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Escapando Las Trampas: Teacher preparation for Mexicanas

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Abstract

Developing Maestras face and overcome linguistic, academic and cultural forms of gatekeeping while trying to navigate through our current education system. For this Capstone Project, the impact that gatekeeping has on developing Maestras and how it affects their academic and professional aspirations was investigated. This is an important issue for developing Maestras, the University of Gringolandia as well as for the education system of Nepantla county. The success of developing Maestras Mexicanas closes the racial gap and directly impacts the student success rate within Nepantla county. The literature and data results analysis indicate that the gatekeeping practices that keep Mexicanas from being successful within the teacher preparation program at the University of Gringolandia are directly related to a lack of understanding from both familia and the University about the complexities of their identities as estudiantes Mexicanas. The participants in this investigation were Mexicanas who are current and former students of the teacher preparation program at the University of Gringolandia. The emergent action options that were uncovered are culturally relevant mentorship, community development opportunities and support resources. Culturally relevant mentorship is argued to be the most effective way to achieve the goal of helping Mexicanas overcome gatekeeping practices within their education in the teacher preparation program.

Escapando Las Trampas: Teacher preparation for Mexicanas

I was eight years old when my parents decided to come as a family to the United States. My parents gathered our family from all across Mexico to announce the news. I was happy when I first found out we were moving. I was excited about traveling to a new place. I was not aware of all the obstacles I would experience until we settled in the United States. I say obstacles because there is more than one obstacle that has kept me from successfully adapting to this new country. In this essay, I share the one obstacle that has affected me the most since my family and I migrated to Salinas, California. The obstacle of being an English language learner, and having to adapt to English only has negatively impacted my schooling in the United States specifically in learning math.

My parents would talk to me and my younger siblings about migrating to the United States for a better future, *un futuro mejor*, for the three of us. My parents definition of a better future was one in which we would learn English and advance into a career that would lead us to have a job, any job, other than working in the fields. I was just eight years old. I didn't know what *un futuro mejor* would mean to me until my first day of fourth grade in Salinas, California.

I was placed in an elementary class in which all the instruction was in English. I knew I was different from everyone in my classroom because I was not able to communicate in English. My teacher was bilingual, and so she tried to translate when she had free time. But, she did not have much free time, therefore there was only a little translation. So, for the most part I sat at my desk looking around wishing I could understand the lesson, but I could not understand what was being taught. The only subject I could understand was mathematics, and it was the only subject I enjoyed. Mathematics had to do with numbers. I was able to see the operation that I needed to solve for. In short, I didn't have to be proficient in English to solve math problems. Being able to solve a math problem and actually understanding something brought back confidence. I thought to myself "maybe I don't need to learn English" because I felt smart by being able to solve math problems. As the school year continued, my teacher became aware that I was struggling in class. Yet, she wasn't able to give me the extra time I needed to learn English. So, she decided to contact my parents. My parents, my teacher and I sat together as she explained to my parents that I needed to be transferred to another school where the teachers could help me develop my English. My parents agreed and I was moved to a new school. I was not sure how a new school was going to take care of me. But, I was happy that my teacher and parents acknowledged that I needed help from teachers that will focus on developing my English.

The school to which I was transferred was a specialized program for Newcomers. This program was offered to students who came from different parts of Mexico who were learning English as a second language. As soon as I walked into my new classroom I was welcomed. There were posters in my native language, Espanol! The feeling of being able to read the words on the classroom posters made me feel valued because my native language was being valued. My teacher taught us the core curriculum--reading, reading comprehension, mathematics, writing, and history--in Spanish. As for English, we had English Language Development for two hours in the morning. My experience in the Newcomers program was great because my classmates were all developing our English together. But, most importantly we were maintaining our Espanol, which made each one of us smart because we felt confidence in understanding and communicating our ideas.

I was only part of the Newcomers program for two years. In sixth grade, I was moved back to a mainstream English-only class. I was not ready to make the move to an English-only

class. I was not ready because by using my native language in the Newcomers program I was still learning the core curriculum. And now, I didn't have enough English to sufficiently follow the instruction in the English-only class. My native language not only allowed me to learn math in Spanish, but it made me confident. Speaking in Spanish made it possible for me to communicate effectively with my teacher. I quickly realized that making the change to English meant no more Spanish. And thus, less learning.

I managed to promote elementary school in an English-only class in which I felt a loss of identity. There was something missing throughout my middle school education, and it had to do with using my native language. I was confused by the school's decision of having me learn core curriculum in Spanish for two years, and within a blink of an eye it was taken away. As I continued to high school, I was maintained in mainstream English classes. Each high school year went by and I grew up with the idea that English was what I needed to use to succeed.

As I began college I felt ready to conquer the word because my English had gotten better each school year. But, I was not aware, until I made it to my first semester at a university, that within my K-12 education there were gaps in my conceptual understanding of parts of the curriculum that I didn't receive. One of the subjects in which I struggled the most was math--the subject that I loved as a child. But, a subject that I missed out on in middle school and high school. This is a mathematics class that is designed to prepare elementary school teachers to teach mathematics. I was confused by the fact that one of my favorite subjects in my elementary school days was now a source of academic failure. This woke me up from my dream, my dream of becoming a teacher. I thought "why am I unable to understand these mathematical concepts as well as my classmates?" I was even more embarrassed, and ashamed, when my instructor would say, "you were taught this in second grade." I reminisced back to my elementary school years and realized I was never taught these concepts. This class was exposing me to the knowledge which was omitted from my primary school education. From where was I to get all this knowledge? Upon reflection, I realized the first couple of years of my education in the United States were invested in learning English--not in learning the core curriculum. I had to remind myself that I had to navigate two worlds in my education. One was my Spanish education that I left behind in Mexico, and the other was my education as an English language learner, learning mathematics in California.

Literature Synthesis: Mathematics Education for Latinos

Pursuing higher education is a privilege and great opportunity for Mexicanas. Each individual has a *sueño* to become someone in the real world. Higher education can be a way to reach success for some Mexicana students. In order to reach that *sueño*, Mexicanas are required to take courses that prepare them for their profession. In this manner, the academic curriculum can also become a gatekeeper for some Mexicanas and this prevents them from reaching their *sueño*.

What is the problem?

Gatekeeping in secondary education keeps Latino/as from pursuing or completing an educational *sueño*. These types of gatekeepers may be personal or institutional barriers that Latino/as face while pursuing higher education. Gatekeeping can be experience at a personal level, for instance, when Latino/as embrace the importance of family. Zurita (2004) describes family obligations as a personal barrier that keeps Latino/as from attending or completing college. Olivas (1986) labels family obligations as adjustment demands that Latino/as have to manage on top of their academic work. Adjustment demands like these also include finding

employment that will not interfere with academics, allow for students to make financial contributions to help their immediate family with everyday realities like rent and groceries, and advocating for family when it comes to English-speaking situations (Olivas, 1986, p. 143). Latinos identify family as their motivation and emotional support to pursue higher education (Cardoza, 1991). But maintaining a balance between family obligations and academic work can be overwhelming for Latino/as pursuing higher education. And thus, *familia* becomes a personal barrier that Latino/as have to learn how to navigate as they pursue higher education.

Gatekeeping can be institutional when school staff have low expectations on Latino/as students. Martinez (2003) specifies that many Latino/as have been inculcated to pursue higher education because it is the key to success. Therefore, Latino/as are taking this into account by furthering their education. Martinez (2003) notes that 10% of Latinos are part of student enrollment in higher education. But, pursuing higher education for Latino/as is not only about *eharle ganas* (doing your best) to reach their goals. Rather, Latino/as also need support from institutions and school staff. Matinez (2003) explains that even though Latino/as now are increasing their representation in institutions of higher education, they encounter barriers that have to do with "...low expectations placed on Latinos and other students of color which impact their relationship with school officials and their ability to navigate the systems successfully" (p. 14). Aviles, Howarth & Thomas (1999), research the types of low expectations that Chicano/Latino students deal with in their education. One low expectation has to do with the negative attitudes shown by principals, counselors, and or teachers. These types of negative attitudes were described by Chicano/Latino students, as teachers being verbally and facially surprised when a Chicano/Latino student answered a question correctly (Aviles et. al., 2003). Because of the negative attitudes and low expectations placed upon Chicano/ Latino students, Aviles et. al (2003) find multiple factors that led to high school students dropping out. For example, Chicano/Latino participants describe that they dropped out because "...principals and counselors, told them they wouldn't graduate" (Aviles, et. al., 2003, p. 469). In sum, the research shows that *eharle ganas* (doing your best) is not only the responsibility of the student. It is an institutional issue that requires the commitment of faculty, staff, and administrators to support Latino/as in their pursuit of higher education.

Why is it an issue?

There are different factors that contribute to gatekeeping for Latino/as. But academic gatekeeping is an issue that Latino/as experience throughout their K-16 education, though it has unique manifestations in higher education. Academic gatekeeping, especially in mathematics, often keeps Latino/as from pursuing or completing their higher education. The field of mathematics is a subject where Latino/as attending community college often have low success rates. In California, community colleges implement a placement exam that measures students' knowledge in subjects such as English and math (Huber et al., 2015). The results of the placement exam defines the students' readiness to enroll in college-level coursework. Latino/as must complete the college-level coursework in order to receive a degree, whether it's a certification, or transfer-level coursework for those Latino/as that want to pursue their education at a four-year university (Huber et al., 2015). Huber et al. (2015) explain that Latino/as experience difficulty completing sequences of basic skills math courses. For instance, "out of 100 Latina/o students who were placed into basic skills math between 2009 and 2012, only 14 successfully completed a transfer-level course in three years" (Huber et al., 2015, p. 9). While this statistic reflects the overall transfer rate, it nonetheless reflects the reality that low academic

success in mathematics is often a gatekeeper for Latino/as who wish to pursue higher education beyond the community college.

Due to the low success rate in mathematics for Latino/as, institutions need to evaluate what it means to educate Latinos in mathematics? Gutierrez (2008) sees the achievement gap between White middle-class and Black, Latina/Latino students as a way to narrow down the success rate. Yet, Gutierrez (2008) states that focusing on narrowing the achievement gap misses the point of focusing on the “multiple identities and agency of students” developed in their previous mathematics education courses. Also, narrowing the achievement gap identifies the problem as a technical instead of looking at improvement in teaching and learning environments for Latinos (Bartolome, 1994).

It is important that teachers, who teach in higher education acknowledge the mathematical education, or mis-education received by students in their K-12 education. Whiteford (2009) explains that some continents such as Asia and Africa have different numerals or counting system from the United States. This is important for teachers to consider because teachers need to be aware that some students will not be familiar with mathematical concepts being taught in a United States classroom. In order to recognize the students’ mathematical background, teachers need to focus on addressing the identity of the student. Gutierrez (2008) looks at students’ identity by focusing on the cultural, linguistic and familial connections. The cultural, linguistic, and familial connections are ways in which Latino/as can learn collaborative. Although considering students’ previous mathematical knowledge is important, Gutierrez (2008), argues that there is “...little recognition of the linguistic and cultural resources that marginalized students bring to the mathematics classroom or to the discipline of mathematics” (p. 361). The cultural, linguistic, and familial connections are being disregarded by institutions and teachers. Yet, all these realities need to be integrated into the classroom if institutions of higher education, especially Hispanic Serving Institutions are to meaningfully promote the success for Latino/as, especially in mathematics.

What should be done?

Latino serving teachers and institutes need to eliminate mathematics as gatekeeper courses. Gutierrez (2013) describes mathematics as “formatting power on our lives”, because it brings individuals to always reach the right answer. For, as she argues, when the correct answer is reached by a student, it measures the individual's intelligence. Therefore, Gutierrez (2013) argues that the field of mathematics has constructed a myth that “...some people are good at mathematics and some are not; therefore, some people possess intelligence and some do not” (p. 10). This brings mathematics and mathematics teaching to have significant power in society and, thus, it has the power of a gatekeeper.

