas/Latinas (Delgado Bernal, 1998). In this way, CLFE resists the erasure of Chicanas/Latinas and, instead, theorizes for and about Chicanas/Latinas, thereby providing an avenue to combat epistemic violence. In studying the relationship among epistemology, mothering, and pedagogy, Cruz (2006) theorizes how “our production of knowledge begins in the bodies of our mothers and grandmothers, in the acknowledgement of the critical practices of women of color before us” (p. 61). The relationship highlighted in this quote by Cruz signals an intimate connection between knowledge production and the transmission of knowledge—the pedagogy—among Women of Color. The ensuing review of the literature focuses on pedagogies grounded in Chicana/Latina feminist epistemologies, including border/transformational pedagogies, pedagogies of the home, and mother–daughter pedagogies, to situate the perseverance of Chicanas/Latinas despite epistemic violence and erasure.

### Pedagogical Practices of Intergenerational Knowledge

In her seminal book, *Transforming Borders: Chicana/o Popular Culture and Pedagogy*, Elenes (2011) asks for the consideration of Chicana feminist knowledge and meaning-making within and outside of traditional schooling structures. Elenes argues:

Border/transformational pedagogies involve cultural politics that incorporate as social practices the construction of knowledge capable of *analyzing unequal social conditions*, power relations, and conflicts over meaning

that ensue from these struggles. They offer a cultural critique of the material conditions of subaltern communities and invoke politics of change to transform society in order to become truly democratic. (p. 1, emphasis not found in original)

Maintaining unequal social conditions at the forefront, Elenes centers alternative pedagogies that align with a Chicana/Latina feminist epistemic framework. While her book makes *La Llorona*, *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, and *Malitzin/Malinche* the foci of border/transformatory pedagogies, Elenes (2011) also notes the importance of Anzaldúa's (1987) borderlands theory in amplifying subaltern identities to underscore "the discourse of people who live in between different worlds" (p. 12). Anzaldúa's borderlands theory stems from her epistemologies as a queer, border woman who straddles multiple cultures, languages, and borders. Moreover, her work also acknowledges the historical and contemporary influence of the U.S.–Mexico border on Chicanas/os and Latinas/os. By acknowledging the present material conditions and power relations along the U.S.–Mexico border, the experiences of Chicanas/Latinas living in border geographies are particularly urgent. Thus, as Mexican immigrant women from the border, we utilize Elenes and Anzaldúa's scholarship to further explore the unequal social conditions that lead to epistemic violence in academic spaces.

While Elenes (2011) provides a framework to understand the larger phenomenon of border/transformatory pedagogies, the scholarship of Delgado Bernal (2001) focuses on the pedagogies of the home embodied by Chicanas/Latinas attending college. Delgado Bernal's (2001) study emphasizes how Chicana college students rely on cultural knowledge produced within their homes to navigate oppressive educational systems, such as colleges and universities. Drawing from interviews and focus groups with 32 Chicana college students from working-class backgrounds, the findings highlight the communication, practices,

and learning that take place at homes that facilitate students surviving despite racist, classist, and sexist structures found in academia. Delgado Bernal (2001) demonstrates how the resistance exhibited by Chicana college students can include "how a student balances, negotiates, and draws from her bilingualism, biculturalism, commitment to communities, and spiritualities" (p. 628). Thus, Delgado Bernal recognizes that Chicana college students can best navigate college with the necessary traits of being bilingual, bicultural, serving your community, and being spiritual. These findings support the notion that Chicana/Latina families produce and reproduce feminist epistemologies and pedagogies within the home, similar to the narratives shared in this essay. By pointing to the intergenerational nature of pedagogies, Delgado Bernal challenges deficit notions of Chicanas, their homes, and communities and allows for the familial teachings of resistance to transcend the home and be embodied by daughters.

