

Review of *Latina Leadership: Language and Literacy Education across Communities.*

Michael Caballero

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Latina Leadership draws on Latina narratives to challenge the dominant discourses in rhetoric and composition and to promote feminist mentorship, activism, and literacies in Latina communities. The collection uses the voices and experiences of women of color as tools to break racial, gendered, and pedagogical barriers that have left their communities underrepresented and underserved in the education system while encouraging coalitions that support, empower, and amplify one another. The book comprises eleven chapters divided into three parts (“Part 1: Identity and Self- (Re) Identification,” “Part 2: Research, Recovery, and Learning from Our Histories,” “Part 3: Pedagogies and Mentorship,” and an afterword). Each chapter consists of narratives from the authors and challenges the dominant higher education practices by sharing counter-stories and offering mentorship practices to support their communities. Most of all, this work serves as a call to help Latina scholars reclaim their histories and power and create bridges of solidarity and community with one another.

Part 1: Identity and Self- (Re) Identification:

In “Advocating Comradismo” Ana Milena Ribero and Sonia C. Arellano introduce a feminist mentorship approach called “comradismo,” utilizing the knowledge of Latina academics and their experiences in mentoring as a framework for arguing that academic scholars must “attend to the specific needs of black, Indigenous, people of color to recruit and retain diverse voices in the discipline,” such as strength, empathy, and access to a network of support for personal and external crises that may arise (Ribero and Arellano 15). Comradismo is structured by addressing needs that have been neglected or ignored completely. This approach provides space for Latina academics to share their unique experiences and challenge both hegemonic structures and traditional scholarship, which remain largely dominated by white cis-gendered male voices.

Michael Caballero is a master’s student in Technical Communication at Texas Tech University. My research interests are focused on literacy LGBTQ+ studies. I will never forget when I first took a course in literacy studies as an undergraduate student. The class opened my eyes to the diverse literacy practices of Latinx communities, as well as other communities of color, and how language, identity, and power intersect. My goal is to help further the conversations surrounding representation, identity, and social justice in the fields of composition and literacy and LGBTQ+ studies, with an emphasis on communities that have been marginalized. Outside of school, I enjoy hiking, traveling, and going on road trips with my family.

In “Beyond Skin Deep,” Blanca Gabriela Caldas Chumbes examines Latina identity and the need for self-reflection in academia to determine what roles transnational Latina scholars play in the academic hierarchical structure of rhetoric and composition, including their own racial, cultural, and linguistic identities and how they navigate through the colonial and neocolonial ideological practices that exist in predominantly white institutions. Chumbes introduces the issue of ‘whiteness’ and how it presents better opportunities for some Latina scholars who have fairer skin compared to Latinas of darker skin, highlighting how institutional colorism prevents many Latina and BIPOC from achieving equal ranks and opportunities in academia as opposed to their white Latina counterparts.

Laura Gonzales’ chapter, “Beyond and within My Skin,” also focuses on Latin identity and highlights the institutional racism and oppression she experienced as a bilingual student and how this transitioned into her experiences in graduate school. Gonzales points out the importance of her role as a Latina scholar because it allows her to build coalitions with other women of color in and beyond academic arenas (Gonzales 63). She highlights how mentorship models that give Latinas the freedom to share their testimonios of their experiences help to form “recursive spatial movements” that allow Latina women to understand their identities and their roles as Latinas in academia, as well as to build friendships and mentorship coalitions with one another (Gonzales 64).

Lorena Guitierrez’s chapter, “Research and Raíces,” examines language, literacy, identity, and education of linguistically diverse communities by tracing her family roots in migrant farm work and her experiences growing up as a bilingual student. She introduces a literacy practice called language brokering, which she practiced growing up by translating English for her Spanish-speaking family members, and recounts negative interactions that they encountered while speaking Spanish in public places—such as being ordered to “speak English” by an officer while applying for federal assistance (Gutierrez 78). Her experience is an example of racist nativism, which discourages linguistically diverse people from speaking their own language and pressures them into adopting the dominant language. Through her research of her literacy background, she recognizes that Latina students are also subjected to this type of racism in schools and institutions.

Part 2: Research, Recovery, and Learning from our Histories

Stefania Baldiva and Kendall Leon’s chapter, “Building Stories and Changing Spaces,” encourages their mentoring approach that draws on creating counterstories in university archives to facilitate changes in academic institutions. This form of mentoring focuses on the following key areas: realizing that stories can inspire change, creating changes in institutions begins by changing the stories in the institutions, and building empowerment and coalitions that help students connect with their communities (Baldiva and Leon 99). Such mentoring approaches also lend the way to producing anti-racist practices in the field of composition and rhetoric by challenging the white, cis-heteropatriarchal ideologies (meaning master narratives that define the experiences of marginalized communities through power and collection) that currently dominate archives by building records of their own experiences.