The way mathematics is viewed by teachers and society is equally as important. As a result, Gutierrez (2013) explains that institutions need to prepare mathematics teachers with political conocimiento (knowledge). Political conocimiento (knowledge) is the “...clarity and stance on teaching that maintains solidarity with and commitment to one’s students” (Gutierrez, 2013, p.11). Teachers who maintain solidarity with their students must go beyond just making good lesson plans for undereducated students. These are six ways in which Gutierrez (2013) describes the action teachers should take from their political conocimiento, in order to make a positive change in their students mathematical education: indicating achievement by instituting regular learning logs rather than relying on test scores, renaming a course to note that it only covers Western, Euclidian geometry, standing up to an administrator in a public meeting in order

to defend undereducated students, refuse to go along with procedures at a workshop that asked teachers to publicly advocate for the Common State Standards in mathematics, making arrangements with co-teacher that the mathematics being taught needed to reflect a more rigorous curriculum, and helping lead a professional development workshop to have local teachers reflect on how their definitions of mathematics influenced who did well in their mathematics classes (Gutierrez, 2013, p. 15). These actions reflect what teachers can do in order to advocate for and be transparent with their Latino/as students.

Additionally, teachers who educate Latino/as in mathematics and don't speak Spanish, or who are not bilingual need to explore different ways to see their students succeed. As mentioned previously working on students' linguistic connections is often not recognized by teachers as an essential part of mathematics education (Gutierrez, 2008), therefore this is an opportunity for both institutions and teachers to make changes for Latino/as. In particular, Gutierrez (2002) explores the ways in which mathematics teachers can help English Language Learners and undereducated Latino/as in math education.

Gutierrez (2002) breaks down these ways as the following: working in students' primary language, providing materials in students' primary language, knowing the linguistic backgrounds and needs of students, building on familiar knowledge domains, stressing the language of mathematics, working in groups, and involving families. Students show greater engagement and have greater access to the mathematical materials when they are encouraged to work in their primary language (Gutierrez, 2002). One way in which teachers can provide materials in students' primary language is by having printed translated materials such as vocabulary words in the students' primary language in order to help students comprehend the vocabulary (Gutierrez, 2002). Knowing the linguistic background and needs of students requires teachers to acknowledge students' fluency in Spanish. In addition, but even when a student is fluent in Spanish, this does not mean the student can effectively communicate mathematical concepts and work in that language. Therefore, teachers must also learn if a student has been formally schooled mathematics in Spanish in order to make connections between language, mathematics, and identity (Gutierrez, 2002). When building on familiar knowledge domains teachers can build on central themes over a period of time based on students' previous experiences and primary language to learn mathematical concepts (Gutierrez, 2002). By stressing the language of mathematics, teachers need to engage students in language experimentation, this way students can more easily understand mathematical concepts (Gutierrez, 2002). Also, working in groups can have its pros and cons, but teachers can design collaborative groups to help English Language Learners with listening and speaking skills in English (Gutierrez, 2002).

Lastly, involving families is another way in which teachers can help Latino/as in math, by focusing on funds of knowledge from Mexican families. Through funds of knowledge teachers can come up with themes for effective teaching in the classroom (Gutierrez, 2002).

Furthermore, building on students' funds of knowledge is another way in which teachers can avoid mathematics as gatekeepers for Latino/as. Civil (2016), draws on funds of knowledge for teaching in STEM the field of mathematics, by having teachers examine family history, labor history, household activities, and parental attitude. Teachers conduct home visits so they can build on student backgrounds and family experiences. Civil (2016) explains that home visits allow teachers to find effective ways to provide a meaningful schooling experience for low performing students. One important aspect for building on low performing student funds of knowledge, is the ability to see the amazing work these students' can perform when they are

home. Civil (2016) explains that there is a "...disconnect between how non-dominant students are perceived in school and at home" (p. 46). There is no correlation between acknowledging the way in which non-dominant students are problem solvers at home. Therefore, teachers should take the opportunity to spend time outside of the classroom with those students who have low mathematical performance.

Overall, mathematical education is an academic gatekeeper for minority students. When Mexicanas are being gatekeep from the curriculum in the field of education, it limits them on reaching their educational *sueño*. But, as discussed by the literature in mathematics there are different ways in which both institution and teacher can avoid math education as a gatekeeper. It is never too late for institutions and teachers to acknowledge the previous mathematical education each student brings to the classroom.

Methods

Developing Maestras face and overcome linguistic, academic, and cultural forms of gatekeeping while trying to navigate through institutions of higher education. For this Capstone Project, the researchers investigated the impact that gatekeeping has on developing Maestras and how it affects their academic and professional aspirations. The researchers sought to uncover potential solutions that address gatekeeping issues from the perspectives of developing Maestras, who are in or have gone through a teacher preparation program. Additionally, the researchers explored the various coping mechanisms and strategies that Maestras draw upon when contending with these various forms of gatekeeping. Based on an analysis of the data and the relevant research literature, the researchers used what they have learned to formulate an action that responds to the focus issue in a way that inspires, informs, or involves a particular audience.

Context.

Our community partner was our peers, therefore our research location was primarily at the "University of Gringolandia " which straddles the border between the city of Del Mar and Playa California. The city of Playa is located along the Central Coast of California and has a population of roughly 34,182 people. The racial demographics of Playa is made up of approximately 48.4% Caucasian, 43.4% Hispanic or Latino, 9.7% Asian, 8.4% African American, 1.6% Pacific Isander and 1.1% Native American ("City Demographics: Seaside, CA", n.d.). The City of Del Mar has a population of approximately 21,227 people. In Del Mar, the racial composition is made up of 35.8% Caucasian, 27.9% Hispanic or Latino, 17.8% Asian, 7.17% Afriacn American, 2.7 % Pacific Islander, 0.56% Native American ("Marina, CA", n.d.).

The University of Gringolandia was established in 1994 and is one of the smallest CSUs in the state of California with a current enrollment of 7,616 students ("The California State University", n.d. ; "Enrollment Fast Facts (Most Recent Term)", n.d.). A distinguishing characteristic of this university is the intimate class sizes that average about 26 students per class ("IAR data", n.d.). The average cost of tuition is \$5,742 per academic year ("2019-20 Tuition, Fees, and Deadlines", n.d.).

Additionally, an important contextual factor to take into consideration for the purposes of our research paper is the designation of the University as a Hispanic Serving Institute. This assignment is given to institutions that have a Hispanic population that makes up at least 25% of their student body. Located in Nepantla County, the most densely Latino populated county in the state of California, the University of Gringolandia serves a Latino student population that makes

up approximately 44% of the total student body as of Fall 2019 (“IAR data”, n.d. ; “U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: San Diego County, California; Los Angeles County, California; Monterey County, California; Salinas city, California”, n.d.). Within the liberal studies program in the college of education, hispanic/latina/Mexicanas make up approximately 56% of the demographics (“IAR data”, n.d.).

Participants and Participant Selection.

We invited 7 of our Mexicana peers who are current and former traditional teaching pathway students to participate in this study. This group of prospective participants were invited to participate because their relevant experience/expertise/knowledge/membership as Mexicanas, who are or have been students in the teaching pathway, are relevant to our focus.

Researchers.

Irma: This concern is personally meaningful to me because I am a Mexicana who is currently going through the teacher preparation pathway at the University. I have lived through many experiences and challenges that are specific to my identity as a woman and Mexicana that I do not feel are acknowledged within the University. These struggles are not unique to me and ultimately are contributors to the racial gap that is prevalent within the classrooms of California and specifically of Monterey County. The experiences and background knowledge that qualifies me to carry out this project are those that I live through as a Mexicana who is a student at the University and who is going through the teacher pathway. I am able to understand the particularities of that experience and use that basis of understanding to help me formulate relevant questions and better analyze the data. I am different from the targets of my research in that our experiences have differed. Most of the peers that we will interview are former ESL/ELL students who have had a poor educational foundation in their K-12 experience. Although my educational foundation was dramatically better than theirs as a Mexicana on the English only track, it was a different experience that yielded a different result. Additionally, I am a 36 year old mother and wife where as most of our targets will likely range between the ages of 19-30. These differences might impact my perspective and the lense through which I live my reality will undoubtedly have an affect on the way that I interpret data and research. My differences may help work on the concern because I think that my experiences and realities provide me with unique perspectives and unique perspectives can yield unique/new solutions.

Monica: This is personally meaningful to me because I have experienced gatekeeping in the teacher preparation program. Those challenges are important for me because I identify myself as a Mexicana. Therefore, I would like to contribute to researching for different solutions that may be beneficial for those future Mexicanas teachers. The experiences that I have to help me carry out this project include the ability to describe the challenges I have experienced as a Mexicana in a teacher preparation program. The skills that I can carry along to the project is having communication with other Mexicana peers that are current and former students in the program. The ability to know some peers allows me to identify the struggles in each individual. I am different from the targets because my education journey is different from the participants. For example, when it comes to the ESL program, I was part of the program for one year only. Some of the participants were part of the ESL program for more than one year. I

was able to gain other educational resources in middle school and high school, such as having elective classes, and field trips to different UC and CSU universities. My academic differences may impact this concern because even having a different academic journey leads to different ways of viewing or interpreting each education.

Larissa: Having more Maestras in the community for us is meaningful because we want to have more Latinas in the classroom. I was part of the ESL program in middle school and high school. By being placed in the ESL program in high school I did not receive the grade level education I needed to receive. A skill that I will carry in this project will be communicating with former ESL students who are in the process of becoming a Maestra. I am different from the targets because my education in high school was a mix of the ESL program, mainstream, AVID and Honor classes. This gives me the opportunity to understand what kind of education each of my peers received in high school.

Informants.

Lidia: is 22 years old. She was born in California but moved to Michoacan Mexico when she was three years old. When Lidia came back to California she was fourteen years old and was placed in the ESL program to learn English. She remained in the ESL program throughout middle school and high school. She is a recent graduate of the University of Gringolandia where she majored in Liberal Studies. Although she was able to successfully complete her undergraduate work, she has not applied for a teaching credential program because she has been unable to pass the CBEST. She is currently working in the fields picking strawberries. Her goal for the next few months is to pass the CBEST and get into the credential program by Summer 2020. Lidia prefers to use Spanish with her family and friends, but uses English when it comes to education.

Isabel: is a 49 year old elementary school teacher

Rosario: is a 26 year old Mexican immigrant and recent graduate from the University of Gringolandia with a bachelor's degree in Liberal Studies. Although she graduated from the University two years ago, she has not applied to a teacher credential program because she has not passed the CBEST. She is part of DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) meaning she immigrated to California when she was a child without having a green card. Rosario was part of the ESL program upon her arrival in high school.

Genesis: is a first generation Mexicana who was born and raised in California. She is a 29 year old student at the University of Gringolandia who is currently working towards completing her undergraduate work for the Liberal Studies major. Genesis transferred to the University of Gringolandia after completing her general education requirements at Coastal Community College. In addition to being a college student, she also works as a teacher's aid at Punto de Vista Elementary school.

Yolanda : is a 24 a teacher preparation pathway program student at the University of Gringolandia. She is the mother of a two year old active little girl who keeps Yolanda very busy. Yolanda is a third generation American citizen of Mexican descent who was born and raised in Salinas, CA. She was a mainstream English only student throughout her K-12 education.

Luz: is 24 years old. She was born in Guanajuato and moved to CA when she was 11 years old. Luz was also part of the ESL program in middle school but in high

school was placed in mainstream classes. After completing high school, Luz went to a community college and transferred to University of Gringolandia. In Spring 2020 she will take a class and graduate from University of Gringolandia. The goal of Luz is to take and pass the CBEST as soon as possible because she wants to get accepted in the credential program.