Studying the pedagogies birthed in cultural spaces, such as the home, has encouraged scholars to explore additional types of teaching, including those among mothers and daughters. Collins (1994) investigated the labor of mothering through a Black feminist lens, which centralizes the importance of systems of oppression on the lives of mothers. Motherwork, as coined by Collins (1994), recognizes the role of structural forces such as racism and classism in shaping the teachings of mothers. Through a mother-oriented framework, Villenas and Moreno (2001) define "the teaching and learning that occurs between mothers and daughters of color, as being wrought with tensions and contradictions yet open with spaces of possibility" (p. 672). Their study on Chicana/Latina mothers in rural North Carolina pays close attention to the role of immigration practices and discourse on the lives of Chicana/Latina mothers and their daughters. Recognizing how political climates shape mother–daughter pedagogies with immigration rhetoric lends a more complex understanding of the pedagogies found among Chicana/Latina mothers



and daughters—from mothering across imposed borders along the U.S.–Mexico frontera to tensions arising from racism, classism, and patriarchy (Villenas & Moreno, 2001). The findings from their study point to the role of *consejos*, *cuentos*, and *la experiencia* as mediums to convey teaching and learning between mothers and daughters.

Furthering the research on mother–daughter pedagogies, Flores (2016) found that the teachings of working-class Mexicana/Chicana mothers cultivate the educational success of their first-generation college student daughters. Using a pedagogy of the borderlands, these mothers incorporated actions, rituals, and interactions to raise *muxeres truchas*—a unique form of intelligence in Chicanas/Latinas that resists oppression. The pedagogies shared between mothers and daughters can nurture spaces of possibilities, which a recent collection of scholarly narratives on Chicana *m(other)work* explores. Across the tensions, contradictions, and beauty embodied by Chicana and other Women of Color mothers and daughters, an intersectional lens reveals invaluable truths and nuances of understanding (Caballero, Martínez-Vu, Pérez-Torres, Téllez, & Vega, 2019). Caballero et al.’s (2019) anthology discusses epistemology, systemic violence, mother-activists, and intergenerational mothering, and the contributors continue to center mothering as transformative labor that defies systems of oppression, because *sin madres, no hay revolución*. While the examination of mother–daughter pedagogies continues to grow, the scholarship discussed here provides a rich foundation from which to analyze mother–daughter pedagogies found in our relationship, as a mother and daughter navigating P–20 schooling across the U.S.–Mexico border. Additionally, the anthology authors’ focus on oppression, tensions, and resistance provides us the language to share our lived realities with epistemic violence, while also underscoring the importance of making space in academia for non-dominant epistemologies—that is, those not Eurocentric and male.

The inquiries of Chicana/Latina and Women of

Color feminist scholars have provided academia the language and tools to continue to resist epistemic violence. In its simplest form, the scholarship on border/transformational pedagogies, pedagogies of the home, and mother–daughter pedagogies honors the transmitted knowledge as well as the teaching and learning among Chicanas/Latinas at the intersections of race, class, immigration, motherhood, and heteropatriarchy. Additionally, we must each recognize our role as knowledge creators and epistemic contributors.

### A Plática Methodology

As we brainstormed how to revisit the conversations, *consejos*, and experiences we shared with each other throughout our lives as mother and daughter, we soon realized that a *plática* methodology was the most adequate approach. Because of its roots in Chicana/Latina feminist epistemology, *pláticas* refuse traditional research techniques, including rigid interview protocols and, instead, embrace culturally affirming data collection methods that honor oral storytelling and reciprocity (Gonzalez, 2001). The cultural sensitivity embodied by *pláticas* has led to the development of *pláticas* as a Chicana/Latina feminist method and methodology that informs the entire research process. Fierros and Delgado Bernal (2016) identified five contours that have been essential to Chicana/Latina feminist *pláticas*:

- 1) Centers Chicana feminist theory and other critical theoretical frameworks;
- 2) Honors collaborators as co-creators of knowledge and embodies a relational stance;
- 3) Welcomes the holistic lived experiences of collaborators and makes connections to the research inquiry;
- 4) Provides a potential space for healing; and,
- 5) Emphasizes the importance of reciprocity, vulnerability and researcher reflexivity.

