

“HERE, I ALREADY FEEL SMART”: EXPLORING CHICANA FEMINIST LITERACY
PEDAGOGIES WITH YOUTH IN AN (IM)MIGRANT HOUSING COMMUNITY

by

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Abstract

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“Here, I already feel smart”: Exploring Chicana feminist Literacy Pedagogies with Youth in an (Im)migrant Housing Community

Thesis directed by Professor Elizabeth Dutro

This qualitative study focuses on the literacies produced, practiced, and embodied among Chicana/Latinx youth in an im(migrant) housing community. Working at the intersections of Chicana feminisms, critical literacies, and Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR), this dissertation explores spaces for re-imagining literacy pedagogies as feminista, participatory, and as a way to disrupt oppressive narratives and approaches to education that have deemed oppressed communities illiterate. The youth in this study cross and navigate borders, their families have been displaced by colonial projects, many of their lives have been criminalized, and their humanity called into question. Yet, this study responds to the urgent call within educational research to highlight the ways in which im(migrant) young people are producers and holders of knowledge, have agency, and above all, are human. The research questions guiding this study are, (1) how do the Chicana/Latinx young people in this housing community engage with YPAR and Chicana feminist pedagogies as ways to disrupt dominant notions of knowledge production? And, (2) How does YPAR in community spaces inform the theory and praxis of Chicana feminist literacy pedagogies? The findings of this dissertation reveal that the literacies and knowledge of the young people in this study are etched on and within their bodies, shaped by their lived realities, and transcend generations and borders. Further, this study grapples with the implications for examining literacies in community spaces, de-centering school, and looking

towards young people as collaborators in efforts to trouble and rupture colonial ideas of teaching and learning.

Dedication

Para mi mamá, my first Chicana feminist educator.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In large bold letters, the journal prompt on the whiteboard read “What have you learned from the findings of our research?” As I finished organizing the materials for the following activity, I looked up and noticed Joaquin staring at the blank page in his journal with his head on his hand, tapping his pencil on the table. Though Joaquin had never expressed authentic excitement for journal writing, he seemed particularly stuck at that moment. With no intention of starting a whole-group *plática*, I asked, “Joaquin, what’s going on?” He dropped his pencil on the table and threw his hands up in the air, “I don’t know anything!” The heads of the other students quickly popped up as they exchanged smiles and laughter. Interrupting the commotion, Noemí, a student who often writes more than she speaks in the group, said, “Yeah, I felt like that too...like, I didn’t get to think about what *I* thought about it,” referring to the data they collected at *Comunidad Miravalle* (CM) via *testimonios*. She continued, “but people were saying what we thought about the community—the problems, like the lack of unity, but also the support, the shelter, the food, and the homework help.” As Noemí explained her thoughts, the rest of the group, including Joaquin, nodded and voiced agreement. In this moment, the youth at CM reflected on the knowledge they hold as members of their (im)migrant community and how that guided their inquiry and meaning making process. Specifically, youth highlighted both strengths and tensions and connected these issues to their own knowledge of their community.

This opening vignette is just one example of the kind of meaning-making that took place in a *plática*, an informal conversation, after youth collected *testimonios*, narratives of marginalization and survivorship, from their families, peers, and fellow residents at CM. In my

dissertation research, these Chicana feminist pedagogies (Delgado Bernal, Elenes, Godinez, & Villenas, 2006) served as an entry point to engage youth in recognizing their rich knowledge base, the practice of teaching and learning that exist in their community, and their powerful literacies. As demonstrated in the opening vignette, the intent of my dissertation is not to highlight the ways in which students participate in traditional literacies limited to reading and writing—as Joaquin’s blank page served as an entry point to examine literacy and knowledge production—but rather to theorize an approach to pedagogy that centers on critical literacies, knowledge from the margins, and Chicana/Latinx youth from (im)migrant communities. Drawing from scholarship in the fields of Chicana feminisms, critical literacies, and Youth Participatory Action Research, my work destabilizes dominant notions of literacy, teaching, and learning by challenging Eurocentric understandings of how literacy and knowledge are produced, by whom, and where. The interwoven threads of my dissertation create a framework for re-thinking pedagogy—a pedagogy that is *feminista*, participatory, and recognizes and values literacy in spaces, events, and from people who have been often deemed illiterate. This kind of Chicana feminist pedagogy emerged over a three-year period, through my work with Chicana/Latinx youth in the learning center at CM, an (im)migrant housing community in the rocky mountain region.

Statement of the Problem

The narratives of undocumented youth, youth from (im)migrant, mixed-status families, and their broader communities continue to circulate within political and educational discourses (Seif, Ullman, & Núñez-Mchiri, 2014). These narratives function for a variety of purposes. In the context of immigration policy, narratives of illegality, for example, work to criminalize undocumented youth and families. Even in attempts to shift this dominant narrative, discourses

around Dreamers, undocumented (im)migrants who arrived in the U.S. as infants or children, often rely on normative ideas of success and position youth as complacent in their family's decision to immigrate without documentation, placing the criminal status onto their parents. Within educational research, narratives of struggle, meritocracy, and exceptionalism shape discussions about youth from (im)migrant communities (Patel, 2013; Patel, 2015). While these narratives are purposeful and strategic—especially in garnering support for the educational rights of these young people—they limit how we discuss their knowledge, their joys, their activities in the mundane, their complexities, tensions, and all the reasons they are human. In the field of education, these young people are rarely positioned as pedagogues, collaborators in knowledge production, or everyday youth whose knowledge, literacies, and lives are situated within a web of discourses that attempt dehumanize and strip them of their ability to simply exist.

This dissertation works from the assumption that youth from (im)migrant, mixed-status families are human, hold knowledge, and survive and resist oppressive discourses and structures in ways that are relevant and meaningful to them. These young people can help us think about (im)migration policy, activism and allyship in social justice projects, and the wealth of knowledge that exists within their communities. They can teach us how they are teachers within their own community, drawing on their literacies and pedagogies of the home (Dolores Delgado Bernal, 2001) for strategic purposes. They can show us how the expertise and knowledge they carry can inform and guide them in conducting their own research. This dissertation is, thus, not about activist youth; it is not about youth who subscribe to dominant notions of success; and it is not about their hardship or that of their community. It is, however, about the possibilities that exist when we re-imagine literacy pedagogies—how they create spaces for youth's knowledge,

lived realities, critical consciousness, tensions, and complex and shifting identities to be visible, valued, and embraced. That is what I learned from the youth at *Comunidad Miravalle*.

Comunidad Miravalle

At least once, sometimes two or three times, a week, I left the predominately White, wealthy city where I lived, worked, and attended to my graduate studies to drive 15 miles north to my research site. Pulling up to the 32-unit housing complex, I am welcomed by a large wooden sign posted at the end of the U-shaped driveway that reads *COMUNIDAD MIRAVALLE* in bright red letters. As I drive through the parking lot, looking out the window, I am reminded that while each unit is constructed the same way, with the same outside panels, doors, and windows, each family's home carries individual character. Some of the fronts of residents' homes are surrounded by beautiful flowers and plants while others are hidden behind the children's bikes, scooters, and muddy shoes. On most days, children and youth play outside after school or running between their houses and the *Miravalle* learning center, while older youth casually strut to their scheduled programs. Upon entering the learning center, one of the first things I see is the large mural in the community room—a beautiful painting of migrant laborers, a Latinx graduate, an (im)migrant family, and the words of revolutionary, Emiliano Zapata over the corner of the mural.

Comunidad Miravalle is a housing community for migrant families where the head of each household is required to work in either agriculture or landscape. While migrant labor is often described as transient, it is important to note that the documentation, or lack thereof, of residents prevents them from crossing borders freely. While regulations of the complex do not permit more than one working adult per household, many of the parents and young people from each home work multiple jobs such as cleaning houses, cooking or bussing at local restaurants,

and in retail. Based on the community's self-reported demographic data, the average income for the 32 families is \$38,657, and most households are made up of 4 or more members. Most residents are of (im)migrant and mixed-status families from Mexico, though other countries in central America are represented. While many of the adults within the community were undocumented at the time data was collected, citizenship status amongst children and youth varied, with the largest population of undocumented residents 18 and under being high school aged youth. All of the children attend the local, predominately White suburban schools surrounding the community and, while many of the children's first language is Spanish, all consider themselves bilingual.

In the middle of the housing complex is the *Miravalle* learning center, where children and youth, ages 4-17, gather, study, and participate in various programs offered by staff and volunteers. The learning center attracts volunteers from local colleges and universities to provide academic tutoring, mentorship, and assistance with robotics programming. In addition, partnerships with professors and community members have often designated the learning center for practicum sites in education and psychology classes. The majority of the volunteers at the learning center are White, monolingual English speakers. While there are a few long-term volunteers, there is a high turnover rate and sometimes a shortage of volunteers available throughout the week. Since I began volunteering at the learning center in the summer of 2013, there have been three shifts in leadership. I have been fortunate to collaborate with each director to further develop special programs and outreach efforts through the Youth Leadership Collective which I describe in chapter three.

Overview of the Three-Article Dissertation

In this three-article dissertation, I discuss some of the key findings from the study centered on my work with the youth at CM. While each article is guided by its' own sub-research questions, this dissertation, as a whole, is guided by the following questions:

- (1) How do the Chicax/Latinx young people in *Comunidad Miravalle* engage with YPAR and Chicana feminist pedagogies as ways to disrupt dominant notions of knowledge production?
- (2) How does YPAR in community spaces inform the theory and praxis of Chicana feminist literacy pedagogies?

The first three chapters of the dissertation pertain to the larger studies on which my three articles are based. In the next chapter, I piece together a framework that brings together Chicana feminisms and Youth Participatory Action Research as theoretical perspectives to re-imagine literacy pedagogies for Chicax/Latinx youth. I emphasize two pedagogical practices, *testimonios & pláticas*, for literacies and highlight how they serve as frameworks for engaging the cultural wealth of youth from an (im)migrant housing community. Testimonios, for example, offer an opportunity for young people to engage in the voicing and documenting narratives of marginalization from their own lived realities and/or those of their community as either *testimonialistas* (someone who gives a *testimonio*) and/or an interlocutor (person who records, documents, and publishes/shares the *testimonio* to wider publics) (Cruz, 2012; Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, & Flores Carmona, 2012; DeNicolo & Gonzalez, 2015). *Pláticas*, processes of co-constructing knowledge through dialogue, become ways for youth to share their knowledge, critique sociopolitical issues, and push each other's thinking in new ways (Mendoza Aviña, 2016; Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016). This theoretical framework emerged from my data and

serves as a critical lens for examining the kind of knowledge production and literacy experiences that can emerge when youth participate in Chicana feminist literacy pedagogies.

In Chapter 3, I review my methodological approach to this study. I open with an in-depth discussion of my positionality as a 3rd/5th generation Chicana, my educational experiences, and how I come to my work in literacy education, specifically within the context of CM. I outline how my methodological orientation to the project was deeply connected to my pedagogical approach in teaching ethnic studies courses at CM and facilitating the Youth Leadership Collective program (YLC). I describe what a Chicana feminist pedagogy for literacy looked like in praxis and how these pedagogies provided a base for a YPAR project where youth collected testimonios from their community, analyzed them, and prepared multimodal projects to demonstrate their findings. I then describe the youth at CM, sharing a bit of their personalities, how they are positioned at school, and their participation in the YLC at CM. Finally, I provide an overview of my process for engaging with my data, emphasizing multimodal methods for data collection and analysis.

Chapters four, five, and six are comprised of the articles through which I share my findings. In the first article, I highlight how youth from (im)migrant mixed-status families hold critical, complex, and tension-rich knowledge central to engaging in sociopolitical discussions of immigration, citizenship, and migrant labor. I center my analysis on one *plática* and reveal how through their participation they are able to co-construct critical arguments, rooted from their knowledge and experiences, in addition to those of their families and community members. Further, I argue that *pláticas* provided youth the space to push each other's thinking to interrogate dominant, oppressive paradigms for discussing the humanity and worth of (im)migrant communities. I highlight how this *plática* unveiled the ways in which youth in this

study navigate belonging to (or not) a nation-state that continues to render them as criminal, complicate narratives of meritocracy and migrant labor, and continuously invest in promises of (im)migration policy change because their livelihood and material realities depend on it.

The second article takes a deep look at the intersections of race, gender, and literacies for the young women in the study. I expose how *pláticas* are a feminist pedagogy where young Chicanas/Latinas can draw on their embodied and intergenerational knowledge to engage in feminist politics of disruption and reflection. The findings highlighted in this chapter speak to the messiness and complexities of meaning making for youth. Specifically, how critical consciousness and the development of feminist thought is a process. Further, the data show that young Chicanas/Latinas draw on, what I call, *mujerista* literacies to engage in intersectional feminisms, situating their understandings of race, class, gender, and sexuality within larger conversations of oppression across various communities.

In the third article, I focus on the final multimodal compositions of the YPAR project. The findings in this study supported my theorizing of Community Cultural Literacy Pedagogies, a framework to examine how youth's draw on their home, familial, and community knowledge and experiences for pedagogical purposes. These pedagogies reflect the needs of this particular Chicana/Latina (im)migrant community, collective lived realities, and literacies. For these young people, these pedagogies demonstrate youth's critical knowledge of (im)migration and border crossing, their educational aspirations, their deep commitment to community strength and success, and a robust linguistic repertoire that is rooted in communicating critical knowledge.

Collectively, these articles contribute to empirical work that highlights how youth draw on their cultural and experiential knowledge to engage in a multitude of literacy practices across contexts and extend well beyond those considered academic or allowed in school (Elizabeth

Dutro, 2017; Jocson, 2016; Paris, 2010; L. Vasudevan & Rodriguez Kerr, 2016). Further, this dissertation emphasizes how these literacies are a product and reflection of the teaching and learning that takes place in communities and homes of (im)migrant families and communities. In the concluding chapter, I discuss the implications for youth who participate in out-of-school contexts such as the one I designed and how these programs and spaces can be re-imagined so that young people can engage in transformative pedagogies and learning opportunities. I also discuss some of the outcomes that came about from this work. In doing so, however, I attempt to disrupt the normative ways that outcomes are discussed in critical youth work—as those discussions often highlight meritocracy, college readiness, and academic achievements. I complicate this narrative by highlighting the different work in which young people engage after participating in studies like mine. I emphasize how, across the various paths they pursue, they are still valuable members of our society, how they are human, and how they continue to be holders and producers of knowledge.

Chapter 2:

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

This dissertation is guided by the idea of re-imagination—seeking alternative possibilities to what exists, particularly for literacy pedagogy. What does it mean to re-imagine literacy pedagogy? I argue that this re-imagination depends on the knowledge, practices, and pedagogies of youth, specifically youth whose literacies have been and continue to be devalued, other[ed], and silenced (de los Ríos, López, & Morrell, 2015; Dutro, 2013; Jocson, 2015; Lyiscott, 2017). Re-imagining requires that we articulate and define what we mean, exactly, by literacy pedagogy. For the purposes of this dissertation, it means recognizing, teasing through, and questioning what has been understood as the foundations of literacies and literacy pedagogy. This requires a stance of opening ourselves to alternative modes and frameworks for understanding literacies. In this chapter, I first review literature central to the conceptualization of literacies. Next, I focus on the empirical work significant and critical to discussing the literacies of Chicana/Latina and (im)migrant youth. I then offer Chicana feminisms as a theoretical framework to re-imagine literacy pedagogy, specifically drawing on two pedagogical tools: *testimonios* and *pláticas*. This theoretical framing sets the stage for one way we might re-imagine literacy pedagogies as feminist and participatory, specifically for facilitating this praxis through Youth Participatory Action Research.

Conceptualizing Literacies

The ways in which I conceptualize literacy within this dissertation are informed by important moves in the field that define literacies within sociocultural frameworks and in relation to social contexts rather than cognitive skills (Perry, 2012; New London Group, 1996; Moje &

Lewis, 2007; Street, 2003). Sociocultural perspectives of literacy aim to understand how people use literacies in their everyday lives and how literacies are embedded within epistemological frameworks of particular communities (Street, 2003). New Literacy Studies, as a tradition of scholarship within this umbrella, for example asks critical questions about what counts as literacy, whose literacies are valued, and problematizing ideas of literacy across axes of power, culture, and language (Street, 2005). The work of multiliteracies scholars, specifically the New London Group (1996), add to this discussion by expanding ideas of what counts as text (beyond print) and the significance of multimedia technologies, specifically within the pedagogies taken up by literacy educators. Central to these frameworks is the notion of meaning making—or how people understand, construct, and play with various texts. Critical scholars within this field have pushed on these frameworks to acknowledge and ground discussions of literacies within discourses and ideological intersections of power and social structures (Gutiérrez, 2008; Sealey-Ruiz, 2013; Winn, 2010). These works play close attention to identities, agency, and relationships within broader systemic and sociopolitical issues across race, gender, class, sexuality, and citizenship status.

Many scholars in the field have taken up discussions of literacies drawing upon critical theories from other fields of study, situating their work alongside and within in feminist, post structural, queer, and post/decolonial perspectives (Blackburn, 2005; Jones, 2012; Kerkham, 2011; Leander & Boldt, 2013; Pedro, 2015; Saavedra, 2011). While the conceptual grounding of literacies of this work is based in sociocultural perspectives, the use of critical lenses to understand literacies makes visible the gaps that persist within literacy studies and literacy education and how we might address them. From this work we have learned, for example, how communities of color not only engage in literacies that are specific to their sociopolitical

contexts, but also how these practices are shared, embodied, and reflective of pedagogies of resistance and survival (L. R. Johnson & Rosario-Ramos, 2012; D. C. Martinez, 2017; Winn, 2015). We have also witnessed how youth of color participate in constructing new literacies specific to their cultural and sociopolitical understandings of the world through hip hop, art, and activism (Akom, 2009; Butler, 2015; Mirra, Garcia, & Morrell, 2015). Further, these studies have emphasized the importance of honoring student's traumas and lived realities in literacy pedagogy (DeNicolo & Gonzalez, 2015; Elizabeth Dutro, 2013; Jones, 2012). This work has been critical to the ways in which I discuss literacies, specifically for Chicanx/Latinx youth from an (im)migrant housing community.

Situating My Work: Exploring Youth literacies in Chicanx/Latinx (im)migrant Communities

This dissertation builds on scholarship that emphasizes the powerful literacies that emerge from Chicanx/Latinx youth, highlighting the deep connections between language, knowledge, and culture (Paris, 2011; Martinez-Roldan & Sayer, 2006; Pacheco, 2009). These literacies are shaped by the sociopolitical, historical, and cultural contexts of which Chicanx/Latinx populations exist within the U.S. (Gutierrez, 2008). Empirical work in this area has emphasized the particularities of Chicanx/Latinx youth and how their literacies are reflective of home and community knowledge. They make the connection between racialized knowledge and ways of engaging in literacy practices. Further, this work has taken up critical issues that shape the literacies of Chicanx/Latinx students such as immigration, oppressive language policies, and racist-nativist rhetoric. This work has lead implications and suggestions for policy and praxis for k-12 classrooms that emphasize valuing and leveraging the cultural and linguistic

knowledge and experiences that emerge from communities and households of Chicanx/Latinx students.

Within this broader field of Chicanx/Latinx youth literacies, scholars have taken up critical perspectives like transnationalism and the idea that language and literacies are constructed and take place across borders (Morales, 2016; Noguerón-liu & Hogan, 2017; Sánchez, 2007). de los Rios (2017), for example, explores the transnational and translangual literacy experiences for one high school student through his reading, writing, and performing of *corridos*, Mexican ballads that emphasize border issues. Her study reveals how student's ties to communities, cultures, and practices across borders provide a critical lens for youth to think about their lived realities within the broader experiences of Latinx/Chicanx communities across generations. This intergenerational analysis to literacies is significant for understanding how transnational knowledge, experiences, and languages are different for youth and adults. For example, in their findings, Noguerón Liu & Jordan Hogan (2017) show how these differences surface in digital projects and *testimonios* describing hometowns in Michoacan, México. These descriptions of home, cultural memory, and place are molded by communication across borders, travel, and also by media and cultural productions that highlight hardship and the violence of cartels, poverty, and displacement that exist in Mexico. Transnational literacies of Chicanx/Latinx youth exist within these realities and often shaped by the institution of citizenship, border crossing, and the distinct experiences of (im)migrant communities in the U.S.

The literacies of Chicanx/Latinx youth from (im)migrant families are cultivated from experiences of border crossing, knowledge of (im)migrant labor, and pedagogies of survival and resistance to oppressive structures (Campano & Low, 2011; Pacheco & Gutiérrez, 2009). These ways of knowing shape the literacies of undocumented youth, specifically how they think about

and advocate for their human rights. Looking at literacies of an activist group, Parkhouse (2017) identifies how youth navigate racist-nativist discourses and structures that shape the lived realities of undocumented communities. These young people specifically use their literacies to lobby for legislation and to protect people from deportation. This work looks at the powerful literacies youth hold and draw on to engage in civics. While it holds critical implications for civics education, it also reminds us of the continued emotional and physical labor that undocumented youth are forced to take on to prove their humanity. Through her study on the significance of ethnic studies at the high school level, de los Rios (2017) reminds us of the importance of finding pedagogical practices that resist dehumanizing discourses that attempt to measure the worth and deservingness of undocumented youth and communities.

Scholarship within the broader school of Chicana/Latina youth literacies specifically takes a deep look at the ways in which youth not only engage literacies that reflect their home and community knowledge, but how they are active agents in constructing literacies that are reflective of their everyday experiences as youth of color within their respective contexts (de Los Rios, 2016; Patel Stevens, 2011). For example, in their community partnership with Latina and Indigenous youth, Torrez, et. al (2017) argue that creating spaces that are grounded in the storytelling practices of communities of color provides young people with opportunities to write their own narratives, drawing on their own cultural and linguistic resources. Within this space, youth are invited to draw on youth languages and pop culture. Without being instructed to do so, students weaved these literacies within their narratives of broader community issues and cultural knowledge. In this tradition, scholars also highlight how youth participate in intersectional politics and activism alongside other youth of color. For example, Martinez (2017) identifies languages of solidarity that Black and Latina youth engaged in, particularly to support each other

and survive the continued physical violence against Black and Latinx communities. These narratives are critical to discussing, honoring, and valuing the continuously shifting and diverse literacies of Chicanx/Latinx youth.

Despite the extensive work on Chicanx/Latinx youth literacies, gaps still exist within the literature, specifically around the knowledge and literacies situated within the sociopolitical realities of youth from mixed-status families and migrant labor communities. This dissertation examines the literacies of youth from an (im)migrant migrant community, acknowledging the precarious institution of citizenship, the gendered ways of knowing that shape these literacies, and the pedagogical literacy practices that youth take up to engage their community members in critical conversations. My dissertation adds to this line of scholarship by highlighting the messiness that exists when youth participate, co-construct, and play with literacies—unveiling the intangible, never-static, and shifting nature of Chicanx/Latinx youth literacies. Additionally, this dissertation explores implications beyond classroom pedagogy, offering Chicana feminisms and YPAR as guiding frameworks for engaging youth’s literacies in ways that work towards social change and thinking about knowledge and literacy pedagogies outside of school walls. In what follows I outline the theoretical contributions of Chicana feminist thought and put them in conversation with YPAR scholarship.

Chicana Feminisms as a Framework for Re-Imagining Literacy Pedagogies

Chicana feminist thought is largely concerned with interrogating dominant notions of knowledge production and legitimacy, particularly as it relates to the ways in which Eurocentric, colonizing epistemologies have been taken as normal while de-legitimizing, appropriating, and/or policing other[ed] knowledges, like those of people of color, women, and queer folks. Chicana feminist theories expose the knowledge that comes from living on the margins and

surviving the intersections of heteropatriarchy, White supremacy, and colonialism (Villenas, 2006). These theories also explore how existing within the margins informs the development of an oppositional consciousness (Sandoval, 2001) or *facultad* (Anzaldúa, 2007)—ways of knowing generated from and imperative to the survival and living of marginalized peoples, and Chicanas in particular. In other words, this area of scholarship commits to recognizing and uncovering the knowledges, narratives, and histories from the in-between spaces where those who navigate multiple worlds, cultures, and identities live. Chicana feminist scholars, thus, theorize from alternative sites of knowledge production. Some of these spaces include the brown body (Cruz, 2001; Anzaldúa & Moraga, 1981), the home (Delgado Bernal, 2001; Trinidad Galvan, 2001) and the physical and metaphorical borderlands (Anzaldúa, 2007; Elenes, 2011; Saavedra & Nymark, 2008). Within these spaces and through these particular sensibilities, Chicana feminist scholars approach intersectional work in social justice by building solidarities and with the goal of disrupting, if not dismantling, all systems of oppression.

Following this tradition, Chicana feminist scholars in education have used these marginalized ways of knowing to “intervene in the schooling of Latina/o students,” (DeNicolo & Gonzalez, 2015, p. 111) and reject oppressive, dominant discourses that position these students in deficit ways. Knowledge located within the margins becomes central to reframing the educational discourses of Latino/a students, their families, and communities (Yosso, 2005). Saavedra (2011), for example, argues that when we use Chicana feminist theories in educational research, “we can conceive new and unimagined possibilities with children and acknowledge the fragility of our taken-for-granted truths, thereby opening new spaces for reinvention and creation” (p. 262). In other words, Chicana feminist theories have the potential to not only speak and resist harmful scholarship and educational practices that construct Latino/a students as

‘failing,’ but work towards the re-positioning of student’s voices, knowledges, and bodies within educational discourses (DeNicolo, González, Morales, & Romani, 2015; Pérez Huber & Cueva, 2012; Malagon, 2010; Pérez Huber, 2009). With that, they provide a language that acknowledges the complexities of students, like those in my study, whose lives and familial/community histories have been largely shaped by the establishment of borders, forced migration, and an exploitative relationship to land through migrant labor. This rich framework encourages a deeper look into the tensions and transformative possibilities for teaching and learning within the most marginalized spaces.

Locating Theories of Literacies within Chicana Feminisms

While Chicana/Latina scholars in literacy have certainly intervened in the discussion and positioning of Chicanx/Latinx youth literacies, leading with their critical insights and experiences of Chicanas/Latinas in the U.S. (Gutierrez, 2008; Pacheco, 2012; Norma Gonzalez, 2006), there is limited literacy scholarship deeply grounded in the theoretical and empirical contributions within the broader tradition of Chicana Feminisms. Literacy is, in many ways, central to Chicana feminisms. Chicana feminist scholars discuss literacies as liberatory processes of meaning making that continuously draw on personal experiences and knowledges of the borderlands, or the in-between, marginalized spaces occupied by women of color, queer folks, and youth. Although there are very few empirical studies that examine youth literacies from a Chicana feminist perspective, there is a rich foundation within Chicana feminist theory for examining the literacies of Chicanx/Latinx youth.

For example, in her theorizing of autohistoria, Gloria Anzaldúa (2015) outlines the powerful ways personal narrative is a complex, critical, and transformative literacy practice. She offers,

Personal narrative with theoretical discourse, autobiographical vignettes with theoretical prose. I create a hybrid genre, a new discursive mode, which I call 'autohistoria' and autohistoria-teoria'. Conectando experiences personales con realidades sociales results in autohistoria, and theorizing about this activity results in autohistoria-teoria. It's a way of inventing and making knowledge, meaning, and identity through self-inscriptions. By making certain personal experiences the subject of this study, I also blur the private/public borders. (p. 6)

As Anzaldúa points out, literacy and knowledge are not only deeply connected, but their relationship is also central to Chicana feminist theories, specifically in piecing together our lived realities for a greater understanding of who we are within our sociopolitical worlds.

Chicana feminist literacies also require the re-reading, questioning, and critiquing texts—practices that have been highlighted in critical literacy scholarship. In her book, for example, Elenes (2011) re-examines dominant, colonial narratives of Mexican women by seeking out alternative representations of Mexican/Chicano mythical figures: *La Llorona*, *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, and *Malintzin/Malinche*. She connects the contested and conflicted meanings of these figures to representations of Mexicana and Chicana women, identifying ways in which women have resisted their patriarchal representations while redefining their significance. One of the theoretical tools Elenes (2011) draws from is Emma Perez's (1999) decolonial imaginary—an imaginative space where we can begin to fill in the gaps of what has been omitted, hear what has been silenced, and see what has been hidden by colonial writings and interpretations of history. Describing this alternative way of reading history, Perez (1999) states,

As much as I would love to stumble upon diaries, journals, and letters written by queer vaqueras of the nineteenth century, I must challenge my own desire for the usual archival

material and the usual way of seeing, as well as honor that which women scholars before me have uncovered. While I will not always find the voices of the subaltern, the women, the queers of color, I will have access to a world of documents rich with ideologies that enforce white, colonial heteronormativity (p. 126).

