The Dissertation Committee for Christopher Lee Milk

certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

Narrating Racial Ideologies: An Ethnography of Relational Organizing at a

Working Class Latino Elementary School in Texas

Committee:

_____

Douglas Foley, Supervisor

_____

Noah de Lissovoy

_____

Kevin Foster

_____

Maria Franquiz

_____

Joao Vargas

Narrating Racial Ideologies:

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Working Class Latino Elementary School in Texas

by

Christopher Lee Milk, B.A., M.A.

Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Texas at Austin

December 2011

Dedication:

To Liliana, Diana Isabel and Yashua Josue,

For their love and support in this project

Acknowledgements

I want to thank the community of support which helped me throughout this process, from getting me to and through graduate school, to collaborating with me in the ethnography, to getting me to finish writing. Since I will invariably miss someone who played a crucial role in this work, I want everyone to know that their support was greatly appreciated. Thanks.

I want to continue by thanking my professors who have provided me feedback, encouragement and wonderful critique: Doug, for your guidance, taking me on after you wanted to retire, and guiding me to the very end; Noah, for working me as a welcome to UT, and engaging in the exam so thoughtfully; Kevin, for all the classes I took with you and the advice on how to teach classes, you got me through the prospectus and provided invaluable help in those stress-filled months; Maria, for also working with me as soon as you came to UT, taking on an individual study and engaging with the difficult questions I struggled with, thank you for your faith; Joao, for your friendship and critique, your comments have made my work better and your view from outside of education has been crucial in escaping my ideological bubble. Thanks to all the professors who have been willing to engage with me and have taken the time to discuss my concerns and critiques.

Secondly, I'd like to thank all the people who collaborated in my ethnographic project. Engaging in race was risky, and yet Joaquin, Maria and Russ took me in and spent so much of their time working with me as organizers to develop and struggle through racial systems together. Panchita, Sylvia, Rebeca, Annette, Maranyeli, Elizabeth,

There is no way to thank you but with my love. And finally, Liliana, Diana and Yashua. I could not have made it without you. Words can not express my daily love and thanks.

Narrating Racial Ideologies: An Ethnography of Relational Organizing at a Working Class Latino Elementary School in Texas

Christopher Lee Milk, Ph.D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2011
Supervisor: Douglas Foley

The purpose of this research was to document how racial ideologies were expressed in relational organizing practices in a working class Latino Elementary school in Texas. By identifying dominant and subjugated racial ideologies, this research contributes to effort to challenge inequitable racial systems in schools through community organizing for school reform.

I employed a participant ethnographic approach by becoming a volunteer relational organizer with a community organizing institution at Walnutbrook Elementary. I worked with working class Latino parents and the school staff to identify and challenge inequitable racial systems at the school. Using a racial systemic framework, I describe how dominant racial ideologies shaped relational organizing practices through racial narratives repeated throughout the organizing actions. I also document how some working class Latina leaders were able to counter narrate subjugated ideologies by using differential techniques as their organizing practices. Through microethnographic case

studies, I am able to tell the stories of how schooling institutions continued inequitable

racial systems by narrating dominant racial ideologies while local community leaders

created spaces through which to challenge these systems and ideologies by privileging

their Latina epistemologies.

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Introduction: Studying racial systems within community organizing for school reform

A welcome picnic: an introduction to Walnutbrook Elementary

Before the academic year started in mid-August, 2008, I was invited to begin my year as a City Alliance volunteer community organizer at Walnutbrook Elementary in the City[1] in Texas by participating in the annual school picnic, which introduced families to their children's new teachers. That evening, I went to Walnutbrook a little early to help Elvia, the parent specialist, set up the parent reception area. As a volunteer organizer I was hoping to meet the parents and staff of Walnutbrook, learn some of their key concerns and encourage them to join me in addressing some of those concerns.

As parents entered the school through red, solid double doors, they faced a short hallway that ended at the cafeteria entrance where we set up our table. Our position allowed us to welcome the parents as well as situate ourselves at the intersection of all the evening's activities. A little before parents were to arrive, teachers began to congregate around us. Elvia introduced me to members of the faculty. I noted that most of the faculty was white, except for the faculty in the bilingual program which was all Latina. This fact was even more striking when I recognized that all the staff, including office clerks, janitors and food service personnel, were people of color, more specifically Latinas. The only exceptions were two African Americans who worked in the cafeteria. For a first-time observer, this was made even more obvious because faculty and staff did not mix,

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[1] All names are pseudonyms to protect the privacy of the participants. Since both the neighborhood and the school shared the same name, they are referred to as Walnutbrook Elementary and Walnutbrook neighborhood respectively. The city I refer to only as The City and is a city in Texas.

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but rather stood together in little, racialized groups. Upper-grade, white teachers conversed close to rear doors, Latina bilingual teachers whispered and laughed standing near their classrooms and Latina staff worked furiously around the entrance in anticipation of the parents' arrival. While I would learn that some people and groups did occasionally intermingle, stark racialized social groups were a permanent part of the physical and social landscape of Walnutbrook.

As 7:00 rolled around, families began to arrive, and Elvia and I welcomed them. This group of parents was overwhelmingly Latino. Many Latina mothers hugged and kissed the cheeks of most staff and faculty and then offered to help with whatever might still need to be done. Elvia in particular welcomed them and told them this evening was for them and encouraged them to sit in the cafeteria and to get something to eat. As the evening progressed, the few white and African American parents formed their own groups separate from the Latinos. I also began to notice sub groups within the Latino community, as some new parents were welcomed into certain groups and not into others. Furthermore, some parents, mostly white middle class parents, spent the evening talking with teachers while many working class parents of color ate and spent the evening alone. I asked Elvia if parents always did this, break into little groups, with whites, African Americans and Latinos always sitting apart from each other. She nodded. If I were to unite the parents, I would have to find a way to take into account the racial systems already in place.

Half way through the evening, one white mother, Lynette, accompanied by a lower-grade teacher approached Elvia and asked if they had a new parent representative

for the CAC (Campus Advisory Council). Elvia responded that she did not. Lynette said that she had just met someone who would be willing to take that position. She motioned to another white parent who she said was her neighbor. She added that although her neighbor was new to the school, she would be willing to take the post. I asked this small group what the key issues were that they thought the CAC should address. Lynette said that the CAC had already decided that science was the top priority and she agreed because science test scores were so low. I then asked them how they thought we should address this issue. The teacher mentioned that Walnutbrook had offered parent classes that shared ways to teach science at home, and she thought that this was an excellent, hands-on learning opportunity. They just needed more parents to attend these classes. After this, Lynette, the new parent and the teacher left together.

Soon after, another mother approached Elvia and me. Elvia introduced her as Laura. Laura asked Elvia if she had been able to find some academic help for her son. Elvia said she was still working on it, but that maybe Laura could attend classes to help her son herself. Laura said that she had attended some of those classes and that they hadn't helped her. She couldn't speak English and hadn't even finished school, so she wasn't able to help her child in school. In fact, once her child had come home telling her that a child had hit him in the nose, and the school had never bothered to let her know. Laura had contacted the office but the school had done nothing about the incident. I asked her if she would be willing to work with others to address some of these concerns. She said that there was no one in the school she could work with and that she was getting tired of all the problems at the school. The school said that it was helping everybody, but

it was not helping her. At Walnutbrook, I would have to address the inequitable racialized access that Latino parents had to the systems, which impacted their children's schooling.

Community organizing for school reform at Walnutbrook Elementary

The year before, I had asked José García, Walnutbrook's principal, about the possibility of researching community organizing for school reform at Walnutbrook. He expressed an interest in working with me, but wanted to make sure that I understood that City Alliance had not been active recently at Walnutbrook. He explained that six years previously, Walnutbrook had worked with three CA community organizers to combat drug violence in the neighborhood, plan a science curriculum and fight to prevent the school's closing, an idea that had been suggested by the district in an effort to save money. In the last six years, though, organizers had sporadically visited the school. Walnutbrook had continued with some organizing techniques, like getting to know the neighborhood and working to include as many parents as possible in conferences and decision making entities. The few teachers and staff who remained from the time when CA had been most active were the people who primarily carried out these efforts. In fact, less than a dozen teachers, staff or parents remained from that time period, and only the principal, Elvia the parent support specialist and one teacher had been sufficiently involved in CA's organizing actions and techniques to be able to understand or initiate relational organizing. Most people at Walnutbrook did not know what organizing was nor did they understand its role in the school. Given that reality, I spent time with him and Elvia to delineate what my priorities, as a relational organizer at Walnutbrook would be.

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As an organizer at Walnutbrook, my job was to encourage the families of students, who were mainly working class, Latinas, to work with each other and with Walnutbrook staff to address shared concerns. I did this by using a set of techniques that I had learned by volunteering with City Alliance (CA). CA had a set of organizing techniques that it suggested be followed sequentially, in order to create a cycle of actions that CA organizers described as part of an 'organizing action'. CA called their form of community organizing for school reform 'relational organizing' because they used relationships to build organizational power (See Fig. 1.1). I called 'relational actions' actions which focused on building more equitable institutional relationships while I called actions that focused on challenging specific institutional racial systems 'institutional actions'. In reality, most actions both built relationships and challenged racial systems but some actions focused more on one of the two aspects.

Fig. I1 Selected techniques used during a relational organizing action

6) Follow up - Accountability session and action reflection

1) Build relationships - Individual meetings and house meetings

2) Identify issues - Leadership caucus and agenda of issues

3) Research an action - Power analysis and parent academies

4) Turn out - Neighborhood walk and phone trees

5) Action
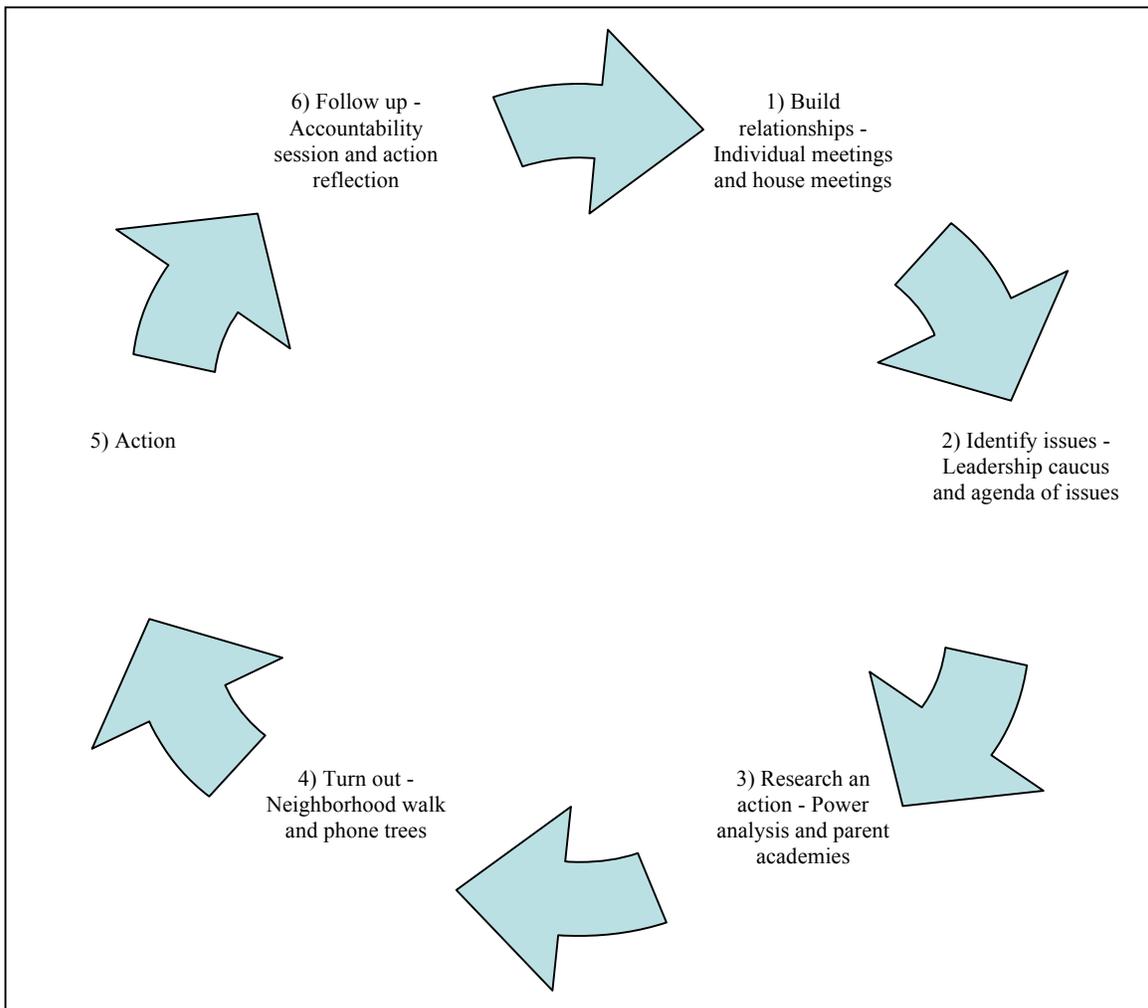
Since the purpose of relational organizing is to build institutional power through relationships, the majority of these techniques involved meeting with others to make institutional decisions, whether it was getting to know them or learning about an issue together. Thus, the majority of my time at Walnutbrook was spent meeting with Walnutbrook parents and staff members and encouraging them to meet with each other. I did this mainly through formal and informal conversations and small group meetings,

though I also attended community events which I often took advantage of to get to know (i.e. meet) staff and parents in multiple settings. Using ethnographic terms, much of my job as a volunteer organizer was to do a lot of deep, focused hanging out (Crang & Cook, 2007; Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995).

In terms of researching racial ideologies at Walnutbrook, I focused both my meetings and my actions on working with others who wanted to challenge racial systems in the school. I did this by informing others in initial meetings that I was researching race and asking them if this is an issue that they would like to address at Walnutbrook. I emphasized this during the fairly common organizing conversations which were called individual meetings and then mentioned it again in larger meetings at the beginning of the semester. While I worked on many organizing actions that did not explicitly challenge racial systems, there was soon a group of about a dozen parents and staff who were interested in working with me in challenging specific racial inequities which they identified. While these inequities included curricular, social and organizational concerns, both parents and staff kept on returning to one racial system. Most Latina parents and staff felt that working class Latinas did not have equitable access to decision making that impacted their children.

This was most blatantly demonstrated in the Campus Advisory Council (CAC), the official parents and staff group through which all Walnutbrook community members were supposed to have a say regarding decisions at the school. While less than 10% of the school's students were white, the vast majority of the parents who attended the CAC were white. When working class Latinas attended the CAC, they said they struggled to

understand the proceedings, get their voice heard or have their issues addressed. These struggles of working class Latina parents to understand and communicate key educational decisions with Walnutbrook staff often became the centerpiece of an organizing action. Organizers guided participants in their efforts to put working class Latina issues and leaders at the forefront of our relational organizing actions. Although both parents and staff repeatedly brought forward the issue of working class Latina exclusion from school decision-making, often their concern was reduced to a disagreement about whether Latinas made individual decisions to not be involved or whether there were racial systems in place that inhibited democratic participation. These disparate interpretations of racialized access to school decision making was a key stumbling block in addressing systemic racial inequities at the school.

As an organizer and researcher trying to encourage others to take a leadership role in challenging inequitable racial systems at their school, the way that people understood racial relationships impacted the kinds of collective action participants were willing to take. People who perceived inequitable participation as the result of an individual choice wanted to take collective action to encourage individuals to participate in the school. People that understood race as a product of a racial system wanted to take collective action to change these systems. More often though, people were undecided on how to understand race and wanted to both encourage people to participate and challenge racial systems.

In making sense of participants' expression and explanation of racial relationships at Walnutbrook, I relied heavily on Bonilla-Silva's (Bonilla-Silva, 2001, 2010) concept

of 'racial ideologies', or 'the segment of the ideological structure that crystallizes racial notions and stereotypes.' I found this formulation described people's understandings of race at Walnutbrook; participants' explanations of race were often explicitly ideological, that is they made sense of race within the framework of a specific social context. For instance, some Latina women made sense of racial relationships in the context of their segregated apartments while some middle class white women made sense of racial relationships in the context of a racially integrated school event. Furthermore, I found that these ideologies changed depending on the context. So, participants might describe racial relationships as equitable in a group meeting of teachers but as inequitable in a small meeting with parents. Finally, I found that by creating their own contexts, participants would impact their own and others' racial ideological expressions. Thus, parents might feel more open to discussing racial inequities with teachers once they created their own support groups and ways to meet with teachers. Racial ideologies became the primary lens through which I examined relational organizing practices at Walnutbrook.

When it came to expressing racial ideologies within the specific context of organizing, participants expressed their perspectives through social narratives. Specifically, they explained race relationships through stories about their lives, the school and the community around them. In fact, organizers taught participants to tell stories, elicit stories and analyze these stories in order to unite people around common issues. This dissertation, as a racial ideological focus of organizing narratives, pays particular

attention to how participants perceived and expressed these narratives during the course of organizing actions.

In order to describe these perceptions and place them within the context of the various individuals' actions, I employ a microethnographic approach to the study. That is, I provide a detailed examination of key participants' behavior, expressions, narratives and social locations during organizing actions over a short period of time. In particular, I critique, or examine in relation to access to societal power, the narratives within the organizing actions. A critical examination of these Walnutbrook organizing narratives contributes to an analysis of racialized organizing practices within this ideological context.

These organizing practices and narratives took place within the contested space of Walnutbrook Elementary and the Walnutbrook neighborhood. This meant that participants' narratives expressed dominant and subjugated ideologies. In my work, I found that the dominant racial ideology was what Bonilla-Silva has termed the color blind ideology (Bonilla-Silva, 2001, 2010), or an ideological frame that minimized or obfuscated the role of race in social inequity. As a mental frame though, the color blind ideology was expressed differently in each context depending on multiple social factors. These factors included the speaker of the ideology, where they expressed the ideology and who was present in that context. This meant that a similar narrative of the color blind ideology explained by the same person would be expressed quite differently among white parents as compared to when expressed among working class Latino families or middle class Latino teachers. Much of this was due to the fact that in these different contexts the

color blind ideology was intersected by differing dominant classed ideologies or other dominant social ideologies. Thus, when analyzing the school's racialized policies, we worked to critique color blind ideologies which were ideologically intersected differently in the multiple spaces of the school, including the classroom, the parent meeting and the district office. When analyzing the dominant color blind ideology, I made a point to include how understandings of class intersected participants' understandings of race at Walnutbrook.

While participants often expressed the dominant color blind ideology, they also challenged this ideology through subjugated ideologies in counternarratives. In particular, I highlight the counter narratives of working class[2] Latinas[3]. I do this for several reasons. First, although working class Latinas comprised a large percentage of the Walnutbrook population, this understudied population was often denied access to decision making that impacted the schooling of their children. Additionally, both José García and CA wanted me to build leadership among working class Latinas so that City Alliance and the school could address their needs, which were currently not being heard. Finally, most of the leaders were working class Latinas. On top of this, working class Latina organizers were often the people most willing to engage racial inequities at a systemic level. That is working class Latinas were the ones who most often expressed subjugated ideologies in

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[2] By *working class* I define people who make below the federal poverty line (USHHS, 2008), defined in schools by those who receive free or reduced lunch. Some participants defined class differently, with many parents defining working class as people who did not graduate from high school. When participants use a different definition than my definition, I define it in the dissertation.

[3] I use the term *Latinos* to refer to people who are from Latin American ancestry. When I am only referring to women, I use the term *Latinas.* When I am referring to people of Mexican ancestry, I use *Mexicano* or *Mexicana*. Most of the time, participants were *Latinas*, that is mostly *Mexicana* with a significant population of people from other Latin American counties. There were moments though when participants referred to perceptions or actions within the *Mexicano* community.

their counter narratives that led to alternative policies that challenged racially inequitable systems. This was often due to the fact that they were the ones most affected by these inequities. More specifically, they were most affected by the intersection of oppressions, only one of which was racial systems, so they were the ones who expressed subjugated ideologies which attempted to make sense of these intersected oppressions. By focusing on the narratives of working class Latinas, I was able to detail their attempts to challenge racial inequities within the larger context of multiple oppressive systems at the school.

This dissertation examines the role of racial ideologies within relational organizing at Walnutbrook Elementary. In particular, I examine the way organizers and working class Latinas at Walnutbrook expressed their ideologies with each other and the broader community in their attempts to understand and have power over their children's schooling. While I acknowledge the success organizers and school staff experienced through their organizing actions (Gold, 2002; Mediratta, Shah, & McAlister, 2009b), this critique focuses on the narratives of working class Latina parents in their efforts to be heard and have their concerns addressed within the context of an organizational struggle.

With these concerns in mind, this was the main research question which guided my research:

Research Question:

How do racial ideologies express themselves in relational organizing at Walnutbrook?

I broke this question into two sub-questions:

1) What are the dominant racial ideologies in organizing at Walnutbrook?

   a. How are these racial ideologies expressed? Under what circumstances, in which spaces and to whom?

2) How do working class Latinas express dominant and subjugated racial ideologies in organizing at Walnutbrook

   a. How are subjugated racial ideologies expressed within the relationships that working class Latinas form within the organizing?

Community organizing for school reform in the United States

In the last twenty years in the United States, community organizing institutions have been working with schools in a combined effort to improve schooling and to organize the communities schools serve (Fabricant, 2011; Gold, 2002; Mediratta, Shah, & McAlister, 2009b; Oakes, Rogers, & Lipton, 2006; Shirley, 2009). These institutions have had mixed success in addressing racial inequities within schools, their communities and in the organizing institutions themselves (Dyrness, 2008; Orr, 1999; Su, 2007; Warren, 2001). This school ethnography adds to the research on the racial systems of community organizing for school reform by examining the racial ideologies within one

school's organizing effort. This ethnography is based on two years of field work which I undertook at Walnutbrook Elementary, a predominately Latino elementary school in a city in Texas.

Trained by and in regular contact with City Alliance (CA), I employed their method of community organizing for school reform. CA specifically stated that they were not a community organizing institution, but rather focused on 'institutional organizing'. By this, they meant that instead of organizing neighborhoods or geographical areas, they focused on organizing *institutions*. By organizing, they meant that they trained individuals within civic institutions, specifically churches, school and unions, to develop working class leaders through focused relationship building in order to impact public policy through elections and lobbying (Chambers, 2004). Furthermore, they were part of an Alinsky-based national institutional organizing network called the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) which practiced this distinct form of community organizing they self-defined as institutional organizing (Alinsky, 1969, 1971; Chambers, 2004; Rubin & Rubin, 2008). Yet, within the educational literature, Mediratta has proposed, and organizers at CA explicitly accepted, that institutional organizing be part of an umbrella term Mediratta defined as 'community organizing for school reform'. (Mediratta, 2007; Mediratta, Shah, & McAlister, 2009b; Mediratta et al., 2008). For the purposes of this dissertation, I accept the definition of *institutional organizing* to include a form of community organizing for school reform, .

Within this frame of institutional organizing, my ethnographic interests focus on CA's organizing techniques which they term 'relational organizing' (Chambers, 2004).

Chambers' identifies a set of techniques, which members use to strengthen individual institutional relationships with each other. That is, while institutional organizing refers to an organizing *system*, relational organizing refers to the organizing *practices* within that system. In this dissertation, I focus on two organizing techniques within relational organizing, *individual and house meetings* as ways to explore how relational organizing practices framed how individuals understood racial relationships within and without the institution. By situating these techniques within the context of relational organizing in Walnutbrook, I am able to describe how race is utilized within the context of organizing.

Figure I2 Key organizing terms

Key terms	How it is used in this dissertation
Community organizing for school reform	This term is used by a segment of the research literature to describe community organizing institutions which are working with schools and their surrounding communities to improve educational outcomes. This includes, but is not limited to City Alliance's involvement with schools.
Institutional organizing	Industrial Area Foundation and City Alliance's term for their *system* of organizing which focuses on working with civic institutions to improve their ability to provide a positive impact on the community they are serving. This term is used to describe the entire system of organizing, including but not limited to its organization, funding structure, political philosophy, organizing practices, relational culture, etc.
Relational organizing	Industrial Area Foundation and City Alliance's term for its organizing practices. This includes but is not limited to its organizing techniques, pedagogical approaches, communicative practices, etc. *These practices are the focus of this dissertation.*

Relational organizing and racial systems

Cortés, a lead organizer of the Industrial Areas Foundation argued that race should not be addressed because it divides rather than unites the organizing community (Rogers, 1990). Chambers (2004), a current IAF leader, further clarified this point by calling IAF a broad-based organization that works with all races. In addressing these concerns, I have instead followed Warren and others (O'Connor, Hanney, & Lewis, 2011; Shirley, 2002; Warren, 2001) who have noted the importance of addressing race within the IAF for two key reasons. First, since racial inequities impact the institutions which organizers are trying to organize, they are systemic barriers to institutional equity (Su, 2007; Williams, 2005). Secondly, institutional organizations are racialized institutions in themselves, so organizers must be able to address racial inequities within the organizing (Dyrness, 2011; Simmons, Lewis, & Larson, 2011). Organizing at Walnutbrook necessitated addressing racial inequities in both the school and within the organizing structures that we created.

Racial systems frame my understanding of race relations at Walnutbrook in the context of relational organizing. I follow racial social theorists (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1997) in defining 'race' as a social construct which uses physical features as an excuse for inequitable social grouping. Concepts, symbols and institutions can also be socially 'racialized' to represent social groups or to define a group (Pollock, 2008; Rodriguez, 1998). Within racial social theory, systemic racism stands out by focusing on how social systems impact the social definition and negotiation of race.

Feagin (2006) defines systemic approaches to race and ethnic relations as focusing on 'a societal whole with interlocking parts'. These include political, social, economic and ideological systems, which are part of a US history in which powerful white Americans have intentionally created systems of white-on-black oppression. For Feagin, a systemic approach to race relations should include both the formation of racial systems and the long-term oppressive relationship between whites and Blacks, in particular how racial systems generate wealth for whites and transmit wealth intergenerationally. These systems should show the relationship between structures and systemic forces, how they relate to social counter forces and how they aid in the understanding of social change or the lack thereof. Although Feagin focuses on white-on-Black oppression, he and others have discussed the systemic differential racialization of Latinos both in schools and in society (Cobas, Duany, & Feagin, 2009; De Genova, 2005). Multiple racial systems have been found to aid in establishing and perpetuating white wealth accumulation through community institutions like schools and community organizing groups.

In focusing on the expression of racial ideologies, I privilege an ideological approach to racial systems because I found that participants' discussions about what needed to change to make Walnutbrook more racially equitable were based and often hampered by dominant racial ideologies (Bonilla-Silva, 2003, 2010). That is, people explained race relationships based on the social systems, and more specifically, racial systems, around them. So when new parents entered Walnutbrook and saw that Latinos were mostly talking to Latinos, this was part of a frame of understanding on how 'racialized' people should interact with others at the school. This dissertation explores

how school organizing systemically supported, negotiated and challenged these racialized frames and notions within different spaces in the organizing at Walnutbrook.

Critiques of race and ideology in education

Within the field of racial ideological critique, there are divergent opinions on how race should be critiqued in order to address racial inequities. One debate has centered on whether activists should focus on ideologies that promote individual civil rights or ideologies that target greater systemic forces (Bonilla-Silva, 2001; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006). Many critical race theorists have resolved this debate by focusing on how race has become endemic, or permanently socially constructed, into the social systems of the United States (Bell, 1995b; Dixson & Rousseau, 2006). Drawing from Critical Legal studies, I follow critical race theorists (CRT) who argue that we must critique the systems that promote the inequitable ideologies and institutions in which we live (Aleman, 2007; Bell, 1995a). In order to provide alternative visions of educationally equitable systems, I also draw from theorists who use Freirian, Afrocentric and Chicana theory to describe ideologies that present alternatives to the dominant ideologies in schooling (Huber, 2010; Lynn, 2005; Yosso, 2006).

This use of ideology to provide an alternative vision to the dominant ideology is called a positive ideological critique (Dijk, 1998; Leonardo, 2003). Not all ideological theorists agree that ideology can be positive, instead arguing that ideologies are exclusively defined as social idea systems that obscure social relations so that ruling

groups can continue to define their vision of society (Eagleton, 2007; Marx, Engels, & Pascal, 1939). While I agree that these 'negative' ideologies are the dominant ideologies in society and are extensively used to promote the ideas of those in power (in the case of race, the ideas of white supremacy) I have also found that positive ideologies have promoted alternative understandings of racial relationships and the possibility of alternative racial systems at Walnutbrook.

In my ideological critical practice at Walnutbrook, I particularly drew from the works of Freire (Freire, 1970, 1997) to work with others to critique the racial systems in organizing. Freire argued that by getting a group of oppressed peoples to describe their understandings of the key problems in their world, we can teach them to critique their ideologies and work towards changing their oppressed realities (Freire, 1973; Freire & Macedo, 1987). Yet many theorists have pointed out that Freire has ignored racial systems in his work and even promoted white supremacy (Ladson-Billings, 1997; Leonardo, 2005). At the same time, I follow the works of others who use the principles of his 'problem-posing' education to critique race and other intersected forms of oppression in their daily lives (Haymes, 1995; hooks, 2003; Jennings & Lynn, 2005). As a researcher and organizer at Walnutbrook, I found much of my work was to collaborate with school community members to critique negative, dominant racial ideologies and to promote new racial systems based on participants' alternative racial ideologies.

Working class Latinas in schools

Chicana theory provided a base from which to critique racial ideologies and from which to provide alternative visions for what was possible at Walnutbrook (Anzaldua, 1987; Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002). This was particularly important since the majority of the leaders at Walnutbrook were working class Latinas, women whose ideologies and ways of understanding the world have been subjugated and ignored (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Elenes, 2001; Galvan, 2006; Hurtado, 2003; Perez, 1999). As an organizer, I drew from Chicana theory to find ways to access, research and make sure that working class, voices were heard and respected at Walnutbrook.

There has been an entire literature, called parent involvement (PI) literature, which dominates Latina parent-school relationship practice. It advises how to be more inclusive of Latina parents in US schools. (Delgado Gaitan, 2004; Hiatt-Michael, 2007). Yet there has also been a significant critique of this literature . The critiques describes how both schools and organizing institutions have systematically ignored the desires and needs of Latina parents by promoting school interests and white supremacist education (Dyrness, 2011; Lewis, 2003). I agree with these theorists who argue that in the context of schooling today, much of PI literature promotes practices that end up silencing Latina parents' voices and promoting harmful educational practices in the home and in school (Auerbach, 2007; Olivos, 2006; Valdés, 1996).

In particular, there has been a concern that schools have failed to respect the knowledge that Latina parents bring to schools (M. Victoria Rodriguez, 2005; Villenas, 2001). In response, there have been a group of researchers advocating for new methods to

imagine and respect working class, Latina forms of knowledge (Mercado, 2005; Moll, Gonzalez, & Amanti, 2005) and epistemologies (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Thayer-Bacon, 2003). As an organizer and research, I critiqued the school's PI practices and my own advocacy of Latina parent voices. At the same time, I wanted to critically promote the alternative knowledge base and epistemologies that Latina parents brought to Walnutbrook and to relational organizing.