The five contours provide guidance to the practice of pláticas and the research process. Unlike traditional methodologies in educational research, Chicana/Latina feminist pláticas welcome our own lived realities as Tijuana–San Diego borderlanders and educators in the data process, as we contest beliefs of neutrality and objectivity that claim to produce universal truths. Furthermore, because Chicana/Latina feminist pláticas center CLFE, and not dominant ways of knowing, pláticas are not concerned with Eurocentric markers of research validity, including concepts such as generalizability, credibility, and trustworthiness (Flores & Morales, in press). Researchers who center non-dominant epistemologies have long documented the futility of traditional research methodologies and methods as they pertain to the lived realities of marginalized communities (Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008; Morales & Gaxiola Serrano, 2020; Smith, 2012). In line with these scholars who likewise challenge white logics in research (Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008), pláticas honor us—two Mexican immigrant women—as co-creators of knowledge, while also providing us space for healing.

Our primary goal in using pláticas was twofold: to go back in time and revisit the conversations leading to Elvia's decision to return to work in Mexico and to discuss how Tanya interpreted her mother's decision and what it taught her. We audio-recorded the pláticas between us—Elvia (a mother) and Tanya (a daughter)—that took place over the phone and in person. Since we primarily used Spanish during the pláticas, in this essay we present the excerpts in Spanish to preserve their cultural meaning and translate to English for non-Spanish readers. Our pláticas gifted us the opportunity to revisit previous moments in our lives, strengthen our relationship, learn from one another, and co-create new knowledge.

### **Platicando Entre Mamá e Hija: A Discussion on Knowledge Policing and Pedagogies**

The pláticas and reflections provided in this es-

say display our experiences with knowledge policing and pedagogies as a mother–daughter dyad from the U.S.–Mexico border region. Our pláticas as mother and daughter underscore how gender, race, class, language, and immigration come together and shape our experiences. As Chicana/Latina educators in Mexico and the United States, our lived realities reflect our working-class backgrounds and varying levels of English language and citizenship status.

### **Practices of Epistemological Policing**

While studies have found that People and Immigrants of Color in the United States are oftentimes the targets of epistemic violence, it is important to recognize the details surrounding these experiences. As Spivak (1988) and Elenes (2011) argue, the subaltern, those who dominant power have Othered and kept at the margins, have the ability to speak and demonstrate their awareness of unequal social conditions. The pláticas found next attempt to make space—metaphoric and literal—to highlight critical literacies and center our experiences as Chicanas/Latinas who have endured epistemic policing. Due to the pervasiveness of dominant discourses, experiences often go unheard and unacknowledged in academic spaces.

As mujeres with immigrant experiences, it is important to first acknowledge our privileges as a U.S.-born citizen and a naturalized U.S. citizen. The experiences described next would not have occurred if we did not have access to documentation authorizing us to live and work in the United States, as well as travel between Mexico and the United States at our leisure. We also recognize that even though we come from working-class backgrounds, our cisgender identities and ability to have a college degree and graduate degree provide us with additional privileges, resources, and employment opportunities not afforded to all People and Immigrants of Color. The beginning of our plática took us back to over 15 years ago. During that time, Tanya (daughter) had just left for college a couple of hours north of San Diego, and Elvia (mother) had decided to quit her U.S. employment at a



preschool and return to Tijuana, Mexico to work as a kindergarten teacher and shortly after as a school principal. The plática begins with Tanya revisiting this moment in time, as she, once again, asks her mother, Elvia, why she made this life-changing decision.

*Hija:* ¿Porque decidiste hacer eso, después de tener el trabajo bien cerquitas de la casa y, pues, después de todo lo que tuviste que hacer para obtener ese trabajo [en los Estados Unidos]?

*Mamá:* Lo que pasa es que yo, siempre esta es mi contestación, mi idiosincrasia, mi cultura, de donde vengo pues.

*Daughter:* Why did you decide to do that after having a job very close to the house, and well, after all, you had to do to get that job [in the United States]?

*Mom:* What happens is that I, this is always my answer, my idiosyncrasy, my culture, where I come from.