Lizette: is a 27 year old teacher preparation pathway student at the University of Gringolandia. She is a first generation American citizen that was born and raised in Salinas, CA. She is a hearing impaired student who has also had to contend with a heart condition throughout her entire life. In high school she was part of the ESL program. She feels that her physical disabilities have contributed to her resiliency as Mexicana and ESL student within the education system. Lizette recently celebrated one year of marriage with her husband. She hopes to graduate from the University with her BA in liberal studies by the end of Fall of 2019.

Semi-Structured Interview and Survey Question.

1. What do you see as the problem challenge with gatekeeping within the university; or What are you concerned about when it comes to gatekeeping within the university?
2. What is currently being done to improve gatekeeping within the university - by whom - and do you think this is good, bad, or indifferent? Why?
3. What do you think should be done about gatekeeping within the university?
4. What do you think are the obstacles/drawbacks/disadvantages to changing gatekeeping within the university? and/or the improvement of gatekeeping within the university?
5. How do you navigate your school routine as a Mexicana?
6. What does academic success mean to you?
7. Did you face any barriers as a Mexicana that kept you from reaching your goals? What were those barriers?
8. What do you like most of Liberal Studies so far? What would you like to see change?
9. What was your experience like as a Mexicana in the University in pursuit of a higher education?
10. Is there anything else that you'd like to say about your experiences as a Mexicana within the Liberal Studies major or how to improve the experiences of Mexicana students?

Procedure.

Participants were interviewed. All interviews were done in small groups. When it was not possible to interview participants in person, they were invited to complete a phone interview or paper and pencil survey of the same questions. Face-to-Face interviews took no more than one

hour, were audio-recorded (with participant consent), and took place in CSUMB library study room 3103. A semi-structured interview format was used for face-to-face interviews, to allow for follow-up questions to unclear, interesting or unexpected responses. All interviews/surveys will be scheduled at the convenience of the interviewee and should take approximately 60 minutes to complete.

Data Analysis.

Transcribed interviews will be coded and analyzed for emergent themes.

Results

For this Capstone Project, seven Mexicanas that are current and former students in the traditional teacher preparation pathway at the University of Gringolandia were interviewed to learn what they think could be done to eliminate gatekeeping issues that affect Mexicanas within the teacher preparation program at the University. Although gatekeeping is complex and multifaceted, there are two significant issues of importance that rise above the rest. The most salient of these is the need to understand the complexity of the identities of Mexicana college students in order to more effectively support them in their quest for higher education. By finding ways to effectively support Mexicanas within institutions of higher education, the healing effect will reverberate throughout the K-12 educational pipeline.

This reverberation of healing would address the secondary reason why gatekeeping is so significant and that is to reduce, or close, the racial gap in elementary schools between students, of whom the majority are children of color, and the professionals who educate them, the vast majority of whom are white. Increasing the number of maestras Mexicanas within the teaching profession in an area like Nepantla County, that has a high density of Mexicana/o students within its schools, has the potential to break the cycle of trauma that is, and has been, enacted upon Mexicanas during their K-12 experiences. This ultimately, as our research documents, has the power to improve educational outcomes for Mexicanas within institutions of higher education.

Identifying gatekeeping experiences

We asked a series of questions to elicit from our participants, what kinds of gatekeeping challenges, if any, they faced within their experiences as students at the University of Gringolandia. While our interview questions initiated dialogues about gatekeeping, it was within the responses to the follow up questions and via comments made throughout the interactive dialogue between the participants of our focus group, that we were able to decipher what issues resonate most predominantly.

At the commencement of our interview, we sought to establish a culturally relevant definition of the word gatekeeping amongst our participants. We felt that this was important because as Mexicanas, we could not come up with a translation for the word gatekeeping in Spanish. Gatekeeping, it would seem, is a very white middle class concept and thus understanding how our participants made sense of this concept was crucial to our interview. After discussing what gatekeeping means to them, Rosario, one of our participants articulated that “Gatekeeping es como una trampa o cárcel o algo donde te sientes atrapada” (Personal communication, October, 2019). This interpretation of the concept of gatekeeping was met with enthusiasm by all of our participants and the group agreed collectively on this articulation of what gatekeeping means to them. Validating the funds of knowledge that our participants bring to this issue and making our work culturally relevant is crucial to the work that we are doing in

this project. In our commitment to this intention of cultural relevance, for the remainder of this paper, we will use the word “trampa” instead of “gatekeeping” when referencing the concept of gatekeeping.

The strongest emergent theme relates to the lack of recognition that they feel as Mexicanas who experience various choques within institutions of higher education. Several of our participants talked about their frustrations of not being understood by either their familia or the University. This lack of understanding about the particularities of the struggles of Mexicanas within institutions of higher education has an alienating effect on them.

The ways in which our participants expressed feelings of being misunderstood by the University centered around issues of trauma, fear and self esteem. The majority of our participants shared stories of trauma that were enacted upon them while in their K-12 experiences. These traumatic experiences altered the way that our participants felt about their positions within the education system and inculcate them with a sense of fear that they carried with them into the University.

ESL Trampa

Six out of our seven participants shared their experiences as ESL students that indoctrinated them with a fear of speaking Spanish within mainstream English-only classrooms. Luz talked about the fear that she felt as an 11 year old newcomer entering a school system where she did not understand the language. That fear temporarily subsided when she was given the opportunity to be in an ESL class where she could speak and learn in Spanish. However, her time in the ESL program was far too brief, and she was placed in a mainstream class before she had a strong enough foundation in the English language to be successful. At this point, not only had her fear of being a Spanish dominant speaker in a mainstream English only class returned, she also developed a sense of shame in her inability to speak English well. This fear and shame still haunts Luz (2019) today as a student within the University, as she articulates in the following statement:

Man, where do I start. It is such a cocktail of negative emotions. Cuz in the beginning when I first came, me daba miedo.... Now I am still scared of doing presentations because when I get nervous my accent gets really thick. I can like feel it getting stuck in my throat, it is a little disabling. It's like they say, you know what the answer is, but you're not going to raise your hand (Personal communication, October, 2019).

Lydia (2019) also echoed this sense of fear that was inculcated in her through her experience as an ESL student in a mainstream English only class that contributed to the silencing of her voice. Lydia states:

Es como estar siempre en silencio. Porque piensas que hablar en tu propia idioma es mal porque exigen el inglés. So en la clase cuando la Maestra pregunta algo, a lo mejor lo sabes pero te da pena por mismo, por tu acento (Personal communication, October, 2019).

Rosario (2019) shared a very powerful story with us about the kind of trauma that she suffered as an ESL student:

Siento que that is many of the reasons why the ESL or ELD students are afraid to move on. Because they know if they are going to be transferred [out of an ELD class and into a mainstream class], they are going to deal with those types of things [referencing the belittling experiences that Lidia and Luz had shared with the group about being an ESL student]. At least that was my case. Because in my ELD classes, everyone was the same. We were all the same so we weren't scared. Eramos familia. I belonged there, because we were all the same. We all shared the same story. But I knew if they would transfer me to a regular English class, or higher math or higher lo que sea, I know that I would be like with different students, or higher students or with students who saben el ingles bien...they will make fun of me or they will make fun of mi acento because I know we will have to do presentations. So that was one of the things that I would always think. No, porque en ese clase, tengo que hacer presentaciones. No I'm not going to go and I wouldn't even try. Especially in English.... English, history, you know, I knew that we would have to do presentations. So I was stuck with my Spanish or my ELD classes. In the end, they told me that I had to move on because I already completed my two or three years of ELD. Even if they move you out, you deal with those types of things. Es donde te sientes que you don't belong. Or that you are less than the rest. Or that you are not good at something or that you shouldn't be there. Te pasan muchas cosas por la cabeza (Personal communication, October, 2019).

These are only a few of the examples that were shared with us about the types of trauma that our participants have endured at the hands of English only ideologies within their K-12 experiences.

Trampas de consejeros (counselors)

Perhaps one of the most common traumatic experiences that five of seven of our participants shared was having a traumatic encounter with high school counselors . Many of the experiences that were shared in common had racist undertones embedded in them that greatly negatively impacted the trust that our participants had, or should have had, in the school system. Isabel (2019) shared the following story with us about her experience with an individual who tried to gate keep her from continuing her education past the high school level:

I remember when I was in high school. All of my class were called college prep courses. Back then they called them college prep but now they call them AP classes. Back then I had mostly AP classes and I went to go speak to the counselor and told him that I wanted to stay on the same track because my plan was to go to a university. I will never forget what he told me, he said " Why are you worried about getting an education, your place is in the cocina, cocinando y creando hijos. And he told me this in English and my jaw just dropped. I was like what the hell. Fast forward, this happened like five years ago, the VP that got hired here [at my school] came into my class and told the students that he had a counselor that told him, what are worried about getting an education for, you are going to be a field worker, you are going to work in the fields and raise your family. Later on I

asked him where he went to high school and it turns out that we went to the same high school and we had the same counselor. That wasn't the first time that I've run into people trying to gatekeep me from wherever I wanted to go. But I was just like, if he is telling this to everybody? Wow, how many people did he gatekeep from furthering their education? When I was thinking about his story (the VP) I was thinking well at least he didn't get stuck, but how many people did he stop from continuing their education? (Personal communication, October, 2019).

Rosario (2019) also chimed in and was eager to share her experience with a counselor in high school that almost kept her from even graduating high school in the following statement:

Yeah, same for me. It was a counselor in high school. I was in my third year cuando me llamo and she asked me the same thing, que what was I going to do after high school. And I was like, no se, ir al colegio. Y me dice, o si, vete aqui a Hartnel. That was my plan, to go to Hartnel but then like a year after I saw that all of my friends were applying to UCs and CSUs, 4 year colleges. And I was like, pues yo también quiero estar como ellas. I want to go there too. Because they are igual como yo, they are ELD students. So I want to be like them. I went to my counselor and told her, I want to apply for a CSU. Y me dice, "Estas segura?" Y me dice porque no vas a calificar. And I am like porque, y me dice que porque tienes puros ELD clases, I am not even sure if you are going to graduate from high school. Because you have to be, you have to have certain credits, from regular classes. Not as ELD, because ELD doesn't count. So because you have all ELD courses, I don't know if you are going to be to graduate high school and on top of that your GPA and on top of that, pues todo. Y muy aparte de eso, es el dinero. That was the thing que me calmo because me dijo, no tienes papeles. No vas a calificar para FAFSA. And I was like ok. So cuando me sali de all, I was like that's it, ok, I am going to drop out of high school. What's the point. And that was my whole thinking during my Junior year, was that I was going to drop out. Y unos me preguntaban, are you going to come back next year, your senior year, and I was like nope, nope, nope. And in the summer, me puse a trabajar en el field, and I was like, I am going to stay here. Pero no me quedé porque me lastime, so I ended up going back to high school. There was a CSUMB counselor that came para ayudar, I'm not sure what he did pero se que era de CSUMB. He wasn't like a regular counselor pero venia de CSUMB y nos ayudaba. Y pues fui con él y él fue el que me ayudó. Y me introdujo al dream act, y toda esta ayuda que podía recibir. Me ayudo aplicar. And I had to take like three English classes, and last year I took like a Spring and Winter section in order to clear my credits (Personal communication, October, 2019).

Genesis also wanted to share experience with us even though it was clearly still a very painful memory to recount. Genesis's (2019) voice trembled as she fought back her tears while she told us the following story:

I had a similar experience, I don't want to say similar, no. But in high school, I was part of the migrant program, all the way up until highschool. I was in it from elementary and through high school. I had a migrant counselor and he would call me in. And he called

me in this one time and he asked me what do you want to do with your life, like what do you want to do? And I told him, I am interested in college, I am interested in attending a UC. He literally told me, he looked me in my eyes and told me, “Be realistic”. And I was like holy shit, I was like, ok. That was the last time I stepped foot in his office. Whenever they came to my class to give me the pink paper to go see him, I decided to go into the bathroom and hide instead. I was like, I’m done, I’m not going back to him (Personal communication, October, 2019).

