

BORNE OF CAPITALISM: RAZING COMPULSORY EDUCATION BY RAISING
CHILDREN WITH POPULAR AND VILLAGE WISDOM

by

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DEDICATION

Richard Ruiz
Jorge Santa Cruz
María Teresa Vélez

in Loving Memory

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ABSTRACT

This multi-modal dissertation examines the historical hegemonic making of U.S. education, and how compulsory schooling has framed acceptable notions of culture, language/literacy, and knowledge production. Through this criticism of colonization and education, theoretical and practical alternatives are explored for the opportunities outside mainstream schooling in the US. In examining the literary work on decolonizing education, these efforts can engage in unlearning of coloniality by finding examples from a time before colonization. In contemporary society, the practice of de/unschooling can hold the possibilities for decolonizing education. To demonstrate how families of color in the U.S. engage with unschooling, interview questions serve as the sharing of knowledge and experience so as to ground the research in lived reality. A brief survey of critical education and critical pedagogy broadens those already critical of schools and/or receptive to the criticism of schools and the un/deschooling alternative then places student and family/community as the center of learning and teaching.

INTRODUCTION

As a doctoral student, writing about deschooling – the practice of intentionally breaking away and undoing the damage schools have done to our psyche – can be seen by many as reckless. I am aware that schooling for people of color is alleged to be the Great Equalizer in a society dominated by structures of white supremacy. Moreover, from an equality stance, I stand as a testament that schooling provides the equitable opportunities it purports to provide. Looking back, I cannot say that all of my schooling was terrible. Was I made to do things I did not want to? Absolutely, but I saw class time as getting me closer to after-school tennis practice. Tennis was my ticket out and I was fortunate to have a high school tennis coach who paid for and pushed my development as a tennis player, which later allowed me to receive an athletic scholarship for college. My first year in college I felt relieved that I had made it out of becoming another statistic in Tucson’s south side and felt a sense of pride that others would see me as a “success.”

However, as excited and eager as I was about this new agency I felt in my life, I could not help but think about my peers who had dropped out of high school, those who finished, and the handful of us who went onto college. The teachers and mentors I had treated me like an exception to the norm of cultural/social complacency and I believed it. It took me spending two years in Birmingham, Alabama to experience overt prejudices to then realize how race and social class were more of a determinant of how others treated me. When I returned to Tucson, I pursued an undergraduate degree in Mexican American Studies, as I was resolute to find a language to name these injustices. Somewhere along my academic trajectory I no longer saw my scholastic success or my realization of the “American Dream” as fair. Today, my academic accomplishment is a double-edged sword in my tool kit, a contradiction of sorts.

Aside from coming to grips with the exploitive economics that filter how children of color fare in American schooling, I was also faced with recognizing myself in the mirror. In Alabama, I was pressed to discover and understand my cultural identity as the way I identified (American) conflicted with the way others labeled me (Mexican, Native, Indian). It was around this time I found refuge in the writings of Sandra Cisneros, Gloria Anzaldua, Ana Castillo among others and I was thrilled to finally come across narratives I could identify with. Their work shared experiences and literary voices of womyn¹ who had grown up in the U.S who also shared my feelings of not belonging anywhere--- no pueblo, state, or nation claimed us. With my political and cultural consciousness, I began to identify as a de-Indigenized Chicax² who was trying to make sense of the world through two colonizing languages, meanwhile trying to find my own voice and like Anzaldua (1987), “I will no longer be made to feel ashamed of existing. I will have my voice: Indian, Spanish, white. I will have my serpent's tongue - my woman's voice, my sexual voice, my poet's voice. I will overcome the tradition of silence” (p.59).

Anzaldua’s unapologetic voice and pride in her Indigenous past/present led me on a journey of uncovering the rich history of my familial roots to Indigenous pueblos in Sonora (Eudeve/Opata) and Chihuahua (Tarahumara), Mexico. Coming across her work as a budding Chicax also solidified the importance of writing from my lived experiences and, as a result, inspired my research interests and pursuits to be grounded in my *auto-historia* (Anzaldua, 1987) or my quest of re-imagining my Chicax/Indigenous womanist narrative. In doing so, my effort toward liberatory educational narratives is a personal journey I hope to make accessible to whomever feels moved to do the same.

¹ The spelling is a symbolic act of defining ourselves away from the subcategory of man/men.

² I use the x to mark trans/gender queer inclusivity and my personal gender fluidity.

FRAMING THE STUDY

“I am no longer accepting the things I cannot change, I am changing the things I cannot accept.”
Angela Davis

Parallel to my academic journey to help frame this study is the social-historical account of the fate of Mexican American Studies (MAS) in the State of Arizona. MAS, a program that unlike my own educational experience which was void of cultural and class understandings, taught students that not only were they not culturally deficient, they came from an ancient and culturally rich lineage. By teaching academic content from a critical lens and a culturally relevant perspective, MAS had been successful in reducing the dropout rates and increasing graduation rates in Tucson Unified School District (TUSD). Arizona state officials became aware of the program after the infamous Dolores Huerta³ visit to Tucson High during the annual Cesar Chavez week in 2006. During Huertas’ speech about the anti-immigrant sentiment and legislations coming out of Arizona she stated something to the effect of, “Republicans hate Latinos.” This statement of the obvious political/cultural tensions resulted in a series of domino effects that led to the signing of HB2281 in 2010, also known as the banning of Ethnic Studies in Arizona.

The state claimed that MAS courses or culturally relevant courses designed from a particular ethnic point of view instigated resentment towards White people and taught subversive values that could lead to the overthrow of the U.S. government. The other important part of the legislation to highlight was that conservative legislators wanted students to see themselves as individuals not members of ethnic groups. The state found the district in violation and later the Tucson Unified School District (TUSD) board voted to ban the books used to teach these courses.

³ See http://tucson.com/news/local/education/precollegiate/did-tusd-huerta-break-law/article_74c531e4-93f8-5b8d-a46d-6121a81a47e8.html

I will later examine how this law mirrors the intention of the early U.S. government and boarding school officials to strip Indigenous children of their cultural identity and community loyalties.

TUSD schools have been ground zero and the contemporary site for these age-old cultural wars. My traditional school journey in the Sunnyside School District (SUSD), the second-largest district in Tucson that at the time had an eighty percent Mexicanx student population taught me to see myself as an American with no critical understanding of the world, did not prepare me for the “real” world (taking place outside of school) and I grew up feeling confused about who I was and who others were too. Contrast this educational model with MAS courses designed to make students aware of who they are and develop critical analyses of the world’s systems of oppression. Despite the academic and cultural achievement of students of color, the State banned the successful program. This act of state repression demonstrated how the culture wars at the onset of colonization continue to take place within the U.S. Critical reflection allowed me to see that mainstream education offers few students of color the opportunity (at the cost of suppressing their cultural identities) to access higher education and that when culturally relevant programs foster achievement for students of color, the state can actively crush them.

In 2010, I lost the little faith I had in public schooling for my own children and was forced to think about not only critical pedagogies in education but also the history and purpose of schooling/education and consequently, the theories about learning and knowledge acquisition. As a result of this ongoing reflection and my own activity as a mother, I realized I no longer could support/justify sending my own children to school. So here I am, the exception to the rule—using my doctoral platform to explore and highlight the literature and activist work in alternative education that is taking place outside of and in place of compulsory schooling.

In the U.S. this type of framework falls under the “homeschooling” umbrella but I want to be clear that the work I will be discussing does not recreate school culture, testing, and curricula at home. For legal reasons, education outside of schools falls under homeschooling legislation but for this study I will refer to this alternative as community education, deschooling, or unschooling. It is important to note that initial homeschooling efforts came from parents who were not satisfied with the state assuming the power of knowing what was best for children. In the effort to collect and portray the narratives of people engaging in liberatory education, the case narratives I have chosen are stories of people whose deschooling practice is not only a lifestyle but connects to their ongoing social justice work. The overarching research topic was how deschooling as a framework for decolonizing education is best represented by popular or village wisdom and that it can take the place of compulsory education. The research questions guiding each one of the projects were:

1. How does the analysis of hegemony apply to the schooling of Indigenous/Chicanx people?
2. How does unschooling get lived out with families of color?
 - a. Why did these families seek out an alternative to compulsory schooling?
 - b. When they have a history of colonization/oppression, how have they built culturally appropriate learning networks as a means of cultivating conditions for social change?
 - c. How did economic realities play a role in how families made decisions around unschooling? How were they inspired/motivated to creatively come up with solutions to allow for that possibility?
3. What are the common/popular concerns people have about not sending children to school?

MULTIMODAL DISSERTATION EXPLORATION

I opted for a multi-modal dissertation project because I felt that it fit best with my particular research interests on deschooling which encompasses a collection of three projects: (1) a literary analysis of the moments of hegemony in the history of compulsory schooling and its deculturalizing effect on Chicana/Indigenous people; (2) a case narrative about mothers reconceptualizing motherhood by interrogating common sense ideas around birth, child rearing, and schooling; and, (3) a 30-minute auto-ethnographic film that addresses popular concerns that my family has about my raising children that do not engage with compulsory education.

According to the SLAT, “the defining characteristic of the multi-modal dissertation is that part of the research is presented in a mode other than expository text” (SLAT Dissertation formats). The auto-ethnographic film, is a means to more effectively demonstrate the non-textual components of how unschoolers experience learning and home/community education. Meanwhile, also addressing the acquisition of technical knowledge that was not covered in the first two research projects.

In academia, I have struggled with the tension of “studying” people and speaking of and for them. Specifically when at the end of research studies academics are the main beneficiaries of doctoral degrees, published work, tenured positions, other paid work, etc.; meanwhile, oppressive conditions for people we “studied” continue. I felt conflicted about this for my doctoral research, so I centered the deschooling journey of my family and I as a way to deliberately imply my connectedness to the work, but most importantly because I want to use my voice to write about my own experiences as opposed to only being written about.

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS GUIDING THE ARTICLES

Because of the format of the multimodal dissertation, there will be some overlap in the literature review; however, I have attempted to go into more detail in the attached manuscripts. When the manuscripts did not offer an extensive review of the literature, I have done that in the following literature review.

Chicanx/Indigenous Studies

“As Chicana/os, we are a displaced people of many nations of origin, living in diaspora in the United States. Our *mestizaje* – perhaps more a political idea rather than a fact of biology—was forced upon us. How do we recover from the shock of displacement, the loss of indigenous memory? How do we rekindle the home-fire? The painting is the record along the road. It allows me to think, meditate, to assume the posture of ceremony, to pay attention in that deep way. The door opens to us, just by spending time looking at the images, the symbols. And we begin to understand. These paintings and installations are a conceptual language, a suggestion of how to find our way back to home” (Celia Rodríguez, artist cited in Moraga, 2006, p. ??).

During the student walkouts of the late 1960s Chicana students criticized the lack of *raza* teachers in public schools, the mistreatment of Chicana students, and the streamline mechanisms in place to track them into skilled manual labor and away from college by counselors and school officials. Tucson Chicano activist Salomón Baldenegro remembers how students were forbidden from speaking Spanish in class, from using the restrooms during class time and how schools taught a curriculum that largely ignored or denied Mexican-American history (2006, personal communication). Students demanded culturally and linguistically relevant education by teachers who looked like them and they pushed for this as part of a broader social justice movement going on throughout the U.S.

The Chicano Movement adopted the term *Chicano/a* as an affirmation to their self-determination. The founders of Movimiento Estudiantil Chicana/o de Aztlán (MEChA) via El Plan de Santa Barbara, acknowledged the term to signify continuity and tie to an Indigenous past. Mexicanxs have had a complex relation to their identity in the U.S. and Mexico where

government bodies have fluctuated on how to categorize them. After the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, U.S. state officials who wanted to deny Mexicans citizenship identified them as “Indian.” California and Arizona enacted discriminatory laws that denied Mexicanxs citizenship and other legal rights. In Texas and New Mexico, Indigenous people were considered citizens but not allowed to vote. California’s first constitutional convention of 1849 obliged legislators to classify Mexicans as citizens but deny them the right to vote unless they were “White” Mexican males. As a result, Mexicans learned to assert whiteness by asserting Spanish ancestry to prevent being classified as Indian (Menchaca, 1993).

Chicanx became a politically loaded and controversial term, as it was non-conforming to the western assimilationist project. Since the time of the Chicax Movement, Chicax and Native scholars have argued for or against Chicax asserting Indigeneity when they no longer have the visible markers of “appearing Indian” through language, traditional dress/customs or by belonging to a land-based nation. In the U.S. and Mexico, history and natural museums have facilitated and solidified what becomes the official story in regards to the nation-based identity (Davalos, 2001, p.7) Renato Rosaldo (1988) critiques the role anthropologists play in solidifying the definitions of culture that is “visible.” Since the official notion of anthropology is that culture is at the heart of how people understand and relate to the world, when anthropologists "study" a culture, they are viewing it by its difference(s) from other cultures, and this perception in turn denotes the visibility of the "original" culture and how it separates nature from nurture (p.78) In plain terms, the above perception classifies people that are sedentary as “with culture” and people that are mobile as “without culture” (p.80).

Mexicanos have also ascribed to the imaginary Mexico of using the term mestizo, coined by José Vasconcelos. In *La Raza Cós mica*, Vasconcelos glorifies the Latin and erases the Indian:

“The mandate from History is first noticed in that abundance of love that allowed the Spaniard to create a new race with the Indian and the Black, profusely spreading white ancestry...”

(Vasconcelos, 1979, p.15). Vasconcelos’ proud embrace of mestizaje promoted the westernizing project of Spain as successful in exterminating the Indigenous and the Black. American Indian scholar, Jack Forbes (1995) argued that true mestizaje is what took place in Spain, Ireland, England and many other European and Eastern countries. In Mexico and much of South America, the concept of Mestizo was created to justify the system of racism. Forbes refers to this as the colonial policies of Spain, Britain, and the United States as they made the definition real by putting in place racist policies that put Whites and non-Whites at opposing ends meanwhile privileging whiteness. Matters of White privilege continue to be seen today in who controls national wealth, politics, land, discourses, media, etc. in both the U.S. and Mexico.

The identity dissonance associated with territorial dispossession has been the experience of many Native nations and Indigenous Mexicans that has led to cultural displacement. This cultural displacement experienced by many Mexicanxs has been a result of anti-Mexican/anti-Indigenous sentiment rooted since colonization (Perez 2007, p.147). This self-hate in many Mexicanos looked like suppressing identification with Indigenous groups and asserting White ancestry to gain access to power. As second generation in the U.S., I want to be clear that my claim to Indigenous ancestry is not a claim to Aztlán or the Southwest, it is an act of self-determination and acknowledgement of a long and complex history of Indigenous peoples in the Americas. I live on O’otham lands, the caretakers of Stjukshon and my responsibility is to use my voice to stand in solidarity with Indigenous nations and their struggles.

Indigenous Education

In the body of literature surrounding Indigenous education, the forced schooling of native children is described as a dehumanizing process. “Many [American Indian/Alaska Native] children and families were forced to accept an education that would *civilize* and *Christianize* children rather than one which would foster their development in a kind nurturing environment” (Grace, 2007, p.397). This violent process also included extreme measures such as boarding schools or *reducciones* in colonial Mexico that established a practice of forcing children and their families to cut ties as a way to ensure Native children would develop a western set of values and lifestyle.

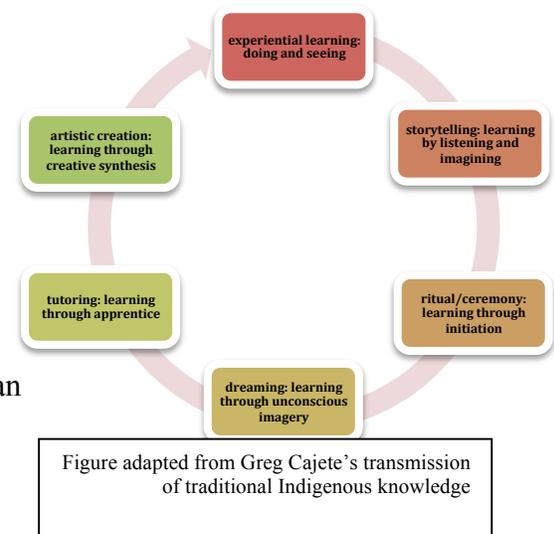
Local Indian populations fell subject to efforts intended to change them to the expectations of transplant Americans whose aim was to ‘civilize’ them by any and all means possible...[boarding schools] reflected the same notion, the best way to cause American Indian children to lose their sense of heritage and change their value system was to remove them from the source of those things, the family (Foreman, 1987, p.1) .

Other scholars have illustrated the educational process as a mirror image of the initial European and Native encounter in which two worlds collide and Native people are the ones charged with having to learn the ways of each world.

When academics depict the often difficult experiences of Native American students at institutions of learning, many evoke the image of an individual trying to walk between two worlds. This metaphor implies that in order to survive and participate successfully in mainstream culture, Native American students must learn an alien way to walk, talk, think, and act, behaving as themselves only when they are at home in the Indian world. This

expectation places the burden of assimilation squarely on the shoulders of Native American students and can be brutalizing to one's identity and spirituality (Garrod & Larimore, 1997, p. 3).

Many Indigenous scholars have responded by developing pedagogical frameworks to name these colonizing practices and engage Indigenous students in culturally relevant objectives. Sandy Grande's (2004) *Red Pedagogy* is one of these frameworks that was created as a space for developing an Indigenous curricular pedagogy within schools. According to Grande, this Red Pedagogy is "committed to providing



American Indian students the social and intellectual space to re-imagine what it means to be Indian in contemporary U.S. society..."(p.116 and p.118) Grande's idea of Red Pedagogy is a realm of engagement where one can critically analyze power structures like mainstream education and strive for decolonizing oneself by re-imagining and incorporating Indigenous knowledge. Grande maintains that, "...a Red pedagogy compels students to question how (white stream) knowledge is related to the processes of colonization. Furthermore, it asks how traditional Indigenous knowledge can inform the project of decolonization" (p.56). Red pedagogy is an employment of a decolonization practice, "a hope that lives in contingency with the past—one that trusts the beliefs and understanding of our ancestors as well as the power of traditional knowledge" (p.28). Looking to the time before colonization, Gregory Cajete's (1994) work in *Look to the Mountain*, re-imagines the purpose of education for Indigenous people as "Education for life's sake: learning about life through participation and relationship in the community, including not only people but plants, animals, and the whole of Nature" (p.26).

Cajete's work on Indigenous education, serves as a comprehensive map to guide modern day educators on what it means to have spirit (life) at the center of an educational endeavor. This philosophy of education is central to my growing understanding about the world and the life-long journey of what it means to be human. This educational experience can be explained as autochthonous (land-based) learning— learning that takes place and is linked to the surrounding cultural and physical environment because for Indigenous people, cultural knowledge is based on the natural environment and its resources. In *Ignite the Sparkle* (1999), Cajete breaks down the transmission of traditional Indigenous knowledge (education) through what scholars such as Sheilah Nicholas describe as the total communicative framework of oral tradition (p.55; Nicholas, 2012, personal communication). The expression (or real test) of education for life's sake was not only individual survival but also the ability of the individual to fulfill his/her purpose in the continuation of the tribe. Knowledge (specifically technical knowledge) for the purposes of memorization and regurgitation was of no significant value to the survival of a people, so learning was to be experienced and expressed in the context of tribal life. Indigenous people had the power to extract meaning from everyday experiences and thus build on their understanding of the world.

In committing to a Red Pedagogy, I knew that a decolonizing education journey could not stay within the imagination of capitalist schooling so when I came across the practice of unschooling, I knew this way of being in the world held the possibilities for truly a decolonizing Indigenous education. To understand the conditions that gave birth to unschooling in the U.S., we will look at a brief overview of compulsory schooling legislation and the push by parents to legalize homeschooling.

History of schooling and homeschooling

In the U.S., it is a ritual or right of passage to send your child to school. This ritual overtime has naturalized compulsory education to where we no longer feel like the government is forcing us to send our child to school as many accept schooling as part of children's natural human development. Barbara Rogoff (2003), as an education psychologist and anthropologist, approaches human development as stages or timetables that vary across cultures and as a result, "people develop as participants in cultural communities. Their development can be understood only in light of the cultural practices and circumstances of their communities--which also change" (p.3-4). In looking at the U.S. formation of the nation-state and the fast-paced development of today's modern society one can see how the Industrial Revolution and its development of the labor market and compulsory schooling was greatly influenced by the ideologies of the early Anglo protestant colonist. These consequent changes of moving from an agricultural economy to capitalistic labor market produced striking changes as spaces became more urbanized, families migrated in search of better economic opportunities, and parents found themselves spending more time away from home to meet the demands of this new political economy.

The children of the early colonist learned the manual work of everyday survival in the home but it was customary to send young children (for a small fee) to a dame school, where children were taught the 4R's: religion, reading, 'riting, 'rithmetic (Good & Teller 1973, p.27 and p.34). Parochial and other private schools that met for short terms became an option for refining more of the above skills and subjects. In 1647, some Massachusetts towns passed "the old deluder Satan" law that fined towns of fifty families or more who did not maintain a schoolteacher who could teach English and Latin (p. 37). Towns seemed to find ways to divert this by paying fines, as they were cheaper than maintain a schoolteacher or hiring a traveling teacher with other towns.