Racial ideologies in relational organizing in an ethnographic context

Much of racial ideological theory has   primarily been based on how participants have expressed their ideologies in the law or in surveys (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Danns, 2008). Racial ideology has thus been mostly studied in documents. My interest has been studying racial ideologies in the context of the conversations, actions and events of constantly changing relational organizing actions. In order to do this, I chose to do an ethnography so that I could have access to participants' explanations of racial inequities throughout the different contexts and interactions during my time at Walnutbrook (Crang & Cook, 2007; Spindler & Hammond, 2006).

Specifically, I chose to focus on descriptively critiquing the racial systems at Walnutbrook and then working with others to challenge these systems. In order to accomplish this, I combined elements of critical ethnography (Carspecken, 1996; Foley & Valenzuela, 2005) with elements of participant activist ethnography. As a critical ethnographer, I focused on researching and describing how racialized power inequities

were expressed in the systemic and daily practices of the organizing (Duncan, 2005; Pollock, 2006).

I also chose to work as a participant activist ethnographer. While there have been concerns that activist researchers have impacted the research site so much that they compromised the validity of the research (Ebbut, 1985; Glesne, 2006), I agree with those that argue that researchers always impact the research site and that researchers have a responsibility to the communities they study to impact the participants in as positive a manner as they know how (Dyrness, 2008; Jason, 2004; Nygreen, 2006). Just as importantly, as a researcher I wanted to study organizing and racial ideologies in praxis to understand the challenges of perspectives of critiquing racial ideologies while attempting to organize (Gardner, 2004; Soto, 1997).

Agency within racial systems: Narratives in figured worlds

One of the key concerns many theorists have with ideological studies is that many of these studies place so much emphasis on the social forces that structure ideologies that there appears to be little room for individual agency (Glesne, 2006; Lather, 1991). Holland et. al. (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998; Holland & Lave, 2001), have addressed these concerns about balancing social structures and agency by focusing on what they call 'figured worlds', or specific contexts in which the different actors in that context used specific symbols and narratives to make sense of their surroundings, including racial relationships. They argue that individuals in these smaller contexts have agency to shape the narratives and symbols in these figured worlds while still being

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bound by greater systemic forces (Sfard & Prusak, 2005; Urrieta, 2007). I found that many of the organizing communities in which I participated at Walnutbrook were figured worlds in which participants attempted to make sense of racial relationships through context specific narratives and symbols.

Narratives, in fact, were so prevalent in the expression of racial ideologies in these figured worlds that I found them to become one of the key ways to describe racial relations at Walnutbrook. These narratives expressed both the dominant ideology in dominant narratives and alternative ideologies in counter narratives (Knight, Norton, Bentley, & Dixon, 2004; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). It was these counter narratives that offered alternative visions of racial relationships at Walnutbrook and through which I was able to critique positive racial ideologies in the organizing. Within these figured worlds, participants fought over the meaning of symbols in the different narratives to make sure that their version of racial relationships dominated (Barthes, 1972; Johnson, 2005; Rodriguez, 1998). Participants contested interpretations of racial ideologies through the symbols in narratives within the multiple figured worlds in Walnutbrook. By analyzing these narratives, I could then describe how racial ideologies were expressed and contested during different moments of the relational organizing.

Methodology: Using relational organizing techniques to study racial ideologies

Relational organizing lent itself well to ethnographic research. As a beginning organizer, I was encouraged to meet as many people as possible and to get to know the organizational systems of the school. For instance, in my first semester at Walnutbrook I

conducted over one hundred individual meetings as part of my job as an organizer. At the same time these modified interviews allowed me to discuss with interested participants their perspectives of racial systems at Walnutbrook. By using relational organizing techniques, I was able to learn how participants and Walnutbrook staff expressed racial ideologies within the context of relational organizing.

Two of the primary techniques I used as a relational organizer were the individual meeting and the house meeting. Individual meetings consisted of conversations between two people that lasted from twenty to thirty minutes in which institutional members built relationships around issues of common concern (Chambers, 2004). Typically, individual meetings occurred between institutional leaders. City Alliance and I defined institutional leaders as any members of the institution that wanted to help organize their school. I refer to people who taught institutional leaders how to organize as institutional organizers. By conducting numerous individual meetings, both organizers and leaders got to know the main concerns of the individuals in their institution. For instance, a school parent or staff, i.e. institutional organizer, who wanted to organize a school, might hold numerous individual meetings and learn that parents and staff's main concerns were cafeteria behavior, the science curriculum and Latina parent-teacher relationships and then start organizing actions around these three topics. CA would encourage institutional leaders to hold approximately ten individual meetings a month; City Alliance's paid organizers were mandated to hold one hundred a month. While at Walnutbrook, I averaged about twenty-five meetings a month, which, added together equaled about a hundred meetings per semester. Because of their frequency and their importance as a way

to get to know people, individual meetings were an integral part of organizing at Walnutbrook.

I developed a routine approach to individual meetings, especially when I was first conducting an individual meeting with someone. During our initial meeting, I informed the other participant that I wanted to have an informal conversation about their main concerns about Walnutbrook. I explained that the intent of these conversations was to invite community members to work together on shared concerns. In an attempt to spark conversations about their concerns I added that there were three topics which they could discuss with me in any order they liked: any current concerns, their vision for the school and their history with the school. After about fifteen minutes of discussing their concerns, I would then tell them I was also studying racial relationships at Walnutbrook and was particularly interested in discussing their perspectives about how parents of color related to the school and whether discrimination was an issue at the school. During the meeting, I would always ask them to provide examples, i.e. elicit stories, which demonstrated their perceptions or concerns. If their concerns in any portion of the meeting mirrored concerns others had already articulated to me, I often shared that fact and asked the individual to consider addressing a shared concern. Thus, through personal narratives, I encouraged participants to act to address any shared concerns about the school.

While I approached follow-up individual meetings in a similar manner, participants would express themselves quite differently. Most often, these meetings took place because either the participant or I wanted to discuss a shared concern. I would still approach these meetings wanting to elicit narratives that explained the history, vision and

reasons for the concern, especially as it related to racial systems, but these meetings involved more of a back and forth exchange as we both shared multiple stories of issues that impacted that concern. For instance, a concern about school behavior policies might include stories about our childhoods, language policy and staff wages as we both tried to make sense of why Walnutbrook had a certain behavior policy. Through individual meetings, I held focused conversations with institutional leaders about shared concerns about racial systems at Walnutbrook and the relational organizing actions we were conducting to address these concerns.

The other principal technique discussed in this dissertation is the house meeting. A house meeting was a gathering of about eight to twelve people that focused on sharing perspectives on a common concern or issue (Chambers 2004). While the goal of the house meeting was to encourage action on this issue, its immediate purpose was to build relationships through understandings among the different concerned members of an institution. For instance, a school at which concerns about literacy were expressed might hold a house meeting with the main purpose of listening to the variety of concerns about literacy and then discover shared concerns around which the members of the institution could act. In the process, individuals met other people in the school who shared similar concerns and could continue to work on other shared concerns. That is, they built relationships for a shared purpose. Relational organizing is called "relational" because many of its techniques, including individual and house meetings, are used to build relationships among members of an institution so that they could work more effectively

together (Chambers, 2004; Gold, 2002; Mediratta, Shah, & McAlister, 2009b; Rubin & Rubin, 2008).

House meetings had a structure that was based on CA training. A house meeting involves three steps: a pre-meeting, a house meeting and a post-meeting. First, a group of two to four participants met in a pre-meeting to plan the house meeting. During the pre-meeting, participants discussed who would be invited to the house meeting and who would lead the meeting. The pre-meeting group would also create an agenda for the meeting and prepare a relevant question and story to elicit responses from house-meeting participants. The planners also discussed goals that they   hoped would emerge from the meeting. These goals could range from identifying new leaders, deciding to have subsequent meetings and/or dealing with a specific crisis.

This pre-meeting group then led to the *house meeting*. During the house meeting, the leaders asked the prepared question and shared the prepared story. One of the leaders' goals was that most people in the house meeting also answer the question with their own personal stories, and then propose a follow up action based on participants' answers. For instance, a literacy meeting might share stories about how different teachers or parents taught and encouraged literacy and then propose an action based on the concerns that were brought up about struggles people had in teaching literacy.

Immediately following the house meeting, leaders met in a brief *post-meeting* to evaluate the meeting and, if relevant, how the action was going. In the post-meeting, leaders would discuss whether their goals were met, whether the goals needed to be modified, who would be responsible for following up on the decisions of the meeting and

who they might want to include in the follow-up actions. House meetings were structured so that institutional leaders could hear the perspectives of multiple leaders through stories in order to promote actions that took these perspectives into account while involving more leaders in the process. In my research, house meetings provided an opportunity to see how racial systems and relationships were expressed, negotiated and acted upon in public spaces.

Most of my participants though, were neither familiar with nor used relational organizing techniques. While I taught these techniques to participants, I also encouraged them to use techniques that they had used in the past to address other oppressive systems. I thought of these as *differential techniques.* Sandoval (2000) discussed differential techniques as techniques the oppressed use to organize against a situated form of oppression in a specific space. These techniques were differential because organizers changed their techniques as the forms and expression of oppression changed. Differential techniques are contrasted with *relational organizing techniques* that are applied in institutionally defined cases in prescribed manners. In this study, relational organizing and differential techniques framed how participants expressed racial ideologies and how we challenged inequitable racial systems at the school.

In order to capture how organizing participants expressed their racial ideologies, I thus positioned myself as a volunteer organizer at Walnutbrook Elementary. During the first semester, I visited the school one to three times per week from during the school d ay from 7:00 am to 3:00 pm From January through June 2009, I was at the school the five school days of the week (Monday through Friday) throughout the school day and

would return during the evening for CAC meetings, faculty meetings, organizing

meetings and school celebrations. Throughout this time, I was primarily involved with

relational organizing meetings, but I would make the time to meet informally with school

leaders during their lunch breaks, before and after school.

Data collection within relational organizing

My data sources primarily consisted of relational meetings at the school, but I

augmented these sources through selected socializing to gather informal expressions and

perceptions of organizing participants. When possible, I wrote down field notes in my

laptop computer. In these field notes, I described the events of the meetings, key

expressions of leaders at these meetings and personal reflections and theorizations. I

made sure to write at least one set of field notes every day, but most days averaged from

two to four sets of field notes so that I could collect my most recent impressions of events

as they occurred. I also collected organizing research, organizing reports, news articles of

the time period and electronic communications. These provided both contextual and

documented records of the events occurring around our relational organizing actions.

At the end of each week, each month and each semester I also wrote and

reflected upon key events, themes and trends. At the end of each semester, I share these

themes and trends with key participants as a form of member checking. These member

checks served to gather their comments about whether they agreed these themes existed

and to start a reflexive conversation on how these themes impacted our organizing

actions. In this way, the racialized expressions of organizing actions became the focus of

my field notes. My focus on racial ideologies and systems also served to inform other organizing participants during the actions. Through my relational organizing practices and data collection, I integrated a racial systemic approach to my organizing efforts at Walnutbrook and combined organizing and research practices to collect how organizing participants expressed their racial ideologies while challenging racial systems at Walnutbrook.

Positionality: Studying Walnutbrook and myself

Given my prominent role in our organizing efforts, I was careful to monitor the role in the research. One of the prominent challenges of monitoring my positionality at Walnutbrook, especially as it related to the multiple contexts of the school, was the fact that my role at the school was constantly changing. When I began, José and Elvia had suggested that I focus on building working class Latino parent leadership. When Elvia left, José and I reevaluated my role to include teachers and staff in the organizing efforts. As teachers and parents began to learn organizing techniques and take independent actions, my role then changed to work with multiple actions at the same time. For instance, when teachers led an organizing action to change the bilingual program at the school, I had to decide whether to work with families, teachers or administration at a district level. In fact, in some cases I would work more closely with parent leaders as they faced teachers and in other cases worked with teachers as they faced district personnel and other teachers. As my role in the school changed, I found that this changing position brought me into conflict with participants' roles, desires and values in their multiple

actions (Kindon, Pain, & Kesby, 2007; Maguire, Brydon-Miller, & McIntyre, 2004). Thus my position with participants depended on my changing role over time and the multiple social contexts of our interactions.

One of my major concerns during the ethnography was how to monitor my privileged position within the school. I found that my social privilege due to being a white male and a PhD candidate impacted how people responded to my suggestions and perceptions of social relationships at the school. I approached this by integrating three positional approaches in the organizing: I was explicit about my racial position, I used a problem-posing approach and I discussed concerns about my positionality with other organizers and community elders.

From my introduction to most organizers, I was explicit about my racial position and positional privilege at the school (Ellis, 2004; Leonardo, 2009). When I introduced myself as a researcher and organizer, I also introduced myself as Chris Milk Bonilla, explaining that I was interested in the topic because my mother was a bilingual teacher. Most of the time, this led to a conversation about my mixed ancestry and my relationship to schooling, in which I would explain that as I researcher, I had a positive relationship with teachers and administration, and as a person of Latino and white ancestry I learned to negotiate both cultures. The advantage I found of being explicit about my racial and educational position was that this signaled a willingness on my part to discuss race and education and many participants responded by sharing their opinions about race at the school. This also started a language, which I learned to negotiate as participants responded with their own words and ways of discussing race. At some point in the

research, most participants would also refer to my privilege and positionality when it came to an action, often leading to further conversations about racial systems and privilege. By initiating a personal discussion about race and privilege early in the research, I made the topic of racial privilege a personal topic that I could discuss with participants throughout the research.

I also practiced Freire's (Freire, 1970, 1973) problem-posing pedagogy in which is embedded specific suggestions on how oppressor teachers (or organizers in my case) might dialogue about privilege with oppressed students. By oppressor and oppressed, Freire is referring to individuals with or without social privilege and who have positive or negative access to societal power in a given context. Freire stresses the need for dialogue between the oppressor and the oppressed with the object of dialogue being social relationships and how oppressors can overcome their problematic oppressive situations. Thus, Freire referred to this approach as a problem-posing pedagogy. Since working class Latina parents had little social power at Walnutbrook and I had considerably more social power, I openly problem-posed organizing actions with leaders as oppressive situations. This not only made my privilege and position in relational organizing explicit, it opened up the possibility of these social problems as having solutions. We could then dialogue about how we could organize to achieve these solutions.

City Alliance also trained its leaders how to work in cross-class relationships so that organizers were advocates for the needs of their working class institutional members (Chambers, 2004). Chambers espoused IAF's 'Iron Rule', which stated 'not doing for others what they can do for themselves'. Trained with this thought in mind, I worked

towards a goal of having working class leaders lead organizing actions and a shift in my role to one that would be mainly advisory. I also worked closely with Ron and Elvia, both experienced relational organizers, on how to deal with inequitable class and racial relationships. We held weekly discussions which included conversations about how organizers maneuvered their privileged position in the institution, how to deal with leaders that wanted us to lead actions, how to teach organizing without imposing our world view, how to help various leaders prioritize their organizing actions and how to distribute institutional information equitably.

I also identified the elders in the parent and people of color community and worked closely with them, and greatly benefitted from their experience and expertise. I looked to these   prominent stake holders in the community to help guide the organizing (Smith, 1999). Specifically, community elders often had family members as parents or students at Walnutbrook, so they had a personal stake in the results of the school. When I had doubts about what my role should be in organizing, I often went to them to seek advice. While ultimately this often led to contradictory advice, I felt that I connected to both the official institutional and working class powers in the ethnography to serve as 'project watchdogs' to make sure that the organizing did not consciously detract from the needs and desires of the prominent stakeholders in the institution (Brydon-Miller, 2004; Jason, 2004; Kindon, Pain, & Kesby, 2007). By connecting to community elders and experienced organizers, I worked with others to critically reflect and learn methods to acknowledge and work through my privileged position in relational organizing at Walnutbrook.

Although community supervision was one aspect of monitoring my positionality, ethnographers have also pointed to the need to guide the internal ethics of the researcher (Coffey, 1999; Holmon Jones & Adams, 2010). I faced two repeated problems. First, I had to decide which actions to act upon and how to act upon them. Both of these decisions were ethically complicated because actions impacted research participants inequitably. For instance, when a cafeteria monitor was harassing some parents and children, I asked my three main advisors for advice and I received three differing responses. Parent elders told me to encourage the parent to get the monitor fired. School staff encouraged me to let them take care of the situation. CA organizers told me to encourage the mother to create an organizing action to improve cafeteria conditions. I was given this divergent due to the diversity of my advisors. T he elders wanted immediate results that remedied the situation for their families, that is, the parents and children. School officials wanted organizers to help improve parent collaboration. Parents themselves wanted action as soon as possible. Organizers wanted to build a leadership core. Each of these actions might have ended up negatively impacting different members of the school, so as an organizer and researcher I was torn about which actions to take or to suggest and which of the conflicting desires to prioritize.

In making these decisions, I drew from a combination of organizing and research ethical guidelines. First, I made sure to maintain a 'public relationship' or a formal relationship, with the various factions at Walnutbrook. Organizers stressed the need for institution members to maintain formal relationships within the organizing so that we could publicly continue to work together and work through our problems (Chambers,

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2004; Rubin & Rubin, 2008). Organizers emphasized the need for me to work with everyone to encourage public dialogue. At the same time, I made sure to k maintain privileged relationships with working class Latinas in order to make sure their concerns were addressed. Since working class Latinas as a group tended to have inequitable access to power, knowledge and relationships at Walnutbrook, I made sure to structure my time so that most of it was spent with working class Latina leaders to learn their concerns, guide their institutional leadership and make sure their concerns were being met (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Elenes, 2001).

These relationships would get complicated as working class Latina families disagreed with each other. For instance some families wanted to fire the monitor and others wanted to train her better. In these cases, I would continue to keep my public role in an attempt to capture the various viewpoints, though ultimately, in certain instances, I would have to make painful decisions about which relationships to privilege. In these cases, I discussed the events with a third party that I felt understood the different points of the multiple parties. When my position as an organizer put me in the middle of contested inequitable actions, I would try to encourage public dialogue that privileged working class Latina needs, but would also involve other organizers, elders and leaders in the decision making to negotiate these contested desires.

My field notes were also an important source in helping me negotiate these contested spaces. In particular, they helped me identify, critically reflect and analyze the multiple individual and social values that participants contested through organizing actions. In order to facilitate this analysis, I divided my field notes into events 'as told by

others' and 'events as told by me.' When I wrote my own events, I further tried to separate my observations from my reflections, but recognizing the inherent difficulty in this endeavor. I also on a weekly and monthly basis wrote reflections on my own positionality in the organizing, especially as it related to my own access to the racial systems at Walnutbrook. For instance, I wrote what each participant told me about why the monitors' actions were important and detrimental to them or the children in one field note entry, and then created a separate entry in which I recorded my thoughts as I struggled with what to do. Within these field notes, I also recorded what different participants said when they talked about what my role was or should be in the action. These notes would not only help me maneuver and make sense of a current situation, but also proved to be important data as I used my and others' interpretations of the situation as sources of expressions of racial ideology. By both integrating and separating observations and expressions of contested interpretations, I was able to record my own and others' analyses of why and how participants valued certain actions, positions and interpretations within organizing at Walnutbrook.

I monitored my privileged positionality as a Walnutbrook organizer by relying on community stakeholders and through structured critical reflection. As an organizer working with multiple social groups in contested sites, participant organizers and institutional leaders often had conflicting values, desires and positions when it came to prioritizing which racial systems to change and envisioning how to change those racial systems. Since my role was to advise community members on how to prioritize those changes and to help them imagine more equitable systems, I made it a point to keep

connected to organizers who had worked out a system to monitor their own privilege in advocating for institutional change and to working class Latinas to ensure that their priorities were being addressed. Despite these relationships, I was still often in spaces where different participants contested my own positionality. In these cases, my role was to facilitate dialogue to make sure that working class Latina needs were addressed in a manner which worked towards greater educational equity and decision making at the school. In the process of negotiating, reflecting on and describing these conflicting racialized positional expressions at Walnutbrook, I was able to form an understanding of how racial ideologies impacted important organizing practices at the school.

Data Analysis: Organizing understandings of racialized relationships at Walnutbrook

As previously mentioned, I periodically analyzed my field notes, individual meetings and reports to ascertain the prominent themes that emerged from the data (Carspecken, 1996; Crang & Cook, 2007). Using my research questions as a guide, I read the field notes with the focus of finding the dominant ways that racial ideologies were expressed and how working class Latinas challenged the dominant racial ideologies. After three semesters, I found that five themes consistently emerge from the data: the dominance of color blind ideologies, relational expressions of ideologies, Freidian critical praxis, the role of languages in communication and privilege and the differential expression of ideologies in multiple spaces. Furthermore, when I brought these themes to key participants in individual meetings, they all agreed that those were key themes in our

efforts thus far. A combination of multiple data analyses that triangulated my field notes, organizing documents and member checking further clarified the five themes that formed the foci of my analysis of racial ideologies at Walnutbrook.

When I presented these themes to participants, another significant piece of information that emerged from the conversations was that the second semester of my stay at Walnutbrook was one of the key semesters of my study. Participants described this semester as the semester in which they initially engaged with relational organizing. It was during this semester that participants began extended organizing actions through which they challenged racial systems at Walnutbrook for the next two years. Multiple participants also kept on referring to key actions during this semester. Finally, these early actions provided rich data through which I could describe the prominent themes that emerged through our organizing practices. Since both participants and I found the second semester of my study a rich source of actions through which many of us understood the racialized practices of relational organizing at Walnutbrook, I decided to focus my dissertation on this second semester.

After I decided to focus on the second semester, I had to choose which organizing actions during this time best represented these themes. I also chose actions that represented the diversity of organizing practices at Walnutbrook during these two years. With these criteria in mind, I selected five organizing actions around which this dissertation is structured. The initial chapter of this dissertation is a contextual chapter that describes history and present status of the racial systems in place at Walnutbrook neighborhood and school. The second chapter uses a cafeteria action to provide an initial

description of how racial ideologies are inscribed in racial narrative, the main themes of the dissertation. The next four chapters answer the research questions of the dissertation by expounding on key themes that emerged from the research while providing a detailed description of one action per chapter. These four actions also provide examples of how racial ideologies were expressed in some of the different kinds of actions that emerged at the school, including an institutional action, a relational action, a citywide action and an individualized action. Each of these 'action chapters' describes an action, how the leaders of that action understood racial relationships both within and without the action, and the results of that action. I pay particular attention to working class Latina alternative racial ideologies within each action.

More specifically, the chapters of the dissertation describe the following:

Chapter 1 - The Racialization of The City – In this chapter, I establish the context of the dissertation by describing how segregated schools and neighborhoods contribute to white wealth generation, setting the stage for the racial schooling inequities we faced at Walnutbrook.

Chapter 2 – The Cafeteria Action – This chapter provides an introduction to some key practices and racial ideologies of relational organizing at Walnutbrook. This action was an early action in which working class Latinas worked with the school community to improve behavior in the cafeteria. I introduce how narratives expressed racial ideologies within individual and house meetings throughout the action.

Chapter 3 – The Garden Action – This chapter explores an institutional action that challenged racialized parent-teacher relational structures at Walnutbrook. In this chapter, I explore what transpired when working class Latina leaders attempted to work with a broad-based school community to plant a hands-on garden to improve the schools' science curriculum. I use figured world theory to explore how dominant and subjugated narratives impact organizing actions in the garden.

Chapter 4 – The Pre-Kindergarten Action – This chapter describes a relational action in which working class Latina parents focused on building relationships with each other. In this chapter, I worked with a pre-kindergarten teacher to build Latina parent classroom leaders. I explore how Latinas narrate cross-class relationships within the context of racialized schooling.

Chapter 5 – The Dual Language Action – This chapter describes Walnutbrook working class Latinas' participation in what ultimately becomes a citywide organizing action. In this chapter, Latina teachers attempted to include Latina parents in the struggle to transform the existing bilingual program to be part of a city-wide dual language program. I explore how language is symbolized differently in various contexts, complicating organizers' attempts to be inclusive.

Chapter 6 – The Special Education Action – This chapter explores an action which targets individual relationships in the school. In this chapter, I explore how two socially excluded Latinas use relational organizing techniques to advocate for special education services. I explore how relational (e)pistemologies challenge leaders' attempts at racial solidarity.

Conclusion – Latino Critical Race Pedagogy in relational organizing – In this chapter, I propose a model for providing a Latina epistemological-based pedagogical racial critique within relational organizing. I describe how this model emerged from my research, where it is situated in education and organizing literature and how it presented itself in my practice.

In this dissertation, I describe racial ideologies in the context of relational organizing. I describe how dominant racial ideologies obscure inequitable racial relationships at Walnutbrook Elementary. I also describe institutional leaders' actions and explanations of these actions that challenged dominant racial ideologies in their multiple and changing contexts, specifically their racial narratives and differential techniques. By describing racial ideologies and their critique in a community organizing for school reform context, I am able to illuminate some of the challenges and successes that organizers, institutional leaders, and working class Latinas in particular, faced as they attempted to challenge racial systems at their school.

Chapter 1 - The racial systemic formation of community organizing for school reform at Walnutbrook Elementary School

When I came to work with Latina parents in Walnutbrook, I became a participant observer in a complex racialized community. In this chapter, I describe some of the key racial systems that impacted organizer and Latina access to school decision making at Walnutbrook. I relate how these systems fragmented and segregated social relationships within the Walnutbrook neighborhood by creating inequitable racialized opportunities. The construction of 'race' as a socially separating concept inhibited attempts to build a broad community organizing base. Specifically, white wealthy landowners maintained and adjusted existing racial systems, which materially tied the concept of race to wealth accumulation.

This chapter is divided into two parts. In the first part, I describe how some of the key neighborhood, school and City Alliance racial systems came to be formed in Walnutbrook, emphasizing the role of residential segregation in the perpetuation of white wealth accumulation and the limiting of opportunities for people of color. In the second part, I describe the key racial systems that existed at Walnutbrook when I began the study, detailing how social systemic fragmentation was built into the social structures of the school and the residential community. Taken together, these systems provide a context for understanding some of the challenges that working class Latina leaders and I faced in building relationships and challenging racial inequities at Walnutbrook Elementary.

Part 1: Racializing Walnutbrook neighborhood and Elementary

"NO INTEREST

NO TAXES

NO NEGROES"

     – Early twentieth century pamphlet (between 1910 and 1925) advertising housing

lots for sale in the Walnutbrook neighborhood by the Caswell Company (Anon, 19-)

     Racial systemic theory focuses both on the formation and the interactions of the

multiple systems which contribute to white wealth accumulation. White wealth

accumulation is the generational accumulation of economic and political resources

(Feagin, 2006). Walnutbrook, from its founding as a 'negro free' subdivision, served to

accumulate wealth for the whites who lived within its boundaries. Feagin (2006) argues

that by studying the intergenerational wealth accumulation of racial systems, theorists can

view the social, political and economic contexts of the formation of 'race' as a concept

and race as a lived system which creates inequitable opportunities for the racialized

citizens within its boundaries. I found this to be the case at Walnutbrook. The racialized

barriers that Latina leaders and I faced and tried to challenge in the school and in the

neighborhood were the results of a long history tied to the economic benefit of a

powerful, white middle and upper class. Whether we were trying to challenge rental

policies in the neighborhood or to gain access to special education services, the

institutional and social systems we faced had a racial history tied to providing economic

benefits to the white home owners in the neighborhood. In this first half of the chapter, I provide a racial systemic history of Walnutbrook neighborhood, Walnutbrook School and CA organizing within the school to provide a racial context on how inequitable systems came to play their racialized role in the schooling within the neighborhood.

Residential policy and the City: Segregation and white wealth accumulation

One of the main systems to impact inequitable access to wealth in the City was the segregated housing policies that emerged during Reconstruction and continue to the present day (Orum, 1987; Tiru, 2009). These policies are important in understanding racial systems in Walnutbrook Elementary because City Independent School District (CISD) placed students in schools based on residential zoning (Black, 1995; Cuban, 2010). This policy effectively segregated City schools since housing in the city was both economically and racially segregated.

When the City was founded in the early 19th century, it was founded in a region of cotton plantations. This meant that it had a large slave population. When slaves were freed, most African Americans in the region around the City remained in indentured servitude. Thus, in the late nineteenth century, there were five African American districts around the City whose African American residential citizens primarily worked in the cotton and agricultural plantations around the City (Anon, 1950; Orum, 1987). These five districts formed the basis of the City's future residential and economic segregation, but at this time these districts were outside of the City and thus did not significantly impact residential patterns within the City.

As the City expanded around these districts at the turn of the twentieth century, parts of these five districts turned into valuable residential property because they were near residentially desirable parts of the City. Furthermore, since the five districts were all over the City, these African Americans 'neighborhoods' were racially integrated into the extant white neighborhoods. Valuable African American property that had been absorbed into white parts of the City prompted a change in City policies that became the foundation of modern residential segregation policies.

When the City absorbed these five communities at the turn of the twentieth century, it also passed three Jim Crow statutes that segregated African American schooling and other services on the East side of the City. This forced many African Americans to sell their land to whites and move to the Eastside (Orum, 1987). For example, the only African American high school was built in the Eastern portion of the City (Anon, 1950, 1954a; Schott, 2001). Soon after the high school was built, many African Americans moved to be closer to the school. During this time period in the City, schools were used as means to try to coerce African American families to sell their land and move to the East side to receive the City's educational services.

This strategy of providing segregated services reached its zenith with the City's 1928 Master Plan (Gieseken, 2008). In the City's 1928 Master Plan, Koch and Fowler, planners hired to create a plan for the future growth of the City, wrote:

"It is our recommendation that the nearest approach to the solution of the race segregation problem will be the recommendation of this [East] district as a negro district; and that all the facilities and conveniences be provided the negroes in this district, as an incentive to draw the negro population to this area. This will eliminate the necessity of duplication of white and black schools, white and black parks, and other duplicate facilities for this area. (Koch & Fowler, 1928, p. 57)"

When the City adopted this plan it meant that the City would not provide sewage, electricity or other city services to African Americans unless they lived in the designated, East side of town. These recommendations, based on similar city plans from other Texas cities, effectively segregated the City (Harris, 1992; Orum, 1987).

While not explicitly mentioned in the 1928 Master Plan, Mexicanos were also segregated into the Eastside. Few Mexicanos lived in the City in the early twentieth century, but after the Mexicano revolution in the 1910's, large groups of Mexicano refugees began to move into the City. To deal with this expanding population, Mexicanos and African Americans were informally separated by 11th Street, with African Americans' schools, community centers and parks placed north of East 11th and Mexicano services south of East 11th (Harris, 1992; Orum, 1987). Members of the first CA church in which I participated actually pointed to the 1928 Master Plan as crucial in defining their own role as activists in the Mexicano community.

Mexicano American church elders traced their own lineage back to a group of about a dozen families who were forced to move the church from central City because they were the only *Mexicano* Catholic church. Since Mexicanos were not welcome in downtown after this zoning, these dozen families loaded the foundations of the church on a set of logs and physically moved the church across East Avenue in the City so that it could serve the Mexicano community (Black, 1995). The 1928 Master Plan systemically residentially, educationally, economically and socially segregated the City.