The traumatic trampa experiences with counselors did not end at the high school level for our participants. Luz (2019) shared the following experience that had at her community college:

I did see a counselor for my second semester, and it was like a random counselor. I made an appointment and I asked him about a specific class that I had taken and how would it contribute to my education and he was like “ Do you really want to know?” and I was like “ Yeeeeeaaah”. And he was like “Do you really want to know?” and I was like “yeah” and he asked me like three times. And then I was like no. And then I just didn’t go to any other counselor after that because I felt stupid. Like I said, it took me almost four years to get out of there. Because I thought, maybe I should know those things. So I just didn’t go back (Personal communication, October, 2019).

These traumatic experiences that our focus group participants shared with us were not only contributors to a fearful state of being within the educational pipeline but it also impacted their self esteem in detrimental ways. When Isabel (2019) shared her experience with us about a high school counselor who acted as a trampa for her, as a follow up question we asked her how that interaction made her feel and how it impacted the way she interacted with other people in similar positions of authority. This was her response:

It made me carry around a rough exterior. I started wearing heavy make-up, like resting bitch face. I became hard and stern, like don’t talk to me.... That’s what he made me go through. His words impacted me so much. Plus other stuff that happened throughout my life, but his words, he put the last little grano on there and se desparramo todo. Right there (Personal communication, October, 2019).

We also asked Genesis (2019) a similar follow up question in regard to the experience she had with a counselor in high school who was a trampa for her. She shared the following:

Ooof. That also like shut me down. Like, what is the point of me asking for help, like to anybody like staff or teachers (Personal communication, October, 2019).

Within the context of the University, the negative experiences with counselors continued and is compiled for Mexicanas which make these encounters even more frustrating and hurtful. Isabel, who is familiar with the experiences of many current and former teacher preparation pathway students of the University of Gringolandia, shared with us that she has heard numerous complaints over the years about the academic advising department. Specifically she named

Esther as an academic advisor that she heard many students complain about. This prompted Lizette (2019) to share an experience that she had with Esther while seeking guidance with her academic planning as follows:

When I first came to the University of Gringolandia, I felt lost. I wasn't sure what classes I needed to take or in what order I needed to take them. I tried looking it up for myself but I was scared that maybe I would get something wrong that might mess me up and keep me from graduating. I made an appointment with Esther to create a learning plan. On the day of my appointment, I walked into her office and the first thing she said to me was "So I already created a learning plan for you and emailed it to you. Do you have any questions?" I was like what? When did you send it to me? She said "about ten minutes ago". I felt like she just wanted me to get out of her office because she just sat there waiting for me to ask a question or say that I didn't have any questions. How the heck was I supposed to have questions about something I haven't even seen yet? I thought that a learning plan was supposed to be developed together, you know, like explained to me. I had never met her before, she didn't know anything about me. How can you make a plan for me without knowing anything about my life? What if I couldn't take that many units because of work? What if I could only take night classes? I did have questions but they all left my brain after she upset me with her eager to get me out of her office attitude. I didn't feel comfortable anymore. I avoided her after that. I just figured stuff out on my own or by talking to other students (Personal communication, October, 2019).

The attack on the self esteem of our participants has been continuous throughout their educational experiences. As a student at the University of Gringolandia, Genesis (2019) describes the following experience that really impacted the way that she felt about her own abilities to become a teacher.

I remember this one interaction, it was in my math class. This white girl was sitting next to me and she was talking to her friend and they were talking about the CBEST and she made some comment where she's like, "so if you can't pass the CBEST then you shouldn't even become a teacher." When you hear that kind of shit in class, it ***** with your mind and I had just taken the CBEST and I didn't pass. The CBEST does not define what it means to be a good teacher but it does mess with your self-esteem (Personal communication, October, 2019)¹.

Trampas de los profesores (professors)

Yolanda (2019) shared her experience with us about an interaction with a professor at the University of Gringolandia that she felt contributed to her view of professors as trampas.

Yolanda: It's like for capstone, I remember when I was stressing out for our literature review and I walked up to Dr. X and asked Dr. X if Dr. X could clarify the structure that they want because I am so lost. And Dr. X has this intimidating laugh, and I can't take it. It sounds so fake. And Dr. X does that laugh and says don't worry, it is just a rough draft.

¹ Among the comadres in this focal group, 5 of the 7 have taken the CBEST. All 5 have failed one or more parts. Thus, Genesis' comments are summative of almost the whole group.

I am stressing out and I want to do good and yet you are telling me not to stress out. Like I need some motivation over here. You know, push me. I want to be motivated in my capstone and yet I am not getting it. I have this classmate, Vanessa, and we were having a conversation. We were connecting with each other, it was like she was reading my mind. Vanessa said, you know what I've been wanting to do? And I said no, what? I want to send Dr. X an email saying, I need motivation over here. Do something about it. Vanessa read my mind, because that is how I am feeling. I need to be motivated. It is my last semester, I am doing capstone. I'm paying more attention to my other classes that don't really need that much attention and my priority that I want is to be on my capstone and yet I am not seeing myself giving that attention to it....I was hurt because I am stressing out and Dr. X didn't hear me.

Luz: Dr. X just dismissed your concerns?

Yolanda: Yeah, with that laugh. I don't even think of asking Dr.X anymore, I am just going to go with the flow. Because of that fear of getting that same laugh and response (Personal communication, October, 2019).

As a part of the conversation about the experiences that our participants had within the Liberal Studies program at the University of Gringolandia, their feelings about the struggles that they faced within the Math 308 and 309 courses came up. According to our participants, in these courses they often hear directly from the instructor of record that the concepts that are being covered are "basic" elementary level mathematical concepts that they "should already know". However, several of our participants struggled with these courses because they did not get the foundational knowledge as ESL students within their K-12 schooling that they needed to be successful in these courses. We asked them how it made them feel to hear that they should already know these concepts when they don't and these were the responses that we heard from Lidia, Lizette and Yolanda (2019):

Lidia: Like I'm not capable. Like I am dumb, basically. I really thought about changing my major.

Lizette: It makes me feel like I'm worthless. Like the teacher is telling you "hey you know what, you can't do this so get the hell out of this class you don't belong here". And it's like, you are trying to put yourself like in a higher level and they are just telling you, "Hey, you can't do it". I just depends on the confidence that you have but for me it literally just drops down. It's like I go to the class, but I don't have the energy or the reason to like, interact with others.

Yolanda: Yeah its like you go in with so much confidence and yet it keeps on decreasing (Personal communication, October, 2019).

Cultura as a trampa

While conducting our interview, a conversation unfolded amongst our focus group about some of the challenges that we face as estudiantes Mexicanas within familial contexts. Yolanda, while talking about the kinds of pressures that she deals with at home that are directly related to her gendered and cultured identity as a Mexicana, expressed that she felt misunderstood by her familia. She shared how difficult it is to focus on her school work when she is expected to take on the full responsibility of cooking, cleaning and attending to her child. The only time that it is

acceptable for her to give her attention to her school work, is late at night after her child and husband are both in bed. Sometimes, this isn't until after 10 pm. Being effective after 10pm following a full day of domestic duties and work schedules that likely started from the early morning hours is challenging to say the least. Exhaustion takes a toll on the ability to think critically and write effectively. Yet, *estudiantes Mexicanas* are still expected to produce the same quality of work as other college students within the same time frames.

Adding on to this, other participants brought up challenges they face that pertain to the rules and norms for Mexicanas on how we should project ourselves into society. In the Mexican culture, it is unacceptable for a decent young woman to be outside of the house after a certain hour and even more unacceptable to live outside of the house. Lidia and Isabel both shared stories about their fathers not allowing them to attend college in cities that were too far for them to commute to from home. Earlier in the interview, Isabel shared her experiences with microaggressions as a brown female student at San Juan State University which made the three hour commute less tolerable. Eventually, this resulted in her dropping out of college for several years because her father refused to allow her to move closer to school.

As it pertained to their experiences within the Liberal Studies program at the University of Gringolandia, several of the participants brought up night classes as a particular challenge for them within the context of familial and cultural expectations. Lydia spoke about the scrutiny that she had to endure from her family when she was enrolled in night classes that didn't conclude until 9 pm. Her family questioned and challenged her about these late classes which made her feel that she was doing something that was inappropriate. Rosario shared a similar story with the group. While Rosario's family encouraged her to go to college, she too was questioned about coming home from school at a late hour whenever she had to enroll in night classes. Rosario (2019), when speaking about the conflicting messages she gets from her mother, states,

Obviamente, para ella la educación es muy importante porque siempre me lo ha implementado. Vete a la escuela, vete a la escuela. Pero cuando estoy en la universidad, igual, porque llegas a estas horas? Que son las horas alla? (Personal communication, October, 2019)².

This was a very clear example of how the cultured and gendered roles that we are expected to adhere to as Mexicanas are sometimes in direct conflict with the expectations that we must meet as college students.

Perhaps the most complex issue raised by our participants about the gendered cultural expectations that are *trampas* for them as college students, is the fact that they impose some of these expectations on themselves. The most profound comment that was made about this issue was articulated by Rosario (2019) in the following passage:

Y ahorita es como ya no me dice que es lo que tengo que hacer porque yo siento que si ahora si yo no lo hago, soy mala hija. Aunque ellos no me lo digan, yo lo tengo que hacer. Porque ahora ya no me dicen que lo tengo que hacer pero yo me siento mal en no

² We have intentionally presented "whole" passages of our *comadres* reflections rather than "edit" them down to a singular line or, worse, summarize their words into a "comment." We made this methodological decision so as to be consistent with our *comadres* request that we "give them voz" by sharing their stories.

hacer lo. Porque eso es lo que me han implementado, eso ya se volvió a mi valor (Personal communication, October, 2019).

This insight that Rosario shared, which was met with agreement by most of our other participants, expresses the complexities of the cultural expectations that we, as *estudiantes Mexicanas*, have to mitigate. That even when our families try and adapt their cultural and gendered expectations of us in order to support us in our education, we still have a difficult time renouncing those expectations. In short, these cultural values have shaped our lives for so many years that it is not possible to simply “shake” them off as we move into adulthood. The majoritarian perspective on this phenomena would likely view this as a “choice” that *Mexicanas* make to their own self-detriment. However, this is one of the ways that *Mexicanas* feel misunderstood because even though in a technical sense it is a “choice,” the ramifications of making this “choice” to follow *Mexicana* gendered and cultural expectations has a direct impact our sense of self worth. When examined with this understanding, it is clear that this “choice” that *Mexicanas* make to conform to cultural practices that act as *trampas* for them, is not straightforward and is a difficult one that *Mexicanas* must wrestle with.

Our participants are navigating through the teacher preparation program at the University of Gringolandia with a host of challenges that center around their gendered cultured identities as women and the trauma that they experience within their education. It is the intersection of all of these realities that our participants feel are unrecognized by the University of Gringolandia. Being misunderstood both by familia and the University is isolating. Yolanda expressed this feeling of isolation and being unrecognized in the following statement, “...and it's like the silent struggle that we are going through” (Personal communication, October, 2019). Rosario echoed this expression of being misunderstood when she stated “ Lo que yo siento es que ellos nunca van a entender... No importa porque ellos no han pasado por lo que tú estás pasando” (Personal communication, October, 2019).

Solutions

We sought to gain an understanding from our participants of the kinds of remedies that they feel would best help them overcome the various *trampas* that they articulated throughout the interview. Through the dialogue that unfolded as a result of our interview questions, we were able to extract the following three action options as possible ways of mitigating the *trampas* that *estudiantes Mexicanas* face within the teacher preparation program: culturally relevant mentorship, meaningful community building opportunities, and support resources that work with the identities of *Mexicanas*. The criteria that we used to evaluate each of the three action options are: inclusiveness, effectiveness and sustainability.