The later phases of schooling included independent school districts that were controlled by a board responsible for maintaining an elementary school for a three-month term and although these did not last long, they served as a model for how schools would be administered in the era of industrialization (p. 38).

Post the Revolutionary War, the topic of education became a political and public interest in the formation of the nation-state with ideological male founders like Thomas Jefferson, Noah Webster, Samuel Harrison Smith, and others agreed that a republican form of government could only survive if there was a unified white population (Good & Teller 1973; Spring, 2007). A common education was deemed necessary for “preserving liberty, securing unity, promoting good citizenship, and developing the resources of the land and people” (Good & Teller, 1973, p.77). In the 1830’s, common schools gave birth to the idea that government funded “free” education for *all* would create a, “more common, more equal, more dedicated to public policy, and therefore more effective in creating cultural and political values centering on Protestantism, republicanism, and capitalism” (Carl Kaestle cited in Spring, 2007, p. 5). For *all*, like in most cases of early writing, referred to native-born Anglo-Americans (primarily male) as it was illegal for Afrikan people to receive schooling and when the courts finally granted them access, it was through forced segregation in the 1896 Plessy ruling of “separate but equal” (Spring, 2007, p.55).

The importance of literacy in the Euro-centric tradition was considered a “necessary precondition for economic development” and cultural identity that was afforded to White children, imposed on Indigenous children, and denied to Afrikan peoples (Talbot, 1976, p. 17; Spring 2007). As institutionalized education took shape in Indian Country, its purpose to reproduce homogeneity of the American identity is solidified along with the economic ideals of the U.S. government. The idea of economic mobility, or the American Dream, appealed to the

“exalting egotism of American civilization” and schools were tasked with training the stratification of labor (Oberly cited in Adams, 1995, p.23). The emphasis on education for future job placement became common rhetoric, but to address the continuous unequal distribution of wealth, more schooling became the solution.

According to historians, there seemed to be a broad consensus about the value of schooling, yet compulsory legislation began when people felt truant children needed to be forced to attend school (Tyack, 1971). Reflective of the prevailing ideas at the time and the need to counter the downward pressure on wages that the capitalist class' use of cheap child labor created, even labor unions sponsored compulsory education. Child labor philanthropists (saving the children) and State politicians were also behind coercive attendance laws. Then Republicans largely supported mandatory schooling as they maintained, “the children of the Commonwealth are public property” (Tyack, 1971, p.71).

Legislation and court rulings of this sort continued into the late 1960s and it was the parents of the 70s who “embraced the progressive, child-centered pedagogy espoused by critics of institutional education such as John Holt, Paul Goodman, and Ivan Illich...” (Carper & Hunt 2007, p.239). These parents had no faith in what they perceived as the “oppressive nature of schooling” and they made the decision to educate their children at home as a way to free them from this oppressive force (p. 242). John Holt, a proponent of home education, argued that, “My concern is not to improve ‘education’ but to do away with it, to end the ugly and anti-human business of people-shaping and let people shape themselves” (Carper & Hunt, 2007, p. 243).

It is not until the 80s and 90s that conservative Protestants, disturbed by what they called “de facto secularism” in education, argued for homeschooling to be put on the map; the numbers of this movement saw a dramatic increase (Carper & Hunt, 2007). This movement created a

network of families who began lobbying for homeschooling options as a means of family agency. According to Carper and Hunt (2007), the role of mothers was significant in this movement as they were not only the primary educators in the home but “political organizers and educational entrepreneurs” (p.245). Parallel to the push for unschooling, the intellectual discourse about the purpose of public education continued to examine issues of race, class, opportunity and accessibility for the majority of children who did spend their time within the confines of schooling.

Critical pedagogy and the critique of mainstream schooling

MAS courses in TUSD, armed with the spirit of the Chicax Movement, sought out to incorporate critical pedagogy into the classroom. In the field of critical education, Paulo Freire (1970) in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* oriented us to the psychological effects of colonization, where people who had a his/her story of colonization, no longer needed the “master” or dominant society to oppress them as they had internalized the belief that dominant society was superior and the oppressed, inferior. According to McLaren (2003), “knowledge is a social construction deeply rooted in a nexus of power relations” (p. 77) which is reinforced by our “common sense” sensibilities. To better understand this dynamic, McLaren explains, “[the dominant class] –by supplying the symbols, representations, and practices of social life in such a way that the basis of social authority and the unequal relations of power and privilege remain hidden” (p.76). This is also what Gramsci named hegemony where the dominant culture produces the dreams and desires for dominant and subordinate groups with images, visions, stories, ideals, etc. that adjust to include the language of subordinate groups but is all aimed at perpetuating a “common” worldview that disguises relations of power (McLaren, 2004, p.77). Through mass media,

schools, government institutions, etc., McLaren argues, “dominant ideology is so all-inclusive that individuals are taught to view it as natural, commonsensical, and inviolable” (p.79).

This plays out in schools when subordinate groups blame themselves for school failure. Critical Pedagogy in schools is understood by critical educators as the interaction between learning and teaching that examines the dynamics of power and control in society and is not only a practice of criticizing or naming but to reflect and act critically (a transformative experience) (Wink, 2011). According to Joanne Wink (2011), this practice within the classroom requires unlearning of the above dominant ideology.

[Unlearning] is fundamentally more painful. It involves a complete reexamination of philosophy, beliefs, and assumptions. It means that we each must look seriously within, never a simple task. Unlearning calls us to critical reflection (p.12).

However, according to Wink, the conscientization that comes from critical reflection/action is the power we have when we recognize that we know that we know. This is the power that exists with the practice of critical education in mass schooling, helping create the conditions for youth to feel empowered by owning their experiences, their life knowledges, their voice. To do so, we have to shift from only valuing technical knowledge or what Giroux calls productive knowledge and engage in emancipatory knowledge which espouses as the foundation for social justice and empowerment: “emancipatory knowledge helps us understand how social relationships are distorted and manipulated by relations of power and privilege” (McLaren, 2004, p. 73).

Much of the tenets of critical pedagogy were inspired by the earlier writings of Freire, whose work with adult literacy education propelled him to create grassroots community learning spaces known as culture circles. These circles were motivated by the popular culture movement in

Brazil that attempted to democratize the culture through dialogue on topics such as nationalism, remission of profits, development, literacy, class consciousness and increasing the popular vote (Elias, 1976). Another term that came from this era was “popular education,” a method of democratizing educational practices by using visual aids to dramatize issues and lessons illustrated through photographs.

Contemporary uses of Freire’s culture circles can be seen in the work of scholars like Loui Reyes and Myriam Torres in *Decolonizing family literacy in a culture circle: Reinventing the family literacy educator’s role* (2007), where they define a culture circle as:

a distinctive learning environment in which ‘participants’ (not pupils) meet to dialogue, in the presence of a ‘co-coordinator’, in order to understand critically their worlds and define the ways they can participate in shaping those worlds and improving their life conditions (p.80).

Reyes and Torres’ work centers this practice on Freire’s understanding that culture is a dynamic evolving human-environment interaction at the base of our experiences. The circle serves as a means to dialog about the realities of these communities in an attempt to democratize our social-cultural realities. According Reyes and Torres (who are dealing with alternatives to the colonizing literacy views imposed on communities of color), literacy practices in marginalized communities should grow and change “from the collective dialogues in a culture circle rather than from top-down colonizing practices” (p.81).

As a community organizer, I am a witness to how popular education is a powerful tool in the process of conscientization. Community education around special topics/issues creates a dialogue and camaraderie in democratizing the educational process and speaking truth to power.

In the discussion of critical education in schooling, we often forget to highlight that Freire believed that reformist activities (even within schools) were inadequate in bringing about radical change to the lives of poor and marginalized communities (Elias, 1976). Schools can function as reservoirs of specified knowledge, but critical education cannot be confined to compulsory schooling.

Deschooling as decolonizing methodology

“I know that our criticism is destructive of one of the great creations of the last two generations. It pulls the rug out from under the only ritual, which at this moment keeps stability. It calls for a radical alternative which we cannot imagine, because I do not know how one imagines the sense of the future.” Ivan Illich in *Deschooling Society* 1971

Although Illich said the above at the beginning of a generation that would later unschool, I believe this radical alternative (much has been written and discussed) is not easily articulated. Deschooling or unschooling (I use the two interchangeably), seeks to place learners at the center, return the community to be both site and resource for learners, and connect ideas and themes to the existing woven patterns of creation. Thus, dialectically speaking, the subordinated role that the community played in education will now take the dominant role over the community-separated, decontextualized, and compartmentalized Western-style education. Unschooling to me is a project much like decolonization that includes a critique and a naming of one of the aspects of colonial legacy, schooling. By revisiting and critiquing western institutions of education we are putting forward alternative knowledges that give us access to “alternative ways of doing things” (Smith 1999, p.34). Unlike prepackaged by graded educational curricula with neatly laid out learning outcomes and objectives and methods of evaluation that measure their success, the success of living out a radical alternative lives outside the measures of the western imagination.

To better grasp how learning outside of compulsory schooling thrives, one has to be willing to remember or have awareness of how we learn as opposed to how we consume

information. For example, Illich in his later work highlighted how the effects of compulsory schooling had migrated into other forms of compulsory learning where people paid money “to be taught how to have better sex, how to be more sensitive, how to play games, and so on” (Illich in Hern, 2008, p. iv). This understanding of learning operates from the assumption of scarcity or because

The means for learning are in scarce supply, or are assumed to be scarce, then educational arrangements crop up to “ensure” that certain, important knowledge, ideas, skills, attitudes, etc., are “transmitted.” Education then becomes an economic commodity, which one consumes, or to use common language, which one “gets” (p.v).

Ivan Illich’s (1970) critique of educational institutions was more political and anti-capitalist in nature where he saw school curricula as guided by the notion of needing to uncover life’s secrets and mysteries and that to live a good life, one was dependent on knowing this “secret.” Within this system of education, society had created the myth that increased production of information would provide a better life. Illich, on the contrary, believed “learners should not be forced to submit to an obligatory curriculum, or to discrimination based on whether they possess a certificate or a diploma” (p.75). This is what Illich saw as the institutionalization of values where people have given institutions the power to characterize our worldviews and language and turn us into families of consumers.

In *Deschooling Society* (1970), Illich proposed the creation of learning webs as an authentic way of acknowledging the “educational relationship between man and his environment” (p.72). The education webs he had in mind were small communal types of organizations that could serve as a communal referral service for educational objectives, skill

exchanges, and a peer matching reference service to access community educators at large. To think about how these learning webs function daily, the work of Etienne Wenger (2000) looks at how *communities of practice* are the everyday within the subcultures we interact through. He explains these as social learning systems that have three major elements: joint enterprise which is a “collectively developed understanding of what their community is about and they hold each other accountable”; mutual engagement where members of these communities establish “norms and relationships of mutuality that reflect these interactions”; and “shared repertoire of communal resources—language, routines, sensibilities, artifacts, tools, stories, styles, etc.” (p.229). Wenger’s work has been used in emerging literacy research and provides a framework for how these learning communities already function in everyday group interactions.

Grace Llewellyn, in *The Teenage Liberation Handbook* (1998) and *Guerilla Learning* (2001) explains unschooling and its philosophy of learning as follows: “When you get down to it, unschooling is really just a fancy term for ‘life’ or ‘growing up uninstitutionalized’” (p.11). Llewellyn touches on the tensions of home/unschooling as a “largely misunderstood, largely unknown, even stigmatized alternative” (p.11). However, proponents of unschooling make the case that human beings are born learners and that children will learn best when given the freedom to learn what, when and how they want (Feteroll, 2009). Rogoff’s (2003) work also mirrors this sentiment when she explains how in “developed” countries, children are segregated from the full range of activities in the community where schools usually work from the context of preparing children for adult life rather than being active participants of children’s present.

John Holt, a longtime childhood educator who paved the way for many parents in the U.S. to think differently about education and learning, made the claim that: “A person’s freedom of learning is part of his freedom of thought, even more basic than his freedom of speech” (Holt,

cited in Hunt et al, 2008). The idea that learning is taking place at all times is not a new concept. In *The Book of Learning and Forgetting*, Frank Smith (1998) outlines the *classic view of learning* prior to the contemporary theory of learning as:

archetypal, universal, deeply rooted, and uncontaminated... we are learning all the time— about the world and about ourselves. We learn without knowing that we are learning and we learn without effort every moment of the day. We learn what is interesting to us, and we learn from what makes sense to us (Smith 1998, p.3 & 31).

The relevance in deschooling to decolonizing Indigenous education is that it can function as a process of unlearning coercion, capitalism, and western accounts of histories by “acknowledging it [deschooling] as a lifelong, cooperative project of questioning and discovery, thinking and rethinking” (Lyn-Piluso in Hern, 2008, p. 84). Where schools intervene as *in loco parentis* of children, they deny parents and communities the “complete authority over the upbringing of their children, and they may well interfere with the ability of parents and religious communities to teach their particular beliefs to their children” (Macedo 1999, p. 145).

OUTLINE OF MULTIMODAL METHODOLOGY WITH PROSPECTIVE JOURNALS

To document the literature and case narratives, I use a multi-modal approach of writing academic papers (for journal publication) and film documentation as a means of making visible what I observe and understand (Bhroiiiméil & Donoghue, 2009). Appendix A is a literature review of the hegemonic making of compulsory schooling for Chicax/Indigenous people. Appendix B, is a case report of m/othering as a decolonizing practice and Appendix C is an auto-ethnographic film about the practice of un/deschooling in my family. Appendix A and B will have a more thorough examination of the academic literature.

Literature review of compulsory schooling. In Appendix A, I ask the question of whether decolonizing Indigenous education is possible. I argue that scholarship on Indigenous/Chicax education is transfixed in making school curricula more culturally relevant for students and although this scholarship fills a necessary void in the schooling of people of color, we need to take decolonizing education further by revisiting how compulsory schooling was designed with the intent of deculturalizing children of color. By highlighting the historical hegemonic making of U.S. education, one can extrapolate how compulsory schooling has framed acceptable notions of culture, language/literacy, and knowledge production. This article poses that decolonization efforts in education can engage in unlearning of coloniality by finding examples from a time before colonization. In contemporary society, the projects of de/unschooling can hold the possibilities for decolonizing education.

Prospective Journal: I originally submitted this article to the Teachers College Record (TCR), which encourages graduate students in the field of education to submit their digital and print versions. I submitted the paper under their Social Context topics in the history of schooling

and education philosophies but it was not considered to be in line with the Journal. I have since submitted to *Decolonization, Indigeneity, Education and Society*, a peer-reviewed online open access journal “committed to supporting and advancing decolonization scholarship, practice, and activism within and, more importantly, beyond and against, the academy.” The journal’s appeal is its interest in sharing stories of decolonization efforts from the ground and not furthering academic interests. The manuscript is currently under review.

M/othering narrative collection. In Appendix B, I use the framework of m/othering as the action that poses critical questions on common sense notions of birth, child rearing, and schooling. The study portrays the narratives of mothers who have opted to unschool. Through a series of interview questions, phone calls, emails, and blog research, the study reveals how mothers are challenging the hegemony of medical/educational institutions and capitalist socio-cultural norms by opting for home births, mothering as parent-child partnership, and unschooling all practices that are better aligned with family/cultural/social justice values. With these family narratives, the paper examines how decolonizing motherhood holds the possibilities for claiming authority over the “education” of our children.

M/othering participants in the m/othering narrative collection shared the following commonalities⁴

1. identify as people of color
2. participate in home schooling/un schooling practice
3. have written and blogged about their child rearing educational practices

⁴ The participants of this study were all in agreement to use their given names as I was citing their online/published work and so that the reader could also become familiar with their online presence

4. social justice/decolonizing efforts at the heart of their education and child-rearing practice

Teresa Graham Brett: Teresa with her partner Rob shares her life with children Martel (13) and Greyson (8) and they identify as a biracial family that is ethnically Japanese American, White, and Mexican American. Teresa and Rob both have degrees from the University of Arizona (UA). The Graham Brett's live in Tucson, AZ, where Teresa is currently the Associate Dean of Students at the UA's Inclusion and Multicultural Engagement department.

Akilah S. Richards': Akilah shares her life with husband Kris (37), daughters, Marley (11) and Sage-Niambi (9) and identify as a Jamaican family and ethnically and culturally Black. Akilah and Kris both spent their grade school years in South Florida and both went to college. The Richards family describe themselves as "tech-savvy, location independent, unschoolers raising ourselves in a culturally conscious, African-centered, world citizen-view type of lifestyle" (A. Richards, personal communication, 2015).

Panquetzani: Panquetzani identifies as Chicana/Indigena and is raising her two boys Akinyemi (7) and Itzix (4) with her boyfriend/parenting partner, a math and Spanish teacher. She attended community college but soon realized school got in the way of pursuing her passions of filmmaking and music where she already made a decent living. Panquetzani's paid/community work through *Indigemama* is inspired by Traditional Mexican Medicine knowledge that was passed on to her by her *abuelita*.

Instead of data collection, I opted for using the term narrative collection as a framework of story-telling/sharing. This collection was gathered through a series of interview questions, phone calls, emails, and blog research. Through online communities, the digital medium of blogging has

not only functioned as an informational and an empowering way to disseminate ideas and knowledges but is also transforming power relations (Friedman & Calixte, 2009). This media has made information about unschooling more accessible and the way in which I too learned about these communities. After compiling the participants' stories, I also engaged them in the process of writing the article on M/othering to make sure I captured their words and practices appropriately and gave them an opportunity to expand or retract what they first shared. I also asked for their consent in using their names, so that I could cite their online and print work. They all consented over email that I had their permission to use their names and also shared that through the writing of the M/othering article I shared with them a community of which they were part.

Prospective Journal: I am in the process of submitting this manuscript to *Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social (MALCS)* an inter-disciplinary peer reviewed journal committed to Chicana/Latina experiences through research articles, creative writing, review essays, commentaries, etc.

Auto-ethnographic film. In using visual and voice media to archive this process, I can best construct a complex and multilayered narrative that for me is symbolic of Indigenous oral traditions. Through story telling in my research endeavors, I am in practice committing to the responsibility of facilitating a dialog about the opportunities for creating alternatives to schooling. I plan to share the film on online media platforms, present at conferences, and hold community forums that showcase the film and families who engage in unschooling.

Film participants:

Familia Santa Cruz-Byrne/Nepan Ollin: The film follows the unschooling lives of Tenochtli age 8 (at time of filming), Yenelli age 7 (at time of filming), and Síquei Maella (under age 1).

Francisco & Elia Santa Cruz: My parents are first generation in the U.S. and much of their narrative for coming to the U.S. in their early twenties was to give their children a better life. They both pastor a Spanish-speaking Evangelical church in the City of South Tucson and run a Christian Spanish radio from the same place.

Jorge Santa Cruz: Is my oldest brother who dropped out of high school at an early age. I always remember thinking he was the smart one in the family. As children, he would take toys apart to see how they worked but the joke was that he never put things back together. It is no surprise that he ended up being an aircraft mechanic where he is not only a meticulous mechanic but also a charismatic member of any work team.

Usiel Barrios: I met Usiel when he was eighteen fresh out of high school and had no qualms about voicing his dislike for schools. He currently works for a center against Domestic Violence.

Southern Arizona (soaring) unschooling social group: Our family is a part of the local group of families who unschool and I asked three of the parents who I interact with most often if they were willing to be a part of the film and answer questions about unschooling.

Liz Holaday: Is the founder (2007) and coordinator of the group. She is the mother of two, ages fourteen and eleven. She has a Masters in Linguistics from the UA and when she is not coordinating events for the unschooling group, she is a freelance editor.

Brianna Fricke: One of the earlier members of the group and the mother of two ages fourteen and ten. Brianna identifies as a Queer-feminist, works part-time from home, enjoys doing organization-consulting group and is a minimalism, simplicity advocate.

Teresa Graham-Brett: Same as m/othering narrative.

STATEMENT OF POSITIONALITY

I am first and foremost a mother, a community activist/organizer/educator, and a researcher. My undergraduate involvement in Movimiento Estudiantil Chicana/o de Aztlan (MEChA) solidified my identity as a Chicanx and the corresponding responsibility of sharing my academic knowledge and privilege with my family and community. For the past ten years, I have been actively organizing around issues dealing with youth voice, Chicanx student access to higher education, migrant rights, sexual/domestic violence prevention, and food justice. I have also spent time working for the City of Tucson as a council aide in the ward that represents south and west side neighborhoods. Much of my work was building neighborhood capacity and an advocate for all the previous community work I had been involved with. I currently work as a community bike mechanic at Bicycle-Intercommunity Arts & Salvage (BICAS) a community education center where through advocacy and bicycle salvage, we promote education, art, and a healthy environment all while providing service and opportunity for those in need.

I have made the decision to not send my children to school. I want to bring to the forefront the possibilities of creating spaces to educate ourselves and our children about our original culture and language while maintaining a link to our current realities. I also understand that my positionality through my research can make people think that I am judging their choices if they chose to send their children to school, and I understand it is a complicated tension to tread as my choice to deschool is the epitome of disapproving opinions from academics to friends and family. As stated before, my role as an organizer and researcher is a commitment to “the process of transformation, of decolonization, of healing, and of mobilization, as peoples” (Smith 1999, p.116).