This physical segregation of the City was further symbolically and physically concretized in the 1950's by the routing of the interstate highway east of downtown; this

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created a physical divide that geographically segregated White City from East City. Official reasons for this policy were strikingly similar to the reasons given for moving minorities to the east in the 1920's. City bureaucrats and business leaders argued that this would encourage the creation of a business district in the City and that by geographically separating the poor, people of color, whites would feel more comfortable coming to spend their money and live in downtown (Gieseken, 2008; Orum, 1987).

This racial systemic history emphasizes two important mechanisms that drove the institutionalization of the segregation of the City. First, the system was rooted in the economic gain of a powerful, white group. From its founding, residential segregationist policies in the City were used to benefit white access to land and to limit people of color's access to land, educational opportunities and City services. Secondly, race and wealth were conflated. Most people of color were in economically impoverished areas while the economically valuable regions of the City were white. In this way, not only did a white, wealthy landowning group work to create racialized municipal policies that segregated the City for their material benefit, these municipal systems provided inequitable racialized opportunities for wealth accumulation within the City.

The Racial Systemization of Walnutbrook Neighborhood

The components of residential segregation can be seen in the racial systemic formation of Walnutbrook neighborhood. Walnutbrook was built in the late 1920's on the edge of Rich Park, one of the richest neighborhoods in the city (Anon, 19-, 1954b). Since this was the era of legalized segregation, this meant that the neighborhood began as

a white suburb -thus the quote from the pamphlet that opened this section - 'No Negroes and No Taxes'. The initial homeowners and property owners were legally restricted to being racialized white (Anon, 19-). In this case, Walnutbrook followed the pattern of allowing access of a valuable City land to powerful whites only.

As the city grew, so did Walnutbrook neighborhood. The City experienced three periods of exponential growth in the 1970's, 1990's and the first decade of the new millennium. In all three time periods, property values soared benefiting people who already owned property within the City (Humphrey & Crawford Jr., 2001; Tiru, 2009). In the most recent period of growth, the City had grown so much that Walnutbrook was no longer considered a suburb, but rather the edge of the desirable City Center, a concept that doubled property values in the area (Trulia.com, 2011). By being systemically racialized white through a combination of legal and economic segregation, white property owners of Walnutbrook accumulated significant wealth by investing in homes in the Walnutbrook neighborhood. A group of white owners were able to conflate race and wealth in property for their gain.

Yet, residential segregation, as a system, did not remain the same. In the early 1970's Jim Crow residential policies ended as civil rights protesters teamed up with IBM and the university to try to desegregate the city. By repealing a set of zoning policies, they made it legal for people of color to live west of the freeway (Gieseken, 2008; Greenberger, 1997). Walnutbrook became a popular destination for people of color. As one long time Mexicano resident explained it, Walnutbrook apartments were the cheapest apartments available on the West side since they were next to the freeway (Sofia, 2008).

People of color, and Mexicanos in particular, thus started to move into the apartments of the neighborhood in the early 1970's (Gregor, 2010; South, 1975).

While the initial wave of people of color renters was comprised of a combination of African Americans and Latinos, this would change in the 1990's. During this decade, attracted by a construction and tourism boom that provided a wealth of construction and service sector jobs, the Mexicano immigrant population increased dramatically in the City (Anon, 2008). Many Mexicano immigrants were attracted to the Walnutbrook neighborhood due to its central location and proximity to many jobs, cheap apartments and an extant Mexicano community. In many cases, this influx of Mexicano immigrants to neighborhood apartments, created a majority of Mexicano residents (Carolina, 2009). Cheap housing in a central location for a racialized labor force resulted in racialized apartments within the Walnutbrook neighborhood.

Segregated housing policy within Walnutbrook though had a different impact on apartment residents than on homeowners. Renters did not own the property. So, when property values increased, instead of increasing in wealth, they actually had to pay more money to stay in the neighborhood. This meant that property value increases meant a loss of wealth for the people of color in the neighborhood because they were mostly renters. For most of Walnutbrook's people of color, the City's systemic property value increases meant a systemic loss of wealth.

Economic conditions in the City between 1970 and 2008 resulted in a racialized shift in housing in Walnutbrook neighborhood. In this time period, Latinos, mainly Mexicanos, moved to the Walnutbrook neighborhood apartments. For the neighborhood,

this meant they changed from a uniformly white neighborhood to a mostly white home-owning neighborhood and a mostly-Mexicano apartment- dwelling community. Internal segregation within Walnutbrook meant that whites systemically accumulated property value wealth while Mexicanos systemically lost wealth by paying rising rental costs. Walnutbrook neighborhoods adapted to the racial systemic shift of economic segregation by segregating access to property *ownership*. While residentially integrated in terms of having Latinos and Whites living in the same neighborhood, Whites were economically segregated because they still had inequitable access to the properties, which provided access to wealth accumulation.

Additionally, two other major racial systems impacted relational organizing at Walnutbrook School. These two systems were the CISD school system and the City Alliance organizing system. In the next two sections, I will cover some of the key manners in which school and organizing racial systems developed in the City before returning to examine how residential, school and organizing racial systems came together in Walnutbrook the first time CA organizing came to Walnutbrook School.

Choice segregation: District policies' impact on racialized schooling

Schools have traditionally been seen as an important means of intergenerational white wealth accumulation because schools serve as primary institutions to provide children with inequitable access to the economic opportunities of their parents (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001).

During the Jim Crow era, CISD schools were segregated by City statute. But when the office of Civil Rights started to enforce the Supreme Court's decision in Brown vs. the Board of Education in the mid 1950's, the Jim Crow system of racialized schooling was mandated to change. In 1955, CISD's responded to the Supreme Court decision by instituting an elementary 'free choice' policy (Anon, 1955; Carruth, 1966; Ward, 1968). This policy stated that all parents had the opportunity to choose the school to which they wanted to send their child . Since few people of color or whites freely chose to send their children to a school where they would be a minority and that additionally was inconveniently on the other side of town, most schools continued to be segregated. It was not until an NAACP law suit against CISD in 1968 forced one-way busing in 1971 (people of color to white schools) and two-way busing (whites to people of color schools) in 1979 (Harris, 1992; Milius, 1971; Statesman, 1977) that CISD mandatorily integrated some schools. Starting in 1980, 20% of CISD schools were integrated through two-way busing. Despite this minimal integration rate, CISD was declared 'integration compliant' by the Office of Civil Rights in 1986 and busing was discontinued in 1987 (Black, 1995; Harris, 1992). By 1998, 70% of the schools were once again dominated by one ethnicity, effectively reinstituting segregated schools for most students of color (Schott, 2001). For the majority of CISD's history, City schools have been segregated through the use of voluntary integration, or 'choice' policies, the primary method of integrating schools.

One prominent tactic that public schools have used to pass on inequitable access to wealth in the United States has been by disproportionately tracking whites into

universities and the higher paying jobs that university degrees provide (Shirley, 2009; Valenzuela, 2005). In CISD, one key method of carrying this out was to have university-track schools on the west side of town (Mediratta, Shah, & McAlister, 2009a; Schott, 2001). Since whites were residentially segregated on the west side, this meant that whites had disproportionate access to university-track schools. Conversely, there were few university-track schools in the east side where most people of color lived. Thus, students of color had inequitable access to university-track schools. Residential segregation combined with the segregation of university-track schooling meant that segregated schooling provided inequitable schooling opportunities in the City.

This school choice policy had continued relatively unchanged when I began my organizing at Walnutbrook School in 2008. In 2008 it was called a 'neighborhood school' policy and stated that all children in the district were assigned to their 'neighborhood school' based on their primary residence. Any child could ask to be transferred to another school as long as there was room in the school where they wanted to go and the parent provided transportation. Furthermore, children who were numerical minorities in a school received priority in being allowed to this school (Anon, 2009). This meant that if a student of color and a white student were competing to get into a white majority school, the student of color would be provided the spot. Despite this modified choice policy, most schools remained segregated (Cuban, 2010).

Despite school desegregation, transfers remained a racialized, contested policy. This site of contestation was most obvious in the racialized response to school choice. On the first day of transfers, middle class, mostly white parents had waited in long lines

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the previous night to become the first ones to sign up for a popular, mostly white West-side school. Families organized among themselves so that one person would wait in line as a placeholder for others. There was a concerted effort for friends to inform their friends in their racialized neighborhoods about the importance of being in line to get their children into the preferred white schools. This and other efforts resulted in   long waiting lists for white, middle class schools by mostly white, middle class families (people who could not get in through the working class, people of color exemptions). Internet sites, neighborhood associations, churches and other organized white institutions advertised certain schools as 'good' schools in mostly middle class, white media (web sites and newspapers distributed in white neighborhoods), letting people know the importance of making the efforts needed to get children into these racialized white schools. There were also private schools on the west side which were full of middle class whites who could not get their transfers into the mostly white schools (Cuban, 2010; Gieseken, 2008). In other words, many white families organized waiting lists, publications and even private schools as ways to attempt to guarantee that their children made it into mostly white schools. Conversely, most people of color also chose not to transfer, but rather sent their children to non-university track neighborhood schools. While whites organized to stay in segregated schools, CISD continued a choice policy, which had failed to integrate residentially segregated schools for more than fifty years. The result of both policies was that whites continued to systemically have inequitable access to university-track schools that provided greater economic opportunities to white children.

Responding to fiscal crises: **City Alliance's racialized institutional organizing**

Just as the city and the district were racialized, the organizing institution, City Alliance was also racialized by the residential segregation that unevenly distributed access to wealth in the City. In this section, I describe how City Alliance's need to follow institutional funds racialized its ability to prioritize people of color schooling issues.

Formed in 1985, City Alliance (CA) City's affiliate of the Southwest IndustrialAreas Foundation was part of a national Alinsky-based community organizing institution that organized churches, unions, schools and other civic institutions in order to have their voice be heard more prominently in their local, state and national governments. (IAF) (Simon & Gold, 2002). Primarily, CA considers itself a faith-based group which aims to have civic institutions be accountable to their working and middle class constituents (Chambers, 2004; Rubin & Rubin, 2008). In terms of race, CA is a broad-based organizing group, meaning that instead of focusing on organizing only working class or Latinos or African Americans, the group organizes everybody so that the organization could have a 'broader base' to advocate for their agenda of issues in elections (Rogers, 1990; Shirley, 2009). But in practice, the institutions which they organized, be they schools, churches or unions, were often racialized as Black, Latino or white (Orr, 1999; Su, 2007). That is, they organized Black churches, white unions and Latino schools. Within this broad base, they were organizing racialized institutions. CA was subject to the same racial systems as the City and CISD as it tried to organize Walnutbrook and other institutions.

CA first began by organizing churches and by the late 1980's its efforts included Latino and Black churches on the Eastside and white churches from the city center. During this time period, Latino organizers identified schools as a common concern of their church communities, so a group of predominately Latino parishioners worked to organize the schools in their neighborhood. Although these schools and a couple of unions would join as members of CA, the majority of CA's member institutions remained churches (Interview, Ron, March 18, 2009).

From the first, when CA began organizing schools, school organizing was a racialized issue. This was because only Latino and Black neighborhoods considered schools a concern. Recalling the state of CISD's racialized school system, this should not be a surprise. Schools were only a concern for Latinos and Blacks because most of the poor, or non-university track schools were in people of color neighborhoods. Therefore, school organizing was a racialized organizing issue because poor schooling inequitably impacted communities of color in the City.

Despite these challenges, CA proved successful in organizing people of color schools. Within a few years of organizing schools, the number of school academics increased as well as parental participation. By the mid-1990's, these schools would be mentioned in several national reports on successful community school collaborations (Rogers, 1990; Shirley, 1997; Simon, Gold, & Brown, 2002). With this success, CA was able to get more funds and hire as many as three community organizers to work on school issues. A people of color issue, 'schools', rose to prominence in a broad-based organizing group because there was federal money with which to fund this work.

Yet as City Alliance focused on schools, the organization lost financial support from many churches. There were a couple of reasons for this shift. Traditional support for CA had been annual funds from churches, what CA calls 'hard money' because it was money that would be guaranteed year after year. But many of these churches of color were losing their neighborhood bases as their parishioners moved to the cheaper suburbs in the 1990's. This resulted in a loss of funds from these churches. It also resulted in a loss of community leaders who had prioritized schools within their people of color churches (Interview, Ron, March 18, 2009).

CA also lost grant money. The organizers who worked with schools received their funding from grants that provided funding to CA for a maximum of five years and CA referred to these grants as soft money because it was for only a limited amount of time. Although CA received several grants in the early 1990's, most of this money that had been designated for schools ran out by the year 2000 (Interview, Ron, March 18, 2009). By the end of the 1990's, CA lost much of its funding for educational organizing due to a combination of loss of funding from the people of color churches who had initially funded it and from the national organizations that only offered temporary, 'soft' funds.

Without this money, CA struggled to fund their school organizers from 2001 to 2005. When the grant money for school organizing ran out, new leadership decided to put a greater emphasis on organizing churches and to reduce their emphasis on organizing schools. At the same time, they also attempted to increase their funding from churches (hard money) by organizing new churches in the suburbs. Since most of the newer,

suburban churches were white churches, the majority of the new churches in CA were white institutions. For these new churches in the suburbs that had the 'good' schools, schooling was not an urgent issue. Furthermore, without the funding and organizers that sustained school organizing, the number of schools with CA membership dropped to six in 2004 (Interview, Ron, March 18, 2009).

School organizing was impacted by two major racial systemic shifts within CA. First, CA lost much of their funding and leadership within the people of color institutions. Since there was a systemic flight of people of color from the city center due to the majority working class, people of color were unable to afford to live in the city center, there was also a systemic flight of people of color from CA. Despite schooling being a racialized, people of color issue, it had been able to sustain itself through outside funding. Once this funding ran out, a commitment to schooling was no longer sustainable since it lacked both the people of color leadership, institutional 'hard' funding and outside financing. If we see schools as a system of wealth accumulation, when people of color lost the ability to fund community organizing, they also lost a systemic ability to advocate for intergenerational wealth accumulation.

The second systemic shift within CA was an organizational shift toward white institutions. Due to race being tied to wealth, when money got scarce, the little that remained usually came from white dominated institutions. For CA, this meant including the white institutions in the suburbs. Since schooling was not racialized as a 'white' issue, this racial shift in CA meant that schooling became less of a priority.

The economic crisis in the City and in CA impacted wealth accumulation by systemically rearranging the source of funding and leadership in the institution toward white institutions and away from people of color institutions. With this shift, it reduced CA's systemic ability to advocate for people of color institutional issues and wealth accumulation.

Community organizing for school reform comes to Walnutbrook

In 1998 a new principal convinced Walnutbrook School staff and community to become a member of City Alliance. Walnutbrook was one of the later schools to get involved in City Alliance, and experienced academic and community success during the time that CA was involved.   From 1998-2001, CA organizers focused on increasing Latino parent participation in the school. CA also worked with the staff to find ways to work more collaboratively and also organized to improve house owner and apartment resident relationships (Interview, José, October 7, 2008).

Within the school, CA organizers worked with the parent support specialist, a school staff person in charge of home school relationships, on creating parent meetings that served parent needs. These meetings educated families on school policies that impacted student academic achievement, like test scores, literacy instruction and the science curriculum. Organizers, teachers and families recalled that the school was always full of parents volunteering in the school., going to meetings or just hanging around the hallways (Interview, Sofía, October 6, 2008). Often teachers and staff attended professional development sessions and community meetings. Through these and other

group activities they became well acquainted with each other. Parents and teachers said that this increased communication and personal accountability resulted in higher standardized test scores, greater academic programs for the students and greater community involvement (Interview, José, October 7, 2008). Both teachers and parents from this time period emphasized that the major difference in the school when CA was active in the school was that it helped bring a large group of Latino families to school and community meetings which previously had only been attended by a few white families. CA's initial impact on the school's racial system was to create an organized system of providing greater Latino pressure on school policy by bringing more Latino families to school meetings.

Outside the school, City Alliance focused on improving housing conditions. Upon returning from school one day, students who lived in the Walnutbrook neighborhood found a dead person outside their apartments. This event provided a spark for CA to work with apartment residents, neighborhood churches and neighborhood organizations to combat gangs, drugs and violence in the neighborhood. These efforts resulted in improved security measures in many apartments. Some of the changes included installation of security gates, improved maintenance, on-site apartment managers, a police substation and city inspectors who enforced code violations. These changes resulted in the closure of two apartment complexes (Interview, Carolina, January 13, 2009). Families then discussed how this improved sense of security had positively affected students because they could then focus on their schooling instead of safety issues. Once again, community members recalled constantly meeting to get to know each

other and to work on shared concerns. Working class Latinos were being organized both inside the school and within their neighborhood to address their civic and educational concerns.

CA was able to organize community support for the school despite substantial personnel turnover at Walnutbrook. In 2001, the principal left with many key faculty leaders and the parent support specialist (the parent leader) and the vice principal, José García, became the new principal. He was immediately faced with his first challenge. The district, in the midst of a budget crisis due to an economic downturn, tried to close Walnutbrook citing low student enrollment. CA organizers helped family leaders put together a few frenzied community meetings in which mainly Latino families filled district meetings. After this show of support, the school board members and superintendant decided to keep the school open (Interview, José, October 7, 2008). Even with significant staff changes at Walnutbrook, CA was able to impact the schooling experience by making working class, Latino family participation a voice in both local decision making and within the larger arenas of municipal and district decision making.

Both the district and CA considered this involvement with Walnutbrook a success. The district was pleased with the fact that Walnutbrook received the highest rating in the state test results for three of the four years of CA's involvement (Interview, José, October 7, 2008). CA recognized Walnutbrook's success by featuring the school and its story in their reports, sending faculty and community members to city-wide and nationwide meetings and sending three organizers to work with the community (Interview, Ron, March 18, 2009). During the time that CA was involved in

Walnutbrook, Latinas, through their participation in decision-making and their children's rising test scores, received greater access to more equitable schooling.

Yet these changes did not occur without complications. Involved Latinas recalled the challenges they faced in working with the mostly white neighborhood associations and school. They recalled neighborhood association and school governance meetings (Campus Advisory Council (CAC)) in which they had to find a way to make their apartment security or bilingual education concerns a priority to the white majority for whom the issues were not priorities. For example, Carolina remembered, "Querían que nos metieramos en peligro atrapando los que vendian drogas, pero teníamos que pelear por cual cosa que queriamos para los apartamentos [They (the white home and apartment owners) wanted us to put ourselves in danger by trapping the drug sellers, but we had to fight for anything we wanted for the apartments]". These organizations were still tied to City racial systems that relied on segregated property values for its funding as well as the way it prioritized the issues of the continued white majority membership of the CAC and neighborhood association.

Keeping the school open would be the final large action of City Alliance at Walnutbrook as CA experienced its own economic difficulties which led to it only being able to provide diminished support for Walnutbrook (Interview, Ron, March 18, 2009) After CA organizers stopped visiting Walnutbrook regularly, Walnutbrook lost its high testing rating and lost much of the participation of working class, Latino families (Interview, José, October 7, 2008). Without the systemic intervention of CA, Walnutbrook and the neighborhood association changed their focus to other priorities and

no longer organized its mainly working class, Latino population. CA provided a systemic manner for working class, Latino families to be working with the institution that schooled their children and without this support, their interaction with their families lessened.

To a great measure, these changes were impacted by the fact that organizers were tied to City Alliance and larger racial systems. When the City's people of color left the expensive city center, this move resulted in a racial systemic shift for the City. Since CA was tied to people of color church funding in the city center, their internal racial systems were forced to change when they relied on greater white institutional funding. Due to City and organizing racial systemic shifts, schooling became less of an organizing priority. The greater racial systemic shifts of the city impacted CA's racialized organizing. Neither CA nor the Latina organizers at CA were able to respond to the shifting racial systems in the City.

Part 2 – Walnutbrook's racial systems at the beginning of the study

I began my study six years after CA had ceased organizing the Walnutbrook community. In that time period, racial systems had continued to change and I arrived at a school predominately populated by working class Latinos. With this in mind, I want to offer a brief introduction to some key systems at Walnutbrook at the beginning of my study and how they interacted with racial systems to impact Latino participation in the school.

A school divided: The segregated spaces of faculty and staff

One of the key systems that divided Walnutbrook racially was the class system among the staff of the school. Class had multiple intersections within the staff, which was also racially divided. These divisions would impact the staff 's lived experience and, from the perspective of relational organizers, the facility to build strong relationships within the institution.

In Walnutbrook, there was an economic divide between professional staff that included teachers and administrators who received a higher wage because they had a university degree and hourly staff including office staff, cafeteria workers, teacher aides and janitors who received a lower wage and were without a university degree. This class divide was also a racial divide since the majority of university degree holders were white.

Specifically, hourly staff received from $5.00/hour to $20.00/hour, depending on the job. This translates to less than $10,000 a year to $40,000 with the majority getting $20-30,000/ year ($10-15/hr or $1500-2500/month) with health benefits. Most of the hourly staff had not earned a university credential and this impacted their ability to get a teaching credential or get a salaried job at Walnutbrook.

With a university degree, teachers and administration had a significantly higher salary. They made between $40,000 to $80,000 a year with health benefits, with most receiving $40-50,000/year ($3-4,000/month). While all teachers had to be university graduates to be allowed to teach, after three years of teaching teachers had the option to go to universities for advanced degrees for a couple of additional years and receive an annual salary that was increased by at least two thousand dollars, with the exception of administrators, who could receive up to $20,000 more (CISD, 2009b). The big difference

between salaried and hourly wages at Walnutbrook was whether or not an individual had earned a university degree.

I regard this as a class divide that mainly held true to socio-economic definitions. The annual salary rate for hourly workers was just around or below the federal poverty rate. Even the professional workers who earned the lowest incomes were just above the federal poverty rate (need a source). Furthermore, having a fixed, salaried income that generally came with a yearlong contract provided a more stable source of wealth than the two-week and monthly hourly wages to which the hourly workers were subjected. These contracts could and were often cancelled anytime during the year. Therefore, the opportunity for wealth accumulation for these workers was virtually non-existent.

 This class divide had a racial systemic component. Outside of the bilingual program, the majority of the faculty was white. The majority of the hourly staff, on the other hand, was Latino. This resulted in a racial divide along class lines, in which whites tended to occupy the higher paying jobs at Walnutbrook and Latinos tended to occupy the lower paying jobs.

Additionally, there were also class divisions within the Latino racialized groups. Latinos in Walnutbrook were divided by class in two important ways. First, Walnutbrook bilingual teachers had United States university degrees. So, Latino teachers and members of the administration earned a substantially higher salary than Latino staff. There was also an additional class division that distinguished between those who had U.S. degrees and those whose degrees were from Latin American universities. Since Latin American university degrees in general were not validated in the US, Walnutbrook staff with Latin

American university degrees was more often paid at a scale that was similar to the monthly wages of teacher aides and clerical staff. Walnutbrook staff that had no university degrees was more often the two-week hourly workers of custodial and cafeteria staff. Although the differences were not as large as between salaried and non-salaried jobs, monthly jobs were a little more stable than the two-week jobs. More importantly, these jobs had greater institutional prestige as jobs requiring education. University degrees provided some wage earning differences within the Latino staff population in the staff.

Within the mainly Latino, bilingual teachers, there was one more important systemic division. The older bilingual teachers at Walnutbrook tended to be immigrants while the younger teachers were almost exclusively second generation. This corresponded with a history in bilingual instruction in which, initially, there were not enough Spanish-speaking teachers to fill bilingual teaching needs. In the 1970[s City ISD had originally accepted teaching and university degrees from foreign countries so that they could have trained teachers who spoke Spanish.   This meant that most experienced bilingual teachers at Walnutbrook were immigrants while the newer staff was second generation. The Latina staff at Walnutbrook was divided by class and immigration generation.

These divisions had important consequences for relational organizing. Teachers and staff were systemically separated and his impacted their living experience of the school and their ability and desire to create the relationships which nurture organizing. Teachers had their own meetings, their own lunchroom and their own training sessions.

Staff likewise had their own spaces that were separate from teacher spaces. Since teachers were mostly white and staff was mostly people of color, this meant that teacher/staff job segregation was also racial segregation. This segregation was linked to inequitable access to salaries, decision-making and social status. Teachers dominated the decision making bodies at school, which gave them a voice in decisions that included positions at the school would be added and removed, which budgets would be cut and who would speak for them in larger district events. In order to build relationships within the school, organizers would have to find ways to cross these racialized divisions structured into the physical and temporal organization of the school.

For organizers, these systemic fractures had a strong bearing on building strong relationships around common identities and issues. First, relationships were naturalized so that the school was already organized along these fractures. Thus, when the school staff gathered for the school picnic, they gathered in the groups with whom they regularly got together, teachers with teachers and staff with staff. Although they gathered as 'teachers', they gathered as middle-class, white teachers and working class, Latino custodians that experienced the school from the perspective of the jobs they held. Even among the teachers, bilingual teachers had a time for themselves, so they had systemic time to organize and socialize among themselves. Issues often became racialized and classed due to these racialized and classed systems. Teachers would organize around the need for a reading specialist while custodians would organize around the need for consistent landscaping help. When organizers tried to build around similar issues or

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identities, these issues and identities were broken up through the racialized and classed position of the groups in the school and society.

Walnutbrook neighborhood: Organizing white homeowners and Mexicano apartment dwellers

In terms of organizing, residents were more likely to organize along class rather than racial lines. Thus, Latino homeowners often organized around the mostly white neighborhood organizations. White apartment-dwelling families socialized and talked with their mostly Latino fellow apartment residents, even if they didn't share a common language. Walnutbrook residents then had to cross racial lines to organize within classed groups. Although Latinos could organize with other Latinos in the school and whites could join the mostly white neighborhood association, most residents tended to socialize around their classed peers. While participants characterized these residential relationships as just hanging out with their closest neighbors, these relationships were the most common form of both informal and formal organizing in the Walnutbrook neighborhood.

It is important to note that there were explicit material benefits to organizing around class lines. One of the key goals of neighborhood associations was to find ways to keep property values high so that homeowners' economic investment in their homes was kept safe. Schools impacted property values as the school children would attend was a factor many families considered when they chose a neighborhood (Gieseken, 2008; Orum, 1987). Families would move into a neighborhood within a 'good' school's boundaries so that their children would not have to transfer. With a good school, families

would pay more money to but a home, thus keeping property values high. Other key issues of the NA were crime prevention and transportation, two quality of life issues. These were important because families might be wary to move into a neighborhood if it was seen as unsafe due to high traffic or crime. With low crime and traffic, families would pay more for their homes. The point here is that one of the major concerns for homeowners was that they were getting some economic compensation in organizing together and improving the 'quality' of their neighborhood.

This classed organization impacted racialized wealth accumulation in the community. As a mostly white organization, their advocacy of mostly homeowner issues impacted the wealth accumulation of the white residential system. For Latino homeowners, NA had a greater impact on their wealth accumulation than it would on renters, and they became more involved in the NA than with   Latino apartment dwellers. On the other hand, white apartment residents rarely had their concerns addressed in the NA. Since residential organizations focused on their class interests residents split along classed organizations. Despite the exceptional splits of the few people of color home owners and White apartment residents, community members' class organization still tended to impact racialized wealth accumulation by advocating for racialized homeowner interests.

A Rural Mexicano community from B and L: Divisions within the Latino community

In terms of wealth accumulation, Latinos were additionally impacted by a combination of their social racialization in the Walnutbrook neighborhood and school and by how they were differently socialized and racialized within the Latino community. Since many Latinos emigrated from other countries where they already knew and established social relationships with other Walnutbrook residents, these different racial and social relationships became   part of the Walnutbrook community.

Working class, Latino relationships became integrated into the racial system in Walnutbrook in two systemic ways. First, City social systems racialized Latinos through job opportunity. Most Walnutbrook Latinos tended to work in construction, gardening, and childcare or housecleaning services and this Latino job racialization had a strong systemic base. Since many immigrant Latinos lacked the documents to show they had the expertise to work in a job, they were limited to a few, lower paying jobs that required no formal training in the City. By documents, I mean university degrees, vocational training certificates or even high school degrees valid in the US, which were usually required for individuals who sought employment in more highly skilled jobs. (De Genova, 2005; Flores & Rosaldo, 2007). Often transcripts from other countries and a lack of acceptable documentation prevented immigrants from qualifying for job training programs. This left mostly lower-income jobs, among which manual labor like gardening and construction dominated for men and the service industry, including childcare, cleaning and food service, dominated for the women. These jobs became even more racialized since

Spanish speakers tended to hire Spanish speakers and English speakers hired English speakers. Latinos were racialized into a Walnutbrook group of lower income jobs and within the City, immigrant Latinos were racialized into the low-income social group.

Latinos were also racialized through their residences. Walnutbrook School drew from four major apartments, and about a dozen smaller ones. Apartments themselves were racialized and classed, with white, African American and Latino clusters in smaller apartments, while the four major ones were relatively low-rent apartments dominated by working class, Mexicano immigrants (Interview, Elvia, February 6, 2009) These were low rent apartments because they were in high traffic areas away from many amenities, including stores and the school. Latinos at Walnutbrook were mostly racialized into a few lower income apartments in the neighborhood.

These residences also had a strong systemic component. Just as there was a limited number of low-income jobs, there was a limited number of low-income residences that those with low-income paychecks could afford. Just as Spanish and English language proficiency or lack thereof further racialized jobs, family and social relationships further racialized residences. Many people were more willing to live in an apartment complex that they knew was safe and reputable based on social contacts they had already established. Since Latinos already mainly knew other Latinos, when families recommended apartments to each other, they tended to racialize the apartment complex of which they were a part. A combination of a reduced number of low-income opportunities and social relationships meant that many Latinos lived with other Latinos in racialized apartments. Between racialized jobs, a factor in wealth accumulation, and

racialized housing, a main form of wealth expenditure, Latinos were systemically racialized economically into the Walnutbrook neighborhood.

This social system was further intersected by the fact that most immigrants came from Mexico, and many emigrated from two rural, Mexicano towns, B and L (Interview, Carolina, March 9, 2009). This meant that people from these two towns tended to hang out together, while people who were not from these two towns had to find an alternative group with which to socialize. Although both groups would work together, this separation meant that if you were from one of these two towns, you systemically experienced schooling differently at Walnutbrook due to your social contacts. In terms of racial systems, whether one was connected to one of these social networks impacted how one was racialized and access to important material and schooling resources.

B was a town of less than a 1,000 inhabitants, and so most people from B already knew each other or at least of their family. L was closer to 10,000 in population, so although former residents often knew each other less personally than those from the smaller town, they usually shared at least a friend of a friend and knew each other's schools. Either way, people from one of these two towns already not only had a known social position in that town, but also had access to someone who knew some of the world they were familiar with. This familiarity often meant that newcomers could more quickly have the City school system explained to them. Since many came to live with family members or new close friends, these relationships often involved material help, like offering English tutoring, child care and help getting a job or social services. Families

from B or L often had greater help in getting acclimated and offered material help within Walnutbrook.

Latinos who were not from these two towns often shared similar housing and economic conditions, but did not have the pre-established social relationships. This group included Mexicanos from other small towns in Mexico, families from urban, working class area and rural or working class urban families from other Latin American countries, mainly Central America including El Salvador, Nicaragua and Honduras. When they helped each other, they shared information about the English program, transfer policies, sand other important school matters that families did not learn about directly from Walnutbrook.