As Elvia comments in the opening of the plática, her culture and where she comes from are essential to her idiosyncrasy as a person. Unsure if the word “idiosyncrasy” was the most appropriate to explain her feelings, Elvia shares how her traits, knowledges, and ways of being as a Mexicana were intimately tied to her life in Mexico.

The literature provided by critical scholars supports the claim that immigrants hold a strong connection to their native countries, especially those who resided in Mexico until adulthood before migrating to the United States (Benavides López, 2016). The longing to return to their native countries is an impossible task for many immigrants from Mexico and Central America, particularly for those who are undocumented (Moran-Taylor & Menjívar, 2005). Yet, Elvia, because of her immigration status as a naturalized U.S. citizen and proximity to the U.S.–Mexico border had

the opportunity to realize her dreams. She made the decision to stop working in the United States and, instead, work in Mexico while continuing to live in San Diego—a decision that amplified her subaltern identity as a woman living entre mundos. In this way, she would be in a safe workplace environment that validated her culture and ways of knowing. Without pausing, Elvia continued with the plática, saying:

*Mamá:* Una cosa que me deprimió mucho es, por ejemplo, que una persona dijo que a su niña no le hablarán en español. Entonces yo también hablaba en español.

*Mom:* One thing that really depressed me is, for example, a person who said that their girl will not be spoken to in Spanish. I also spoke in Spanish.

Having immigrated to the United States as an adult led to a lot of challenges for Elvia, including learning how to navigate a new country—the United States—with limited English language skills. Even after navigating the barriers of obtaining a revalidation of her bachelor’s degree and attending English classes at the local community college, Elvia was the victim of language marginalization. As shown in the above plática excerpt, Elvia experienced feelings of depression when a person said that she did not want her daughter spoken to in Spanish. In her preschool work environment, Elvia inferred that students’ parents did not appreciate her native Spanish language. Elvia expands:

*Mamá:* Yo me acuerdo que estaba yo hablando español, y la [mama del estudiante] le dijo a otra maestra, ‘hay no, yo preferiría que no les hablarán en español a mi hija,’ me entiendes. Pero creo que yo me acuerdo que yo estaba hablando con la niña en español.

*Hija:* ¿Por eso te sentiste así, como mal?

*Mamá:* Si, y yo me quede, pero si la niña aprende inglés y español, que bueno, me entiendes. Pero eran cosas así; no las entendía.

*Mom:* I remember that I was speaking Spanish, and the [student's mom] said to another teacher, 'oh no, I would prefer that they not speak Spanish to my daughter,' you understand. But I think I remember that I was talking to the girl in Spanish.

*Daughter:* Is that why you felt that way, like bad?

*Mom:* Yes, and I thought, but if the girl learns English and Spanish, that's good, you understand me. But it was things like that; I didn't understand.

Elvia's Spanish communication with the student prompted the parent's request to not speak Spanish to her daughter. This made Elvia feel sad and depressed about the entire situation. To complicate matters, the parent was a Latina leaving Elvia feeling more distressed.

In this case, one can interpret the language oppression Elvia experienced as a form of epistemic policing. While the United States does not have an official language, the dominant discourse is rooted in white supremacist ideologies and places a strong preference for English and, at the same time, devalues the Spanish language and the epistemologies it transmits (Saavedra & Esquierdo, 2020). The fact that the perpetrator of epistemic violence, in this case, was a Latina highlights the complex internalization of racism, white norms, and ideologies for People and Immigrants of Color. Anzaldúa (1987) theorizes about the intricacies of language for Chicanas/os/x and Latinas/os/x in U.S. border regions—people who are oftentimes the victims of language violence, erasure, and forced English acquisition as documented in Texas' educational history. While we do not know the reasons behind the parent's English only request, re-