CONCLUSION

The significance and importance of this study was to engage in a communal practice of broadening the scope of what gets recognized as “education.” Using the framework of deschooling, this multifaceted study attempted to orient us in thinking more holistically about the world by learning in a manner that is contextualized, grounded in culture, and in a way that will give children a sense of purpose. Recreating *education for life’s sake* (Cajete, 1999) or creating an educational alternative will reconnect us to our shared stories of survival and cooperation with the natural world. As an educational practice, learning families/communities can co-create experiences that help us heal from colonial history, and in healing from colonization; communities of color can undo the *susto* or “soul loss” from the past (a sickness well-known in Mexican traditional medicine). This healing will allow us to freely flourish in the present with dignity, creativity and love.

Well-intentioned educators may feel the need to justify the necessity of schools for poor/working class families of color because of their lack of social/economic capital, but if there is a conscientization context and families are willing to take a leap of faith, communities can build informal networks that can cultivate conditions for social and economic transformation. The ability to learn and think is a precondition for all human beings regardless of race, class, gender, and sexuality: “The way we learn doesn’t vary according to social and economic circumstances. But what we learn— and how easy or difficult it is to learn particular things—always varies with circumstances” (Smith, 1998, p.37). It is my hope that with this study we can open doors and possibilities to having family and community agency over education where academic institutions are not seen as the gatekeepers or reservoirs of education but a tool along with many that can serve and benefit a variety of interests.

Restoring confidence may not be easy after generations of social and intellectual discrimination, but taking a step at a time and with like-minded communities and families, one can create a community of learners. “We must press for an educational environment in which youth can develop the capacity and commitment collectively to control their lives and regulate their social interactions with a sense of equality, reciprocity, and communality” (Bowles & Gintis 1976, p.14). In re-envisioning Indigenous education, there are no easy answers or “how-to” manuals that can address or do justice to Indigenous/Mexican communities, but through the process of envisioning the possibilities of learning communities outside of schools, families and educators can gain knowledge through critical awareness, self-reflection, and most importantly action. This process of self-determination can take us back to *Schooling in Capitalist America*, where Bowles and Gintis insist that: “We perceive a nearly universal striving among people for control over their lives, free space to grow, and social relationships conducive to the satisfaction of group needs” (Bowles & Gintis, 1976, p.16-17).

Limitations & Implications

In reflecting on my engagement with youth in the Social Justice Education Project (SJEP), I remember hearing from former MAS students who had graduated from high school but were struggling with the idea of continuing on to higher education. They hated school and with their newly found consciousness did not see why an oppressive institution should be the only alternative for them. I did not understand back then why they continued to hate school after having taken these “life-changing” courses; but after being exposed to the literature behind de/unschooling, I understood that because learning is a natural byproduct of being alive, forcing anyone to be in a classroom against their will seems counterintuitive to this process. In *Re-*

imagining School Public Educators & Unschoolers May Have Much in Common, Eva Swidler (n.d.) points out the agency that stems from ones ability to homeschool:

Homeschooling affirms the worth of what children learn in the bosom of their communities and their families, however defined. It rejects the governmental claim of the culturally deprived, linguistically impoverished Black community or the portrayal of “cultures of poverty” as the main enemy of success for the poor. Homeschooling is the ultimate in cultural self-determination, that often touted but poorly observed human right. Keeping our children out of governmental institutions can be a way of keeping them in our community’s cultural commons.

I understand, however, that the majority of parents may feel that there is no other choice to sending children to school or that sending children to school is part of being a responsible parent. The limitations in this study is that it does not begin to address how unschooling is relevant to the masses. In many ways it is not. I see unschooling as an extension of the conscientization process that for many people can begin in schools with the work of critical educators.

Like the MAS graduates who no longer bought into schooling as the great equalizer, there is a need for community support and resources for those youth and families who choose to unschool as well. As critical educators we cannot continue to reveal the bars obstructing our freedom and expect people to continue to work within those constraints. I think future work can de done with how un/deschooling practice can inform children in public and tribal schools. That the work of critical educators within public schooling and the work of community activists outside need not be a contradiction. In practice, we can find and work from common ground. Schools have established themselves as an education that is done to us rather than us truly

influencing and having ownership of our children's education. Like Moll and Ruiz (2005) posit in *The education sovereignty of Latino/a students in the United States*:

Educational sovereignty requires that communities create their own infrastructures for development, including mechanisms for the education of their children that capitalize on rather than devalue their cultural resources...these forms of education must address Latino's self-interests or self-determination, while limiting the influence of anglo-centric whims of the majority that historically have shaped their schooling (p. 317).

The optimism and implications in this work is to extend the conversation on the education of our children that centers family, cultural communities, and social justice as an act of self-determination and not only a means for academic material.

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APPENDIX A

IS DECOLONIZING EDUCATION POSSIBLE? REVISITING THE HEGEMONIC MAKING
OF COMPULSORY SCHOOLING AND ITS DECULTURALIZING EFFECT ON
CHICANX/INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

Santa Cruz, D. (in review) Is Decolonizing Education Possible? Revisiting the hegemonic making of compulsory schooling and its deculturalizing effect on Chicanx/Indigenous people
Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education, Society.

Abstract

Scholarship on Indigenous/Chicanx education is transfixed in making school curricula more culturally relevant for students. This scholarship and programs fills a necessary void in the schooling of people of color, however, this literary research seeks to take the conversation about decolonizing education further by revisiting how compulsory schooling was designed with the intent of deculturalizing students of color. By highlighting the historical hegemonic making of U.S. education, one can extrapolate how compulsory schooling has framed acceptable notions of culture, language/literacy, and knowledge production. This article poses that decolonization efforts in education can engage in unlearning of coloniality by finding examples from a time before colonization. In contemporary society, the projects of de/unschooling can hold the possibilities for decolonizing education.

Key words: decolonization, coloniality, hegemony, compulsory schooling, deschooling, unschooling, capitalism, Chicanx, Indigenous

Is Decolonizing Education Possible? Revisiting the hegemonic making of compulsory schooling and its deculturalizing effect on Chicax/Indigenous people

Moses wanted to turn a tribe of enslaved Hebrews into free men. You would think that all he had to do was to gather the slaves and tell them that they were free. But Moses knew better. He knew that the transformation of slaves into free men was more difficult and painful than the transformation of free men into slaves...Moses discovered that no spectacle, no myth, no miracles could turn slaves into free men. It cannot be done. So he led the slaves back into the desert, and waited forty years until the slave generation died, and a new generation, desert born and bred, was ready to enter the promised land.” -Eric Hoffer (diary entry, May 20, 1959 as cited in Gatto, 2001).

The first time I read this excerpt in John Gatto’s *The Underground History of American Education* (2001), I was stunned by this revelation of the Hebrew text and even in the wake of this new generation of free people, I could not shake off Marx’s historical insight of how “the tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living” (as cited in Freedman, 1968, p.188.). Like Moses’ newly liberated Hebrews, the generational memories of Afrikan and Indigenous peoples in the U.S. have been traumatized by brutal oppression and exploitation that we continue to embody through historical trauma. Even though the initial violent conditions are no longer visible, contemporary social justice solutions continue to be constrained by the imagination of colonization. Today, this imagination keeps us believing that education—compulsory schooling, although recognized by many as flawed, holds the best access to equitable opportunities (never mind outcomes) for people of color. Better opportunities, we believe, will cultivate conditions to create a more just society. As a womyn of color and a mother, I no longer buy into the idea that using the masters tools will work to our benefit. I do recognize that institutions of education through social justice and decolonization efforts have incorporated

recognition and representations of our voices, many educators (myself included) along the schooling spectrum have even gone as far as using these platforms for subversive efforts that use the classroom space and resources to decolonize because we recognize that schools are beyond reform (Andreotti, Stein, Ahenakew, & Hunt, 2015). However, at the end of the day, we are so wrapped up in the mechanics of fitting round objects into squared holes, that we are not actively presenting radical alternatives to schooling. Attempting to push decolonizing projects through capitalist institutions that are framed by a colonial mindset cannot achieve the desired results; it leads to the reproduction of western education necessary to the social reproduction of capitalism. In seeking to create truly transformative realities for our next seven generations, I am compelled to revisit the deculturalizing effect schooling has had on Indigenous/Mexicano children by illustrating the moments of hegemony in the making of Western/Capitalist education. By doing so, I seek to point out the hegemonic moments in U.S. education where Indigenous systems of knowledge or languages have been recognized and incorporated (as a result of movements to the left) but continue to uphold western/capitalist values and interests. By undergoing this critique, it is my hope we can decolonize our understanding of education and center the re-imagining of education as a project of living (not a product or even a by-product of compulsory schooling) in all its transformative possibilities in order to break the colonial mindset that plagues our memory. These transformative possibilities include creating collective solutions that dismantle institutions and relations of oppression and exploitation.

Coloniality and Decolonization

To address the colonial mindset, we can view it from the lens of coloniality which according to Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2007), survives colonialism as “it is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-

image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience” (p. 243). The Spanish and English colonial projects created the institutions, social relations, and ideology necessary to their expansion and maintenance and this laid the foundation for the development of capitalist institutions, social relations, and ideology. Coloniality recognizes that while the political economy of colonization is gone, the mindset is not. This state of being is the long-standing patterns of power and colonial relations in the post-discovery/conquest Americas—a manifestation that tied domination and subordination to capitalism (Maldonado-Torres, 2007).

When speaking to a decolonizing project, I look to the work of Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), who explains decolonization as an ongoing process that engages with imperialism and colonialism as it involves a knowingness and naming of the colonizer. In doing so, we are revisiting and critiquing western accounts of history because “to hold alternative histories is to hold alternative knowledges” which gives us access to “alternative ways of doing things” (p.34). These alternatives help us pose solutions from a time before colonization “to recover ourselves to claim a space in which to develop a sense of authentic humanity” and this testimony of historical injustice is critical in the political project of self-determination (p. 23-24).

Self-determination...becomes something more than a political goal. It becomes a goal of social justice, which is expressed through and across a wide range of psychological, social, cultural, and economic terrains. It necessarily involves the process of transformation, of decolonization, of healing and of mobilization as peoples.” (p. 116).

To revisit the deculturalizing effect schools have had on Mexicano/Indigenous people, we are naming the colonizing actor in education and by sharing an alternative account that uncovers the

hegemonic moments, we can pose solutions and alternative ways of conceptualizing education in childhood from a time before colonization.

The colonial and imperial projects of Europe and later the U.S. created the necessity for new institutions to maintain and reproduce their domination over acquired territories and peoples. Education as a byproduct of schooling became one of these necessary institutions. As the dominant class of merchant, finance and growing industrial capitalists controlled the state, the institution of state education served as transmitter of western bourgeois values, ideas, and defined social relations for purposes of creating unity and allegiance to the formation of the U.S. nation-state. For it was in the context of this massive colonial enterprise, the more widespread and ambitious in the history of humankind yet, that capitalism, an already existing form of economic relation, became tied with forms of domination and subordination that were central to maintaining colonial control first in the Americas, and then elsewhere (Maldonado-Torres 2007, p. 243). The colonial history of boarding schools as Indigenous education is a testament of how the process of schooling furthered the project of colonization by profoundly affecting people of color in the Americas with what education historian Joel Spring (2007) defines as deculturalization—“the educational process of destroying a people’s culture (cultural genocide) and replacing it with a new culture” (p. 7). As a Chicana, this is a process I could personally relate to after uncovering my own Eudeve-Opata and Tarahumara history which mirrored the work of Mexican anthropologist Guillermo Bonfil-Batalla (1996). He describes ethnocide or de-indianization as a historical process where “populations that originally possessed a particular and distinctive identity, based upon their own culture, are forced to renounce that identity, with all the consequent changes in their social organization and culture” (p. 17).

The deculturalization of my people's memory has been erased in waves that movements like Chicana/o and Ethnic Studies have attempted to uncover. In recent years, these deculturalization tensions continue to shape the politics of education surrounding Mexicanos and Indigenous people and their place in Arizona and U.S. history. The passing of Arizona State House Bill 2281 set back the advances that Chicana/x activist/scholars had made in bringing culturally relevant curricula into the classroom. The attempt of incorporating and representing oppressed people's history with institutional measurements and standards was witlessly attacked by the state and its bureaucracy arguing that they promoted ethnic solidarity, anti-patriotism, and the hatred of White people. The AZ State Superintendent of Public Instruction at the time, Tom Horne, said, "The job of the public schools is to develop the student's identity as Americans and as strong individuals"; he added, "It's not the job of the public schools to promote ethnic chauvinism."⁵ If one understands the making of public education, Horne is right. The job of the public school since its inception was to develop people's patriotism and allegiance to U.S. social/political and economic values all while holding the individual responsible for their lot in the hierarchical social order. As a product of schooling, I now realize how my schooling is a continuation of the colonial and capitalist project that keeps many of us trapped in the reproduction of injustice while believing we benefit from individual freedoms. This false sense of agency allows us to not only willingly send our children to school but also believe that although compulsory schooling is not perfect it is better than not having it at all. If we examine the above dynamic through the lens of hegemony we can better understand how hegemony obscures this negotiated coercion/compromise between those in power and those who are not.

⁵ Horne pushes ban on ethnic-studies courses: Tucson schools targeted; bill would cut funds, Arizona Republic: <http://www.azcentral.com/news/articles/2009/06/13/20090613ethnicban0613.html>, June 13, 2009.

Hegemony & Knowledge Production

The documentary *Schooling The World: The White Man's Last Burden* demonstrates the profound deculturalizing effect capitalist development and mass education has had on the lives of the Ladahki people. A narrative that mirrors the colonial treatment of Native lands and people in the U.S., Manish Jain (Coordinator of [Shikshantar](#), The People's Institute for Rethinking Education and Development) is a counter-hegemonic voice in the film who explains that in the developing world, local languages, customs, and traditions are a barrier to modernization and the way communities can progress through the stages of development is to eliminate these. This film is a great example of how the U.S. has exported its ideas of progress through exploitive development projects and schooling. As I was seeking to understand how development and schooling fall under the scope of hegemonic reproduction that allows for a small amount of flexibility or light adjustments to the status quo, I came across the critical ethnographic work of Michael Goldman (2005). His critique of the World Bank demonstrates how hegemony and counter-hegemony are constituted in a spectrum of “political and cultural closures and opportunities—from the extremes of societywide approval to major resistance—with full understanding that most social activity occurs in the spaces in between” (p. 25). Goldman's work is important as it highlights observations or moments in the formation of the capitalist project of development that produce commodities, knowledge, environments, capital and subjects.

The World Bank (WB) and the United States desire to export their capital, goods, and services around the globe (cheaper than going to war with communist-influenced countries), by dictating its political interests and forcing usurious loans that only create more debt for the Global South(p.18). The WB along with its backers, investors of first world countries (with the largest vote being the U.S., Japan, Germany, the UK, and France) sought to profit from the project of

development with its investments in roads, mines and power plants and through its various stages was confronted with the push back from environmentalist, non-governmental organization (NGOs), religious institutions, and social justice activists. As a result, the WB advocated its social responsibility to alleviate poverty and used the discourse from the movements to the left to launch its work as the emerging environmentally sustainable leader of our time. Goldman identifies the above manifestation as *green neoliberalism* and the result of a series of events and practices that included not only corporate interests but also “professionals working in government, firms, NGOs, and the scientific community” (p.33). This is what Stuart Hall (1986) calls a moment of hegemony:

which transcends the corporate limits of purely economic solidarity, encompasses the interests of other subordinate groups, and begins to propagate itself throughout society bringing about intellectual and moral as well as economic and political unity, and also the questions around which the struggle rages.... (pg.14).

According to the work of Goldman (2005), the Gramscian moment has arrived when “so many people—including promoters, interpreters, and even critics—now accept as fact that there is no alternative to development and that the only question is how to make it more sustainable” (p.7). As a result, we have a profit-driven institution taking on the narrative of social justice activists (people/environment over profits) to advance its profitable development project. The knowledge production this “benevolent” project now generates further cements its power as it marries knowledge production and political economics as “mutually constitutive and codependent” (p.33).

To understand the above process of normalizing the power and exploitive effects of development, “hegemony is sustained, not exclusively through the enforced instrumentality of the state, but rather, it is grounded in the relations and institutions of civil society” (Hall 2000, p.18).

These relations are an exchange of two opposing forces and what has been understood as a consensual coercion in the reproduction of hegemony. To understand the role of consent in hegemony it is a “negotiated compromise [that] replaces irreconcilable interests” (Burawoy, 2003, p. 225). It is important to point out that by framing consent as a negotiated compromise or even an obligation of citizenship in a nation-state, takes away from the agency it purports to imply as a free willing (not forced), deliberate and thoughtful choice that can be taken back at any time. Shay Welch (2012), in *A Theory of Freedom*, contends that in “social relations, consent must always come first but it must also be continually renewed and must involve both parties” (p.94). Her work is an analysis of how oppression has been justified behind the veil of obligation through social contracts and even when individuals believe they are making a free choice, suasion still exists from the part of the dominant group so she argues “any analysis of consent that is motivated by freedom must be robust and comprehensive enough to ensure that all ostensibly free individuals are capable of consenting equally” (p.95). Feeling the need to give in to pressure, consenting for fear of retaliation, or believing that it is the only alternative are how the dominant group reasserts their power and control within social relations. Framing consent, as a forced coercion because survival of our collective spirit is better than the alternative of having no voice, is a sentiment perpetuated in many social movements-- the resignation that having a token voice in the power structure is better than no voice at all.

Over time the abrupt welding of this compromise gets grinded over through the apparatus of common sense ideology. Unlike philosophy, which Gramsci argues has no guarantee of making it into the everyday consciousness of popular thought, common sense, “is continually transforming itself, enriching itself with scientific ideas and with philosophical opinions which have entered ordinary life” (Gramsci as cited in Goldman, 2005, p.32-33). According to Stuart Hall (1986),

common sense is not only a product of the historical process and its popular knowledge for that place and time it is important to understand how it is the already formed and taken for granted terrain, on which more coherent ideologies and philosophies must contend for mastery, the ground which new conceptions of the world must take into account, contest and transform, if they are to shape the conceptions of the world of the masses and in that way become historically effective (p.20).

The important role common sense plays in knowledge production is that these are not merely popular beliefs or scientific ideas that exist in the mind, they are real material forces that influence our everyday interactions and which we need to be aware of if we want to change them (Goldman, 2005). According to Gramsci, the State functions as the politico-juridical organization, the hidden or private apparatus of hegemony as it creates and reproduces an ideology around a cultural morality that meets the needs of the productive forces of capitalism. The night watchman is the force that polices this cultural morality and that includes the political, legal, and cultural superstructures (Gramsci in Forgascs 2000, p. 236). In the U.S., like in most developed/ing countries, this type of policing is encountered in a profound manner through what Gramsci identifies as a *civil hegemony*:

the voluntary associations, relations and institutions of civil society-schooling, the family, churches and religious life, cultural organizations, so-called private relations, gender, sexual and ethnic identities, etc. become, in effect, for the art of politics...the 'trenches' and the permanent fortifications of the front in the war of position.... (Gramsci as cited in Hall 2000, p.18).

These wars of position, according to Goldman (2005) and Burawoy (2000), are not positions outside hegemonic order but an attempt to work within the systems of power to redefine democracy in ways that influence the market, sovereignty, and human rights. Understanding

hegemonic order in the development projects of capitalism is relevant in seeing how education becomes part of common knowledge narrative for alleviating poverty. To attempt a decolonizing education project, we must understand the larger war, those who formed the trenches from which we fight, and the limitations of fighting from these already-molded, if not fortified trenches. As schooling is a contested trench, education historians have argued that U.S. schools have mostly embraced contradictory and conflicting goals and outcomes, it is also imperative that we be critical of how western-capitalist knowledge systems over time become common knowledge that displace and criminalize Indigenous worldviews. The effects of colonization continues to have a real impact on our day-to-day experiences; naming perpetrators of violence, even when they are invisible and intimately entrenched in our structures of power, is the only way to face our contradictions and create opportunities for social change (Hart, 2009, p.137).

The establishment of mass education

The role in preserving the history of education is to provide us with background information that documents, “human attempts to choose, shape, and preserve a preferred way of life” (Sherman & Kirschner, 1976, p.31). Knowing the history of education as compulsory schooling in the U.S. offers an opportunity for the existential exercise of choosing to act consciously and purposefully. This is the assumption that “if an individual possesses a background of knowledge or understanding, his behavior will automatically be affected and changed for the better” (p.41). Therein lies the hope of this work as a critical engagement project—the praxis of “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (Freire, 1970, p.33). Offering counter-narratives of schooling then helps give an understanding of why we see schooling as common sense knowledge and later how to question its legitimacy. In the

following paragraphs I will examine the colonial conditions that created mass-produced education, a right deemed so necessary, so imperative that it needed to be forced.