Mentorship and Community. All seven of our participants articulated that access to effective mentorship and community was important to helping them overcome the *trampas* that they must face as *estudiantes Mexicanas*. For instance, Luz (2019) articulated the lack of a mentor at her community college as a *trampa* that she experienced and struggled to overcome:

I can't think of a specific person, but maybe the lack thereof is the *trampa*. I went through community college without really having a counselor. And it [counseling] is for those

students who are white who have a counselor, they have a guide. So the lack thereof a person was my trampa. I was there forever. I was there I think for like almost four years. I was ready to quit. I went under the radar. There wasn't anyone there to guide me, so I think that the lack thereof was my trampa (Personal communication, October, 2019).

While the benefits of mentorship are straightforward, the nature of the particular kind of mentorship that is needed to effectively support Mexicanas within institutions of higher education is more complex. While our participants stated that it would be beneficial to have more Latino representation amongst the faculty, they also shared examples that demonstrate how simply having a mentor who identifies as Latino is insufficient. Rosario addresses this specifically when she talked about her experiences with two Latino professors at the University of Gringolandia who both reached out to her and offered her their support. She explains that while they both seemed to have a genuine interest in supporting her, one of them demonstrated a better understanding of who she was and what her experiences have been like as a Mexicana within the educational system. Rosario (2019) explained this to us as follows:

Dr. D offered me help, whenever you want to come to my office hours...You know, Dr. D is brown y habla espanol y todo. I didn't go with Dr. D, instead I went with Dr. G. I went to Dr. G because I didn't feel like I had to explain myself. Dr. G no mas en mirame, entendio. Todo lo que me decía, I was like yes, yes, como sabe? Y me iso llorar muchas veces. I wouldn't have to say anything. Because Dr. G would say, como dicen, todo mi vida. It was like yes, yes and I was just crying. Because other teachers, te cuestionan y cuestionan y no sabes como expresarte y no sabes que decirles lo que sientes o lo que sabes, no encuentro los palabras perfectas para que ellos lo comprendan. There is not. And Dr. G has them. Dr. G me los dio. Dr. G me entendio because I didn't have to explain myself to him, he already knew who I was (Personal communication, October, 2019).

In this example, Rosario illustrates how simply being Latino and having the ability to communicate in Spanish did not enable Dr. D to understand her in the ways that Dr. G was able to. The characteristic that led to a meaningful mentorship was not so much just the Latino factor, but rather that Dr. G was equipped with an understanding of the cultured and gendered identities of Mexicanas as well as how the lasting trauma of the ESL experiences that many Mexicanas wrestle with shapes their identities.

A Latino faculty member who is not cognizant of the particularities of the experiences that Mexicanas live through has the potential to cause great harm. Earlier, we shared Genesis's experience in high school with a migrant counselor who dismissed her dreams of attending a UC when he told her to be "realistic". The trauma of that experience was exacerbated by the fact that the person who enacted this trauma on Genesis was Latino. The following statement was the emotional exclamation point to that story, which Genesis (2019) said with disgust in her voice as she struggled to keep her tears at bay:

I mean, you are my counselor, and not only that, you are a brown counselor. Your job is to be out here to support the migrant, disadvantaged people. It was kind of traumatic to say the least (Personal communication, October, 2019).

The woundedness that Genesis felt in the way that she was treated by her Latino counselor would suggest that she granted this counselor a degree of *confianza* based on his racial similarity to Genesis; a *confianza* that was not reciprocated and shattered. The counselor likely did not intend to betray the *confianza* that Genesis extended to him because he was simply operating on a different paradigm than she was. He was there to check off boxes and make determinations about the college worthiness of students based on what he knew about those students on paper.

The similarity-attraction paradigm is a theory that suggests that people have a tendency to be more attracted to others who share similarities with them. Within the mentorship context, the similarity-attraction paradigm often results in the preference of mentors who are of a similar race, culture or ethnicity (Sanchez, Colon-Torres, Feuer, Roundfield & Berardi, 2014). Sanchez et al., also argue that a detrimental effect on mentorship relationships that are established on the basis of racial similarities is the assumption that race, ethnicity and cultural values are congruent for both the mentor and the protege. The disappointment comes with the realization that racial similarity between the protege and the mentor does not guarantee a hoped for standard of shared cultural values. And, in fact, this disappointment results, as was the case with Genesis, in a deeper loss of trust and rapport. Ultimately, this results in rendering these mentorship relationships as ineffective (Sanchez et al, 2014). The trauma that Genesis felt from the realization that brown skin did not equate to automatic advocacy and empathy has left her with a general distrust of all people within the education system within similar positions irrespective of their race. This is why inserting more racially similar mentors is not enough to result in the kind of mentorship that Mexicanas need. Rather, what is needed are mentors who share cultural similarities and experiences and who have *cariño*.

An additional important solution that our participants articulate is centered around community building opportunities. Our participants describe the essential role that mentors play in facilitating the building of communities that offer the support that Mexicanas rely on to overcome the fears and challenges that they face. In the following statement, Luz talks about how the safety of community helps her cope with the fear of being a *maestra Mexicana* within a profession that is dominated by middle class white women. Luz (2019) states:

I was actually thinking about that this morning. Because it like makes me not want to be a teacher. And the other day I remembered something that Dr. G said something like he makes these groups to make an impact. Because if I get [a teaching job] in a school and Yolanda gets in the same school and Genesis gets in the same school it's three of us in that same school and I was thinking about it this morning and I was like if we are together it's not that bad (Personal communication, October, 2019).

Furthermore, not only is there a need to build a community, but there is also a need to build community within that community. Many people think of a community as merely a simple space or a time and place when people can come. What we wish to distinguish is the additional need to build the *confianza* within that space. Community building opportunities for Mexicanas represents the building of a circle of trust and a willingness to learn and support each other. Rosario (2019) talks about a community building opportunity that positively made a change in her life as follows:

Yeah, it was towards the end. It was with the poems cuando lo comparti aqui, todos me dijeron que era un buen poema que que bien to keep writing que seguir escribiendo. Y siento que escuchar las diferentes voces, que me decian, oh you are good at writing poems....Me ayudo Dr. G y las comadres because they have been my support. Por eso I try to be here because siempre cuando vengo acá I feel like I am good at something. Because I know that we share the same story and if you are in a group of people who share the same story, te da poder (Personal communication, October, 2019).

Upon researching possible solutions for culturally relevant mentorship and meaningful community building opportunities, we came across the Mujerista mentorship model which is outlined by Villaseñor, Reyes and Muñoz (2013) as follows:

We define Mujerista mentoring as a collectivist, assets-based model that values the lived experiences and multiple ways of knowing of Chicanas/Latinas, focused on the building of communities and reciprocal mentoring relationships, and challenging model of mentoring that re-inscribe hierarchies between mentors and proteges. (p.50)

One of the key factors of mujerista mentorship is the Anzaldúan notion of developing a tolerance for ambiguity as a part of a mestiza consciousness (Villaseñor, Reyes & Muñoz, 2013). Effective mentorship for estudiantes Mexicanas requires the understanding that as estudiantes of la Universidad, we live in the borderlands of conflicting realities. Mexicanas must construct new ways of understanding and being that allows us to navigate between the worlds of school and home. Our mestiza consciousnesses are not uniformly constructed and it is for that reason that a mentor must be equipped with a tolerance for ambiguity.

Additionally, a mujerista mentorship places equal importance on both the formal and informal interactions (Villaseñor, Reyes & Muñoz, 2013). Formal interactions reference conversations and interactions that are directly associated with academic work and informal interactions reference interpersonal socialization (Villaseñor, Reyes & Muñoz, 2013). Given the trauma that our participants experienced at the hands of individuals in positions of authority within the education system, there is a lack of confianza with such individuals that must be repaired. Informal interactions are essential to building confianza which is essential to effectively mentoring Mexicanas.

The first criteria that is used to evaluate this action option is inclusiveness. Mujerista Mentorship is very specific in some ways but it is also pliable. The basic principles of this mentorship model are applicable across various races, cultures, ethnicities and genders. In fact, Villaseñor, Reyes & Muñoz specifically point out that while a Latina/Chicana mentor potentially has a greater possibility of empathizing with the experiences of Latina/Chicana proteges through shared experiences, this type of mentorship can be effectively executed by non-Latina/Chicana mentors (2014). In short, this option has the potential to be highly inclusive.

In terms of effectiveness, our second evaluation criteria, this option has a medium level of effectiveness. While mujerista mentorship is a far better approach to mentoring estudiantes Mexicanas than other traditional models of mentorship, it falls a little short. One of the most prominent issues that are trampas for Mexicanas within the University is the trauma that they bring with them from their K-12 educational experience. While the mujerista model takes into account the various identities that Mexicanas juggle in their daily lives as estudiantes, it does not

seem to place an emphasis on ensuring that mentors are cognizant of the frequency with which Mexicanas experience trauma within the education system. Each of the seven participants shared specific stories about the trauma that they experienced in their K-12 education that have impacted the way that they navigate through school. Based on our research, educational trauma is an extremely common occurrence that needs to be at the forefront of any kind of interaction, especially mentorship. The community building aspect of *mujerista* mentorship adds to the effectiveness of this model. Its emphasis on reciprocal mentorship and networking aligns with what our focus group articulated was needed for them to be successful. They articulated that building a community of support is important, but that due to their insecurities it is essential that a mentor help facilitate these meaningful community building opportunities.

The sustainability of *mujerista* mentorship, which is our third criteria, we rated as medium. Determining the sustainability of this option is not straightforward because it is largely dependent on the individual mentor. The willingness of an individual, or individuals, to put forth the effort and commitment that this kind of mentorship requires is something that can not be governed without making it a part of the mentor's job description. That, however, has the potential to corrupt the nature of this particular kind of mentorship that at its foundation, is built on *confianza*. When the desire to help is not organic, mentorship can come across as very superficial and disingenuous which, in turn, eliminates its effectiveness. However, this model has the potential to be sustainable in the sense that it requires little in the way of material resources to employ. It is possible that time could be interpreted as money which in turn could be viewed as a material resource, but otherwise, it does not require financial capital to execute which makes this option easier to sustain.

Culturally relevant support resources.

Our participants elaborated that the resources offered at the University of Gringolandia are not sufficient to fight gatekeeping for *estudiantes Mexicanas*. Luz described her participation in the EOPS program at the university level as "being more work than help" (Personal Communication, 2019). When Luz (2019) described the EOPS program as more work, she specifically mentioned,

You are required to meet with your mentor, twice per semester. And then you are required to go to like four workshops or something. I can't attend that. Like I could before, but now with my baby, I can't. Where am I going to leave him for like two hours for a random workshop that I am not going to use (Personal communication, October, 2019).

In short, Luz identifies this program as time consuming for her as a mother and *estudiante Mexicana* at the university. This experience with EOPS at the University of Gringolandia was unlike her prior experience with EOPS at her community college. Luz reflected on her experiences in the EOPS program as being more beneficial for her as a *estudiante Mexicana* in community college. As Luz (2019) describes the benefits that she received from EOPS within her community college, the following conversation unfolded:

Irma: So why did you go to [EOP] begin with? Was it because you thought that you were going to get some financial aid?

Luz: Financial aid, they [EOP at her community college] used to give you priority registration. Like you used to be able to get your classes before everyone else.

Irma: And you don't get that here [EOP at Gringolandia]?

Luz: No. They don't do anything for you. I used to just go because I got to print for free in their lab. That was the only reason why I stayed. But right now I have a hold. I don't know what is going to happen, I have to take care of it, I just want to drop them, I can't go, it's no help for me. It's not worth it.

Isabel: In Heartless community college they would give you better benefits. Because they would give you the books.

Luz: Yeah, they give you books, they give you a calculator.