search has found that Latino parents sometimes prefer an English education for their children as a means of preventing their marginalization (Moreno, 1999). Even in today's society, it is not uncommon to hear about hate crimes targeting People and Immigrants of Color for speaking Spanish or other non-English languages at schools, restaurants, coffee shops, and other public spaces (Díez, 2019). For instance, in 2015, a white woman physically attacked a Somali immigrant woman for speaking Swahili while at a restaurant, leading to her hospitalization. The white woman perpetrator wanted the Somalian woman to only speak English, because as she said, "In America, we speak English" (Lynch, 2016, para. 3). Similarly, in 2020, a white couple violently assaulted a Latina and her 15-year-old daughter while walking on the streets of Boston. The white couple yelled at the Latinas, "This is America; speak English. We don't speak Spanish here" ("This is America; speak English," 2020, para. 4). While there are over 41 million people in the United States that speak Spanish, the white supremacist rhetoric found in this nation is characterized by violent practices of epistemic erasure. Being aware of such dangers can lead People and Immigrants of Color, including native Spanish speakers, to embrace the English language in public spaces as a means of protection and security. The white supremacist sentiment has increased in contemporary times, as established by the growing number of hate crimes towards People and Immigrants of Color, which are, in part, due to the 45th president of the United States' "English only" endorsement (Díez, 2019; Southern Poverty Law Center, 2016).

It was an accumulation of moments filled with epistemic violence due to Elvia's use of Spanish language or pedagogical techniques learned from her professional experience in Mexico that led her to make the ultimate decision of leaving her job in the United States. In contrast, Elvia sought to return to Mexico where her knowledge and epistemologies were valued. As Elvia was Othered in her U.S. workplace, she confided in her daughter, sharing her experiences

and feelings of disappointment, shame, and frustration with her daughter, Tanya. While Tanya did not yet have the language and tools to name the epistemological violence taking place, she understood the pain her mother was experiencing. Thus, Tanya listened and shared consejos with her mother on how to navigate the workplace, which eventually led to Elvia's decision to quit her U.S. job and continue her career in Mexico—her ultimate form of resistance (Villenas & Moreno, 2001).

Elvia continues the plática by sharing her conversations with U.S. border patrol agents at the San Diego ports of entry. Because Elvia lived in San Diego and worked in Tijuana, she traversed the U.S.–Mexico border multiple times per day, going into Mexico in the mornings and crossing back to the United States in the evenings. As part of the routine questions U.S. border patrol agents asked at U.S. ports of entry, she was often asked about her whereabouts in Tijuana, to which she responded that she was in Mexico for work purposes. Elvia describes,

*Mamá:* Cada vez que me preguntan [los migras] en la línea: '¿Porque no trabajas aquí en los Estados Unidos?' cuando me regrese a trabajar a México, yo le decía porque no se bien el inglés. Y ellos me decían 'lo puedes aprender,' y les decía, si pero la cultura, la forma de pensar de los mexicanos [en Estados Unidos], la interacción que tienen con los maestros no es la misma [que en México].

*Mom:* Every time the [border patrol agents] at the border asked me: 'Why don't you work here in the United States?' when I returned to work in Mexico, I would say because I don't know English well. And they told me, 'you can learn it,' and I would say, yes, but the culture, the way of thinking of Mexicans [in the United States], the interaction they have with teachers is not the same [as in Mexico].

This excerpt provides additional insight into Elvia's decision to leave behind the American dream of many immigrants of gaining employment in the United States. It highlights how for many People and Immigrants of Color working in the United States comes at a high cost. While Elvia understands first-hand the difficulties attached to learning a new language as an adult, she also explains how there are other things that you cannot quite learn, such as a new culture, ways of thinking, and different educational practices. Although Elvia shared that maybe her English would have improved over time if she continued to work in the United States, her potential as a skilled teacher and principal with many years of experience would have gone unappreciated and underutilized if she remained working in San Diego. In contrast, Elvia was able to establish institutional level changes via policies and practices to better serve students and families at her preschool in Tijuana—something that would have been impossible in the United States. Making the decision to walk away from her U.S. employment and pay in U.S. currency was difficult; yet, the next quote underscores the importance of being validated in your place of work.

*Mamá:* Pues ya cuando regrese a México me sentí súper bien, porque otra vez las mamás me decían, '¿profe, como está mi niño?'