In going back to the formation of compulsory schooling, early historical writings point to the early colonist and their children learning the manual work of everyday survival in the home and in their communities. However, formal training in reading the Bible was also necessary and so it was customary to send these young children for a small fee to a dame school, where a woman in her home taught the 4R's: religion, reading, 'riting, 'rithmetic (Good & Teller, 1973). Parochial and other private schools that met for short terms became an option for refining more of the above skills and subjects. In 1647, some Massachusetts towns passed "the old deluder Satan" law that fined towns of fifty families or more who did not maintain a schoolteacher who could teach English and Latin (p.37). Towns seemed to find ways to divert this by paying fines, as they were cheaper than maintaining a schoolteacher or hiring a traveling teacher with other towns. These town schools declined as colonist expansion moved West as they saw opportunity in dispossessing more Native populations from their land. The later phases of schooling included independent school districts that were controlled by a board responsible for maintaining an elementary school for a three-month term and although these did not last long, they served as a model for how schools would be administered in the era of industrialization (Good & Teller, 1973).

The topic of education in the Post-Revolutionary War period became a political and public interest in the formation of the nation-state with ideological male founders like Thomas Jefferson, Noah Webster, Samuel Harrison Smith, and others who agreed that a republican form of government could only survive if there was a unified white population (Good & Teller, 1973; Spring, 2007). A common education was deemed necessary for "preserving liberty, securing

unity, promoting good citizenship, and developing the resources of the land and people” (Good & Teller, p.77). In the 1830s, common schools gave birth to the idea that government funded “free” education for *all* would create a, “more common, more equal, more dedicated to public policy, and therefore more effective in creating cultural and political values centering on Protestantism, republicanism, and capitalism” (Carl Kaestle as cited in Spring, 2007, p.5). For *all* like in most cases of early writing referred to native-born Anglo-Americans (primarily male) as it was illegal for Afrikan people to receive schooling and when the courts finally granted them access, it was through forced segregation in the 1896 Plessy ruling of “separate but equal” (Spring, 2007).

Noah Webster, the well-known American School Master, envisioned and advocated for a new American identity. In 1830, Webster’s skills as a writer helped solidify the new literacy for the American culture and its characteristics when he published the first standardized American dictionary, Bible, and spelling book (Spring, 2007). His definition of education continues to dictate how we conceive of the act of educating

to provide schooling for, to train by formal instruction and supervised practice especially in a skill, trade, or profession, to develop mentally, morally, or aesthetically especially by instruction, to provide with information: inform, to persuade or condition to feel, believe, or act in a desired way (Merriam-Webster).

This definition of education made it synonymous with schooling and standardized learning in a way that benefited and continues to benefit the ideals of the early Anglo American Protestant colonists (Spring, 2007). The importance of literacy in the Euro-centric tradition was considered a “necessary precondition for economic development” and cultural identity that was afforded to White children, imposed on Indigenous children, and denied to Afrikan peoples (Talbot, 1976; Spring, 2007).

Horace Mann known by many educational historians as the father of the common school era, introduced what he believed to be the best example of organized education for the U.S. in the Prussian school model (Tyack, 1974) . Prussia a once powerful kingdom in Germany was most influential for its professionalization of militancy and achieving its goals through the idea of centralized schooling where children were disciplined through universal conditioning for the interest of national allegiance. The U.S. Education Department published *Designing Education for the Future* in support of the Prussian model as “a means to achieve important economic and social goals of a national character.” The goals were the following:

- 1). Obedient soldiers to the army; 2). Obedient workers for mines, factories, and farms; 3). Well-subordinated civil servants, trained in their function; 4). Well-subordinated clerks for the Industry; 5). Citizens who thought alike on mass issues; 6). National uniformity in thought, word and deed (as cited in Gatto 2000, p.132).

In preparation for modernity, literacy and work were given significant power and as Industrialization pulled in populations to work in the factories, rural schools are seen as needing to get with the times of urbanization and a push to further democratize. The irony however is that the democracy expounded was the professionalization of education where “professionals” were brought in to tell the rural districts or community committees that they knew best (Tyack, 1974). This new era, transferred the power from everyday people to professionals whose efforts brought standardization, enumeration, scientific data collection, centralization, and consolidation of town schools into new larger buildings that could house a greater number of students (Tyack, 1974).

The professionalization of education brought male school commissioners or superintendents to organize and manage school districts. Professional leadership was believed to provide a bridge between city government and school boards. Creating a supposed non-political

body of bureaucracy was another way to achieve a top-down model. The gendered division of labor was another assignment of women's role in society as natural mothers; they were sought after as teachers for elementary schools and parents were more willing to trust a woman with their children. When schools became more centralized and education a profession, women continued to occupy posts as teachers meanwhile men held principal, management titles as it was believed that women worked more efficiently with a male head and men were better disciplinarians for older boys (Tyack, 1974).

The classification of children into grades was deemed necessary to optimize learning results and textbooks became the central form of a unified curriculum that decimated information and knowledge authority. The spread of Eurocentric literacy created a discipline of learning that spread with industrial development:

But what does widespread literacy do for a developing country? At the very least it constitutes a training in being trained. The man who has in childhood submitted to some process of disciplined and conscious learning is more likely to respond to further training, be it in a conscript army, in a factory, or at lectures arranged by his village agricultural association. And such training can be more precise and efficient, and more nationally standardized, if the written word can be used to supplement the spoken (Ronald Dore as cited in Talbott 1976, p.17-18).

In the 1880s towns like Portland, OR wanted to address the sweeping waves of immigration and saw the opportunity in common schools as the place to train "every child in our own tongue and habits of thought, and principles of government and aims of life" (Tyack, 1974, p.74). Immigrants were seen as a problem as they were difficult to socialize politically and eliminate the vice, crime, and poverty they took with them. Corporal punishment in schools with immigrant children was justified as part of the systematic effort of training them in "industry, temperance, and obedience"

(p.75). Religion, culture and language were always points of contention in the formation of the American school system. German-Americans were some of the first groups to organize and pass laws that required schools to teach German as part of their instruction in reading, writing, and grammar in the elementary schools. Many immigrant groups (Irish, Italian, Czech, Norwegian, French, Spanish, Dutch) realized their ethnic power and pushed for similar efforts to have their corresponding languages taught as separate subjects in elementary school. However, in 1889 the Edwards law in Illinois and Bennet bill in Wisconsin attempted to regulate immigrant influenced private and public schools to make most school instruction in English (Tyack, 1974).

Around the 1870's, Republican politicians of the time campaigned on the need for mandatory school attendance laws to assure voters were not "ignorant masses" or in other words, voting democrat (Provasnik, 2006, p.318). Before the turn of the century, 71 of 100 children between the ages of 5-18 attended school and five years of schooling was the norm (Tyack, 1974). According to historians, there seemed to be a broad consensus about the value of schooling, yet compulsory legislation began when people felt truant children needed to be forced to attend school to serve as the moral vacuum they were not receiving at home. States began passing coercive attendance laws many of which were sponsored by labor unions who wanted to prevent competition for already too low wages, child labor philanthropists (saving children), and politicians with Republicans largely supporting mandatory schooling as they maintained, "the children of the Commonwealth are public property" (p.71). John Philbrick, a prominent American educator, also believed in mandatory school attendance saying, "public instruction cannot be considered as having fulfilled its mission until it secures the rudiments of education to every child. To accomplish this object coercion is necessary" (Philbrick as cited in Tyack 1974, p.71). There was some pushback from educators and parents about forcing truant children to attend their

schools and advocated for them to have reformed schools that would prevent them from ending up in the prison system.

Several states began to enact similar laws like in Iowa; the Bennet Law of 1889 was one of several legislations, which made school attendance mandatory for children between the ages of seven and fourteen. It gave school boards the authority to fine parents who refused to comply with the law (Tyack, 1974). In 1891, the newly elected governor repealed the law saying it was, “arbitrary and unjustifiable interference with parental rights, individual freedom, and the liberty of conscience” (George W. Peck 1891 as cited in Carper & Hunt, 2007, p. 111). According to Carper and Hunt (2007) the governor of Iowa saw the law as unjustifiable because parents at this time voluntarily sent their children to school as it offered them status and hope for future economic advancement, “in other words, there was a ‘pay-off’ for relinquishing some parental authority” (p. 242). Carper and Hunt also contend that other parents were relieved to have the public school assume some of the responsibility of raising their children as this task had become more difficult when the workplace was separated from the household.

Stephen Provasnik (2006) chronicles the role the courts played in enforcing compulsory attendance laws and further enacting the power of the school/state over the child to the extent of usurping parental rights. Some of the decisions the courts made that sided with the school ranged from corporal punishment, charging children of being of “poor moral character” missing school for religious holidays, etc. (p. 322). Ultimately, according to the courts, “the power of the school authorities was a delegation of natural parental authority (*in loco parentis*) or arose from ‘common consent’ and ‘universal custom”(p. 321). According to Horace Mann, parental instinct could not be trusted to know best in matters of the state so “the right of preservation of a body of politic took precedence over all other rights” (Horace Mann as cited in Tyack, 1974, p.75).

Regardless of whether school attendance was consensual or mandatory, the discourse of the benefits of schooling was becoming impossible to challenge, as schooling was the place where good morals were acquired.

The attributes—considered “good morals”—would make good self-controlled workers that were more attuned to taking orders:

When educators argues that the educated worker made a better employee, it did not simply mean that he could read directions or was less likely to drink whisky or go out on strike; it also meant in effect that he was properly socialized to the new modes of production, attuned to hierarchy, affective neutrality, role-specific demands, extrinsic incentives for achievement (Tyack 1974, p.73)

According to Tyack the transformation of urban education did more to industrialize humanity than perhaps the possibility of humanizing the labor-production process. The progressive efforts at the turn of the century to make schools more progressive, more adapted to human need created the child-centered philosophies of John Dewey and the likes who advocated a progressive education that “called for learning experiences that fostered social, cultural, and intellectual meaning” (Donato, 1997, p.11). These commendable efforts, however, did more to reproduce home life or the experiences of the outside world into the classroom that further entrenched learning about life as a science and learning as a scarce commodity. People needed to “get an education” to assure a decent lot in future job placement within a capitalist economy. However, to address the continuous unequal distribution of wealth, more schooling was touted as the solution.

Capitalism: economic interest embedded in education

Our critique of the capitalist economy is simple enough: the people production process—in the workplace and in the schools—is dominated by the imperatives of profit and domination rather

than by human need. The unavoidable necessity of growing up and getting a job in the United States forces us all to become less than we could be: less free, less secure, in short less happy (Bowles & Gintis, 1976, p.53-54).

Marx argues that within this economic system labor becomes an act of force and not a voluntary one (much like schooling), as a person has to work or starve but according to Gramsci's moment of hegemony, proletarianization is the negotiated compromise of making due with the inevitable. The idea of *progress* and economic mobility is reproduced in schools where the training and stratification of labor begins to take place. In *Understanding Race Class Gender and Sexuality*, Lynn Weber (2002) argues that, "the institution of education supports both the political and economic structures of society, but at its core it is an ideological institution—intended to create and transmit ideas on which the society is organized and which will support its continuation" (p.122). In our socio-economic reality, the American Dream ideology is what sustains our economic system. This ideology is "that those who are talented and work hard can get ahead" and our educational system is the medium that provides that opportunity or the chance to achieve success to everyone regardless of origin or status (p.122).

To understand the paradox or contradiction of the American Dream, Weber explains our current political and economic system as a system of Democratic Capitalism. "Democracy is a political system in which supreme power is vested in the citizens—government *by* the people, justified by the principle of social *equality*" and Capitalism as "an economic system based on the pursuit of profits and private ownership resulting in pervasive economic inequality" (p.124). To address how these two contradictions, social equality and economic inequality, can exist, Weber argues that the American Dream is forced to reconceptualize "equality to mean equality of opportunity not of outcome" (p.124). This equality of opportunity, "lends itself to a social system based on meritocracy or the belief that because the race for social rewards is fair, those who reach

the finish line must be faster and thus more meritorious runners than those who come in last” if they finish at all (Oakes et al. as cited in Weber). The Gramscian moment of hegemony is when we accept that equality of opportunity (not the outcome) as the best we can do and the objective then is how to diversify access to this opportunity.

In *Schooling in Capitalist America*, Bowles and Gintis (1976) maintain that because schools reflect the above meritocratic values and capitalist economy of society, then it is natural for schools to create and reinforce patterns of inequality and “relationships of dominance and subordination” (p.11).

...by imparting technical and social skills and appropriate motivations, education increases the productive capacity of workers...education helps defuse and depoliticize the potentially explosive class relations of the production process, and thus serves to perpetuate the social, political, and economic conditions through which a portion of the product of labor is expropriated in the form of profits (p.11).

In essence, the current educational vehicles, from pre-schools to universities continue to reflect and perpetuate the hegemonic contradictions of society and its consequent social injustices: “Through its central role in reproducing race, class, gender, and sexuality hierarchies and in justifying those hierarchies, the institution of education is a cornerstone on which ideology of the American Dream rests” (Weber, 2002, p.127). The depoliticization of class tensions in schooling may be another reason why Marx’s prediction of the inevitable overthrow of capitalism became a vision of the past, and replaced by the social and economic opportunity of the American Dream. In short, the working class has been indoctrinated to voluntarily consent to their exploitation and blame themselves for their poverty. The Dream vested schools with the responsibility of being the great economic equalizer. Meanwhile contemporary state superintendents, university board of regents’, corporate education sponsors, and school boards continue to push for schools to be

administered more like businesses, to help create opportunities for income/profits--the overarching objective of neoliberalism.

Hegemony in Indigenous/*Mexicano* encounters with mass schooling

For American Indians, African Americans, immigrants, and others, schooling has been an engine of standardization, not of parental choice and control, as powerful interests within the dominant society endeavored to fit diverse Americans for their assigned place within established economic and social hierarchies (Lomawaima & McCarty 2006, p.5).

In the nineteenth century, the ongoing Indian Wars were becoming so exceedingly costly that Eleazar Wheelock, one of the founders of Dartmouth College, claimed that educating the Native populations in the ways of Anglo Americans would be cheaper than war (Spring, 2007). In *Education for Extinction*, David Adams argues the Anglo colonists believed that, “Indians would ultimately confront a fateful choice: civilization or extinction” (Adams, 1995, p.6). The mantras of the Anglo colonists were that of *manifest destiny*, i.e., “a belief that it was God’s will that the U.S. government extend its powers across the continent and over all Native American tribes” (Spring, 2007, p.24). In the Naturalization Act of 1790, Indigenous people are considered domestic foreigners and ineligible for citizenship (Spring, 2007). However, one hundred years later Congress officially altered their status to “wards of the government, a colonized people” (Adams, 1995, p.7).

As the tensions over land intensify, the U.S. government pushed for Indian removal from southern states and created reservations and allotment programs as a result (Spring, 2007). To accelerate the push to civilize, literacy in the English language was determined to be the key instrument to indoctrinate Native people in the sentiments and thoughts of Anglo Americans (Spring, 2007). Language as the living, breathing essence of tribal thought would have to be changed in one generation in order for Indigenous children to have an Anglo Protestant

worldview. To accomplish this, the Indian Peace Commission Report concluded, “Through sameness of language is produced sameness of sentiment and thought; customs and habits are moulded [*sic*] and assimilated in the same way, and thus in process of time the differences producing trouble would have been gradually obliterated” (report as cited in Spring, 2007, p.31).

Boarding schools began to take shape as the U.S. government ordered Indigenous children to be removed from their homes and tribal customs/languages and to isolate them with Anglo American missionaries (Spring, 2007). Local Indian populations fell subject to efforts intended to change them to the expectations of transplant Americans whose aim was to ‘civilize’ them by any and all means possible...[boarding schools] reflected the same notion, the best way to cause American Indian children to lose their sense of heritage and change their value system was to remove them from the source of those things, the family (Foreman, 1987).

When Thomas Jefferson came into his presidency in 1801, he held that it was imperative that Native people be taught to desire the accumulation of property and wealth “and to extinguish the cultural practice of sharing” (Spring, 2007, p.16). Trading houses and later boarding schools were established to instruct the Native populations on Western ideas of “farming, families, government, and economic relation” (p.17). Superintendent of Indian Schools John Oberly argued in 1888 that a major objective of Indian schools was to wean the student from ‘the degrading communism of the tribal- reservation system’ and to imbue him ‘with the exalting egotism of American civilization, so that he will say ‘I’ instead of ‘We,’ and ‘this is mine,’ instead of ‘This is ours (Adams, 1995, p.23).

The hope was to engrain in the students an allegiance to the U.S. government rather than to their tribal leadership (Spring, 2007). The presence of the American flag in every all schools was a symbolic inculcation of this patriotism: “The ‘Stars and Stripes’ should be a familiar object, and

students should be taught to revere the flag as a symbol of their nation's power and protection” (Prucha as cited in Spring 2007, p.33). An expression of this sort of patriotism in the school was the celebration of national holidays (Christmas, Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, etc) as a form of support to government policies (Spring, 2007).

The schooling process in the Americas became a cultural cleansing for Indigenous children and the site for their ongoing culture wars. Indigenous scholars such as K. Tsianina Lomawaima and Alice Littlefield have documented how educational practices in the U.S. served not only to instruct Indigenous children to be subservient to white power and agree to surrendering traditional lands but also to prepare them to enter the manual/domestic labor market (Lomawaima & McCarty 2006, p.49). In *Border Citizens*, Eric Meeks (2007) recounts the racial and economic tensions of Anglo westward mobility that solidified territories like Arizona becoming a state. This spread of development shaped labor markets in the West but also defined citizenship criteria and delineated national boundaries (U.S./Anglo American & Mexico/Mexican). In the midst of these imposed physical and psychological boundaries, Mexican/Indigenous people struggled to maintain control of their culture and lives through what Meeks calls resistant adaptation. During this time, Mexicanos and other Indigenous people shared a communal identity until U.S. government officials separated Tohono O'Odhams from Mexicanos (and Yaquis) under the pretext that Mexicanos polluted the Tohono O' Odhams because they, the Mexicanos, were not "real Indians". The politics around *mestizaje* and blood purity amongst Indigenous people is one of the divide and conquer tactics of the colonist that continues to put Indigenous people and Mexicanos at odds.

Jack Forbes (1995), American Indian scholar has argued that true *mestizaje* is what took place in Spain, Ireland, England and many European and Eastern countries before setting foot in

the Americas. To Forbes, the mestizo concept was created by Europeans to marginalize the people they had conquered and justify the system of racism in which White and non-White were the two race binaries and everything in between competed to be White. According to Forbes, these were the “colonial policies of Spain, Britain, and the United States” as they were the ones responsible for the concept of mestizaje and made the definition real by putting in place racist policies from slavery, caste systems, segregation and later institutionalized violence that continues to limit accessibility and opportunity for people of color.

Forbes identifies Chicanos as Indigenous people and by doing so he attempts to resist the racist history of the mestizo identity as Mexicanos/Chicanos cultural identity is more indigenous to present day Mexico than to the Europeans who also forced Indigenous tribes in the South to the political and economic agendas of the colonist. In claims of authenticity such as “one hundred percent Indian blood” Rosemary Henze and Kathryn Davis (1999) posit that “representing something as elusive, varied, and ever changing as culture” cannot be held stagnant—stuck in the past. Leanne Hinton and Jocelyn Ahlers (1999) argue that absolute Indigenous authenticity cannot exist. The reality that “many native people have multiethnic backgrounds and must negotiate these identities as well as their native and dominant culture ‘selves’” so we cannot “reduce culture to something tangible such as rituals, songs, dances, and food” (Henze & Davis, 1999, p.8 & p.15).

On the contrary, Heriberto Godina’s (2003) work speaks to the eternalized self-hate that Chicana/o students carry as a direct result of colonization and not wanting to be associated with Indigenous people.

The stigma of being associated with Native American culture is ingrained into the majority of the Chicano and Chicana belief systems. The desire for the Chicana and Chicano to deny their ancestral culture prevails in their attempt to assimilate into the

mainstream society of the United States, yet their belief systems are very similar to those of the Native-American (Godina, 2003, p.143).

The above identity politics stemmed from the limitations in citizenship the U.S. battled in courts in attempting to categorize Mexicanos. In 1887, Texas courts ruled that Mexicanos were not white; meanwhile, in California they are classified as Caucasian until the 1930's when they became landless "Indians" (Spring, 2007). The uncertainty of citizenship rights for U.S. born Mexicanos was solidified by the repatriation efforts that deported half a million of them to Mexico, mostly U.S born, many whom were here before the West was taken over.

The contradiction of educational efforts to try and Americanize children was not the same intention for people of color as it was for white immigrants. The separate but equal ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) also affected the schooling access for Mexican American children as their cultural and linguistic difference was an excuse to keep them segregated from white students. Assimilation did not seem to be an option for children of color as the education they had access to was intended to instill in them biological/cultural inferiority to their white counter-parts: "In one community, for example, a superintendent said Mexican children needed at least 'five or six years of Americanization before being placed with American children'" (Donato, 1997, p.13). Even after the desegregation ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), language continued to be a pretext for remedial tracking of Mexican children that would continue into the creation of vocational education for students of color post desegregation.

The status of migrant Mexican children whose farm worker families followed the seasonal agriculture work became another excuse of discrimination as school attendance fluctuated. School administrators blamed Mexican parents for not valuing education as a result of their poverty and

cultural values (Donato, 1997, p.33). The intellectual and activist work of the 1960s inspired Mexican American communities to organize and call for educational reforms:

for boards of education in the area to recognize their children’s language and culture; for the teaching of Spanish at the elementary level; and for the inclusion of the history and literature of Mexico and other Latin American countries in the curriculum...pressed school professionals to develop unbiased testing instruments that assessed their children...to ‘recruit, hire, and place bilingual teachers, counselors, and administrators [who understood] the Mexican-American child’ in their schools (Donato, 1997, p.60-61).