Rosario: They would give you scantrons. You could go in and get as many scantrons as you needed.

Isabel: This is Heartless college though.

Luz: That is the reason why I went to it. I thought it was going to be the same thing and it wasn't (Personal communication, October, 2019).

In addition to the EOPS program at the University of Gringolandia, our participants brought up a discussion of a newly integrated program called Los Profesores in the University of Gringolandia. As the conversation evolved about Los Profesores program, our participants discussed that they were not sure what the purpose of the program is. The following conversation shows the lack of communication and understanding students (2019) have towards Los Profesores program:

Yolanda: The emails have recently provided the image that says Los Profesores something but I don't even know what it is about.

Isabel: What are the hours? When are they available? Are they available after 5pm?

Irma: I am not sure, but I doubt it. They are located in the Special building. They close at 5 p.m. in there.

Luz: You should note that, even though they make the attempts to help us, it is not enough.

Irma: I think that is the point, we don't even know how they work. They don't make an effort to come into our classes, to talk to us. It's an email, a flyer around school.

Luz: It's like figure it out for yourself.

Irma: But that's the thing right? We don't do that.

Luz: Because we are too busy!

Yolanda: The email doesn't even catch your attention.

Isabel: Do you have someone you can email to ask about office hours? (Personal communication, October, 2019)

As the conversation continued there was another critique by our participants regarding Los Profesores program. Luz brought up a point where she talked about the credential recruiter at the University of Gringolandia. Luz points out that the recruiter from the credential program comes to the classrooms every semester (Personal communication, October, 2019). Therefore, our participants argue that this program should do the same thing. This is to come to the students and introduce their goal as a resource.

Luz: Like that lady from the credential program, she goes every semester.

What I mean is that the University should place that same importance on this program as they so the credential program in terms of reaching students.

Irma: We met with Maria because we were trying to get data from her. She is the director of the Los Profesores program, and one of the side conversations we had was her telling us that they hired three math tutors for students in the CLC of which two of them are Latinx students. And that our Latinx LS students are not using those resources and she doesn't understand why.

Luz: Well because nobody knows.

Irma: Nobody knows about it right? But you know that the CLC is there. You may not know that there is two Latinx tutors but I am kind of curious about that. Why don't we use these resources? Luz, you said because we don't have time. But like you Yolanda, you said that you get the email and that you look at it and wonder but you don't go beyond that. I'm wondering why. Can any of you articulate that or explain that? (Personal communication, October, 2019).

To break the ice from multiple critiques about Los Profesores program, we asked our participants what a support system looks like to them? We gave individuals time to reflect on their previous educational experiences, and there was a minute of silence in the room. Genesis, Rosario, Luz, and Rosario(2019), comeback to their loss of trust, shame, and fear that others broke in their k-12 education.

Rosario: Es que estamos acostumbradas a no recibir nada. No creemos.

Genesis: There is a little of shame involved. Its like what we have been talking about. Yeah, that is not something that I do.

Irma: Ok, so there is shame. But shame about what?

Luz: There is a fear of asking.

Isabel: Because you should know these things.

Luz: Yeah, I feel like I see that everyone around me knows it and I appear to be the only one who is having trouble.

Yolandal: There is an expectation that you have to already know these things.

Irma: That is really interesting.

Luz: Irma is like, well that is dumb! Hahaha

Irma: Oh, no. It makes sense. It stems back from your previous traumas. You've taken the risk and you've asked about something and then they've told you, you should already know it and so then that just like carries with you.

Luz: There you go! You get it.

Irma: Connecting the dots! (Personal communication, October, 2019).

Due to the broken wound that our participants have shared about their K-12 education, they want resources at the University of Gringolandia to acknowledge the stories they bring with them. For example, Yolanda described that for her a support program should ask what is it that they need to improve their courses at the university. As for Rosario, she noted that not giving up

on us is necessary for these resources to fight gatekeeping. The following is the input that Yolanda and Rosario (2019) shared:

Monica: So what would a support system look like to you?

Yolanda: I feel like, that if they see that they are struggling, I don't know. I want them to ask us like, in what way can we help you improve?

Monica: You want them to ask you.

Yolanda: Yeah, like hey, I know that this is going on, how do I help you. In what ways do you want me to help you?

Rosario: by not giving up on us.

Rosario: Yeah, because it is like we said, they don't get it. They expect for us to already know it. Like nunca vas a aprender. It's one of the things that I am experiencing right now with the kids that I work with, that's what they receive. Teachers just give up on them. You know what, we are just going to drop you out of the program. Or you know what, if it the after school program, se supone que es una programa para ayudarlos. For extra support. Even the teachers of the afterschool program are like, aqui no van a aprender. You are supposed to be teaching them, supporting them, helping them and you are giving up on them. No wonder we are that because everyone gives up on us. Se den por vencidos. Don't try. No ponen el empeño de, otra vez back to it, para entendernos. No han pasado por lo que nosotros hemos pasado (Personal communication, October, 2019).

After analyzing the multiple critiques that our participants gave of the institutional resources such as tutoring and EOPS, within the University of Gringolandia, we looked into ally training as a possible solution to remedy the shortcomings of these resources. One of the factors that make these resources ineffective is their lack of cultural relevance. While looking into we possible ways in which these resources could be adapted and made more culturally relevant, we came upon a possible solution which is ally training. Just like Woodford, Kolb, Durocher-Radeka, Gabe (2014) argue, for LGTBQ allies, those who are straight can support those who feel oppressed by their LGTBQ sexual orientation. We propose a similar solution, in which estudiantes non-Mexicanas would be provided by the University, opportunities to learn about the Latino community.

We are evaluating inclusiveness of ally training as high. Ally training at the University of Gringolandia, aims to be beneficial for our Mexicana participants. The LGTBQ allies reflects that anyone can contribute to this type of training as long as allies learn about LGTBQ student's experiences, critically reflect on one's attitudes, and understand heterosexism (Woodford et. al., 2014). Therefore, non-Mexicanas at the University of Gringolandia are welcome to become allies. This type of training will focus on Mexicans, yet it can have a generic focus. One potential thing to consider when becoming an ally is commitment and willingness to learn about the Mexicana culture to be able to offer effective resources when it comes to support the different trampas Mexicanas experience in higher education.

In terms of effectiveness, our second criteria, we rated this option/solution as low. While culturally relevant resources are needed and would be a great improvement over the existing resources in place, they are not enough to remedy the totality of the issues that act as trampas for Mexicanas within the University. Ally training has the potential to improve the effectiveness of

those who facilitate these resources but there are potential issues with this kind of remediation. First, and most importantly, it reduces the extensive work that is required to know how to effectively support Mexicanas to a mere training that is provided over a short period of time. Unfortunately, the issues that Mexicanas face are very complex and can not be fully understood at this superficial level. Ally training, while beneficial and necessary in many ways, is simply not enough to truly transform institutional resources into something that could be seen as culturally relevant.

The sustainability of this option is low. While we did not find the exact cost that this kind of training entails, we know that there is a cost that is associated with this option. It is because of the financial implications that are associated with this option that we feel that the overall sustainability of this option would be low. The reality is that this kind of training would be viewed as a non-essential and when budget cuts are necessary within an institution of higher education, it would likely be omitted. Yet, we believe omitting this training should not be an option due to the fact that the University of Gringolandia is a Hispanic serving institution.

Legitimizing our language in academic contexts

Even though only two of our participants in the interview mentioned as a solution to have the opportunity to use their native language at school, it is important to make sure students use their native language at school. By utilizing their first language at school students will value their native language. For instance, Lizzete (2019) described how she felt about the ESL program.

I feel like when I was in that classes they treat you like a puppet just for you to lose your Spanish, look just repeat after me. You were repeating words, unable to understand the meaning. The teacher was looking at you while you pronounce the words, and you getting scare mas como el panico que te da by not being able to make the sounds and having the teacher looking at you (Personal communication, October, 2019).

Lizette (2019) describes how scared she was to repeat words in a language she was learning, because she was not able to pronounce them correctly. Lizette has been trained in her ESL classes to pronounced words with an American accent because that was the correct way to pronounce words. If words were pronounced with a Mexican accent, they had to keep repeating the word. Lizette was not given the opportunity in her ESL classes to use the language she felt more confident and felt she was adapting to a new language and was not using her Spanish at school. Similar to Lizzete's experience, another of our participants trauma was to speak English in her classes during class presentations. Rosario shared the following:

I didn't like history because of the teachers. I would have like a lot of conflict with the teachers porque no me entendían y porque yo no quería presentar. Like they will give you a "D" for not presenting, aunque tengas tu todo tu trabajo pero te dan una "D" por no presentar. Because I wouldn't go the day of the presentation porque me dicen que tiene que ser en Inglés. So I was afraid of that. The conflict was que no me entendian (Personal communication, October, 2019).

Rosario did not go to class the day of the presentation because she did not feel comfortable presenting in English, she received a “D” on her history class. Rosario’s trauma of developing the English language didn’t only affect her self-esteem, but it also impacted her academics. For instance, Rosario received a “D” and lose the presentation points. Teachers did not see her trauma of not wanting to present because of the language barrier. Teachers saw Rosario’s behavior as laziness or a rebel teen in high school wanting to act cool by not presenting in class.

After Rosario (2019) finished talking, Lydia (2019) shared with us her experience of how teachers who do not understand English still can help Estudiantes Mexicanas communicate with them, and do little things to help students not developed a trauma. This is what Lydia (2019) said:

Yo tuve una experiencia similar de que una maestra me dijo, puedes contestar en español y a mi me lo pueden traducir. Porque ella no hablaba el español. Yo tambien me quede, en serio, lo puedo decir en espanol? Entonces, yo pienso que allí los maestros tienen que ver mucho de darte su apoyo, esa confianza que no importa el idioma tu puedes comunicarte. Y no hacer lo menos, al contrario hacerlo más (Personal communication, October, 2019).

In addition to that Rosario (2019), one of our participants during the interview commented the following:

Yo me impresioné mucho cuando conocí a Dr. Lopez porque me dijo, “You can write in Espanol.” and for me, it was like no I can’t. Porque es algo que siempre te han dicho so now I don’t believe it. Even though he was like you can and I thought he was just joking. Even though el me dijo que si, yo llegue a la casa y yo trate de hacerlo en Inglés. Se lo mande en Inglés porque tenía miedo de que no. He was like I told you, you can write it in Spanish porque tienes muchos errores, and I was like okay but then the next assignment I would do it in English. Even though he told me I could do it in Spanish porque I was afraid of that. Because before antes nadie me habia dicho eso, like in my high school or college siempre me decia. Es Inglés, es Inglés, y si no, no pasas. Y es como algo que ya te atormenta so cuando llega una persona y te dice you can write en Espanol, you are like no I can’t. I have been told by all my teachers I can’t y ahora llega un maestro y me dice that I can, I can’t believe it (Personal communication, October, 2019).

The previous examples are of three of our participants who had different experiences with three different teachers. First Lizette , who was placed with a teacher who wanted her students to develop the American accent by having her students practice words orally. Secondly, Lydia who had a teacher who apparently was aware of the importance of conserving the first language, and the importance of being in communication with her students. That is why Lydia’s teacher told Lydia that whenever she wanted to say something she was able to say it in Spanish, and someone in class would translate for them. Lydia’s teacher did that because she did not want Lydia to remain in silence in her class. Finally, Rosario received the opportunity to write in Spanish in one of her classes at the University of Gringolandia by Dr. G. Rosario did not write

her homework in Spanish the first time she was given that opportunity because she was not used to that type of action from professors.