*Mom:* Well, when I returned to Mexico, I felt super good, because again the moms would tell me, 'teacher, how is my child?'

The tone Elvia had as she shared her sentiment of happiness upon returning to work in Mexico displayed her excitement about feeling appreciated once again. When asked if she made the right decision in leaving her U.S. job, Elvia responded with an enthusiastic, "Yes!" For her, feeling like students and their parents appreciated her skills, language, and epistemologies was worth the demanding commute across

two countries and prolonged border wait times. While the pláticas between mother and daughter in this section focused on Elvia's experience with epistemic policing, the next part emphasizes the mother–daughter pedagogies shared between them and the impact they had and still have on Tanya. In a sense, the ensuing section helps provide an answer to the question posed by Collins (1998), “how did [our mothers] manage to prepare us for lives that none of them had ever lived?” (p. 188).

### Intergenerational Mother–Daughter Pedagogies

Race, ethnicity, class, gender, language, sexuality, and immigration status are some of the identities capable of influencing the experiences of People and Immigrants of Color in the United States, where epistemic violence remains prevalent (Crenshaw, 1991; Pérez Huber, 2010).

Mothers of Color, aware of the challenges their children might face in the United States, engage in pedagogical practices of survival and resistance as a means of preparing their children (Caballero et al., 2019; Collins; 1994; Flores, 2016; Villenas & Moreno, 2001). It is pedagogies of the home alongside practices of intergenerational *conocimiento* that nurture resistance and *sobrevivencia* among Chicana/Latina mothers and daughters (Delgado Bernal, 2001; Lara, 2019). This section pays close attention to how the lived realities of Elvia have shaped and nurtured intergenerational mother–daughter pedagogies that inform the personal and professional practices of Tanya.

*Witnessing my mother (Elvia) struggle to learn English, figure out how to navigate a new country, and go through the process of securing a job in the United States taught me an immense amount about her strengths, particularly her resilience, and without knowing at that time, about me (Tanya) as well.*

As a reminder, Villenas and Moreno (2001) define mother–daughter pedagogies as the teaching

and learning between mothers and daughters. The teaching and learning exchange between Mothers and Daughters of Color accounts for the tensions and contradictions present in these relationships, while also offering the potential for new possibilities. Elvia's teachings to Tanya were informed by her experiences as an immigrant woman from Mexico who navigated multiple oppressive spaces in the United States. As Villenas and Moreno explain, “for working class Latinas/Chicanas, the work of maintaining cultural integrity and dignity in the midst of racism, cultural and language denigration, workplace abuse, and citizenship policing, profoundly shape their mothering experiences” (p. 671). It is through a combination of the mothering that I, Tanya, receive(d) and the individual and collective experiences that we share(d) as immigrant women working in P–20 schooling that I continue to nurture my role as a professor within U.S. educational institutions.

*As a graduate student, I (Tanya) at times experienced an internal struggle over the details surrounding my dissertation topic. In my heart, I knew I wanted it to be about something I deeply cared about, something close to home, but I was not sure that academia's entrenchments in white supremacy were interested in the stories of my communities. It was the scholarship of Chicana/Latina feminist scholars alongside critical and wholistic mentorship and femtorship that provided me the space to see the value of my own lived realities as a mujer with immigrant experiences from the U.S.–Mexico borderlands. This, together with the pláticas that I had with my mom throughout my life, reminded me that our experiences are worthy and that no one deserves to feel cultural and language denigration.*

*Rather, academia needs to hear these stories, which have led to my research on the educational experiences of students in border regions. After all, my own mother had followed her truth in an attempt to maintain cultural integrity and*

*dignity when returning to her home work environment in Mexico. For me, returning to Mexico was not what I longed for; instead, I needed to carve out a space for me here, in the United States, where I could “do work that matters vale la pena” (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 22) the same way my mom taught me.*