The Chicana/o Movement politicized many students who went onto academic professions that established k-12 and university programs in bilingual education and Mexican American/Chicana/o Studies to continue addressing “dropout rates, test scores, and other indices of academic achievement” (Macedo, 2000, p. 22). However, generations later, we are still grappling with the effect compulsory schooling has had on our lives, many continuing the hegemonic wars of position attempting to work within the systems of power to redefine access and opportunity.

Although we are decades later from Bowles and Gintis (1976) early work in *Schooling in Capitalist America*, I maintain that the reformist efforts of progressive leaders in major social overhauls dealing with educational policies like the War on Poverty, Head Start, Title 1, and I would add even grassroots efforts of sovereignty in reservation schools, bilingual education, Ethnic Studies have done little to create “a more equal distribution of income or opportunity” and that on the contrary, poverty and discrimination have persisted--“Liberal social reform has been reduced to a program of band-aid remedies whose most eloquent vision is making do with the inevitable” (p.6-7). Paulo Freire’s work in Brazil also reinforced this sentiment that reformist activities were inadequate in bringing about radical change to the lives of poor and marginalized

communities (Elias, 1976). Ivan Illich (1970) was also critical of taxing the poor (seen as a regressive tax) for public education that supported the apparatus of educators and buildings but ironically restricted the public.

Institutionalizing Indigenous knowledge

The standardization of learning affected the continuance of Indigenous education by creating what Lomawaima and McCarty (2006) term “safety zones,” the dilemma of juggling which Indigenous values and practices could be judged as “safe, innocuous, and tolerable” and others “dangerous, different, and subversive of mainstream values” (p.5). Lomawaima and McCarty scrutinize how schooling, with its standardization of learning and its supposition as a tool for equal opportunity, has further marginalized and segregated Indigenous people and people of color as “it has circumscribed a narrow zone of tolerable difference” (p.5). Indigenous educators in the past two decades have tried to bridge the two dilemmas of preserving culture and being equipped to maneuver in a capitalist institutionalized society. Designing culturally responsive curricula or intercultural education in public and reservation schools have been efforts aimed at preparing Indigenous children to the schizophrenic identities they will be forced to embrace or consent to as colonized peoples if they choose to maintain a rootedness on the stories of who they are as a people. Other scholars have illustrated the educational process as a mirror image of the initial European and Native encounter in which two worlds collide and Native people are the ones charged with having to learn the ways of each world.

When academics depict the often-difficult experiences of Native American students at institutions of learning, many evoke the image of an individual trying to walk between two worlds. This metaphor implies that in order to survive and participate successfully in mainstream culture, Native American students must learn an alien way to walk, talk, think, and act, behaving

as themselves only when they are at home in the Indian world. This expectation places the burden of assimilation squarely on the shoulders of Native American students and can be brutalizing to one's identity and spirituality (Garrod & Larimore 1997, p.3).

For time immemorial, the Indigenous inhabitants of the Americas experienced education as embedded in the everyday community life of the tribe (Spring, 2007). In *Look to the Mountain*, Gregory Cajete (1994) defines the original purpose of education for Native people as "education for life's sake: learning about life through participation and relationship in the community, including not only people but plants, animals, and the whole of Nature" (p.26). This relationship-oriented, land-based learning environment was centered on what Cajete calls a natural community or *natural democracy*, "the idea that plants, animals, and other entities in the natural world have rights of their own and must be given respect, as would any member of a human tribe" (p.89). This natural democracy is what social justice looks like for Indigenous people where rights are inherit to all humans and the natural world and their existence denotes a participatory and cooperative relationship.

In *Native Science* (2000), Cajete positions that because "Indigenous people are people of place" then this place--- the natural environment is embedded within Indigenous people's languages:

Language is more than a code; it is a way of participating with each other and the natural world. At one level language is a symbolic code for representing the world that we perceive with our senses. At the deeper psychological level, language is sensuous, evocative, filled with emotion, meaning and spirit...in its holistic and natural sense, language is animate and animating...in the Native perspective, language exemplifies our communion with nature rather than our separation from it (p.72).

Alaska Native scholars Ray Barnhardt and Oscar Kawagley (2005) argue that Indigenous

worldviews and thought processes are also rooted in the language as well as the “how, when, where, and for what purposes the language is used” (p.19). Understanding Indigenous languages as a multidimensional knowledge system then one can better grasp what happens when “the language associated with that system of thought is usurped by another” (p.19). Henze and Davis (1999) associate the loss of language to “the loss of the indigenous worldview embedded in the language” (p. 16).

Language has been another place of hegemonic contestation in education from erasure, displacement and appropriation. In *Deschooling Society* (1970) Ivan Illich argued that through our participation in validating the values of the nation-state we have given institutions the power to characterize our worldviews and language and turn us into consumer families. The struggle then to make us all speakers of a common standard American English and mainstream American culture is imperative for the reproduction of the U.S. political economy. It is also important to note that having a standard of communication that everyone can understand does create a unifying force and also lessens the fear of possible uprising or revolt by marginalized and oppressed groups.

In John Bauch’s (2000) *Beyond Ebonics: Linguistic Pride and Racial Justice* he connects the African American plight of acquiring standard American English in addition to speaking Ebonics as the effort that would linguistically unify a racially diverse nation that will eventually achieve Dr. King’s color-blind ambition (p. 116). The controversy surrounding the legitimacy of Ebonics resonated with this attempt to disembody this communicative practice from the historical and social context that created Ebonics or black speech a “complex mixture of European and African languages born of the African slave trade” (Baugh 2000, p. 3). The existence and

generational exchange of Ebonics serves as a testament of how languages or speech evolves and reproduces itself as it interacts with a physical, social, and cultural environment.

The literature on Ebonics voices the legitimacy of the language or communicative practice but also a sort of acceptance that made it necessary for Afrikan American children to learn standard American English if they were to “succeed” in school and transition out of poverty and a marginalized status. This was the thought process of the Oakland school system when they validated Ebonics (in a board resolution) as the native language of their Afrikan American students as a way to better meet their needs by designating them as limited and non-English proficient or L2s (second language learners) of standard American English (Perry & Delpit, 1998). This designation would allow for the implementation of courses and programs like the *Standard English Proficiency* program (SEP) in Oakland (Perry & Delpit, 1998).

What is unsettling in the narratives surrounding Ebonics is the resignation that standard American English is “how mainstream America communicates” and that all Afrikan American children have to learn to speak the standard because not knowing it will limit them in their education and future jobs (interview of linguist John Rickford in Perry & Delpit 1998, p. 61 & p. 134). In this sense, the purpose for legitimizing Ebonics (in Oakland schools) as a communicative practice was to intervene with the reality that Afrikan American students were being labeled as failures. Like many progressive *band-aid policies* of our time, Ebonics was validated only as a tool that would facilitate the integration of Afrikan American children as “competent” American adult citizens that in time would be trained to work, move, and sound like everyone else.

The power struggle of validating the diverse experiences of language and culture within the Afrikan American community is similar to the struggles facing many Indigenous and

immigrant communities in the U.S. who have had to persist and re-adapt through the continuing waves of colonization. As communities of color continue to dialogue on the efforts that will engage us in a process of decolonization, we will have to give critical thought to how language policies (even progressive language policies) perpetuate nation-state politics and agendas. Languages/communicative practices are central to our human experience and will continue to freely move regardless of language restrictions and legislative policies.

The dilemma with instituting the “teaching” of Indigenous education in schools is the compartmentalizing or packaging of language and culture as a discipline. In doing so, we create the possibility for extending the reach of capitalism which always seeks out novelties outside of itself to mass-produce. There is nothing sacred in capitalism and schools buy the latest educational trends for teachers and students to consume. Social justice or Indigenous education, are not outside of this. The standardization of Indigenous knowledge systems is problematic itself and educators of color in an attempt to decolonize Western curricula, introduce Indigenous worldviews and concepts into the classroom (knowing the profound effect this knowledge can have on youth who cannot relate to traditional curricula) may be tempted to capitalize on this “successful approach” by packaging a curricular paradigm for others to consume. In doing so, we reproduce the hegemonic order of knowledge production and exploitative economic relations we intended to counter. In the efforts to redefine our experiences outside of hegemonic order, it is important for educators to keep the above challenges in mind.

So, is decolonizing education possible?

I believe the project of decolonization is what gives many of us hope and why we push so hard to learn the master’s tools/language/literacy so that we know not to reproduce them in our

own lived visions for decolonization. The critical ethnographic work in D/development by Gillian Hart (2006) re-inspired me to not only see the transformative moments that occur in social movements but to spark curiosity in how we can make visible the tensions that hegemony hides. That as disposed and deculturalized people, historical and geographical memories and meanings can provide us “new understanding of power-laden processes of constitution, connection, disconnection, slippages, openings, contradictions, possibility for alliances within spatial scales” (Hart 2006, p.982).

I hope that dialoguing about decolonizing education will continue to move us to be critical of compulsory schooling and to dialogue about the multiple ways that local communities can envision and transform educational realities for our children. After reading Greg Cajete’s (1994) anthem to Indigenous education in *Look to the Mountain*, I was moved so deeply, I knew it was the type of education I had been yearning for my entire life and what I wanted to pass on to my children. When I came across un/de schooling movements from the 60’s and 70’s that questioned compulsory schooling and institutionalized learning, I knew that space held possibilities for people of color who wanted a material framework for taking the leap outside of western education. I believe that Indigenous education as it was prior to colonization holds the potential for alternative ways of doing things. In many ways however, we have to be open to the uncertainties of the unknown that comes when one moves in the direction of un/de schooling-- an unlearning of coloniality for the purposes of reclaiming our cultural identities, recreating collaborative economies that dismantle capitalist practices, and the restoration of our natural communities/democracy.

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APPENDIX B

M/OTHERING AS MOUNTAIN MOVING:

NARRATIVES OF MOTHERS QUESTIONING BIRTH, CHILD REARING, AND
SCHOOLING

Abstract

The project of decolonization in child rearing manifests itself through mothers challenging the hegemony of medical institutions and capitalist socio-cultural norms by choosing birthing practices/ceremonies connected to this life project “of addressing soul loss, land loss, cultural and spiritual fragmentation” (Gonzales, 2012, p. xvii). Post-birth, the challenge extends to western-capitalist educational institutions by opting for a de/un schooling approach that best aligns with family/cultural/social justice values. This paper examines how decolonizing motherhood holds the possibilities for claiming authority over the “education” of our children toward ethnic, racial, and gender counter-hegemonies.

Key words: decolonization, traditional birth, mothering practices, unschooling, deschooling, children

M/othering as Mountain Moving: Narratives of mothers questioning birth, child rearing, and schooling

The mountain-moving day is coming.
 I say so, yet others doubt.
 Only a while the mountain sleeps.
 In the past
 All mountains moved in fire,
 Yet you may not believe it.
 Oh man, this alone believe,
 All sleeping women
 Now will awake and move.
 -Yosano Akiko

Introduction

I grew up in a Mexican Evangelical home and the crack in my conservative Christian upbringing came when I took a human sexuality course my freshman year in college where among many firsts, I was exposed to the alternative birth movement. In the course, I heard from midwives, doulas, and mamas on their birth experiences. I was blown away by this revelation on birth practices and never putting much thought into wanting to have children; I decided then that if I ever did, I wanted to have a non-medicalized birth. Growing up I never engaged with younger children - in fact, I avoided babies. When I was nineteen, the birth of my niece Abigail changed everything. From each time after our first meeting, holding her was a transcendental experience. I was humbled by her presence as a manifestation of the sacred human cycle and wrapped in her innocent warmth I knew that I wanted to experience that magical life cycle for myself. Her birth widened the crack made by the alternative birth movement so that I was on a path that would lead me to question child-rearing ideologies that privileged adultism, institutionalized learning, and child development.

As an undergraduate, my early experience in women studies courses pertaining to motherhood turned me away from taking any more courses. Motherhood was seen as an inhibitor of female liberation and reproduction of hetero patriarchy. This sentiment made me feel that to be

a good feminist I had to give up my agency of choosing parenthood. My senior year in college I was pregnant with Tenochtli and as happy as I was to start this new journey, college professors and administration looked at me with disapproval. As a younger Chicana, I seemed to fit the bill of another stereotype I was supposed to break and my pregnant body served as a bad example for other college students. But like the Akiko poem, I was beginning to move my feminine fire.

With my first pregnancy, I knew I wanted a natural childbirth with a midwife but limited economic resources had me birthing in a hospital with a female ob/gyn who was insensitive and bothered that I refused an epidural. The nurses later informed me that I was her first mom to deliver without an epidural. The birthing process was a struggle against my own body with every contraction getting me closer to Tenochtli dropping through the birth canal, my body instinctually propped me up and out from the hospital bed and every time the ob/gyn was there to push me back down. I told her I could not take the pushing any longer, that I needed to use gravity to help me get the baby out and she refused. She needed to have full control of the situation and needed to see what was going on at all times – hallmark behavior of a western-trained doctor. I pushed for two hours after fighting with her again that I did not want an episiotomy, telling her that if the baby was going to tear through my body then I rather he do it. After the birth, I was full of endorphins with a high ready to take on the world, but my body was not. It had been terrorized and traumatized by the medical industrial complex and I swore to never birth in a hospital again.

My second birth was at a freestanding birth center and was the most empowering physical/spiritual encounter I had ever experienced. My godmother Patrisia Gonzales and comadre Cazandra Zaragoza caught Yenelli as I held on to his father standing up with no need to ever forcefully push; meanwhile, the midwife stood half awake in the bathroom doorframe

rubbing the sleep from her eyes. My godmother wrote about our birth in her book *Red Medicine* (2012):

Standing Up Woman had her baby standing up. From preconception, she followed ceremonial protocols. Ceremonial sweeping rites in which she donned a new huipil, the rebozo turned her transverse baby. As her husband drummed a water drum, she disappeared into her ceremony. In less than two hours of contractions and pushing, her son was born as she was standing up. I caught her baby and we cut the cord over a corn grown from a ceremonial milpa. Boy child presented to the morning star and the placenta of the night sky. Another life enters the world from a decolonized body. The ceremony ends following a forty-day ceremonial cycle. Baby is bathed with flowers. Mother receives her medicinal baño. In the lodge her womb is returned to its place, the body to its order with the bath tea and grandfather stones, the whisking of the hot broom of herbs carrying the sacred vapors. This *Eudeve/Opata-Tarahumara* Chicana has returned birth ceremony to her family. This ceremony is hers. This is how she got her name. The story will remain alive in those who remember her name (p.237-238).

The birth of Yenelli showed me the beauty and most sacred part of the human cycle, something I remind myself of when times get tough. The succeeding pregnancy of Siquei Maella gifted me the home birth I had dreamed of. Although I had intended for a midwife and my family to attend and support my birthing process, the baby had other plans. After everyone left for the night and the children were asleep, the surges got stronger. The only relief I felt with the pressure building up was when I pushed through the wave. After a few more surges that had me quivering out loud, my water broke. I tried squatting next to the bed to move the baby deeper into the birth canal but I did not feel supported. From my past birth, I remembered how efficiently my body worked at pushing baby out when I stood up, so I asked my partner to stand with me so I could hold on to him. Immediately each surge had my knees bending into a squat and in the ring of fire, I could feel her head ready to pull through. I felt like I had a team cheering me on in that last

stretch as my partner and godmother got me through the final stage. With roars that live in the wild, Síquei Maella came earth-side as my godmother dove to catch her and hand her to me. That moment when my eyes met the spirit I had felt inside my womb was surreal. Síquei Maella, with her profound stare, studied me quietly then looked around to see what this place was all about. Again, birth had transformed me, the process had made me connect and listen to how my body and baby were asking me to move. I felt like a portal in the hands of the most creative forces of the universe and although shaken up by the experience of a long labor, I was thankful.

The birth and ensuing rearing of my children transformed everything I thought and wished I knew about child rearing. Many times I have felt unprepared and incapable as a parent and have wondered if I would feel differently had I grown up helping care for children rather than spending most of my waking life in school. Instead, I attempted to learn about child rearing from reading books on every style of parenting, attending classes, and watching “educational” videos on child development. Motherhood or child-rearing, I have come to realize is all-consuming and no amount of schooling or information about mothering can prepare you for the lessons you learn first-hand by experiencing the myriad of challenges and growth that comes from the journey of living and engaging with birth and children.

My journey/fire movement of critical engagement that led me to the practices of traditional childbirth was connected to my journey of decolonization--- a search for alternatives inspired by a time before colonization (Smith, 1999). This is what led to this topic of mothers of color engaging in educational alternatives for their children came to be. My fight in creating dialogue about the opportunities for creating alternatives to schooling is twofold: to heal *susto*⁶ and prevent the reoccurring cycle of heartbreak that comes from the reproduction of injustices. By

⁶ Can also be understood as historical trauma, see Gonzales (2012).

reconnecting with traditional indigenous knowledge and practices, I believe, will equip us to raise a generation of children with less of the above violence whose lives will help better inform the project of decolonization for our communities (Gonzales, 2012; Grande, 2004). Like Gonzales (2012) posits, “we must transcend the sense of loss to create restorative justice” and this journey is aimed at that.

The Project:

As the research on unschooling began, I encountered literature on the topic from online blogs. Immediately, I realized that, like myself, many of the families who were unschooling their children also had unmedicalized births (or were supportive of them), practiced attachment parenting, and unschooled. Despite these three points of commonality, the demographics of these unschooling families were mostly White/Euro-American and although I could sympathize with their child-rearing philosophies, I did not feel like I could culturally or critically relate to them. After unrelated conversations and online searches, I came across the work of womyn⁷ of color who were sharing their life’s work of parenting and child rearing online. It was refreshing to learn that my path/journey/fire movement to unschooling was not a freak accident and that other parents who were doing social justice work shared a passion for reconceptualizing education for children. By sharing these counter-hegemonic narratives, I hope to contribute to the critical pedagogy dialogues in education.

The Questions

When I started thinking about this project, my overarching question was: how have families that have a history of colonization/oppression built culturally appropriate learning networks as a means of cultivating conditions for social change? For example, what were the

⁷ The spelling is a symbolic act of defining ourselves away from the subcategory of man/men.

conditions that existed for these families who sought out an alternative to compulsory schooling? What were their fears, hopes, and interests in seeking out alternatives to schooling? And finally, if current economic realities made it difficult for families to see home/community education as a viable option, how were they inspired/motivated to creatively come up with solutions to allow for that possibility? My questions came together after spending much time with local social justice teachers and educators discussing my own unschooling journey and the concerns they raised. Many thought it was fine for my family but not something for other people of color. Some feared the socialization that would be lacking if children of color did not attend school or the limited accessibility to information or ideas. Eva Swidler (n.d.) in *Re-imagining School:*

Public educators & unschoolers may have much in common also shared having similar responses,

You're homeschooling??!! Many of us in the progressive political world are familiar with the double take inspired by saying that our kids don't go to school. Isn't homeschooling for supporters of the extreme Right, creationists, militia members, libertarians, child abusers? Doesn't homeschooling mean also supporting the privatization of public schools, school voucher programs and the creation of unequal access to skills, training and credentials? How can a progressive be a homeschooler? (Swidler, n.d.)

It was this sentiment that guided my questions because, in all fairness, they are valid questions for us to engage in and create a sense of accountability for our children; however, this accountability for raising children needs to exist for both schooling and homeschooling communities. Some of the other concerns were that children of color needed to have certifications to put them at a more level playing field with their White counterparts. Moreover that people of color are more likely to have two working parents so that homeschooling would not be an option.

As I continued to reflect on my own journey into deschooling, I realized I could not only focus on learning networks that represented the period of school-aged development. I knew that the seed for deschooling had been planted long ago when I began my decolonizing project but was most palpable through my birth and mothering practice. I wanted this research to reflect the unlearning of colonial practices and relearning of ancestral knowledges, which could best be represented through birthing and mothering practices. As I gathered my interview questions I created the following subcategories: Family Background; Mothering/Parenting; Education/Learning; Social Justice & Accessibility of homeschooling; Personal/Family reflections. All of which were aimed at extrapolating views on birth, mothering/childrearing, and education.

Methodology & Narrative Collection

I am personally embedded in this story-telling research work owing to the inspiration of Gloria Anzaldua whose work taught me the importance of writing from my lived experiences. As a result, my research interests and pursuits are grounded in my *auto-historia* or my quest of re-imagining my Chicana/Indigenous womanist narrative. My birth experiences that pushed me to learn through the body serve as a metaphor for the at-home/in-community learning I would later advocate for. With each birth, I learned to trust my body and intuition where I could finally bring that power and agency back to the home. By deconstructing the professionalization of birth and education, I seek to decolonize my own parenting practices and move toward liberatory educational practices that I share with other people of color. This narrative collection has been put together through a series of interview questions, phone calls, emails, and blog research. Through online communities, the digital medium of blogging has not only functioned as an informational and an empowering way to disseminate ideas and knowledges but is also transforming power

relations (Friedman & Calixte, 2009). This medium has made information about unschooling more accessible.