As described by Perez, the decolonial imaginary provides a theoretical space to engage in critical literacy practices, and thus, functions as a critical literacy device to support in the re-reading and re-writing of dominant, colonial narratives.

A significant dimension of Chicana feminist theories is the practice of story-telling. Highlighting the powerful implications for story-telling pedagogies specifically related to mothering, Villenas (2005) offers “literacies in convivencia” as the literacies that emerge in spaces of social, cultural, political, and historical exchanges where Latina mothers aim “to carve out the moral lessons of strength, courage, intellect, and compassion for their children,” (p. 273). These literacies are thus circulated and shared amongst women with the intention of and strategic practice of passing these literacies over generations. Sanchez (2007) also explores these story-telling pedagogies in her work with Chicana/Latina teens who draw on their transnational experiences and knowledge to document familial narratives across borders.

Chicana feminists also offer theoretical tools to think expansively about literacies. Like literacy scholars (E. Johnson & Vasudevan, 2012; Kerkham, 2011; Vasudevan, 2014) have argued that the body as central to literacy, Chicana feminist scholars have also deeply theorized the body is a site of knowledge production and cultural memory (Cruz, 2001). As Anzaldúa (2016) describes the relationship between feminism and the body, she states, “my feminism is grounded not on incorporeal abstraction but on corporal realities [...] The material body is center and central. The body is the ground of thought. The body is text” (p. 5). Chicana feminists

have, thus, centralized the body in theorizing knowledge and pedagogy, laying out a foundation for further expanding discussions on embodied literacies (DeNicolo & Gonzalez, 2015; Elenes 2013). Additionally, land, borders, and borderlands have also been recognized as locations of knowledge production for Chicanas as well as sites for reckoning with painful histories of colonization and forced migration (Pendleton-Jimenez, 2006; Calderon, 2014). Pendleton Jimenez (2006) states, “For Chicanas, learning about the land risks dredging up at least 500 years of colonial and indigenous knowledges in conflict, or hurtful understandings of ourselves in the world” (p. 220). At the same time, these geo-political sites hold rich ways of knowing that are specific to the cultural practices, pedagogies, and, as I argue, literacies for Chicana/Latinx communities.

Theorizing Chicana Feminist Literacy Pedagogies

A central thread of Chicana feminisms in education is the re-defining of educational spaces and pedagogical practices. Because of the ways that Latino/a students are often positioned in mainstream classrooms, Chicana feminist pedagogies refer “to culturally specific ways of organizing teaching and learning in informal sites such as the home—ways that embrace Chicana and Mexicana ways of knowing and extend beyond formal schooling” (Delgado Bernal, 2006, p. 114). We see this emphasis through Delgado Bernal’s (2006) theory of pedagogies of the home, where she highlights how Chicana college students draw from the knowledge and histories of their homes and families to navigate higher education and work towards academic success. Similarly, Trinidad Galvan (2001; 2006) theorizes womanist pedagogies of *campesina* women exposing how they draw on their lived realities and spirituality to engage in the sharing of knowledge for everyday life. Recognizing the ways in which these alternative spaces hold and produce knowledge allows us to reimagine the definition of pedagogy as a move towards

social change and equitable education. For example, in her articulation of Border/transformational pedagogies, Elenes (2006; 2011) suggests that the re-invention of pedagogical practice must involve cultural politics, social practices, and the “construction of knowledge capable of analyzing unequal social conditions, power relations, and conflicts over meaning that ensue from these struggles,” (p. 1). In other words, Chicana feminist notions of pedagogy rely on marginalized knowledge, spaces, and practices to critique normative educational discourses and politics that perpetuate oppression.

I draw upon these ideas of pedagogy to theorize Chicana feminist literacy pedagogies within my study. I focus on two pedagogical tools: *Testimonio* and *pláticas*. While *testimonios* and *pláticas* have been taken up theoretically and methodologically across the fields of sociology and anthropology, Chicana feminists, particularly within education, have employed these tools through a particular epistemological framing that is aligned with broader Chicana feminist perspectives (Fierros & Delgado Bernal 2016; Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, Carmona, 2012). In following this tradition, I take up these pedagogical tools within the context of literacy education.

Testimonio

The genre of *testimonio* is most notably recognized for its roots in Latin America, particularly for its use in documenting and voicing experiences of people who have faced marginalization, persecution, and oppression by governments and socio-political forces (Beverley, 2005; Brabeck, 2003)¹. Tied to a history of human rights struggle, *testimonio*

¹ Footnote: A well-known *testimonio* that has been a focal point in discussing the genre’s possibilities and tensions is, “*I, Rigoberta Menchú, an Indian woman in Guatemala,*” (Burgos-Debray, 1984) a story of an indigenous communities’ struggles for liberation witnessed and told through Menchú’s lived realities. Through her *testimonio* we learn about the methodological tensions of the genre within traditional social science paradigms, such as the interrogation of truths, validity, and narrator authority. More importantly, however, this particular *testimonio*

incorporates socio-political, historical, and cultural experiences in an effort to elicit social change and greater social consciousness. It is understood as a performative text that purposefully and strategically connects individual experiences to a collective narrative—voicing the silences of the marginalized. *Testimonio* illustrates personal, political, and social realities. Different from traditional narrative, life stories, or autobiography, it calls for action based on personal accounts that situate themselves within larger sociopolitical contexts that transcend over time and through generations (Delgado Bernal, et. al, 2012).

Within literacy education, *testimonio* has been recognized as a genre of the borderlands (Saavedra, 2011), a powerful tool for examining the language and literacy practices within (im)migrant communities, and amongst children and youth for understanding how they draw on community and familial knowledge to resist and counter dominant, deficit and heteronormative ideologies (Campano, Ghiso, Yee, & Pantoja, 2013; Cruz, 2012; Ghiso & Campano, 2013; Gutiérrez, 2008; Noguerón-liu & Hogan, 2017). Expanding on multiple forms of which texts can take shape, *testimonio* is rooted in oral tradition, engages print texts, and centralizes the body as a holder and producer of knowledge. It is understood as a performative text that purposefully and strategically connects individual experiences to a collective story—voicing the silences and exposing the knowledge located within marginalized bodies (Elenes, 2013; DeNicolo & Gonzalez, 2015). *Testimonio* holds the possibility to engage in a teaching and learning process that speaks and works from the margins while listening to the subaltern voices and narratives that have been silenced. As a literacy pedagogical tool, it becomes a way to centralize the voices of students, highlighting knowledges gained from their lived realities and the ways in which they

reveals the injustices, violence, and genocide experienced by indigenous communities in Guatemala—subaltern histories and realities of a collective narrated by a *testimonialista*.

have had to navigate educational institutions. Within this framework, *testimonio* becomes a way to spread awareness of sociopolitical injustice, state sanctioned violence, and coloniality while calling on audiences for solidarity (Cervantes-Soon, 2012).

The pedagogical nature of *testimonio* begins with the ways in which the text is created and shared in addition to the teaching and learning that takes place within the process of *testimoniando*— the process of giving and witnessing *testimonio*. In this process, narratives are shared by the *testimonialista* and then recorded, and prepared by the interlocutor for sharing to bring attention to critical issues. Many times, the roles between *testimonialista* and interlocutor are blurred and overlapping as *testimonios* become a co-creative process. *Testimonios* hold important information about traditions, sociopolitical histories, and strategies for survival and resistance. Engaging in the pedagogical process, particularly acting as interlocutor and witnessing *testimonio* is a both a privilege and an opportunity to receive knowledge, participate in the tradition, and situate ways of knowing within sociopolitical histories and current lived realities. Seeing *testimonio* as a pedagogical tool for literacies not only recognizes alternative ways of teaching and learning, but also considers the ways in which knowledge comes from places like the body, borders, and the home. With that, *testimonio* pedagogy is reflective of the ways in which literacies are embodied and passed on through generations.

Within this dissertation, I highlight the knowledge and literacies that emerge when I engaged youth in the pedagogical practice of *testimonio*. Specifically, I examine how the pedagogy becomes a way for young people to not only recognize their own ways of knowing through narrating their lives, but also how their knowledge and literacies are shaped by the lived realities and experiences of their families and community members. Though *testimoniando*, the young people in this study participate in the co-construction of literacies with their parents,

peers, and CM residents. They critically examine the texts and create new texts that expose their learning and understanding for their community. As a Chicana feminist pedagogical tool for literacy, *testimonio* also challenges students to re-think what counts as knowledge, who can be a teacher, and alternative modes for learning. Finally, this pedagogical process holds the possibility of engaging youth in collaborative processes of meaning making across generations.

Pláticas

Pláticas are conversations embedded within the cultural practices of Chicana/Latinx communities (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016; Preuss & Saavedra, 2013). *Pláticas* are dialogic opportunities to teach, learn, and understand who we are in relation to others and how our experiences are situated within sociopolitical histories of our ancestors (Chabram-Dernerseian & de la Torre, 2008). They are filled with *chismes*, *cuentos*, *consejos*, and reflective of the pedagogical practices shared among Chicana/Latina women that exist in non-traditional educational spaces. *Pláticas* are, thus, reciprocal exchanges through dialogue, grounded in trust, and emerge from strong relationships. They have been taken up in research as methodological approaches that reflect these traditions, particularly in Chicana/Latinx scholarship and largely within Chicana/Latina feminist frameworks (Mendoza, 2016; Flores & Garcia, 2009; Ruiz & Cantú, 2013). This work not only resists and re-frames dominant notions of method and methodology but is also recognized as a way to re-position participants as collaborators in knowledge production and research. While this work has helped in theorizing the methodological possibilities of *pláticas*, little work has been done on *pláticas* as a pedagogy, specifically within literacy education.

For Chicana/Latinx youth, the act of *platicando* engages those participating in teaching and learning practices that are often devalued or dismissed in traditional classrooms.

Pedagogically, *pláticas* draw on the unique epistemologies and cultural traditions of

Chicanx/Latinx young people allowing them to not only share their own knowledge and experiences, but also learn from that of others and create new knowledge (Mendoza, 2016). *Pláticas* remind us of the significance of oral literacies and the ways in which meaning and texts are co-created through dialogue. As a literacy pedagogy, *pláticas* reflect student's home pedagogies but also create spaces for healing and sharing practices of survival within the sociopolitical worlds they navigate. Youth are, thus, able to share information, build relationships, and support each other in making meaning of their lived realities. Throughout the *plática*, texts are re-organized and re-shaped as students draw on their sociopolitical, cultural, and home knowledges and languages to make meaning of topics and issues that are relevant to their lives.

Situated within Chicana feminist perspectives of pedagogy, *pláticas* have the potential to serve as a pedagogical tool in literacy education particularly for Chicanx/Latinx youth. Throughout my work with at CM I engaged *pláticas* as a pedagogical tool to engage the diverse literacies that youth brought with them to the learning center. As I highlight in the findings of this dissertation, *pláticas* became a process where youth displayed their understanding of content, questioned each other, and challenged each other to take on new perspectives. Further, these dialogues included *testimonios* of student's experiences and required other students to sit within vulnerable moments, listen critically, and practice support and solidarity. *Platicando* (the act participating in a *plática*) engaged all students in co-creating knowledge through dialogue, revealing their embodied literacies, and exposing their unique ways of meaning making. Further, *pláticas* created a space for the youth and I to collectively work together in talking through critical issues. In other words, relationships, trust, and reciprocity—the foundations of *pláticas*—between the youth and I shaped how we engaged in this process. This Chicana

feminist literacy pedagogy, thus, opens spaces to re-position youth as teachers in a process that centralizes in the co-creation of knowledge and literacies.

YPAR and the facilitation of Chicana Feminist Literacy Pedagogies

Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) recognizes youth as holders and producers of knowledge, valuing their critical insights about sociopolitical injustices to engage in inquiry and action (Torre & Fine, 2008). YPAR studies collaborate with young people with varied expertise and knowledges to develop research questions, collect data, analyze it, and then produce and disseminate findings (Kirshner, 2015; Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Mirra, Garcia, & Morrell, 2016). The centrality of youth knowledges and voices, thus, create opportunities for youth to take up expert positions within the sociopolitical worlds they navigate and also motivates an understanding that research is “more than just empirical experimentation” (Bautista, Bertrand, & Morrell, 2013, p. 2) of which they have been subjected. Instead, this kind of inquiry aims to frame research as a vehicle for social change and action. YPAR, however, is not designed to ‘give voice or ‘empower’ young people, but instead acknowledges that young people have the potential to be agents of change through liberatory praxis that challenges hegemonic and oppressive sociopolitical contexts (Akom, A. A. Cammarota, Julio Ginwright, 2008; Irizarry, 2011). As Kirshner (2015) argues, YPAR projects “create venues for young people to articulate *counternarratives* (original emphasis), which contest or disrupt dominant explanations” of their bodies, lives, families, and communities (p. 91).

Chicana scholars (Sanchez, 2009; Torre & Ayala, 2009; Torre, 2009) have already begun a conversation about Chicana feminist possibilities in YPAR/PAR as a way to engage in emancipatory research. Sanchez (2009), for example, applied YPAR in a project examining transnational familial relationships, where she worked with two Latina youth collecting and

analyzing ethnographic data from their trips across the Mexico-U.S. border. YPAR and Chicana feminist notions of knowledge production created spaces for the young women and Sanchez (2009) to locate the wealth of knowledge and community across transnational experiences. In a more theoretical example, Torre & Ayala (2009) and Torre (2009) highlight Anzaldúa's conceptual tools, *choques* and *nos-otras*, to examine and make sense of the methodological tensions and possibilities of YPAR/PAR. Torre & Ayala (2009) suggest that *choques* [clashes] “represent both moments of contestation and creative production” within PAR work (p. 390). These clashes, or moments of tension throughout the research process, bring about deep reflection as we reconsider and challenge ideas of collaboration and participation with PAR. Within that reflection, *nos-otras*—or the idea of working across difference, becomes another theoretical tool for engaging in meaningful relationships, recognizing the ways in which we can see ourselves in each other, seamlessly and within the contradictions.

Literacy scholars have also explored the methodological and pedagogical benefits of YPAR particularly with youth of color, highlighting the complex and sophisticated ways they engage, embody, and practice literacies. These literacies are required at every juncture of the YPAR process—developing research questions, interviews, writing fieldnotes, coding, and the distribution and presentation of findings—and often exceeds the expectations of youth in literacy curriculum and standards (Golden & Womack, 2016; Morrell, 2006). Further, YPAR's orientation to knowledge production powerfully creates spaces for youth to unearth and demonstrate their critical literacies to motivate sociopolitical change in their communities and schools related to schooling for students of color (Mirra, Garcia, Morrell 2015), environmental racism (Akom, Shah, Nakai, & Cruz, 2016), language arts curriculum (Zavala & Golden, 2016), and many other issues that challenge the systems and structures that these students navigate in

their everyday lives (Caraballo, 2017). These studies demonstrate how youth of color hold a great deal of knowledge and desire to engage in a variety of critical literacies through meaningful opportunities for teaching and learning that YPAR provides.

The theoretical coupling of Chicana feminisms and YPAR creates an opportunity to recognize the potential for youth to participate in literacy pedagogies such as *testimonio* and *pláticas* within YPAR projects. Within this dissertation study, the youth of CM used their understanding of *testimonio* to engage in a process of *testimoniando* with their families, peers, and community members. These *testimonios* became the data they transcribed, coded, and created collages to visually represent their analysis. *Testimonios* engaged students in discussing critical topics that were not only important to their community as (im)migrant youth and families, but to other communities of color as well. *Pláticas*, thus, were central to youth's inquiry—how they negotiated research topics, the ways in which they decided on their research questions, and the themes that were surfacing in their data. *Testimonio* and *pláticas*, as Chicana feminist literacy pedagogies, fit seamlessly within a YPAR project because the theoretical and methodological framework lends itself to alternative practices for teaching, learning, and engaging youth in processes of knowledge production.

Chapter 3:

Method[ology]

Methodology refers to the theory of method—the foundation and contexts that inform research design, data collection, and data analysis (Harding, 1989; Tuhiwai Smith, 2005;2012). Because the relationship between epistemology, ontology, and methodology are closely related, Eurocentric ways of knowing and theories for carrying out social science research have often been situated within positivist, normative, and colonizing frameworks. Within those long-standing traditions for social science inquiry, the work of other[ed] scholars is often viewed as “too corporal, too colored, and sometimes too queer,” for the academy (Cruz, 2001, p. 659). Chicanas, Third World feminists, and Women of Color feminists, however, have made methodological interventions that create spaces for resistance and decolonial possibilities within educational research (Calderón et al., 2012; Cruz, 2001; Delgado Bernal, 1998; Hill Collins, 2002; Mohanty, 2003; Saavedra, 2011; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). In line with my theoretical framework, I situate my dissertation within these contributions, and particularly within Chicana feminist methodologies because expanding dominant ideas of pedagogy and resisting dehumanizing narratives of (im)migrant youth and families requires other[ed] lenses and methodological orientations.

In this chapter, I begin by discussing what I refer to as a *nepantlera* methodology— an approach to educational research that considers my personal experiences and sociopolitical positioning as a Chicana in the U.S. I then discuss how this methodology guided my work with the young people at CM, teaching ethnic studies courses and organizing the Youth Leadership Collective (YLC). From there I describe, in detail, what a Chicana feminist pedagogy for

literacies looks like in praxis at a place like CM and how this informed and lead to a Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) project. I also use this chapter to introduce and describe the 11 extraordinary young people who have guided, supported, and genuinely cared about this work. Finally, I outline my methods for data collection which were shaped by my active role in the CM community as a researcher-educator. Finally, I describe how multimodal analysis provided affordances for thinking about, seeing, and analyzing the literacies of the young people at CM.

Nepantlera Methodology

Nepantla is a transitional space, where competing ideologies, discourses, and ways of knowing intersect. It is also a marginal, liminal space where new ways of being are constructed. In *nepantla* we exist in the midst of *chaos y calma* (Anzaldúa 2002) and undergo the anguish and happiness of transition and constant shifts, making meaning of our experiences and realities. It is a site of transformation as the result of arduous work of the bodymindspirit (Lara, 2002)—challenging our own perspectives and confronting crossroads and the many thresholds connecting us to different people, places, and ways of thinking (Anzaldúa, 2015). For me, *nepantla* has been a space where the contradictions of my identities, the many threads of my personal and political work, and the roots of my epistemologies merge and create new possibilities for theorizing. *Nepantla* is home (Anzaldúa, 2002). This is where we live, *las nepantleras*.

Nepantleras embrace and skillfully use their knowledges from the spaces in-between and the movement across worlds to create new ways of being, new theories for understanding, and transforming the realities in which they exist (Keating, 2006). While everyone can experience moments in *nepantla*, not everyone is a *nepantlera*. Being a *nepantlera* is a choice and an

identity that is developed and always shifting. A *nepantlera*, does not simply exist, but rather works, creates, and re-organizes for social change within and across cultures, spaces, and discourses. While we must celebrate the work of *nepantleras*, we also have to recognize the risks and vulnerability involved. To avoid romanticizing Anzaldúa's concept, Keating (2015) emphasizes,

It's not easy to be a *nepantlera*; it's risky, lonely, exhausting work. Never entirely inside, always somewhat outside, every group or belief system, *nepantleras* do not fully belong to any single location. Yet this willingness to remain with/in the thresholds enables *nepantleras* to break partially away from the cultural trance and binary thinking that lock us into the status quo (p. xxxvi).

This work is necessary within literacy educational research, specifically because *nepantleras* are the ones who “facilitate passages between worlds and (un)natural bridges” (Keating, 2006, 9). *Nepantlera* work is required to challenge colonial approaches to research within the academy while remaining grounded in community, familial, and embodied knowledges. *Nepantleras* continue to imagine new possibilities for more equitable and transformative approaches for working with children, young people, and marginalized communities. In what follows, I review key concepts that inform my *nepantlera* methodological approach to this study.

Cultural Intuition: Situating Myself in the Research

Central to my *nepantlera* methodology is my ability and desire to draw from my own community and familial knowledge and from my experiences as a 3rd/5th generation Chicana attending predominately White suburban schools. Delgado Bernal (1998) conceptualizes and coins the term cultural intuition as the experiences, viewpoints, and epistemologies of Chicanas

that inform the ways we construct and develop our methodologies. She argues that for Chicana scholars, our academic inquiries move “beyond quantitative versus qualitative methods, and [lie] instead in the methodology employed and in whose experiences are accepted as the foundation of knowledge” (Delgado Bernal, 1998, p. 558). In this conceptualization, cultural intuition is what guides our decisions at every stage of the research process. In other words, my standpoint as a Chicana is what shapes the way I observe, interpret, and understand the world around me and as it relates to my work in educational research with (im)migrant students and families (Tellez, 2005). From my own grandparents (im)migrant histories, my grandfather’s relationship to migrant labor, and my families’, as well as my own, experiences of marginalization in the United States and Mexico (particularly as it relates to schooling), I bring the knowledge passed down over generations to this project. This knowledge is deeply connected to the collective and community memory that exists within *Comunidad Miravalle*.

To be explicit, there are many differences between my experiences and those of the students and families of *Comunidad Miravalle*. In attempts to avoid essentializing, I also wish to be transparent about my own privileges that often unfold in the very material differences in experience and positioning (Villenas, 1996; Saavedra, 2011; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). For example, witnessing my grandfather’s *testimonio* of working in the fields—not being able to clean his ears with a cotton swab because he was exhausted by the sight of cotton after picking all day—is *very* different than working in the fields myself or witnessing first-hand the exploitation of my parents (as many of the young people at *CM* do). In addition, while I hold knowledge from my family’s immigrant history and am often made to feel as an outsider within the US nation-state, my citizenship status grants me particular privileges and protections from which many of the students and families at *CM* are excluded (Cervantes-soon, 2014). My

cultural intuition, however, allows me a particular way to grapple with and make sense of these tensions as I approach this research. More specifically, acknowledging history, culture, and racialized, classed, and gendered experiences is what reinvigorates my commitment to CM, my sense of responsibility to carry out well thought-out and trustworthy research, and my desire to illustrate the powerful and rich knowledge that exists from the margins.

Em[bodied] Epistemologies: Centralizing Knowledge Within the Body

In resisting western, colonial ideas of knowledge production and legitimacy, my *nepantlera* methodology follows the tradition of Chicana feminist scholars in emphasizing the brown body as a site for theorizing (Trujillo, 1998; Cruz, 2001). Anzaldúa (2015), for example, explains her feminism grounded on “corporal realities,” where “the material body is center and central [...] the ground of thought” (p. 5). Embodied epistemologies, then, refer to the ways we come to know through our bodies. I draw on what Anzaldúa & Moraga (1981) conceptualize as theory in the flesh as a way to describe the kind of knowledge production that takes place from our physical realities and the way our bodies are the source of our memory and ability to make sense of the world. I rely on what Lara (2002), conceptualizes as the bodymindspirit, a theoretical tool to consider how knowledge production engages our whole self. Through this theoretical perspective the brown body is, thus, the source of embodied epistemologies. It is where we hold our knowledge of the world around us— the ways it has created, resisted, and also been exploited, violated, and displaced (Saavedra & Pérez, in press).

Recognizing how knowledge lives within the body—how the body re-members (Latina Feminist Group, 2001; Anzaldúa 2002; 2015)—is imperative to a study with (im)migrant Chicana/Latina youth. As Cruz (2001) explains, “For the educational researcher, understanding the body and the regulation of its movements is fundamental in the reclamation of narrative and

the development of radical projects of transformation and liberation” (p. 657). Central to my study are the bodies of the young people and families because their embodied knowing reflects specific locations and how knowledge is passed down over generations (Delgado Bernal, et. al. 2012). To situate a discussion of knowledge production in the context of the body, then, acknowledges the deep roots and richness of ancestral ways of knowing, resistant to colonial logic, and the Cartesian split more specifically.

Geographies of Selves: Starting with Land and (Im)migration Histories

My genealogy is deeply connected to (im)migration journeys, the crossing of geopolitical borders, and connections to places and spaces. In conceptualizing geographies of selves, Anzaldúa (2015) argues that the places we’ve lived, the borders we’ve crossed, and the cultures we’ve come into contact with mark and impact our bodies and our identities. She states,

The terrain, the planes (and plains) of identity alter when a person moves (immigrates) into another community or social position. One ends up living in a different physical and symbolic environment while retaining the former “home” culture and position (p. 71).

Like this, and through *movimiento*, we shift. The relationship between who we are and how we come to know is, thus, situated within place, space, and land (Pendelton- Jimenez, 2006). My knowledge base, the *movimiento* that lives within me, is grounded in the roots to northern Mexico and south Texas, migration patterns that take both sets of grandparents to Chicago, and then my parents to White suburbia. It is also informed by my own movement and desire to escape the classism and racism of my childhood neighborhood, attempting to return ‘home’ by re-crossing the Mexico-U.S. border and later making homes within Salt Lake City, Utah and Boulder, Colorado throughout graduate school.

Beginning with land and recognizing our geographies of selves, holds powerful implications for Chicana feminist methodologies (Calderon, 2014). This process is often complicated and painful, as we unearth the histories of genocide, displacement, and settlement. As Pendleton- Jimenez (2006) describes, “For Chicanas, learning about the land risks dredging up at least 500 years of colonial and indigenous knowledges in conflict, or hurtful understandings of ourselves in the world” (p. 220). Incorporating land as a central component of my methodology, however, brings me to spaces in-between these borders, histories, and knowledges—the borderlands, or *nepantla*, thus, become spaces of possibility and theorizing. This also leads me to recognizing the geographies of selves of the young people and families within *Comunidad Miravalle* and their relationship to land through (im)migration, border crossing, and through migrant labor. Specifically, geographies of selves are a critical component of *nepantlera* work because it offers a way to think about land, place, and space with a desire to transcend colonial borders and build coalitions through constructing *puentes* (Anzaldúa, 2015).

Youth Leadership Collective & Ethnic Studies Courses at CM

I brought and further developed this *nepantlera* methodology to my work with the Youth at *Comunidad Miravalle* within the context of our Youth Leadership Collective. The Youth Leadership Collective began through an initiative by the director at the time I first began volunteering in the summer of 2013. The director’s idea of my role at CM was to engage the high school girls in thinking about their engagement in the community, developing a strong sense of self, and beginning to think about their future college and career choices through a framework of leadership. At the same time, the director and I’s relationship was grounded in critical trust—a reciprocal understanding that our work at CM was situated within the

sociopolitical demands and necessities of the community—and left room for flexibility as to how this Youth Leadership Collective might unfold.

After a month of volunteering at the learning center as a tutor, developing relationships with youth of all ages, talking with parents, and observing the practices of the learning center I began teaching my first ethnic studies course at CM called *Chicana/Latina Experiences*. This course was designed like a college seminar-style class with a syllabus that included readings Chicana feminist theorists like Gloria Anzaldúa and Ana Castillo and covered themes of education, spirituality, body politics, and pop culture. Two young *mujeres*, Karina & Juana, attended this 2-hour seminar every week for the entire fall semester of 2013. Every now and then the high school boys would peer in and ask what we were doing and if they could join. Recognizing the importance of, and honestly enjoying, the *mujer*-centered space the young women and I created that semester I would politely say “no.” One day, however, after one of the boys sluggishly left the classroom before we began our class, Joanna said, “Maybe it would be good if the guys did do this class.” With the increased interest from both the young women and young men at CM, I met with the director about opening the collective to all high school youth. She hated the idea.

After much persistence, I began teaching my next seminar style course on Chicanos/Latinos/Mexicanos in the U.S. in the Spring 2014 semester to all high school youth who were interested. This course discussed important historical moments related to the racialization of Latinx peoples in U.S. such as the U.S.-Mexico war, the Chicano movement, and contemporary examples of how these events shaped the realities of communities like C.M. That semester, in addition to Karina and Juana, three young men regularly attended the class. In preparation for a summer 2014 ethnic studies course, I applied for and received a small grant for

volunteers in the county which CM resides which covered the cost of new books, food, and transportation for activities. In the semesters that followed I taught ethnic studies courses on race and education, Latinx Literature, and Latinx Politics as the 2016 presidential elections approached. By the Spring 2016 semester, the Youth Leadership Collective was open to all middle and high school youth.