To continue, Dr. G gave the opportunity to Rosario to write in Spanish. In the beginning, Rosario felt it was not right to write her assignments in Spanish. Rosario was told in high school English was the language used at school in order to succeed in her education, and developed a trauma. Rosario did not believe she was allowed to write in Spanish and thought her professor was joking because in her education in the United States she was told English was the language valued at school, not Spanish. Dr. G was aware of the trauma Rosario had developed, and that is why Dr. G had to insist and was constant to Rosario on telling her she was able to write in Spanish in his class. Dr. G continued insisting on her to write in Spanish. Since Dr. G knew Rosario had to heal the trauma of not being able to use Spanish in high school in her education, Dr. G insisted, for a semester to Rosario to write in Spanish. It was at the end when Rosario felt proud of her Spanish. As a follow-up question, Rosario was asked if she ever got to a point where she believed Dr. G, that she could legitimately write in Espanol for his class? This is what Rosario (2019) answer:

Yeah, it was towards the end. It was with the poems cuando lo comparti aquí, todos me dijeron que era un buen poema , que bien, to keep writing que siguiera escribiendo. Y siento que escuchar las diferentes voces, que me decian, oh you are good at writing poems. You are good at writing this. So siento que eso es lo que me motivó a seguir escribiendo en Espanol. Y pues no darle tanto importancia al Inglés. Obviamente tengo que seguir trabajando para entenderlo y todo eso pero es como que ya no ha sido tanto mi trampa. Y no me detuvo. Siento que era una frontera que no podía pasar y siento como que ya lo pase. Me ayudo Dr. G (Personal communication, October, 2019).

In the previous example, Rosario illustrates that having Dr. G telling her she was able to write in Spanish was not sufficient. Rosario did not give value to her native language. It was until she was told by her comadres that she writes amazing poems in Spanish that she believes it. Rosario writes beautiful poems in Spanish and is encouraged by her comadres to publish a book. Thanks to Dr. G, Rosario wrote again in Spanish and discovered she writes beautiful. If it was not for Dr. G, she would have not found out her use in writing in her native language. Also by Rosario discovering her strength in writing Spanish made her not focus too much on English, and value her native language. Rosario is aware that she has to keep improving her English, but English is no longer a trampa in her life.

When doing research we find out that Macedo (2000) and Anzaldua (1987) frame that language forms part of each individual identity. Learning English is more than morphemes and sentence structures. Lizzete mentions that when she was in the ESL classes she was learning how to pronounce words. In this scenario Lizzete was being taught that her language had no value and she needed to learn how to learn words that had no meaning for her. To sum up Anzaldua (1987) states, "Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself" (p. 81). In other words in order for our participants to overcome the trauma they experienced in their education at a younger age something needs to be changed by teachers. As Lydia (2019) mentioned "yo pienso que allí los maestros tienen que ver mucho de darte su apoyo, esa confianza que no

importa el idioma tu puedes comunicarte” instead of forcing students to present in class (Personal communication, October, 2019).

The solution to overcome or make sure estudiantes Mexicanas do not develop a trauma by the language barrier is to give students the opportunity to use their native language in class. Teachers should not only tell students to use their home language but tell them multiple times. Pinnon (2018) conducts research focusing on the effects of the bilingual program and trying to find solutions to help students be successful at school. Pinon (2018) suggests a solution by the teachers she interview which was “Bilingual education should make the program for all grade levels, not only lower grade levels”(p. 14). This is a solution that will require a lot of money and time, and that is why we recommend that it is not necessary to be a bilingual teacher to make a difference in a student’s life. We are recommending to encourage students to use their native language in class. For example, a teacher can tell students that they are able to take notes in the language they feel more confident with. At the end of the day, the student is the one who will be using the notes.

The first criteria that is being used to evaluate this action is inclusiveness. By allowing Estudiantes Mexicanas to utilize their native language in class it will include the whole class. For instance, when taking notes in Spanish students will be able to compare their notes with their classmates who are also Latinos. When it comes to including different ethnicities, they will be included because they will be able to share their notes and learn new words in another language. In addition to that, teachers will be also included in this activity because they will be able to learn from their students by asking for clarification and at the same time create a close relationship with their students.

The second criteria used to evaluate using language is Effectiveness. In terms of effectiveness, this option has a medium level to be successful. It has a medium level because there is only one teacher and a lot of students. If students write in their native language they might get distracted because they will be sharing with their peers. That might be a distraction in class, especially if the teacher does not have an understanding of what is going on in the classroom. In order for this solution to be successful, the teacher needs to have a good control of her class.

The last criteria that is used to evaluate this action is sustainability. This option was marked as high. Once teachers have the option to allow students to use their native language to communicate it will be easy to maintain that policy in their classroom. For instance, a student can be allowed to present in Spanish, or ask questions when they are not sure how to formulate a question in English. If the teachers speak Spanish, she will translate the question in English to include everyone in the class. In contrast, if the teacher does not understand Spanish she will have a person translate for her what the student said. Allowing students to use their native language in class is possible to maintain, it all depends on what the teacher decides.

Conclusion

Through our research, we were able to outline some of the challenges that Mexicanas within the traditional teaching preparation pathway at the University of Gringolandia face that contribute to atrapando them. Based on the feedback from our participants, we were able to identify possible solutions that have the potential to eliminate the trampas in order to improve educational outcomes for Mexicanas. This section will justify the action that we recommend to eliminate the trampas that Mexicanas face within their work in the traditional pathway of the

teacher preparation program within the University of Gringolandia.

Recommendation. Of the three action options that we outlined above, our recommendation is to pursue the *mujerista* mentorship model as a solution that will likely have the greatest impact on mitigating and eliminating some of the *trampas* that Mexicanas contend with. This action option is one that can potentially encompass the other two action options within the work that it does. The supportive community building aspect of a *mujerista* mentorship can act as a resource for Mexicanas who need support with their various classes and assignments. Also, tutors and faculty within the University that facilitate institutional forms of support can be more effective by adopting a *mujerista* mentorship understanding of how to interact with *estudiantes Mexicanas*. *Mujerista* mentorship can also be a way in which academic work can potentially and unofficially be done in Spanish. Within the community of support, peers can assist each other with their work in their native language.

Concessions. While it was not our recommendation, the implementation of culturally relevant resources is also a good option for consideration. Although we argue that in some ways *mujerista* mentorship can serve as a substitute for culturally relevant institutional resources, we understand that institutional resources would likely have a higher level of expertise in the specific content that those resources are designed to support. This kind of specialized support has the potential to improve the passing rate in classes that act as *trampas* for Mexicanas. The option of legitimizing the use of the Spanish language within the coursework at the University is also a good option for consideration. For some Mexicanas, the required use of the English language in their coursework stifles their intellectual growth because of their lack of foundational knowledge of English grammar. Because they are insecure about their abilities to articulate themselves accurately in a technical sense in English, they resort to withholding their voices from their work. Having the liberty to express themselves in the language that they feel most confident in allows them to break their silence and consequently frees their minds.

Limitations. The *mujerista* mentorship option is limited in terms of reach. Mentorship, especially one that focuses on nurturing the development of supportive communities and interpersonal interactions, is a time consuming endeavor that unfortunately limits it to a small number of students relatively speaking. It is unreasonable to expect a mentor to establish a *mujerista* mentorship with every student that they come into contact with. Additionally, the effectiveness of the mentorship and community is based on the establishment of *confianza* which is something that is not easily extended to a vast number of people. Another limitation of the *mujerista* mentorship solution is the dependency on the willingness of individuals to employ such practices. The desire to engage in a *mujerista* mentorship in order to improve the educational outcomes of Mexicanas must be organic and not imposed.

Potential negative outcome(s). Taking on the role of a *mujerista* mentor requires a degree of selflessness. The amount of uncompensated time that is invested in building these kinds of relationships is, in some ways, a sacrifice. The nature of the *mujerista* mentorship model does offer some reciprocity in the benefits of engaging in this kind of relationship, but this might be a luxury that some people can simply not afford. In addition, the *mujerista* mentorship model has inherent limitations as a solution. Specifically, efforts to build a mentorship model amidst a racially “diverse” student body can lead to racial tensions. For instance, if the mentor is perceived as white (racially and/or culturally), some Mexicanas might feel excluded because of the absence of “*confianza*” across racial “borders.” And, in the opposite direction, if the mentor is Latina and works closely to build *confianza*, there is the perception of racial exclusion for

white students. In this case, the entire mentorship model comes under scrutiny. In addition, the mere demographics of a mentorship model creates an unintentional exclusion. In the University of Gringolandia teacher preparation program estudiantes Mexicanas make up roughly 50% of the student population. In raw numbers, this translates to roughly 220 students. It is not realistic that any one mentor to serve this number of students at a minimal level of confianza required of a quality mujerista mentorship. Thus, while a mujerista mentorship model is the strongest option, it can also, inadvertently, contribute to feelings of alienation that many of Mexicanas, as documented in this study, already feel within and toward the University.

Conclusion. Despite the limitations and possible negative outcomes of our recommended solution, we still strongly believe that mujerista mentorship is the strongest of our action options. One of the biggest conclusions that we drew from the emotions and responses that was shared with us by our focus group about the various trampas that they must escapar from in order to persist in their education was the importance of building confianza. In many ways, the trauma that our participants carried with them from their K-12 experiences caused them to shut themselves off on multiple fronts. Building confianza is an essential process for healing the damage and supporting Mexicanas within the context of higher education. The building of confianza can be compared to starting a bonfire at the beach. A flame is hard to keep alive against the moist beachside breeze. It is extremely delicate and requires attention, persistence and nurturing. A beachside bonfire must be strong in order to withstand all of the environmental elements that threaten to extinguish it. Even once the flame begins to spread, it is important to remain vigilant because all it takes is one strong swoosh from the ocean breeze to extinguish it all together. Confianza within the context of the University must also be strong enough to withstand the constant environmental threats. The conditions are set against confianza but the cariño that is embedded in the mujerista mentorship model can protect it and make it strong. It is the confianza that frees estudiantes Mexicanas from the trampas and empowers them to own their education and demand that their needs are validated. In short, mujerista mentorship is the most powerful and profound option.

Table 1

Evaluation of Action Options

| | Inclusiveness | Effectiveness | Sustainability |
|--|---------------|---------------|----------------|
| Mujerista Mentorship | Medium | High | Medium |
| Resources that are culturally relevant | High | Medium | High |
| Language Legimitazing Spanish | High | Medium | High |

Action Documentation and Reflection

The action that we implemented in response to our research was to give voz to the stories

that our participants shared with us. This was not a solution that was formally articulated by our participants during the interview. The inspiration for this action came from the informal interaction with our participants that took place immediately following the conclusion of our interview. Many of our participants expressed gratitude for legitimizing their struggles by sharing and giving importance to their experiences and stories. Luz, one of our participants, inquired about the next steps that we would be taking in our project. We explained that we will be analyzing the responses that were shared with us to come up with an action plan that we will implement. Upon hearing this, Luz (2019) made the following statement:

You already did something. You started a petition to try and help us get the kind of mentorship that we are saying that we need. Also, your capstone project is a way of taking action because you are telling our stories. (Personal communication)

Essentially what Luz articulated was the importance of voz as a solution that addresses the issues that Mexicanas face within institutions of higher education. We felt that this statement was extremely powerful and thus we were compelled to make this our action.

Petition for mentorship

Prior to the commencement of our official work on this project, we wrote a letter to the chair of the liberal studies department to request that we be allowed to take our capstone class with a specific instructor who has taken on a mentorship role for us. Capstone projects are supposed to be the culmination of our work in the teacher preparation pathway. It should be an experience where we learn not only about an issue in education but where we learn about ourselves as emerging educators. Understanding the challenge that capstone work entails led us to initiate a formal petition to request that we be allowed to work through this project with an instructor of our choosing. We wanted the freedom to choose our own instructor because we desire to have culturally relevant pedagogy and mentorship to guide us through the work.