Christine Garcia's chapter, "The Chingona Interviews," utilizes storytelling by interviewing two Latina academics, focusing on women of color trying to navigate the higher education system academically and professionally in composition and rhetoric fields. She argues that counterstorytelling is necessary to give Latinas the autonomy to share how they navigate through and adapt to the environment, institutions, and communities they occupy. Through her interviewing process, Garcia reinforces that counterstories are an effective way of building Latina empowerment and community, and listening to testimonios and sharing them among Latina leaders is a meaningful way to create institutional changes. Thus, the sharing of counterstorytelling is also imperative in giving Latina academics a safe space in which they cannot simply exist to survive but use the messages within their stories and culture to combat stereotypes and bring attention to how they have been oppressed by the dominant culture.

Michelle Hall Kells' chapter "Latina Leadership and Lessons Learned from Women of Local 890," discusses public scholarship and activist literacy with the Salt of the Earth Recovery Project, a collaborative effort of four graduate students who facilitated writing workshops for Latina/o activists in the Local 890 union halls to write their narratives of fighting systemic racism, sexism, unequal working conditions, and white-nationalist power structures in New Mexico's Central Mining District in the 1950s. Each narrative shared common themes of maintaining union and solidarity for the Latina/o community and created rich archives of historical feminist activism. Latina educators and scholars can use the lessons in these stories to empower their students and communities to fight for gender and racial equality in today's society, which is still rife with sexism, systemic oppression, and white nationalist policies that target communities of color.

Part 3: Pedagogies and Mentorship

Aja Y. Martinez's chapter "Counterstory Por mi Gente" introduces CRT Counterstory methodologies for scholarship and pedagogy in composition and rhetoric, recognizing that experiential knowledge of students of color is necessary for understanding how racism is perpetuated in classrooms. Martinez's counterstory narrates interactions between Alejandra, an instructor, and a student, Rick, who reveals how students made assumptions about him because of racial stereotypes. Rick's experience with "color-blind" racism challenges his instructor's previous assumptions about him and highlights the barriers he faces navigating through a system that was not designed for him. Reflecting on her own lack of awareness about race and class until she entered graduate school, the instructor implements a "Race Literacy Narrative" assignment, which encourages students to examine their personal histories and how issues of race, class, and power have shaped their racial literacy.

Raquel Corona and Nancy Alvarez offer collaborative approaches for self-identified black and Latinx doctoral students to share their experiences attending a PhD English program and teaching at schools in New York City. The chapter focuses on personal narratives of navigating through micro and macro-aggressively racist institutional structures, as well as mentorship for Latina students. The chapter specifically focuses on how systemic oppression shapes Latina experiences in graduate school, for example, through the assump-

tion that all Latinas are a monolith of the same cultural ideas and experiences. The two stories of the doctoral students unpack the hardships Latina/BIPOC students face in higher education as they navigate through a system that sees them as out of the ordinary, which has implications on their mental health as well (Corona and Alvarez 206).

Cristina D. Ramirez's chapter "Mestiza Pedagogy" discusses a pedagogical strategy that transcends beyond mentorship between teachers and students of color and promotes engagement between researchers, educators, and communities of color— while also fostering feminist rhetorical approaches that challenge the cultural and gendered institutional status quo (Ramirez 223 and 246). Ramirez's testimonio of her early years as a teacher reflects on how her work as an educator led her to research feminist rhetorical recovery work (Ramirez 224). She discusses how teaching diverse classes of Mexican American students prompted her to begin her own research on Chicana literature to provide representation for her students.

Monica Gonzalez Ybarra's chapter, "Testimoniando," introduces a Latina feminist methodology that encourages Latina academics to reclaim their histories and experiences and position them at the forefront of literacy education, while also challenging traditional research approaches in rhetoric and composition (Ybarra 250). Ybarra highlights how this practice has been a central focus in her life, as well as the communities she grew up in. Testimonios amplify voices that have marginalized Latina communities, and they also serve to decolonize educational research by positioning Latina voices as valuable. Additionally, positioning testimonio as a methodological tool in education gives political agency to Chicana and Latinx communities by exposing issues that are usually silenced. The chapter also emphasizes how testimonios can serve as a "restorative practice and promote justice and healing to create an embodiment of knowledge" (Ybarra 252).

In the afterword, four junior Latina scholars share stories about navigating academia. They emphasize the central themes of this book to build coalitions of solidarity, mentorship, and community among Latina scholars through counterstories that transcend beyond academia.

Conclusion

Latina Leadership is an important collection that amplifies the voices of Latina communities. The stories presented in this work are helpful for instructors in the fields of literacy studies and composition and rhetoric to promote more in-depth knowledge of diverse communities in their teaching. Moreover, the collection's themes of Latina mentorship can be used by feminist scholars to produce research that supports the experiences of Latina students and scholars in and beyond academia.