In addition to ethnic studies content, I arranged visits to local universities and community colleges, invited youth to participate in a weeklong Chicana/o studies institute, and assisted in college and scholarship applications. Spending at least one day a week, often more, with the young people at CM created opportunities for building trusting relationships. These strong relationships with the youth and between the youth were the foundation of learning and the base of developing *conocimiento* (Anzaldúa, 2002) through ethnic studies content, which supported student's critical understanding of their lived realities (Gaxiola, et. al., 2017). These courses were much more than college-style seminars. They were places where the youth at CM were able to engage in knowledge production by challenging themselves to see the world through alternative lenses, push each other *con cariño* to consider frameworks that centered intersectionality, and as many of the youth described, "feel smart."

A Chicana Feminist Literacies Pedagogy in Practice

As I explained in Chapter 2, Chicana feminist notions of pedagogy are grounded in the idea that knowledge and rich practices of teaching and learning exist within other[ed] spaces, like *Comunidad Miravalle*. Teaching ethnic studies courses in the community learning center, in the middle of the homes of all the young people, provided an opportunity to engage these ways of knowing in class. For example, in the Chicana/Latina course, after reading and discussing Chicana Feminist theory, students and I created visual representations of our epistemological

maps. These drawings were created in response to the broad question, “Where does my knowledge come from?” The framework guiding these pieces of art, however, encouraged youth to think about knowledge within the context of their homes, families, and communities. Karina and Juana connected images of borders, mountains, and family members to their future aspirations. In a later semester, students used cameras to document what “community” means to them through images. In their PowerPoint presentations, students highlighted community members assisting others, children playing in the grass, the details of the apartments, and mural art around the learning center. These are just a few examples of youth engaging in Chicana feminist pedagogies to identify what Yosso (2005) refers to as Community Cultural Wealth, or the knowledge and strength of homes, families, and community of Latinx students. Through these pedagogical practices, CM youth were able to draw on literacies through a variety of modes to make meaning through a lens that emphasizes alternative sites for knowledge production.

Theorizing testimonios and *pláticas* as Chicana feminist literacy pedagogical tools emerged from my work with youth at CM. As we covered topics at the intersections of race, gender, class, sexuality, and citizenship we also shared our personal experiences related (or sometimes not related) to the course material. As we read and listened to *testimonios* of other Chicanx/Latinx students, fiction texts, and empirical research students also brought their own narratives to class. In the form of *testimonios*, students often shared their experiences of racialization and othering in school, histories of (im)migration and struggles of being undocumented, knowledge of (im)migrant labor, and battles with mental health. These *testimonios* became active, living texts that helped shaped our *pláticas*. In the ethnic studies courses *pláticas*, practicing the co-creating of knowledge through dialogue was a critical

pedagogical tool to engage youth using their experiences and knowledge to understand their lived realities within larger sociopolitical and historical contexts. Through *pláticas*, youth played with meaning making—talking through their ideas, expanding on each other’s points, and sometimes calling on each other to take up the discussion or the issue at hand in different ways. Through *pláticas* and *testimonios*, the youth and I not only engaged with course content, but we co-created and practiced literacies, exposed our embodied literacies, and welcomed our home, community, and familial literacies. These Chicana feminist literacies centered student’s knowledge, voices, and experiences to highlight and understand complex ways in which they made meaning. In the articles through which I share the findings of this dissertation, I highlight how these two pedagogical tools in particular make visible the rich, complex ways of knowing of young people and how they use literacies to engage in sociopolitical discussions about their lives, intersectional praxis, and youth-lead pedagogies.

Summer 2016 YPAR Project

After 3 years of ethnic studies courses, the students in the youth leadership collective had not only gained critical knowledge to engage in sociopolitical discussions and action, but they were also able to bring that knowledge to navigate their schooling, shape their educational futures, and make decisions about their career paths. While once sophomores in high school, many of the students in the Youth Leadership Collective were preparing for HS graduation, working part-time jobs, and applying to college by the Spring of 2016. Although this created a shift in participation, it also provided an opportunity to reach out to middle school and younger high school youth at CM—many of which were siblings of the active youth in the Youth Leadership Collective—to begin thinking about a summer YPAR project in the community. With the understanding that summer 2016 would be the end of my consistent presence at CM,

due to the need to move back to Chicago, I proposed the YPAR project as a way to culminate work with the Youth Leadership Collective.

Upon receiving a grant for my dissertation, I decided to use the funds to provide honorariums to all participants for the summer 2016 YPAR project. Unlike previous participation requirements in the Youth Leadership Collective, students had to apply to be part of the research team. All middle and high school students who participated in spring programming, including those who were not active participants in the YLC, were eligible to apply. The application included demographic information, like age and year in school, as well as short essay questions that asked about interest in being on the team and experience with research. Students were asked to sign an agreement about attendance, following the policies and guidelines of the learning center, and understanding their summer commitment to the project. I received ten applications and of those, nine students ended up being able to participate in the summer research. Three of the nine students had participated in at least two years of ethnic studies courses through the YLC, the rest of the students were new additions to the program. This difference in experience created opportunities for mentorship, leadership roles, and challenged new students to think critically about content that other students had been exploring over the previous three years.

I proposed a YPAR project where youth would collect *testimonios* from CM residents to learn more about histories of (im)migration. While youth generally liked the idea, they also expressed a desire to address one issue in the community that they felt was most pressing: Unity, or lack thereof. We began our 7-week YPAR project discussing research situated within sociopolitical contexts, being critical researchers, and thinking about intersectional perspectives to frame our research. Based on youth's experiences as community members, their knowledge,

and expertise, they decided on the following research questions: (1) How do residents of CM define and value community? (2) How do the values of the community influence the participation and goals of the learning center? And (3) How does the community at CM resist and interrupt stereotypes of Mexican and migrant families? Students identified residents, CM directors and staff, and family members that they felt could help them answer these questions based on their involvement in the community, time living at CM, and relationship to the youth.

The students and I met three days a week that summer, for two hours each meeting. I would create lessons and activities to guide us through the research process, but our meeting agendas were always discussed and determined by the needs of the group. For example, in the midst of creating a plan for data collection, national tragedies occurred, such as the mass shooting at Pulse Night Club in Orlando and the murders of Philando Castile and Eric Garner. These events led us to re-organize our agenda and create spaces for critically discussing violence against people of color and our role as Latinx peoples within national discourses and action. Further, as students developed a deeper understanding of their research, they were able to determine what they needed and how they would organize their time to meet their goals.

Although I had begun the summer work with the idea that youth would share their work in PowerPoint presentations with the community and CM directors, the young people decided to create three distinct group projects (a website, a brochure, and a composite narrative). Drafts of these culminating projects were shared at a resident meeting and then again with CM directors and a grant writer from the county in which CM resides.

CM Youth

Although I could never fully capture the unique, vibrant, and complex personalities and histories of CM youth, below I highlight some of their qualities, joys, and educational

experiences. I do not, however, explicitly discuss the citizenship status of the individual participants in this section to protect their identities. All of the young people in this project come from mixed-status homes and understand the lived-realities of undocumented immigrants in the U.S., being part of the broader CM community. It is important to note here that I understand identity as ever-shifting and these descriptions have and continue to shift over time and as I continue to get to know the CM youth. Nonetheless, documenting what I know about them and featuring their individual lives is deeply significant in recognizing their humanity and their immense contributions to this dissertation research. These brief descriptions, thus, serve as a backdrop to the findings of my dissertation where their personalities, knowledge, and voices help paint a fuller image of who they are.

Karina

Karina is a politically-engaged, animal loving, superhero fanatic. Throughout high school she was positioned as a high achieving student. While usually quiet at school and in spaces of unfamiliarity, Karina's evolving *feminista* consciousness moved her to be vocal about (im)migration, rights for DACA students, and human rights for Black and Brown People, at CM and on social media. She was the youngest student in the leadership collective until the summer YPAR project when she took on a mentoring role. Karina participated in various activities in CM. While she was accepted to 4-year institutions for her undergraduate career, she and her family decided it was best to begin her post-secondary education at the local community college and then transfer to a large university. In addition to her studies and involvement at CM, she works part-time at the local movie theatre. Karina arrived to the U.S. when she was two years old from Chihuahua, Mexico, began living at CM when she was three years old. Though she and

her family moved to the trailer park community behind CM during my third year, she remained active in the Youth Leadership Collective.

Juana

Juana loves Mexican rancheras and attending *bailes* with her family and friends on the weekends. Her laugh is distinct and contagious. At school, Juana was labeled as a student with a learning disability and with limited support services, Juana's school performance did not reflect her knowledge and passion for learning. In addition to participating in the youth leadership collective for all three years, she was also a participant in the robotics program and continuously volunteered at CM as a tutor and director's assistant.. Juana's family (im)migrated from Chihuahua, Mexico and became residents of CM when she was two years old. After graduation, Juana began working at a local green house to adhere with CM resident requirements of work in agriculture or landscape.

Ricardo

Ricardo plays with fashion, enjoys trap music, is goofy, and the oldest of three siblings. His participation in the Youth Leadership Collective and robotics programming at CM provided him rich learning environments and opportunities to show leadership when school became difficult. While a feeling of hopelessness prevented him from excelling in high school as an underclassman, he later begin to see himself as a role model for his siblings and other students at CM inspired him to focus on his academics and apply for college. Ricardo is a full-time student at a large metropolitan university, where he commutes to and from his home for his classes. Ricardo and his family immigrated to the U.S. when he was two years old from Chihuahua, Mexico and became residents of CM when he was five. During my third year at CM, he and his

family moved out of the community. Due to his intense work schedule to earn money for college, Ricardo did not participate in the summer YPAR project.

Aurelio

Aurelio is a funny, kind-hearted, critical thinker. In school and at CM his outgoing energy was often policed and mistaken for misbehavior. While he was an active participant in our ethnic studies courses—always offering new ways to think about the issues we were discussing, he found school boring. Aurelio continuously reminded me that he did not like school and that he had no desire to go to college. He never subscribed to the notion that you can only be successful by attending college and was very critical of the potential for student loan debt. Aurelio entered the workforce full time after high school graduation. He and his family (im)migrated to the U.S. from Durango, Mexico when he was ten years old. Aurelio moved to CM at the beginning of his sophomore year in high school (a different high school than all the other HS participants) and continues to live at CM.

Miguel

Miguel has a vibrant personality and the ability to re-energize a space with his dancing, acting, or sly jokes. He enjoys trap music and *corridos*, hanging out with friends, and is passionate about science and math. His participation in the YLC was often determined by his work schedule with his father, helping with landscape jobs. At school his love for math and science was overlooked because of his resistance to traditional schooling. This frustrated teachers and counselors which resulted in little patience and institutional support for Miguel to finish his high school career. After a year of attending the alternative high school in the district, Miguel started coming around the learning center again and volunteered as a mentor in Robotics team. Miguel and his family (im)migrated to the U.S. from Guanajuato when he was eight years

old and began living at CM. After my third year of working at CM, he and his family moved to the trailer park community behind CM.

Pedro

Despite his giant stature, Pedro is silly, sweet and thoughtful. He is an avid *Chivas* soccer fan and loves listening to *norteñas* over American music, any day. Pedro began attending ethnic studies courses and participating in the YLC my second year at CM. In school, Pedro was labeled as an average student. He was liked by his teachers and received support from academic counselors. College-going culture was prominent in Pedro's household, largely by his older sister. Pedro's college aspirations fueled his passion for building a strong resume. He volunteered as a tutor in local elementary schools, played volleyball at his high school and took on a leadership role in the summer YPAR project. Pedro's family immigrated to the U.S. from Mexico City before Pedro was born. Pedro was born at CM and he has lived there his entire life. Pedro now attends the state flagship university, and while he lives in the dormitories, his family still lives at CM.

Erik

Erik is charismatic and can be funny without even trying. He loves baseball and plays it competitively. His participation in the YLC was limited to the YPAR summer project, though he's always been a familiar face at CM through his involvement in the robotics program, sports club, and many other activities. Although Erik never lived at CM, his family's connections to CM as former residents of the community has afforded him opportunities to stay connected to the community and benefit from the services the learning center provides. He is currently a sophomore in high school and has felt supported in school and at CM. Erik's family

(im)migrated to the US from Guanajuato, Mexico, moved to CM, and then moved out of the community before Erik was born.

Lorena

Lorena has a playful personality. She enjoys art, music, and *chisme*. Although not an active participant in the YLC until the summer YPAR project, Lorena took up her role as a youth researcher very seriously. Despite not attending ethnic studies courses, she demonstrated a critical understanding for important sociopolitical issues and her role in social justice projects. Lorena gets along with everyone at CM but her strongest friendships are with her classmates at her high school. Over the past two years, Lorena's strong relationships with everyone in the community has helped me maintain connections with other CM youth—updating me with phone numbers, snapchat handles, and the news around the community. She and her family immigrated to the US from Guanajuato, Mexico, where she was born and the same town as Erik. Lorena and her family moved to CM when she was eight years old.

Noemí

Though she comes off as an introvert, Noemí's serious and quiet demeanor fades away as she builds trust in people. Noemí enjoys fashion, hip-hop, and photography. Throughout elementary and middle school, Noemí was positioned as a high achieving student—so much that she was accepted to attend the science and math high school in the district. Throughout her educational trajectory, Noemí typically found herself as one of the few students of color tracked in AP and honors courses. Although Noemí did not participate in the YLC before the summer YPAR project, she attributes her critical consciousness to her collaboration, support, and patience of her peers at CM. She is the younger sister of Ricardo and was born and raised in the CM community.

Julian

Though quiet in social spaces, Julian's energy is vividly displayed on the soccer field. At CM, he is a soccer star—often too busy with his practice schedule to participate in any of the learning center programming. At school, Julian struggles to engage in the course material, but works hard to make sure his grades allow him to further develop his athletic passion. As the younger brother of Pedro, Julian was encouraged to participate in the summer YPAR project. Throughout the summer, he positioned himself as a learner and was eager to work alongside his peers to further connect with the content. Julian's family immigrated from Mexico City before he was born. Julian was born and raised at CM

Joaquín

Joaquín is kind-hearted, very thoughtful, and generous. He enjoys playing sports, video games and riding his bike around CM. Though too young to join the YLC before the summer YPAR project, Joaquín was and continues to be an active participant at the CM learning center. His participation in critical conversations during the summer project were often situated within his particular positions across race, gender, and citizenship status. Joaquín has lived at CM since he was four years old and he is the younger brother of Miguel. He and his family are from Guanajuato, Mexico.

Enrique

Every time Enrique walks into the CM learning center, his swagger captures the attention of everyone. On warm spring days, he can likely be found with his group of friends, Joaquín included, playing outside until dusk. Enrique is a critical thinker and voices his thoughts often. He began participating in the YLC through the summer YPAR project and was one of the

youngest participants in the group. At the time, Enrique was incoming 8th grader. His parents are from Sinaloa and Chihuahua, Mexico. He lives in a house nearby CM.

Data Collection as a Researcher-Educator

My work with youth at CM led me to develop an identity as a researcher-educator, specifically acknowledging how I navigated the space and my relationships as both a critical educator and someone who also wanted to collaborate with students, families, and staff to learn more about the literacies that emerge from spaces like CM. In year one, my goal was to gain an understanding of the learning center, develop relationships with students and families, and collaborate with directors and staff. I regularly met with students in the context of the Youth Leadership Collective, checked in with staff and directors regularly about programming, talked with parents in the community, and attended community gatherings (holiday parties, resident meetings, graduations, field trips). This first year provided context for the data collection that would take place in years two in three.

The second year of data collection I was regularly teaching ethnic studies courses, developing lesson plans, curriculum, and relationships with the CM youth. As I began to consider possible projects for dissertation research and potential research questions, I became strategic with how and what data I collected. For example, rather than recording every class session, I often alternated between audio recording and writing reflective memos. These audio recordings included small group work, *pláticas*, and youth's audio reflections at the end of class. Reflective memos, however, would capture my thoughts about whatever occurred at CM, within the ethnic studies courses and beyond (i.e. meetings with staff, conversations with parents, etc.). After each class, I would take pictures of any work produced by youth, gallery walk work,

drawings, and written work because I knew that these pieces of data would be important for theorizing literacies within CM.

In the summer of my third year at CM, I was able to purchase research equipment (video camera, additional audio recorders, and a microphone) which allowed me to expand my data sources. For the 7-week YPAR project I audio and video recorded all research team meetings, took pictures throughout the meetings and of any work produced by students. Throughout the summer, youth wrote in their field diaries, produced video and audio reflections, and created digital projects. For any digital work they produced I was either given access via google drive or sent login information. At the end of the summer, I interviewed six of the nine students who participated in the YPAR project (See appendix for interview protocol). In the fall of 2016, I conducted follow-up interviews with two youth had participated in the YLC long-term and the learning center director (director during the third year and currently still the director).

As previously mentioned, after the third year of working at CM, I moved back to my home state, Illinois. Despite moving and not being able to be physically present at CM regularly, my strong ties with the community created opportunities to continue our reciprocal relationships as I finished my doctoral work. I continue to check in with CM youth about their academic trajectories, jobs, families, and other evolving interests. I make myself available to write letters of recommendation, review scholarship and college application materials, and revise resumes. Sometimes youth and I casually text or engage via social media. Many of these interactions have served as in-the-moment member-checks, where as I am writing or analyzing data, I text a student to see what they think about how I am looking at and describing our collaborative work. Other times, our conversations are solely on the lived realities of the young people and broader CM community. For example, in the days after the election, I spoke with the director about the

fears of deportation that loomed over CM and the anti-immigrant rhetoric that followed many CM youth at school. When DACA was revoked, I made sure to check in with the undocumented youth to get a better understanding of what they were feeling and how I could support them. These moments are what guided me to thinking about my role as a researcher-educator and how my commitments and obligations to engaging in critical, decolonial educational research shaped how I understood my data.

Multimodal Analysis

In drawing from a variety of data sources such as memos, video recordings, photos, student produced artifacts, and audio recordings & transcripts, my analysis identifies the multiple ways in which young people perform, position, and produce literacies and knowledge's through a variety of modes and how they are situated within and attached to particular discourses (Dutro & Bien, 2013; E. Johnson & Vasudevan, 2012; Wohlwend, 2009; Wohlwend, 2012). I situate this approach within the theoretical and methodological ideas and strategies from Chicana feminisms, multiliteracies, and Youth Participatory Action Research. As Delgado Bernal (1998) states, "methodology provides both theory and analysis of the research process, how research questions are framed, and the criteria used to evaluate research findings" (p. 558). Thus, as I make a move here to discuss analytical affordances of a multimodal discourse analysis, I also explicitly make the choice to foreground how it is situated within the frameworks I have described and conceptualized within this methodology.

As a way to move away from traditional notions of literacy, particularly as they focus on written and verbal texts, multimodal perspectives in literacy emphasize the idea that meanings are constructed through multiple modes, including language (written & through speech), but also through sound, image, gesture, gaze, movement, etc. (Johnson & Vasudevan, 2012; Jewitt 2008;

Dalton & Smith, 2016). Vasudevan (2014), for example, suggests that a multimodal analysis attends to a variety of modalities in processes of meaning making and knowledge production that “may be otherwise over-looked or dismissed within frameworks that embrace a more verbocentric ontology,” (p. 51). Taking a broad view of “text” to include objects, artifacts, and bodies, a multimodal approach attends to how various modes surface across data sources.

Through my analysis I learned how the knowledge and literacies of youth at CM were produced, lived within particular spaces, created, embodied, and situated within discourses and, thus, a multimodal analysis provides tools to identify and expose how this takes place across modes. Further, I approached my data looking for the “the micro-moments of meaning making across differences,” (Vasudevan, 2014, p. 51; Wohlwend, 2009; 2012). In the table below, I illustrate the various data sources, modes, perspectives/theoretical tools, and multimodal methods for analysis that I utilize within this dissertation.

Table 1: Data Collection & Analysis

Data Source	Modes for collection	Theoretical Perspectives	Analytical Methods
Research Team Meetings	Audio and video recording; Photos; Fieldnotes	<i>Chicana Feminisms: Nepantla, Mujerista</i> politics,	Multimodal transcripts; Photo ethnography; Photo collaging; Critical Discourse Analysis;
Student produced artifacts	Reflections (written, audio, video); Images & drawings; collages, Journal reflections	<i>Testimonios</i> , pláticas, Pedagogies of the Home	Inductive/Deductive Coding
Student lead interviews & <i>Testimonios</i>	Audio and video recording; fieldnotes	<i>Critical literacies:</i> Producing, engaging, embodying narratives,	
<i>Pláticas</i> , Interviews and member checks	Audio and video recording; screen shots; fieldnotes	sociopolitical literacies, textual creations	

*YPAR: Young
people engaging in
inquiry, agents of
change, and
community
educators*

As each data source was documented through a variety of modes, my analysis involved inductive coding based on the research questions and frameworks guiding the study and deductive coding from themes emerging from the data. Here, I describe examples of some of the key tools that the members of YLC and I employed as we sought to learn from community members and each other (readers will see examples of these analytic tools in the three articles).

- In analyzing the research meetings, I created a multimodal transcript (Flewitt, Hampel, Hauck, & Lancaster, 2014; Phillips & Smith, 2012) that snapshots sections of the video and includes the conversations that are taking place.
- Using Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1995) alongside Chicana feminisms, I identified analytic questions to ask of those transcripts in order to identify the multiple discourses young people are straddling in *nepantla*.
- To analyze some of the student produced artifacts I photographed each piece and created a collage (Vasudevan, 2016) for each student to look at the various narratives and literacies surfacing or the ways in which young people are taking on identities as researchers or engaging in discussions about knowledge production and where those are situated within dominant and resistant discourses about teaching, learning, and research. I then used inductive and deductive coding to learn from the students' responses.

- In addition, the youth and I collaboratively coded some of the data from our sessions using both inductive and deductive codes in order to identify shared or disparate storylines in both the *testimonios* and the interactions in research meetings and locate interactions and narratives that stood out as important for our learning and ideas on which we wished to build. The ideas that arose as most resonant for them, became some of the key themes and interactions I took up in the focused analyses I engaged for each article included in the dissertation.

Although I was not geographically close to the young people in this study during much of my analysis, I was in touch with them and able to periodically connect to ensure that my interpretations still seemed resonate with their experiences.

Methodological *Nepantlas*

In a conversation where I was proposing this project to the YLC, two youth expressed hesitation. With a skeptical look in her eye, Noemí asked, “Sooo you want *us* to tell *you* our stories and you’re gonna write about them?” Caught off guard, but also intrigued by Noemí’s question, I responded, “Well, we’ll have to discuss that and decide together.” Moments later, another student, who did not end up participating in the summer project, added, “Yea, Mónica, I don’t think my mom is gonna wanna do that. She doesn’t like to talk about that stuff.” Other students nodded in agreement. After discussing other pieces of the project, making clear that any topics discussed and analyzed in *testimonios* would be decided on by youth, I asked the young people to sign up if they were still interested in participating in the project on their way out. Everyone who was in that room put their name down on the scratch piece of paper I had placed on the table. The following week, I felt as though I needed to check in with parents about the project I introduced to the students. In two separate conversations with mothers of some of the

students at the meeting, I was reassured that this project was a good idea, but moreover, that they would participate in whatever capacity they were needed. Nilda, for example, smiled and said, “¡Si Mónica, lo que necesites! [Of course, Mónica, whatever you need!]”

One way to interpret these responses to the project is that students were not entirely sure what parents would think about sharing their narratives. While this may be true, I am more concerned and refreshed with students questioning the project, de-stabilizing, and de-normalizing the way I think about equitable research. With that, I am grateful that my relationship with the community comes with a great deal of support from parents in assisting me with my dissertation study. While I am still not entirely sure what to make of the scenes above, it prompted critical methodological questions that benefited and enriched my approaches to the study, including analysis. How do I invite and engage youth in a study that emphasizes home and community knowledges and literacies, when there is apprehension from the young people involved? How could the study of our YLC inquiries place both students and parents in vulnerable positions within *Comunidad Miravalle*? How do I let go of pieces of the project that are important to me, but less so to the young people involved? How do I continue to be trustworthy to the young people, families, and community in the data collection, writing, and dissemination of this dissertation? As Vasudevan asks, “Whose story is whose to tell?” (2016).

It is important to note here that despite efforts to engage in transformative and more equitable methodologies, there is always a risk and potential to reproduce the very approaches to research we aim to resist. Saavedra & Pérez (2014) argue that the purpose and goals for decolonizing and reimagining methodologies is “to see research approaches and methods with new eyes and become more cautious about the ways qualitative research can re-inscribe Western imperialistic ventures,” (p. 78). The goal, in other words, of decolonizing methodologies, is

always in practice—en route (Calderon, et. al., 2012). While on this journey, however, we hold the potential to highlight possibilities within research and continue to push on the academic standards for ‘valid and rigorous’ research by interrogating dominant notions of knowledge production, the invisibilities and silences of injustice, and to use new approaches for thinking about ethics and implications for marginalized communities (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). In many ways, I argue, those of us who aim to challenge colonial reproductions within educational research and engage in decolonial praxis often find ourselves within *nepantla*—the crossroads of competing, challenging, and conflicting discourses, theories, positions, and world views.

The methodology, methodological design, and tools I employed are intended to build upon each other as a methodological framework to study the narratives, knowledges, and literacies of *Comunidad Miravalle*, specifically through the youth’s questions, inquiries, and interactions. While I believe my findings contribute to expanding the field’s understanding of knowledge, knowledge production, and literacy, the issues I discuss above show how the research process raised productive methodological tensions, *nepantlas*. Anzaldúa (2015) states that, “*Nepantlas* are constant places of tension, where the missing or absent pieces can be summoned back,” (p. 2). *Nepantla* is, thus, a powerful methodological framework for recognizing how tensions within our empirical work can be fruitful and help us piece together the puzzles of our inquiry. *Nepantla* is where we can sit within the tensions, think of alternative meanings, and challenge ourselves to new, different ways to carry out empirical work in literacy educational research. In the articles that follow, I hope that those tensions are present, alongside the results and implications that, I argue, contribute to scholarship on seeking and valuing youth perspectives and to supporting youth in sharing their knowledges and literacies within and beyond their communities.

Article 1:

“Since When Have People Been Illegal?”: Mixed-Status Youth Reflections in Nepantla

Reaching over the table to grab another slice of pizza, Ricardo asked, “Since when have people been illegal?” This question sparked a variety of student responses. One student answered “a long time ago...,” while another began, “since before the slaves...” As the facilitator of this *plática*, I contemplated Ricardo’s question. One response could have been framed around the history of immigration and the increasing numbers of undocumented (im)migrants from Asia and Latin America, but, Ricardo’s question interrogated something else. At its core, Ricardo’s question disrupts the normalized idea that people, human beings, can be illegal. The question itself requires that we truly consider the discourses of immigration, the material realities of undocumented and mixed-status communities, and “since when” the simple act of *being* became a criminal act.

(Research memo, April 2015)

The research memo above reflects the kind of meaning-making that takes place in a *plática*, a semi-structured conversation where knowledge is shared and produced through dialogue (Gonzalez, 2001; Preuss & Saavedra, 2013). This *plática* occurred amongst six mixed-status, Latinx² youth who live[d]³ at *Comunidad Miravalle* (CM), a migrant housing community located in the western rocky mountain region. Over pizza, Ricardo and his peers shared their thoughts and experiences of (im)migration with me—some as undocumented youth, others as children of undocumented parents, and all as members and residents of a migrant housing community. In this *plática*, these young people questioned, critiqued, and reflected on the institution of citizenship, constructions of illegality, and migrant labor, specifically in relation to their lives. The *plática* also revealed the tensions and contradictions that undocumented youth

² While the students all use varying terms to identify ethnically and racially, largely dependent on context, I use the term Latinx when referring to the entire group. The term Latinx is an intentional way of discursively disrupting gendered binaries, specifically in the Spanish language (i.e. Latino/a).

³ During the time of data collection for the study, many families in the CM housing community were leaving because of strict policy enforcement.

and youth of mixed-status families navigate. Perhaps most striking, the *plática*—as a practice and theory for teaching and learning—exposed the rich knowledge young people possess and use to make sense of their lives, as well as the nuanced positions from which they speak to deconstruct dominant narratives surrounding (im)migrants and (im)migration. In many ways, these young people find themselves in *nepantla*—a site of conflict and tension, yet at the same time, a space of reflection, knowledge production, and transformation (Anzaldúa 2002, 2015).