To be a member of the B or L community was a two edged sword. On one hand, participants who were new to the City had someone who could help them get introduced to the schooling system. On the other hand, being part of a community meant that that person was already part of that social system and was forced to be part of the racial system that was already established. For instance, those who were marginalized as poor, uneducated, or indigenous in B or L often found themselves marginalized at Walnutbrook. Yet, the racial systems, and their intersections with schooling, in B and L were different so they impacted residents differently. For instance, the distinction between being of indigenous or European descent was much stronger in B than it was in L, yet this distinction was almost erased in Walnutbrook as all residents were racialized Mexicano, if not Latino. Since indigenous Mexicanos had systematically been denied access to schooling, this racialization emerged within the community as racialized

indigenous residents were more often treated as uneducated. Racial systems from B or L impacted individuals' racial systems in Walnutbrook by being part of the B and L community within Walnutbrook.

Latina residents who were not from B or L were nevertheless impacted by both the City's extant racial system and the majority B and L racial system. They were still racialized by the work and residential segregation realities previously mentioned, but they often did not have access to the social relationships within the B and L social system.

While the B and L racial system dominated within the Mexicano community at Walnutbrook, they were still within the greater City racial and class system. For instance, Latinos discussed how it was easier for a B or L resident to get a management position at a Mexicano business, but most Mexicano immigrants faced great difficulties breaking into job opportunities outside of construction or the service sector. This desire to see their children with greater job opportunities was often given as a reason for wanting to see their children succeed in school (Interview, Carolina, October 2, 2008).

From a relational organizing perspective, racial systems impacted Latino schooling intergenerational wealth accumulation in three key ways. First, racial systems impacted residents' access to community organizations. The established PTA and NA's were racialized white, and thus Latinos had limited access to the resources to impact schooling that these organizations represented. Secondly, residents had racialized access to the informal social systems which provided material access to key schooling resources. While most middle class whites had access through accepted organizations like PTA's, Latinos had differential access based on established social networks which were impacted

by City racialized concepts of Latino schooling and B and L Mexicano concepts of indigenous, rural schooling. Finally, residential systems impacted access to schooling through district policies. Middle class families had greater access to private schools, moving to other neighborhoods and transfers through systemic access to transfers and district policies that segregated schooling, thus they had schooling options. Most working class Latinos had less access to these transfers, alternative housing and other schools, so their schooling option was often limited to only Walnutbrook. Residential racial systems meant that white residents had greater systemic access to schooling options, schooling organizations and social relationships, which improved their access to schooling. These organized systems resulted in community-based limitations to how working class Latinos could access school-based wealth accumulation for their children. Among the Latina community, racial systems impacted access to wealth generation through a combination of City, white-Latino racial systems and Mexicano white-indigenous racial systems that fractured access to wealth generation within the Latina community.

Conclusion: Racial issues in relational organizing

"Race' was not just a case of structures and issues, but a societal system which impacted organizing on multiple levels. Racial issues, in an institution are expressions of racial ideologies that serve as systematic ways of understanding race relations in that institution. Since white supremacy and racial systems are permanent systems of current United States society (Bell, 1995b; Dixson & Rousseau, 2006) it was hard to find any issues which were not also racial issues. Safety was racialized to negatively impact the

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apartments. Schooling has been racialized to negatively impact Latinos. It was hard for CA to address any issue without addressing a racial issue. Furthermore, the understandings of these issues were racialized, so all these issues were expressions of racial ideologies. While CA may not officially address racial issues, the Walnutbrook neighborhood exemplifies how racial issues emerged from racial systems that structured how white or Latino residents viewed the organizing relations within an institution like the neighborhood association. When CA successfully addressed these ideologies, they transformed institutional racial political and ideological systems by working with different communities differently so that they could focus on Latino, working class inequities that had been systemically ignored. In the chapters that follow, I describe how working class Latinas found multiple strategies to advance subjugated racial ideologies that challenged these inequitable systems.

Chapter 2 - Narrating organizing: Racial ideologies in the cafeteria action

This chapter serves as an introduction to racialized relational organizing at Walnutbrook. Some common practices were prominent in most of these actions and it was through these actions that racial ideologies were expressed. This chapter serves as an introduction to these practices in the context of one of these early organizing actions. To this end, I introduce how Elvia, the parent support specialist, and I used the relational organizing techniques of individual and house meetings to elicit narratives, which framed parent leaders' concerns about the school. In particular, I draw attention to the racial ideologies within these narratives and describe how leaders' communicated understandings of racial relationships and systems at the school through these contested racial narratives. Finally, I describe how these racial narratives formed the basis for the organizing actions that leaders enacted to challenge racial systems at the school. This pattern of eliciting racial narratives through relational organizing techniques that guided organizing actions was repeated in most organizing actions at Walnutbrook. This chapter describes how racial ideologies were expressed through these racial narratives using the relational organizing techniques of individual and house meetings.

Three Latina parent leaders, Carolina, Brenda and Paquita, led an attempt to improve behavior in the school cafeteria during lunch. I describe these leaders' concerns and racial ideologies as expressed in their individual meetings. I then describe how we used their narratives to bring over twenty people together to discuss changes to cafeteria policy. In particular, I focus on how their subjugated racial ideologies are contested by

dominant racial ideologies and narratives. While these leaders were able to provoke some changes to the cafeteria, dominant narratives continued to deny consistent Latina parent access to decision making at the school. At the same time, by using relational organizing and differential techniques, these parent leaders were able to experience how their personal narratives could provoke a positive change in the institution that schooled their children.

Racial ideologies in individual meetings: Making sense of racialized participation

In order to encourage Latina families to participate in decision making at Walnutbrook, Elvia and I first wanted to know how families perceived and described their racialized experiences at the school. In order to learn of parents' experiences, one of the key techniques we used was a City Alliance strategy called an 'individual meeting' (Chambers, 2004; Mediratta, Shah, & McAlister, 2009a). Individual meetings afforded opportunities to discuss with participants their perceptions of racialized participation at Walnutbrook and what they thought we could do to remedy it.

Walnutbrook parents told Elvia and me that cafeteria behavior was a primary concerns at Walnutbrook. We decided to hold follow-up individual meetings with Walnutbrook parent leaders for two reasons. First, we wanted to find out why these issues concerned the parents. Just as importantly, we wanted to find out if a group of people would be motivated to lead an organizing action based on their concerns. By holding individual meetings with parents to discuss their thoughts about Walnutbrook, we hoped to encourage people to work together to address common issues.

Two people who showed interest in pursuing an organizing action around the cafeteria were Carolina and Brenda. Carolina was a mother who had worked with Elvia for the last three years and had volunteered to lead several parent meetings. While she had not expressed an interest in the cafeteria, she had shown a strong desire to work with other mothers to help Walnutbrook. With this in mind, Elvia and I met with her.[4] I began the meeting by asking her what she thought were the strengths and weakness of the organizing so far. She said that while she was glad that more families were involved, we had to work on improving our communication. She then told a story of how her son's pre-kindergarten teacher had given her tips on how to communicate better with teachers, and she felt that all parents, and Mexicana parents in particular, should have those tips because they really improved her relationship with the school. Now she wanted tips on how to better communicate with her son, because as he grew up she found out that her old strategies were no longer working. Responding to her, I explained that I was concerned about the number of Latinas who simply attended parent education meetings without really being involved in decision making at Walnutbrook which impacted their children's education.

Carolina said that she thought she understood what I was suggesting. In her search to learn how to be a better parent, she had gone to parenting classes in a community center downtown and had been put in a Latina mothers' group. Her advice was that to reach mothers, the school had to offer what the mothers wanted, like opportunities to

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[4] While in most of our individuals meetings we met with people individually, we were flexible and sometimes met with a small group. Since both of us wanted to meet with Carolina, this was one such exception.

volunteer and parent education classes. She commented, "Hay que respetar lo que quieren hacer las madres [You have to respect what the mothers want to do]."

Carolina voiced two common themes that I had heard from many Latina mothers. First, while all mothers could benefit from participating at Walnutbrook, Mexicanas had particular needs, that included learning about how to effectively communicate with teachers and other school personnel. Second, was the recognition that while there was a need for Mexicanas to participate in decision-making, she was not interested and did not want to feel pressured to participate in that way. While she recognized that racialized participation existed and might even be problematic, she was not generally interested in challenging these practices.

During Elvia and my conversation with Carolina, Brenda, another Mexicana mother arrived for her scheduled individual meeting with Elvia. Brenda was the mother who had come to Elvia with concerns about behavior in the cafeteria, and it was her concerns that we shared with the larger group that decided to make the cafeteria issue a priority. Elvia asked Brenda if she minded if Carolina and I were a part of their individual meeting. Brenda said that she would actually appreciate any advice that Carolina or I could offer. She had come because ever since she had shared her concern about the cafeteria in mid-November; she had been helping the cafeteria monitor, Sonia. Brenda said that even though she knew that Sonia always wanted more help, the relationship had reached a crisis point when Sonia had yelled at Brenda and insulted her in front of her daughter. She felt uncomfortable that Sonia continued to demand more help from her and she didn't know how to deal with the rude monitor. She also felt that Sonia had a reason

for her short temper; she didn't have enough help in the cafeteria. Brenda added that she heard so many Mexicana mothers complain about the cafeteria, but they weren't willing to come and help. She stated that many of the white mothers worked, but she knew that many of the Mexicana mothers were at home and she thought that they should be at Walnutbrook supporting the school.

Elvia responded by noting what a wonderful person Brenda was. She remarked that during the time that Brenda had been at Walnutbrook, she had done nothing but be helpful, but that in this situation, it appeared that someone was taking advantage of her good will. Brenda expressed concerned that if she were to refuse to help at this point, it might affect how the school treated her daughter. Carolina said she had undergone a similar experience when she had started to volunteer, but then Elvia had taught her how to say no in a nice way. Elvia suggested that we hold a meeting to find more people to help. She asked if Brenda would be willing to be in charge of such a meeting. Brenda said that she didn't quite feel comfortable leading a meeting, but that she was very interested in contributing. We thanked the mothers and they left.

During these individual meetings, Carolina and Brenda explained to Elvia and me why volunteering for the school was so important to them. They both felt like they were able to help the school and their children when they spent time in the school. They were also able to acknowledge and explain the racialized pattern of volunteering at Walnutbrook. Brenda believed that Mexicana parents made natural, individual decisions to not volunteer at Walnutbrook. Carolina thought that Mexicanas struggled to advocate for their children in schools because of cultural differences between US schools and

Mexicano families. Since Mexicanas culturally expected the schools to take care of their children, then they did not participate in decision-making. Bonilla-Silva (Bonilla-Silva, 2001, 2010) referred to these explanations as *racial ideologies*, or as mental frameworks for making sense of racialized relationships. When parents and staff explained Mexicanas' racialized perceptions at Walnutbrook, they were explaining their racial ideological understanding of racial relationships at the school.

The vast majority of the participants, including Carolina and Brenda, often tried to downplay the role of race in relationships in the schools. Bonilla-Silva referred to this practice of ignoring inequitable racial relationships as the *color blind ideology* (Bonilla-Silva, 2005, 2010). While minimizing the importance of race in relationships, individuals still gave differing explanations to why Latinas had less access to decision making at Walnutbrook than middle-class whites. Brenda provided a story that described natural, individual differences while Elvia provided a story that described cultural differences. Bonilla-Silva termed these different explanations within an ideology 'storylines' (See Figure 2.1). These storylines provided rigid, societal stories, which explained racialized participation. While there were moments when both organizers and parents critiqued and acknowledged the importance of race, more often both groups tended to diminish the factor that race played in describing the racialized participation of Latinas at Walnutbrook.

Figure 2.1 Bonilla-Silva's four major story lines within colorblind ideologies

Storyline	Explanation for racialized relationships	Example
Abstract liberal	Groups racialized, but not willing to counteract with policies	Not willing to change school policies so Latinas have access to decision making
Cultural	Groups racialized because of cultural differences	Latinas need to learn to have greater access to decision making
Minimization	Groups racialized, but society is getting better	While participation is racialized, we are training Latinas to be more involved.
Naturalization	These are natural differences	Latina families are not involved in decision making because they don't want to be involved.

Institutional pressures to teach how to organize

While organizing at Walnutbrook, Elvia and I worked with parents to make sense of racialized participation in the cafeteria. At the same time, through our work, Elvia and I were affiliated with institutions that affected the way we viewed and acted upon racialized participation. Elvia was a district employee and I was a university researcher and volunteer CA organizer. This meant that our differing duties impacted how we thought we could or should promote school organizing to advocate for more equitable parent participation. Both Elvia and I brought goals, techniques, views and mandates from our other jobs that we had to negotiate. In our individual meetings, we often discussed how these systemic, institutional pressures might impact, both positively and negatively, our work with the Mexicana families at Walnutbrook.

For instance, soon after meetings with Carolina and Brenda, we met to discuss how we would help organize the parents that semester. I began the meeting by asking Elvia whether she had been able to better balance her organizing and parent support specialist duties. She took out a job description folder from her desk and sighed. She said that she had been able to document all the families who had gone to parent education meetings and who had volunteered this semester, but she continued to struggle to find time to organize effectively when it was supposed to be only thirty per cent of her job responsibilities. Elvia said she was always trying to find time to train more Latina institutional leaders, but that in the end, the school asked for volunteers, and the Mexicanas were often more than willing to volunteer since they didn't need to be trained to do that. On the other hand, when she asked for leaders of the Parent Teacher Association (PTA), a parent decision-making body she was in charge of, the only ones who showed up to trainings were white mothers. "Yo no quiero que esto pase con el PTA, pero no hay familias Mexicanas que quieren tomar decisiones [I don't want this to happen to the PTA, but there are no Mexican families who want to make decisions]."

I told her that I had similar concerns and commented that it seemed that we were not helping Latina mothers be self-sufficient when it came to dealing with Walnutbrook. I reminded her of City Alliance's Iron Rule which stated that we should never do for others what they could do for themselves. In this case, I felt that volunteering imposed a pattern in which parents were dependant on others to tell them what to do as volunteers instead of making decisions about their children's schooling on their own. Since Latina parents were not attending meetings and taking active roles in the decision making bodies in the

school, school staff was making educational decisions for the students that parents should be making with the school. As organizers, we wanted parents to learn to critique what was going on the school and feel empowered to propose changes and question staff, organizers and each other.

I told her that as part of the class I taught in a teacher-training program at the University, I was teaching one pedagogical strategy called backward design to my pre-service students. I offered to teach this to her and the Walnutbrook parents as a way to plan meetings. I knew that this technique did not address barriers to Latina access to decision making, but I hoped that it would help parents feel more comfortable participating in Walnutbrook meetings.

Elvia and I both approached organizing as an opportunity and responsibility to teach others, and more specifically Latinas, about how to organize in Walnutbrook. At the same time, we were also members of institutions outside of the school. Elvia met regularly with the district PSS department and I was a student at an education department at a university. Elvia thought of her role as a job in which she was evaluated whether she performed certain tasks, only one of which was teaching organizing. In fact, she felt that her job's main purpose was to get volunteers and that they that ended up being racialized Latinas. I thought of my role as researching and teaching pre-service teachers about techniques that they could use with anyone regardless of circumstances. This way of regarding teaching carried over to organizing so that I wanted to teach relational organizing techniques that leaders could likewise use with anybody.

Elvia and I agreed in our commitment to teach organizing. Viewed from the perspective of Bonilla-Silva's racial ideologies, we thought we could create more equitable participation if only we had more time to train Mexicana leaders to be part of decision making. In other words, we often used a minimized story line to explain racialized participation at Walnutbrook (See Figure 2.1). The problem with this explanation was that we continued to use the same techniques, like volunteering and backwards design, without challenging the systems to come up with ways to include Latina parents in decision making. In training parents, we were saying that they were the problem and not Walnutbrook's decision-making bodies that excluded them. Elvia and I identified our own systemic pressures to minimize the role of race in our organizing efforts. Despite this, we still explained racialized participation at Walnutbrook by using dominant color blind story lines. As in most of our organizing actions, the organizers and leaders were in institutions that framed racialized participation as a problem of parents of color and not of the systems of which we were a part.

Racial narratives in house meetings: Telling stories to prompt action

Elvia and I structured the next cafeteria meeting as a 'house meeting' in an effort to encourage families to participate in decision making about the cafeteria. In planning this meeting as a house meeting, Elvia and I hoped to encourage Walnutbrook parents to act based on their shared concerns about the cafeteria while simultaneously continuing to build stronger relationships with each other. We used our backwards planning meeting as a pre-meeting in which we prepared a question to elicit stories from parents and learn

which parents might want to lead a cafeteria action. That Friday we held the house meeting.

Elvia began the meeting by asking parents whether they still wanted to try to address cafeteria behavior.[5] Parents quietly nodded in agreement. Elvia then shared how Brenda, who was in attendance at the meeting, had come to her because her pre-kindergarten daughter had come home complaining that children were bothering her during lunchtime. In response, Elvia had suggested that Brenda visit the cafeteria at lunchtime to observe. The next week Brenda told Elvia that during her lunchtime visit, she noticed that while most children behaved, some students got bored and played with their food. Students did not listen to the cafeteria monitor while they were in line and, what was most disconcerting for her as a mother, some children did not always eat. Elvia then asked if anyone else had ever visited their children during lunchtime.

Carolina shared how she often went to the cafeteria, and after further prompting, shared a story of how she helped the cafeteria monitor, who she characterized as very busy and effective. Paquita, a Mexicana great grandmother who frequented the group, disagreed with Carolina. Her great grandchildren also complained about the cafeteria and she had volunteered in the cafeteria several times. Paquita stated that the problem was that Sonia, the monitor, punished some children while letting others go, and that those children who were punished were the Mexicans. She then shared a story of her visit to the cafeteria in which she helped Sonia pass out forks. Suddenly one of her older great grandchildren and another child had started screaming at each other. The monitor had

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[5] We held the meeting mostly in Spanish since all the mothers but one spoke Spanish. I served as a personal translator for our only white, English speaker at the day's meeting.

then told her great grandchild to stand up and move to another table but did nothing to the other child. Paquita said that while she recognized that her great grandchildren could be a handful, she also knew that when children know that they can get someone else in trouble without getting in trouble themselves, they would bother that child until they get a reaction. Since then, she had noticed it was always the same children who got in trouble "Les deben tratar a todos igual, no importa quienes sean [They should treat everybody the same, no matter who they are]." While she thought the monitor was ineffective, she did agree with Carolina that the monitor needed more help. She felt that all parents should be volunteering, but thought that more Mexicanas in particular should be helping out in the cafeteria so that they could see both how their children behaved and how the cafeteria monitor disciplined them.

Three families then shared stories of how children misbehaved in the cafeteria while Carolina wrote their concerns about noise, children finishing their food and children hitting each other on the board. As was often the case, when we shared a story that resonated with parents, like Brenda's story of cafeteria discipline, this encouraged other mothers who had shared similar stories with us to share their stories with the whole group.

José García, Walnutbrook's principal then came by for an unexpected visit. He said he was very pleased to see parents here eager to support the school. He then shared a story about the first school in which he had taught and the parent committees he had organized there. He told a story about how one of the committees had gone to the district to demand a full-time instructional specialist to assist students who were struggling to

learn to read. He went on to say that while his experience with cafeterias suggested that Walnutbrook's cafeteria was not out of the ordinary, he appreciated Walnutbrook's parents' feedback on the cafeteria and encouraged them to visit other cafeterias and come back with any new ideas they might have. As Mr. García told his story about parent committees, Elvia and I could see that parents were ready for some concrete ideas. We suggested that parents could visit other schools, provide support in the cafeteria or plan a meeting with the principal to more thoroughly voice their concerns. After deliberating and discussing the options, one group of parents decided to visit other schools. In this house meeting, Elvia and I were successful in using the parents' own stories to find a common concern and encourage them to take action on that concern.

When CA trained leaders to hold the three-part house meetings and individual meetings, CA organizers underlined the importance of getting individuals to tell stories. These stories were seen as the best way to understand leaders' perspectives in the context of their lives, and help them see how they could change that context to get what they wanted from the institution (Chambers, 2004; Rogers, 1990; Shirley, 2009; Su, 2007). Narratives were important in house meetings because they allowed people to learn other people's institutional concerns in the context of their lives and through it, discover common concerns about the institution.

As a researcher, I soon noticed that these narratives also served to inform me about how individuals explained racial relationships at Walnutbrook. For instance Brenda felt that parents could help all children, while José discussed how families worked together regardless of race. Both José and Brenda used stories to describe racial

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relationships. When people used stories to discuss race, I termed these stories *racial narratives*. These racial narratives became a common method for individuals to discuss racial relationships within organizing at Walnutbrook.

Racial narratives often used racial ideological storylines as a frame for their stories, but they were qualitatively different. Racial narratives were flexible stories used to discuss race whose characters, actions and themes changed based on the context of where and why the story was told. Racial storylines, on the other hand, are set story frames that focus on the *explanations* for racial inequities. Within Jose's narrative was a storyline that Mexicanas could individually choose to make decisions at the school. My focus on narratives enabled me to correlate the manner in which people told a story to the way in which people understood race. I listened to their explanations of racial inequities. Brenda, José and Carolina used narratives to minimize the role of race in describing racialized participation. That is, the color blind ideology framed their racial narrative. Because of the prominence of narratives in relational organizing techniques, racial narratives were one of the primary methods through which parents and organizers discussed the racialized relationships at Walnutbrook.

Counter narratives: Alternative explanations of racialized relationships

While most racial narratives used a color blind ideology as their storyline, many narratives offered alternative explanations for racialized participation at Walnutbrook. Most of these narratives were expressed in individual meetings. Paquita expressed a key alternative explanation for racialized participation during an individual meeting with

Ron, the City Alliance educational organizer assigned to our school. This individual meeting occurred soon after our first cafeteria house meeting as Ron was getting to know our parent leaders.

Before the meeting, Paquita asked me about my role as an organizer. I told her that one main point of relational organizing was to teach people how to use their relationships to help people and their community with whatever needs they had. As an example, I asked her to share why she came to school and what needs she thought Walnutbrook had. She said that she came to school for her children because she had seen how badly the school had treated her great grandchildren. I then noted that I had also seen some very oppressive relationships in the school. She agreed saying, "He visto que aquí, como en mi pueblo [en Mexico] a veces las escuelas solo sirven las familias ricas, y eso está mal [I have seen how here, like my town [in Mexico], sometimos the school only serves the rich families and that is wrong]."

Around that time, Ron walked in and introduced himself to Paquita. He then asked if he could meet with her and I told him I could translate since Paquita spoke little English. He began by asking her why she was involved in the school. She said that she was here for her children. He then noted that many people had their children in this school, but she was the only great grandmother that he saw here. There had to be something in her background that made her so passionate about supporting the school. She admitted there was. She said she felt she had raised her children well because they had all gotten jobs and done well in society. But then she had ignored her grandchildren because she felt they were her children's responsibility. But while in her home town of B

in Mexico, she had received a call from a lawyer who said that her grandchild was in a halfway house in Mexico City. Since his parents were ignoring him, they called on her, and she went. As she learned of his struggles, she had learned that her daughter had been ignoring him, a primary reason, she thought, for his involvement in drugs. To compound problems, the Mexican legal system was coming down hard on him for minor violations. Fortunately, with the help of a lawyer who was part of a community organization combating legal abuse in Mexico, she was able to fight the government and she transferred the grandson to her care. Based on this experience, she learned she could make a difference in her grandchildren and now great grandchildren's lives. When her granddaughter had told her that her eldest great grandchild was experiencing difficulty in school, she had immigrated to the United States to make sure that nothing happened to him here at Walnutbrook.

She said that she had struggled with her granddaughter to communicate the importance of being more involved in her children's lives, but that it was tough since she worked two jobs and this made for sixteen-hour days. While she was generally happy with Walnutbrook, there were some things that made her really mad.

With tears in her eyes, she then related a story of how one teacher had stopped her at the end of the school, and in front of all the families and children, had taken her great grandchild's back pack, turned it upside down and threw all the things on the street. The teacher then grabbed some crayons from the bag and said that they belonged to her, shouting in front of everybody that her great grandchild was a liar and a thief. Paquita said she had come from Mexico to defend her children against such treatment. "Quizás

mis nietos son drogadictos y ladrones, pero mis bisnietos solo son niños. No son ni ladrones ni mentirosos. Y no son racistas como esta maestra. [My (adult) grandchildren may be drug addicts and thieves, but my great grandchildren are only children. They are not thieves and liars. And they are not racists like this teacher]." Ron handed her a tissue and said that he could tell that she was an incredible leader and would be honored to work with her on organizing anything she would like. Paquita said she felt that the cafeteria action was going in a positive direction and thanked him for coming.

Individual meetings provided an opportunity to discuss and narrate alternative explanations to racialized relationships at Walnutbrook. In this instance, Ron encouraged Paquita to engage with narratives that ran counter to the desire to just volunteer at Walnutbrook. Initially, Paquita countered with a narrative of wanting to help her children, but Ron insisted by naming Paquita a leader in the school. With this narrative, Paquita was forced to narrate a different story in which she was more active in defending the rights of her grandchild. Since in Critical Race Theory (CRT) literature, counterstories are stories which critique dominant perspectives of race relations (Blum & de la Piedra, 2010; Knight, Norton, Bentley, & Dixon, 2004; Lynn, 1999; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001) I identified these narratives which challenged dominant narratives of color blind volunteerism as *racial counter narratives*. The racial ideologies that framed these counter narratives were *subjugated racial ideologies*. I ran into various kinds of counter narratives and subjugated racial ideologies while I was at Walnutbrook (See Fig. 2.2). These counter narratives were different ways to narrate relationships at Walnutbrook as significantly impacted by race.

Figure 2.2 Examples of the expression of counter narratives and subjugated racial ideologies during school organizing

Counter narrative	Subjugated racial ideology	Example of expression during organizing
Racist	Individual	'Es racista. [She is a racist monitor].' – Brenda
Civil rights	Legal	'We need to take leadership in changing bilingual education policy because it is a right.' – Jose
Oppression	Intersected oppression	'How can we dialogue about the cafeteria's oppression?' – Elvia
Critical race	Endemic	'It will never change. Special education and the schools are just racist. We have to find a way to take that into account.' – Amanda (Special education teacher)
Class systems	Class struggle	'Solo nos quieren mandar a nosotros por ser humildes [They (middle class) just want to tell us what to do because we are poor]' – Paquita

Individual meetings are particularly effective in eliciting counter narratives for two reasons. First, parents said that because these meetings were private, they felt they could discuss controversial topics like race more freely than they could in the public forums of house meetings. Second, leaders noted that they could ask more intimate and probing questions, so that both parents and leaders had time to think about alternative explanations to racialized participation. In Paquita's individual meeting, Ron pushed Paquita to go beyond just color blind, 'helping all our children' explanations for

participation, allowing for counter narratives of racist teachers and classed legal systems to explain her participation at the school.

At the same time, Walnutbrook parent leaders and organizers often expressed narratives that were both consistent and critical of the color blind parent ideology. For example, José specifically narrated stories about Mexicanas volunteering throughout his career as a teacher and an administrator. Yet, these Mexicana volunteers were also the parent leaders who advocated for their children as exemplified by the story of their action to bring a reading specialist to their school. Within Jose's narratives, Mexicana parents were both the racialized volunteers of the PI narrative and school leaders who fought schools for their children's academics. Throughout our interactions, counter narratives of challenging color blind participation framed school organizing, but they were also framed with other narratives, which were dominated by the color blind ideology.

Creating color-blind consensus: Narrating agreement between contested narratives

As families continued to be excited about the cafeteria action, Elvia and I invited parents to a 'pre-meeting' to plan the next larger house meeting and involve Mexicana and other parents more directly in planning the organizing action. Initially, only two parents volunteered, but on the day of the pre-meeting nine mothers showed up eager to 'get something done', as Brenda said. During this planning meeting, Ron, Elvia and I struggled to teach the mothers how to narrate the meeting among the contested narratives in the action. Ultimately, parents successfully led the cafeteria meeting based on a color blind narrative upon which they all agreed.

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By this point in the cafeteria action, Carolina, Brenda and Paquita had stepped up to be parent leaders. They had expressed their concerns about the cafeteria and started to discuss racial critiques about their role in the decision making of the cafeteria. These critiques and narratives were inconsistent and varied. There would be times Brenda would argue for a greater say in how the cafeteria was run and times when she would argue for more volunteers to do whatever the principal requested that they do. There were times when Paquita and Carolina agreed that the way that the monitor was treating them was racialized and there were times that they vehemently disagreed about whether or not it was important to involve a racially representative group of families in the cafeteria action. At one time or another, Elvia and I supported and argued against volunteering and the colorblind narratives that supported racialized volunteering initiatives. We were often uncertain whether we should be arguing for or against a certain course of action. Racial narratives within the cafeteria action were contested.

At the next pre-meeting, Ron explained how personal stories were powerful in getting our concerns across. Elvia added that this was an important form of family participation during meetings because it was through stories that parents expressed their concerns. She asked if there was anyone who had stories they wanted to share about the cafeteria. Brenda spoke up. She said that she had many concerns about the cafeteria because she had seen so many things that bothered her there. For instance, just last week when she was eating with her daughter, two boys had started to push each other at an adjacent table. She didn't know what to do. Even worse, when Sonia came and told them to stop they wouldn't listen to her. The monitor finally separated them, but Brenda was

concerned that if they didn't listen to the monitor, they would not be expected to listen to her either. She did not know what she could do as a parent volunteer.

At this, Paquita agreed. She then repeated her story of the unequal treatment of her great grandchildren. She ended the story this time though by saying that she had tried to work with Sonia, but that Sonia had stopped listening to her, and she didn't feel respected as a parent volunteer. Furthermore, she had seen how Sonia was treating other Mexicana parents, which amounted to her just brusquely telling them what to do This was in sharp contrast to the way the monitor very respectfully spoke to white volunteers. While Paquita wanted Mexicana parents to come volunteer, she made it clear that she understood why they had stopped coming. She wasn't sure whether she or other Mexicanas could be helpful as parent volunteers with Sonia as a monitor.

At this, Carolina interjected. She said that she found that there were many important things that she thought parents could do, from helping a child to eat to helping them just tie their shoe. She said that what seemed like a small action could make a big difference. She explained that just last week, she saw that the kids were waiting for their teacher in line at the cafeteria door after eating and were playing, shouting and running around. She noticed one little boy who had his shoes untied and she asked if she could tie them for him. As she sat down with him to tie his shoes, all the other boys then went to sit down in line next to her. Soon, the teacher came and picked up the children. "Ese día sentí que hice una diferencia para todos los niños, no solo para el niño que tuvo los zapatos desamarrados [That day, I felt I had made a difference for all the children and not just for the child with the untied shoelace]".

After Carolina's story, other mothers at the meetings shared their own story about their experiences in the cafeteria with the person next to them, provoking side conversations about lack of cafeteria discipline and how much the cafeteria needed to change. The themes of their stories included the need for explicit rules to support the monitor, incentives or prizes to classrooms that behaved and specific attention to behavior at breakfast. We wrote down these suggestions to be covered at the upcoming house meeting and concluded the pre-meeting.

