

Descubriendo la Voz: Maestras Mexicanas Reading Historias Inmigrantes and (Re)Membering the Mexicana Experience in el Norte

This set of papers are the *testimonios* of pre-service *Mexicana maestras* as they reflect upon their engagement with, richer understanding of, and commitment to the teaching of *la literatura* of *Mexicanas'* experiences in *el Norte*. Through a reading of Guadalupe McCall's *Under the Mesquite*—a Pura Belpre novel—and Luis Rodríguez' *América Is Her Name*—a picture book by the former *Los Angeles Poet Laureate*—*las maestras* have *las historias* of *dos poetas*: Lupita, who lives on the *Tejas y Coahuila frontera*, and América Soliz, a *Mixteca* from Oaxaca, who resides in Chicago. These *cuentos* are Lupita's and América's *historias* of navigating life—physically or via *memorias*—both *aquí, en los Estados Unidos*, and *allá, en México*. As students and future teachers of *la literatura Mexicana*, *las maestras*, via a “close reading” (Fisher & Frey, 2012) and teaching of these two texts, came to know (*saber*) cultural, literary, sociological, and pedagogical frames by which they can “read [and teach] the word” (Freire, 1970). But, more significantly, Lupita and América, as *testimoniadoras* (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001), offer a “culturally sustaining” (Paris, 2012) set of *historias* by which *las maestras* are able to “read [and teach] the world” (Freire, 1970)—their world, and that of their future students. In this sense, Lupita and América are *nepantleras*, those whom Anzaldúa describes, as “boundary-crossers.... *activistas* who...rise to their own visions and shift into acting them out, *haciendo mundo Nuevo*” (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002, p. 571).

Nepantleras, Anzaldúa (2004) adds, “change the stories about who we.... They serve as agents of awakening, inspire and challenge others to deeper awareness, greater *conocimiento*, serve as reminders of each other's search for wholeness of being” (p. 19). These papers document, first, through the words of *las maestras*, how Lupita and América are *nepantleras* who live into the “drama” of negotiating *familia*, language, gender, schooling, and *cultura* as *Mexicanas* on the *frontera*. Second, they document how, as the result of Lupita and América “awakening” within the text, *las maestras* are “inspired and challenged” to (re)member (*recordar*) their own *historias* (especially their PreK-16 *educación*) and, then, to (re)member (*reconstruir*) these *historias* into beliefs about what it means to *ser maestra*. Through this process of (re)membering, *las maestras* are able to heal—to “change the stories” of how they understand themselves— and (re)imagine what it means to “*haciendo mundo nuevo*,” especially within the public schools. The *testimonios*, *historias* of each *maestra's* process of *conocimiento* (knowing/knowledge) of self and others— Anzaldúa's (2002) notion of *nos/otras*— emerged, in part, as a series of *poemas*—thus mirroring Lupita's and América's *identidades* as *poetas*. Guadalupe McCall “work-shopped” these *poemas*. McCall, thus, is a *nepantlera*, first, giving *voz* to Lupita and América. Second, inspiring *las maestras* to (re)member, and thus give *voz* to their lives. And, third, via feedback on their *poemas*, sharpening *la voz* of *las maestras*. Accordingly, this paper closes with the words of McCall and *las maestras* about the power of writing, especially, poetry as a tool for (re)claiming *voz*.