Nepantla is a useful theoretical tool to see and call attention to the voices of young people and the various ways they might enter conversations around immigration, citizenship, and migrant labor. In many ways, *nepantla* is similar to Menjivar's (2006) concept of liminality. Rather than emphasizing the material ways in which citizenship positions (im)migrants in limbo status though, *nepantla* situates the in-between as a source of knowledge and a space to question, critique, and reckon with our most painful realities. I explore the sociopolitical sense-making processes of (im)migrant youth through this theoretical lens and connect them to discussions of liminality (Menjívar, 2006), deservingness (Cacho 2011; Patel 2015; Pérez Huber 2015; Menjívar and Lakhani 2016), and the contradictory relationship between (im)migrant labor and immigration law (Ngai 2004; Glenn 2002; Lowe 1996). I situate the reflections of the young people at CM within *nepantla*, particularly emphasizing its potential for examining how young people navigate and exist between discourses, cultures, and worlds.

The research questions guiding this study are (1) How does the knowledge and experiences of mixed-status youth shape their understanding and critique of immigration and citizenship? And (2) How do *pláticas* serve as a pedagogical tool to support young people in co-creating knowledge from their lived realities? I make the argument that there is a continued need to create spaces for and center the voices of young people to discuss (im)migration and

citizenship, as complicated and tension rich as it might be, to destabilize harmful binaries within these institutions. In practice, creating new spaces and possibilities has the potential to collaboratively engage with young people to seek out alternative modes for thinking about and demanding human rights and justice for (im)migrants⁴, outside of dehumanizing and meritocratic paradigms.

In what follows, I review the idea of deservingness and constructions of illegality, particularly as they relate to undocumented youth and young people from mixed-status families. In doing so, I highlight the tensions that emerge within the narratives and discourses produced about and by those within these communities—those of which are deeply connected to inequitable distribution of rights and resources in the United States. This literature takes a look at the complex, nuanced, and often problematic web around citizenship, immigration discourses, and immigrant and migrant labor. This sets the stage for how we might look at youth’s reflections within these discourses. Next, I review how *nepantla*, as a theoretical tool, allows us to see the powerful processes young people engage in to make sense of these narratives, discourses, and realities. To provide context around the lives of the youth and, thus, their reflections, I further describe the CM housing community and those who participated in the *plática*. Next, I briefly review *pláticas* as both a methodology and pedagogy, and discuss the findings of this study, weaving theory and empirical data throughout. Finally, I conclude with implications of this study considering the current sociopolitical realities during a Trump presidency.

⁴ While ‘immigrant’ and ‘migrant’ are not interchangeable terms, the students I work with come from families who can be considered through both terms.

Deservingness, Constructions of illegality, and Latinx Youth

Dominant discourses around immigration and immigrants often describe youth through a racist-nativist dichotomy; young people are either deemed unwanted and disposable or praised for being productive, hard-working, contributors to U.S. society (Pérez Huber, 2015). For example, in the summer of 2014, when mainstream media covered the increase of unaccompanied children and youth from Central America crossing the U.S.-Mexico border, (im)migrant young people were largely described as economic burdens and threats to U.S. society (Pérez Huber, 2015). At the same time, discourses around high-achieving and activist youth, like dreamers, maintained an emphasis and focus on meritocratic narratives of success and the American dream (Unzueta Carrasco & Seif, 2014). This binary reflects the dichotomous rhetoric of deservingness within neoliberal immigration policy which stresses individual accountability and privileges those presumed to be law abiding, responsible citizens, while criminalizing and dehumanizing the alleged deviant non-citizen (Inda, 2013). Historically, these discourses have been used to deny, regulate, and distribute rights and resources. *Who* deserves these rights and resources continues to be called into question, particularly for (im)migrant youth (Patel, 2015).

The stakes are high when discussing (im)migrant young people. As such, a large body of scholarship continues to emphasize and focus on law-abiding, high achieving, and activist youth without complicating or dismantling the binary of deservingness or narratives of Latinx (im)migrant youth in general, for that matter (Patel, 2015). While critical and necessary, this literature often highlights a particular construction of (im)migrant young people at the expense of silencing and/or dismissing the voices and narratives of students who have been pushed out of schools or those who do not identify as activists (Patel 2013). Consequently, deservingness

continues to be discussed within a binary that upholds a particular way of being that justifies access to rights and criminalizes others who are ‘undeserving.’ In practice, as Unzueta Carrasco (2014) highlights, this binary is used to regulate access to citizenship by the state and is often produced, endorsed, and critiqued by undocumented youth activists themselves when strategically navigating deportation cases. Unzueta Carrasco’s work, thus, urges scholars and activists to reject this binary by centralizing the voices of young people to, “disrupt citizenship paradigms by calling into question citizenship, as recognized by the state, as the determining factor for whether a person has a right to live, work and participate in the nation-state” (p. 297).

Deservingness and illegality, though different, do not function as mutually exclusive within the institution of citizenship. Through the neoliberal discourses described above, undocumented (im)migrants and their children are often depicted as criminals, regardless of citizenship status. Racist discourses surrounding immigration and immigration law have created the very *being* of these communities as unlawful and unfit for formal and social citizenship. While Ngai (2004) suggests that the status of “illegal alienage” is unnatural and fluid, it is deeply connected to immigration law. In other words, although ‘illegal’ status is produced and contingent upon immigration law, it is also constructed socially through racist nativist discourses that strategically frame (im)migrants as criminal and thus justify their exclusion in the U.S. (Pérez Huber, 2009). In other words, the construction of illegality is both practical and theoretical, and inseparable from the institution of citizenship (De Genova, 2002). We witnessed this through the racist-nativist rhetoric employed throughout Donald Trump’s presidential campaign and the strategic executive actions enacted to keep (im)migrants of color out of the U.S. (i.e. travel ban on countries that are predominately Muslim and the proposed construction of a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border). As de la Torre and Germano (2014) describe, “illegality,

as a kind of exclusion from full civic, social and political citizenship, can be both created and enforced by state and non-state actors, and can be either official or informal” (p. 452).

Regardless of the fact that immigration law produces the possibility unlawful presence, racist-nativist discourses force the embodiment of illegality on to undocumented (im)migrants, mixed-status families, and (im)migrant Latinx young people. Illegality, thus, shapes day-to-day practices of survival and the strategies these families engage in socio-political action to address injustices facing (im)migrant communities (Gonzalez & Chavez 2012).

Undocumented youth are, without a doubt, central to urgent conversations around immigration and citizenship. Immigration policy and racist-nativism, however, construct (im)migrant youth and their families as illegal subjects, often times regardless of legal status (Abrego 2016; Ngai 2004). The close relationship between immigrant law and anti-immigrant discourses, thus, create a sense of forbiddenness within the context of the U.S. nation-state. This construction creates the very affective relationship (im)migrant communities and mixed-status families have with immigration law, citizenship politics, and the performance of citizenship (Cisneros 2012). For example, in an analysis of in-depth interviews of both documented and undocumented Latinx (im)migrants over the course of 10 years, Abrego (2016) examined how illegality and the criminalization of undocumented Latinxs deeply impacted mixed-status families regardless of how many people were documented or were granted temporary protection from deportation within a single household (i.e. through DACA: Differed Action for Childhood Arrivals). Young people from these families, both documented and undocumented, thus, find themselves at the intersection of multiple discourses that mark their bodies, families, and lives as criminal and illegal. Centralizing the voices of young people within conversations of illegality, its instability and contractions, is critical and absolutely necessary to further expand how we

theorize, write, and engage in scholarship about immigration within Latino/a/x studies. In doing so, we move towards disrupting those binaries that silence and ignore young people who are situated at the margins.

Across the literature about (im)migrant young people, many scholars have employed Menjivar's (2006) concept of liminal legality as a theoretical tool to describe the often uncertain, unstable immigration status of many young people (de la Torre & Germano, 2014; Gonzales, 2011; L. M. Martinez, 2014). Liminal legality refers to the ways in which the state both grants and withholds protections, resources, and opportunities for (im)migrants and how these are determined by immigration law, and thus, fluctuate over time. Liminal legality, thus, "highlights the enduring power of the nation-state in creating immigration laws that shape immigrant integration, playing a significant role in opportunities for work, rights, and social benefits." (1003). As such, this liminal status not only shifts over time, but also varies across communities and within mixed-status households. Menjivar's idea of liminal legality moves us to theorize within a space of ambiguity in attempts to destabilize the false dichotomy of undocumented vs. documented, providing an opportunity to further interrogate dominant notions of citizenship. Further expanding on the idea of liminality, I draw specifically on Anzaldúa's (1998, 2002, 2015) notion of *nepantla* to examine how (im)migrant youth and those of mixed-status families are not only situated in-between spaces of legal status, but also at the margins of competing discourses, conflicting cultures, and colonial geopolitical borders. Furthermore, employing *nepantla* as a theoretical tool allows for an analysis that examines particular ways of knowing from living within and navigating this liminal space.

A Tension-Rich Space: *Nepantla* as a Theoretical Tool

Nepantla is a Nahuatl word that means “in-between space” (Keating, 2006) or “*tierra entre medio*” (Anzaldúa, 2002). As Gloria Anzaldúa (2015) describes, *nepantla* refers to the spaces “between imagination and physical existence, between ordinary and non-ordinary” (p. 2). An Anzaldúan understanding of the word, thus, recognizes *nepantla* as a liminal space of reflection, knowledge production, and transformation—the margin of various intersections and multiple realities. In *nepantla*, we can question normative, colonial structures that aim to police who we are, how we come to know ourselves, and the world as we exist within it—our identities and ways of being always in process. *Nepantla* is multidimensional, complex, and continues to be theorized in ways that push our thinking about borderlands, living on the margins, and navigating the intersections of multiple sociopolitical realities (Elenes 2011).

To examine the ways that the young people in this study exist within and em[body] specific knowledges, identities, and world views, I use Anzaldúa’s notion of *nepantla*—a marginal space of tensions, cultural clashes, and creative acts, and (re)visions. As Gutierrez (2012) explains,

[*Nepantla* is where] we birth new perspectives on reality, new knowledges. It is this ability to exist in *Nepantla* (the uncomfortable space where there is no solid ground, that has no official recognition) that has contributed to the expansion of new ways of asking questions, new theories, and more interdisciplinary approaches to understanding the world around us. (p. 35).

Nepantla is, thus, a space where we can begin to think about the various ways youth live “in between” worlds, discourses, borders, relationships, languages, and histories and through these

experiences have the potential to engage in critical discussions and action for social transformation.

I bring *nepantla* to my analysis of the knowledge and voices of (im)migrant youth at CM while also acknowledging the ongoing conversations and legitimate critiques around the (mis)use, incorporation, and at times, appropriation of indigenous knowledge in Chicana feminist work (see Alberto, 2012; Saldana-Portillo 2001; Contreras 2014). Working within this tension-rich space is messy and contradictory, but necessary for interrogating colonial and imperialist projects, specifically as they relate to borders and nation-states. Grappling with these tensions, scholars have looked towards Anzaldúa's (2002, 2015) expansive theories and later workings on *nepantla* (Prieto & Villenas 2012; Calderón et al. 2012; Guishard 2015; Keating 2015, 2006; Elenes 2010; Mendoza Avina 2016), exposing how it remains an important and significant theoretical tool. Anzaldúa's expansion of *nepantla*, in many ways, can be understood as an entry point to thinking beyond social constructions, colonial logics of identity, and western ways of knowing (i.e. western science, privileging of the mind as a producer of knowledge, etc.). Further, *nepantla* offers the idea that acquiring new knowledge comes with and through deep reflection. These are all useful ideas for considering the ways in which young people from (im)migrant communities exist and produce knowledge outside normative, colonial constructions of citizenship, nation, and borders.

Research Context and Participants

The youth, with whom I worked with, speak from their individual knowledges and histories. At the same time, their individual experiences are also situated within their collective reality of being children of migrant workers and growing up together in *Comunidad Miravalle* (CM). *Comunidad Miravalle* is a housing community for migrant families where the head of

each household is required to work in either agriculture or landscape. While strict regulations governing CM do not permit more than one working adult per household, many of the adults and some young people work multiple jobs as cooks or waiters at local restaurants, or in industries like retail and house cleaning services. Based on the community's self-reported demographic data, the average income for the 32 families is \$38,657, and most households consist of at least 4 members. Furthermore, most residents identify as being of Mexican descent and come from (im)migrant or mixed-status families. The demographics also reveal that while many of the adults in the community were undocumented at the time data was collected, citizenship status amongst children and youth varied, with the largest population of undocumented residents being high school aged youth (18 and under). All of these children attend local, predominately White suburban schools, and all consider themselves bilingual, with Spanish being the first language for many of them.

In the middle of the housing complex is the CM learning center, where children and youth, ages 4-17, gather, study, and participate in various programs offered by staff and volunteers. In the three years I volunteered at the CM learning center, I lead the youth leadership programming. Working alongside the program directors this program evolved into a series of Ethnic Studies courses which were offered to all high school and middle school youth. During the academic year, the topics for these courses explored the various intersections of education, race, class, gender, sexuality, and citizenship. The classes were designed as college seminars. Students read college-level material, critical pieces on current events, and engaged in *pláticas* around sociopolitical issues. Through these courses, students were able to embark on a journey of critical consciousness and explore content that would otherwise be silenced or erased in their mainstream U.S. classrooms (Gaxiola, Gonzalez Ybarra, & Delgado Bernal, 2017). This

manuscript, thus, focuses on themes that emerged in a *plática* around citizenship, immigration, and migrant labor and is part of a larger project that broadly examines youth literacies and knowledge construction within this community.

In the findings section, I draw on a *plática* between myself and six high school youth—Karina, Juana, Aurelio, Pedro, Miguel and Ricardo—and another volunteer/community member I call Félix. At the time the data was collected, all the students were in their junior year of high school except Karina, who was a sophomore. Below, I describe a bit more about each young person to shed light on how their experiences, lived realities, and knowledge often served as their points of reference for engaging in socio-political discussions. All of the young people in this study have a deep understanding of the risks of undocumented communities, but living in an (im)migrant housing community, where being undocumented and being part of a mixed-status family is a lived reality of many, has provided support and strength in navigating and surviving outside of CM. The directors of CM often host legal clinics and bring community advocates for undocumented and mixed-status families. Many of the youth in this study accompany their parents to these clinics, help them apply for resources, and stay alert and informed about immigration policy at the state and national level. While all the youth in this study occupy varying positions of citizenship privilege, they all have participated in using humor as a strategy for survival and finding moments of joy in a world that often deems them and their community criminal and un human (Reyes 2017). This includes joking about documentation, poverty, and the many restrictions the state places on their lives. Throughout our time together, I engaged with openness and was transparent of my own privileges as a fair-skinned, third/fifth generation, bilingual Chicana. Although each of us are situated at different intersections of oppression, we

were able to critically discuss how we, alongside the larger community, navigate, survive, and thrive across various institutions.

Pláticas as Methodology and Pedagogy

Pláticas are conversations embedded within the cultural practices of Chicana/Latina communities (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016; Preuss & Saavedra, 2013). *Pláticas* are dialogic opportunities to teach, learn, and understand who we are in relation to others and how our experiences are situated within the sociopolitical histories of our ancestors, elders, and peers (Chabram-Dernerseian & de la Torre, 2008). They are filled with *chismes*, *cuentos*, *consejos*, and reflective of the pedagogical practices shared among Chicana/Latina women that exist in non-traditional educational spaces (Delgado Bernal, 2006; Trinidad Galvan, 2006; Elenes, 2011). *Pláticas* are, thus, reciprocal exchanges through dialogue, grounded in trust, and emerge from strong relationships.

Pláticas have been taken up in research as methodological approaches that reflect these traditions, particularly in Chicana/Latina scholarship and largely within Chicana/Latina feminist frameworks (Mendoza, 2016; Flores Carmona & Garcia, 2009; Ruiz & Cantú, 2013). This work not only resists and re-frames dominant notions of method and methodology but is also recognized as a way to re-position participants as collaborators in knowledge production and research. *Pláticas*, which are different from interviews or facilitated large group discussions, have the possibility to engage the researcher and participants in a reciprocal exchange. In her work with Mexicana youth, Gonzalez (2008) argues that *pláticas* served as a method for gathering “family and cultural knowledge through communication of thoughts, memories, ambiguities, and new interpretations” (p. 647). *Pláticas*, in other words, are a method that

recognize and value familial and cultural knowledge and *platicando* becomes the process of drawing upon that knowledge and making meaning across experiences.

In the ethnic studies courses at CM, many of the rich conversations took the form of *pláticas*. It was through these dialogues that I began to see the pedagogical implications of this method. *Pláticas* are, thus, more than a strategy for qualitative data collection, and additionally serve as a pedagogical practice that elicits Chicana/Latina ways of knowing, teaching, and learning (Mendoza Aviña 2016). Furthermore, I witnessed how the youth engaged in critical conversations as they specifically drew upon their past experiences and community knowledge. As a facilitator, educator, and researcher at CM, I also shared with the youth my own knowledge, family history, and personal experiences. Through our *pláticas*, we co-constructed new knowledge and contributed to each other's processes of sense-making (Flores & Garcia, 2009), particularly making meaning of our lived realities in relation to larger socio-political contexts.

While some *pláticas* were spontaneous, many were planned and in the context of the topics we were discussing in our ethnic studies courses. The data excerpts featured in the findings section are from a *plática* around the topic of citizenship, criminalization of immigrants, and migrant labor. We met at our designated class time but had no set agenda to guide or inform it. Next, to both draw & engage the youth into the *plática*, I asked if anyone felt comfortable to share their immigration story. Each student participated & shared their experiences with the group, helping us learn things about each other and our families that we had not known before. This process served as a catalyst for discussion and many students asked questions and critically responded to pieces of each other's narratives. Throughout the *plática*, I continued to pose questions around citizenship, illegality, and criminality, particularly as they related to students' lives. In doing so, I recognized how young people can complicate each other's, and their own,

understanding of citizenship, illegality, and criminality, and how their reflections can lead to theoretical and methodological interrogations of binaries to unsettle normative immigration policy and discourse.

As the *plática* unfolded, I also engaged in in-the-moment data analysis where themes such as in-betweenness, contradictions, sociopolitical critique, and identity emerged. After transcribing the *plática* I began to consider different Chicana feminist theoretical tools that might help me further describe what I was seeing in the young people's reflections. Recognizing the ways in which *nepantla* is a theoretical space that highlights messiness, contradictions, and powerful ways of meaning making, I was able to code the transcript with aspects of *nepantla* that were most apparent. The most prominent themes were the ways in which young people described living in an in-between state, being able to see and discuss immigration and migrant labor through multiple lenses and navigating ambiguous realities of immigration policy. As Anzaldúa (2002) describes, however, *nepantla* is a fluid, shifting space and everyone's experience in *nepantla* is different. This lens, while helpful to understand youth's reflections, can be useful for considering the various and other[ed] ways those living at margins make sense of their lived realities.

This single *plática* is an example of the findings from my larger study which examined the language and literacies of youth at CM. Specifically, this *plática* highlights the sociopolitical contexts and nuanced identities central to thinking about knowledge production for youth from an (im)migrant community. Even though many *pláticas* took place over the three years I was at CM—covering a multitude of topics such as racism in schools, gendered roles at CM, and intersectional activism—they were not always specifically connected to citizenship, immigration, and (im)migrant labor. I argue that because of this, focusing on the aforementioned single

plática is of great significance. Furthermore, much like the ways in which literacy and language scholars in education have identified the richness in interactions and micro-moments in data analysis (Ball 2000; Dyson 1987; Leander and Boldt 2013; Vasudevan 2014), I argue that a deep dive into a single instance, or in this case, *plática*, provides a wealth of evidence for thinking about the ways in which young people co-create knowledge and make meaning of their lived realities. In other words, the emphasis and analysis of this single *plática* serves as a moment—a specific instance that connects to larger sociopolitical issues of concern (Lenters, 2016). Thus, the emphasis on this *plática* reveals how researchers can engage with young people on specific topics where youth can have the opportunity to focus on issues that are not sanctioned, encouraged, or invited within traditional schooling spaces.

Findings

Providing excerpts from the *plática*, I examine how three aspects of *nepantla* surface to highlight the messy, contradictory, yet powerful ways young people make meaning and discuss illegality, citizenship, and labor, specifically as it relates to their lives. I organize these findings into three themes that point to the ways in which young people are situated in *nepantla*—an in-between space that has potential to be a site for critical reflection, sorting through tensions, and the production of new knowledge. These three themes are (1) living in-between, (2) seeing double, and (3) developing a tolerance for ambiguity. First, I examine living in-between because it highlights how the young people in this study are oftentimes, regardless of documentation, situated at the margins of illegality, geopolitical borders, and dominant discourses about immigration. Next, I discuss the theme of seeing double which highlights how young people, as children of migrant workers, have a heightened sense of awareness and understanding of migrant labor, (im)migrant exploitation, and the value of (im)migrant lives. Lastly, I share data excerpts

that highlight Anzaldúa's ideas around developing a tolerance for ambiguity which point to the tensions of citizenship and the materiality of rights.

Being "Illegal" and Living In-Between

Within this finding, I draw on the specific aspect of *nepantla* as an in-between space and as home to those who are situated at the margins of multiple worlds (Anzaldúa 1998, 2002).

Latinx young people, especially those who are undocumented or of mixed-status families, find themselves living between geo-political borders, legal status, cultures, and discourses. Living along the margins often leads to critical reflection of the world and an opportunity to produce knowledge or new ways of thinking. *Nepantla* is a space where, "different perspectives come into conflict and where you question the basic ideas, tenets, and ideas inherited from your family, your education, and your different cultures..." (Anzaldúa 2002, p. 548). In other words, normalized ways of knowing, cultures, histories, and discourses are problematized, creating a space for other[ed] knowledge. *Nepantla* is a site where young people can question, critique, and come to new understandings of their lived realities. For undocumented youth and youth of mixed-status families, in particular, it has the potential to be a space to interrogate colonial borders and neoliberal rhetoric that deems their bodies, existence, and presence illegal.

The excerpt that follows is an example of how some of the young people made sense of the definition of "illegal." This process of theorizing reflects nuanced and complicated ways in which young people make sense of social constructs that often shape their lives. As we sat around the table I sensed the students' frustration and exhaustion, I asked, "are you all tired of this conversation?"

Juana: No...but...

Ricardo: ...Of being illegal? I'm tired of being illegal.

Felix: [CM Volunteer]: (Reading on his phone) The definition of illegal is, 'contrary to or forbidden by law. Especially criminal law.'

Karina: So...we're...forbidden from being here

Ricardo: Wait--what?

Felix: Contrary to or forbidden by law. Especially criminal law

Juana: So, *no nos quieren aquí* [they don't want us here]

Ricardo: That's not at all what it said.

Karina: (rolls her eyes) It's just that we're forbidden. They probably do want us here but we're not allowed to be here. (laughs sarcastically)

In discussing the definition of 'illegal' and how they each understand it, the youth from this excerpt point to how illegality is constructed around and upon bodies, particularly their own, and how "nations etch and scratch their borders onto human flesh" (Patel, 2017, p. 62). While the definition of illegal exists without the attachment to individuals, the youth here exemplify the ways in which communities are forced to embody criminal status, taking on and identifying as 'illegal, as Ricardo does. In this excerpt, Karina and Juana's analysis also exposes how the construction of illegality serves to displace and criminalize those whom are marked as such. Even in the conflicted process of sense-making, as Ricardo contests the connection, Juana and Karina grapple with the thought of people being criminalized and positioned as unlawful, and consequently consider what "forbidden" means in the context of their own lives and bodies.

In using *nepantla* as a theoretical tool, we can see the tensions and contradictions youth work through, such as belonging or not belonging to particular nation-states, cultures, and spaces. This excerpt of the *plática*, thus, illustrates that young people push on each other's understanding around illegality and their own ideas about belonging. As Keating (2006) describes, while *nepantla* is "painful, messy, confusing, and chaotic" (p. 9), it is also a site for personal and political shifts and transformation. Even while Ricardo has identified himself through his [non]citizenship status, he resists the notion that the construction of illegality in the U.S. forbids his presence. It is also important to note here that while both Karina and Ricardo are undocumented, Juana is a U.S.-born Chicana and the only documented member of her

household. However, Juana's response to the definition, despite being a U.S. citizen, reveals the kind of othering that takes place in the construction of illegality, and how she, regardless of documentation, does not identify as someone who is made to feel as if they belong within the nation-state.

Seeing Double: Recognizing the Relationship Between Labor and Citizenship

Anzaldúa (2002) suggests that the deep reflection and questioning that happens in *nepantla* moves us to see double. In other words, we develop an ability to “[perceive] something from two different angles,”—a sort of split awareness. Much like W.E.B DuBois' (1965) notion of double consciousness, Anzaldúa argues that the capability of seeing double is a way for those living on the margins to survive. She states,

Living between cultures results in ‘seeing double,’ first from the perspective of one culture, then from the perspective of another. Seeing from two or more perspectives simultaneously renders those cultures transparent. Removed from that culture's center, you glimpse the sea in which you've been immersed but to which you were oblivious, no longer seeing the world the way you were enculturated to see it (p. 548).

Seeing double creates an opportunity to see the endless contradictions and tensions within institutions and systems of oppression. For the youth in this study, *nepantla* is where all of these complexities come to bear as they begin to critically examine the experiences of their families as migrant workers and the exploitation of undocumented (im)migrants. Seeing double, thus, renders their ability to see the relationship between citizenship and migrant and undocumented labor, particularly as it relates to their lived realities. At the same time, seeing double does not mean that these contradictions and tensions are mediated. Instead, the young people's reflections of migrant and undocumented labor reveal the messiness of meaning-making within *nepantla* as well as the paradox that exists when discussing the matter.

After sharing our immigration histories and narratives, I asked students to describe some of the stereotypes that exist about Mexicans and (im)migrants. “That they’re lazy,” said one of the young people. Aurelio contested,

Aurelio: They can’t say that. Mexicans aren’t lazy.

Karina: True.

Juana: They’re actually hard workers.

Karina: They’re actually doing the jobs that [White Americans] don’t want.

Aurelio: America’s at its place because of us!

Juana: *Como dijo Karina, estan haciendo los trabajos que no les gusta hacer* [Like Karina said, they’re doing the work that they do like to do] they’re doing the hard work instead... there’s some people that don’t like doing agriculture things, *pero somos los que hacemos mas ese trabajo* [but we’re the ones who do most of that work], like us Mexicans.

Aurelio: I can’t imagine seeing a White guy like in the fields just picking up things.

Monica: You can’t imagine that?

Aurelio: I can’t, no.

Karina: They complain about people coming and stealing their jobs, but at the same time, people who come here to work take up the jobs they don’t want to take.

Citizenship and labor are deeply connected within the context of the U.S. The relationship between undocumented immigration and labor, in particular, has produced the idea of American “exceptionalism” and economic development (Ngai 2004; Glenn 2002; Martinez 2014). Undocumented (im)migrants of color, thus, are wanted and unwanted at the same time. Although their bodies are criminalized and understood as “illegal,” undocumented workers make up a large sector of cheap, exploitable labor in factories, farms, kitchens, and homes of the middle class (Lowe 1996). Recognizing the ways in which is labor racialized, particularly agriculture, the youth aim to ascribe value to the jobs they understand specifically taken by undocumented Mexicans. In this way, they attempt to decriminalize undocumented (im)migrants, by describing them and their work as valuable rather than a burden or danger to the nation—a discursive strategy to resist discourses of illegality (Cacho 2012). As Cacho

(2012) explains, however, describing (im)migrant labor as the jobs “no one wants,” suggests that exploitive labor is a privilege and those who work those jobs should feel lucky to have them. As such, dominant discourses around migrant labor leave these young people navigating contradictions and tensions as they discuss how their families and communities are hard workers.

Even after describing their parent’s work as valuable, the students admit to these jobs as being undesirable, even to them. Karina begins,

Karina: It’s also hard seeing them work in a job that you know they could have done better, because my parents— I know that they could work in *way* different jobs but they’re kinda stuck working outside. My dad works in a ranch and my mom cleans a house.

Aurelio: My dad has papers but he likes working where he works.

Ricardo: If I had papers I wouldn’t work there.

Aurelio: you wouldn’t?

Ricardo: there’s no way...If they paid me 50 bucks an hour, I still wouldn’t work there.

Miguel: Work where?

Ricardo: *En* like...

Pedro: The fields...