Brenda, Carolina and another mother continued talking after the meeting had been adjourned, so I invited them to stay and evaluate the meeting. Elvia thought we had to be more explicit about how parents could help. She noted: "Es importante que padres se sienten que pueden ayudar [It's important that parents feel like they can help]." All three parents agreed that they wanted more families to be involved in the cafeteria because they saw the children behave so much better when parents were present. We then asked Brenda and Carolina to lead the next meeting and to prepare questions and stories with which to prompt families to share their own stories about the cafeteria.

Brenda and Carolina led a house meeting the next week with sixteen participants that included Mr. García, the principal, cafeteria staff and over a dozen parents. They began the meeting by sharing stories about parents working with staff to improve behavior, including Carolina's shoe-tying story. While staff was initially skeptical about the changes, other parents shared their stories about wanting to help make the cafeteria a happier and healthier space for their children. Mr. García eventually promised to remind teachers to come help with discipline. At this, Carolina urged the other parents to back up

their words of wanting to help by volunteering at the cafeteria. We sent around a sign-up form and finished the meeting. In the post-meeting, Carolina and Brenda expressed joy at being able to convince so many parents to join them in becoming involved in the cafeteria.

Part of the success of these meetings for parents was that they had gotten other parents to agree with them in articulating and supporting the concept that 'all parent could help'. This phrase was particularly potent when parents expressed it because it supported parents' desires to be involved. This concept of the need for *parental involvement (PI)* has been pervasive in school relationships with Latino families. (Auerbach, 2007; Delgado Gaitan, 2004; Reynolds & Clements, 2005; Valdés, 1996). This concept was supported at Walnutbrook through multiple parent meetings, conversations as well as PSS district norms, which required that records be kept of how many parents were 'involved' at Walnutbrook. Parents were repeatedly told that they could best help the school by being involved. Stated as a color blind narrative in which presenters, teachers and other parents advocated for the involvement for *all* families, Elvia and parents directed the narrative mostly towards other Latino parents. Because of the prevalence and district support for this concept, I considered the PI narrative as the dominant racial narrative at Walnutbrook. When Brenda, Carolina and Paquita called for all parents to volunteer, they were narrating a version of this dominant PI narrative.

Initially, parents had shared contested narratives about what they should do in the cafeteria. Carolina had shared a PI narrative about how they could help all children while Paquita had shared a story in which Sonia had racialized Mexicana volunteers by rudely

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telling them what to do. Brenda's story questioned parents' ability to help, unsure whether they were being racialized or not. Parents disagreed about racialized relationships at Walnutbrook and thus disagreed about what they wanted to do. To break this stalemate, Ron, Elvia and I encouraged them to tell stories around which they could agree. We forced narrative consensus. The consensus the parents found was to promote the concept of 'all just wanting to help', using stories about how each person helped.

As others have noted (Apple, 2004; Pollock, 2004), in forging consensus, differences in perception and systemic action are often not addressed. One of the easier ways for parents to come to consensus about the house meeting story was to rely on their version of the PI color blind narrative of 'all wanting to help'. Finding consensus was an important part of our relational organizing practices because we wanted to identify issues, narratives and possible solutions in which different sides could come together and collaborate. More often than not, the result of this forced consensus was a return to the familiar institutional color blind narratives which framed the institution of which we were all a part.

Differential techniques: Counter narratives inform parents' actions

For much of the cafeteria action, both organizers and parents continued to participate in racial narratives that promoted volunteerism. There were moments when this form of volunteering was challenged. In the next section, I describe how Paquita challenged this racialized participation and Carolina and Brenda would respond by collectively counter narrating an organizing response.

After this cafeteria meeting, parents began to volunteer regularly in the cafeteria but their enthusiasm was short-lived. After two weeks, Paquita, Brenda, Carolina and three other mothers were the only ones who volunteered regularly. In a planning session three weeks later, Brenda and Paquita asked for help in getting more volunteers to go to the cafeteria, so I asked them to tell me why people had stopped volunteering, asking them to focus on the cafeteria as an oppressive system. Paquita noted that Sonia continued to yell at both parent volunteers and children. She said that just last week she had gone to volunteer and Sonia had gotten mad at her for conversing with the children. Brenda agreed that Sonia was disrespectful to the parents.

 I asked them to focus on the cafeteria as a system needing a change of rules. Paquita, returning to her analysis of the monitor said, 'Es racista, Cris, lo sabes. Hemos hablado de esto. Como la maestra de [mi bisnieto]. Sonia está cuidando nuestros hijos y está espantando las otras madres. Por lo menos gente sigue viniendo aunque esté aquí. [She is racist. You know, Chris, we have talked about this. Just like my great grandchild's teacher. Sonia is taking care of our children and she is scaring away the other mothers. At least people still come even though she is here'] Brenda reluctantly agreed and she suggested that we could meet with Sonia to try to talk through our problems. I suggested Carolina as a good person who might find a way to dialogue with her. We finished the meeting with Brenda promising to get Carolina to the next meeting to discuss our approaches to deal with this cafeteria staff member.

When I returned to Walnutbrook the next week, Brenda told me that Paquita had had a fight with the cafeteria staff and the monitor had left, leaving Walnutbrook without

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a cafeteria monitor. To make matters worse, middle class families and teachers now blamed Paquita for the fact that now the school had no monitor at all. I met Carolina in front of the auditorium. She was calming Paquita down and told her that parents had no right to blame her. Paquita replied that all that she had done was to tell the staff that they were racist so that they would stop getting angry at her children and all the Black and Latino boys. I told Paquita that she shouldn't be blamed, but that parents should instead take their concerns to José, since we were supposed to have a cafeteria meeting the next day. Carolina then interrupted me and said that the issue wasn't about who to blame, but rather about taking care of the children. There were many people being hurt by the cafeteria, including the silent girls being hit, the kids being screamed at and the families who were being reprimanded by staff. She then reminded us of the stories of how parents had made the children happy with their presence in the cafeteria. Brenda then told Paquita that it wasn't about the parents who had tried to blame her, but that they had supported each other in the face of staff. A growing number of leaders knew how the staff treated the parents and the children and they knew that she had done what she had done to defend the kids. Carolina agreed and said that we were all going to take responsibility to help the kids.

When I arrived the next day, Brenda met me at the door and asked if she should talk to Mr. García about coming to the cafeteria meeting that morning. I encouraged her to invite him and she returned a short while later saying that he was going to attend. He had told her to encourage other mothers to attend the meeting. I then observed Brenda talking to all the families waiting for school to start. In less than half an hour, I was

sitting with her in a meeting with more than twenty people, including José and Elvia. Brenda asked me to lead the meeting so I began by asking how they wanted to structure the meeting. Carolina noted that we needed to address the problem directly and not discuss meeting structures.

Carolina then said that the parents should move forward and not look back. Brenda added that it was important for families to understand that it wasn't Paquita's fault that the monitor left. She then asked Mr. García why the monitor had left. José said he could not discuss the specifics of personnel matters, but that the monitor had been asked to leave because she was not following school policies. He promised that school staff would cover the cafeteria and the children would be safe. At this, Brenda said we had to help the school staff until monitors could be hired. I helped her pass around a calendar to sign up more volunteers. The meeting ended as parents signed up to volunteer in the cafeteria until the volunteer sign up sheets filled up. In the post-meeting, Brenda, Carolina and Paquita expressed hope and happiness that they had helped to deal with this crisis.

In the cafeteria action, parents met their initial goal, which was to unite around a common concern and improve the situation. In fact, they had succeeded several times during the cafeteria action. They advocated for a new cafeteria behavior policy, brought more volunteers into the cafeteria and got promises for a greater degree of control over students during lunch. Most of these actions though were narrated through a color blind PI narrative in which all parents have equitable access to helping the school.

These final two actions though, were informed by counter narratives which critiqued this concept of equitable parent access to decision making. When Paquita went to confront Sonia, her action was based on her counter narrative that Sonia was racist. When Carolina and Brenda set up a meeting to defend Paquita, they acted on a counter narrative that not all parents were treated the same. Neither of these actions were scripted relational organizing practices, but rather modified relational organizing practices that addressed a specific oppressive situation. Paquita modified individual meetings to speak to Sonia by being more direct in her dialogue and challenging the monitor to change her racialized actions towards students and other parents. Carolina and Brenda modified house meetings by specifically addressing a racialized attack on Paquita. Because of these modifications, I considered these *differential techniques*. There were two aspects of these actions which emphasized their differential nature. First, the practices changed when the oppression changed. When Sonia and parents became hostile, leaders stopped trying to work with the system and rather confronted it. Secondly, their techniques addressed the specific kind of oppression they were facing. So instead of just discussing race or class, Carolina and Brenda named it as an attack on working class Latinas who were volunteering. This kind of attack meant that they needed to get administrative support to challenge the class elements and focus the narratives on students and parents as people to humanize the racialized elements. In this way, differential techniques were able to adapt to the intersecting, changing elements of oppressive systems within the schooling institutions.

Conclusion: Contested racial narratives within relational organizing

In the cafeteria action, Latina parent leaders wanted to involve all parents in an action to help the school. They used racial narratives that described the moments when they felt they were helping in the cafeteria. Yet these color blind narratives focused on the need for parents to volunteer. They ignored the fact that their decisions failed to impact institutional systems in the cafeteria. It wasn't until Paquita critiqued why she felt disrespected in the cafeteria that parents created counter narratives that imagined different actions that they could take in the cafeteria.

The cafeteria action provides a good example of the role of contested racial narratives in relational organizing. Organizers and leaders systemically searched for narratives through individual and house meetings. Most of these narratives were dominant narratives that were framed by the dominant color blind racial ideology because the prominent institutional systems in school repeated color blind explanations and desires for everybody to work together. Again these narratives failed to take into account the privileged stratification that made equitable access to decision making impossible.

Some individuals often expressed counter narratives based on subjugated ideologies, especially in the relative privacy of individual meetings. Once these narratives were expressed, organizers and other leaders engaged with leaders' counter narratives in order to imagine alternative systems that addressed these racial critiques. We engaged with Paquita in critique by imagining dialogue with Sofia. After Sofia resigned, Carolina and Brenda imagined a meeting in which Paquita's concerns were addressed publicly. This proposed call for dialogue and public conversation are examples of differential

techniques that these working class Latina leaders envisioned to address a specific situation. More often than not, organizers and leaders proposed actions based on color blind narratives. There were moments, however, when we engaged with Latina leaders' counter narratives and supported the differential techniques they provoked. These were the moments when we challenged the racial systems of which we were a part.

In each of the next four chapter of this dissertation, I describe an action in which working class Latina leaders used a variety of relational organizing and differential techniques to challenge specific racial systems at Walnutbrook. These actions and techniques represent the diversity of the challenges that Latina leaders had to address and the variety of techniques that they used to address them.

In chapters 3 and 4, I spotlight the two main kinds of actions in which Latina leaders engaged: institutional actions, which focused on combating systemic inequities and relational actions, which focused on building more equitable relationships among individuals. In chapter 3, I spotlight an institutional organizing action. This action is focused on challenging parent/teacher-racialized relationships while planning a school garden. In chapter 4, Latina leaders focus on a relational action in a bilingual pre-kindergarten classroom. This action attempts to build unity across the diversity within the Latino community.

In chapters 5 and 6, I spotlight the breadth of relational organizing at Walnutbrook. Chapter 5 provides an example of a district-wide action in which Latina leaders addressed racial narratives in multiple contexts to improve the bilingual program.

In Chapter 6, the scope of the organizing focuses on the individual. In this action, a

Latina leader tries to help a friend get special education services for her child, ultimately

challenging the racial systems at an individualized level.

In all these action, the ways in which Latina parents negotiate the color blind and

subjugated ideologies within the narratives in the organizing actions impact how they

challenge the racial systems at Walnutbrook. These actions provide a variety of

challenges for Latina leaders, as they find ways to use the techniques of relational

organizing and their own differential techniques to address these challenges.

Chapter 3 - The Huerta Action: Acting to Create Spaces Based on Racial Counter Narratives

In this chapter, I describe an institutional action in which working class Latina leaders worked with middle class, white parents and Walnutbrook teachers to plant several gardens at the school. This garden action represented an attempt by teachers and parents to challenge institutional systems in which teachers held inequitable control over the curricular systems at the school. Initially proposed as a community-curricular partnership, the gardens became a site of contested narratives of the different kinds of curricular actions which teachers and parents wanted to emerge from the school. In the process, Latina narratives and desires to create a garden that would teach their children about their rural, Mexican traditions got lost in the action.

Acting on her own counter narrative, a Latina leader planted a garden based on what she narrated a school garden should be. She challenged color blind narratives of a false, institutional inclusivity. Unfortunately, removing herself institutionally from the sites of the other contested narratives of the garden had its consequences. By focusing on how Latina leaders created and acted around their own narratives in relation to other dominant, color blind narratives, I describe some of the dilemmas that Latina leaders confronted in deciding whether to participate in color blind narratives with teachers or create their own actions based on their own counter narratives.

The three garden narratives at Walnutbrook

During my individual meetings with Paquita and other rural, Latina parents, I heard families share how much they enjoyed planting gardens and working with the earth. In fact, this lack of access to horticulture was a big disadvantage to their urban life in the United States, especially since the majority of them lived in apartments and had little access to their own land. In my individual meetings with Walnutbrook teachers and parents, I found that middle class, white and Latino parents and teachers were also interested in creating a garden at Walnutbrook, but theirs would be a hands-on garden created to enhance the science curriculum. There were in fact three visions for a garden at the school: Latino parents' vision to have a garden to teach their children about Mexican horticulture, a garden to improve science TAKS testing scores and a garden to provide a hands-on curriculum. Furthermore, I found that each of these visions had a different set of narratives that explained why each garden was important.

Paquita's garden vision was representative of many immigrant parents who had grown up in rural Mexico and wanted to share their knowledge of gardening and taking care of the earth with their children. For instance, Paquita discussed how much her great grandchildren missed by growing up in the city without the opportunity to learn about plants and animals. While the heart of it was how much she enjoyed feeling she had something to teach her children, as opposed to English, reading and writing of which she knew little, she was also able to discuss how important it was for the children to learn about the cycle of the Earth, respect for the environment and the responsibility of taking care of a growing community, all aspects she felt they lost in the city. Different Mexicana

families discussed this desire to share their Mexican gardening practices with their children using slightly different stories. For example, one mother discussed how she remembered how proud she felt of a tree that her husband had planted at Walnutbrook ten years earlier. She saw this tree as a living symbol of her connection to and inclusion in the Walnutbrook community. Despite these differences, all these stories shared the vision of planting a garden like the huertas (vegetable gardens) they had planted in Mexico. I considered this collection of stories as different versions of what I call a *huerta narrative* at Walnutbrook.

The dominant garden narrative at Walnutbrook, though, had little to do with Mexican gardening and mostly to do with supporting the science TAKS[1] test. This was because the TAKS test, the state mandated standardized test, was so important to teachers at Walnutbrook. Schools were given one of four state rankings: 'unacceptable', 'acceptable', 'recognized' or 'exemplary', based on how their students performed on the TAKS test. Walnutbrook had been rated "acceptable" for the last five years and José and many teachers expressed a desire for the school to move up in ranking and be considered "recognized". In order for a school to be considered *acceptable*, 50% of their students had to pass the science test, 70% pass the reading test, 70% pass the writing test and 55% pass the math test (TEA, 2009). In order to be considered *recognized*, 75% of the students had to pass *all* the tests. Walnutbrook teachers and principal wanted to improve the school's testing passing rate because they said they felt pressured by district and community members to improve their school ranking. In the previous year, more than

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[1] The Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) was the current state adopted standardize test in Texas at the time.

75% of the Walnutbrook students passed the reading, writing and math tests, but not the science tests, meaning that Walnutbrook only had to improve science test scores to be a recognized school.

Upper grade teachers, those who taught third, fourth and fifth grades, though, were the only ones to administer the TAKS test. Furthermore, the science TAKS test was only administered in fifth grade. Upper grade teachers and administrators, citing the pressure they felt for their students to do well in the TAKS, told me that the garden should be used as a method to improve students' science TAKS scores. That is, those teachers who were most affected by the state science standardized tests wanted relational organizing to prioritize supporting science academically because their students were not scoring high enough in that test. As Karen, a third grade teacher put it, "We need the most help in our science scores, so we need resources to make sure our science test scores go up." Because participants who discussed this perspective backed up their reasons with stories emphasizing the importance of the TAKS, I thought of this as the TAKS narrative.

Many Mexicana families also supported the TAKS narrative. There was a group of families who had attended many sessions designed to inform parents about the TAKS. In these sessions, they had learned how important it was that students score well in the TAKS tests so that they would be placed in advanced academic classes. Sofia a long-time Walnutbrook parent whose youngest children were in pre-kindergarten and first grade, discussed how important the TAKS had become for her older children who were currently in high school and college. She told the story of how her older children had done so well in the TAKS that they had been placed in college preparatory classes, which

prepared them to attend the university. To her, her children doing well on the TAKS meant that the school prepared them for college. Other Mexicana mothers provided a different narrative about the importance of TAKS in schools. Many had grown up in the United States and had not done well in the TAKS. They felt that the school had not prepared them for the TAKS and this led to a cycle of poor academic performance. Both the narratives of TAKS as college preparatory or as a barrier to quality schooling were common among many working class, Mexicano families. In both cases, families prioritized performing well in the TAKS, so the garden seemed like a good idea to improve science TAKS scores.

The third reason given for planting a garden was as a way to provide an alternative curriculum to what teachers and parents felt was a test-based curriculum. Because most people who discussed this perspective described creating the garden as fighting the TAKS emphasis in schools, I thought of this narrative as the anti-TAKS narrative. Amanda Martinez, a special education teacher best articulated this perspective when she described how one of her special education students was having a hard time learning science because it was so book-based. She was hoping that by planting a garden, teachers would change their practices so that they would have a more hands-on approach to science that would be more conducive to many of her special education students' styles of learning.

Many middle class, white families also supported and shared with me a version of the anti-TAKS garden narrative. Melinda, for instance, discussed how when she talked to her middle class friends, they told her stories about how much their children enjoyed

working in their school garden. Melinda worked with her own children in a garden at home and could see how much they enjoyed that time with her. At the same time, she heard stories of children in the upper grades starting to dislike school because they were spending too much time preparing for the TAKS. Based on their own experience gardening with their children and their conversations with other parents, many white, middle class families wanted a garden so that their children would enjoy learning about science.

When Paquita and I started to talk with different members of the Walnutbrook community about the possibility of doing a garden at Walnutbrook, we found that there was a lot of support for the idea. But rather than a single vision for a garden, there were three different visions. Teachers and families who felt pressured by the TAKS test shared stories about how success or failure in the TAKS test had impacted their lives. Families and teachers who knew mainly middle class schools in which gardens were used for hands-on learning shared stories about how much their children and students enjoyed gardening. Finally, Mexicana families who had grown up gardening in rural Mexico shared stories about how gardens helped pass on their families' values. Just because Paquita and I had found an organizing action that interested a broad Walnutbrook community did not mean that other members of the school community were interested in taking that action in the same direction as working class Latinas.

Getting the garden going: Collecting an archive of counter narratives

When Paquita and I learned that there were different ideas of what a garden should look like, I talked with her about the possibility of getting a meeting together to promote a garden in which Latinas and teachers could work together. I was heartened by the fact that there was such a strong anti-TAKS narrative in which teachers wanted to work with parents. Furthermore, I had found out that teachers had already been trying to get a garden going for quite some time. Third grade teachers already did an annual garden that was part of their science curriculum. Two other teachers had applied for a grant to help them create a school-wide garden, which all teachers could use as part of their curriculum. Yet each of these efforts was mostly led by a single individual and the gardens were currently stalled as the individuals waited for a grant to go through or could not work on the garden at the moment because they were busy with other projects. Most importantly, there was little group coordination or attempts to involve parents in these efforts. I hoped that by getting everyone to meet, the school would better coordinate their efforts and include both white and Latino parent ideas in their gardens.

When I told Paquita and her friends about teachers' interest in a garden, she said that she had been getting excited about the garden also. She reminisced that when she lived in Mexico, she helped the village school plant a garden and care for their plants. The garden not only made the school look nice, but it was also used for their science lessons. When I asked her if we could use family and teachers' interests to get such a garden going at Walnutbrook, she said that she wasn't sure because most of the families I had mentioned as those who had expressed interest were white parents and teachers she didn't know. I suggested that she have individual meetings with Melinda and other white

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parents as a way to get to know them better. She said that she was not willing to have individual meetings with teachers and these white families because all they did was tell you what to do and they never listened to your advice. I asked her whether she wasn't criticizing a little too harshly and over generalizing. She told me, "No estoy criticando, solo te estoy diciendo las cosas como son [I am not criticizing, I'm only telling it like it is.]." I told her that I was trying to get a garden meeting together and that I hoped she might make it to the meeting anyway. She said she might make it if her friends went and as a way to support my actions at Walnutbrook.

When Paquita said she would not host the meeting, I went to other teachers and parents who had expressed interest in the garden. After a couple individual meetings, Melinda finally volunteered to lead the school-wide garden campaign. When she first presented the idea to other teachers, she was not very successful as each teacher told her to go talk to another teacher because their garden was not ready or they did not know how to involve the parents. Despite this, Melinda said she had learned quite a bit in the process. Each teacher had told her their vision of the garden and connected it to gardens they had had at Walnutbrook five to ten years previously. She said in these discussions she had preferred Amanda's and the lower grade teachers' discussions of hands-on gardens, but in the end she just wanted to support all the teachers in their efforts to get a garden going. She added that she didn't really understand the academic differences among the different gardens. "Amanda talked about her garden and I thought 'That's great! We can teach them about environmentalism. Get then out of the classroom instead of just sitting around all day'… Get them to do hands-on learning… but there's tension

among the teachers that I don't quite understand. I just want to help them with a garden."
I encouraged Melinda to just set a meeting date, which she did.

As the meeting date approached, I met with Melinda to make sure that the different people who were interested in a garden were represented. I found out that while she had let the predominately white membership of the Parent Teacher Association know about the meeting, she had talked to few Mexicana mothers. She said that it had been such a struggle just to get the teachers to meet that she has been spending most of her time talking with teachers. Furthermore, she was not comfortable speaking in Spanish and didn't know how to contact the people I had recommended. Later that day, I let Paquita and her friends know of the meeting date. Much like the previous time I asked them, they said they might come but gave no promises.

Paquita was wary of coming because she already had extensive experiences of working with white families and not being listened to. In fact, Melinda's reluctance to invite and talk with Paquita and other Latinas about the meeting fit right into these life experiences. Melinda reiterated her reluctance by saying that she struggled enough in getting other teachers to come, and that left little time to also struggle with Latino families. She had prioritized getting other teachers and white families to come over getting Latino families to attend. Melinda had talked to the people with whom she felt most comfortable. In the process, she learned that this group shared an anti-TAKS narrative vision of the garden. That is, while telling different stories, these narratives shared the theme of how mostly lower grade teachers and middle class, white families had heard or experienced positive socio-emotional development using a school-wide

hands-on garden. In the tradition of Halberstam (2005), following Cvetkovich (2003) I call these collections of narratives an *archive*. An archive was a collection of stories that a subjugated group used to describe their own existence and feelings within society. This archive united this group because they shared and discussed these narratives as ways of making sense of their lives. For Melinda, who had been mostly working on a hands-on garden in isolation, learning that there was a community at Walnutbrook that shared her gardening vision was an uplifting experience. Yet in talking to only people with whom she felt comfortable, she failed to realize that there were other subjugated garden narratives at Walnutbrook, including the huerta narrative. While Melinda was able to organize Walnutbrook around a subjugated garden archive that included parent and teacher voices, she had excluded Latina parent narratives in the archive.

The anti-TAKS garden meeting

This lack of Latina narratives would have an impact on the garden house meeting Melinda organized. The day of the meeting, I first met with Melinda and Amanda, the Special Education specialist who had offered to help with the meeting. Amanda was concerned that teachers would take the opportunity to impose TAKS standards on the garden and not allow the garden to be fun for the children and for parents. Melinda said that while she agreed, she only hoped people came and that they could find a way to work together. I expressed concern that Latina parents be involved in the garden planning process. They both agreed and asked me to be in charge of making sure that Latina concerns were addressed. While Amanda and Melinda were sympathetic to making sure

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that Mexicana voices were present in creating a parent-teacher garden, they were more concerned that other teachers and administrators might impose a TAKS vision on the garden which, for them, would have contradicted their desire for a garden.

Melinda's objective of having a large turnout was a met. Five families, including Paquita and two of her friends, and eight teachers attended this meeting, making this the largest joint parent-teacher meeting held up to that point. Amanda began the meeting by welcoming everybody and saying that she was glad that they decided to attend. She then briefly discussed the different gardening projects teachers had begun, including a joint parent-teacher garden near the library they were proposing. After finishing her introductory presentation, she asked if there were any questions or comments about the different projects.

Most of the resulting comments were positive. Parents and teachers praised the fact that we were finally talking about the garden and some added that they had been working on this for years. My concern about the exclusionary nature of the way people were or were not informed of the meeting, and in my role as an organizer/advocate for Latina families I then asked how the garden would impact academics, especially as it related to racial and social equity. I wanted to make sure that the garden would meet the needs of all students. Karen, the third grade teacher, tried to answer my question by saying that the third grade garden had been teaching both science and literacy for years and maybe we could discuss the best practices to make the garden effective in our classroom. José said that it was a question that required some thought and we should move on.

Sofia spoke up and said she wanted to make sure that the garden helped the students with their TAKS. At this, another lower grade teacher said that that was a concern of teachers, but that teachers would discuss it another time. They wanted to take advantage of the parents' presence to plan the garden that they could work on together.

Melinda responded by saying that they only wanted to support the teachers. She then said she had met with the librarian and they had discussed the idea of making a mural or getting some nice lawn chairs to sit in, but that they were still in the planning stages. Some parents and teachers quickly agreed that this would be a nice idea and suggested bringing in some potted plants to place in the space just outside the library. At this, Paquita, for whom I had been translating the entire meeting, asked me if she could make a comment. I said of course, waving to Melinda to get permission to speak. Through me, Paquita offered to bring flowers and asked if we had tools to transplant the flowers and a hose to water them. Amanda said that that was probably something she had to discuss with the librarian who suggested they meet following week and the parents agreed.

Amanda ended the meeting by asking for comments. Participants were overwhelmingly positive about the meeting. Carolina, one of Paquita's friends who had been silent throughout the meeting, was the last one to speak, saying in English, "I am so happy to see the garden… this way I know our children will learn how to take care of Mother Earth." Parents and teachers applauded at this comment. Amanda smiled and once again thanked parents and teachers for taking time to come together and work together to improve Walnutbrook. As I left, I asked Paquita and Carolina what they

thought of the meeting and they were both very pleased. Paquita said that she was excited to be able to work with teachers on the library garden.

For Amanda and Melinda, and most of the teachers and parents who participated, the garden meeting was a success because it successfully proposed an academic project that did not have the TAKS at its core. They created an organizing space in which their narrative of creating a hands-on garden was the dominant narrative. Holland, et. al. (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998; Holland & Lave, 2001) have discussed how groups of individuals have created, or *authored*, specific contexts in which their narratives provided the dominant guides for what actions tended to take place in these contexts, or *figured worlds.* Amanda and Melinda authored a garden figured world in which their hands-on garden guided the kinds of gardens which parents and teachers could work on together.

Working class Latinas' huerta narratives did not play a large role in this figured world of garden organizing. In fact, Melinda and Amanda were so concerned about the dominant TAKS narrative within the Walnutbrook figured world that their time and energy was spent making sure that they promoted hands-on gardening. In the process, they neither learned about nor promoted Paquita's and Carolina's huerta narrative.

Working on the garden in the anti-TAKS figured world

While Paquita and Carolina at first did not mind the lack of a huerta narrative, as soon as Paquita and Carolina started to work on the garden, the absence of a huerta narrative would prove problematic. After a planning meeting with staff and faculty in the

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library, Melinda, Paquita and a couple of other parents decide to also plant flowers in the front of the school. They set the date to plant in the front of the school together as the following Friday. Paquita, Melinda and I invited mothers from the parent group and six Latina and three white parents showed up to plant flowers in the front flowerbeds on that Friday. Two raised flowerbeds were on either side of the front door, with two long rows of mulched earth with small bushes extending along each side of the front walls of Walnutbrook. The morning was unseasonably cold and a fine mist covered the flower beds as parents huddled together, shivering while they waited for instructions on what to do.

Paquita arrived with two dozen pansies, a couple of potted cacti and some aloe vera. Melinda brought a truck full of shovels, hoes and garden trowels and four small bushes. Paquita took a small trowel and went straight to work on one of the front flowerbeds. She dug holes quickly and took out a pansy and covered its roots. She moved a few feet to her left and started work on another pansy. Slowly, Mexicana parents approached Paquita and asked her what she wanted them to do, and she told them to grab a stick or a trowel and to start planting. Half of the mothers had planted in Mexico and soon took six pansies to one of the long mulched rows and started to plant over there. The other two mothers, who had never planted flowers before, kneeled around Paquita and tried to follow her quick movements as they tried to plant their one pansy. The mothers in the long row joked that Paquita would finish before they even they got started. As they worked together they discussed the different methods they had used to plant huertas in their own homes in Mexico.

Melinda said she did not want to plant her bushes until the staff told her where they wanted her to plant them, and was waiting for Jose to get out of a meeting. As they waited, Melinda and her two white friends shared how they planted gardens with their children. Once all the pansies were planted and Jose still did not show up, the white parents asked me what they could do. I told them to ask Paquita. When they said they didn't speak enough Spanish, I reminded them that several of the mothers spoke English and that they could find someone to translate. Melinda would eventually get one of the mothers assisting Paquita to help them translate, but all Paquita said was to plant the bushes and cacti wherever they thought it looked best. She also said that she was planning to bring roses and plant them when it was a little warmer. This concerned Melinda's friends because they thought the thorns in the cacti or the roses might hurt the children. As they tried to convince Paquita to not plant the roses, José finally came out and asked them how things were going. Melinda explained that Paquita wanted to plant roses and that they were trying to convince her not to, but they weren't sure she understood. José said that whatever they planted was fine, as long as they understood that they might have to move them later if it went against district regulations. At this, Melinda nodded and took out her two bushes. She pointed to four spots in the front beds and José nodded. With the help of the other mothers, all the bushes were planted within half an hour and we went into the school for some hot coffee.

The following week, Paquita and Carolina met me at the door to talk to me about the garden. They told me that Paquita had planted several rose bushes, but that when she returned they had been moved. While she was sort of expecting that, there were other

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difficulties to deal with. First, they didn't have access to a key to the garden shed to get tools she needed. Second, they had to ask for water from a n next door neighbor of the school because they didn't have access to the water key (a special screwdriver that opened the outside faucets) they needed to open the faucets outside of the school. Finally, they had planned on planting the roses right where the teachers asked them in the middle of the bed, but that Melinda and others had already planted their bushes there. In fact, when the grounds crew replanted their roses, they had moved Melinda's bushes to make room for her roses. It seemed that whatever Melinda wanted she got, but when they tried to plant their garden, they encountered many bureaucratic obstacles.