La experiencia is one of the means identified by Villenas and Moreno (2001) through which mothers and daughters engage in pedagogical exchanges. In this way, Tanya learned from Elvia’s experiencia. It was in their daily pláticas over the phone as Elvia left her workplace in Tijuana and waited at the U.S. port of entry to return home to San Diego that Tanya learned about the long and tiring commutes her mother endured, but also about the deep care she had for her students, school, and Tijuana community. Elvia’s care for her students was so genuine that almost every day, she came home with a story of joy or concern from work. Witnessing this level of passion for her profession amidst all the barriers she faced, taught Tanya it was possible to do work that matters, que vale la pena, across borders and educational spaces. Elvia fought hard to ensure that her children had access to a future in the United States, and now, it was Tanya’s turn to follow in her mother’s footsteps and honor her heart and her passion.

*Now, as a professor who identifies as a first-generation college student and immigrant, I (Tanya) use my privilege as a person working within academia to honor stories like those of my mother. My research seeks to augment the lived realities of those that continue to be pushed to the margins of society—People and Immigrants of Color. My mother’s experiencia and pedagogies have taught me that I need to maintain my ‘cultural integrity and dignity in the midst of racism, [sexism, and] cultural and language denigration’ (Villenas & Moreno, 2001, p. 671). One way of accomplishing this is by disrupting practices of*

*epistemic violence and erasure and, in exchange, honoring my family’s realities and those of many others along the U.S.–Mexico borderlands.*

While Elvia worked for over 30 years as a preschool educator and principal, the lessons she imparted on Tanya through her experiencia remain present in her daughter’s epistemologies. As Lara (2019) argues, intergenerational conocimiento among grandmothers, daughters, mothers, and grandchildren cultivate sobrevivencia. Part of Tanya’s sobrevivencia as she navigates the United States and academia includes ensuring that her scholarship is personal; in this way, it remains grounded in what matters most to her—her comunidad y la frontera. Similarly, Elvia’s deep care and love for her students influence Tanya’s pedagogies in the classroom and her mentoring of students. Although being a Woman of Color Faculty comes with many challenges, Tanya’s favorite parts of being a faculty entail being in the classroom and meeting with students (Gutiérrez y Muhs, Niemann, González, & Harris, 2012). It is during these intimate moments that Tanya welcomes and acknowledges the pedagogies of the home that Students of Color bring with them to classrooms (Delgado Bernal, 2001). Together, the scholarly and pedagogical actions taken by Tanya actively humanize and legitimize the epistemologies of People and Immigrants of Color. Tanya’s practices invite students to challenge white supremacist academic spaces that have historically denied their existence in order to reimagine higher education.

*As I (Tanya) write this reflection on our mother–daughter pedagogies, I pick up a couple of Chicana/Latina feminist books from my dining room table to further peruse. Unknowingly, a handmade bookmark falls from within the books. A few minutes later, I look closely at the purple cardstock bookmark with a heart at the end, and I recognize my mom’s writing on it, it says ‘mejor hija del mundo’ dated May 2016. This was part of a project she made as a teach-*



*er with her preschool students for el Día de las Madres to encourage reading at home. Serendipitously, this once again reminded me that my mom and her teachings are always with me.*

Let us take a moment to return to the question posed by Collins (1998), which asked how mothers were able to prepare their daughters for a life they had never experienced themselves. Researchers have found that it is mothers' experiences with colonialism, racism, classism, sexism, xenophobia, heteropatriarchy, and other forms of oppression that intimately influence their motherwork and mothering (Caballero et al., 2019; Cervantes-Soon, 2016; Flores, 2016; Lara, 2019; Villenas & Moreno, 2001). Teachings of survival and resistance are at the core of mother-daughter pedagogies, as Mothers and Daughters of Color integrate their intergenerational *conocimientos* to navigate hostile spaces and fight against epistemic violence. The narrative of Elvia and Tanya, a mother-daughter dyad from the U.S.–Mexico borderlands, demonstrates how *sobrevivencia* is found in the *experiencias* of Chicana/Latina immigrant women across P–20 educational spaces.