Ricardo: Yeah, the fields

In the excerpt above, both Karina and Ricardo recognized the work of their parents as devalued, exploitable labor. For example, Karina suggests that her parents could have had “better jobs” if they had citizenship. Unintentionally pointing out the contradictions of labor and citizenship while, again, trying to ascribe value to the labor of (im)migrants, Aurelio mentions that even as a legal resident, his father is limited to work “in the fields.” While the first excerpt illustrates how young people reinforce narratives of hard-working (im)migrants, the excerpt above reveals how they recognize the exploitation of the labor their parents are forced to take as migrant workers. In this way, the young people see double and make visible tensions that exist in the relationship between labor and citizenship. *Nepanlta*, thus, brings about this sensibility to see the paradox of hard work and exploited labor that migrant and undocumented workers are

subjected to. Within these examples, the ability to see double provides a lens to be critical of migrant and undocumented labor, while also recognizing the worth, lives, and realities of migrant and undocumented (im)migrants as human. This particular way of seeing the world allows these young people to move back and forth from dominant discourses, discourses of resistance, and the realities of their families working low-paying, exploitative jobs.

Developing a Tolerance for Ambiguity: Tensions of Citizenship and The Materiality of Rights

As described throughout this chapter, *nepantla* is a site where competing and conflicting discourses, ideologies, and world views come to a clash (Anzaldúa 2002, 2016). It is a tension rich space, that requires a tolerance for ambiguity—an ongoing process of questioning, navigating, and grappling at the various intersections of our identities, cultures, experiences, and material realities. Youth, queer youth, youth of color and (im)migrant youth reflect the knowledge and subjectivities of *nepantla*, including this ability to reflect in ambiguity (Mendoza 2016; Anzaldúa 2016). For undocumented youth and young people of mixed-status families, the rights, privileges, and resources administered by the state are often through arbitrary constructions of deservingness (Inda, 2013; Menjivar, 2006; Pérez Huber, 2015). In this finding, I highlight how the youth at CM negotiate their varying, often ambiguous status and the very material rights that are necessary for their survival.

When I asked the students how they felt about their respective citizenship status, Miguel responded, “I feel like I don’t have rights.” Miguel’s response reflects the ways in which the state denies legal and human rights to those who are undocumented. As we discussed citizenship, the students pointed out the unequal distribution of rights, particularly for those whose presence is deemed “illegal.” I asked the students, “what does citizenship mean?”

Ricardo: That you're legal to be here. Right?
Monica: What does citizenship mean to you in your life?
Ricardo: Nothing, cuz I'm not a citizen.
Karina: A job.
Pedro: A house, a license.
Juana: An education

Here, students point to the material implications and privileges associated with citizenship, particularly for their lives as young people, undocumented, or children of undocumented (im)migrants. Glenn (2002) states, "Citizenship has been used to draw boundaries between those who are included as members of the community and entitled to respect, protection, and rights and those who are excluded and thus not entitled to recognition and rights" (p. 1). In other words, the institution of citizenship has produced a status of "rightlessness" for marginalized people who are positioned as foreign and criminal in relation to the state (Cacho 2011). As listed by the youth, the right to a just and humane livelihood—work, shelter, transportation, and education—is withheld by the state for undocumented (im)migrants.

Skeptical of the idea that citizenship is synonymous with acquisition of rights, the youth began to discuss the ways in which communities of color are denied rights, regardless of citizenship. Pushing the conversation towards a discussion of second-class citizenship, I asked, "Those of you who do have papers, do you feel like an American? Do you feel like you have rights?"

Aurelio: I don't feel like an American, I just feel like more free.
Ricardo: Black people have papers and they still get discriminated.
Monica: That's second-class citizenship, that's a perfect example. If you all were to get citizenship tomorrow, do you think your lives would change?
Ricardo: Yea
Karina: Yea
Aurelio: No it wouldn't.
Ricardo: Not entirely
Monica: What would change and what would stay the same?
Juana: You would be able to go to your hometown.
Karina: I'd be able to drive, legally.

While Juana and Karina point to the material and physical affordances of citizenship, Aurelio and Ricardo mention the precarious relationship between citizenship and rights, specifically the right to be free. It is important to mention here, again, that the youth who participated in this *plática* have varying legal status and, thus, speak from those positions. For example, Aurelio recognizes that as a legal resident, he has access to some freedoms that his peers do not. While he is quick to suggest that obtaining legal status does not necessarily mean that his peers would not be subjected to second-class citizenship, Ricardo, Juana, and Karina point to the material realities that would be afforded to them and their family members. Over the course of the *plática*, there were messy, nuanced moments like the one described above. Through my analysis, specifically using *nepantla* as a theoretical framework, I am able to sort through these contradictions. Through *nepantla*, we can see how young people are left having to navigate and sit within the tensions that exist between the very system they critique and yet remain invested in for their livelihood and survival—like gaining access, privileges, and rights to travel, visit family, purchase a house, and have job security.

Concluding Thoughts

The young people with whom I worked with at CM do not identify as activists, only a few of them would be labeled by their mainstream schools as ‘high achievers,’ and at times, all of them reproduce meritocratic rhetoric in hopes that their futures in the U.S. lead to normative definitions of success. In many ways, however, their voices, narratives, and experiences trouble the dichotomous ways in which young people are discussed within scholarship on (im)migrant youth and within liberal immigration discourse. Through my analysis and strategic use of *nepantla*, I highlight the powerful reflections of these young people. I argue that *nepantla* is a

theoretical construct that allows us to see and amplify the voices, experiences, and critical arguments of young people. *Nepantla* allows us to complicate the positions that they hold when entering conversations about immigration. It also provides a theoretical lens for examining tensions and centering youth whose lives have been largely shaped by geopolitical borders, migration, and oppressive structures (racism, capitalism, etc.). It becomes a site where normative discourses of mixed-status youth are called into question and instead requires us to think beyond binaries to highlight young people living, thinking, and being *entremundos* (Anzaldúa, 2002).

The findings in this piece also inform broader discussions in education and Latino/a/x studies around teaching and learning, specifically working in collaboration with Latinx young people. As I have suggested, *pláticas* have powerful pedagogical and methodological implications as they can reposition young people as co-creators of knowledge and, thus, become collaborators in activism and resistance. *Pláticas*, are opportunities to refuse traditional and hierarchical youth-adult relationships and instead, welcome vulnerability and reciprocity. This methodological approach, thus, resists traditional and dehumanizing practices in traditional, positivist research (Paris & Winn, 2014). Pedagogically, *pláticas* position youth as both teachers and learners. They encourage youth to support each other in making sense of their lived realities while also pushing on each other's thinking and providing opportunities for critical analysis. *Pláticas*, thus, disrupt traditional classroom practices by emphasizing oral traditions and the idea that knowledge surfaces from the day-to-day experiences, conversations, and pedagogies in their homes and communities (Delgado Bernal 2001; Yosso 2005; Valenzuela 1999).

This work also acknowledges and contributes to the ongoing discussions amongst pro-(im)migrant activists and artists, both documented and undocumented alike, to re-frame these

discourses around (im)migrants. Activists across the nation are urging undocumented youth and communities to center their humanity, their existence and contributions that extend well beyond their labor, and, perhaps most radical, the ways in which they experience unapologetic joy (Reyes, 2017). I do not think that the youth in this study are alone in their ability and desire to speak to and point out the tensions and contradictions in pursuing these goals, but rather that these thoughts and knowledges are reflective of many undocumented youth and youth of mixed-status families. We, however, as activists, educators, and allies, however, are often quick to dismiss or silence this messiness because of our continued investment and hope that the state will, once and for all, commit to protecting the lives of (im)migrant and undocumented youth and families.

Although this *plática* took place in the spring of 2015, the reflections of the youth at CM speak to the continued inhumane treatment of undocumented (im)migrants, particularly under a Trump presidency. In addition to a history of (im)migrant labor dependency and exploitation throughout his career, Donald Trump's campaign and executive agenda following his election victory, was and still is largely centered on further criminalizing (im)migrants, Mexicans in particular.⁵ Donald Trump secured his presidential nomination and place in the White House by capitalizing on racist-nativist rhetoric to appeal to a White supremacist nation-state. Although this political strategy is long-standing in the U.S., the policy implications under a Trump presidency, in many ways, secure and normalize the dehumanization of undocumented (im)migrants.

⁵ During Donald Trump's campaign, he referred to Mexicans as rapists and drug dealers. One of his promises to his supporters upon taking office was and is to deport any Mexican immigrants who have criminal offenses, regardless of the severity.

Gloria Anzaldúa (2016) states, “the Mexican (im)migrant at the moment of crossing the barbed-wired fence into a hostile ‘paradise’ of El Norte (the U.S.) is caught in a state of *nepantla*,” (p. 56). Now more than ever, we are forced to reckon with the instability of immigration policy and the reality that the protection of undocumented and mixed-status families is never secure in the hands of the state. Furthermore, we are witnessing the shortcomings and limits of binary notions of deservingness and respectability politics because of the ways in which (im)migrants, undocumented (im)migrants specifically, are framed around illegality. On February 10, 2017, in the midst of xenophobic executive orders put forth by the Trump administration, Enrique Ramirez Medina⁶, a DACA (a policy now revoked under the Trump Administration) recipient, was detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Despite being legally protected from deportation through DACA, Medina’s constitutional rights were not only violated, but completely disregarded. As evident in Medina’s case, undocumented youth and mixed-status families remain under attack (Enriquez, 2015).

While I have exposed and highlighted the ways in which holding undocumented status and being a part of mixed-status migrant communities forges complex identities, knowledges, and voices, I want to be clear in stating that the unstable and liminal status of (im)migrants, is nothing to be celebrated. Rather, the arguments of this paper are meant to expose the tensions and contradictions of citizenship, hostile discourses of illegality, and dehumanizing realities of migrant labor as told by youth. Centering the many voices of young people in discussions of (im)migrants and immigration can lead to the creation and sustainability of humanizing discourses. Further, their voices can help unveil and disrupt false dichotomies of deservingness,

⁶ Medina’s case was one followed by many other DACA recipients detained and/or deported such as Pedro Miguel Montes and Enrique Vargas.

particularly amongst and with youth. This approach is imperative to our work and resistance as educators and allies to undocumented and mixed-status youth, families, and communities.

Article 2:

“We have a strong way of thinking... and it shows through our words”: Exploring the Mujerista Literacies of Chicana/Latina Youth

Sitting around a table four young *mujeres* and I discussed where our knowledge comes from. Sharing rich histories of immigration, personal and familial racialized experiences, and processes of teaching and learning, each of the young women revealed their complex and wide epistemological maps. Pulling from examples of critical, difficult, and intersectional *pláticas*—a process of co-creating knowledge through dialogue, Karina explained, “I think [we are] strong, but like strong minded. We have a strong way of thinking about stuff. And it shows through our words.” Making the connection between literacies and knowledge, Karina identifies this relationship as a source of strength. Karina and the other young women in this *plática* reflected on this idea, specifically on their experiences of being *mujeres* and how that informs their commitments to social justice and feminist projects. This *plática* was one moment in our Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) project in which young women revealed what a *mujerista* sensibility, a feminist/womanist way of knowing, means for young Chicana/Latinas and the implications this has for literacy.

Chicana feminists, Black feminists, and third world feminists have argued that knowledge is shaped by the intersections of race and gender (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Dillard, 2000). It is through this knowledge that we make sense and meaning of our worlds. The recognition of literacies as raced and gendered creates opportunities to further examine knowledge, activism, and literacies of young women and girls

of color. Further, it creates a space where we, as educators and educational researchers, might support these young women in classrooms and in non-traditional spaces of teaching and learning. In this article, I argue that the raced and gendered epistemologies of these young women inform and sculpt the literacies they practice, engage, and produce and how these literacies support their engagement in sociopolitical discussions and intersectional activism.

Drawing on Chicana feminisms and critical literacy frameworks, I examine the literacies of Chicana/Latina youth, specifically highlighting their womanist politics and practices, during a 7-week YPAR project in a migrant housing community. The research questions guiding this study are (1) how are the *mujerista* literacies of the four young Chicanas/Latinas in this study reflective of their raced-gendered knowledge and (2) how and for what purposes do they draw on their *mujerista* literacies in sociopolitical discussions. These research questions interrogate dominant, deficit orientations in the discussion of Chicana/Latina youth and girls, by working from the assumption that they are holders and producers of knowledge. Further, they provide a launching pad to consider the implications that *mujerista* literacies of Chicana/Latina youth have for feminist theories, practice, and sociopolitical change.

Locating Gaps and Intersections for Exploring Chicana/Latina Youth Literacies

While many scholars have taken up work around the literacies Chicana/Latina students (Gutierrez, 2008; Martinez & Montano, 2016; Pacheco, 2009;2012) there is a dearth of literature that examines and emphasizes literacies of Chicana/Latina girls and teens. Considering the continued global and national attacks on women—their lives, bodies, and knowledge, women scholars of color in literacy have emphasized a moral and political imperative to reveal the literacies of young women of color to support them and serve as allies in addressing and resisting systemic oppression and social injustice (Winn, 2005; Cervantes-Soon, 2012). In this section, I

discuss the intersections of racialized and gendered literacies within the broader umbrella of critical literacies, a framework that works from the assumption that texts and human relationships to texts are never neutral, and instead are located within discourses and ideological intersections of power and social structures (Campano, Ghiso, & Sanchez, 2013; E. Johnson & Vasudevan, 2012; Street, 2003). Literacies, in this view, expand well beyond traditional notions of literacy that focus on written text, and, instead include the ways in which we interact and participate in the construction of meaning across multiple forms of communication. Such a framework, thus, considers various interactions students have with texts and how we might disrupt harmful and deficit literacy practices such as the privileging of the traditional, western canon, standard forms of language, and the idea that the communities and households of color are illiterate spaces (Gonzalez, 2001; Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2005).

Chicanx/Latinx Youth Literacies

Scholars who have emphasized the powerful literacies that emerge from Chicanx/Latinx youth highlight the deep connections between language, knowledge, and culture (Paris, 2011; Martinez-Roldan & Sayer, 2006; Pacheco, 2009;). Scholarship within this area specifically takes a deep look at the ways in which youth not only engage literacies that reflect their home and community knowledge, but how they are active agents in constructing literacies that are reflective of their everyday experiences as youth of color within their respective contexts (de Los Rios, 2016). For example, in their community partnership with Latinx and Indigenous youth Torrez, et. al (2017) argue that creating spaces that are grounded in the storytelling practices of communities of color provides young people with opportunities to write their own narratives, drawing on their own cultural and linguistic resources. Within these spaces, youth are invited to draw on youth languages and pop culture, weaving these literacies within their narratives of

broader community issues and cultural knowledge. These narratives are critical to discussing, honoring, and valuing the continuously shifting and diverse literacy experiences of Chicana/Latina youth.

Literature within this tradition also highlights how for many Chicana/Latina youth literacy is connected to their (im)migrant and transnational experiences (Noguerón-Liu & Hogan, 2016; Pacheco, 2009). de los Rios (2017) for example, explores the transnational and translingual literacy experiences for one high school student through his reading, writing, and performing of *corridos*, Mexican ballads that emphasize border issues. Her study reveals how student's ties to communities, cultures, and practices across borders provides students with a critical lens for youth to think about their lived realities within the broader experiences of Latina/Chicana communities and across generations (Johnson & Rosario-Ramos, 2012). Further, critically examining students translingual and transnational experiences pushes educators and researchers to consider how family and community members become literacy teachers and how artistic expression is a platform for developing critical consciousness. Further, this work emphasizes the significance of including, supporting, and understanding the expansive, creative, and sociopolitical literacies of Chicana/Latina youth that exist across borders within classrooms and community spaces for teaching and learning.

Chicana/Latina Youth Literacies

The dearth of literature that exists around the literate lives of Chicana/Latina youth limits our understanding of the ways that raced and gendered experiences shape literacies. Further, this gap erases the distinct experiences of girl/womanhood that exists for young women within broader Chicana/Latina communities, particularly as it relates to how they come to make meaning of their lived realities. The few empirical contributions in this area, however, have

highlighted how Chicana/Latina feminist frameworks in education are critical to recognizing the meaning making, production, and navigating of Chicana/Latina youth literacies (Sanchez, 2007,2009; Knight, et. al., 2006). This includes an emphasis of what Delgado Bernal (2005) calls pedagogies of the home, or the teaching and learning that is rooted in Chicana/Latina ways of knowing and theorizing these practices as pedagogies for literacy.

Knight, Dixon, Norton & Bently (2006)'s work, for example, examines how these literacy pedagogies serve as foundations for Latina youth to critique educational inequities and provide them with tools to navigate their paths to college. Outlining Chicana/Feminist practices of knowledge production and practices of survival in academic spaces they theorize literacies as feminist affirmations that engage intersectionality, agency, and family. The Dominican and Puerto Rican young women in this study, thus, draw on feminist affirmations and mentoring relationships with other *mujeres* to resist oppressive texts such as dominant stereotypes of Latinas within white, middle class high school and college spaces. This work not only highlights how the raced-gendered literacies of Chicana/Latina youth are shaped by their intersectional experiences, communities, and schooling, but also that these young women view their literacies as a source of strength and capital.

Black Girl Literacies

Despite the gap that exists on Chicana/Latina youth literacies, there are rich conversations taking place across Black feminist literacy scholars that provide critical intersections and spaces for theorizing. Scholarship around Black girl literacies makes a critical, necessary move to center literacies within a framework that emphasizes the connection between raced-gendered knowledge and literacy. Largely grounded in Black feminisms, this work places literacies within the intersections of race and gender, particularly within historical, sociopolitical,

community, and the lived experiences and realities of Black women (Mcarthur, 2016; Muhammad & Haddix, 2016; Winn, 2010). This line of scholarship also expands dominant paradigms of literacy research. Muhammad & Haddix (2016) argue that the literacies of Black girls are “multidimensional, layered, nuanced, and complex” (p. 301). Further, these literacies exist over a variety of tools, texts, bodies, and spaces, informing how Black girls engage and read their social contexts and environments (Price-Dennis, 2016). As such, Black girls are not only recognized as literate but also as carriers of critical knowledge that can lead to sociopolitical change.

Butler (2016), for example, explores the “actionist” work of girls of color through their social justice capstone projects on human sex trafficking. Through these projects, the girls of color in her study bring awareness of the issue through research, testimonies of victims, and art. Examining the literacies of Black and Latina girls through their multimodal compositions, she roots her analysis in a critical literacy framework supported by scholarship on Black girls. Butler, thus, identifies intersections for thinking about the literacies and knowledges of girls of color broadly. She argues that while the “creative practices and lived experiences [of Black and Brown girls] are varied, there are also areas of overlap,” and, thus, work on Black girl literacies and Black girlhood have critical implications for centering the marginalized narratives and voices of girls and young women of color in literacy studies. I draw specifically on Butler’s work with Black and Brown girls because she illuminates the kinds of literacies that emerge within and across modes and projects, ultimately making a case that modes indeed do matter in studying the literacies of young women of color.

As Chicana/Latina feminists have always, and continue to, include, cite, and build upon the work of Black and Third World feminists, I argue that the frameworks offered to examine the

literacies of Black girls are essential to discussions on Chicana/Latina youth literacies. In focusing on Chicana/Latina youth literacies, however, there is an opportunity to further enrich discussions around the literacies of girls of color specifically expanding on literacies at the intersections of language, immigration status and histories, and cultural practices specific to Latinx/Chicanx communities. Drawing on Chicana feminisms, thus, informs and adds to critical literacies scholarship, especially the literature that emphasizes the connections between literacy, race, and gender.

Chicana feminisms: A Framework for exploring the *Mujerista* Literacies of Chicana/Latina Youth

Chicana feminist thought is largely concerned with interrogating dominant notions of knowledge production and legitimacy, particularly as it relates to the ways in which Eurocentric, colonizing epistemologies have been taken as normal while de-legitimizing, appropriating, and/or policing other[ed] knowledges, like those of people of color, women, and queer folks (Anzaldúa, 2002; Sandoval, 2000; Perez, 1999). Working from the margins, Chicana feminists have theorized alternative ways of knowing such as through community cultural ways of teaching and learning, the brown body, and within and across border/lands (Cruz, 2001; Elenes, 2011; Anzaldúa, 1987). Through these practices of engaging in knowledge production, Chicana feminists have re-written and written themselves into resistance of White hetero-patriarchal histories—sharing critical narratives of subaltern realities and emphasizing the significance of theorizing from raced-gendered experiences. I argue that Chicana feminist theoretical perspectives offer a critical lens to consider the ways in which Chicanas/Latinas, youth in particular, participate the production, sharing, and embodying of raced-gendered literacies.

Drawing on Alice Walker's (1984) definition of "womanist," Chicana feminists have embraced the term *mujerista* to honor the cultural and linguistic identities of Chicanas/Latinas in mainstream feminism (Revilla Tijerina, 2004). As Ruth Trinidad Galvan (2006) states,

A *mujerista* or Latina womanist vision [...] aims to uncover, share, and validate the diverse knowledge and experiences of Latinas in the United States and abroad. It takes a holistic approach to self that includes spirit and emotion, and recognizes our individual–communal struggles and efforts to name ourselves, record our history, and choose our own destiny (p. 172).

I use the term *mujerista* to signify a particular politics and action that reflect Chicana feminist thought, specifically through literacies. In many ways, *mujerista* literacies can be understood as literacies that are reflective of and work in the service of feminist ideas of sociopolitical change, processes, and shifts in knowledge.

The *mujerista* literacies of the young women in this study are located within their bodies; they are practices of *mujerista*/Chicana feminist pedagogies within their families and move across geopolitical spaces and borders (Dyreness, 2008; Revilla Tijerina, 2004). Further, these literacies are deeply intersectional. In line with the ways in which Chicana feminists have identified rich knowledge and theory building within spaces of contradiction, ambiguity, and tension, the literacies of these young women are messy, making visible the ways in which they navigate competing discourses, cultures, and ideologies (Villenas, 1996; 2006). *Mujerista* literacies, thus, can provide a theoretical lens for illuminating the literacies of Chicana/Latina feminist youth as they make meaning of their lived realities and the worlds they traverse.

Though there are empirical studies that employ a *mujerista* lens, they largely focus on adult women and college aged women, rather than high school aged young women and girls

(Dyreness, 2008; Revilla Tijerina, 2004; Trinidad Galvan, 2006). Exploring *mujerista* politics with high school aged women further extends this work, providing a more nuanced understanding of feminisms for Chicanas/Latinas and girls of color. To theorize this alongside and in collaboration with young *mujeres* is particularly important as we can learn how Chicana/Latina youth engage with and produce literacies, inserting themselves in these critical conversations as to what it means to be a feminist.

Methods

Karina, Noemí, Juana, and Lorena are four young women who participated in a 7-week Youth Participatory Action Research project along with their male peers during the summer of 2016. Methodologically, YPAR served as a way to collaborate with young people in a learning process that centered on their voices, experiences, and knowledges. While the students collected, analyzed, and presented data from their own research, I learned more about them and their literacies—their sociopolitical ideas, their identities as researchers, and their community cultural ways of making meaning of their lived realities. It is important to note here that the findings highlighted in this study are part of my dissertation research and are, thus, situated within the context of a broader study that examined the knowledges and literacies of youth in an (im)migrant housing complex. In what follows, I further describe this housing community, the young women, and the project.

Research Site and Participants

The young women in this study are members of *Comunidad Miravalle* (CM), an (im)migrant housing complex located in a semi-rural suburb in the rocky mountain region. CM is a 32-unit apartment project where the head of each household is required to work in either agriculture or landscape. While migrant labor has been largely understood as a transient labor,

the ability to cross borders and travel freely was not a privilege afforded to residents in CM, as many families were undocumented or made up of members who had varying status. Majority of the residents are Mexican (im)migrant families, though other countries from Central and South America are represented. All the children and youth all consider themselves bilingual and attend the local predominately White, well-resourced suburban schools. The change of property managers in 2016 resulted in a rapid change in residence in CM. As such, while all the young women and their families had lived at CM for over 15 years, stricter implementations of legal documentation status and income guidelines for resident eligibility created a great sense of discomfort and fear among the community which in turn became reason for many families, such as those of Karina and Noemí, to leave CM.

In the middle of the housing complex is the CM learning center, where children and youth, ages 4-17, gather, study, and participate in various programs offered by staff and volunteers. I began volunteering in the community in the summer of 2013. Though not a staff member, directors would often refer to me as the youth leadership coordinator in professional settings. Over the three years I regularly volunteered at CM, I worked primarily with the high school youth teaching various ethnic studies seminars that focused on the intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, and citizenship. In the beginning, I primarily worked with and developed close relationships with Juana and Karina. While I would interact with Lorena and Noemí in different contexts at the community center, we did not work closely together until the summer of 2016 during our Youth Participatory Action Research project. At the time this data was collected Karina was an entering high school senior, Juana had just graduated high school, Lorena was an entering sophomore, and Noemí was an entering high school freshman. Juana,

Lorena, and Noemí identify as Latina, Karina identifies as Chicana, and all four young women embrace cultural, ethnic, and national ties to México.

YPAR at CM

In the summer of 2016, I proposed the idea of establishing a Youth Research Team that would work towards addressing issues within the community by collecting personal narratives of the experiences and lived realities amongst residents. All middle and high school students who participated in spring programming at the learning center were encouraged to apply to be on the team. Nine students agreed to be on the team and committed to seven weeks of research, including the four young women and five young men. This project took place over a 7-week period where the youth collected *testimonios*, narratives of marginalization, from their families and community members about their immigration histories and experiences living in the U.S. and within the CM to address issues they felt were pressing to the community. Pedagogically, I facilitated this project drawing on Youth Participatory Action Research and Chicana feminist scholarship and practices.

My pedagogical and methodological orientations for this project emphasized the importance of student knowledge, experience, and expertise, specifically related to young people's capability to carry out high quality research (Torre & Fine, 2008; Cammarota & Fine, 2008). This approach to research with youth, thus, works from the assumption that youth have agency, carry valuable insights of the worlds they traverse, and can work within their communities to bring about social change. The students and I met three days a week where we worked through the different phases of research, such as creation of research questions, review of literature, data collection and analysis. Throughout this process, the youth reflected on their own knowledge and experiences to guide their research. Further, they were compelled to discuss the

significance of their research process and findings within larger socio-political discussions. As the findings will show, the young people specifically used their research meeting time to engage in *pláticas* about racism, anti-queerness, anti-blackness, heteropatriarchy, anti-immigrant rhetoric.

For the 7-week Youth Participatory Action Research project all youth created and interacted with various texts and materials. This includes, for example, creating PowerPoints, websites, collages of data, recording and translating interviews and *testimonios*, research journal writing, and drawing. To record the students meaning making processes across modes I used audio recorders to record large group and small group conversations, video recording to document body positioning, gestures, and em[bodied] textual productions. I collected the journals, final projects, and any written work created by youth. As data collection unfolded, I began to pay close attention to the ways in which the young women demonstrated feminist of color sensibilities and literacies specific to their race and gendered learning processes. I documented these themes in my audio field notes and written memos. After our final research team meeting and celebration, I asked the young women if they could stay after to have a *plática*, or an informal conversation (Gonzalez, 2001; Preuss & Saavedra, 2013) where we could dialogue and come to new understandings about our lives, *juntas*. As a facilitator of this *plática*, I shared with the young women that the intention of organizing the conversation was to think collectively about the idea of *mujerista* or *feminista* knowledge broadly. This *plática* served as more than a member check and more of a way to engage in a dialogue about what I was seeing and further define what *mujerista* knowledge and feminisms are to the young women.

Data Analysis

My interest in identifying the ways in which the young *mujeres* in this study engage, produce, and practice *mujerista* literacies stems largely from a desire to witness and understand how these literacies reflect a meaning-making process of social political issues, feminisms, and identity. Throughout our 7-week Youth Participatory Action Research project the young women used various texts, practices, and platforms to make meaning and to share their ideas. As such, my analysis for this article focuses on how these young women participated in various aspects of the project and what this looks like across modes (visual, aural, written, gestural, embodied, etc.) and through particular modalities (pen for writing, *plática* for dialogue, body for gestures, etc.) (Jewitt, 2005; Omerbasic, 2015; Vasudevan, 2014). I take up multimodality as an analytical method through which I examined and coded data. Engaging multimodal methods for data analysis allowed me to approach my data looking for what Vasudevan (2014) argues are “the micro-moments of meaning making across differences” and the ways in which literacies and knowledges are produced, practiced, and embodied through a variety of modes and how they are attached to, disrupt, or coexist within larger sociopolitical discourses.

During data analysis, I examined a variety of data sources such as student writing, digital projects, video and audio recordings. I transcribed all audio recordings and created video logs, creating multimodal transcripts for the pieces of data that reflected codes surrounding *mujerista* literacies. These multimodal transcripts included talk, action, and anchor images that capture the events taking place. After coding all student writing, I selected specific works of the young women that included some of the same codes found in the multimodal transcripts. These codes, for example, include disrupting deficit discourses, calling out maleness, distribution of labor, raced-gendered experiences, intersectionality and ally ship, and Chicana/Mexicana ways of

knowing. After examining both written works and multimodal transcripts, I sorted codes into three major findings, further discussed below.