Paquita and Carolina wanted to help plant the garden, but this wasn't what they were expecting. They just felt they couldn't do what they had wanted to with the garden. They had to seek permission to do anything in the garden, and even when they asked, the school staff was not cooperative with their gardening goals. Paquita and Carolina had invited their children to come and help them, but when they came they didn't have access to tools or anything. The same happened to other Mexicana mothers who had come to help. They asked mothers to come and help them and the mothers had told Paquita and Carolina that they didn't want to come again because no one took their suggestions seriously. Furthermore, they saw how the white parents ignored Paquita and they didn't want to be disrespected that way. When I encouraged Paquita and Carolina to go and talk to Melinda about their concerns, they said that Melinda did not listen to them. When I said that she listened to me, they both almost shouted, "Porque eres tú. Tu eres anglo. Tú tienes educación. A nosotras no nos hacen caso [It's because it is you. You are white.

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You are educated. They don't pay attention to us]." After this, I promised to speak to Melinda for them.

On Wednesday during lunch, I saw Melinda, her husband and younger son planting more bushes. I stopped by and asked if I could help. As I worked with her, I ask her if the garden was coming out like she hoped. Pointing to her family, she said that it was providing a way for all her family to feel like they contributed to the school. I told her that I had also heard some complaints about how the roses were moved and asked her whether she had heard anything. She said that she had not. I then added that parents wanted access to a key for the garden shed to get tools and water for the times when they wanted to garden. She said she had heard that parents were frustrated, but wished that they had talked to her. She said that the key for the garden was available in the office, and she was sure she could make the water key available also. Soon after, José came out to talk to Melinda and she asked if a water key could be made available. She then asked if they could put the gardening days on the school calendar next to the office. He encouraged her to and she told him that the next meeting would be on Friday. I asked her if she could communicate this to Paquita. She said that that was one of the reasons she wanted to put it on the calendar. So everyone would know. I then said that it would mean a lot if she communicated this directly to her, especially since Paquita couldn't read. Melinda promised to, but said she was frustrated, not realizing how difficult it would be to communicate with the families.

Melinda said she was also frustrated because she provided a solution that she thought was democratic and open to all families. By putting material with the office, she

was offering a bureaucratic mechanism through which most families had access to the garden tools. In fact, from meeting dates to knowing what to plant, Melinda and most white parents said they preferred to work through Walnutbrook's staff. Yet, as several theorists have pointed out (Apple, 2004; Larson & Ovando, 2001), staff and bureaucracies are not democratically available to all. Many Mexicana families did not feel they understood the bureaucracy. More importantly, Paquita and most families did not feel as comfortable coming and talking to Jose and the office staff any time they had questions about the garden. They recognized that a key aspect of Walnutbrook's bureaucracy was getting to know the right people to ask them either how to get things done or to help you to get something you need, like a water key or access to a calendar. Furthermore, they recognized that these relationships were racialized, thus when I asked them to have individual meetings, they stressed how much easier it was for me to meet with white families and teachers, than for them to meet with the families.

While Melinda and I discussed individual meetings and going to the office as color blind actions, Paquita and Carolina pointed out how it was easier for white parents to talk with the staff than it was for Mexicana parents. Paquita and Carolina emphasized that they were not only frustrated with the garden because they did not have access to materials, but because the entire process was more difficult for them in situations that included talking to the bureaucracy to bringing their children to learn from the experience. These racialized relationships within the figured world of the garden were hidden by bureaucratic narratives that denied the inequitable access Latina parents had not only to garden materials, but also to schooling at Walnutbrook.

Planting a huerta

After struggling to plant the roses, Paquita often expressed her frustration about

the garden to Carolina and me. She at first repeated her complaints about having limited

access to water and to the garden shed, noting how difficult it was to get office staff to

get her a key. A few days later, she complained that she wasn't even doing what she

wanted to do. So Carolina and I asked her what she wanted to do:

"Yo quiero plantar verduras. Tomates, calabazas, frijoles, las plantas de
B…Cuando dijeron que querian plantar plantas, yo no pensaba que solo iban a plantar
flores… Eso es un jardin. Yo quiero una huerta. Yo quiero plantar verduras para que mis
ninos puedan comer lo que sacan de la tierra (I want to plant vegetables: tomatoes,
squash, beans, plants I planted in B… When they said that they wanted to plant plants, I
didn't think they were only going to plant flowers… that's a flower garden (jardin). I
want a huerta (a vegetable garden). I want to plant vegetables so that my children can eat
what they get from the earth."

Carolina and I then challenged her to lead a huerta organizing action. She

responded that she didn't want to lead anything. Carolina and I left the conversation

there.

At a subsequent meeting, when Carolina announced that she had brought beans

from Mexico and was ready to plant them outside, Paquita at first protested that she

wasn't ready, but Carolina said that they had been discussing planting a huerta all week,

getting her excited enough to go buy Mexican beans. On top of that, she knew that

Paquita had those squash seeds that she brought from Mexico from her last trip that and

that those seeds were not even available in the United States. At this, Paquita agreed and

Carolina and I accompanied her to plant the beans next to where the third graders planted

their garden. I asked if they had asked permission to plant the garden there, but Carolina said she knew the teacher and it would be all right. I then suggested that other parents might like to join them in planting la huerta. Paquita said that the parents were mad at me because I didn't let them speak at meetings, so they wouldn't join us to plant. She added that in not letting Mexicana mothers speak, I was acting just like the teachers. At this I remained silent and let them teach me how to plant beans.

Paquita, Carolina and I struggled for about a month to figure out what it was about the gardening action that bothered Paquita. It wasn't until Paquita separated the concept of 'jardin' from 'huerta' that Paquita figured out that she wasn't doing what she had envisioned in the garden. More specifically, she defined 'huerta' as part of a narrative that described what she envisioned a garden in a school should be.

Freire (Freire, 1970, 1973) described a problem-posing education as one in which educators discussed key 'generative words' with participants in order to describe their world. For Paquita, Carolina and me, the 'huerta' became a generative word through which we described the school as we wanted it to be. Furthermore, the huerta also produced a narrative for Carolina, creating a huerta archive. Through these huerta narratives, Paquita and Carolina imagined a separate garden action which we were able to act upon. In a sense, they created their own huerta figured world in which they created narratives through which they could plant the garden they imagined.

Paquita shares her knowledge

Others have noted that one of the strengths of relational organizing is that it helps participants imagine different actions they could take to help their institution (Chambers, 2004; Sobel, 2004). In the garden action, teachers imagined working on gardens with parents as a way to teach a non-TAKS curriculum by sharing stories about gardens in schools. Paquita and Carolina imagined an alternative garden to teach their own children their own gardening skills by telling stories of their work in huertas in Mexico. Holland et. al. (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998) described how symbols within the dominant narratives of figured worlds helped individuals imagine the actions they could take within these figured worlds. In Paquita's case, the symbol was a huerta in the figured world of relational organizing at Walnutbrook. The huerta became a symbol Paquita and Carolina used to tell stories of how they could help the school. As Paquita continued to tell stories about her huerta within the larger figured world of Walnutbrook, she found more and more symbols which helped her imagine other actions she could take within the figured world of Walnutbrook.

Soon after Paquita planted the beans with Carolina, she spoke with Ricardo, one of the school custodians, for ideas on how to get water to her huerta. In particular, they had to work together to get her a garden hose and a water key to turn on the outside faucets. A week after planting the beans, Ricardo showed Paquita and me how to use the key. As they discussed which faucet to use to water the plants, Ricardo asked Paquita where exactly she had planted each bean to see if the hose would reach. She showed him each plant and then said she was going to plant squash seeds a little further over. At this, Ricardo, who was from a different town in rural Mexico that Paquita, said he

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remembered that squash. "Mi mamá hacía un caldo de calabazas en el otoño cuando salían las calabazas que no he probado en años. No son las calabazas de aquí. Tienen un sabor distinto, como más dulce, que no se encuentra [My mother used to make a squash stew in the fall when the squash would come out that I haven't tasted in years. They're not the squash from here. They taste different, sweeter, that you can't find here]." He then said that he actually had brought a plant himself that he had planted at home and he would love to transplant it here so it could have more room to grow. Paquita said that he should transplant the squash. They then decided where he would plant his squash. The next day, Paquita came and planted her squash. Just like Paquita, the squash and the garden symbolized much more that just school plants to Ricardo, they were a symbol of valued Mexican practices he could now share with Walnutbrook.

Paquita and Carolina's beans were planted next to a third grade cabbage garden. The third grade cabbage had sprouted a full week before the huerta's beans were planted, so by the time the beans and squash had sprouted, the cabbage had started to produce large, green heads, one for each student in third grade. A week after Paquita planted her squash, vandals pulled up all the cabbages. Paquita spent the next morning replanting pulled up cabbages, hoping they would take and continue to grow. As I tried to help her replant the cabbages, Paquita shared how distressed her great grandchild had been at seeing his cabbage tossed out on the sidewalk.

Soon, Karen Weber, a third grade teacher, passed us with her class. She stopped and thanked Paquita for taking care of the cabbages. She then asked if her beans were OK. Paquita said that the vandals had neither touched the beans nor the squash because

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they were just beginning to sprout. She then showed Karen all the different places where the beans and squash were coming out. Karen said she had not been aware that Paquita had planted so many seeds. There actually seemed to be as many beans as there was cabbage. Paquita said that she had wanted to take advantage of the space. Karen then asked if Paquita would give permission for her students to study the beans and the squash, because they had not quite finished the plant unit when the cabbage was pulled. Paquita said of course. She had planted the beans and cabbage for the children. Karen thanked her and said she had to go to class. At this Paquita returned to replanting the cabbage and then checked the bean and squash area for weeds. The beans and squash grew well and filled the walk in the garden plot as the third graders, Paquita, Ricardo and Carolina took extra good care of the plants over the months of April and May. Paquita, Carolina and Ricardo's Mexican agricultural knowledge base, what Moll et. al. call 'funds of knowledge' (Moll, Amanti, Gonzalez, & Neff, 1992; Moll, Gonzalez, & Amanti, 2005) had been acknowledged by having the plants they had taken care of be studied academically by the students.

As Paquita continued to participate in Walnutbrook, her home funds of knowledge continued to be an important part of her interaction with staff and faculty. In early May, Walnutbrook staff asked parents to help plan a celebration for faculty for teacher appreciation day. For this event, Paquita brought in some tacos bathed in a sauce that was specific to her village. While teachers were eating, one of the lower grade bilingual teachers, Norma Hernandez, asked who had made the tacos. Parents, including Paquita, were serving teachers, so staff quickly pin-pointed Paquita. Norma asked her

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how she had made the tacos because she had never tasted anything like them and that they were delicious. Paquita said that she had gotten up at five in the morning to make the sauce with a combination of roasted nuts, chiles and herbs. She had then set the sauce to a low boil while she cooked the chicken. As she went into the details of the two-hour cooking process, they asked her how she had learned to cook so well. She shared how her husband had not had work for a long time, so she had cooked to support their family in Mexico. She had made many dishes that her entire town had enjoyed. Even the richest men from town would continue asking for orders from her long after she had retired from the cooking business. Now that she was in the United States, her cooking was something that she loved sharing with her great grandchildren and the Walnutbrook community. At this, Esperanza, one of the school clerks, mentioned that Paquita had also shared with her how to use basil and other herbs from the Mexican herbal store to cure her cough and even reduce pregnancy stretch marks. Norma said she would love for her to come to her class and share her knowledge with the children because her youngest great grandchild was in her class. She was sure her great grandchild would be proud to show off all that her great grandmother knew. Paquita said she would be happy to visit the classroom.

A week later, it was time for teachers to hold parent conferences to discuss the academic progress of their children. Paquita enthusiastically told me that Norma had asked her if she would like to participate in the conference of her great grandchild. Paquita told me that in her three years in the United States, she had never been invited to a teacher conference for any of her great grandchildren and that she felt very honored by the invitation.

When she returned from the conference, I asked her how it went. She said that it didn't go well. It turns out her great grandchild was doing very poorly and she may not even be allowed to pass to the next grade. While Ms. Hernandez offered many ideas of what they could do at home, most of those involved reading and other skills that Paquita did not have. While Paquita was willing to offer so many things to her great grandchild, who she often took care of, she did not know what to do in this case. She expressed her frustration:

"A veces me desespero, pero tal vez la escuela les está hacienda bien…. Ellos enseñan lo que no puedo hacer... Ellos querían que yo trabajara con los niños (sus bisnietos), pero no puedo. No se puede tapar el sol con un dedo porque los niños ya saben que no les puedo ayudar [Sometime I get discouraged but maybe they [the school] are doing a good job… they teach them what I can't… They wanted me to work with the kids (her great grandchildren), but I can't. You can't cover the sun with a finger (a Mexican saying) and my great grandchildren already know I can't help them]."

I asked her if she had known that her great grandchild was struggling academically. She said she had, but she hadn't known the extent of the problem. She was frustrated because she had been coming to this school daily for the last three months and no one at the school had even bothered to tell her the severity of the situation. Now it was the end of the year and it was almost too late. She believed that the teacher and the school should have let her know much earlier. I agreed.

Paquita's lack of access to academic information about her great grandchild was reminiscent of the battle many Latinas faced in working in the garden. While teachers shared an archive about how everyone could be involved and benefit from the garden, teachers failed to communicate and include the narratives of Latinos. In fact, most Latinos did not have the same kinds of relationships with teachers and administrators that

middle class, white parents had. This meant that not only information about the garden, but often information about academics and behavior, was not communicated to parents. The dominant, color blind narratives that all people could be involved in organizing masked racialized relationships in which middle class, white parents unlike working class Latina parents had access to decisions and information, both academic and otherwise, at Walnutbrook.

Paquita was able to challenge dominant narratives by creating her own figured world in which her huerta narrative was the dominant narrative and she was the dominant narrator (Sfard & Prusak, 2005). Through the huerta narrative, Paquita was able to share her knowledge of agriculture, cooking and herbs in ways that benefited the staff and children at Walnutbrook. She told stories where she valued her own knowledge and shared how others valued her knowledge. She learned to link her collection of stories, her huerta archive, to actions that were valued within the gardening figured world of Walnutbrook.

While Paquita was able to link her funds of knowledge to many aspects of schooling, they did not provide a narrative in which she was an advocate for her great grandchild's academic development. Teachers and staff were willing to talk to her about Mexican herbs and gardens, but they did not share with her their lack of academic results with her great grand daughter. Her huerta narrative gave her access to participate in the gardening figured world of Walnutbrook, but not the academic figured world. Paquita was involved in many ways in the school, but she was not involved in a manner that held the teachers at Walnutbrook accountable for their academic results.

The figured world of the huerta

During the garden action, Paquita was initially willing to collaborate with teachers and white middle class parents to plant a garden. Yet, teachers' narrative that they were willing to work with all parents was a color blind obfuscation. In reality, their anti-TAKS narrative only narrated the desires and curricular concerns of the middle class white community. Furthermore, these narratives obscured how teachers had privileged relationships with white parents.

Paquita realized that these racialized relationships meant that white parents had greater access to teachers, bureaucracy and getting their garden vision realized. Paquita counter narrated these color blind claims by building a garden with a group of people who found her huerta useful. In fact, as she persevered in sharing her huerta with others, she found that she had built a figured world in which her herbal funds of knowledge were appreciated and useful to others. It is this concept of building figured worlds within the figured world of Walnutbrook's organizing which is at the heart of Paquita's technique. While the dominant narratives within the figured world of relational organizing were color blind, limiting Paquita's access to organizing gardens and decision-making, she created a figured world in which her counter narrative built relationships with people for whom Mexican herbal knowledge was important. This narrated a vision through which she and her fellow leaders planted gardens to share their knowledge with their children, grandchildren and great grandchildren.

This lack of strong relationships between Latina parents and teachers at Walnutbrook would continue to be a primary concern for Latina leaders. A group of pre-kindergarten Latinas addressed this concern by creating a classroom community. The next chapter describes the process, challenges and successes of their efforts.

Chapter 4: The Pre-Kindergarten Action: Critiquing Parent Involvement Narratives in a Relational Action

In this chapter, I chronicle how two Latina leaders, Sofía and Nayambi, led a relational action in which they organized the Latino parents of students in a bilingual classroom. In this effort, Sofia and Nayambi worked with organizers and the classroom teacher to train other Latina mothers to lead their own house meetings. They co-created their own narratives, which guided their own understandings of their role in the organizing action and at Walnutbrook. While their narratives proved to be popular with most Latina mothers, one mother challenged both the parents' and the organizers' understanding of how to work with parents to solve the problems at the school.

The action began in response to a threatened cut of the pre-kindergarten program at Walnutbrook from a full day to a half-day program. Once the full day program was saved, the leaders had to work through contested narratives in order to convince organizers and each other that helping Latino parents to build more positive relationships with the school and with each other was an important action to take. In this relational action, Sofia and Nayambi had to challenge dominant narratives in the school. Once leaders decided to work on building more equitable relationships among parents, they also had to engage with dominant narratives that denied the existence of inequitable relationships within Walnutbrook. As they created more inclusive counter narratives, they struggled to create narratives that acknowledged racialized relationships while at the same time narratives that did not characterize inequities as being purely race-based. In these efforts, the mother who challenged them at the end of the academic year forced

them to rethink and modify their narratives as they worked to create more equitable relationships.

Nayambi and Sofía's Parental Involvement ideologies and structures

In mid-February, Ron informed the Latina mothers' group that, due to budget constraints, the school district was considering cutting full day pre-kindergarten programs to only half a day. While many mothers were concerned about the cuts, when Ron asked who would help him organize other mothers to save the program, only Sofía and Nayambi volunteered. When they agreed to volunteer, I decided to hold individual meetings with them in order to learn why they wanted to save the program and what other goals they might have.

A week later, I met with Sofia. I began the individual meeting with her by informing her that Ron and I were reducing our role in leading actions and now our role would mainly be one of encouraging mothers to lead the meetings themselves. I then asked her why she would want to organize people around the issue of pre-kindergarten. She told me that pre-kindergarten was important for two reasons. First, full day pre-kindergarten was academically stronger than a half-day pre-kindergarten. Her two older children had attended Walnutbrook ten years ago when there was not full day pre-kindergarten. She said she saw that her two youngest children, who were currently in pre-kindergarten and first grade, had emerged knowing their numbers and sounds much better than her older children had at the same age. Sonia added that pre-kindergarten was also important because, through contact with the teacher, she learned how to begin to

encourage her children to attend the university. She then told the story of how the Walnutbrook pre-kindergarten teacher had suggested many years previously that she let her children teach her as a way to communicate the importance of school. Since then, she had made a point of "playing school" with her children. The children were the teachers and she was the student. Not only did her children enjoy the activity, but also it enabled her to continuously reinforce the importance of going to university. Her efforts seem to have been successful because her eldest was currently in the university and her second was applying for university.

I then asked her if she thought that Latinos faced any specific challenges in succeeding in pre-kindergarten or in school. She replied that there had been moments where she felt she had been discriminated against for being Latina and that she had had to learn to advocate for her children. Once, her third child's third grade teacher had told her in December that her son was in danger of failing the grade. Sofía had asked that he be given help, but had received no support from the teacher, who she suspected of being covertly racist. She then went to the parent specialist who sent her to the organizer who sent her to the principal. In each of these steps, she felt her concerns were not being addressed. Finally, she got her husband to go to the principal and demand that they be told how to support their child. They were finally given names of people who offered inexpensive tutoring and they ultimately found someone from this group to help their child. As a result of this experience, and having learned of the experiences of other parents, she strongly believed that parents needed to be involved in their children's schools. Sofía narrated a parent involvement ideology that combined stories of how

parents supported schools' academic programs with stories of a racialized need to advocate for one's children when they were victims of individualized, racialized discrimination.

I met with Nayambi a few days later and asked her why she wanted to be involved in the pre-kindergarten action, and more specifically why she deemed it important to involve other mothers in saving a full day pre-kindergarten. She said she felt that students learned when you supported them with home activities like reading and doing number problems because those efforts reinforced the school's academic goals. Her child had learned a lot while he had been in pre-kindergarten, but then struggled in kindergarten. She felt it would have been a lot worse for him had he not had a full day pre-kindergarten program. At the same time, she wanted to encourage other families to support their children. She remembered that at first she had struggled to help her child because she was not familiar with the content and methodologies his teachers used to teach him, but now that she had become familiar with the process, she actually enjoyed spending time with him and even learned some things herself.

I then asked her if she had any concerns about Walnutbrook. She replied that her biggest concern was the academic progress of her eldest child, but that he seemed to be starting to learn again. She really wanted to be able to spend time with her children, in part because she felt that her own parents never had time to spend with her. She recalled that her parents were always working and rarely had had time to make sure she was doing well in school. She ended up doing poorly, in part because she could get away with it. When her parents asked her if she had done her homework, she lied and said yes. But

even if they had known about her academic struggles, it would have been tough for them to help her because they had not been academically educated in Mexico. She felt that if they had been able to pay more attention to her studies and had learned about the school system, they would have been able to better support her in her schooling. "Mis padres no se involucraron… los padres necesitan estar mas allí [en la escuela]. (My parents weren't involved… parents need to be [in the school] more.)." Nayambi narrated a parent involvement (PI) narrative that emphasized the need for Latino parents to be involved in schools in order to make sure that their children did well academically.

Sofía and Nayambi accepted the color blind PI ideology and also acknowledged the existence of racialized home-school relationships. Surrounded by academic success, both of them had seen how parental involvement helped children succeed in school. They were both explicit in saying that one way they wanted to address this inequitable racialized school was to teach other parents how to successfully build relationships with teachers, staff and other parents. In other words, they believed that they had learned to create a positive relationship with schools, and relational organizing offered an opportunity to teach others how to act in schools in ways that would help build positive relationships. Some theorists (Foley, 1990; Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998) discuss this as learning how to perform in schools. Using the concept of performance, Foley described how individuals acted out symbolic roles in society. Sofía and Nayambi narrated a belief that Latinas could learn to perform positive parenting and civic roles that would result in a positive relationship with the school.

Organizers' performative narratives: discussing critique

After talking to Sofía, Nayambi and several other parents, I met with Ron again to discuss the pre-kindergarten situation. He told me he was excited about the possibility of putting together a pre-kindergarten parent academy as a way to build parent leadership and create stronger relationships at Walnutbrook. I asked him how he had previously put together parent academies, and added that in my experience parent academies had been disempowering for families with school experts telling parents to volunteer instead of leading organizing in school. Rather than building relationships, Latina parents were being told what to do.

At this, Ron admitted that sometimes academies were disempowering, but done correctly, they were, in fact, empowering. He said he could even cite research which showed that. He asked me if I had read the Annenberg Report (Mediratta, Shah, & McAlister, 2009a) which demonstrated a link between sustained organizing, parent leadership development and academic success. In this report, the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University had studied six school organizing projects, including City Alliance, and presented quantitative data that gave evidence that community organizing improved test scores, teacher retention and school climate in low income, majority people of color schools. Specifically he pointed out that it described how the combined organizing of parents, teachers and community contributed to academic gains on the campus. I told him that though the report was good, it didn't describe how relational organizing was racialized, nor did it explain that relational organizing was not building enough leaders who were working class, people of color.

I then shared the story of a faculty meeting I had attended with two parent leaders. Teachers conducted the meeting in English and in an academic Spanish that included many terms the parents didn't understand. Parents came away from the meeting feeling extremely disheartened. I noted that the Annenberg Report didn't discuss those kinds of challenges nor how to create more equitable relationships with teachers and staff. Ron responded by telling me that the Annenberg Report's quantitative format impressed the foundations that granted money to CA and thus was important for that reason. He then asked me if we could meet again to discuss how we might change how parent academies were structured to make sure that what we did would facilitate communication between the school and the parents.

I discussed the idea of a parent academy with Melissa Cuellar, the bilingual pre-kindergarten teacher. I began by asking about her vision for parent-teacher relationships. She said that she wanted parents to see each other as resources and for families to feel comfortable coming to teachers with any concerns. She then shared a story of a parent who came to see her and who shared how their family was running out of money. The woman's husband had just been fired and was having difficulty finding a new job. Furthermore, the United Stated Immigration and Custom Enforcement (ICE) raids had made both her and her husband nervous and they had had to be very careful as they sought employment because they were undocumented. They were having trouble making ends meet and struggled to just pay rent. Some weeks they ran out of money for food on Thursdays and Fridays. She was concerned that all this uncertainty was negatively affecting her daughter. The mother had told Melissa that she was sorry if her daughter

had not turned in her homework or had arrived to school a little late, but that she would try to do better. The mother, who had an older daughter who had graduated from Walnutbrook, also confided that she felt that Melissa was one of the few teachers she could come to with her concerns particularly because of the immigration situation. "Can you believe that this mother is struggling to feed her child, and she comes to me to tell me sorry that her child forgot to do her homework?" Melissa added that this was not the only case like this she had heard, and that she knew other Latino families were struggling as construction and service jobs dried up in the city while simultaneously the immigration crackdown continued to intensify. She even had had former students' families come and share their stories. She knew that she was one of the few teachers that Latino families felt comfortable coming to converse with and wanted to teach other teachers how to establish these relationships.

I asked her how she saw this vision coming to fruition and she said that she wanted to have monthly meetings and a weekly newsletter to keep parents involved. When I asked her why, she mentioned that she had just been writing a paper for her professor (someone I knew) on parental involvement and was unhappy with how involvement has been defined in the assigned readings. I agreed with her and asked her to be more specific. She laughed because that was precisely what her professor had asked her and she admitted to not having a more precise definition. She still needed more time to figure it out. I told her that I was wondering if we could somehow bring together these two topics – relational organizing and a critiqued sense of home-school relationships. I asked her if she had read Freire (1970) and she said she had. I suggested that maybe we

could use the ideas of Freire to teach teachers to have critical dialogues with their students' parents and be more relational. While she was uncertain about the critique, she was excited about teaching other teachers to be more relational with their students' parents. We agreed to meet later to discuss how exactly we could accomplish both teaching teachers and holding a critical parent academy.

When I met with Ron and Melissa, we discussed the need to critique the parental involvement narrative. Each of our critiques of the PI narrative was differently informed by the different institutions of which we were a part. Ron relied on critiques that helped to prove CA's academic worth so that the organization could continue to receive educational grant money. Melissa's critiques were based on reflections for a paper for a master's class in which she had to demonstrate she could reflectively improve her own pedagogic practice to get a master's and receive the economic and social privilege that the degree provided. I was doing research for a dissertation in which I had to prove my ability to critique schooling in order to receive the economic and social benefits of a Ph.D. Viewed from a performative lens, we had all learned to perform critique differently. While we were all parts of institutions that materially supported our critiques of the PI narrative, our different positions in these institutions impacted how to perform critiques and which critiques to prioritize.

Preparing for the first meeting - Dialogic narratives

I met with Sofía and Nayambi together later that same week to discuss how we might address the pre-kindergarten situation. First I asked them to tell each other why

they were so interested in pre-kindergarten. Sofía said she was there to support Ms. Cuellar and Walnutbrook because she had done so much for her children. Nayambi said that she also wanted to support Ms. Cuellar and the pre-kindergarten program, but that as for the school faculty as a whole, she hadn't had a particularly good experience with other teachers at Walnutbrook. She wanted to work with parents in order to teach them successful ways they could work with their own children because that had been the key to her success when her child struggled in kindergarten and first grade.

I suggested we could invite parents to come to a pre-kindergarten classroom meeting with their children, share information about the program and have the children demonstrate what they had learned as a way to focus on academics. I added that Ron and I would guide them with suggestions for the meeting, but that they would lead the meeting, starting with inviting parents from their class to come to the meeting. They agreed.

Over the next two weeks, Nayambi and Sofía talked to other mothers in their classroom as well as other mothers they had met in the parent education meetings. They informed mothers that the survival of the program was in danger and that they needed to unite to defend it. They convinced two other mothers who had volunteered in Walnutbrook previously to join them in planning the meeting. Both Sofía and Nayambi noted that withpractice it became easier to talk with other mothers. For example, Sofía commented, "Ya de estar platicando… uno se siente el apoyo de las personas con quien está platicando estas agarrando más confianza en conocerlas [When I'm talking… I start

to feel the support of the people I'm talking with, you gain more confidence in getting to know them]."

After those two weeks, Ron and I met with Sofía, Nayambi and the two other mothers to prepare them to lead a pre-kindergarten house meeting. Early in the meeting, one of the mothers asked whether we should meet with parents of students in the mainstream English classroom or only with the bilingual parents. Nayambi asked for our opinion. Ron and I had conflicting responses. Ron argued for a broad-based approach, saying that we needed to unite the largest number of people to save the pre-kindergarten program. I said that many Latino families did not feel comfortable speaking in a mixed Latino-white setting and that for the initial meeting we needed people to feel comfortable in order for them to speak openly. I suggested that we needed to integrate the two communities at a later meeting. Sofía quickly agreed with me, arguing that we first needed to unite among the bilingual parents before we tried to unite all of Walnutbrook's parents. Nayambi said she was not as convinced. Sofía reminded her that Latino parents needed to learn to work with the school, especially those parents who didn't feel as comfortable talking or working in a large group. Nayambi agreed, saying that we should ultimately work with the bilingual class and the whole school, but first we had to unite among ourselves.

After the meeting, I asked Nayambi if she was comfortable with the decision. She said she was because Sofía had made a good point. She then shared how nervous she had been in meeting with Melissa when her child was in pre-kindergarten, but that Melissa had made her feel comfortable and that had made her more assertive in looking for help

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for her child the next year. She argued that we needed to meet monthly as a pre-kindergarten bilingual classroom in order to help other parents feel comfortable with each other and learn how to educate their children at home. With this decided, we moved toward planning the bilingual pre-kindergarten meeting.

When Nayambi and Sofia shared their reasons for holding a pre-kindergarten meeting among Latinos, only, they shared that their reason was wanting to teach other Latino parents how to be more involved in the schools: they narrated the PI narrative. But unlike their previous PI narratives, this narrative was a substantially different narrative that they told *together*. They interrupted each other, questioned each other's part of the story, added on to each other's story and modified each other's narratives. It was mutually constructed. It was more than just a case of one person finishing the known story of the other, but rather both people were listening and responding to each other's stories. Due to the dialogical nature of their narration, I refer to these narratives as *dialogical narratives* (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Wells, 1999). When I discuss dialogical narratives, I refer to narratives shared by two or three people, which are constructed, narrated and critiqued together. Among our relational organizing leaders, dialogic narratives were common ways of groups of leaders making sense of racialized relationships (see Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1 Components of dialogic narratives

Dialogic narrative component	Description	Example
Initial narratives	Leaders share differing narratives that describe a common concern	Sofía and Nayambi shared stories with each other about why pre-kindergarten was important
Dialogic interpretation	Leaders interpret each others' narratives	Sofia commented on Nayambi's experiences with Ms. Cuellar and other bilingual teachers
Dialogic clarification	Leaders question and clarify each others' narratives and each others' interpretations	Nayambi discuss their experiences with Ms. Cuellar and what it means for other Latina parents
Sharing the dialogic narrative	Leaders share dialogic narratives with other institutional members together and at the same time	Sofia and Nayambi narrate Nayambi's experiences with Ms. Cuellar and their interpretations at the pre-kindergarten meeting

In organizing, these dialogical narratives were not only narrated together during a meeting, but often seemed to form part of a more extended dialogue between the two individuals narrating the story. For instance, Sofía and Nayambi referred to discussions that they had while going to talk to other families as well as discussions that took place at previous meetings. Nayambi noted that her desire to teach other parents how to have a positive relationship with the school had been modified from her initial desire to just keep a full day pre-kindergarten program through her conversations with Sofía:

"Yo pensaba que la reunión iba ser solo para salvar al programa de pre-kinder, pero después de hablar con Sofía, ella me dió entender que esto le da confianza a madres a hablar con las personas de la escuela [I thought that the meeting was only going to be about saving the pre-kindergarten program, but after talking with Sofía, she let me know that that it gave mothers confidence in talking to people in the school]."