### **Building Bridges: On Survival and Resistance**

*For women of color, work, family, and community are intimately interwoven.*  
(Villenas & Moreno, 2001, p. 671)

We opened this essay with a reflection written by Tanya about her mother's decision to leave her U.S. job in exchange for work in Mexico. As found in the *pláticas* and reflections, Elvia's decision to return to Mexico was rooted in cultural integrity and preservation. Fellow coworkers have endured acts of resistance against the epistemic violence in her U.S. workplace, particularly around her use of the Spanish language, her native language. The quote by Villenas and Moreno (2001) at the top of this section reflects our personal narratives surrounding the strong linkages

among work, family, and community for Women of Color. Utilizing Chicana/Latina feminist epistemologies provided the space to share how we challenge epistemic policing and engage in intergenerational mother-daughter pedagogies across the U.S.–Mexico border and educational spaces from preschool to graduate school.

As Mexican immigrant women educators, we highlight our experiences navigating schools to underscore the epistemic violence permeating educational institutions and their impact on the bodies, minds, and spirits of a preschool teacher and college professor. Making space to actively interrogate systems of oppression that seek to erase and delegitimize the epistemologies of People and Immigrants of Color is one way of resisting academia. Thus, we pledge to continue uplifting the voices, narratives, and experiences of People and Immigrants of Color in an effort to work within, beyond, and against traditional schooling structures. At the forefront of this essay, we invited practitioners and scholars of higher education to carefully listen to our narratives. Sharing our experiences of marginality and oppression was not an easy task, as these experiences resurfaced painful emotions for us; yet, we offer them to illuminate the material realities of epistemic violence. We now ask you to acknowledge the various forms of violence that are created, maintained, and serve as the foundation of educational institutions—P–20 curriculum, college admission practices, student affairs, or in placing value on non-Eurocentric knowledges. We would be remiss not to acknowledge the historical and contemporary legacy of physical and epistemic violence impacting our Black siblings as amplified in the Black Lives Matter movement—from police brutality to the school-to-prison pipeline and the implicit anti-blackness in Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x communities. We must do better. While this essay focuses on two Mexican immigrant women, we ask you to consider the ways in which educational institutions commit epistemic violence and erasure on Black, Indigenous, queer, trans, and dis(abled) folks (Nicolazzo, 2017;



Patton & Njoku, 2019). If upon reflection of the aforementioned question, you are not able to identify the ways that institutions commit epistemic violence, then you may very well need to consider your complicity in promoting different forms of violence on P–20 campuses. In other words, your answer to these questions can illuminate where you fall in the quest to dismantle oppressive educational structures that fail to engage in liberatory education.

Through this essay, we created a bridge to hold space for the lived realities of People and Immigrants of Color— instances filled with oppression, resistance and survival. It is our hope that readers will also follow us on this path and develop bridges in their own personal and professional lives that honor the epistemologies of People and Immigrants of Color. Of equal importance, this essay provided us, a Mexican mother–daughter dyad from Tijuana–San Diego, the opportunity to tell our story filled with tones of survival and resistance. It gifted us space to further legitimize our ways of knowing, knowledges, and epistemologies and to infiltrate academic spaces that have historically silenced and devalued People and Immigrants of Color. Cervantes-Soon (2016) conceptualizes *mujeres truchas* as Chicanas/Latinas that utilize their smartness, *saberes*, and critical consciousness as a means of surviving, navigating, and resisting colonial systems of power. Flores (2016) builds on Cervantes-Soon’s work by focusing on the way mothers inculcate a *trucha* sensibility on their daughters by teaching them how to read and resist oppression. This essay contributes to this line of research, as it underscores the tireless work that Chicana/Latina working-class and immigrant mothers perform in all aspects of their lives to provide better opportunities for their daughters. Elvia, a *mujer trucha* herself, raised and continues to raise a *trucha* daughter as they nurture their mother–daughter pedagogies together.

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**Recommended Citation:**

Gaxiola Serrano, T. J., & Serrano, E. (2020). Building bridges: Epistemic violence and mother-daughter pedagogies from the U.S.-Mexico border. *Journal of Critical Scholarship on Higher Education and Student Affairs*, 5(3), 49-64.

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