Findings

The *mujerista* literacies of the young women in this study are located within their bodies, they are reflective of Chicana/Latina pedagogies, and move across geopolitical spaces and borders. In line with the ways in which Chicana feminists have identified knowledge production as often contradictory, ambiguous, and tension rich, the literacies of these young women are also messy, making visible how they navigate competing discourses, cultures, and ideologies. I have identified the following examples from the data to highlight the various ways *mujerista* literacies emerged over the 7-week Youth Participatory Action Research project. Through my analysis of these examples, I show how *mujerista* literacies are (1) em[bodied] and intergenerational, (2) disruptive, and (3) reflective and shifting. The first finding, thus, highlights how the *mujerista* literacies of these young women are connected to their raced-gendered ways of knowing, while findings two and three emphasize the ways in which, or for what purposes, the young women draw on their *mujerista* literacies. Throughout this findings section, I demonstrate how these literacies unfolded throughout the summer and across different contexts.

***Mujerista* Literacies as Em[bodied] and Intergenerational Literacies**

In our final *mujeres plática*, after we shared some of our reflections and experiences of our summer work, I asked the young women if they could describe where their knowledge comes from. It was through this discussion that they began to describe the ways in which their knowledge and literacies are em[bodied], located and shared across the brown bodies of women in their families, and shaped by their identities and sociopolitical locations of *being* in the world. Below is a multimodal transcript of part of that conversation.

Table 2: Multimodal Transcript of *Mujeres Plática*

Mode

Anchor Image



Talk

Monica: How do you think your identity influenced how you engage in critical conversations?

Noemí: Well I think it's because like, we're-

Noemí: --Latinas. We see like different perspectives. Like seeing our families, like how they struggle, and I think it gives us different points of views. And like, different perspectives.

Karina: Um for me it's been seeing what's going on around me with social media and also like my mom, my grandma, and seeing all these like powerful *mujeres*. Seeing their ideas and everything, you stop just thinking about yourself...

Noemí: You wanna be like a role model.

Action

Noemí begins speaking. Everyone is looking down.

As Noemí says "Latina," she sits upright and looks at Mónica.

Karina begins speaking and Noemí looks up towards her. Noemí nods in agreement and looks towards Mónica. Lorena and Julia nod in agreement towards Noemí.

In this example, Noemí argues that knowledge is directly linked to race, gender, and the struggles of her family. In moving her body from hunched over the table to sitting up tall as she says, "Well I think it's because we're *Latinas*," she conveyed a sense of pride and ownership of her identity. She also makes the case for knowledge being deeply connected to community, particularly of "struggle." Drawing from Alice Walker's definition of womanist, Revilla Tijerina (2004) argues that the commitments of women of color to their communities must be considered

when theorizing feminisms. In this specific example, the struggle and strategic use of the collective “we,” refers to the hardships endured by (im)migrant families, specifically in *Comunidad Miravalle*. Noemí’s idea of knowledge shaped by lived experiences across families also draws on Delgado Bernal’s (1998) notion of community memory, or the ways in which marginalized communities have historically resisted oppression and shared those experiences and knowledge across generations. Noemí’s thoughts of knowledge, thus, speak to the ways in which women of color feminists have theorized raced-gendered epistemologies. Further, she embraces this knowledge and recognizes how it provides her with particular world views that are different from others.

In the following moments, Karina discusses how her feminisms are situated within the broader context of women, especially her mother and grandmother. She then states, “...seeing all of these powerful *mujeres*... Seeing their ideas and everything, you just stop thinking about yourself.” This moment in the *plática* opened up a larger conversation where the young women discussed how their ways of knowing were shaped by women in their lives, particularly their mothers. For example, Lorena added, “I’m pretty sure that Mexicans just have like a strong connection with their mom... Like, ima be better because she [my mom] wants me to be better... like explore new things and just become better.” To that Juana described sometimes having arguments with her mother, but quickly getting over them because of the strong relationship they have. She explains the kind of connection Latinas have with their mothers, “It’s just something that you and her have, between you two.” In this moment of the *plática*, the young *mujeres* explain how their mothers specifically created spaces and opportunities to be feminists and become better versions of themselves. They also illustrate how their ways of knowing are grounded in their relationships with their mothers and other women in their family.

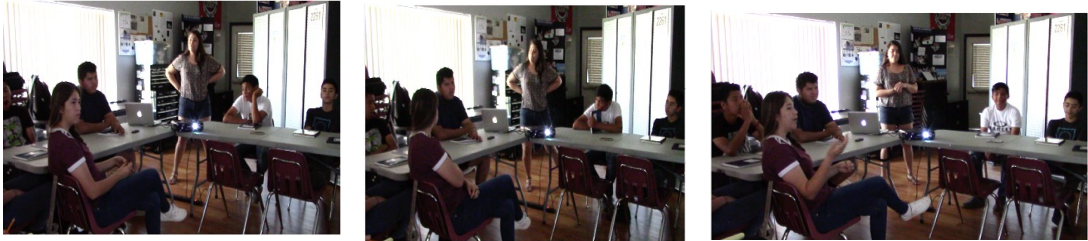
In theorizing an epistemology of a brown body, Cruz (2001) states, “Our production of knowledge begins in the bodies of our mothers and grandmothers, in the acknowledgement of the critical practices of women of color before us” (p. 658). In my analysis of this *plática* around knowledge, I argue that the reflections of the young women reveal how knowledge is not only located within and on bodies, but specifically that these knowledges are intergenerational, political, and reflective of Chicana/Latina pedagogies of mothering (Galván, 2008; Mangual Figueroa, 2013; Téllez, 2013). As Villenas (2005) argues, the pedagogies of Chicana/Latina mothers are central theorizing literacies, specifically valuing and taking into consideration the ways in which they share “cultural/social histories wherein they struggle—with dignity, integrity, and not without pain—to carve out the moral lessons of strength, courage, intellect, and compassion for their children” (p. 273). I argue that it is precisely these pedagogies and ways of knowing that shape the *mujerista* literacies of the young *mujeres* in this study.

***Mujerista* Literacies as Disruptive**

In line with *feminista* praxis, part of *mujerista* literacies is disrupting spaces and discourses that perpetuate normative ways of knowing and violent systems of oppression. In this finding, I highlight how the young women drew on their *mujerista* literacies to disrupt oppressive conversations. Throughout the summer YPAR project there were many discussions about disrupting dominant narratives and stereotypes, specifically about (im)migrant communities. This idea is what largely lead the students to collect testimonios from family members and *Comunidad Miravalle* residents. To frame our research questions and resist deficit assumptions in research, I asked students to draw on the statistics of Latinx graduation rates, highlighted in my PowerPoint presentation, to trouble the dominant stereotype, “Latinx students do not care about their education.” In doing so, I encouraged students to consider research

questions that would prevent leading back to the often deficit research findings that come as a result of this assumption (Valencia, 2010). The following table is a multimodal transcript where I highlight how Karina engages her *mujerista* literacies to read the narratives being circulated about Chicana/Latina youth and schooling and disrupts them by calling out the systemic ways in which these students are pushed out of schools.

Table 3: Multimodal Transcript of Latinx Student Stereotypes *Plática*

Mode			
Anchor Image			
Talk	<p>Pedro: But I feel like...</p>	<p>Pedro: ...some students actually don't care about their education, so they're just dropping out</p> <p>Mónica: Ok let's look at the data [the Latino student dropout rates], Out of every 100 latino students, 50 of them don't care? That's literally half. So I see what you're saying Pedro, some students actually might not care, but I don't think it's half of every 100 Latinos... What do you all think?</p>	<p>Karina: I think that saying, or asking, "why are these students dropping out? And saying they just don't care...I would agree with you (Pedro), that still ties into why they're being pushed out. [The data] probably [won't] change if they are being taught with the same curriculum... The reason probably why they are lazy or why they don't care is because of the school they're in, their teachers, and how they're being taught</p>
Action	<p>Some students look at Pedro while others still look at the data are viewing the PowerPoint</p>	<p>Everyone in the room looks at Pedro</p>	<p>Students look back at the data. Karina refers to the data with her hands when making her point.</p>

which shows statistics of
Latinx student graduation

While the literacies of young people are complex and constantly evolving, they, at times reproduce colonial, dominant ideologies and ways of reading the world. This is reflected in the example above as Pedro expresses his opinion about Latinx students “really” not caring about their education—a narrative that has become normalized through deficit rhetoric and ultimately deems that homes and communities of Latinx youth as knowledge-less and lacking cultural capital (Yosso, 2005). This is often perpetuated in discourses around high stakes testing, graduation rates, and overall academic achievement. Recognizing the limits of such a narrative about Latinx students, Karina states, “[The data] probably [won’t] change if they are being taught with the same curriculum... The reason probably why they are lazy or why they don’t care is because of the school they’re in, their teachers, and how they’re being taught.” While Karina draws on the language used to label Latinx students as uncaring, admitting that such realities might exist, she explains that they do not exist on their own. Specifically, she disrupts the deficit and simplistic notion of Latinx student achievement by pointing out the structural issues behind push out rates and educational inequities.

On June 12, 2016, just one week after beginning our YPAR project, 49 people were murdered (and 53 wounded) in a mass shooting at Pulse night club in Orlando. During one research team meeting our agenda shifted as the young people and I felt the need to reflect, discuss, and mourn the lives lost in the tragedy, largely of whom were queer people of color. Below is another example of the ways the young women drew on their *mujerista* literacies to disrupt spaces and anti-queer discourses.

Table 4: Multimodal Transcript of Pulse Night Club *Plática*

Mode

**Anchor
Image**



Talk

Erick: Gay, straight, they're just people
Noemí: No but it matters... that they're people of color and that they're queer

Mónica: Why does it matter?
(long pause)
Joaquín: That's how they wanna live their lives... It does matter, but for them
Mónica: So it matters to them, but it doesn't matter for the rest of us?
Joaquín: Well, for them, all of them, but not me.

Mónica: We've been talking about this idea of community, do we not include queer folks in our community?
Karina: We need people to see all the violence that people, that identify themselves as queer, especially when they identify as minorities... how much violence they go through, what they're going through right now.

Action

Karina gazes down as she speaks, holding her water bottle

Joaquín extends his arms away from him in a distancing motion. Karina turns her head back and down, in Joaquín's direction, but does not look directly at him.

Karina looks directly at me

There are a few different narratives circulating in this example. One, for example, is the multicultural idea that differences in sexuality are irrelevant because we are all human when Edwin says, "Gay, straight, they're just people." This narrative is often used to dismiss the injustices and experiences faced by marginalized communities. In tragic events like the mass murders at Pulse night club, this narrative circulated and discussions of violence against queer folks of color were muffled by white noise and anti-Muslim discourses in mainstream and conservative media. To prevent this from happening in our meeting, Noemí disrupts the

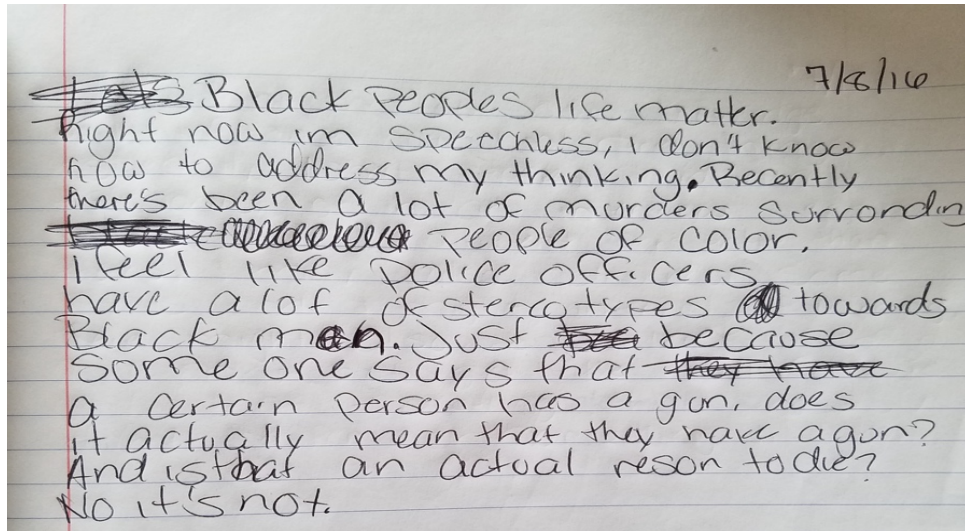
multicultural messages projected from Edwin when she states, “no but it matters... that they’re people of color and that they’re queer.” In doing so, she emphasizes that the lives lost at Pulse night club were navigating marginalization at the intersections of race and sexuality. Karina goes on to disrupt the other[ing] and anti-queer rhetoric being projected by Joaquín, as he physically and verbally distances himself from queer folks of color. Discussing the significance in recognizing this intersection within historical and present day violence that queer folks of color endure, she says, “we need people to see all the violence that people, that identify themselves as queer, especially when they identify as minorities...how much violence they go through, what they’re going through right now.” Both Noemí and Karina disrupted a conversation and potentially a space that was becoming saturated with anti-queerness, pushing on other students’ thinking, of male peers and ways of engaging in the conversation.

***Mujerista* Literacies as Reflective and Shifting**

In the examples above, I illustrate how young Chicanas/Latinas might draw on their *mujerista* literacies to disrupt normative, deficit stances and conversations. In line with Chicana feminist perspectives, I find it necessary and productive to reveal the ways in which *mujerista* literacies are also messy and, thus require reflection. I also illustrate how these reflections create opportunities for shifting perspectives and ideas. Just a few weeks after our discussion of the murders in Orlando, the young people and I learned about the murders of Philando Castile and Alton Sterling, two Black men who lost their lives because of police violence within 24 hours of each other. Noemí suggested we discuss the murders which lead to reorganizing our agenda to cover topics such as anti-Blackness, police brutality, and the #BlackLivesMatter movement. On this day, students had the opportunity to review social media and share their findings and

thoughts through PowerPoint presentations. At the end of our research team meeting I asked everyone to take some time to write in their research journals. Below is Lorena's journal entry.

Figure 1: Lorena's Journal Entry 7/8/16

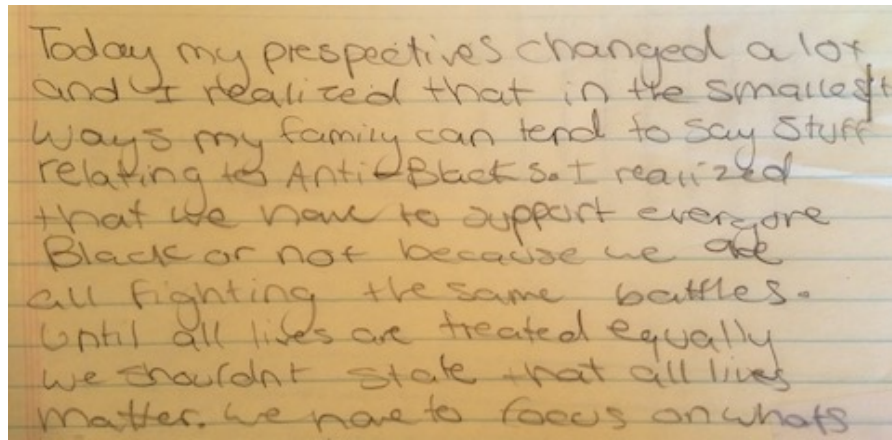


In this journal entry, Lorena describes feeling speechless and asks questions that interrogate the normalized justifications of police brutality and murders of Black folks—rhetorical strategies used to protect the racist acts of violence of police and further criminalize victims. She asks, “Just because someone says that a certain person has a gun, does it actually mean that they have a gun? And is that an actual reason to die?” While Lorena’s questions illustrate her skepticism around the justifications to police violence, we can also learn a great deal about her sense making process when we look deeper and closer at her strategic word choice, literally beneath her scribbles. In her question where she asks if a “certain person has a gun,” we see that she initially wrote, “they have” as in, “Just because someone says [they have] a gun...,” she then replaces it with “a certain person,” implying that these occurrences and justifications like, “suspect was believed to have a gun” are not universal, but rather, only in context of “certain” people. We can also see how Lorena is connecting her reflection to prior

pláticas as she writes, “recently there’s been a lot of murders surrounding [scribbled out: Black people] People of Color.” Through her writing, Lorena is situating this conversation on the murders of Black men within broader conversations of the violence inflicted onto people of color, but also likely in connection to our conversation about Orlando.

In another example from that day, Noemí’s journal entry reveals the shifting that can often come because of reflection (Anzaldúa, 2002). Below is an excerpt from her journal.

Figure 2: Noemí’s Journal Entry 7/8/16



Here, Noemí recognizes anti-blackness within her family. With that, she describes a desire to support Black lives as part of dismantling systems of oppression that further marginalize people of color more broadly. And finally, she argues that all lives cannot matter, if the lives of Black folks do not. This reflection is what I describe as a shift—a new way of making meaning where one gains new knowledge and disrupts what has been taken as normal. While I recognize Noemí’s journal entry as a shift, it is also necessary to point out that in naming anti-Blackness within her family, Noemí writes out the phrase “Anti-Blacks.” This example reveals how *mujerista* literacies are not static, and instead, messy and complex. Specifically, Noemí’s journal entry shows how young people navigate and sometime appropriate colonial discourses, like using language that is reflective of anti-blackness. Theorizing literacies through

a Chicana feminist framework, however, allows for space to recognize how these processes of meaning making are tension rich.

These shifts also have transformative potential, as they provide young women with new perspectives and tools to engage in activism and feminist politics, on their own terms. In our final *plática* (*mujeres* only), all the women discussed how their thinking changed over time. For example, in her reflection on police violence, she writes, “I’m sad and angry that this is still an issue and that nothing has been done.” three weeks later during the final *plática* she discussed how her approach to addressing systemic oppression shifted. She stated,

I think from being angry—being angry only works for yourself and you'll just go and post stuff [on social media] and go and say stuff, but in talking about it and everything, your anger fuels whatever you have to say about it and you say it in a more calm, understanding way [so] that other people can understand you.

In this example, Karina’s response describes how *mujerista* literacies are Chicana/Latina literacies in action. These literacies are, thus, about *movimiento*—specifically moving towards action. As Anzaldúa (1999) states, “the possibilities are numerous once we decide to act and not react.” For Karina, this means using anger as fuel to approach sociopolitical conversations around injustice, finding places of interconnectivity to engage with people and spread knowledge.

Discussion

Women of Color feminists have theorized the ways in which knowledge is shaped by the racialized and gendered experiences of women. In this piece, I have emphasized how this raced-gendered knowledge informs how young women of color, especially, engage, produce, and practice literacies, specifically through feminist politics. In the first finding I demonstrate how

mujerista literacies are deeply connected to Chicana/Mexicana feminist pedagogies of the home, and for these women, in particular, deeply connected to mothering. In findings two and three I highlight *how* the young women in this study draw upon their *mujerista* literacies to engage in feminist praxis. For example, in finding two, they use their *mujerista* literacies to disrupt oppressive discourses about Latinx in Education and Queer people of color. In finding three, I demonstrate how the young women use their *mujerista* literacies to be reflective and participate in intersectional feminisms. In line with my research questions, these findings demonstrate how *mujerista* literacies emerge from raced-gendered ways of knowing and can be leveraged to participate in feminist and social justice projects.

Through my analysis and writing of these findings, however, I contemplated questions such as, how do we hold the young men in our social justice youth work accountable to equitable work distribution and troubling the way heteropatriarchy unfolds in these spaces? What is our responsibility, as educators, to the young men in these spaces in supporting them sort through and challenge the painful ideas of masculinity and patriarchal expectations that they have internalized and taken as normal? And finally, how do we work alongside young *mujeres* to ensure that their contributions to discussions and social justice work are agentive rather than arduous, taxing labor? I alone do not have answers to these questions, but it is necessary that we, as scholar-educators further grapple with them, share reflections of praxis, and be transparent about the tensions that emerge in collaborating with young people in this work. Further, I argue, we must work with our young people to re-imagine what our classrooms and community learning spaces look like, especially so that our students can build coalitions and work together to resist and dismantle the systems of oppression that marginalize them, their families, and communities.

Conclusion:

In an interview discussing the backdrop behind the creation of the America Chavez, Marvel's 1st queer Latina Superhero, comic writer Gabby Chavez discussed the deep significance of such a character for young *mujeres*. Beyond the importance of representation, Chavez acknowledges how examining and recognizing the literacies of Chicana/Latina youth is a matter of life or death. She states, "young Latinas have some of the highest rates of suicide in the country (SPRC Report, 2013). It's (the comic) saying, you exist, you matter, you are powerful, you are strong, you are vibrant, you are necessary and we need you in our universe." As Chavez so beautifully affirms, the lives, knowledges, and literacies of young Chicanas/Latinas are critical to disrupting and resisting systems of oppression that too often bring about tremendous, and at times unbearable, pains for so many youth for Chicana/Latinas in particular. The arguments laid out in this article around Chicana/Latina youth literacies speak to the necessity of supporting, engaging, and exposing the contributions of young *mujeres*. It is through the recognition of these young women as literate, political, and critical decedents of resistant, intelligent, and powerful communities, that we can begin to collaborate with them in creating more spaces and opportunities for them to thrive.

Article 3:

“Because we have lived it...”: The Community Cultural Literacy Pedagogies of Youth Researcher-Educators

On a white board, next to a list of codes created by a group of youth participating as researchers in a Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) project, I wrote a question for journal reflection: How might your knowledge and experience influence how you interpret the data vs. someone else looking at it? In his journal, Erik wrote, “[It’s different] because we have lived it.” Julian wrote, “I think [my knowledge and experience] would help me because we have lived it and we studied all these things in our [research project].” In these journal reflections, both Erik and Julian shed light on the significance of community cultural knowledge and how this knowledge informs the ways in which they engage in critical literacies. They and their fellow Researcher-educators carried this deep awareness with them as they not only analyzed their data, but also planned and prepared their presentations of the findings to their (im)migrant housing community, *Comunidad Miravalle* (CM). As I explore in what follows, those literacies infuse what I call Community Cultural Literacy Pedagogies (CCLPs), or powerful pedagogies enacted by youth when positioned as both researchers and educators within their communities.

YPAR scholars have emphasized the pedagogical benefits of engaging youth in processes of inquiry about issues that affect their lives. Few studies, however, further explore what Scorza et. al. (2017) call a “dual pedagogy” of YPAR—or acknowledging the ways in which youth are both researchers and community educators when they participate in action research. At the intersections of Chicana feminist perspectives, critical literacies, and YPAR, this study employs CCLP as a framework to examine how youth at CM participate in the construction of literacy

pedagogies that reflect the knowledge, experiences, and needs of this particular Latinx im(migrant) community. Focusing on the final multimodal compositions of the YPAR project, the findings in this study reveal how the young people engaged, created, and drew on their CCLPs in the presentations of their research. I use this framework to ask (1) What are the Community Cultural Literacy pedagogies of the youth researcher-educators at *Comunidad Miravalle*? And (2) How and for what purposes do they use these pedagogies? For the youth at CM, CCLPs are reflective of their critical knowledge of (im)migration and border crossing, their educational aspirations, their deep commitment to community strength and success, and a robust linguistic repertoire that is rooted in communicating critical knowledge. These findings, thus, contribute to the empirical work that highlights how youth draw on their cultural and experiential knowledge to engage in a multitude of literacy practices across contexts and extend well beyond traditional notions of school literacies. Further, these CCLPs are a product and reflection of the teaching and learning that takes place in communities and homes of (im)migrant families and communities.

Literature Review

In this section, I outline the contours of Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) through the contributions of scholars in the field of education working with youth across various contexts to engage in transformative learning through inquiry. I begin with an overview of YPAR as a way to center the voices, experiences, and knowledge of youth to engage in social justice projects. Next, I discuss the significance of this work with youth of color, in *particular*. I then highlight how literacy scholars have taken up YPAR as a way to engage young people's diverse literacies and knowledge of critical issues affecting their lives. Finally, I discuss Chicana

feminist ideas of pedagogy and how the contributions of Chicana feminist scholars fit within discussions of YPAR.

YPAR: Centering the Voices, Experiences, and Knowledge of Youth

Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) emerges from community and scholarly traditions that aim to trouble dominant ideas of knowledge production, methodological validity, and pedagogy (Torre & Fine, 2008; Fine & Cammarotta, 2008). Central to this approach to research is the critical acknowledgement and deep understanding that young people are experts in myriad issues and the sociopolitical contexts in which they live and navigate (Elena Torre & Fine, 2008). Youth not only hold knowledge around these issues, but they also have the ability to engage in rigorous research and knowledge production. In YPAR projects young people, along with adult facilitators (community leaders, university researchers, parents, community members, etc.), identify an issue or a problem to address through research. Youth carry out data collection, data analysis, and the dissemination of findings to audiences they see fit.

Many scholars have showcased the very important and critical issues young people have taken up such as inequitable policing in communities of color, unjust schooling practices, and school closures (Caraballo, Lozenski, Lyiscott, & Morrell, 2017). Many of these projects have taken place in classrooms or as afterschool programs. While many YPAR literacy scholars highlight the ways in which this research unfolds in school settings, there is limited scholarship around YPAR taking place in community spaces, and learning centers in (im)migrant communities like CM. I argue that YPAR in community spaces offers an opportunity to look at the powerful practices of teaching, learning, and literacies that are shared, produced, and exchanged across youth and adults through a YPAR project and how within this context we can see how these literacies reflect the rich ways of knowing within communities of color.

YPAR with Youth of Color

Scholars in education have utilized YPAR as a methodological and pedagogical tool in their work with youth of color, emphasizing the possibilities that emerge for young people to critically examine, interrogate, and transform their educational realities (Morrell, 2006; Fine, Burns, Payne, & Torre, 2004; Irizarry, 2011; Zavala & Golden, 2016). Mira, Garcia, and Morell (2015) document their long-term work with the Youth Research Council, where youth of color worked together and in collaboration with their teachers to address the racist schooling practices across South and East Los Angeles (see also, Morrell 2004; Morrell 2008). The young people within this project addressed the inequitable distribution of resources across the city and how this largely shaped the educational trajectories of students of color. In Tucson, Arizona, students in the Social Justice Education Project documented the racist schooling practices experienced by Latinx students in the district's high schools (Cammarota, 2008; 2014; Romero, et. al., 2008). The young people in this study facilitated and utilized their expert knowledge and experiences at every juncture of the research process which included live observations, writing fieldnotes, and conducting interviews. Through this work, the young people in this YPAR study addressed both the pervasive and structural racist practices that existed in their schools such as tracking, language oppression, racial macro and micro aggressions from teachers, and the policing of home and community knowledge. Across this empirical work, youth were not only positioned as producers and holders of knowledge, but as scholars engaging in rigorous research that emphasized their experiences and lived realities. (Torre & Fine, 2008)

YPAR and Literacy

Literacy scholars have begun to explore the methodological and pedagogical benefits of YPAR, particularly with youth of color, highlighting the complex and sophisticated ways they

engage, embody, and practice literacies. These literacies are required at every juncture of the YPAR process—developing research questions, interviews, writing fieldnotes, coding, and the distribution and presentation of findings—and often exceeds the expectations of youth in literacy curriculum and standards (Golden & Womack, 2016; Morrell, 2006). Further, YPAR’s orientation to knowledge production powerfully creates spaces for youth to unearth and demonstrate their critical literacies to motivate sociopolitical change in their communities and schools related to schooling for students of color (Mirra, et. al. 2015), environmental racism (Akom, Shah, Nakai, & Cruz, 2016), language arts curriculum (Zavala & Golden, 2016), and many other systems and structures that these students navigate in their everyday lives (Caraballo et al., 2017). These studies demonstrate how youth of color hold a great deal of knowledge and willingness and desire to engage in a variety of critical literacies through meaningful opportunities for teaching and learning that YPAR provides.

Chicana feminist Pedagogies & YPAR

Chicana feminist pedagogies are understood as Chicana/Latina culturally based ways of teaching and learning that take place in informal sites. As Delgado Bernal (2006) argues, they “embrace Chicana and Mexicana ways of knowing and extend beyond formal schooling” (p. 114). This idea of pedagogy, thus, moves away from the notion that teaching and learning can only take place in mainstream classrooms and instead looks towards spaces like the home, religious spaces, and other community sites (Galvan, 2001; Jiménez, 2014; Saavedra & Pérez, 2013; Sánchez & Ek, 2013). Chicana feminists have also theorized pedagogical practices such as *testimonio* (narratives of marginalization and survivorship) and *pláticas* (engaging in knowledge production through dialogue) to examine how teaching and learning unfolds in alternative spaces of knowledge production (DeNicolo & Gonzalez, 2015; Mendoza Aviña, 2016). Chicana

feminist scholars, thus, argue that reimagining the definition of pedagogy has the potential to move towards social change and more equitable education (Mendoza Aviña, 2016).