As Sofía and Nayambi talked together throughout the process of organizing a meeting, they were dialoguing about each other's narratives.

The first meeting: Negotiating dialogical narratives

Over the next month, Sofia, Nayambi and the other mothers held pre-meetings to prepare for a pre-kindergarten relational house meeting. Despite their preparations, Sofia and Nayambi struggled to narrate their dialogical narrative at the house meeting.

Sofía began the meeting by telling the eight assembled parents, "Solo queríamos conocernos, porque conociéndonos ayudamos a nuestros hijos (We wanted you to come to get to know each other, since in getting to know each other, we help our children)." She was met with silence until Ms. Cuellar shared that parents still come to her three years after they had first asked her how they could help their children. More silence. Nayambi then asked the parents whether they had any questions and yet another long silence of about five minutes ensued. Ms Cuellar then asked Sofía to share how she helped her children. So Sofía told her story about how she played school with her children at home. She then added that it was Ms Cuellar who had shown her how to support her children at home.

A mother who had been at Walnutbrook for as long as Sofía agreed: "La maestra hace un buen trabajo haciéndonos sentir cómodos, pero ya no veo tantas madres involucradas como antes. No las veo en los otros salones. ¿Qué pasará el año que viene porque no todas las maestro son como la maestra Cuellar? [Ms. Cuellar does such a good job of making us feel comfortable but I don't see as many mothers involved as there used

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to be. I don't see them in the other classrooms. I wonder what will happen next year because not all teachers here are like Ms Cuellar]." Nayambi agreed, sharing her story about how her son had trouble in kindergarten and first grade, but that she had been able to help him. She felt that if it hadn't been for the full day pre-kindergarten program, he would have struggled even more. That was why she came to this meeting.

After Nayambi's story, a father said that he and his wife had asked for a day off from work to come to the meeting to address just that issue and wanted to know how to support the pre-kindergarten program and their children. Ron answered him by announcing that the district had taken the proposal to cut back pre-kindergarten off the table after City Alliance and some teachers had complained, so the program was no longer in danger. But he thought that there was still a lot that the parents could accomplish. Sofía continued, "Solo viniendo y uniéndonos, apoyamos a nuestros hijos [Just by coming here and being united we are helping our children]." After this comment, more and more parents spoke up as they shared how much they wanted to help their children. Two or three families expressed their nervousness about their children entering kindergarten, so Ron and Ms. Cuellar suggested inviting the kindergarten teacher to the next meeting. Parents left the meeting expressing happiness that they had united and added that they were eager to work together to support their children's education.

When Ron and I met with the leadership group after the meeting, Sofía, Nayambi and the two other mothers said that they were happy about the way the meeting turned out because everyone who attended shared their stories and wanted to help them. Sofía even got another mother to join the leadership group. The new mother commented that

she wanted these meetings to continue for years to come so Sofía and Nayambi told her that they too were committed to continue the meetings so that families would continue feeling comfortable about coming to school. Although Sofia and Nayambi had initially struggled to narrate their dialogic PI narrative, the moment Sofia and Nayambi shared the PI narratives they had practiced with each other in which they helped their children with schooling, other parents joined in wanting to find ways they too could help their children. Sofia and Nayambi had successfully performed their dialogic PI narrative so that other parents could narrate parent involvement with them.

Latina parents that disagreed: Interstitial narratives in the organizing

Over the next month, Sofía and Nayambi were busy with work responsibilities, so the leadership group was not able to meet until two days before our proposed meeting date with the bilingual pre-kindergarten classroom. In the meantime, I talked to Melissa and we agreed that it would be too difficult to put a meeting together in such a short time. Melissa and I thought that I should try to convince the mothers to postpone the scheduled meeting.

When I pre-met with the mothers, I told Sofía, Nayambi and the new mother that if we were going to hold the meeting, then we would have to meet daily to prepare for the meeting. I then recommended that we postpone the meeting due to lack of time. All three parents were adamant that the meeting happen as scheduled. Nayambi's response summed it up nicely for everybody, "No me quiero quedar mal (I don't want to look bad)". Sofía said that they had set this date so they had to fulfill their promise. The three

mothers pledged to meet the next day and call all the parents in the classroom while Nayambi promised to make a flyer to go out later that day. The next day, I met with Sofía, the new mother and Nayambi and planned the main question and helped prepare their stories for the meeting. The meeting was on.

At the meeting, three new parents showed up meaning that twelve of the fifteen total families in the pre-kindergarten classroom were represented. Sofía asked the kindergarten teacher her prepared question about how to improve communication. The kindergarten teacher answered that her wish was that parents feel free to talk to her with any concerns.

Sofía then shared her story about helping her child at home. Maria Teresa, a long-time Walnutbrook parent who had not attended the last meeting, noted that not all families had the time or ability to do that. Without responding to the comment, Nayambi asked about how to motivate her son so the kindergarten teacher discussed how parents could read with their children to excite them about reading. Maria Teresa followed up asking what the differences were between kindergartens and pre-kindergarten. She added a story about how she was struggling to academically support her high school daughter. The kindergarten teacher said that the main difference was the children's growth to greater independence, but that the changes were gradual so parents should not consider it a worrisome change. With time running out, I asked what they wanted to be the focus of next month's meeting. After a longish silence a parent spoke up about the desire to find summer programs. Maria Teresa and Sofía chimed in with ideas they had heard and agreed that summer childcare could be a challenge.

During the subsequent evaluation meeting, Sofía dragged Maria Teresa over and convinced her to join the leadership group to help plan a late May meeting. I thanked them for putting the meeting together and Sofía responded by reminding me that I had thought they couldn't do it. I said that they had proven me wrong and that this success was not accidental but due to their hard work. Sofía and Nayambi then went off together discussing what they needed to do to make the next meeting a success.

During this meeting, Sofía and Nayambi dialogued with parent narratives outside the dominant parent involvement narrative. These counter narratives were represented by Maria Teresa, who at least three times disagreed with the PI narrative that Sofía , Nayambi and Ms. Cuellar presented. First, Maria Teresa argued that not all parents could support their children the way Sofía had. She then disagreed with Nayambi's story that parents could successfully support the academics of their children. Maria Teresa's stories represented narratives that were often ignored by the teachers and parents who narrated the parent involvement ideology. While the kindergarten teacher was sympathetic to Maria Teresa, her responses did not address the classed nature of her situation. Not all parents had the time or academic background to help their child with homework or even read to them. Most PI narratives were both color blind and class blind. I call a narrative *class blind* when it narrates social relationships without addressing class inequities, effectively obscuring the impact of class in the narrative.

Instead of explicitly disagreeing or attempting to silence Maria Teresa, the end result of both parent and teacher narratives was to ignore Maria Teresa's narratives. I call narratives that appear to have been ignored, in the side conversations of organizing,

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interstitial narratives (Licona, 2005; Perez, 1999). Perez (1999) described interstitial spaces in Chicana history as spaces that refused to be narrated into the dominant historical themes. Sometimes they appeared in places like the sidebars, journals and footnotes of official histories. Similarly, Maria Teresa narrated concerns that continued to be ignored by the dominant narratives of school meetings. Sofía, though, would challenge the dominant performances of teachers, organizers and other parent leaders by bringing Maria Teresa into the leadership group.

Critical dialogue and dialogic narrative performance

I met with Maria Teresa two weeks after she had begun to work with Sofia and Nayambi to get her views about the process as they integrated her into the pre-kindergarten action. I asked her why she was interested in meeting with the other pre-kindergarten parents. She said that initially she had become involved to help her youngest daughter, Teresa, who was struggling a little in pre-kindergarten, and then she had become interested in sharing information about free summer camps in the parks. She added that as she had gotten to know Sofía, she realized she was really there to help the kids. In her ten years at Walnutbrook, she had seen children mistreated and felt that parents should be more involved as a way to be aware of what was happening at the school.

I asked her if she thought that discrimination was an issue at Walnutbrook. She answered 'yes' immediately. When I asked her to describe it, she said that there were teachers that just didn't treat the parents right. For instance, some teachers would make it

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difficult to meet with them, not tell parents when their kids were struggling, or just be plain mean. She confided that she had had to be in a few teachers' faces several times wi to find out what was going on with her older daughter in the classroom, and that even with these efforts, sometimes she didn't find out that her daughter was behind in academics until it was too late to do anything about it. She wanted to make sure that nothing like that happened to any other parents. She commented: "Ahora todo está bien, pero aunque no me afecta, quiero apoyar todas las familias. Quiero que todos los niños estén bien [Everything's fine now, but although it doesn't affect me, I want to support all the families. I want all the children to be fine.]." Maria Teresa, like Sofía, had had to confront teachers at Walnutbrook about her older daughter's schooling. She wanted to make sure that the new parents had the tools to experience academic success at Walnutbrook, whether that meant confronting teachers or supporting their children academically.

Although I could not attend the next meeting, I got a report on the meeting from Sofía, Nayambi and Maria Teresa the next day. I asked them how it went, and they highlighted the different summer programs that they had discovered. For instance, Maria Teresa shared a story about how she always found summer childcare at the last minute and that one year she had not found any until she happened to be driving by the park and asked about the program there. She learned that the program took care of children for the entire day and you just had to drop them off and pick them up. From that first summer, her children loved the program and she had participated in the park programs ever since.

Nayambi had had success finding summer programs in churches. She said that after she shared that her church offered some two week summer Bible school sessions, a couple of other parents at the meeting had shared that their churches offered something similar. Maria Teresa interrupted Nayambi and said that the problem was that most of these programs were very expensive. The free programs lasted only a few weeks. That was what was so great about the park programs. It lasted the entire summer.

Sofía shared that she had found some library programs and that the school library was going to be open during the summer. While the library programs offered quality, academic events, in the library programs they knew about, either the parents had to be there or the program was in the mornings only and thus they didn't take care of children the entire day. She had also gone to the school office and they had given her some flyers, but most of the programs offered in the flyers were expensive and only lasted for a couple weeks. She had shared these programs with the mothers at the meeting, and she had felt that since people were looking for different things, they had been able to offer a wide variety of programs. But the sense she had gotten from the meting was that most people needed something for the entire summer. Even those students who had gotten into summer school needed some kind of childcare because summer school students had to be picked up from school by 2:00 pm. Despite these differences in opinion, Sofía, Maria Teresa and Nayambi all agreed that the night was successful because parents had shared their stories and parents had learned about a variety of available summer childcare.

With this final meeting of the year, Sofía took up the challenge of including Maria Teresa in the leadership group. Maria Teresa was different from other parents in the

leadership group because she was more openly critical of Walnutbrook. She specifically challenged the leadership group's notion that parent support would mean student success. She related her experiences of her arguments with teachers about the schooling of her older child. She did not narrate the dominant, color and class blind parent ideology. Despite these differences, Sofia found a way to engage and dialogue with Maria Teresa's interstitial narratives.

When Sofia and Nayambi had shared their parental ideology narratives in the first meeting, they had been more interested in whether they were organizing the right way and whether they were telling the right stories. Since the parent involvement narrative was a familiar narrative in which school officials told stories about the correct way to be involved, Sofia and Nayambi had learned to tell the kinds of stories that were told in the school. Organizing and dialogue had become a performance.

In this second meeting, Maria Teresa was not focused on the performance of the parent ideology narrative. Her primary concern was to find ways that the school and parents could work together. When she heard stories which were not relevant to parents like her who worked all day or had not completed schooling, she spoke up to find a way in which the school could work with the constraints she had to deal with. Her interstitial narratives critiqued the class blind parent involvement narratives. While most people ignored her questions, Sofia engaged Maria Teresa. But since Maria Teresa's narratives critiqued the PI narrative, she could no longer perform the same narrative. She had to come up with a differential technique that engaged Maria Teresa.

Sofia's differential technique was to use dialogue to understand Maria Teresa, rather than to just perform the organizer role. To this end, Sofia listened to Maria Teresa, welcomed her in the group and tried to form a dialogic narrative with Maria Teresa that validated her worldview. Unlike her PI dialogic narrative with Nayambi in which they agreed on the narrative, this dialogic narrative was more problematic because Maria Teresa continued to disagree. Dialogue as a differential technique thus became finding ways to create a narrative that acknowledge these disagreements yet still found ways to act together. Sofia accomplished this by getting to know Maria Teresa and supporting her narratives while also advocating for her own divergent opinion. Unlike the PI dialogic narrative in which Sofia and Nayambi told the same 'correct' story together, Maria Teresa and Sofia ended up telling different stories together (See Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2 Techniques Sofia used to engage with
Maria Teresa's interstitial narratives

Techniques	Examples
1) Listened to interstitial narratives	Sofia responded to Maria Teresa's concerns
2) Constructed dialogic narratives with interstitial narratives	Sofia met with Maria Teresa repeatedly
3) Created safe spaces to share the interstitial narrative	Sofia met with Maria Teresa outside of the classroom group
4) Brought interstitial narrator into dominant narrative spaces	Sofia convinced Maria Teresa to be part of the leadership group
5) Made interstitial narrator feel listened to in dominant spaces	While in the leadership group, Sofia validated Maria Teresa's comments
6) Integrated the interstitial narrative into the dominant narrative without changing it (narrating dialogue)	While in the leadership group, Sofia modified her own narrative based on Maria Teresa's comments, but agreed to disagree

Since Sofia was willing to critique her own performance, some theorists would consider her performance a critical performance (Boylorn, 2010; Gallagher & Ntelioglou,

2011). Unlike the parent involvement dialogic narratives, which presumed a 'right' way of narrating the dialogue, Maria and Teresa had to negotiate a performance in which there was no 'right' way to perform the dialogue. For this reason, I considered their dialogic narrative a *critical dialogic performance.* By focusing on the results of their dialogue in this specific social setting, that is, in understanding each other's point of view in order to work together, their dialogue turned into a differential technique which critiqued the dominant racial and class narratives in their organizing site. In a social world in which those who engaged in dialogic narratives presumed theywere correct and already told social narratives about the right way to organize or raise a child, these dialogues open to interstitial interruptions were rare.

Critiquing dialogic narratives

In this chapter, Sofia and Nayambi wanted all Latina families to communicate well with their teachers and each other. They met with many Latina parents arguing that when parents collaborated with teachers, their children had greater access to a university-track education. They created a dialogic parent involvement narrative about relational organizing. One problem that this color and class-blind narrative had was that they ended up arguing for activities and events that not all parents had access to, like helping with English homework and partial daycare. More problematically, when working class parents told their own narratives outside of the PI narrative, their counter narratives and concerns were ignored.

When Maria Teresa interrupted the PI narrative with her interstitial narratives,

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Sofia remained committed to understanding dialogue as a means to the end of working together. She did this by remaining committed to the results of dialogic performance, that is, listening to and acting with other Latina leaders, rather than just discussing the correct way to dialogue in individual and house meetings to narrate a PI narrative. Although Sofia accepted the PI relational organizing narrative, it did not prevent her from discussing with others how to use relational organizing to improve children's access to equitable education. Dialogue became a differential technique to critique and accept the dominant PI dialogic narrative.

Sofia and Nayambi continued to hold house meetings and train growing numbers of Latina leaders to hold classroom house meetings into the next school year. Despite the participation of more than twenty Latina leaders in this dialogic performance with more than a hundred Latina families working class Latinas would continue to be excluded from key decisions at Walnutbrook that affected in the education of their children. In the next chapter, I examine the role of language and symbolism as Latina organizers expand out of the classroom.

Chapter 5: The Dual Language Action:
Resignifying 'Language' in Multiple Contexts

In this chapter, I chronicle how Walnutbrook bilingual teachers and working class

Latino leaders advocated for a dual language program. In their efforts to convince school

decision makers about the necessity of the change from a transitional bilingual program

to a dual language program, they shared their narratives in parent meetings, staff

meetings, Walnutbrook Campus Advisory Council meetings, city-wide City Alliance

trainings and ultimately City ISD school board meetings. As they voiced their concerns in

each of these ever-larger contexts, parents struggled to make sure that their message

communicated their desires for their children's schooling. The key symbolic word,

'language', an intrinsic component of their narratives, became a contested symbol

perceived by others to suggest numerous actions, many of which the parents themselves

were reluctant to support. As parents used their stories in multiple contexts, they had to

negotiate narratives that used 'language' to racialize them and their children, using

differential techniques to have their concerns addressed. By focusing on how parents

contested the symbolic interpretation of 'language' in racial narratives in multiple

contexts, I describe some of the challenges that the parents had to confront as they tried

to get their educational concerns met in multiple schooling and decision-making arenas.

The Different Meanings of 'Language' for Walnutbrook Bilingual Teachers

Three Walnutbrook bilingual teachers attended the National Association for

Bilingual Education (NABE) annual conference because they wanted to learn more about

dual immersion, or dual language, bilingual programs. Dual language programs are bilingual programs that "…integrate students whose native language is English with students for whom English is a second language. The goal of this approach is to develop bilingual proficiency, academic achievement and positive cross-cultural attitudes and behaviors among all students (Nieto & Bode, 2008, pp. 244-245)." Dual immersion programs have become increasingly popular among bilingual education advocates (Crawford, 2004; Lessow-Hurley, 2009). During the NABE conference, the Walnutbrook teachers attended sessions about dual language and how to start a dual language program. The teachers came back motivated to start a dual language program and met with other teachers and the principal about how they might start one at Walnutbrook.

Soon after the conference, two of the teachers, Norma and Susana came to me and asked for help in informing their students' families about dual language as an alternative bilingual education programmatic option. They said that a NABE session had provided them with a DVD and a plan to start a dual language program, but that they wanted suggestions from me on how to organize the school community to support dual language in the face of expected teacher resistance. They shared how they felt that their Mexican culture and Spanish language had been denigrated throughout their schooling and that current bilingual students were undergoing a similar process. Susana commented: "Bilingualism is very personal to me… I lost my language… (she tears up and we pause)… sorry, but I see the same thing happening to my second grade students from last year. There is so much pressure to get them to pass the TAKS *in English* [her emphasis] that they lose their Spanish and a little of themselves."

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Norma and Susana also said that another reason they wanted dual language was so that Latino students could become socially integrated. Norma commented, "Latino and Anglo students come to school here for five, six years, and they still didn't know each other. That's not right. And we want to do something about it." Hearing these stories, I agreed to work with them. I suggested they hold individual meetings with the rest of the staff to learn their views of dual language while I worked with them to inform the families of their students about the various bilingual education programmatic options.

Norma and Susana shared narratives about what language meant to them. Primarily, they told stories of how the erasure of their Spanish language led to an erasure of their Mexican cultural identity. In these narratives, language became a symbol of culture (N. Gonzalez, 2001; Zentella, 2005). There were two others sets of narratives in which language symbolized something different. In one group of these narratives, the teachers recounted how Latino children were segregated from Anglo children because they spoke a different language. Language became a symbol for race (Blanchett, Klingner, & Harry, 2009; Cobas & Feagin, 2007). In another set of narratives, Norma and Susana discussed how teachers just focused on language as an academic subject. Language symbolized academics. As the dual language action continued, language would become a key contested symbol with different meanings that would impact both parents' and teachers' perceptions of the organizing.

The multiple symbolic uses of 'language' for Walnutbrook parents

In this section, I present the narratives of two parents who became active in the dual language action: Ana and Mark. Ana was the mother of a son in Norma's classroom. Ana's two elder children had attended Walnutbrook for most of their elementary years and had graduated from the school. Ana and her husband, Rogelio, had immigrated from Mexico where she had been in business and Rogelio had been a teacher. They both worked in business in the United States since his teaching credential was not valid in this country. Ana had always had a close relationship with her children's teachers though she rarely had been to school meetings due to lack of time. She particularly appreciated Walnutbrook because teachers had been so communicative, a trait lacking in the school her children had formerly attended. On top of that her older children had been successful in the TAKS, and they felt that this was due to the language program at Walnutbrook. Even so, the transition from Spanish to English had been difficult, particularly for her middle child, so Ana had been concerned about how the transition of her youngest child would go. Her older children were fully bilingual since both she and Rogelio emphasized Spanish in the home and spent time with their elder children making sure they conversed in Spanish. Language for Ana was symbolic both of academic and cultural success, two symbols supported by narratives in her own family and at Walnutbrook.

Ana was adamant about the necessity of her children seeing the positives of white, US culture and Latino, Mexican culture. She emphasized that she saw the necessity of knowing English in order to succeed in the United States. She explained, "Es importante apoyar los dos idiomas porque así tienen éxito en este país. (It's important to support both languages because that way they [her children] will be successful in this country)." Dual

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language became symbolic of this racialized confluence and both Ana and her husband were enthusiastic about supporting the dual language program even though their youngest child would be too old to participate.

Mark, a Walnutbrook parent, was a Chinese-American engineer whose wife, Graciela, was a Mexican immigrant who had grown up in the United States. Mark became one of the key organizers of the action. He combined economic arguments with cultural and academic concerns. Their children were in first grade and pre-kindergarten and spoke English and Spanish. Graciela spoke to them only in Spanish and Mark spoke to them in English. When the children were too young to go to school, Graciela had stayed home with them. Additionally, they went to Mexico to live with family every summer. Mark was third generation Chinese and spoke Cantonese with his grandparents, but had been unable to find a way to continue Cantonese institutionally with his children. As these families' histories illustrate, their children's multicultural and multilingual heritage was a key issue in their household. As Mike put it, "For us, bilingual was dual language." The model they lived at home was the model that dual language tried to create in the classroom. While language retained a primarily cultural significance for Mike, supported by his and his wife's family institutions, the fact that he was a small business owner often entered into his arguments that dual language had an economic argument.

While language had multiple meanings for both Mark and Ana, they shared a strong commitment to cultural and academic meanings for language. Like the teachers, their cultural meaning was not a racial concern. In fact, both felt that if children learned English and Spanish their children would find success regardless of discrimination. Their

cultural symbols fit into Bonilla-Silva's cultural significance of color blind ideologies (2010), in which language became a cultural symbol that could be modified. The problem with this cultural symbolism of language has been that schools have often ignored academic and social concerns in their overwhelming focus on language instruction which regards Latinos' needs as purely academic (Garcia, 2005; Valenzuela, 1999). That is, Latino students have been racialized as only having language concerns (Cobas & Feagin, 2007; Olivos, 2006).

Learning to narrate multiple symbols of 'language'

Norma and Susana learned about the different symbols of 'language' of many of their students' families when they held their bilingual education informational meeting. I pre-met with Norma and Susana a week before our informational meeting date to discuss what kind of meeting they wanted to have. At this pre-meeting, in response to my question about the kinds of conversations they had had with parents and teachers, Norma commented that while lower grade teachers had been excited about the possibility of dual language, the only concern of upper grade teachers seemed to be about whether the students would still be able to pass their TAKS tests. Because of this concern for academics, there was definite resistance to dual language from both upper grade teachers and administrators. The parents they had talked to had seemed equally concerned about the English tests. Norma had wanted to present dual language as a program that valued both Spanish and English, but teacher's and parent's concerns seemed to mainly be the tests.

I then proposed that we could emphasize how dual language teaches English and preserves Spanish. I shared with them Ada's (Ada, Campoy, & Zubizarreta, 2004; Cummins, 2000) family writing program in which families made books together about their life. I suggested that they could lead this activity and at the same time, share information about the dual language program. Both Susana and Norma expressed excitement and interest in this program and asked me for more details. While Norma was still concerned about staff and parent resistance to the program, I reminded them that all they could do was present it the most positive light possible and try to address staff and parent concerns. They agreed and we prepared the meeting.

A week later, Norma began the parent meeting by welcoming the dozen parents that came and asking them to introduce themselves with the common CA question, 'What is your dream for your child's future." As parents answered the question, most mothers discussed academic and social success for their children. Ana recounted:

"Vine por mis hijos… Oí que iban hablar del programa de inglés y me preocupo que mi hijo aprenda ingles en segundo grado. Para mi hijo mayor fue bien difícil el cambio a tercer grado. Chocó porque no se sintió bien en ingles. Creo que hasta se atrasó un poco. No quiero que a mi hijo menor lo pase lo mismo. [I came for my children… I heard they were going to talk about the English program and I am worried that my son learn [enough] English in second grade. For my older son, the change to third grade was really tough. It was a shock because he didn't feel comfortable in English. I think he might have even gotten a little behind. I don't want the same thing to happen to my youngest son.]."

For the majority of the families at this meeting, the opening house-meeting question provided an excellent opportunity to share their concerns about the language and academics of their children.

After all the families shared, Norma and Susana explained the dual language program. Norma began with a power point presentation which detailed the differences

between the old transitional bilingual program and the dual language program, emphasizing that the main difference was that students continued to learn Spanish after third grade and that students' academics often improved with dual language (Collier, 1995; Howard & Christian, 2002; Thomas & Collier, 2003). When Norma finished, she answered a couple of questions and then passed the meeting to Susana.

Susana transitioned to the planned writing activity. She demonstrated how to share and write an oral story with children. Susana then asked the parents to call their children over from where they were playing in the classroom so that they could write with them. Most mothers struggled with this activity because they tried to get their pre-kindergarten and kindergarten children, who had not learned to write sentences yet, to write out a dictated sentence. This was complicated by the fact that some of the mothers did not know how to write in Spanish themselves. Despite these challenges, Norma, Susana and I walked around and encouraged families to just draw pictures about the parents' childhood memories, sharing stories about the differences and similarities between the parents' and the children's childhoods.

I led the final part of the meeting in which I encouraged families to be involved in the school by working as classroom leaders. I asked participants how they felt about the meeting, and most families responded with positive comments. I then said if they wanted to have more meetings like this, next time there would need to be parent leaders. Ana and Rogelio volunteered to join other parents in leading a meeting during the summer. In the post-meeting, these parents were particularly positive about the meeting. Ana commented, "Estoy muy ocupada, pero esta reunión me llamó la atención. Sentí que

sí me enseñó ayudar a mi hija. [I am very busy, but this meeting interested me. I felt like it taught me how to help my daughter]."

I then asked the teachers what they thought. Norma noted that she was very glad that the meeting had taken place and added that she could see how engaged the families were with the writing activity. Susana in particular was energized by the meeting, "Se veía que las familias les encantaba compartir sus vidas con sus hijos y enseñarles. Quiero comenzar estas reuniones mas temprano el año que viene y ver si podemos cubrir mas cosas. Como leer juntos, actividades en la casa, no sé. [You could see that the families loved sharing their lives with their children and teaching them. I want to start these meetings earlier in the year and see if we can cover more things. How to read together, activities at home, I don't know.]" We left the meeting promising to call each other and see what we could do that summer.

Susana was excited by the parent meeting and the narratives within it because she was able to demonstrate to parents how literacy could include both cultural and academic symbols of language. Language in the narratives of parents and teachers was no longer just academic, but also included the cultural component, which was so important to her. Sandoval (2000), drawing from Barthes (1972), describes this process of providing new meaning to familiar symbols as *semiotic resignification*. For Sandoval, resignification was an important form of resistance to ideological colonization because it challenged the symbolic forms of meaning making. When Susana and Norma were able to encourage families to narrate stories in which language included cultural and academic components, they were not only resisting the symbolic erasure of culture, they were also encouraging

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families to make meaning of their relationships with the school through the lens of language as culture. At the same time, they were interrupting their own color blind narratives which racialized students as only having academic or cultural needs and ignored the students' strengths.

Parents resignify language in multiple contexts

I met with the Latino parents interested in organizing around the dual language program right after Walnutbrook recessed for the summer. I began the meeting with a story of how I had had to advocate for my daughter to be in bilingual education because her school had wanted to place her in an English class. I then asked the group how they wanted to influence the instruction of their children. Mark, his first time at a parent meeting, responded in Spanish with how they had been denied Spanish instruction at Walnutbrook and how he and his wife had to fight to have their children be in the bilingual classroom. Another parent added that she fought unsuccessfully to get her daughter in the bilingual program at Walnutbrook. Mark then commented how the teachers and staff had only been concerned about the children's English language acquisition because that's what they needed to pass the tests. They did not take into account Mark's desires to preserve his children's Spanish language proficiency. Mark continued that in the dual language program, students should be learning both languages. Ana and a couple of other parents who had attended the dual language meeting agreed and committed to advocate for a dual language program over the summer.

Since I was also involved in a City Alliance education sub-committee that was trying to impact the upcoming school district's annual budget, I encouraged the parent group to take their concerns to the sub-committee meeting. I explained how a dozen City schools were coming together to express the needs of each school's parents and teachers and were planning to advocate for these concerns at the district level. They could attend this meeting representing Walnutbrook's parents concerns. The parents agreed with my suggestion and even volunteered to host the next education sub-committee meeting.

A dozen Walnutbrook parents and a couple teachers made it to the next sub-committee meeting, at which over thirty parents and teachers from around the district came to express their desires and opinions. CA organizers presented the district budget and let the participants know that the district was planning cuts due to the economic downturn. CA wanted parents and teachers to join them in letting the district know what their priorities were. They then asked the schools to present their priorities to the larger sub-committee. First though, they let each school meet together to decide which priorities they would present to the larger group.

In the small Walnutbrook group, Mark and Ana presented their list of priorities and then listened as Norma presented the concerns of the teachers. Teacher wanted a vice-principal to provide more focused academic leadership and a counselor to provide leadership for a school-wide behavioral program. Mark and Ana asked how to include their desire to get dual language and other concerns expressed. Norma suggested that they explain that the school needed those two positions to lead the staff in tackling those new challenges. We then asked Mark and Ana to present our priorities to the whole sub-

committee. When they presented, they shared their own stories about their children's struggles with English and Spanish as examples of why Walnutbrook needed the money for a full time vice principal and counselor.

When the parents expressed their concerns in front of a citywide audience, it had a strong impact on the parents who attended this event. After presenting her stories, Ana confided: "Me sentí tan nerviosa presentando en frente de tanta gente, pero cuando oí que ellos también querían lo que queríamos nosotros, sentí que quizás podíamos hacer algo [I felt very nervous presenting in front of so many people, but once I heard that they wanted what we wanted, I felt that maybe we could do something]." After all the schools presented, the sub-committee decided to advocate for vice principals and counselors for all schools as well as a salary increase for the hourly workers.