In sharing these narratives, we are engaging in stories born from experiential knowledge and the print and online presence of this work is helping connect the digital dots of communities of practice engaging in liberatory education. In an effort to humanize this research process, I refer to the participants' contributions as narrative collections rather than data. After compiling the participants' stories, I also engaged them in the process of writing this article to make sure I capture their words and practices appropriately and gave them an opportunity to expand or retract what they first shared.

Narrative Site & Narrative Participants

Participants shared the following commonalities

1. identify as people of color
2. participate in home schooling/un schooling practice
3. have written and blogged about their child rearing educational practices
4. social justice/decolonizing efforts at the heart of their education and child-rearing practice

Teresa Graham Brett was the first parent I met through a mutual colleague in 2012 when she was getting ready to self-publish her book, *Parenting for Social Change*. Teresa along with her partner Rob share their life with children Martel (13) and Greyson (8) and identify as a biracial family that is ethnically Japanese American, White, and Mexican American. Teresa and Rob both have degrees from the University of Arizona (UA). The Graham Brett's live in Tucson, AZ, where Teresa is currently the Associate Dean of Students at the UA's Inclusion and

Multicultural Engagement department. Before taking this full-time position, Teresa served as a consultant to groups, organizations, and institutions engaging in work to “create cultures that are liberatory, just, and inclusive” (Graham Brett, n.d.). Teresa created an online presence by sharing her work in the *Parenting for Social Change* website, and as a contributor for [Home Education Magazine](#), [Pathways to Family Wellness](#), *Rethinking Everything Magazine*, and *Rethinking Everything – Parent*, and the [Natural Child Project](#). Teresa also works with other online communities such as the Kindred Community, Families for Conscious Living and co-founded [Alliance for Parenting Education in Africa](#) (Graham Brett, n.d.).

I came across **Akilah S. Richards'** online after reading her work on *Everyday Feminism*, an online community of feminist digital media where she is a regular contributor and writes about self-expression, womanhood, feminism, location independence, and unschooling (Everyday Feminism, n.d.). Akilah shares her life with husband Kris (37), daughters, Marley (11) and Sage-Niambi (9) who identify as a Jamaican family and ethnically and culturally Black. Akilah and Kris both spent their grade school years in South Florida and both went to college. The Richards family describe themselves as “tech-savvy, location independent, unschoolers raising ourselves in a culturally conscious, African-centered, world citizen-view type of lifestyle” (A. Richards, personal communication, 2015). As a six-time author and digital content writer, Akilah uses storytelling because she believes in the power of expressed personal narrative and deep self-acceptance as tools for authentic self-expression and community enrichment (Richards, 2015).

After a Google search on Indigenous birth mothers, I came across **Panquetzani** on her blog *Indigenous Mothers*. I later followed her on Instagram where she showcased her community education work doing traditional womb care. Panquetzani identifies as Chicana/Indigena and is raising her two boys Akinyemi (7) and Itzix (4) with her boyfriend/parenting partner, a math and

Spanish teacher. She attended community college but soon realized school got in the way of pursuing her passions of filmmaking and music where she already made a decent living.

Panquetzani's paid/community work through *Indigemama* is inspired by Traditional Mexican Medicine knowledge that was passed on to her by her *abuelita*. As a result, she leads workshops and consultations on “womb healing and *sobadas* (womb massage), herbalism, holistic pregnancy coaching, and full-spectrum doula services” (Panquetzani, n.d.). Panquetzani believes that “women are the bearers of culture, our first teachers, and healers of the family unit... that all human life comes through a woman's sacred passageway and that an intimate connection with the divine and Earth are maintained through this channel” (Panquetzani, n.d.).

Literary Framework and Narrative Collection

Birth. In the first three minutes of the film *The Business of Being Born*, a male OB/GYN makes a degrading statement about traditional birth “I call it feminist macho-ism. You know when you're pushing a baby in a stroller three months later to say ‘I did it naturally.’ Personally I don't think it's important.” The association of a sacred and natural rite of passage as anti-feminist propaganda is not new. The fear of womyn birthing outside the medical realm of care poses a real threat to the patriarchal/capitalist practice that led to the establishment of obstetrics and gynecological medicine. As late as the end of the 19th century in the U.S., birth was a female process facilitated by midwives, and female friends/family at home (Falter, 2008). Lay midwifery, womyn skilled in medical (traditional/folk medicine) intuitive care for mother and child was the norm as “midwives played a noninterventionist, supportive role in the home birthing rooms and permitted for a natural course of childbirth” (Falter, 2008, p.26). According to Falter (2008), social childbirth, the process in which expectant mothers relied on female friends and

relatives for care during and after the birth was an act of reciprocity and solidarity amongst womyn.

The 1870's introduced large-scale industrial development and these shifts affected birthing practices as industrial technologies and the push for professionalization engaged with medicine to form technocratic systems of knowledge. The agendas within this system of knowledge sought out to reorganize human relations with "the requirements of industrial capitalism" (Vigorito, 2002, p. 35). To the extent to which science and medicine, touted as subjective universal truths, derived their credibility from "the ability to generate exploitable knowledge" (Etzkowitz & Webster cited in Vigorito, 2002). However, the interplay of professional birthing practices included Christian ideology, which sought to distance itself from folk magic that was associated with midwifery and contribute to a new culture of using professionals and technologies to intervene with nature (Falter, 2008). Increased fear surrounded the idea that a womyn's pain in childbirth was the result of God's punishment stemming from Eve's original sin (Leavitt, 1986). Traditional midwifery remained one of the last bastions of womyns autonomy only to be conquered when the technology and professionalization of western medicine caught up to the anti-feminine ideology of Christianity.

Fear and pain management had a lot to do with why womyn sought out what was advertised as safer less painful birth options. The age of the "New Midwifery" where male physicians trained in Britain returned to the U.S. with their theoretical understanding of the female body and replaced traditional midwives in home births (Wertz & Wertz, 1989, p. 29). According to Wertz and Wertz, this new professionalized trained labor later moved the birth scene to hospitals where all the tools necessary for a safe birth were readily available. The consequent industrialization of life where medical institutions like hospitals were perceived as

human progress wrapped in capitalist economies did more to commodify the female birthing body as hospitals were believed to be the “natural, safest, and most efficient form of delivery in the United States” (Falter, 2008, p. 45). Hegemony, as the acting agent that hides the tensions in knowledge production, has shaped the idea that womyn choose or consent to a “safer” more comfortable birth in hospitals as western medicine has framed hospital births as “the most responsible or correct way of giving birth” (p. 45). In *M/othering: Birth, bodies and the (re)production of culture*, Falter (2008) argues that from birth we are inscribing hegemonic and capitalist cultural norms/values that reproduce American citizenship, on the female body and in the unborn baby.

She must accept the principles of patriarchy and conform to society's mandates and institutions and, most importantly, must instruct her children to do the same so as to secure this endless cycle of necessary cultural instruction. Hospital birth, thus, gets configured as the natural or the cultural norm and any type of birthing method that challenges and resists these methods is framed as a potential threat to the fabric of American culture (pp. 63-64).

Therefore, newborn children in the U.S. are greeted into this world by a medical institution, one of four major imperialistic enterprises (medical, educational, political, economic) they will be forced to navigate throughout their life as responsible citizens. All of which will go minimally questioned, if at all, as these institutions have become common sense realities.

As a counter to the hegemonic practices around birth, Patrisia Gonzales’ (2012) work in *Red Medicine* posits the decolonization of birth as holding the possibilities for decolonizing the body and time itself (p.160). Gonzales conceptualizes traditional birth as a community of womyn and mothers coming together to mentor, support the natural birthing process. By re-centering traditional birth not only as a rite of passage but also as ceremony that serves as the spiritual

passageway of life and death is a re-Indigenization of the life cycle (p. 61). According to Gonzales,

Enacting birth as ceremony reclaims and re-Indigenizes the most essential of experiences. Birth (from conception) is the beginning of one's cultural identity. A mother's decision to assert personal sovereignty over the most intimate and meaningful experience of her life is a key element of self-determination (p. 234).

By reclaiming the womb as site of self-determination we are recognizing a womyn's strength and power. This mirrors the work of Virginia Held (1989) in *Birth and Death* where she emphasizes that when womyn decide to get pregnant and continue the pregnancy they are making conscious decisions around pregnancy, birth, and mothering and enacting human agency.

Birth Narratives & Discussion

Akilah shared that she wanted and preferred natural childbirth in the form of an at-home water birth but had planned c-sections instead. She was diagnosed as high-risk due to significant scar tissue from large fibroid tumors that had resulted in a myomectomy. Aside from the surgery and scar tissue, the fibroids had caused long-term endometriosis so doctors thought a traditional at-home birth experience would put babies and her at risk.

Martel was the first child in Teresa's life and she gave birth to them⁸ in a hospital-midwife practice at the University of Michigan. She wanted a natural childbirth process and was fortunate enough to have a quick three-hour labor but her experiences in the hospital were not pleasant as she fought over newborn tests, vaccinations, and preferences like skin-skin contact. When Greyson was born, they were living in Tucson and she knew she wanted to have homebirth with a

⁸ Martel's preferred gender pronoun.

midwife but ended up having an unassisted home birth with her partner Rob; meanwhile, Martel was in another room. The midwife showed up later. She remembers having had a lot of fear with her first birth and although she was independent during the birth process, she still followed instructions from the midwife. With her second birth, Teresa was able to go inward and listen to her own body and baby and follow that lead.

Panquetzani's first birth was in a hospital with a Certified Nurse Midwife (CNM) because Medi-Cal did not cover home births at the time. She also found it difficult to find midwives in her area that were willing to help at a rate she could afford. She remembers her birth going smoothly and painlessly until the end, when she bled out. She credits her *abuelita's* herbal medicine knowledge in the form of a tea that helped with a painless and orgasmic first birth. When she hemorrhaged, it was her *abuelita's* ancestral knowledge that helped stop the bleeding.

Panquetzani's second birth was an unassisted birth at home in Compton, CA which she shared in her early blog *Indigenous Mother*:

“He is here!” I thought to myself and paused in amazement. Overcome by peace, I cherished the last moments of you, Itzix Chicome Itzcuintli, in my womb. I touched your wrinkly head and thin perineum with my cupped hand and positioned myself slowly into a one-legged half squat...All of the births I've ever seen flash before my eyes in an instant and I have a vision of you splashing out. Just then, you squish out with a burst of water into dada's hands. You slip face first into the world, purple and still. Daddy picks you up and hands him to me while I come back into my head and surroundings...We cover you up, make sure you're warm and still breathing. We fall in love. We are calm. Tired. Ecstatic. You quickly bob over to my breast and latch all by yourself. You are so wise, my little Itzix (Panquetzani, 2011).

Similarly, to my first birth, Teresa and Panquetzani's first birth share the frustrations with a system of knowledge that does not give birthing mothers control of the birth process. Their consequent births at home, demonstrated the agency of bringing birth back to the home where their experiential and intuitive knowledge guided the birth process. Traditional birth is an engagement of a system of knowledge that predates the capitalist commodification of life through empirical lived knowledge that is tried and true. However, even with the alternative birth movement that advocates for traditional birth it is difficult to shake the stronghold hospital births have on "common sense" knowledge surrounding birth practices.

My birthing experiences and critical analysis of medical institutions that serve capitalist interests have led me to see birthing practices as intricately related to the project of decolonization and the unlearning of medical ideologies that have womyn birthing in unnatural/inhumane institutions. Ivan Illich (1970) in *Deschooling Society* argued that the institutions capitalism created made us perceive medical treatment as health care, so if one "doctors" oneself it is seen as irresponsible. Traditional birthing like traditional medicine lives outside hegemonic order and the hope is that this knowledge and these medicinal practices that "address soul loss, land loss, and cultural and spiritual fragmentation" can inform our decolonization project (Gonzales 2012, p. xvii).

M/othering. Unlike birth, for most, motherhood is a never-ending experience, so it is difficult to write about a rite of passage that never stops being a passage. In the literature, the development of parenthood as a major life process that not only influences how one perceives self and one's worldview but also how one conceptualizes parenthood is more common these days (Demick, 2002). According to Demick, *generativity* is the "ability to give oneself to another person or persons" (p. 407). More specifically, through parenthood one finds fulfillment in not

only investing in a child's life by sharing experiences, guidance, teaching etc. but in the act of feeling needed. Demick approaches parenthood as the reorganization of self and frames parental development as, "developmental changes in parents' experience and action over the course of bearing and rearing children" (p.407). In shifting towards parenting as cultural practices within the realm of human development, Rogoff (2003) maintains, "people develop as participants in cultural communities. Their development can be understood only in light of the cultural practices and circumstances of their communities which also change." (p.3-4).

For example, in the U.S., the move towards attachment parenting came as a response to the commodified American culture that valued independence and self-reliance. Mainstream cultural practices included babies sleeping in nurseries or cribs away from parents, bottle feeding and sleep schedules, and an array of technologies that promoted baby's responsibility to safely be independent, much of which was justified by a real fear of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). William Sears, a pediatrician, coined the term Attachment parenting which promoted: Baby wearing, co-sleeping, caretakers being responsive to babies cries, on-demand feeding, extensive breastfeeding all geared towards forming strong emotional bonds between infant and caregivers. Attachment parenting has become a popular option for parents questioning mainstream practices of birth and child rearing.

Across the world, however, mother-child relationship and attachment views vary. For example, in some communities mothers do not get too attached to their sickly child in case they die. These women are not supposed to get sick with grief from the loss of a child as their responsibility of living/surviving for the rest of their children and community is most important (Rogoff, 2003). The role of parents and the community is also fluid like in West Africa where "unborn babies are regarded as belonging to their parents; from birth on, infants belong to their

extended kingroup” (Nsamenang, 1992, cited in Rogoff, 2003, p. 118). This is fundamentally different to how the U.S. sees the responsibility of child rearing as a negotiation between parents and the nation-state. In other cases, “Mothers may take care of children as much by ensuring that others will consistently provide nurturance and support as by directly doing so themselves. This form of child care thus involves indirect chains of support, managed by mothers or other adults” (p. 122). Siblings also serve as caregivers and disciplinarians as they model/show younger children how to interact because, “around the world, child rearing involves children’s families, neighborhoods, and communities in a variety of roles” (Rogoff, 2003, p. 102). Rogoff’s extensive ethnographic work demonstrates that there is no such thing as one best way to child rearing but also contends that not all ways are fine. According to Rogoff (2003), the role of adults in parenting is to guide children instead of trying to control them: “adults and children do not need to be on different sides; rather, they can collaborate, with different roles and responsibilities in the group” (p. 207)

M/othering Narratives: Pedagogy & Experiences

Teresa’s awareness of adult privilege came from realizing the power and control dynamics in parent-child relationships. Her parenting practice, seen through the lens of decolonization, actively seeks to undo the reinforcement of notions of power and domination stemming from the larger context of US social and cultural norms. Teresa draws on how systemically adults are given power over children but this does not mean she has the right to use that power over others. As an example of this, she does not talk about Martel and Greyson as *her* children—they are not hers to claim. Teresa acknowledges that adult privilege is there and her process as a parent is to equalize that power relationship as much as possible. Her practice of parenting is one of reflection and action where the act holds the possibilities for transformation, where parenting is about a

supportive partnership. In that partnership, Teresa is a facilitator, where she practices respect, values children's voices, opinions, experiences, trusts they know what they need, and what is important to them is important to her.

Supportive parenting meets children's needs. It creates a foundation from which they can move out into the world knowing that they're loved and accepted for who they are. They go out from our care knowing that they can be trusted and that they are competent to handle what will come their way. Their emotional reserves are full. They don't have to struggle to get their voices heard and they believe their needs and desires are important (Graham Brett, 2011, p. 74).

As Martel and Greyson get older, she integrates her own needs, wishes, and is more discussion-oriented than when they were younger. Teresa is intentional that the children who share their lives with her do not see themselves as less than because they are children even though society sees them that way. It is important to her that they know they are valuable for who they are in this moment and not for what they produce or do but because they are human beings and have rights to be who they are. Teresa also prefers not to use the label "mothering" as it gives a specific gendered experience as she is exploring her own challenge on gender. She prefers the term parenting but is also aware of the power and control dynamic it connotes for many people.

Akilah's voice resonates with Teresa's in the sense that mothering takes on more of a facilitator role tasked with the responsibility of nurturing that is free of coercion. As she shares in *The Freedom of Unschooling: Raising Liberated Black Children Without The Restrictions of School*:

Kris and I help our daughters get access to information and guide them through everyday living and the life skills to navigate adulthood. We don't position ourselves as their primary teachers, nor do we see ourselves as their role models. Though we understand our position of power as their parents and default primary influencers, we believe in the old adage of it taking a village, and actively help our daughters seek out mentors and other resources for their areas of interest. As their parents, we work toward a shared goal of raising women who are comfortable in their skin, versed in the skill of confident autonomy, and experienced in how to mine and utilize information in the digital age (Richards, 2015, p. ?).

As a direct result of having Marley and Sage-Niambi, Akilah is learning to trust herself and to be comfortable learning about her needs and tendencies as she calls her daughters her life guides because, from the beginning, their presence has helped her become more mindful about the multiple ways she can influence her environment. Becoming a mother has also made her feel a greater sense of responsibility for her life and her leadership within it. When it comes to the cultural/spiritual ceremonies that are part of her mothering practice Akilah said she talks her daughters about smudging to cleanse energy, blessing their food before eating, and encourage them to come up with their own rituals for things they do repeatedly, she said, "We believe in the ritualization of everyday wonderful things" (A. Richards, personal communication, 2015).

Similarly, Panquetzani's mothering practice is about nurturing respect and responsibility. Through respecting her children, she lives knowing that they teach her lessons every day, whether they be about patience, gentleness, fun, flexibility, etc. "I teach them to be responsible for their actions, and understand that anything they do affects the earth and their community. I parent non-violently, mindfully, and whole heartedly," she said. When asked if the project of decolonization

was relevant to her parenting/mothering practice, she said yes. That through parenting, she is undoing the internalized oppression that her family has lived with for generations: “Even my own relating to my children is reprogramming my mind. From religion, to communication, food- our entire worldview is being deconstructed and a new one is built with love and compassion.” Her family participates in cultural/spiritual ceremonies through their local Calpulli⁹ and by practicing Nahuatl ceremonies.¹⁰ Panquetzani also talked about teaching Akinyemi and Itzix meditation, energy work, creation stories, and giving thanks. Like Akilah, Panquetzani’s childrearing has made her the woman that she is because her children inspire her to live with “more conviction, vision, joy, and intention.” She further reflects on how they made her “a birth worker, a conscious communicator, a women’s health specialist, a lover and keeper of the womb” (Panquetzani, personal communication, 2015). Similarly to my own experience of parenting my sons with my partner who is not their biological parent, Panquetzani shares that “they attracted my partner and his family, who uplift us with love and joy. They are my motivation, my inspiration, and my reflection.”

Through my journey/fire movement, thinking about motherhood draws me toward conceptualizing mothering/parenting as a “bridge.” Anzaldua describes this bridge as “passageways, conduits and connectors that connote transitioning, crossing borders, and changing perspectives” (Anzaldua in Keating 2009, p. 243). Anzaldua’s “tierra entre medio” or *Nepantla*, is where transformations occur “unstable, unpredictable, precarious, always in transition space lacking clear boundaries” (p. 243). Motherhood in U.S. capitalist society undervalues and devalues our contributions and our economic relations can have us feeling everything negative

⁹ Present day Calpulli’s represent a group of families who come together to observe Nahuatl based ceremonial obligations

¹⁰ Specifically Miccailhuitl, Panquetzaliztli, Xochiilhuitl, and veintenas.

about a bridge's function of being walked over. Yet this bridge, the experience of mothering as an experience of pain and reward (Nnaemeka, 1997), is full of possibilities and contradictions. Seeing our role as parents as a bridge, a facilitator that also engages in the process, we realize we all learn best from ongoing activities rather than through school lessons—that we all need a context for the information we take in through our environments. This engagement of children, adults, and elders is a testament of the communal effort and responsibility it takes to raise children. I believe that parenting, with its inherent communal status, holds the possibilities for a framework for future economic relations. Although the institution of motherhood under patriarchy and capitalism has left many of us with fragmented and devalued psyches, decolonizing the experience by acknowledging the highs and lows of the mothering/parenting practices reconnects us to our whole selves and the roles we are willing to negotiate as well as the ones we are not with parenting partners and society.

In conceptualizing what decolonizing mothering/parenting practices can look like, I am reminded of Cajete's (1994) work in *Look to the Mountain* where he delineates the governing relationships in the natural world through what he calls a natural democracy as “the idea that plants, animals, and other entities in the natural world have rights of their own and must be given respect, as would any member of a human tribe” (p.89). This interaction and responsibility with the natural world creates a bond similar to that of a nursing child and its mother---feelings of attachment, connection, and belonging. I would further argue that this natural democracy is what social justice looks like for Indigenous people where rights are inherent to humans and natural world and their existence denotes a participatory and cooperative relationship. Furthermore, Cajete maintains that children have always been important to Indigenous communities and members of this natural democracy.