Chicana scholars have begun to consider the ways in which YPAR/PAR fits alongside these theoretical perspectives (Sanchez, 2009; Torre & Ayala, 2009; Torre, 2009). Sanchez (2009), for example, applied YPAR in a project examining transnational familial relationships, where she worked with two Latina youth collecting and analyzing ethnographic data from their trips across the Mexico-U.S. border. YPAR and Chicana feminist notions of knowledge production created spaces for the young women and Sanchez (2009) to locate the wealth of knowledge and community across transnational experiences. Following this tradition, I approached this study at *Comunidad Miravalle* looking for the ways in which these pedagogies emerged throughout the YPAR project.

Theoretical Framework

Critical scholars in education have contributed both empirical and theoretical work to make visible and value the knowledge, pedagogies, and literacies that emerge in the homes and communities of Latinx students (Yosso, 2005; Delgado Bernal 2006; Gonzalez, 2008; Pacheco, 2012). This work has been critical to resisting deficit orientations of these young people, their families, and communities, within U.S. schools. I argue that this work has opened spaces to look at the powerful practices of teaching, learning, and literacies that are exchanged across generations and employed by young people in the ways in which they navigate their worlds. Community Cultural Literacy Pedagogies (CCLPs) is a framework that highlights how young people are pedagogues who draw on their home, community, and familial knowledge to engage in teaching and learning practices within their community. In drawing on these critical works in concert with Chicana feminisms approaches to YPAR, I use this framework to consider, analyze,

and highlight how youth engage with, embody, and strategically employ their community cultural knowledge and literacies pedagogically. In what follows, I outline the critical ideas to consider in theorizing CCLP.

Community Knowledge and Literacies

A central part of CCLPs is the recognition that the homes and communities of students of color, and Latinx youth in particular, are rich with knowledge. In conceptualizing pedagogies of the home, Delgado Bernal (2006) argues that critically examining the teaching and learning that takes place in these other[ed] spaces recognizes how Chicanx, Latinx, and other families of color draw upon these multiple cultures and knowledges to preserve traditions, integrity, and histories while also navigating institutions and resisting systems of domination. Yosso's (2005) framework of Community Cultural Wealth works from these assumption, identifying six forms of capital (aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant), that Latinx/Chicanx students carry with them as a result of the pedagogical practices of their homes and communities. This framework specifically works to make visible the often unrecognized and devalued rigorous skills, practices, and robust knowledge in Latinx homes and communities. Expanding on pedagogies of the home and CCW, however, I argue that these knowledges and forms of capital are directly linked to the literacies these communities and families practice, exchange, and embody.

Community Cultural Literacy Pedagogies is thus a theoretical framework that can be useful for not only examining how literacies are reflective of home and community knowledge, but also how youth researcher-educators engage with, embody, and strategically employ those literacies pedagogically. CCLPs are sophisticated, and while I argue they are embodied and transcend generations, I want to also be clear about how they continuously shift based on the

experiences and current lived realities across multiple communities. For the purposes of my research context, CCLPs centralize on the language and literacy practices and community cultural knowledges exchanged across borders, through experiences of (im)migrant labor, and for the survival and in the name of resilience of mixed status youth and families. When youth are positioned as researchers in their communities those practices and knowledges function pedagogically using strategic modalities, engaging specific languages, and situated within particular sociopolitical contexts.

Modes as Pedagogical Tools

A CCLPs framework also recognizes the significance of multimodal tools and literacies—those which emerge over a variety of texts, platforms, and practices which include, but are not limited to, written or oral texts, images, art, and digital media—and how the support meaning making and pedagogy (Vasudevan, DeJaynes, 2010; New London Group, 1996). In other words, a multimodal orientation towards literacies acknowledges the ways in which young people in particular draw on and bring together a variety of modes, such as written text, image, talk, sound, space, and embodied knowledge to communicate, make meaning, and create new possibilities for new meanings to be conveyed (Vasudevan, et. al, 2010). It is through these multiple modes that we can learn more about the identities, knowledges, and, as reflected in this study, the pedagogies of youth.

Language and Pedagogy

A CCLPs framework lends itself to examining, for example, the complex ways in which youth understand, create and strategically, consequentially, and sophisticatedly use language (Martinez & Monañó, 2016; Garcia 2017). Youth have the ability to use language in pedagogical ways, and within this context to engage community members and broader audiences in their

YPAR projects. In other words, the young people in this study “use their language, bodies, multimodal resources, tools and artifacts in dynamically entangled, interconnected and coordinated ways to make meaning” (Garcia, 2017; p. 258) and communicate critical knowledge from their positions as researcher-educators. Within a CCLPs framework, these projects reveal how youth pedagogically engage in “flexible and meaningful actions through which they feature their linguistic repertoire in order to communicate appropriately” (Velasco & Garcia, 2017, p. 7) to engage community members, in and outside CM, in their YPAR research.

Pedagogies as Sociopolitical Projects

CCLPs are situated within the sociopolitical and sociohistorical contexts from which oppressed communities navigate, resist, and survive. Latinx/Chicanx (im)migrant youth, in particular, carry knowledge that acknowledges border-crossing, exploitative migrant labor, dehumanizing anti-immigrant rhetoric, and unsustainable (im)migrant legislation (Pacheco, 2012; Stevens, 2011). At the same time, these young people also carry knowledge and literacies that reflect the sociopolitical teaching and learning that exists within their homes, families, and communities (Romero, Arce, & Cammarota, 2009; Sepúlveda, 2011). These literacies and knowledge, thus, shape the pedagogical strategies for which youth-educators like those at CM engage in their YPAR work.

Research Site, Participants, and Method[ology]

Comunidad Miravalle is located in a semi-rural suburb in the rocky mountain region. Most residents are of (im)migrant and mixed status families from Mexico. To qualify for residency in this community, the head of each household must work in either agriculture or landscape. While migrant labor is often understood as transient and seasonal, the citizenship status (or lack thereof) prevents many of the residents from crossing borders freely without the

risk of deportation. As such, many of the families have resided in CM for an extended period of time (ten years +). While many of the adults within the community were undocumented at the time data was collected, citizenship status amongst children and youth varied, with the largest population of undocumented residents 18 and under being high school aged youth. Over the three years I worked with the youth at CM, shifts in property management resulted in harsher enforcement of labor and [citizenship] documentation requirements, resulting in some families having to move or for older [legalized] children to become listed as heads of household and acquire jobs in agriculture or landscape.

In the middle of the housing community lies the *Miravalle* Learning Center, a space where children, youth, and adults are invited to participate in academic programming such as robotics, tutoring, art classes, health and fitness programs, and various fieldtrips. The county in which CM resides funds a few program directors and support staff to develop these academic initiatives, coordinate community events, and serve as school-community liaisons. Upon walking into the learning center, you can find students working at computers on homework or gaming, sitting next to tutors reading, mothers dancing in a fitness class, and youth in the state-of-the-art robotics room preparing for their next competition. While many of the youth's first language is Spanish, all consider themselves bilingual and use their robust language and literacies across their interactions with other young people, adult community members, and volunteers.

In the three years I worked with youth at the CM learning center, I lead the youth leadership programming. Working alongside the program directors this program evolved into a series of Ethnic Studies courses which were offered to all high school and middle school youth. During the academic year, the topics for these courses explored the various intersections of

education, race, class, gender, sexuality, and citizenship. Outside of teaching these courses, my role also included organizing college visits, support in scholarship and college applications, working as a teacher/school-student-parent liaison. My visits to CM were usually scheduled for once a week for a 4-hour period, though sometimes I would participate and attend other community events and programming at other times throughout the week. My continuous visibility and participation lead to strong relationships with many families in the community—especially those who had middle and high school aged youth who participated in the youth leadership programming.

YPAR at *Comunidad Miravalle*

In the summer of 2016, I proposed the idea of establishing a Youth Research Team that would work towards addressing issues within the community by collecting testimonios, narratives of marginalization and survivorship, from CM residents. All middle and high school students who participated in spring programming at the learning center were encouraged to apply to be on the team. At the end of the academic year I received 10 applications and all students were invited to participate. Nine students agreed to be on the team and committed to seven weeks of research. During these seven weeks, youth collected testimonios from their families and community members about their (im)migration histories and experiences living in the U.S. and within the CM housing community. Pedagogically, I facilitated this project drawing on Youth Participatory Action Research and Chicana feminist scholarship and practices. Throughout this process, the youth reflected on their own knowledge and experiences to guide their research.

The students and I met three days a week where we worked through the different phases of research, such as creation of research questions, review of literature, data collection and

analysis. All youth created and interacted with various texts and materials. This includes, for example, creating PowerPoints, websites, collages of data, recording and translating interviews and testimonios, research journal writing, and drawing. To record the students meaning making processes across modes I used audio recorders to record large group and small group conversations, video recording to document body positioning, gestures, and em[bodied] textual productions. I collected the journals, final projects, and any written work created by youth. As I coded data, I paid close attention to the themes that youth chose to explore in their final projects, how they discussed their YPAR project, and how they strategically made decisions to present their work. While my codes initially reflected the knowledges and literacies that emerged throughout the process, I reorganized my codes to support my theorizing of Community Cultural Literacy Pedagogies and the moments when youth drew on their community knowledge and literacies to act as both critical researchers and educators.

After six weeks of data collection, the youth research team used their final week of our YPAR project to share their findings. While we had originally planned to host a community event where the youth would share their research in a traditional presentation form, by the end of the project the young people unanimously agreed that they would much rather explore creative projects to showcase their work. The nine students divided into three groups and created three distinct projects. Group one (Juan, Joaquín, and Jaime) wanted to distribute information about their work through a pamphlet where they would highlight their research process, findings, and recommendations. Group two (Noemí and Lorena) created a composite narrative—a fictional narrative based on data collected from the community—which they contextualized through a PowerPoint on immigration experiences related to CM residents. Group three (Karen, Angelica, Daniel, and Edgar) created a website that featured their YPAR project with the goal of getting

other communities outside of CM to support these kinds of efforts and immigrant housing communities similar to CM. Youth shared their final projects twice—once at the monthly CM resident meeting, and again in front of CM learning center directors and county grant writer.

Findings: The Community Cultural Literacy Pedagogies of CM Youth

The findings below highlight how the CCLPs of youth were central to the design of their final projects and the pedagogical tools they employed to engage their community members and others in their work. For these young people, these CCLPs are reflective of their critical knowledge of border crossing, their educational aspirations, their deep commitment to community strength and success, and a robust linguistic repertoire that encourages youth to engage in pedagogies that extend well beyond translation, but instead a true desire to highlight their knowledge across languages. These findings, thus, contribute to the critical empirical work that highlights how youth draw on their cultural and experiential knowledge to engage in a multitude of literacy practices across contexts and extend well beyond those considered academic or school sanctioned. Further, as a product and reflection of the teaching and learning that takes place in communities and homes of (im)migrant families, these literacies function pedagogically in the youth's work in their projects.

In what follows, I organize my findings by the pedagogical approach that each group took up in their final project. In the first finding, I demonstrate group 1's commitment to learning, or the goal of their research being "*para aprender*". I highlight how youth in this group center learning in their pedagogy to discuss their research and engage in a teaching practice that draws on familiar artifacts in the community to discuss the community's commitment to education. In the second finding, I illustrate how group 2 uses community *testimonios* to highlight the power of narrative as a way to teach about the sociopolitical realities of (im)migration.

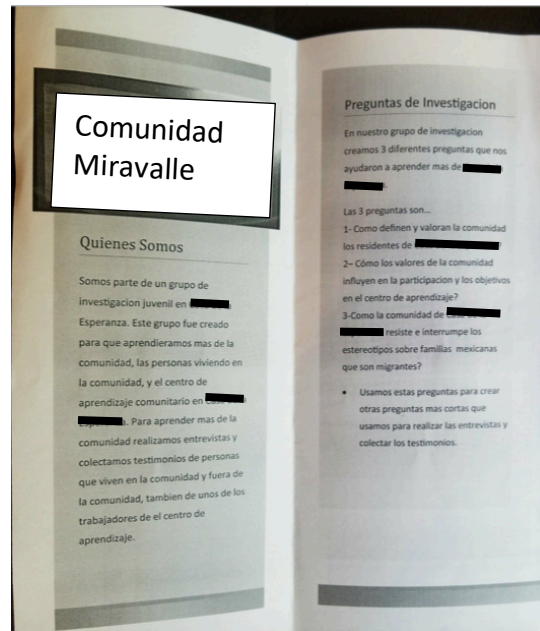
I emphasize how this group creatively uses the data they collected to craft a pedagogy rooted in the lived experiences of the CM community. In the third finding, I illustrate how young people in group 3 disrupt dominant ideas of (im)migrant communities to broader publics by centering a pedagogy of resistance in the ways in which they describe and create a digital image of CM. In doing so, this group resists damage-centered narratives of their community, and instead highlights the assets and strengths grounded their inquiry.

***“Para Aprender”*: Centering Learning**

As the youth discussed their ideas for their final projects, Pedro, Julian, and Joaquín contemplated the pros and cons about creating a brochure. On one end, as Joaquín pointed out, a brochure might just further add to the paper clutter at everyone’s house. Pedro however, said, “Well, what if we introduce the brochure to them at the resident meeting, so they know to look out for it?” This conversation evolved into the drafting of a tri-fold pamphlet, where the group of young men featured a description of who they were, as researchers, the research process, and their findings. In creating this this brochure youth draw on their community cultural knowledge and literacies to teach their community about research and invite them to engage in a pedagogy that centers learning, or *“para aprender”*.

The phrase *“para aprender”* or “to learn” was used frequently as youth discussed the goals and significance of their YPAR project at CM. In their brochure, Pedro, Julian, and Joaquín take up this idea to discuss the mission of their research and how that, in turn, shaped their research project.

Figure 3: Quienes somos & Research Questions Page of Group 1’s Brochure

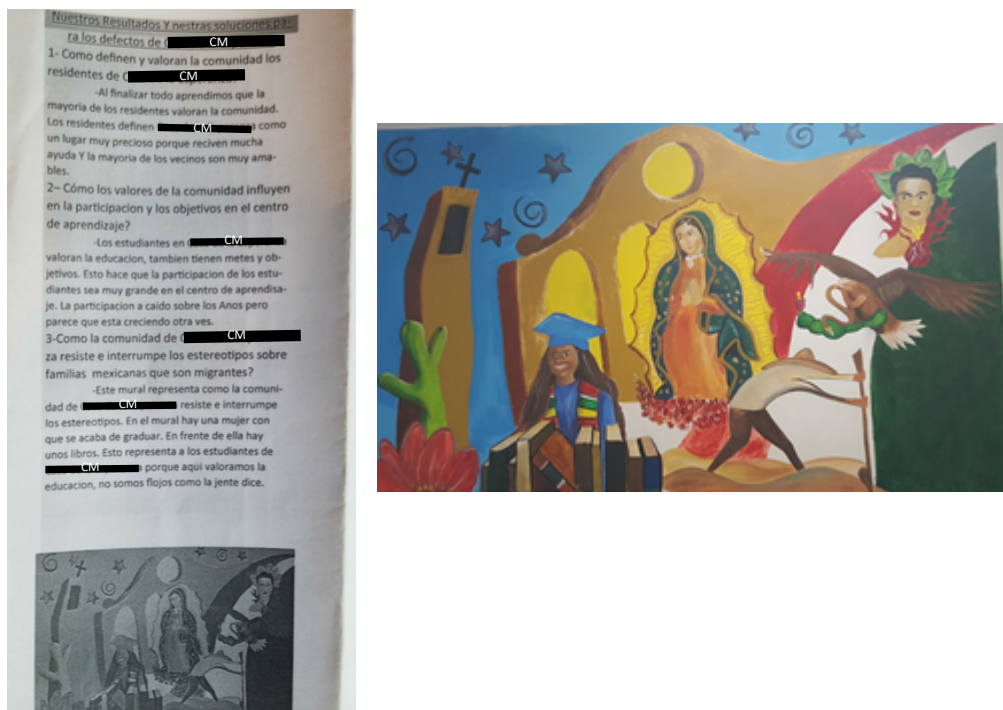


In the example above, the young men open their brochure with a statement answering the question “*Quienes Somos* [?] [who are we?]” As they describe the youth research team, they state that the purpose of creating such a group was to, first and foremost, learn. They state, “*Este grupo fue creado para que aprendieramos mas de la comunidad, y el centro de aprendizaje comunitario en CM.* [This group was created so that we could learn more about the community and the learning center at CM]” They continue mentioning that to pursue this research goal, or “*para aprender*”, they had to engage in particular methods to collect data. Specifically, that the research questions they crafted supported their commitment to center learning in their community-based research. The idea of *aprendiendo*, or the notion that research must be *para aprender*, is rooted in the CCPs of the youth of CM and how learning is active and a commitment of this (im)migrant community. Later in the brochure, Pedro, Julian, and Joaquín further demonstrate CM’s commitment to learning and, more specifically, education.

In our discussion of the significance of the murals in the learning center, Pedro began, “the mural is an answer to our third research question which asks, ‘how does CM resist and disrupt stereotypes about Mexican migrant families?’” The young men in the group continued to describe these stereotypes (i.e. lazy, uneducated, criminal) and how the mural portrays the strengths and resilience of these families. In the design of their brochure, the mural is an anchor image for the explanation of the research team’s third finding.

Figure 4: Findings page of Group 1’s Brochure

Figure 5: Image of Mural



Drawing on their CCLPs, Pedro and his group members identified how the mural, featured in the community gathering room—a place where holiday and graduation parties take place—resisted dehumanizing and racist discourses surround their (im)migrant community (Rosario-Ramos, Tucker-Raymond, & Rosario, 2017; Van Dahm, 2015). In the example above, the youth researcher-educators in this group strategically use and deconstruct the familiar art in

their community to further contextualize their findings about how their community resists dominant, deficit discourses about Latinx students—centering a desire for learning and passion for education. Their CCLPs, thus, engage art from within the community that reflects their community knowledge and literacies. This mural facilitated this group’s pedagogical decisions as youth researcher-educators within this process of not only sharing their findings, but teaching community members about research. Further, the use of image locates the wealth of knowledge and resilience that is featured on the walls of the community—almost as a visual reminder to community members of their worth, cultural wealth, and humanity—while emphasizing the importance of learning at CM. This brochure was designed with their community members in mind—their linguistic practices, their shared knowledge, and experiences as residents of CM—and their commitment to learning and education, or *para aprender*.

The Collective “We”: The Significance of Community *Testimonios*

Although all youth collected *testimonios* from residents in the community, Noemí and Lorena wanted to bring the data together to create a composite narrative (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001) to highlight the similarities across the experiences of members in their community.

Testimonios, while grounded in the experiences of individuals, are very much situated within larger sociopolitical contexts and speak to the oppressive systems that affect the lives of many.

The individual, “I,” in *testimonio* is always in a broader conversation of the collective, “we,”

(Elenes, 2000). Noemí and Lorena’s pedagogical decisions in their final project reflect a

pedagogy of *testimonio* and the powerful ways in which their knowledge and literacies are rooted in the sociopolitical and historical realities of their community.

Figure 6: Slide 2 of Group 2’s PowerPoint

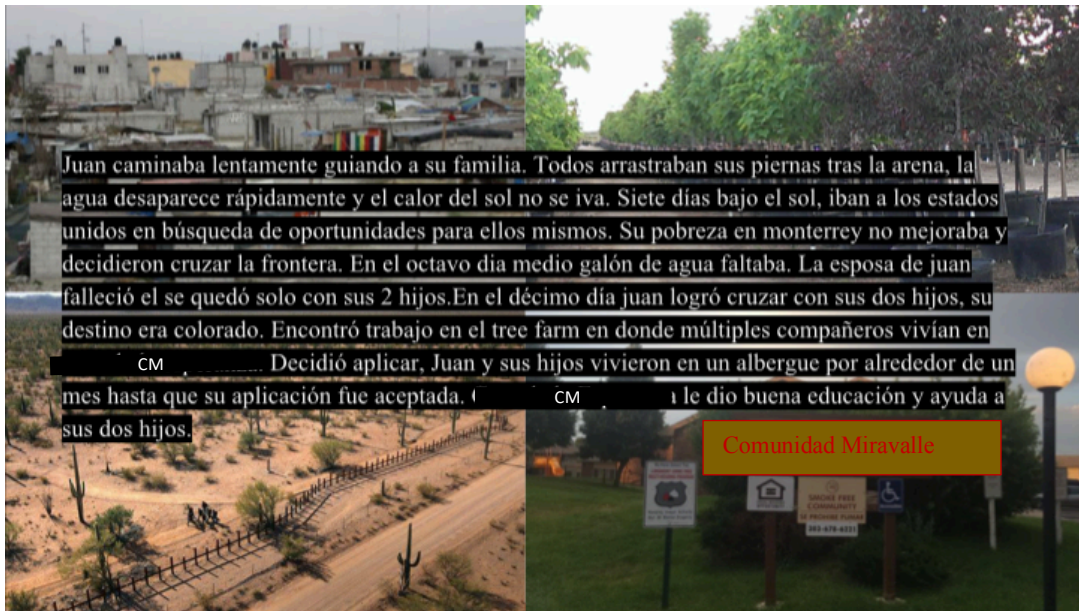
De que sera nuestra presentacion

Nosotras recolectamos información de personas alrededor de la comunidad con toda la información creamos un texto compuesto. Un texto compuesto es una combinación de múltiples historias. La historia que creamos demuestra muchas de las experiencias en las que personas que viven aquí pasaron.

[We collected information from people around the community. With all of the information, we created a composite story. A composite story is a combination of multiple narratives. The narrative we created demonstrates various experiences from the people who live here]

In the example above, Noemí and Lorena explain their methodology, or what they did to develop their *texto compuesto*. They outline how they drew on the data they collected within the community to create a narrative that represented the various experiences of the residents at CM. Further, they define what a composite story is and situate the definition within their project. In the next slide, they share their composite story, a fictional *testimonio* which centers on the experiences of (im)migrants crossing the border by foot and making their way to CM.

Figure 7: Slide 3 of Group 2's PowerPoint



Juan caminaba lentamente guiando a su familia. Todos arrastraban sus piernas tras la arena, la agua desaparece rápidamente y el calor del sol no se iba. Siete días bajo el sol, iban a los estados unidos en búsqueda de oportunidades para ellos mismos. Su pobreza en monterrey no mejoraba y decidieron cruzar la frontera. En el octavo día medio galón de agua faltaba. La esposa de Juan falleció el se quedó solo con sus 2 hijos. En el décimo día Juan logró cruzar con sus dos hijos, su destino era colorado. Encontró trabajo en el tree farm en donde múltiples compañeros vivían en CM. Decidió aplicar, Juan y sus hijos vivieron en un albergue por alrededor de un mes hasta que su aplicación fue aceptada. CM le dio buena educación y ayuda a sus dos hijos.

[Juan walked slowly, guiding his family. Everyone dragged their feet across the sand, the water disappeared quickly and the heat of the sun was ever-lasting. Seven days below the sun, they were on their way to the United States in search of opportunities for themselves. Their poverty in Monterrey was not getting any better so they decided to cross the border. On the eighth day, they needed a half gallon of water. Juan's wife died and he was left alone with his two children. On the tenth day Juan was able to cross the border with his children, his destination was Colorado. He found work at the tree farm where many of his co-workers lived at Comunidad Miravalle. He decided to apply [to live there], and Juan and his children lived in a shelter for about a month until the application was approved. Comunidad Miravalle provided a great education and support for his children.]

In this PowerPoint slide, Noemí and Lorena feature a captivating narrative that exposes the traumas of poverty and border crossing, describe a familiar process of community building, migrant labor, applying to live as a resident of CM, and showcase the benefits from the academic resources of the learning centers. With that, the young women strategically use images that symbolize key moments and experiences within the composite story. They not only include an image of the U.S.-Mexico border and an impoverished *colonia*, but also use images of “el tree farm,” where many of the residents at CM work, and the welcome sign at the front of the CM housing complex. In the design of their final project, the young *mujeres* use their CCLPs to

highlight the themes and experiences that emerged across their data and center community strengths, networks, and resiliency.

In describing their pedagogical decision to create this text, Noemí said,

When we combined a bunch of the data we collected and people's stories of how they came here and what they thought felt when they came here, I thought that was a good way to present our data because it shows people's different thoughts and experiences and like, and that people say that coming here is like a great experience, but sometimes it's not a great experience for everyone.

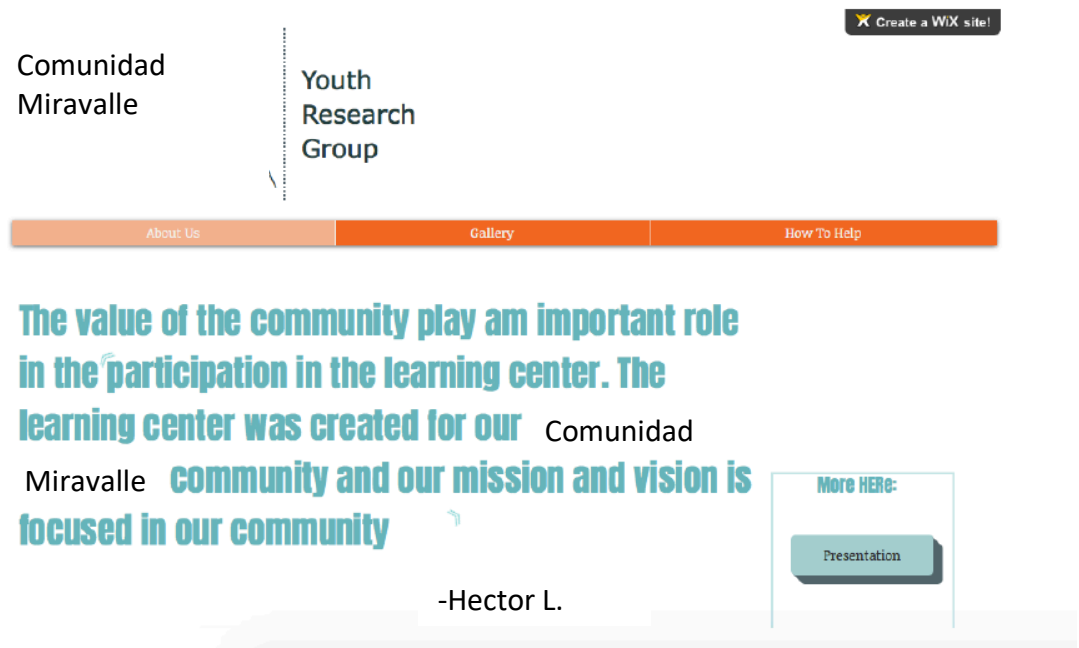
Through their composite story, Noemí and Lorena creatively and powerfully bring together the varied experiences of their community members, they draw specifically on the knowledge of their community to discuss the traumas, realities, and outcomes of border crossing and migrant labor of residents at CM. The creative weaving of *testimonios* evolved into a powerful narrative reflective of the lived realities, embodied knowledge, and community memory of members of CM. Their project, thus, reflects the ways in which testimonio functions as a pedagogical tool and is reflective of the CCLPs that are embedded within the CM community.

Teaching Broader Publics: Resisting Damage-Centered Narratives

In all three community projects, the CM youth researcher-educators take up pedagogical approaches that emphasize their community's humanity, resilience, and strength. The two findings above showcase what these pedagogies look like through modes created specifically for members of the CM community. The third group, Karina, Juana, Erik, and Enrique, however, decided to take their CCLPs to a public platform, through a website. The goals of this website were to share the importance of their research, findings, and community beyond CM. Instead of the focus of the website on the hardship and struggle or, even, the deficit discourses surrounding

(im)migrant communities, these youth researcher-educators emphasize the joys, assets, and goals of CM.