Dear Chairperson [REDACTED]

We, a group of [REDACTED] Liberal Studies students who are about to enroll in Capstone for Fall 2019, are writing this statement so that our voices are heard. We, as a collective, wish to take Capstone with Dr. [REDACTED] who, much to our devastation, will not be teaching it in the Fall 2019. We know that he requested to teach Capstone in the fall and for reasons that we do not know, he was not given the Capstone class. We request that a special Capstone class be formed for us to who wish to take Capstone with Dr. [REDACTED] or that we be allowed to undertake an independent study with him in lieu of Capstone. He is willing and desires to help all of us with our projects.

Capstone is framed as a culminating project of our undergraduate work that encompasses issues around education and where we demonstrate and incorporate what we've learned as Liberal Studies majors going into the field of education. This work in some ways should be inspiring to us and should ignite our desire to seek out the best version of ourselves that is required to do the work of being an effective educator. It is unfair that we should be expected to complete this part of our course work that should be the pinnacle of our experience at [REDACTED] as an undergraduate, without the guidance of Dr. [REDACTED].

Dr. [REDACTED] is an inspiring professor here at [REDACTED] who, for many of us, has engaged us in our education in a way that no other professor has. For some of us, this means that we are inspired to push ourselves in meaningful ways that help us grow as people and as future educators. Many of us have come to realize that in our short time with Dr. [REDACTED], we have received more preparation for our careers as educators than we have had throughout the duration of our time at [REDACTED]. As University students in our senior year, it is disappointing to realize this.

For many of us, Dr. [REDACTED] has had a life changing impact. One of the things that Dr. [REDACTED] does is that he strongly encourages us to interact with him one on one in an effort to deepen our experience in his classroom and as students at the University. No other professor has done this to the extent that he has. Many of us have felt intimidated by the process of meeting with our professors out of fear of judgement. Some of us who have tried to engage with other professors have not experienced the same level of sincerity and commitment that Dr. [REDACTED] has shown us.

We know that in the past, as LS Chair, you have spoken with the other LS Program faculty about such a request. We also know that almost all of the LS Program faculty approved the idea, even though a final decision did not support the students' request. We request that you once again consider the thoughts of all the LS Program faculty for we understand that our request will impact the faculty, most directly those assigned to teach capstone.

This letter was written in community amongst those of us who wish to petition to take Capstone with Dr. [REDACTED]. The following are some of our specific reasons that some of us have for doing this:

- A. We have all taken classes from other faculty in the LS department and Dr. [REDACTED] is our choice.
- B. For some of us, we need the flexibility of doing this with someone who can talk to us in Spanish and read our work in Spanish.
- C. We need to do this with someone who is a role model for us as Mexicanas/os and/or as people of color.

- D. We need to do it with him because we've worked with him and we understand his patience, his commitment and his support for us as Mexicanas/os and/or as students of color at [REDACTED].
- E. The work that we want to do, requires someone who understands us from an insider perspective as being Mexicanas/os and/or as people of color who continue to be under-educated and someone who understands that and can help us develop the needed skills and ways of doing research so we can be successful. We've received this kind of academic support from Dr. [REDACTED] before, and we know we need that because capstone is even more demanding.
- F. Other faculty have helped us with much of the "academic" that is at the core of the LS Program and we are thankful for that. But it is the personal level, and advising with care and patience, that's the additional thing that [REDACTED] gives us that we have not received from other faculty.
- G. Additionally, some of us are not able to accommodate our work schedules and other obligations around the days and times that Capstone is currently being offered for in the Fall of 2019.

One of the recurring themes in our LS classes has been the notion of giving our students more agency in their education. We think that it is important for the University to foster a learning environment that practices what it teaches and gives their students the agency that they feel is so important in education.

We are encouraged that the LS Department is holding a listening session to hear from students on how to better serve them, especially within the context of the "maestro" grant. It is in that spirit that we hope you will listen to our voices today and understand why this is so important for us--as future maestras/os. Furthermore, it would be a great opportunity for the University to show that holding listening sessions and asking for our voices/input is something that is taken seriously at [REDACTED].

Thank you for taking our voices seriously and for making time to discuss this matter with us.

Your LS students,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Thirteen students total signed our petition and set forth to ask that we be granted the support that we were asking for. We presented our petition to a panel that consisted of the chair of the liberal studies department and two representative of a developing teacher mentorship program within the University of Gringolandia. Our petition was denied. We were given a variety of reasons for the denial of our petition but the reason that stood out the most was the argument that anyone can lead us through a capstone project; non-Latino faculty members are just as qualified to lead us through topics and issues about the Latinx community. While in some ways we do feel that Latino professors have a greater likelihood of understanding of the issues that we desired to write about at a deeper level, what we really desire is to have a capstone instructor who has an understanding of who we are as Mexicanas. We stated this during our meeting but still, the issue was minimalized to the technical aspect of capstone work and the personal need for a specific kind of support was dismissed.

Although the capstone petition was not taken as a direct result of our investigation, four out of our seven focus group participants were amongst the thirteen students that signed the petition. When Luz brought up the petition as an action that was already taken on their behalf, it made us realize that the measure we took to vocalize our needs was profoundly internalized by those who were involved. The denial of our petition was interpreted as a silencing and dismissal of our voices. As an attempt to have our voices heard only to be turned away. In short, while the petition succeeded in vocalizing our needs, it did not yield any change or improvement for the struggles that we face as Mexicanas within higher education.

Digital storytelling - failure to launch

Initially, we wrestled with the idea of pursuing a platform for digital storytelling where students could upload and share their stories with the University of Gringolandia community via some sort of blog, social media account or digital archive. We thought that this could be a venue where students can call attention to their experiences and share them with their peers, faculty and

administrators in order to create a more empathetic environment which ideally would lead to ending the trampas that Mexicanas face in the University. We met with the director of the multicultural center at the University of Gringolandia to inquire about collaborating with them to establish some sort of sustainable digital platform for storytelling. Our idea was met with great enthusiasm and support as we were referred to the newly hired ethnic, cultural and gender studies librarian to assist us with some of the technical aspects of this idea.

After discussing some of the different digital storytelling options with a librarian, we took a step back and reflected on the effectiveness of this action. We took into consideration the element of *confianza* and decided that although digital storytelling is a great idea, a platform that is associated with the University would come across as very institutional and thus lack a sense of *confianza*. Even if the platform was not associated with the University, the notion of uploading personal and sometimes painful stories onto something as ambiguous and indifferent as the world wide web is not likely to inspire *confianza*. The digital storytelling idea has to start with smaller, more intimate steps that over time might develop into something that has a greater reach. One possible model to draw inspiration from in regard to developing a thoughtful way of archiving these stories is the Mukurtu archiving system. Mukurtu provides a database where sensitive indigenous information, histories, rituals and stories can be archived in a manner that limits the accessibility of that information in order to honor their cultural practices of how this information is shared. In many instances, some of the information is considered to be “insider” knowledge that is not supposed to be shared with others outside of their tribe. This database provides a platform where these kinds of insider information can be digitally archived and only individuals with proper clearance are allowed to access these files (Srinivasan, Boast, Furner & Becvar, 2009). The time constraints that we faced against developing this particular idea in thoughtful way forced us to abandon it but it is our hope that perhaps our work will plant the seeds the development of this idea for the future.

Showcasing Voices

When Luz informally shared with us that she felt that our capstone project in itself was an action that we were taking in order to eliminate the trampas that we face as Mexicanas, we wanted to honor that and work our capstone in a way that highlights their stories. Luz had not been the first of our participants to articulate this to us. Because our participants are peers of ours in the traditional teacher preparation pathway at the University of Gringolandia, they have been aware of the work that we were tackling with our capstone project from the beginning. Throughout the semester our peers have praised us for our work and let us know how meaningful it is to them. Consistent with the *mujerista* mentorship model which places community and informal interaction on the same level of importance as the formal and academic work, we are placing equal value to both the formal and informal aspects of our work by enacting on some of our informal feedback that was given to us within the context of *confianza*.

For our action, we sought to give voice to our participants and their stories. As mentioned above, we explored executing this action via digital storytelling but retracted after deciding that this was something that had to begin on a smaller and more intimate scale. We decided that we wanted to highlight their stories via the results section of our paper. To do this, we did three things. First, we deviated from the suggested format of the results section to dedicate an opening section that outlines the trampas that our participants described to us during the focus group interview. Second, within the results section, we avoid filtering our participants words through summarization or by extracting only partial statements. Instead we aimed to highlight their

previous education. And to be able to do that we as Mexicana students need the support of those who are in power, this is where change begins.

Synthesis and Integration

As a developing educator this project has positively impacted my professional development. This action project matters because I was able to analyze the barriers that minority students experience before becoming educators. The required coursework in the department of education allowed me to expand my knowledge on the types of issues experienced by Mexicana students. But most importantly I was able to find and propose ways to take action to remove some of those barriers. The diversity and multicultural scholar is one of the most integrated major learning outcomes in my project. Throughout the process of the required coursework, I was able to learn and evaluate my own and other's experiences. When it comes to using innovative technology in this project I have been developing my use of technology especially when it was time to prepare my presentation of our research. By practicing investigation, expression, and design with technology in this project I have learned productive ways we can use technology as future educators. Furthermore, this project allowed me to become a social justice collaborator. Working towards a just and sustainable world requires the action of a community. Therefore, this project was able to expand my community experience by hearing the stories future teachers have to share before having their own classroom. This action project definitely allows us, the students to demonstrate competency that provides content in one specific area. The combination of the major learning outcomes have developed my understanding of becoming a professional by working collaboratively with a community to bring change in the field of education in California.

There are many other necessary steps that I need to take in order to become the professional that I envision to be. I want to be a teacher, and one important step that I have followed throughout my education is to persist. There are different barriers in my education that I have experienced to get to where I am now. Becoming a teacher is my dream, but I still need to complete my credential. There are requisites that I must complete in order to enter the credential program. Those requisites are the following steps, but personally I need to remember myself who I want to be and to continue pursuing my professional envision.

Appendix

Translation for Luz p. 2: Cuz in the beginning when I first came, I was scared.

Translation for Lydia p.2: It is like always being silenced because you think that speaking in your native language is wrong, because English is a demand. So in class when the teacher asks something, maybe you know the answer but you are ashamed of your accent.

Translation for Rosario p.2: No, because in class I have to present. Is where you feel that you don't belong. Many things go through your mind.

Translation for Isabel p. 3: "your place is in the kitchen, cooking, and having children."

Translation for Rosario p.3:

I was in my third year when she called and she asked me the same thing, que what was I going to do after high school. And I was like, I don't know, go to college. And she told me, oh yeah, go to Hartnell. I also want to be like them. Because they are the same as me, they are EID students. And she told me, "Are you sure?" because you are not going to

qualify. And I am like why? And she told me because you have all ELD courses. And plus money. She said, you don't have papers. You are not going to qualify for FAFSA. And I went with him because he helped me. He introduced me to dream act, and all this other help that I would be able to receive. He helped me apply.

Translation Isabel for p.5: He put the last little grain on there and after that everything collapsed.

Translation Rosario p. 8: Obviously, for her education is very important because she has implemented it. Go to school, go to school. But when I am at the university, same, why are you getting home at this time? What are these hours to get home?

Translation Rosario p. 9: I feel like they will never understand....it does not matter because they have not been through what we are going through. Everything he would tell me, I was like yes, yes, how did you know? And he made me cry many times. Other teachers question you and question you and you just don't know how to express yourself. And you don't know how to tell them how you feel or what you know, I can't find the right words for them to understand.

Translation Rosario p.15: Is because we are used to receive nothing. We don't believe it.

Translation Lisset p. 18: Is like being always silent. Because you think that speaking in your own language is wrong because English is demanded. In class when the teacher asks something, maybe you know the answer, but you are ashamed of your accent.

Translation Rosario p. 18: not giving too much importance to English. And obviously I have to keep on working to understand and all of that but it is not my gatekeeper anymore. And it didn't stop me. I feel like it was a border that I was not able to cross and I feel like I have crossed it already

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