Our responsibility in decolonizing child-rearing is to break the cycles of power and domination in adult-child relationships by reconceptualizing the gendered roles of mothering/parenting and by nurturing confidence to create a freer and more dignified approach in which children have a voice and sense of agency. Like Teresa expounds in her book,

The freedom of children is tied to our freedom as well. When children have the freedom to develop their inner authority and stay connected to their authentic selves, they become fuller human beings. We as parents grow as well when we abandon mainstream society's expectations that we treat children with mistrust and disrespect. We regain what we lost in our own childhood (Graham-Brett, 2011, p. 78)

Deschooling. In 2008, Bitch Media published an article titled *Learning Curve: Radical "unschooling" moms are changing the stay at home landscape* about the rise of progressive parents, specifically feminist mothers opting to unschool as a means of instilling open-mindedness and social consciousness into their child rearing practice. The reasons for unschooling included fostering self-expression, gender expression, feminist principles, avoiding racism and homophobia, etc. The piece also asked mothers if they could trade-in their careers for stay at home work without compromising their feminist values. Parents like Sara Schira countered that by removing herself from the workforce, she was opting out of the gendered division of labor under capitalism and rejecting notions that independence and success is about money. In the article Schira said, "I have come to recognize that I don't want the kind of life being offered by our culture... I don't want things. I don't want status. I want interdependence, harmony, new solutions to old problems" (Schenwar, 2008). Like the mothers in this article, I underwent a similar process of questioning compulsory schooling but first came the questioning of what education means in a capitalist society versus what education was prior to colonization.

Coming across Greg Cajete's (1994) work early in my graduate studies allowed me to make the decolonizing connections in education I had been searching for. Throughout his life, Cajete's work has been an extensive process of reimagining the purpose for education in Indigenous communities prior to Western schooling. His work shares from the various tribes of the Americas and gives a general overview of what education was like in oral-tradition communities. Cajete acknowledges that each tribe has unique belief systems and expressions that connect them to their place on Earth as well as the relationship tribes shared with the natural environment. His work serves as a comprehensive map to guide us on what it means to have spirit (life) at the center of an educational endeavor. He does this through reorienting us to a philosophy of education that takes us on a life-long journey of what it means to be human. The path is a quest for truth and a path of "learning about life through participation and relationship in the community, including not only people but plants, animals, and the whole of Nature" (Cajete 1994, p.26).

For Indigenous people, cultural knowledge is based on the natural environment and its resources. The term Indigenous represents the people, who as a result of surviving and cooperating with the land, take on a resemblance to the land (Cajete, 1999, p.87). This relationship and collaboration with the land is part of what Cajete describes as a natural democracy. Caring for plants and animals was central to the survival of Indigenous people. Prayers and offerings were given to request the life of the animal before the hunt or before gathering herbs. According to Greg Cajete (2000) in *Native Science*, knowledge is never lost; it comes into being when needed and leaves when no longer needed or being used properly (p.9).

Along my journey/fire movement I learned about John Holt's (1989) work from other unschooling families who posted online. Holt was a long time educator and critic of

institutionalized education and a leading proponent of home education in the U.S. His educational objective: “My concern is not to improve ‘education’ but to do away with it, to end the ugly and anti-human business of people-shaping and let people shape themselves” (Holt qtd in Carper and Hunt 2006, p.243). When I came across his unschooling framework; I knew it held the possibilities for decolonizing education in contemporary society. Holt (1989) argued that humans learn from anything and everything wherever/whenever and not in specific or special places like schools that prepackaged ‘specially designed curricula.’ He believed this was not the answer but making the world accessible to children was. Many people, in the active years of the 1960s, made a push for home education, opposed to compulsory schooling. It was continued by the parents of the 70’s who “embraced the progressive, child-centered pedagogy espoused by critics of institutional education such as John Holt, Paul Goodman, and Ivan Illich...” (Carper & Hunt, 2006, p.239). Parents had no faith in what they perceived as the “oppressive nature of schooling” and they made the decision to educate their children at home as a way to free them from this oppressive force (Carper & Hunt, 2006).

If unschooling was centered on learning as a life process not the byproduct of classroom teaching, then deschooling served as the political and anti-capitalist critique of educational institutions. According to Ivan Illich (1970), Schools created the myth that increased production of information would provide a better life. Compulsory mentality creeps into compulsory learning, where learning is scarce and educational arrangements crop up to “ensure” that certain, important knowledge, ideas, skills, attitudes, etc., are “transmitted.” Education then becomes an economic commodity, which one consumes, or to use common language, which one “gets” (Illich in Hern 2008, p.v). In *Deschooling Society*, Illich (1970) envisioned learning webs “educational relationship between man and his environment” that could serve as a communal referral service

with educational objectives, skill exchanges, and an apprentice reference service to access community educators at large who could share skills and knowledge with others (p.72)

Without knowing the history of the movement for home education it is easy to discard its credibility as a social justice issue but it is central to fighting hegemonic forces. Learning as a byproduct of teaching is how schools have taken credit for child learning: “in the face of a century of contrary experience, educators cling to the notion that teaching produces learning, and therefore, the more taught, the more learned” (Holt 1989, p.149). Out of convenience schools/teachers are credited when learning takes place and students/parents blamed when it does not. According to Holt, learning disabilities is another explanation schools have termed for students not learning in schools. Again, this strategy reinforces the belief that learning can only happen if you are shown how to do things. Holt argues that learning is biological like needing food, oxygen, shelter, water, etc “learners make learning. Learners create learning” (p.160).

Narratives of deschooling in practice

Akilah gave various reasons for choosing to unschool Marley and Sage-Niambi:

We unschool because having our lives revolve around our children sitting in a building for six hours per day stopped making sense for our interests and needs as a family. We are not anti-school, we are pro-learning, and for our daughters, school put unnecessary boundaries and segmented blocks of time around their ability to explore and process the information they had gathered. Also, school can create a dangerous reliance on external validation (teacher’s approval and social acceptance), which we find particularly dangerous for Black children, as most of the teachers in our daughters’ school did not look like our daughters, nor did they share our family’s cultural and spiritual values. Those values are a vital part

of raising a whole child who is not just savvy in their current time, but has a growing awareness of their context inside the American system, and as part of the developing world (Richards, 2015).

Akilah's reasons for unschooling were two-fold, schools did not operate the way in which she understood people learn and she did not feel that schools were a supportive place for Black children. She also felt that her energy with her children were best suited through unschooling rather than working within the school system to change it.

But it was not enough, nor could it ever be, because our children — like most children — do not learn by collecting information, they learn by experience and guidance. And when you take the lid off a child's learning environment, you really get to see their incredible capacity to absorb, interpret and utilize information to affect their environments and get what they want. Instead of trying to work within the system to lobby and hope for change, we are designing our own liberation (Richards, 2015).

Akilah's voice resonates with what many other Black families have said about their reasons for homeschooling. In the introduction to the text *Freedom Challenge*, Grace Llewellyn (1996) summarizes why African American families decide to home school including how racial integration has not benefitted Black children, schools perpetuate institutional racism, school curricula are Eurocentric, Black children are treated as problems or labeled with learning/attention disorders, amongst many other reasons.

Panquetzani believes state-mandated schooling is puritanical and in contrast, her educational philosophy and learning practice are what she describes as “constructivist education,” child-led learning, where children learn through play and practice. She writes, “I just follow their

lead and give them the tools and support they need to further enhance their experience” (Panquetzani, personal communication, 2015). Panquetzani always knew she did not want to send her children to school but did not think she had the privilege of homeschooling. It was not until participating in an effort to form a home school cooperative (co-op) with other families that the possibility of homeschooling became a reality. Without delving too much into homeschooling literature and research, her decision to not send her children to school came from her understanding and experience with industrialized education and wanting to protect Akinyemi and Itzix’s autonomy. Panquetzani’s Chicana/Indigenous culture also inspires and helps form many curricular themes on history, justice, religion, etc. that the family engages in:

As I am educating, I am racially socializing my kids, with other folks of color. I am giving them cultural context for everything they do and teaching how identity is constructed by everything around us. Cultural education gives us the richness of food, herbs, natural healing, what people call curanderismo, etc... We also have worked hard to form our Spanish immersion co-ops in Long Beach. There are two groups we belong to, and we participate, support, and help build with them regularly (Panquetzani, personal communication, 2015).

The transmission of cultural values is a central factor for both Akilah and Panquetzani in their child rearing/learning journeys. Both of their experiences with state mandated schooling informed their decisions of why they did not want the same for their children.

Teresa came to unschooling after having read John Taylor Gatto’s *Underground History of American Education* and John Holt’s writing that examined the origins of state mandated schooling and its reproduction of systems and structures of oppression, instituted on the hierarchy of power, control and domination, “I believe state mandated schooling is incredibly harmful and it

really reinforces human beings taking their place within corporations and organizations without question” (Graham Brett, personal communication, 2015). Teresa also shared feeling a sense of contradiction when criticizing state-mandated schooling:

On the other hand, the challenge that I feel, about that is that it comes from a very privileged position because what we have in terms of economic privilege, and being half white, having access to resources, socio economic privilege the kinds of neighborhoods I can choose to live in, the places where I can be, the fact that one of us can stay home really creates a level of privilege where I can interrogate state-mandated schooling, and yet I also understand school can be a place, that it can be haven from other really negative environments and even in my own experience it was a haven from a negative home environment. It’s a mix. In a lot of ways I think my critique of state mandated schooling also comes from a privilege place and I have not reconciled that (Graham Brett, personal communication, 2015).

Teresa mentions as a result of her cultural and socio-economic standing, she feels that offering this criticism of schooling is embedded within her access and privilege. As a doctoral student, I understand the feeling that my access to critical theory and decolonizing methodologies has come as a result of my doctoral study. However, from my early involvement in Movimiento Estudiantil Chicana/o de Aztlán (MEChA) I knew that my responsibility in academia was to serve as a bridge back to my community. In this case, I understood the power that came from naming injustices and the need for sharing this language with my family and community.

Teresa talks about her education practice as self-directed learning, holistic learning, or inter-space learning. She says, “people learn best with internal motivation from living in the

world, not necessarily in systems and structures” (Graham Brett, personal communication, 2015). Teresa questioned school from the time she was pregnant and her research included reading about unschooling online from Jan Hunt and The Natural Child Project. She also engaged in online conversations with people who were unschoolers. I asked Teresa about how culture played a role in her education practice with her children and to which she noted that some of the negative experiences from her childhood is something else she was grappling with:

My mother, in some ways there was that book the tiger mom, and when I just read the reviews I couldn't bring myself to read the book because I feel like I lived that experience with my own mom, in some ways if that's particular to Asian culture or not, which in some ways many of my friends who are Asian-specific American who had similar experiences, I think that does play a role, one of the roles that it played was to shift these expectations around performance and never being satisfied. I had a mom who had very high expectations about how I would perform. Expressed her disappointment quite openly and that culture norm I think in many Asian American families...that probably played a role in shifting me away from a very domineering kind of belief about what achievement looked like and I went in the opposite direction...It's been incredibly challenging balancing that [culturally relevant learning networks] with groups and families with similar education goals and there have been many many ways in which I believe I haven't been able to reconcile those well in my family and I struggle with that (Graham Brett, personal communication, 2015).

Teresa honestly shares that her initial social justice framework within parenting included the belief that she did not feel she had the right to indoctrinate children with specific points of views. Overtime, this has shifted and she is making more of an effort to be explicit about the family's

cultural background, experiences, foods and connections, although extended cultural networks are lacking. Teresa, however, includes other networks as part of the family's learning practice from the university to science centers, the Internet, library, books, friends and others who may have specific knowledge.

In directly addressing the initial project questions, when it comes to incorporating culturally relevant learning networks within unschooling, families are using a range of support systems: family, unschooling groups, parent and Spanish language-immersion co-ops, public spaces like libraries and universities, apprentices,' and the Internet. In these families, all of the parents work but it is a mix of hired and independent paid work.

Akilah shares:

We became location independent so we wouldn't be tethered to a big mortgage and cars and school-related fees the way we used to be. We take on more freelance work, and we use the digital space as a way of reaching more people (potential clients) than we can in a local area. I also have evergreen products that don't require me to constantly exchange my time for money, which gives me much more room to be present in my daughters' lives and help facilitate learning environments that match well with their interests (Richards, personal communication, 2015).

In the case of Akilah and her partner, their online freelance work allows them to live "location-independent" so they can spend parts of the year in the U.S. and in Jamaica which helps facilitate raising Marley and Sage-Niambi with African-centric values. Akilah also mentioned using specific online resources for discussing race, culture, class and economic inequalities, etc such as:

ForHarriet.com, Whataboutourdaughters.com, Everydayfeminism.com, BuzzFeed.com, and news videos and articles from *Al Jazeera*.

Panquetzani's participation in her local Calpulli, which practices Nahuatl cultural/spiritual ceremonies and her integration of curanderismo, meditation, energy work, creation stories, and giving thanks are some of the cultural frameworks she incorporates in the rearing of Akinyemi and Itzix. She also has conversations with them about the dynamics of power and control,

We probably talk on this theme every day. If I raise my voice at the kids, they tell me, "Mommy you sound like you're a little bit mad at me right now. You're not yelling, but you kind of are..." and we have a talk on power. I encourage them to observe, identify, name, share, in a safe space where we connect and build values together. Even if their critical thinking calls me out, I am so happy to have the conversation (Panquetzani, personal communication, 2015).

The conditions that existed for seeking out alternatives to compulsory schooling in the case of Panquetzani was that from pregnancy she knew it was not what she wanted for her children but was not sure how homeschooling would be an option either. Her involvement in creating a homeschooling parent co-op made not sending her children to school a reality. Teresa also started questioning school when she was pregnant, and although she already did extensive social justice work, reading Gatto's *Underground History of American Education* allowed her to make the leap into the world of unschooling but most importantly that journey allowed her to understand privilege more profoundly when she found herself in the midst of adult/child relationships. Akilah, on the other hand, sent Marley and Sage-Niambi to school where they excelled and were labeled "gifted" but she soon realized this would never be enough. As she stated before, school

life stopped making sense for their needs and interests as a family and furthermore, the schools did not reflect the family's cultural and spiritual values.

Discussion and conclusions

What remains to be discussed from the original questions are the economic inequalities that exist for families of color and the belief by many, including progressive educators, that a homeschooling option is out of the realm of possibility for low-income families. As such, embarking on a deschooling agenda gets labeled as “privilege” adding to the list of “Oppression Olympics” some people like to play. As an unschooling mom and blogger shared on her site,

Notably, many of the progressives who I've seen voice anger or angst about unschooling or homeschooling and privilege, either don't have children at all, or have children already privileged in terms of race, socioeconomic, health, family support, heteronormative family structure, neighborhood safety, and the school options available to them. Et cetera.

“Privilege” accusations, in some cases, begin to feel like a red herring (Hogaboom, 2012).

Hogaboom's statement made me reflect on the people whom I had heard share the same sentiment and could not help but agree with her observation. Panquetzani's suggestion for circumnavigating working parents was building community with other parents to form homeschooling co-ops and collectives where families could share in the responsibilities. Akilah proposed for community learning centers funded by state and federal entities. She elaborated with:

Creating more deliberate intergenerational connections so that new people can learn from more experienced people in non-school-y ways. We can also stop assuming that it's inaccessible, because in some cases it isn't, especially if we took a communal approach to

facilitating learning. And especially if we got clear on what it is (speaking specifically of unschooling here), and what it requires.

Teresa similarly feels that we as unschooling parents can be more intentional about showing other people of color that we represent diverse people/voices/experiences within the unschooling community and we can help bridge and illuminate the possibilities that exist. She used the example of *The Real School* located in Houston, Texas that was born of necessity for families seeking a non-coercive environment for children of color. As such, she believes low-income families, single-parent households, non-traditional families, etc., can come together to form intentional structures that can accommodate their needs and experiences. Teresa also shared that in society we continue to believe the myth that schooling is the way out of poverty.

To conclude, I have not touched on how children who unschool attain the basic reading, writing, and math skills, schools purport to provide because you can Google unschooling and find all the answers to these questions. The act of writing these experiences in academia is a way of “writing back” and writing myself/ourselves (C.Smith, cited in L.Smith, 1999) into “the narratives of oppression, resistance and resilience” that includes what David Smith called for, “the basis for a radical new pedagogy” (Smith, cited in Gilmore & Smith, 2002, p. 132). The experience and practice of mothering pushed me to act critically but also “face profound ambiguities” (Lyn-Piluso in Hern, 2008, p.89). Looking back, my birth process foreshadowed the experiential learning that I needed to trust and like Geraldine and Gus Lyn-Piluso (in Hern, 2008) espouse, a part of a broader attempt to restructure family:

Many families are rejecting the medicalization of birth, choosing their own homes as the ideal setting for the birth process, ensuring that control rests with the mother and child, not

with a doctor. We can cite the growing popularity of a number of practices: holistic health care, intentional communities and co-housing; childrearing philosophies emphasizing cooperation and intimacy over obedience and discipline; alternative family arrangements and shared childcare; and of course deschooling—all choices which reject the combination of patriarchal authority, sexual repression, and professionalized indoctrination employed in conventional family organization...(p.90).

Through parenting, we make the choice to “side either with or against institutions of power” and through the act of self-determination, we can heal our own histories/childhood by breaking the cycles of power and domination (p. 85). And like the Akiko poem, although others may doubt, remember, *all mountains move in fire*.

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APPENDIX C

FILM

SIN ESCUELA: UNSCHOOLED

Abstract

The film is an auto-ethnographic representation of how an unschooling practice gets lived out in a Chicana/Indigenous blended family. The film as a lived/visual account of oral traditions provides an alternate to the traditional dissertation research manuscript. In the spirit of Indigenous knowledge systems and values that are transmitted through storytelling, I shape the story through my own experiences/understanding but the people in the story also co-construct their own meanings and interpretations throughout the process. The tension in the film originates from popular concerns my family has about not sending my children to school. On camera, I sit down to hear these concerns from family and address them through an interview with parents from our local unschooling group. All while showing what my children's days look like by not going to school and how they learn and figure things out on their own terms without compulsory curricula.

Key words: decolonization, unschooling, homeschooling, parenting partnerships, children

Sin Escuela: Unschooled

Process of creating *Sin Escuela*

Putting together a film for this project felt familiar to me although it was the first time I used film to tell a story. The process was similar to planning out a written paper but instead of words, data and citations, I had visuals, voices, and images to help me construct the story. Planning out the story took time and a lot of visioning periods as I had to figure out the mechanisms of film equipment, filming interviews, lighting, sound, editing, etc. I did not have a team helping me out although I did seek out help from friends who are film directors/editors for support when I needed guidance. It was a rigorous and ambitious undertaking as a graduate student without funding, but using film allowed me to stay true to my values of wanting to bridge academic knowledge and to a broader audience to make it more accessible. In preparation for the film, I took Norma Menoza-Denton's "Linguistic and Media Anthropology" course, where I understood the importance of using film as a complementary addition to academic research. It was also the first time I went behind the camera and helped a colleague in the course with her project on disability and athletics that followed the UA's Womyn's wheelchair basketball team. After the course ended, I wanted to training and experience with the camera, so I took a workshop offered by the Latin Americas Studies (LAS) Department during winter session of 2013, titled "HD Video Production at The U.S.-Mexico Border." This provided the experience I needed as a first time filmmaker with a DSLR camera.

Scholarly Justification for Film

With the conviction that I would use film as part of my dissertation research, I then sought out the justification I would need to convince my committee that film is being used as another mode or methodology in the research process. The Department of Arts Education at the UA offers

a course on Arts-based education research taught by Elizabeth Garber and it was there that I found the academic backing for film as a paradigm of academic research. According to Anita Sinner et al. (2006) in *Arts-based Educational Research Dissertations*, more and more graduate students are opting to incorporate their arts-based expertise into qualitative research as a way to provoke and evoke understanding that traditional research cannot render (p. 1225). Sinner et al. argue that moving beyond traditional text-based dissertations and embracing “complex discourses” allows for a new system of exchange (p.1225). I operate arts-based research as Melissa Cahnmann-Taylor (2008) describes in *Arts-based research in education: Foundations for practice*:

Barone and Eisner laid out a theoretical framework for arts-based research describing the qualities of arts-based texts; the creation of a virtual reality and a degree of textual ambiguity; the presence of expressive, contextualized, and vernacular forms of language; the promotion of empathetic participation in the lives of a study’s participants; and the presence of an aesthetic form through the unique, personal signature of the researcher (p. 8).

Although arts-based research is a point of contention amongst conservative scholarship and political climates that value more traditional and “scientific” definitions of research that are narrowly defined, I am drawn to the approach of the Language, Reading, and Culture (LRC) program that disrupts Western scientific notions of what constitutes dissertation research. LRC coursework problematizes Western notions of science and education by being critical of social/political/economic forces that influence how we experience literacies and culture. By encompassing the output or byproduct of research, in that critique of Western constructions of education, we come closer to embodying other ways of knowing and doing educational research that does not criminalize or marginalize minoritized groups.