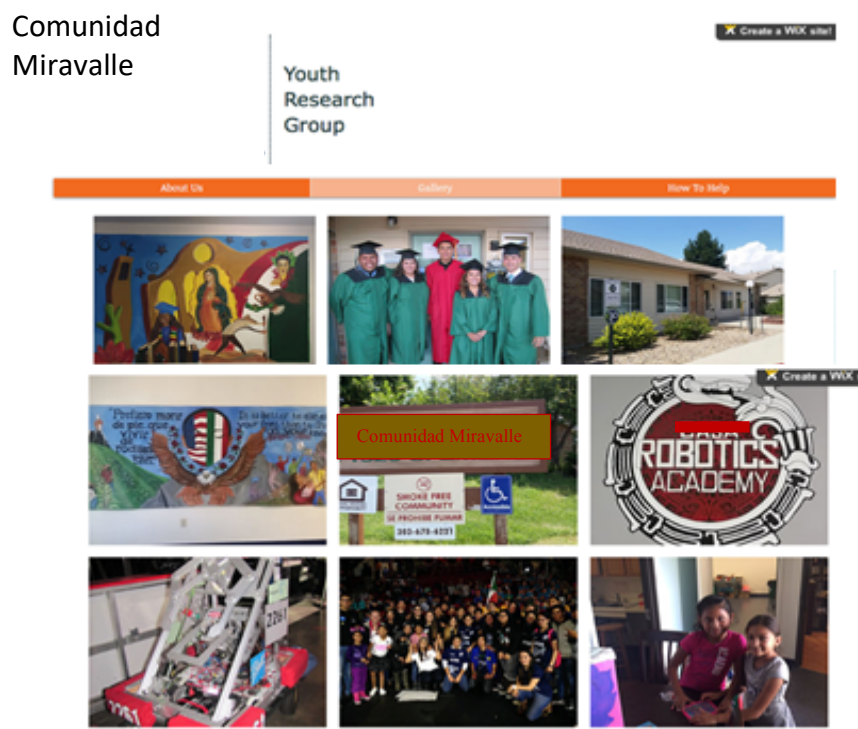
Figure 8: “About Us” Page of Group 3’s Website



The researcher-educators in this group make the pedagogical decision to use a quote from the data they collected to teach others about the value of community at CM on the opening, “About Us” page. Highlighting the words of Hector, the CM assistant director, the quote emphasizes goals and dreams of the community especially related to learning and designing an educational space considering the needs of the community. Further, this opening piece of data functions to set the stage for thinking of community as a collective goal, as Hector uses phrases like, “our CM community,” and “our mission and vision.” This first page of the website centers the community’s resilience and aspirations—a way to re-imagine educational spaces—and functions as a way to teach others about the significance of community to members of CM.

Highlighting the educational aspirations, community wealth, and the teaching and learning of the CM community became foundational in this group’s following page, specifically through their use of image. Their gallery page functions as a disruption to dominant, deficit notions of (im)migrant communities, especially as they exist in digital public spaces like the internet.

Figure 9: “Gallery” Page of Group 3’s Website



In the above example, we see how the young people in this group strategically use image as a pedagogical tool to reshape narratives and engage broader audiences in witnessing the wealth of knowledge, talent, and resources that exist within CM. Further, youth use images of the community, like the welcome sign and learning center, in addition to images of the powerful murals at CM which create alternative pictures to dominant ways in which communities like CM are captured. In many ways, this groups public pedagogy resists damage-centered narratives and

begins the conversation around (im)migrant communities on their own terms (Calderon, 2016; Tuck, 2009). Through images and quotes from their data, the youth curated, in many ways, a public image of their (im)migrant housing community through their eyes.

Additionally, this website captures the different ways youth in this study employed various pedagogical tools, based on their audiences. When I asked Karina, a member of the website group, why they chose to create their site in English, she said, “Honestly, I think we just wrote it in English to start off with but we never discussed what language we should’ve written it. We did know that our audience was gonna be targeted towards people outside of CM though.” In her explanation, Karina explains how their groups’ process began with English in the design without discussion but became consciously important to them as they considered audience. They understood that the nature of their project, available to anyone, literally, in the world meant that the audience of this site would be people outside of CM community.

Discussion and Conclusion

Drawing on Chicana feminist perspectives alongside critical literacies and YPAR, this study anchors youth’s multimodal compositions in a CCLP framework to examine how young people in an Latinx (im)migrant community participate and construct literacy pedagogies that reflect their community’s knowledge, experiences, and needs. Specifically focusing on the final multimodal projects of the youth from their YPAR project, the findings highlight how young people engaged, created, and drew on their CCLPs in their presentation of their research. Their CCLPs reflect their knowledge from and across border/lands, a commitment to resistance, rich linguistic practices, and practices of teaching and learning within their families, homes, and communities. These findings contribute to the ongoing conversations in literacy education that

emphasize the significance of youth in educational experiences where youth can draw on their cultural and experiential knowledge to engage in a variety of literacies across multiple contexts.

Far too often than not, youth of color, and (im)migrant youth in particular, find themselves in educational spaces that silence, dismiss, and/or overlook their robust knowledge, language, and literacies (Abu El-Haj, 2009; Calderon, 2014; Ghiso & Campano, 2013). In the midst of neoliberal and pervasive colonial practices and policies in U.S. schools, the opportunity to see the ways in which youth engage in meaningful and transformative teaching and learning experiences becomes smaller and smaller. Yet, as the findings of this study imply, youth have the expertise to engage in powerful pedagogical practices in their community when they are positioned as holders and producers of knowledge, and as educators. As Wissman, Staples, Vasudevan, and Nichols (2015) argue in their comparative piece of various projects examining the literacies of youth, bringing a pedagogical lens to work with youth in literacy education allows us to consider the expansive ways youth are creators. This lens, thus, calls attention to the ways in which youth engage in critical productions, co-create spaces, and artifacts that are reflective of their literate lives, identities, and experiences. Community Cultural Literacy Pedagogies is a framework that can be one way to answer this call as it functions as a theoretical lens that acknowledges the strategic, sophisticated, and powerful ways in which young people engage in pedagogical work as researcher-educators.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

After a month of being in Chicago, I found myself back at CM sitting in the director's office with Karina and Aurelio, *platicando*. In this *plática*, we caught up on life's highs and lows and discussed the big picture of our work together. I wanted to know their thoughts about their participation in the YLC and how their educational experiences at CM were, possibly, different than at school. Karina, positioned as a high achieving student at her high school, said, "I go to school, and I have to try to learn things. Here, I already feel smart." I know Karina can also speak to the academic rigor of our ethnic studies seminars, action research project, and engagement in the community through our work together. However, her quote gets at the possibilities of a pedagogy that centers home, familial, and community knowledge. Karina especially highlights the impact that this kind of pedagogy can have on a student's academic identity and how they think of themselves as holders and producers of knowledge. Aurelio nodded in agreement and added, "It's different because being a student here is not even like being a student...not a student, but family." Here, Aurelio emphasizes the significance of creating spaces for teaching and learning that are grounded in love, trust, and strong bonds—like a family.

Together, Karina and Aurelio point to critical issues we face as educators for thinking about the importance of students' educational experiences that take place outside of the traditional classroom. Specifically, their words speak to ways in which we might be able to re-imagine literacy pedagogies in out-of-school learning spaces so that they provide opportunities

for young people to see and co-construct their knowledge, center their experiences, and welcome the multitude of identities that come to bear on their learning. This re-envisioning and re-organization can be, without a doubt, a critical shift that can lead to young people and educators co-creating more transformative educational opportunities in classrooms and schools.

In this concluding chapter, I review the key takeaways of this dissertation, specifically speaking to the pedagogical possibilities I see within literacy education. I conclude this chapter with by sharing where youth have taken their knowledge through a discussion of outcomes. Specifically, I discuss how this kind of work merits a re-consideration of outcomes to resist dominant ideas of success in education in order to make room for a variety of ways youth enact agency in their academic and life trajectories and resistance. While I hoped this chapter would move me to make concrete recommendations for practice, pedagogy, and policy, I find myself asking more questions. This chapter is, in many ways, a starting point for more conversations and inquiry pathways that must follow from this study.

Key Takeaways: Chicana Feminisms, YPAR, & Literacy Education

In this dissertation, I offer a lens for how we look at, think about, and work with youth from (im)migrant communities. Specifically, I highlight the ways in which Chicana feminisms and YPAR are critical frameworks for thinking about the pedagogical possibilities within literacy education. I argue that these are powerful lenses and tools because they center on knowledge from the margins, the experiences and voices of youth, and the sophisticated ways in which young people engage, produce, and play with literacies. In chapter two, for example, I discuss the empirical and theoretical work of scholars across the field of education and within the traditions of literacy, Chicana feminisms and education, and Youth Participatory Action Research—outlining a framework to situate my findings. These works emphasize the

relationship between knowledge, language, identity, and literacy, especially for youth of color. In concert with this theoretical framework, I give methodological insights through Chicana feminisms that situate my own positionality, knowledge, and cultural intuition within this dissertation study and my approach to working with young people in the CM community. I outline how my experiences, personal history, and relationships with the youth at CM guided my praxis and how I engaged in participatory research. I describe how *pláticas* and *testimonios* not only served as pedagogies for literacy, but also methodological tools that resist dominant, colonial approaches to educational research.

In article #1, I demonstrate how youth can use *pláticas* as a platform for co-creating knowledge and critiquing dominant paradigms of worth and deservingness of (im)migrants. I emphasize how youth draw from their experiences of border-crossing, being children of migrant laborers, and their precarious relationships with the institution of citizenship to engage in the messy discourses that surround them and their community. Their reflections shed light on the problematic dichotomies that exist around (im)migrants and the need for new, humanizing ways to discuss how young people might enter these conversations about their lived realities. Article #2 focuses on the contributions of the young women in this study to examine raced-gendered knowledge and literacies. I theorize *mujerista* literacies as literacies that exist within feminist projects of social justice. These *mujerista* literacies expose the ways in which young Chicanas/Latinas use their knowledge to disrupt White-heteronormative discourses, engage in intersectional feminisms, and self-reflection. These literacies are complex, fluid, and highlight how young women especially develop a critical, feminist literacies. Article #3 emphasizes how student's home and community knowledge and literacies inform the pedagogical processes they take up when they participate in YPAR projects. I theorize these pedagogical practices as

Community Cultural Literacy Pedagogies (CCLPs) because they display the complex ways in which youth take up language, draw on their home and familial knowledge, and center their community's experiences. These CCLPs are strategic and reflect the needs of the broader CM community.

The over-all contribution of this dissertation is that when we engage young people in pedagogical approaches that emerge from Chicana feminisms & Youth Participatory Action Research, both educators and students can see the knowledge and literacies youth hold, co-construct with each other, and share across their families and communities. Each of the findings of this dissertation take up *pláticas* and/or *testimonios* as pedagogical tools for literacy education and highlight how these pedagogical approaches leverage and affirm student literacies and knowledge. For the youth at CM, this is critical knowledge about immigration, citizenship, illegality, raced-gendered and feminist literacies, as well as community cultural knowledge specifically related to being members of an (im)migrant housing community. These pedagogical tools, thus, push on dominant notions of literacy, specifically limiting and privileging print, and instead encourage educators to re-think literacies, literacy pedagogy, and how youth engage in literacies as learners, researchers, and as pedagogues in projects of teaching and learning.

As demonstrated throughout the findings, these pedagogical tools support a disruption in what has largely been constructed as a binary between home knowledge and school/or academic knowledge. As can be traced across the three findings manuscripts, these pedagogical tools, specifically through YPAR praxis, make visible how youth's literacies are informed by a variety of spaces, genres, outlets, and practices for meaning making. All of these come to bear when we acknowledge the creative ways youth engage in literacies. It is also important to emphasize how even in spaces like the CM learning center, within a community and through leadership that

recognizes the resilience and resistance of Latinx (im)migrant families, this binary of academic/school and home exists and persists in ways that often privileges traditional schooling practices—which we know to be too often dehumanizing, situated within deficit frames, and silencing to youth like those in this dissertation study (Valencia, 2004; Delgado Bernal & Aleman, 2015).

The findings in this study also serve as a call to continue re-thinking and re-organizing teaching and learning opportunities for youth in out-of-school spaces so that they can investigate and share the tremendous wealth of knowledge and literacies that exist within their homes, families, and communities. Further, the youth’s projects and the pedagogies of my study demonstrate that these knowledges and literacies need not be left outside of their traditional schooling and academic futures. In the current state of U.S. public education, we, as educators, are obligated to create alternative spaces for teaching and learning for young people, especially those who find themselves on the margins of society across lines of race, gender, class, sexuality, and citizenship (or lack thereof). We need not replicate school, and instead re-imagine better educational spaces that exist beyond school walls. At the same time, we can strive to share knowledge from those spaces that can inform and impact the reimagining of what is possible within schools. A starting point may be to re-position young people in our classrooms—recognizing and seeing them as teachers as much as they are students.

While this study focuses on the literacies, knowledges, and pedagogies of youth at CM, it is important to consider the critical role that adults—learning center directors, staff, parents, and older siblings—play in shaping the meaning making process of young people. Both YPAR and Chicana feminist perspectives offer theoretical lenses for considering the possibilities of intergenerational learning and how youth and adults can engage in the co-creation of literacies,

exchange knowledge across generations, and create new possibilities for thinking about literacy pedagogies within school and community spaces. For example, in the YPAR project, youth collected *testimonios* from adults in the community and together, they engaged in a literacy pedagogy that emphasizes the sociopolitical realities of CM. My dissertation provides a framing for thinking about this kind of literacy pedagogy and leaves space for further work on the ways in which youth and adults engage and practice literacies together. This work is critical in the field of literacy education as we continue to expand ideas of literacy and how literacies are cultivated in the homes and communities of Chicanx/Latinx young people.

Where are they now? A Discussion of Outcomes

As I have presented this work over the past few years, I am often asked, what was the impact of this study? What were the outcomes? Are these students in college now? Once someone said, “it must have been great for these kids to have you as a role model.” There are many threads to these statements and questions. For one, they speak to traditional, colonial notions of research, which require visible, measurable “impacts” in order to determine the worth of research, especially participatory work with young people. On another front, they reflect a desire to highlight the potential powerful effects of a study like mine for addressing the continued underrepresentation and push out of Latinx, (im)migrant young people, like those at CM, in U.S. K-16 educational institutions. What I find most troubling, however, is that questions and statements like these perpetuate (im)migrant exceptionalism and meritocratic notions of success. As I think about how I’ve responded to these questions and the heartbreak I often feel after, I’m left wondering, how do we emphasize the worth of youth’s lives outside of these dominant paradigms? How do we ascribe value to our projects by showcasing the

powerful knowledge, literacy, and agency of youth, even when some of them continue to resist traditional schooling?

I begin my discussion of outcomes by acknowledging and providing full disclosure that the emphasis of my work with the young people in the YLC was college preparation. That goal was important to the leaders at CM and, for me, I centered that aim within the critical understanding that Latinx students in the U.S. continue to be pushed out of their schools through oppressive curriculum, pedagogy, and policy. Thus, throughout my work, my hope was always to fuel young people's aspirations to apply to and later attend college. It was not until the end of my work in the YLC that I was forced to reconcile that goal with the other hopes driving my collaborations with youth. This was especially the case for the young people in this study, such as Aurelio and Miguel, who continuously and persistently made it clear that college was not their end goal, despite being part of a program that emphasized college-going culture through ethnic studies content and participatory action research.

Consider the following memo, where I reflect on my interaction with Miguel.

After one month of being away from CM, I knocked on the door of Miguel's family's house. I had not seen Miguel since before summer programming and only knew of how he was doing in his alternative school through the director, his mom, and his brothers. He opened the screen door, squeezed outside and closed the door behind him. I hug him tight and tell him that I've missed him. I notice an image of a clock on his soon-to-be complete tattoo arm sleeve and ask him about it. He said, "the clock represents time and how I don't want to waste it. You know, I didn't really use my time wisely. I think about my kids and I want them to do things different and not waste time." I pause as I'm almost at a

complete loss for words because it's as if I don't even recognize the young man standing in front of me. I say, "that's beautiful. I love it. You know, it's not too late, you still have time. You're young. You can still apply to college." He shrugs his shoulders and smiles at me and says "I don't want to go to college." Again, I pause and for a split second I actually hear him and I hear all the times he told me he doesn't want to go to college and all the times I argued with him about it. He continues, "I want to go to school to be a mechanic." I say, "ok mijo, that sounds good."

Miguel, like a few other young people in this study, is undocumented. But unlike Karina and Keven who were supported in school and now find themselves in college, the injustices of oppressive schooling and anti-immigrant xenophobia have weighed on Miguel in different ways. Like Miguel, Aurelio is another student who continuously emphasized his resistance to schooling. Aurelio often told me he had no desire to leave his family and go off to college. Always, often jokingly, he pointed out my financial shortcomings despite my having accumulated years of post-secondary education. Despite their thriving participation in CM programming like robotics and the YLC, these youth's experiences in educational institutions have chipped away at them, leading to a practice of resistance to continued participation in those institutions. Instead, they articulate to create alternative futures for themselves—outside of the educational spaces we privilege and force them to navigate (see Delgado Bernal & Solorzano, 2001).

Our young people have navigated and survived racist education systems—in addition to many other oppressive institutions that continue to dehumanize them (Coles, 2016). Why do we encourage them to fight, knowing full and well the effects these battles have on the body and

psyche (Smith, Solorzano, & Yosso, 2002)? Why do we still use education, college aspirations, and ability to graduate as a measure of worth for our young people? How can we recognize and value the kinds of agency youth demonstrate when they understandably opt out of continuing with traditional education? How can we resist and emphasize the beauty of youth's lives outside of meritocratic notions of success?

So, what were the outcomes of this study? There are many. Karina is in her first year in junior college where she finds herself in classes where she can recognize texts she's already read from our ethnic studies courses. Pedro is active on his college campus and is working towards being a high school teacher, understanding the importance of community in first-generation college student's paths. Ricardo attends a large metropolitan university in the city, continuously applying for scholarships for undocumented students and where he speaks to the significant impact ethnic studies has had on his trajectory as an aspiring engineer. Aurelio works a busy schedule in trucking transportation industry so that he can make extended trips to Durango, Mexico with his family. Miguel graduated from his alternative school and now works as a landscaper. Noemí is in high school, preparing for a study abroad trip to Europe. Joaquín tells me he is living life to the fullest and Enrique is working hard in school to one day support his parents. Juana works at a local green house, and enjoys writing goals for her personal life, one of those always being making her parents happy. Lorena is in Latino Dance Club *y poniendole las pillas* because she wants to go to a good college. Julian keeps busy with school and soccer. Erik is still playing baseball competitively while in high school. All these outcomes are valuable.

Research in Nepantla: Reflections on Sustainability and Realities of Leaving

My relationship as a researcher with CM community, and with the youth in particular, was rooted in the idea of reciprocity—even with the looming reality that, at the end of it all, my

work at CM could never *truly* be reciprocal or yield outcomes that are inherently equal. As I wrapped up my research at CM, I contemplated the messy, uneasy, and difficult politics of leaving the community as a researcher who is committed to engaging in humanizing research and the considering the ways in which are projects may or may not be sustainable (Paris, 2014). In this section I discuss these realities, responsibilities, and relationships—in hope that we can not only be real and vulnerable about our work with(in) communities but also address a real silence around these issues.

At the end of the summer YPAR project, youth shared their research and recommendations with the community. The director and assistant director seemed excited and committed to collaborate with youth and discussed having a follow-up meeting to get to work. Although I would not be there for this follow-up meeting, I was confident that the director would follow through. When I visited CM a month later, I met with the director I asked how the meeting went and what outcomes surfaced. She told me that no one showed up for the meeting, even though it was jointly planned, and that there had not been any follow up by the youth. While I understood that it was the last month of summer—the academic year was around the corner, and many of the youth had new part-time jobs, were beginning their first semesters at college, and commitments from other activities—I was still hopeful that something would come from the work we did, despite my lack of physical presence. At the same time, I also realized that the projects I did with youth had emerged from longstanding relationships—a deep understanding of each other’s lives, interests, fears, and joys. This moment sparked an ongoing reflection on the significance of relationships and how important they are to sustaining projects in communities.

In chapter 3, I offer the idea of methodological nepantlas—or moments where we, as researchers, find ourselves in spaces of tension, ideological clashes, and critical reflection (Andzaldúa, 2002). Again, I find myself in nepantla as I consider a critical question offered by Mangual Figueroa (2014) in her own methodological reflections. She asks, “Have we acknowledged and fulfilled our responsibility to the communities who have welcomed us? Have we—in both our own opinion and the opinion of the participants—fulfilled the commitments we made at the beginning of our study?” (p.129). I have no definitive answers. Instead, I have many questions that I hope will further push critical scholars to considering the ways in which we have honored our commitments to communities and the responsibility we have once we leave. How can we create sustainable projects in spaces and with communities with the full recognition of the demands of the academy, and always with the understanding that we, as principal investigators and collaborators, will not always be there? What tools are necessary for this work? How can we be honest and vulnerable about our work with(in) communities? And, what are our responsibilities to young people, in particular, once we have left our community research sites?

Nepantla is a productive space for contemplating these questions as well as re-imagining what leaving looks like, what it can be, and what it can feel like. Leaving the communities who have welcomed us, collaborated with us, and trusted us with their experiences, truths, and narratives, does not have to be the end. While there is little discussion around “exiting” our research sites—likely because of the continued heteronormative, western, and frankly, cold approaches to research still valued in the academy—we, as critical scholars, not only have the opportunity, but the obligation to practice reciprocity and encourage a conversation on sustainability. We are responsible for reckoning with these methodological tensions. I offer nepantla as a space to do this work. Nepantla, I argue, has the potential to be a place where our

most vulnerable reflections surface and where we are required to make sense of them, engaging in a process of knowledge production. In nepantla, we have an opportunity to theorize and look towards new, more humanizing methodological practices.

Closing Thoughts

Now, more than ever, we need to acknowledge young people's voices, their pedagogies, and myriad ways they engage their literacies in sociopolitical discussions, movements, and lived realities. As we are witnessing with the strong, brilliant, and amazing youth of Parkland, Florida who have just survived a school shooting, young people continue to lead us in social change and intersectional activism—especially considering how these students are now modeling practices for collaborating with your organizers in both the Dreamer and Black Lives Matter movements. At the same time, we also need to consider the varied ways youth participate in disrupting oppressive structures, activism, self-preservation and how surviving and resisting looks different for all young people. As educators, activists, and adult allies, we need to think about the how we support young people in these various projects, despite how different they may look in practice. This dissertation asks that we honor the messiness, listen to youth, and do the work that matters alongside them. We, of course, need to collaborate with young people to create better futures. But we are also morally and politically obligated to take up the in-the-moment, critical work that reminds young people that they can change the world in what whatever ways that our meaningful to their lives, their families, and their communities. In doing this, we show them that they matter and that we need their voices.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Interview Protocol

CM YPAR Summer 2016 Interview Protocol

Interviewee:

Date:

Time:

Can you begin by telling me a bit about your experiences on this research team up to this point?

I want to hear the best thing about being on this research team and the worse team...

Thinking about all the discussions we've had over the past 7 weeks, which conversations stand out to you most?

How are our research team meetings similar and/or different from school?

How do you use your mind when you are here?

How does your participation here compare to your participation at school?

Let's think back to the beginning of the summer when we had our very first meeting when we discussed the goals of the team, the schedule, and the payment, what were you thinking about then? How is this project different from what you envisioned?

Tell me about the project your group is working on, how did that come about?

What parts did you contribute to?

- Follow up questions on specific things

How did/do you feel about sharing this with the community and other communities?

While you were collecting data (interviewing, collecting testimonios), was there anything that surprised you? Anything you found out that was particularly interesting?

Which of your interviews or testimonios stood out to you the most; which the most memorable? Tell me a little more...

How have your opinions or views of this community changed? Or stayed the same? Tell me about that...

Can you say a little bit about what you feel your relationship is to this community? What does it mean to be a community member from CM?

I'm really trying to figure out how to write about the community in an honest way, over the course of the 7 weeks, there were a lot of discussions of the not so good things about C, what do you make of that?

How do we talk about the issues at CM, considering the political climate with Trump, the stereotypes he is perpetuating about communities like this one?

Appendix B. Youth Research Team Agenda Example

Youth Research Team Agenda July 18th, 2016

11:00-11:05 Sign in

11:05-11:15 Ice breaker & Announcements

11:15-11:30 Field diary

Think about our research questions:

- How do the residents of CM define and value the community?
- How do the values of the community influence participation and goals in the learning center?
- How does the CM community resist and disrupt stereotypes about Mexican migrant families?

Now think about all the text data and photo data that you have read, sorted through, and coded. In your opinion, what do you think our findings are for these research questions?

11:30-12:30 Group work

- Each group will work on their respective project showcasing the findings
- At the end of the group work time each group needs to submit a half page status report:
 - What did your group accomplish today?
 - What still needs to get done?
 - What findings is your group featuring in your project?

12:30-1:00 Small group discussions

Questions:

- 1.) What have you learned from conducting this research?
- 2.) Why do you think this research is important to the community? What about to other communities (Longmont, Latinos, Mexican migrant workers)?
- 3.) What do you want to see happen with this research? What should be the next steps?
- 4.) How will this research live on after Friday?

Appendix C. Sample Activity: Methods Scenarios

Scenario #1

A group of Latino students from a predominately White suburban community (like Longmont) feel that they are not receiving the same educational opportunities at White students within the community. There are two high schools in the community, one is mostly Latino students while the other is predominately White students. This group of students is going to bring their concerns to the school board at the next meeting. They need to use research to support their argument and demand change for their education.

Use the following questions to guide your thinking as you prepare the skit:

- 1.) What kind of research methods are necessary and appropriate for this research?
- 2.) Think of some examples of how you might design your tools for data collection (what questions would you ask on a survey? In an interview? etc.)
- 3.) What are some challenges that could arise in data collection?

Scenario #2

A group of students is concerned that their community is suffering from health diseases (diabetes, eating disorders like obesity) related to nutrition. They identify their neighborhood as a food desert (a community that does not have convenient access to fresh, affordable food) and want to bring attention to the severity of the issue. This group of students is going to be presenting in front of their City Council and need to use research to support their argument and demand change for their community.

Use the following questions to guide your thinking as you prepare the skit:

- 1.) What kind of research methods are necessary and appropriate for this research?
- 2.) Think of some examples of how you might design your tools for data collection (what questions would you ask on a survey? In an interview? etc.)
- 3.) What are some challenges that could arise in data collection?

Scenario #3

A group of students from Arizona is holding a community forum to bring awareness about the attack on undocumented immigrants through the policy SB 1070 (Show your papers law). Since this law was put into place, Mexicans in Arizona are required to show proof of citizenship during regular traffic stops. The students are developing a presentation on their research about the policing of people of color and undocumented people in particular. They hope to provide their community members with tips and strategies to stay safe and avoid deportation.

Use the following questions to guide your thinking as you prepare the skit:

- 1.) What kind of research methods are necessary and appropriate for this research?

- 2.) Think of some examples of how you might design your tools for data collection (what questions would you ask on a survey? In an interview? etc.)
- 3.) What are some challenges that could arise in data collection?

Appendix D. Sample Activity: Murals

Mural Activity

- 1.) Choose a mural in the community room that really speaks to you and draws your attention
- 2.) Take a few minutes to think about and jot down what you know about it (when was it painted? Who painted it?)
- 3.) Now, think about the themes that emerge through the mural. Write down a few notes about where you see the themes, and the evidence located within the mural
- 4.) Finally, You have two options for this writing project:
 - 1.) Create a short story about this mural
 - A storyline? Who are the characters? What is their live history?
 - 2.) Create a poem about this mural
 - What are the themes in this mural?
 - What do they mean to you, your family, your community, your life?

Appendix E. Sample Activity YPAR in Real Life

YPAR in Real Life

STATION #1: VOYCE Chicago	STATION #2: Da Town Researchers	STATION #3: Polling for Justice
<p>How are the youth project VOYCE using Participatory Action Research to create change?</p> <p>Why were student voices important for the research around drug out rates in Chicago?</p> <p>From this video, how do you think youth researchers can impact their community?</p>	<p>*STOP VIDEO AT 6:25</p> <p>What was the issue or topic selected by the youth of Oakland? Why do you think this was important to them?</p> <p>What were the findings of their research project? What did they use as evidence, to "prove" their research?"</p> <p>From this clip put together by these youth, what are some important parts of Youth Participatory Action Research?</p>	<p>*STOP VIDEO AT 5:50</p> <p>From the short clip you've seen, what is the mission of polling for justice? What is their research problem or topic?</p> <p>How does the skit from the video make us question who really has knowledge and is considered an expert on issues related to youth?</p> <p>Why should youth be central to research about youth or about the communities that youth come from?</p> <p>What did you find important from this video clip?</p>