

BOOK REVIEW

Latina Teachers Contesting Education Boundaries

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Latina Teachers: Creating Careers and Guarding Culture. By Glenda M. Flores.
New York: New York University Press, 2017. Pp. 272. \$28.00 (paper).

According to the 2016 American Community Survey, there are approximately 15 million Latinx residents in California. Latinx public school students comprised 54.3% of the K-12 student enrollment during the 2017–2018 academic year (United States Census Bureau / American FactFinder). During the same year, Latinx teachers comprised 21% of the teaching force in the state, of which 15% were Latinas. However, non-Latinx White teachers made up 62% of all teachers, with 46% being White females (California Department of Education, 2018). In a time where White female teachers continue to dominate the teaching profession, Flores' *Latina Teachers: Creating Careers and Guarding Culture* is a timely book that unearths the complex intersection of personal, familial, societal, and bureaucratic factors that influence the teaching profession and, in turn, the education of Latinx children.

Via ethnographic research from August 2009 to September 2011, Flores chronicles the distinct experiences of Latina teachers at two elementary schools in California—Rosemead and Compton. Goodwill Elementary in Rosemead had a student population of Latinx and Asian students, while the demographics at Compton Elementary were Latinx and Black. The site selection was intentional and allowed Flores to compare and contrast how

these first-generation Latina teachers chose the profession, dealt with raced and gendered expectations, and became cultural guardians.

Throughout the book, Flores describes the agency exercised by Latina teachers in the face of social constraints, discrimination, and workplace politics. For example, most of the teachers who participated in this study were daughters of immigrants and first-generation college students. Many aspired to pursue lucrative careers in medicine and law to give back to their parents; however, they accidentally ended up in education. As the teachers spoke about how this happened, they reflected on their own schooling and saw themselves in their students. These mirrored experiences fueled their passion for validating, guarding, and drawing from the cultural wealth of their students. By exercising cultural capital, these Latina teachers were challenging the rigid boundaries of our education system that views Latinx culture and language as deficient and that subsequently results in the perpetual marginalization of Latinx students.

Not only did the Latina teachers use their Spanish skills and cultural knowledge with their students, but they also leveraged these funds of knowledge to build rapport with parents. These acts of resistance are the epitome of the characteristics of “cultural guardians” as conceptualized by Flores. For example, as critics of state testing of English Language Learner (ELL) students, Latina teachers recognized the resonance between biased testing and school interpretation and implementation, and how such relationships contributed to the tracking of students and the suppression of their native Spanish language. As they navigated these bureaucracies, Latina teachers also became exposed to the hegemonic racial and gender ideologies of their colleagues. For example, they heard their White and Black colleagues state that Latinx students must assimilate and learn English. In another

example, a Latino teacher's lesson perpetuated stereotypical gender roles that limited girls to homemakers and mothers and boys to laborers. The damaging effects of this hidden racialized and gendered curriculum is what these Latina teachers vehemently fought against with their pedagogy.

Flores' sociological and critical lens advances our understanding of the experiences of Latina teachers and contributes invaluable knowledge to critical education scholarship within the field of Chicana/Latina studies. In a time of incessant teacher shortages, this book provides an in-depth gaze at how the personal and schooling experiences of Latinas led them to become cultural guardians for Latinx schoolchildren. Flores detangles the myriad influences they had to challenge, resist, and negotiate to protect their students. This book complements cutting-edge research on culturally sustaining pedagogy that is flourishing in teacher education programs across the country.

In a profession that continues to be grossly undervalued and underpaid, the social responsibility and fierce advocacy of Latinx culture and language these teachers exemplify merits recognition. The movement toward the validation and sustenance of Latinx culture and language in schools was visible in the 2016 California elections. Reversing proposition 227 (1998), California voters passed proposition 58, thus reinstating bilingual education in the state.

In present times, when Latinx people continue to be targeted, silenced, and overlooked for their social, political, and cultural contributions, this book highlights the resiliency of a burgeoning Latinx population. This book is an excellent read for aspiring and pre-service teachers in undergraduate and graduate education programs, but in particular, policymakers and education leaders, such as superintendents and principals, can greatly benefit from this book to help recruit, retain, and support Latinx teachers.

References

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