In operationalizing arts-based research, I am not rendering myself as an artist in the western-capitalist sense of the word, I am acknowledging my artistic expression as an extension of how Indigenous peoples artistic process was embedded in everyday life and everyone in the tribe was an artist. Everyone created, and the production of art was an expression, a byproduct of living and learning in the world. “Whether songs, ceremonies, dances, pottery, baskets, dwellings, boats or bows, Indigenous people were one and all engaged in creating the utilities of their lives” (Cajete 1994, p.150). The creation of art is a dynamic experience and an expression of living; a practical tool, not merely a token of beauty. In *Language and Art in the Navajo Universe* (1977), Gary Witherspoon explains that the Navajo way of life incorporates the “self” in the creation of art; this self does not look for beauty to the outside but rather creates it from within and projects it to the universe (p.151). My role as an artist utilizes this medium as another vehicle that can tell a story about the way of life of a people and the artistic creation mode of oral traditions.

As I sought out examples of arts-based research dissertation I came across the work of David Penberg (1998) who submitted his dissertation, *Abecedarian: A multimedia education story*, to the University of British Columbia as a multimedia documentary in which he represents the educational experiences of urban youth living in New York City. Much of his work is also based on the philosophies of democratic education; he is an educational consultant at various community and democratic school organizations. His work is pivotal to understand the ways in which graduate students are shifting and expanding on what is considered scholarly work by designing research approaches that are methodologically pluralistic and hybrid that draw from multiple fields and approaches as a way to transform research. The film, as a replacement for a traditional manuscript, serves as the lived/visual representation of oral traditions that was inspired by Sheilah Nicholas’ course on oral traditions across societies: “oral tradition—the stories, songs,

prayers, and other oral media that constitute place-situated systems of knowledge and meaning” (2015, McCarty, Nicholas & Wyman, p. 230).

Ilisa Barbash and Lucien Taylor (1997) in *Cross-Cultural Filmmaking* maintain that “film brings people and cultures alive on the screen, capturing the sensation of living presence, in a way that neither words not even still photos can” (p.1). The film *Schooling the World* directed by Carol Black and produced by Jim Hurst (2010) informed the type of film I wanted to create. *Schooling the World* makes the comparison to how boarding schools for Indigenous children in the U.S. were intended to change their culture in the same way that modern day schools in the Indian Himalayas are deculturalizing Ladakhi people. The director Carol Black is also a longtime unshooling parent/activist whose many years of research include cross-cultural perspectives on education.

Film as storytelling

A few years ago in Nicholas’ course on oral traditions, she shed light on how using film to tell stories is a modern extension of that oral tradition. I knew then that I wanted to carry out my dissertation research. Traditionally, film has not been an accessible tool for storytelling in our community, but media technologies are becoming more accessible and affordable and I wanted to be able to share the growing understanding I have about this medium and also demonstrate that film creation is not only for expert filmmakers. The aim of undertaking the filming as (auto) ethnographic functioned as an ode to Indigenous knowledge systems and values that are transmitted through storytelling. In this case, as the storyteller, I shape the story through my own experiences/understanding but the people in the story also co-construct meaning in the process, as does the audience. Oral tradition in societies around the world (including European societies)

viewed community and knowledge as interlinked, hence the use of storytelling to convey meaning (Eder, 2010). As a way to encourage land-based education in the U.S., storytelling becomes a central component in this shift from western education to Indigenous knowledge.

Storytelling involves: cooperation, respect for all beings (human life, plants, animals, etc.), is intergenerational, dynamic, and its execution creates a collective production--something that gets lost when stories are written down (Eder, 2010). Another important piece of storytelling is its intent to teach children and adults life lessons/knowledge through indirect means. Eder characterizes this when she says, “storytelling is ideal for examining children’s emerging meanings while talking with adults” (Eder, 2010, p.17). With this film, I believe we can encourage these forms of educational spaces (outside of traditional schooling) as a way to connect and bring people together to achieve common goals within families and our communal contexts. In *Narrative as Inquiry*, Petra Hendry (2010) argues that all research is a narrative and then further suggests that *sacred narratives* require an “ontology of faith.” These are “narratives that do not increase our knowledge, truth, or even give us better interpretations. Instead, they may result in increasing our faith in humanity, in being more present to others and in increasing our compassion” (p. 75). With this understanding of film as an arts-based narrative, I utilize the film as a way to disseminate an understanding/interpretation to a broader audience by making this academic and community work accessible to both audiences.

Title and Setting

I chose the title *Sin Escuela/Unschooling* because it let the viewer know that it would be a bilingual piece that would touch on living without compulsory schooling. The film is set in Tucson, Arizona as the local community is a source of knowledge and orientation. I wanted to

show the rich environment children are in when we value the cultural/social capitals found within the community.

Genre

I did not set out to do a specific sub-genre of documentary style film-making but if I had to choose, I would say the film more closely follows a performative mode in which I am a participant in the process and I help not only as the catalyst for the story but help guide it as you meet the other main characters in the story which are Tenochtli and Yenelli. According to Bill Nichols' 6 Modes of Documentary, the performative mode allows for raising questions about what knowledge is, centers personal experience and emotional complexity of experience from the perspective of the filmmaker, and tone and mood are at the forefront rather than subjective truths.

Participants and corresponding trades/skills

Lane (Myself. short for Darlane, named after a waitress my dad worked with) I was born and raised in south Tucson and my family is from Sonora and Chihuahua where I can trace my familial roots to Indigenous pueblos in Opodepe (Eudeve/Opata) and Matachic (Tarahumara). My families grew up deindigenized as Mexicans and after coming to the U.S. surviving through American acculturation. I identify as a Queer Chicanx, a political/cultural label that best characterizes my experiences and beliefs. I have always cared about social justice issues but my college experience really helped politicize my worldview and allowed me to connect with people who were also activists. This of course has influenced how I came to unschooling and advocating for alternative possibilities when it comes to child rearing. I believe in changing the political economies of our time and that work for me begins at home. The work I'm most proud of (after parenthood of course) is working at BICAS as a bike mechanic (part of my own unschooling

project because I'm also a graduate student) and living out the dream of being a collective workspace that serves the community with the values I hold most dear.

Tenochtli/aspiring ninja 8 (prickly pear cactus/Nahuatl-age at time of filming) I asked him to help me put a narrative together that describes him and this is what he shared:

I'm brown. I like to learn new things that I never learned before. A long long time ago I had a batman dream with penguin and joker. I was hiding, I was batman. When I realized that, I won. I love Síquei Maella. I like to go to Get Air. I love my cousins Abby, Lili, and Jojo. I love my family so much that I can barely even ask for them. I like to play with my friends. I like batman. My goal is to play baseball. My favorite plant is a nopal. I like doing rainbow loom snake charms. I'm kinda excited about a tinier house but I'm also pretty nervous because I don't want to leave my old house. Thank you for reading this.

Yenelli/aspiring ninja 7 (one who seeks truth/Nahuatl-age at time of filming)

I'm brown. I'm a Mexican. My name is Yenelli and I'm part of the truth and wind. My favorite place to go is Chinese Palace (a.k.a. Gees Garden dim sum) cuz I get to try new food that I never ate. The most thing I love is my family. I'm a little excited to build our tiny house. And I can't wait to live in it. And I think we're gonna have a master bedroom, we need two. I really really want hideouts, a balcony and a swimming pool and that's it. I like to play. I like to make new things in Minecraft. I feel like making a tower in Minecraft and I want to build a helicopter that I can turn into survival mode. I like playing in new parks, I like playing with my friends and I like building cool stuff on Minecraft and my brother likes watching stampy cat."

Síquei Maella 4 months (red lightning/Eudeve & Irish- age at time of filming)

Co-Parent Jim/highschool teacher (named after his dad, grandpa, and great grandpa but with different middle names)

Jim was born and raised in the suburban-rural part of upstate New York and is in his fifth year in Tucson. His family background is mostly Irish and German but has generally pursued knowledge about his Irish background. Jim has works as a history teacher a Cholla High School and previously worked at Pima County's Juvenile Detention. It was his experience in teacher training and being a teacher mixed with becoming interested social justice that prepared him to be critical of the role of schooling within capitalist society.

Tata Francisco/pastor-locutor & **Nana Elia**/ patient care tech/locutora: My parents are first generation in the U.S. and much of their narrative for coming to the U.S. in their early twenties was to give their children a better life. They both pastor a Spanish-speaking Evangelical church in the City of South Tucson and run a Christian Spanish radio from the same place. I have always processed my critical reflection with extensive conversations with my parents and I would like to think that this has also influenced the way they view the world. I attempt to value the knowledge and experiences they have because I realize that for many years I was socialized in school to think that my Mexican culture, Spanish-speaking, and cooperative sensibilities held me back in school.

Jorge Santa Cruz/aircraft mechanic: Is my oldest brother who dropped out of high school at sixteen. I always remember thinking he was the smart one in the family. As children, he would take toys apart to see how they worked but the joke was that he never put things back together. It is no surprise that he ended up being an aircraft mechanic where he is not only a meticulous mechanic but also a charismatic member of any work team. He makes more money than I will ever make with all my years of schooling. However, I see how the belief that schooling is necessary to know things and to be successful is something he cannot shake off. He moved to the

east side of town to ensure that his children have the best schooling experiences that will better their opportunity to go to college. After defending my dissertation and in the midst of my dissertation edits, my brother passed away early morning on Monday, April 11th while I was in attendance at the American Education Research Association (AERA). It has been difficult revisiting and editing these manuscripts knowing that he is no longer with us.

Usiel Barrios/Bois¹¹ dad -Operations Manager: I met Usiel when he was eighteen fresh out of high school and had no qualms about voicing his dislike for schools. I used to think he was a little extreme in his critique, but I figured he had a bad experience. When I came to unschooling I assumed he would be more open to not sending the bois to school since he did not have a positive schooling experience. However, after our divorce and he remarried, he started having a difficult time with the decision to not send the bois to school because he was concerned they would not learn to read, write and do math without formal teaching.

Southern Arizona (soaring) unschooling social group: Our family is a part of the local group of families who unschool and I asked three of the parents who I interact with most often if they were willing to be a part of the film and answer questions about unschooling.

Liz Holaday: Is the founder (2007) and coordinator of the group. She is the mother of two, ages fourteen and eleven. She has a Masters in Linguistics from the UA and when she is not coordinating events for the unschooling group, she is a freelance editor.

¹¹ A term of variant gender expression, typically used in butch/femme communities but I appropriate the term for Tenochtli and Yenelli as a placeholder for when they choose to assert their own gender expression

Brianna Fricke: One of the earlier members of the group and the mother of two ages fourteen and ten. Brianna identifies as a Queer-feminist, works part-time from home, enjoys doing organization-consulting group and is a minimalist, simplicity advocate.

Teresa Graham-Brett: Teresa identifies as a biracial family that is ethnically Japanese American, White, and Mexican American. Teresa is currently the Associate Dean of Students at the UA's Inclusion and Multicultural Engagement department. She writes extensively about parenting for social justice and on the rights of children.

Problem/predicament

The tension in the film originates from the concerns my family and the bois' dad have about not sending children to school. To bridge these tensions in the family, I sit down to hear their concerns on camera. After reflecting on some of the core issues they have around the acquisition of technical knowledge, the need for education certifications for securing jobs, parents' adequacy in teaching their own children, etc. I asked parents from our local unschooling group, if they could help address these popular concerns. In many ways, I knew that my families concerns would mirror those of broader society, including my dissertation committee and I thought that by documenting these concerns, and raising them with seasoned unschooling parents; meanwhile, showing what time spent at home looks like for the bois would help give a more holistic understanding of what unschooling is.

In coming up with questions to ask my family for the film, I started off asking them how they defined education. I was not surprised to hear that none of them equated schooling with education. Their responses ranged from heritage that parents/grandparents pass on to their children, being an example, passing on life knowledge, learning that happens everyday whether it

be school, home, work, or family values that are passed on. Moreover, ideas expressed that education pertained to the autonomy to have space to grow, having the things to feel like a complete human being and that education encompassed spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional growth. I followed up with asking about their concerns/fears stemming from the boys not going to school and their responses detailed in the film. The final question was what their hopes and dreams were for Tenochtli and Yenelli. My parents wanted a better life for them, better than the one they had, better than the one their children had, that they learn to be better people, have better values, better experiences, and all around better lives. Especially when it came to emotional, spiritual, and economical matters, they do not want their grandchildren to struggle economically and live day to day like we do. My dad specifically wanted them to learn discipline and be orderly enough to be able to have better economic opportunities. My brother Jorge and Usiel both wanted them to have opportunities, to follow their dreams, to feel they have a purpose in life, to follow their heart, and be of service.

Education themes that arise

The opening scene after the viewer sees Tata Francisco and the Bois riding their bikes is Tio Jorge asking the question of what is the alternative to not sending kids to school when we live in a society where... he pauses... and then finally adds that he does not know how to explain it. I understood he was trying to reference that in a capitalist society adults have to work so where else can children go to learn things but with other adults in “protected” places like schools. I opted for this opening scene because it gets the viewer thinking about why we have schools and the contradictions we wrap around the institution. Later as I explain the reasons why I chose to unschool our family, the film addresses the following concerns:

1. What is the alternative to not sending children to school?

In the film, I am proposing Unschooling as an alternative for how children can learn outside of compulsory education. As I have stated before,

Deschooling or unschooling (I use the two interchangeably), seeks to place learners at the center, return the community to be both site and resource for learners, and connect ideas and themes to the existing woven patterns of creation. Thus, dialectically speaking, the subordinated role that the community played in education will now take the dominant role over the community-separated, decontextualized, and compartmentalized Western-style education. Unschooling to me is a project much like decolonization that includes a critique and a naming of one of the aspects of colonial legacy, schooling (Santa Cruz, 2016).

I see deschooling as a way of life that not only encompasses the school age years but how we think about birth, child rearing, family arrangements, housing, labor, community, health, education---life. It is the critique of how we have 'professionalized' life to where we believe we can only learn about it through institutions like schools. Having said that, it is difficult to put forth a comprehensive definition or summary of un/deschooling as it is a process with guiding values and principles that families/people live by. An example of these principles that our local unschooling group ascribes to is the following:

TRUSTING that children (and all people) will learn and develop what they need naturally and without coercion, so long as they are in a rich and supportive environment;
OFFERING resources and information to maintain that environment; and RETHINKING what our culture tells us that children are supposed to learn or know. This is a lifestyle, not something practiced only some of the time or only in some academic areas, and it

necessarily implies not requiring academic work or progress (Soaring Unschoolers 3 guiding principles).

2. How do children acquire technical skills like basic reading, writing, and math if they are not formally taught?

The film demonstrates how Tenochtli and Yenelli are becoming emergent **readers** and the process by which they begin making meaning through coding and decoding of material symbols. A process that is not mediated by force but rather it comes up organically and is intrinsically motivated. Our family does not read at night religiously before bed time but often they will ask for a book or pick one up themselves that they want to try and read. We do not push them or coerce them to decode. Like Brianna in the film shares how her daughter over time began to make sense of reading by the many years of looking up movie titles on Netflix, grocery shopping and reading signs, etc, so too has been the process with the boys that we spend helping them spell things they want to search on YouTube, movies they want to watch on Netflix, or signs on the road that they see and catch their eye.

When it comes to **writing**, the first thing they wanted to figure out how to write was their names. They like to write birthday cards for people and make story books that tell their own stories. The film did not touch too much on this skill, but I see writing as a natural byproduct of reading and knowing that reading and writing is more than memorizing the abc's. It is having a context for those symbols in words, and those words within sentences that have meaning.

Math or playing with numbers is something Tenochtli and Yenelli have explored since they became aware of the usefulness of keeping track of quantities. They first figured out that money gets them things like toys and sweets. Allowing them to save and use money to pay for

things they want also heighten their awareness of what things cost. As shown in the film, the boys also enjoy playing video games on their tablets and many times they need to accumulate or purchase additional points or coins to get super powers or other useful tools. They even enjoy playing educational-type games on pbs.org but because they choose these games, they enjoy playing them. In the film, Brianna also shares that basics are basic because they come up in life.

One of the last concerns Tata Francisco brought up was the use of **technology** and his fear that the boys would be left behind of the technological age because they do not have access to these tools. Like the basic skills argument that Briana highlighted, it is impossible for the boys to not be exposed to technology when it is everywhere. For the most part, they figure out how to navigate technology whether iPads, smart phones, computers, the TV, etc. on their own or they ask for guidance on how to do things. They also learn from older cousins on how to create passwords, and how to use voice searches. When they want to figure out how to build or create something on their videogames or rainbow looms, they seek out YouTube videos where other people post how-to tutorials.

3. Children go to school for socialization, kids who stay at home are not properly socialized

Socialization is an argument that comes up after rebutting other reasons for why schools are not necessary. In the film you see Tenochtli and Yenelli in community with people of all ages rather than only their peer group and authority figures like they would be in schools. Aside from the activities that are in the film, the boys also participate in capoeira and break-dancing where they but learn about the traditions, cultures, languages that gave birth to these movements. They also attend community talks, marches, protests, play in leagues for basketball, soccer, and baseball. They also enjoy riding their bikes (they have done rides from 12-60 miles) and learning how to do

bike mechanics. Taking kids courses at Pima College during the summer in one of their favorite things like a lego class on simple machines. We also attend university funded events like the Insect Festival, Festival of Books, and Día de los Niños. We participate in our local ceremonial Calpolli with Chucho Ruiz, the community educator in the film who shares with the boys their Nahuatl birth symbols and what they represent. At home they engaged with the pregnancy of Siqueí Maella and her home birth. They are also active participants in child-rearing of their sister and younger step siblings.

Further points on socialization included my role in asking for consent. Although their father was in agreement to my capturing their unschooling experience on camera, I asked the boys for their consent each time I was going to film. They would get frustrated each time that I asked, letting me know that I did not need to ask. I used this as an opportunity to talk more in-depth about consent and why it is always important I ask for it (and other people too, no matter the age) and give them the opportunity to bow out, as they are the ones in control of their bodies and how I document them.

4. How do you have opportunities/ job skills without educational certifications?

Tenochtli and Yenelli's lives are immersed in skill learning that they will be able to use presently and in the future when they decide to seek out employment. They are active participants at home in preparing their own food, feeding their desert tortoise and chickens, they love holding yard sales outside the house, they like making things to sell, and farming at Las Milpitas de Cottonwood. Through my work at BICAS, they have spent a lot of time around bike mechanics and they have often participated in work-trade around the shop where they work for shop credit that they can use later to purchase a bike, used bike parts, or shop time.

In the film Liz touches on how many unschoolers volunteer or do extensive internships with organizations or work sites that they are interested in because they have more flexibility with their time. Some have pursued a GED or will simply apply to college putting together a portfolio that demonstrates their ability to do academic work. Others opt not to go to college and pursue other passions like traveling, working in the family business, apprenticing, etc. If unschoolers opt for a career choice or lifestyle that is contingent on academic certifications, then they are supported to follow that path.

Takeaways/Reflections from the filming process

Off the bat, I was the one behind the camera, so it was a challenge to portray how I help mediate many of the children's day to day activities. However, my partner Jim was gracious enough to allow me to capture his interaction with the children as well as his point of view on unschooling. When I started interviewing my family, their definition of education did not name compulsory education as it is practiced in the US. When I interviewed my brother Jorge it was difficult not to engage with him during the interview because he had a way of debating with me what things meant like compulsory education, unschooling, government laws designed to minimize choice when it comes to birthing practices, and schooling. However, I was happy he was willing to be a part of this project and now that he is gone, I will cherish the last image I have of him.

As I edited the film, it was challenging to keep the storyline moving so having multiple viewings with people who offered their suggestions for what would help was essential. It has also been suggested that including a side bar with a loose definition of what unschooling is would help people understand what is being proposed as an alternative. These are suggestions I will continue to include in future renditions of the film. Before making the film more public as it was at my

defense, I shared the film with the participants of the film to get their feedback and their blessing with how I had portrayed them. They all agreed with their rendering, so I was ready to move forward.

I held a viewing session with my family before my defense so that we could have dialogue about what they saw in a way that I knew would not be available to them at the University showing. There was a rich dialogue about how schooling does not prepare people for the real world and that the critique of schools is valid and that unschooling makes because “that’s how people learn.” However, that conversation also yielded a response from my Tia who stood out as the lone resister and defender of compulsory education as is practiced in the US. Additional takeaways included my nephew Julian who at age seven called the bois “lucky” for not having to go to school. Clearly, the couple of years of compulsory schooling have had a negative effect on him already as he says things like, “I hate reading.” Jim’s comment about the negative attitudes, ideas, and behaviors learned in the early years of schooling and how they are not being absorbed by the bois was discussed by several after the defense as an important success of unschooling. Many of the attendees of my dissertation defense expressed how this critique of schooling “makes sense” and even more commented that it made them think about their own schooling experience and they wish it would have been different.

Future directions for the film

I plan to hold a community forum to show the film and have a panel of unschooling parents, children on for Q&A. I want to start a community dialogue especially amongst Chicax/Mexicax families about compulsory education and the effect it is having on our humanity. My dream for some time has been to have a family deschooling cooperative where we

can share skills and alternate child care for when parents have to work. I knew that before getting to that place, there would need to be a lot of groundwork for getting people to that place of taking a leap of faith towards something that seems so foreign to us now. I also plan on sharing the film at conferences and later sharing it online to make it accessible to a broader audience. I am happy about the film and how things turned out for being my first time going through the process. It has been an immense learning experience and like most things, I will not have realized how much I have learned because it is now part of me and my subconscious.

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