

GILDA OCHOA'S *LEARNING FROM LATINO TEACHERS* (2007)

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Learning From Latino Teachers. By Gilda Ochoa. San Francisco: Wiley and Sons, 2007. 267 pages. \$24.95 (hardcover).

Studies show that more than 44 percent of Latino youth drop out of high school (Huber et al. 2006) and less than 10 percent of public school teachers are of color. Policies such as No Child Left Behind are “pushing out” low-achieving students from schools struggling with rising test performance indexes required by the state and federal government (McSpadden McNeil 2005). Despite such clear challenges, the experience of Latinas/os in the education system remains marginalized and silenced in mainstream policy and research. Gilda Ochoa’s *Learning From Latino Teachers* is the corrective to the continued marginalization of research on Latinas/os and schooling. It is an accessible, all-encompassing text that introduces readers to the critical, historical, and structural issues that contextualize the research of Latinas/os and schools. It also provides an overview of the theoretical problems when thinking about culture, race, the role of schools, and the roots of inequality. In this text, Ochoa weaves educational testimonios of eighteen teachers—fourteen women and four men—whose teaching experiences range from one to forty-one years in the classroom. These informants give insight to the struggles of Latino students today. Additionally, their stories speak to the challenges of family, poverty, teacher support and expectations, language and assimilation, tracking, and high-stakes testing.

The text is organized into three main chapters and ten subheadings. The first third of the text is devoted to introducing the politics of knowledge production in the university, placing Latina/o teachers' stories at the center, while including the author's own family history. "Explaining the Achievement Gap" is an overview of the structural and racialized theoretical perspectives that have been used to explain the low educational attainment of Mexicanas/os, Chicanas/os and other Latinas/os. Ochoa's sections on biological and cultural deficiency theories are particularly rich in linking these frameworks with the impact of *Mendez v. Westminster* (1947), the Civil Rights Movement, and the neo-conservative agenda of education policies, such as those found in *A Nation At Risk* (1983). This theoretical grounding of the experiences of Latina/o students is important in developing a framework in which to read carefully the experiences and overall "meta-narrative," a standpoint that is both progressive and critical. This chapter ends with a discussion of demographic data, national and state graduation rates, and gendered differences in Latina/o achievement.

The second part of the text seamlessly weaves teachers' stories through the themes of family and its conflicts, language loss, social support of family and teachers, and the importance of family oral histories and its implications. For example, one teacher offers insight into the conflicts between the values of *familismo* or loyalty and reciprocity with family and individualism. In her testimonio, the teacher recalls one mother purposely unplugging her daughter's alarm clock so the student would miss a day of high school. This teacher eventually learned to "accommodate" the conflict between family and the competitive and individualistic expectations of students at school "without assimilating" them (Gibson 1988).

The final sections discuss how schools and families can support Latina/o students through the educational pipeline. There is also a chapter for teachers,

policy makers, and administrators to develop and improve instructional policies that do not promote a deficit approach to learning, instead advancing the overall wellbeing of students and their families.

Literature about the experiences of Latinas in education and in the academy is absent in this text. An addition of interdisciplinary works by Chicana and Latina feminists in education would have yielded a more nuanced analysis about Latina/o student achievement, knowledge production, and the experiences of women in higher education. Perspectives grounded in U.S.-Third World feminisms and the concept of intersectionality—the systemic oppression of women of color at intersecting patterns of racism and (hetero)sexism—would have made an already good resource even better.

Finally, this text engages a discussion of Latina/o scholarship and education, serving as a handbook for university instructors, journalists, and high school teachers and administrators who are seeking to understand or develop curriculum around the issues of race, schooling, and the Latina/o experience. The extensive bibliography is invaluable, offering new and up-to-date research with Latina/o students, families, and school experiences. Centering these eighteen teacher stories inside a “funds of knowledge” methodology, with the structural issues and critique of deficit social theory that affect Latina/o educational experiences, allows the reader a more comprehensive understanding of the problems in schools (Moll et al. 1992). With *Learning From Latino Teachers*, Ochoa contests the misrepresentation and misunderstanding of Latina/o educational experiences in the United States.

Works Cited

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