When Mark, Ana and the other Walnutbrook parents went to the CA subcommittee meeting, they prioritized the economic symbolism of language in their narratives. Furthermore, by arguing, narrating and listening to stories about language in Norma's dual language meeting and in the summer parent meeting, they used different symbols of language in different contexts. Sandoval (2000) refers to changing techniques of resistance as differential movement, so I refer to these shifts as semiotic adaptations as *differential resignification*, or learning to argue for different meanings of the same word depending on context. This was an important differential technique. Within parent meetings, Ana argued for the use of language in cultural and academic terms while in the budget meeting, she argued for the academic use of language in the budget meetings in economic terms. As the dual language and budget action moved from context to context,

Mark and Ana's attempts at differential resignification would become more challenging as they had less control over the narratives in the new contexts.

Differential resignification at the district level

Over the next two months, the educational sub-committee met with their member schools to discuss how to present their concerns to the school board in a way that would contribute to these needs being adequately funded. The first meetings were well attended by Walnutbrook parents, but they expressed frustration at the slow pace and confusion of the process. It was difficult for many parents to make it to the meeting right after work, a situation that was exacerbated by the fact that the location of the each meeting was a different district school. Parents also struggled to understand the budget terms, the budget process as well as reasons that organizers suggested particular actions. Most of these meetings involved debates over whether we should talk to this or that board member or district member. Parents often felt unprepared to make decisions about complex issues, which were hastily explained. At the end of the meetings, they invariably asked me if their concerns about dual language and a new behavior program were still on the table. Thus, as the summer wore on, it did not surprise me that fewer and fewer Walnutbrook parents attended until the only parents who remained were Mark and Ana and their attendance was intermittent.

The school board continued to postpone the vote on their new budget. This delay allowed the sub-committee time to argue our case individually with many of the school board members, each of whom represented a particular district within the school district.

Walnutbrook's school board member happened to be the school board president, John Miller. Walnutbrook was not able to get a meeting with Miller until the day of the budget vote, which was also the first day of the new school year. Ana, Mark, a couple of CA organizers, other parents, teachers and I came to the school board meeting early to express our concerns to our school board member. Each of us presented our individual stories about why we thought vice principals, counselors and hourly staff were important investments for our school. Ana adapted the same story she had been telling all summer about her elder child's struggles in transitioning to English, but now included how a vice principal would help teachers provide a stronger bilingual program, like dual language, to the children at Walnutbrook. After everyone presented their stories, John Miller, Mark and the CA organizers engaged in a half hour debate about the financial aspects of our proposal. Most of us left the meeting uncertain of what John Miller has said about our proposal. The CA organizer told us that Miller had not committed to any action, but that he had mentioned that some compromises might be on the table.

After this meeting, we had to wait half an hour for the actual school board meeting to begin. Close to forty Walnutbrook parents and staff turned out to support our proposal, a number that we considered excellent, particularly since it was the first day of school. The meeting room was packed. As the meeting began, Walnutbrook sent several people up to the podium to argue our case. As we listened to other speakers, I asked Ana what she thought of the whole process. "No sé. No entendí nada en la reunión con el representante, pero sí se siente bonito que tanta gente de Walnutbrook ha venido a apoyarnos. Espero que todo salga bien. [I don't know. I didn't understand anything in the

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meeting with the representative, but it does feel nice that so many people from Walnutbrook have come to support us. I hope everything turns out alright.].” The budget meeting didn't end until after midnight. By that time most people had left because they had to get ready for work and the second day of school. When the school board finally voted, the approved budget funded vice principals and counselors for schools with large student populations and an increase in hourly workers' wages. Although Walnutbrook did not have a large enough student population to receive additional vice principals and counselors, City Alliance declared this mixed-bag a victory for schools in the City in general, while acknowledging the disappointment the vote brought to Walnutbrook.

The Dual Language Victory: Differential Resignification in Practice?

We had learned one disturbing fact while negotiating with board members at the end of the summer; the school board was pondering closing Walnutbrook the next school year to save revenue. Thus, Walnutbrook parents committed to holding individual and house meetings during the fall to keep the school open. After a month of house meetings, we met with the Latina leaders of four bilingual classroom teams in late September. At this meeting, parents urged that there be a meeting with the school staff to discuss the possible school closure. Ana and I urged them to also remain focused on our concerns of language and academics, to which they agreed.

One week later, parents met with staff. Norma shared how a group of teachers were looking to try to figure out if dual language was a possibility at Walnutbrook. Ana and another parent added their voices by informing the gathering how they had advocated

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for language, behavior and academic concerns over the summer, repeating their stories about their concerns about the English transition. Mark though, was more insistent that we use dual language as a way to make sure the school remains open. He cited his economic discussion with John Miller in which the school board president had stated that Walnutbrook was too small a school to be spending so much money on. Miller had said that unless Walnutbrook could come up with a special reason to remain open, then it became very difficult arguing against its closure. Mark had then shared with him the idea of how dual language taught English speaking children Spanish, telling a story of how the City's Chamber of Commerce had called for a more active instruction of Spanish because it would be an important business language of the next generation. This story had impressed Mr. Miller and Mark felt that Walnutbrook should be pursuing the program more aggressively. The principal promised to get Norma's dual language committee to pursue it and they moved on the rest of the meeting. Most of the rest of the meeting was spent discussing ways to get neighborhood support for the school. In particular, they wanted to plan an anniversary celebration in which they would invite City dignitaries, like former city council members and media personalities whose children had attended the school, to come and support the school. The parents' language concerns had been folded into one of ten academic committees at the school and had mostly been ignored by most teachers and staff at the meeting.

In October I learned that the teacher-only bilingual committee had applied for a dual language pilot program the district had just announced. The pilot program would dramatically transform the bilingual program the next year. Few, if any, parents had yet

to be informed and none had been consulted in the decision. The topic was supposed to have been brought up in the next combined meeting with teachers and families a week before the deadline. Parents, in spite of their expanding efforts, were excluded again.

As I walked into the school library after school for the combined meeting, I met a small group of tired staff and faculty who had spent most of their energy putting together the well-received community event to celebrate the anniversary of the school. The celebration had been complete with local bands, fair rides and bilingual news coverage. When I asked where the parents were, staff and faculty did not know. They had planned the meeting some time previously and had just assumed people would be there. At that moment, Mark walked in, and he, like me, had been informed at the last minute.

Most of the meeting was spent on reflecting on the anniversary celebration. Finally, as the meeting neared the end, Mark asked whether it was true that Walnutbrook had decided to apply to be a dual language school. José said that this was true. They were supposed to officially vote on whether this was the program the school wanted to pursue at the next faculty meeting. When Mark asked if he could attend, José told him 'Of course' and welcomed him to the normally 'staff-only' faculty meeting that Thursday.

That Thursday, Mark collaborated with teachers to write the dual language proposal. In particular, he made a point to mention the economic argument of Spanish as a future business language. Mark though was the only parent involved in the process as the rest of the parents were informed too late of the program and couldn't make the afternoon meeting time of the normally 'staff-only' faculty meeting. Furthermore, they said they did not feel welcome or acknowledged at the meetings they had attended.

Despite this lack of parent support, Walnutbrook staff voted unanimously to apply for the dual language program. Walnutbrook turned out to be one of the first schools to get the dual language program and was commended for the faculty's knowledge of dual language. The district made it clear that Walnutbrook's future, that is, whether the school would remain open or be closed depended on whether the dual-language program was able to attract enough students to fill a classroom. In other words, the economic argument had worked. While there would be other complications along the way, Walnutbrook remained open and started the dual language program the next year.

Mark was able to engage in conversations about the value of dual language programs in which language, in a dual language program, was resignified as an economic necessity to keep the school open. Mark and his wife Graciela served as informal liaisons between the struggle for the program and some working class Latina families. Yet without working class leaders, their families' cultural and academic counternarratives were not heard.

In the initial meetings when working class Latina leaders were present, i.e. the budget and bilingual classroom meetings, their counter narratives were able to accomplish two important semiotic interruptions. When teachers described dual language in mostly cultural terms, they reminded teachers of the necessity of keeping and integrating the academic symbols. And when organizers focused on color blind economic narratives in the budget meetings, the parents' color blind cultural and academic symbols interrupted attempts to racialize and class the children's needs as purely economic. Even in interrupting or resignifying color blind symbols with other color blind symbols, Latina

parents' experiences with language challenged attempts to reduce their children's educational needs to one racialized component. Although Ana was not present at the final meetings, her participation and willingness to go outside the comfort zone of the school to attend large district-wide CA and ultimately school board meetings to present her counter narratives made a significant contribution to the well-being of Walnutbrook and its commitment to meaningful education for its families.

Differential resignification of 'language'

When Ana tried to participate in the district debates about budget priorities, her concerns about language policy were lost among politicians and organizers who spoke a language and spun narratives that left most people out of the conversation. In a color blind narrative that pretends to open up citizen comment to school board debate, the dual language action demonstrated how educational policy was mostly the realm of a few, rich white, powerful men who could impact school board policy. In terms of organizing, these men controlled the definitions of key terms which framed the issues of language and educational policy. Organizers, when they trained their own middle class elite to talk with board members, also ended up defining their key symbols in a language and defining system that was inaccessible to Ana and the majority of working class Latino parents at Walnutbrook.

In critiquing the key words of the color blind language debate, Ana stuck to a few key narratives which described the challenges she had had in the education of her children. Her differential technique was to insist that her academic use of language be

added to the cultural and economic uses of language in other contexts. Instead of replacing the meanings of key terms, as so many CA narratives did, Ana added the meanings to her narratives. In this way, when other contexts incorporated her narratives into their actions, instead of changing the meaning of her narrative with the resignified word, the resignified narrative retained the old meaning and negotiated the new meaning. Thus, when Ana asked for a vice principal for language policy at Walnutbrook, she made sure to include her narrative about how her child struggled academically in English. Even in budget debates about money, her use of language policy retained her academic meaning. Thus, when she spoke about the economic concerns of language policy, her narratives connected these new language budget narratives to her academics. By differentially adjusting her narrative to include new meanings, Ana made sure that her original concern of academic success for her child, and all the children at Walnutbrook, were not racialized by narrow definitions of 'language'.

Chapter 6: The Special Education Action: Critiquing Care and Building Epistemological Solidarity in Relational Organizing

Our relational organizing actions usually involved working with a group of people to challenge an inequitable racial system. While most of these actions involved uniting around issues which involved a large number of students, some of these issues impacted a marginalized population which had small populations at Walnutbrook. Examples include children who were served by counseling services, hourly lunchroom monitors and children who receive special education services. Due to the fact that we were not organizing around a broad-base, but a rather, small specific base, relational organizing practices changed to impact specific racial systems that were a concern to a small group of people. In this chapter, I examine how relational organizing techniques and perspectives provided insight into how to imagine and change the practices within one such system: special education.

I specifically focus on the process of getting access to these services for students who are in need of special education services. While there are multiple, complex issues involving special education and race (Blanchett, Klingner, & Harry, 2009; Maria Victoria Rodriguez, 2005) this chapter is as much about how relational organizing can relate to socially marginalized and numerical minorities in schools as it is about how one family related to special education at Walnutbrook. In particular, I examine how the leaders of this action address and critique the relationships that are involved in getting special education services. In the process, a parent must provide a differential technique which

makes school staff's examine our relational roles in validating each other's epistemological relationships in a caring manner.

Convincing Laura to work with the school: Solidarity narratives in the Latino community

One morning in mid-April, Elizabeth, who had participated in the cafeteria action earlier in the year, asked me to assist her with her friend Laura. Laura's son had been having problems learning, but Elizabeth had not been able to convince Laura to come to the school to talk to anybody. Laura maintained that no one was taking her seriously. Elizabeth had told Laura how Ron and I had helped her with relationship building and the success of the cafeteria actions and that we might listen to her. I agreed and Elizabeth convinced Laura to come meet with me.

As Laura, accompanied by Elizabeth, sat down with me to talk, she informed me that another friend was waiting to take her somewhere else, so we've got to hurry. She then related her story of struggles with the school. Laura's eldest son, Mario had been at Walnutbrook for three years, and was not reading at all. She had come to meetings in attempts to get help for him, but she had had trouble understanding what she was supposed to do to help Mario succeed in school. She knew that the school had given him some exams and she had had to go to different places to get papers signed, but from her perspective, the school staff continuously told her to do many extra actions that she had become confused and maintained that she really had no idea what she was supposed to do. She was at a point where she was frustrated with the entire process. As she said: "Yo

les pedía ayuda, y me mandaron a juntas, pero no le dan servicio (a mi hijo), y no sé que tengo que hacer para recibir ayuda (I asked [the school] for help, and they sent me to all these meetings, but they don't give [my son] any services, and I don't know what I have to do to receive help.)" Furthermore, she told me, another school had offered services for her younger son and she had not had to go through this confusing process that didn't fix anything. Her younger son was already a student at the other school. She did not see why she had to go through this process with her elder son and wanted to see if I could help her transfer both her children out of Walnutbrook.

I knew little about the special education process and its complexities and was unsure what I could do. I told Laura that although I was not familiar with the steps that needed to be taken so that her son could receive services, I knew people who were. I accompanied her to the office and introduced her to the staff there and recommended she talk to the principal, José García. When Laura told him that she wanted Mario to transfer out because he had not received any help, José said he remembered her case and knew they were waiting for paperwork to clear. He recommended against Mario transferring because he would then have to start the special education process all over again.

After José left, I then suggested that Laura next talk to the new parent support specialist, Jennifer. When Laura realized that Jennifer had Elvia's old job she was clearly displeased. She said that Elvira had been of absolutely no help to her. I assured her that Jennifer was more knowledgeable about special education than Elvia had been. She then asked me to take her to Jennifer who quickly agreed to meet with her the next day to review the whole special education process. I said we would gather a group of people

who were knowledgeable in the area of special education to see if the process could be sped up and simplified. Laura said she hoped so and left.

After she left, Jennifer told me that since she was so new, she had not met the special education chair yet. I told her that I had been working closely with Amanda, the main special education teacher since the garden action. When we spoke to Amanda, she said that she knew of Mario, but that since she didn't work with younger students, she didn't know him personally. Jennifer mentioned that Laura had come complaining that she had been trying to get services for Mario for some time, but that nothing had come of her efforts. Amanda was surprised at these delays and called the office to inquire about Mario's status in the special education process. Office personnel responded that were waiting for paperwork. When Amanda hung up, she said she was willing to work with Jennifer in making sure Mario got served. I told them that this was not the first complaint I had heard of the challenges families had had in maneuvering the special education process. I asked Amanda and Elizabeth whether they wanted to work with me in rethinking how special education could be made more relational with its families by using relational organizing skills. Amanda said she was still new to relational organizing, but was willing to give it a try. Elizabeth was also willing to participate and I agreed to work with both of them to see what we could do.

When Elizabeth and I proposed to get Laura's son special educational services we had considerable relationship building to do. Elizabeth and I used stories as an attempt to start to build these relationships. Elizabeth shared stories with Laura about how her children had been helped by the school when Laura shared her negative experiences at

Walnutbrook. I shared stories about how organizing was building strong relationships between parents and school staff when Jennifer and Amanda commented how they had seen the fractured relationships between schools and parents in special education. Elizabeth and I shared narratives that imagined the possibility of Laura and other special education parents working with the school. These *solidarity narratives* attempted to reach across divisions within the Latino community in order to improve the schooling conditions of socially marginalized children. Shelby (2005) identified five components which worked to build this kind of racial solidarity: mutual identification, special concern/partiality, shared values or goals, loyalty and mutual trust. Viewed from this perspective, these solidarity narratives were part of an effort to build the trust, identification and special concern necessary for racial solidarity.

Laura and Elizabeth's social marginalization

Elizabeth's experience of social marginalization at the many school events she had attended was central to the way she interacted with other organizers at Walnutbrook In private conversations with me, other Latina parents often expressed feeling uncomfortable around her, either because of her physical impairment or the manner in which she talked with them. One mother said, "Ella es muy metiche y siempre nos hace preguntas y comentarios muy inapropiadas (She is very nosy and is always asking such inappropriate questions and making inappropriate comments)." Thus, in many meetings she often sat alone either because she couldn't see where people she knew were or because those around her did not want to talk to her; some people even changed seats to

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physically distance themselves from her. She recognized that people did not want to talk with her, but was unclear how her conversations were inappropriate.

Despite this, she continued to reach out to people. At most meetings, she would be the first to talk to her neighbors and ask about their interest in the school. Furthermore, she was not shy about finding and introducing herself to teachers, staff or families from whom she needed information. School staff responded quickly and took seriously any concerns she had about her daughter. Despite her social marginalization from the Latina community, Elizabeth was able to create positive relationships with school staff.

Elizabeth attributed her sociability to her upbringing. When she was growing up on the border of Texas and Mexico, her family always threw parties and as a teenager she often went out to dances. When a debilitating physical condition hit her in her teens, it discolored her skin, damaged her vision, and forced her to squint her eyes. She was as hurt by the social impact of her infirmities as she was by the changes it caused in her vision. Her friends did not want to be with her, and she couldn't go to dances because she couldn't see and didn't want to be seen. She dropped out of school and instead worked for her uncle. An aunt encouraged her to socialize again and get her GED. In the process she met her white husband who became an engineer and Elizabeth learned to socialize with his friends and family.

She praises her aunt and husband for reestablishing her social self-confidence, though she says she always felt more comfortable with Latinas because they made up the community she grew up in. "Siempre he sido social, y necesito hablar con gente, no solo

para que me ayuden, sino para que me sienta bien (I have always been social, and I need to talk with people, not only so they can help me, but also so that I feel comfortable.)

Laura, on the other hand, explained that from a very young age she had been socially distanced from the dominant Mexicana community. She had grown up in B, a small rancho (small rural community) in Mexico and had had to leave school after first grade to help her parents with their crops. She said that what little she remembered of school was not positive because she had found school very difficult. In fact, as an adult she had been diagnosed with a learning disability. This helped explain all the troubles she has had learning things growing up.

She immigrated to the United States as a teenager with her husband. In the United States, she struggled to keep a job because employers and co-workers complained that she was too slow in comprehending what she was told to do. She continued to struggle to understand the school and society, so she really appreciated getting to know Elizabeth. Elizabeth had gone with her to clinics and to social service agencies to explain policies to her and had helped her obtain many services for her and her family. Laura said that before Elizabeth accompanied her to these places including the school, people would not take her seriously or even believe that her illnesses or concerns were real. Laura had felt marginalized from society because she was slow to understanding the rules and norms of the world around her.

This was true both socially and bureaucratically within Walnutbrook. Several mothers commented on how difficult it was to deal with Laura. When she came to school events, she was accompanied by a couple of her friends and rarely spent time conversing

with anyone other than those friends. While with her friends she laughed and told long stories on a range of topics. With other people she was often short and abrupt, even with the other mothers. When she tried to deal with Walnutbrook bureaucracy, she unceremoniously went straight to the point to ask for what she wanted. She told me that she felt very uncomfortable around Walnutbrook staff because they were hard to understand. They gave her all these reasons for things not moving along to help her son with the result that they did not give her what she and her son needed.

When Elizabeth went in solidarity with Laura to the school, she went in solidarity with what Laura was claiming. By this point in the school year, staff and community members considered what Laura said to be unreliable and attributed it to her learning difficulties. Her behavior also made some wonder whether she really cared about helping her son. When Elizabeth accompanied Laura, she was supporting the truth and validity of what Laura was claiming , i.e. Elizabeth was in *epistemological solidarity* with Laura. Scholz (2008) defines epistemological solidarity as a shared consciousness and empathy partially based on sharing some lived experiences. In fact, drawing from Kruks (2001), she underlines that even when living experiences are not shared, people can establish some epistemological solidarity by acting together so that they can create shared experiences. Similarly, when Elizabeth accompanied Laura to the school, Elizabeth had an opportunity to understand Laura's perceptions of the school based on the shared experience of advocating for academic services for Mario. In this way, her epistemological solidarity was based on sharing Laura's lived experience of not being trusted or believed by the school.

The challenge Elizabeth faced was that her prior experience with the school had

been markedly different than that of Laura's. While Laura had a relationship with the

school in which she was not helped, Elizabeth's relationship with Walnutbrook had been

one in which she had been helped. Thayer-Bacon (2003) termed these differing *personal*

relational (e)pistemologies (PRE), or how individuals, social groups and institutions

valued the knowledge of a specific individual based on the relationship they established

with that individual. So, for Elizabeth, her PRE was based on a lifetime in which she had

established a positive relationship with schools in which her knowledge was valued.

Laura, on the other hand, had a PRE based on a lifetime in which academic institutions

had devalued her knowledge and her truth. Not only did Laura and Elizabeth have

different relationships with the school, the school valued the knowledge they brought to

the school differently.

Trying to care about working class epistemologies at Walnutbrook

Amanda and Jennifer recognized that often Walnutbrook staff and faculty failed

to value the knowledge of many working class Latinos who had children in the special

education program. They both narrated to me their desire to challenge a school

environment in which neither Latino family members nor students were valued for what

they brought to the school.

Although Amanda was the lead special education teacher, she felt stymied

because often, when she advocated for the needs of special needs children and families,

the school environment did not share her concerns for truly meeting the needs of those in

the special needs program. She believed that many teachers and staff did not devote enough time or attention to meeting these needs, in part because too many teachers were forced to care about TAKS results rather than what the students knew.

Using a story of her daily experiences, she explained how she often had to face the struggles of her special education students in their regular education classrooms. As a special education teacher, Amanda did not have her own classroom, but rather worked with special education students in the upper/TAKS grades (3rd through 5th grade) in their own classrooms. At Walnutbrook, special education students thus had regular education classroom teachers and special education teachers (Harry & Klingner, 2006; Reiman, Beck, Coppola, & Engiles, 2010). One of the students she worked with had presented an oral report in front of their 4th grade classroom. Amanda explained how she had spent time helping the student practice a science report based on the curriculum they were studying in the regular education classroom. The classroom teacher later told Amanda that she had no idea the student knew so much because the student spent most of the time in her classroom bothering other students and rarely completed any academic work. Amanda had said that in her time in that teacher's classroom she had realized that the teacher had not built the kind of caring relationship that she built with her students in order to get them to work with her, and that this student was not learning very much in his regular education because he lacked this relationship with his teacher. Amanda said that she wanted to help other teachers build these relationships with their special education students so that her students could regularly experience the kind of success this child had with the report in their regular education classrooms.

I then asked her if she involved families in this process. She said that thus far she had not, and that one difficulty was that families were often hostile in their dealings with the school. She didn't blame them because she saw how other teachers treated these families and their children. Not only were the parents often disrespected, but also they were blamed for their children's academic failures. She recalled one parent who had come in complaining because a teacher had yelled at her child. Amanda had explained that Amanda wasn't the child's regular teacher and that she had not yelled at the child. She encouraged the parent to take her concerns to the office. The parent had then thanked her, saying that she was the first person that had respected her.

Because of these experiences, Amanda said was open to suggestions and willing to work with me to involve more families. I left promising to contact her again to discuss working both with other teachers and parents. That was when Laura came and I proposed the project to get Mario services.

Jennifer, the newly hired Parent Support Specialist was also aware of the problems with special education at Walnutbrook and elsewhere. As I got to know her through individual meetings, she told me that while in the university, she had been a Teacher's Assistant in another school in which she would sit in and translate in the ARD meetings in which parents were asked to help decide what educational services were appropriate for their child. The ARD meetings are meant to part of a federally guided process in which teachers, resource personnel, students, when appropriate, and families met to discuss the needs of each of the students in the special education process. Jennifer observed that often parents arrived to the meetings knowing only that their presence was

required without even having an understanding of what special education was. In the meeting, parents would then be bombarded with a lot of terms and options that were unfamiliar to them. She told me that in one meeting she attended, teachers sat around a small table with administrators and discussed the child's learning following a point-by-point agenda. The administrator would ask a question about the objectives the child had learned and then the teacher would respond about the teaching strategies she used. Then a psychologist discussed the results of a test that had something to do with learning difficulties. Afterwards, they asked the parent if she understood, and the parent was quiet. As if to explain everything, they said that the child was having difficulty learning. They then said the parent needed to sign some papers so that their child could get some extra support in the classroom. The parent said she would sign whatever they requested if it would help her child learn and then signed the form.

After the meeting, Jennifer had asked the parent how she felt, and the parent replied that she was unhappy because she had understood so little of what the teachers and administrators said, despite it being translated. She had heard that it wasn't always good to have a child in the special education program, but what else could she do? After that meeting, she felt she had to trust the experts, since they seemed to know what was best for her child. Jennifer said that after sitting in on a number of these meetings and after conversations with teachers in other schools, she found that this mother's experiences were, unfortunately, typical. She wanted to help families make informed decisions about their child's education. She added that one of the reasons she had wanted this position at Walnutbrook was that she had been told that the mothers here were a

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tight-knit group that had stopped the district from closing the school. She was hoping to be able to support these families with the confusing institutional bureaucracy and support them in the education of their children, even though she wasn't yet sure exactly how to do that. She was contemplating holding meetings about the special education process and meeting with families before their scheduled ARD meeting. It now seemed that Jennifer and Amanda would be willing to in work with Laura to get Mario the services he needed.

Both Jennifer and Amanda discussed the need to be in epistemological solidarity with the Latinos in the special education program. Jennifer discussed the need to make sure that when Latino parents attended ARD meetings, they were sufficiently informed to make the best decisions for their children. Amanda talked about how children needed to know that their learning was based on a caring, relationship with their teacher. In both cases, their solidarity narratives discussed how knowledge construction in special education should be based on establishing strong, caring relationships. Scholz (2008) discusses how care theory (Manning, 1992; Ruddick, 1989) provides a good blueprint to describe the affective component of solidarity. She argues that care theory focuses on both providing attention and willingness to act, two key components for solidarity. In their stories, Jennifer and Amanda discuss how they paid attention to Latinos and acted based on their caring understanding of the students' and parents' needs.

But Scholz (2008) points out that epistemological solidarity is not just a case of wanting to be in solidarity. She notes that because of *epistemological privilege*, or how some people's epistemologies are more valued than others, solidarity without a critical understanding of caring could lead to inequities that sabotage the solidarity. By critical

understanding of caring she refers to the understanding that relationships are intersected and inscribed by inequitable distributions of power. Jennifer, Amanda and I had greater access to epistemological and social power than most families who sought special education services for their children. Our narratives did not always acknowledge the reality and consequences of this power imbalance. For instance, when Amanda recounted that she told the mother to complain to the office, there was no accounting for or acknowledgement of the fact that Amanda complaining to the office was different than the parent complaining to the office. The narration of a story in which parents go fight their battles with the office alone, failed to explain that, as a special education teacher, Amanda had a reasonable chance of winning that battle while parents, whose knowledge was often undervalued by office staff, had a much more difficult time of it, usually with less satisfactory results. In reducing the gap between her and parents, Amanda narrated interactive attention without the action of epistemological solidarity. Jennifer, similarly, narrated solutions based on informing parents. After that, there was a lack of narrative imagination of what to do. Both Amanda and Jennifer's epistemological solidarity narratives focused on the interactive attention and action of caring, but failed to sufficiently take into account epistemological privilege.

Caring and solidarity during the ARD process

A week later, there had been little progress. The office was very reluctant to schedule a meeting to continue the ARD process. Office staff explained that they had already tried to begin the ARD process with Laura, but that when they had requested that

she go to a social service agent or simply sign a paper, she had not followed through. Laura complained that she did not have time to do these things and besides, she was not able to understand the meetings. The meeting was finally set when Amanda wielded her power as special education team leader to mandate the meeting. For her part, Elizabeth praised Laura for agreeing to attend the meeting because the meeting was a necessity in the process to get her son the additional educational services he needed.

Amanda, Jennifer, Laura, Elizabeth and I were to meet the day before the ARD meeting to prep for the meeting and help Laura feel more comfortable with the process. We met during the day to accommodate Laura's schedule, so Amanda was unable to attend due to teaching responsibilities. I began the meeting by asking people there what they wanted out of the upcoming ARD meeting. I began by arguing for the creation of a transparent process and making sure that Mario received adequate academic services. Jennifer hoped that Laura could understand the process and make an informed decision. Elizabeth wanted to practice the questions so that Laura could feel comfortable the next day. Laura was explicit with what she wanted, "Quiero que me ayudan con terapia. Que me ayudan de hacerle entender a la maestra y al Señor García que mi hijo está mal. [I want you to help me get therapy (for Mario). That you help me make the teacher and Mr García understand that Mario is not doing well.]" We all came into the meeting with explicit, but different ideas of what we wanted to get out of the meeting.

Jennifer, in response to Laura's request, said that the principal understood that Mario needed help, and that he was arranging a time for Mario to see a therapist, but again, they were waiting for paperwork to clear. Elizabeth noted that they had been

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saying the same thing for some time and that we need to be insistent so that 'Ellos nos hacen caso [They pay attention to us]'. At this Laura shared how just the day before they had been going over spelling words with her son and her son knew them all. But when she asked him this morning he had forgotten them. Whatever help they were giving him was not enough. Laura insisted, "Es que no entiende, no se recuerda que aprendió, y después se desespera y piensa mal de si mismo [It's that he doesn't understand, he doesn't remember what he learned, he gets frustrated, and then he gets down on himself.]." When Jennifer tried to explain the school's position, Elizabeth and Laura made a point to narrate their understanding of the situation.

Laura continued with another story. She recounted how very recently someone tried to choke Mario while he was in the bathroom. When she heard about the incident, she had gone to the school but nothing had been done. She wanted her son to be safe at school. Elizabeth responded by saying that since he was such a good kid that it was difficult to imagine why he was having such problems, but she had seen that he was. She also saw that bigger kids were picking on him in the apartments. She knew he was smart because she often took care of him and helped him with his homework. He caught on to everything so quickly. But then she also saw him forget everything. Laura repeated that he needed extra support from the school. At this point, Elizabeth interrupted Laura and reminded her that at this point, after waiting for so long for so help at Walnutbrook, she really wanted Mario to transfer to a nearby school. Laura agreed, saying that since her younger son had entered his program for 3 year olds, he had almost learned more than his

older brother. It seemed that the other school was doing a better job than Walnutbrook, so she wanted Mario transferred over there.

At this, I pointed out that I heard that Laura wanted three things: academic services for her son, that we make sure that he was safe and a transfer request. Laura nodded. Knowing I wouldn't be there the next day, I suggested that there be one person in charge of making sure that each of these items get taken care of. We assigned the academic component to Amanda. Elizabeth said she would reinforce the safety issue and expand it to make sure that when Laura talked to the school, she was taken care of. Finally, Jennifer said she could help with the transfer request. We left the meeting at that.

After Laura's ARD meeting, Elizabeth told me that she thought it had gone well for two reasons. First, Laura had actually shown up. Second, the school agreed to start providing more academic services to Mario the following week even before the paper work showed up. Jennifer's assessment of the meeting was more ambivalent. She told me that Laura said little during the meeting. Amanda had prepared for most of the meeting beforehand and the meeting itself consisted of little more than everyone agreeing to a plan Laura barely understood. On a positive note, most of the meeting was taken up with making sure that Laura understood that they were giving Mario more services and asking if she had any questions. But Laura didn't ask any questions, and the actual plan was rather vague. It seemed they were going to provide more tutoring, but she didn't really understand what would happen once the paperwork came back. One way or another, at least Mario was getting more services.

During the ARD process, in spite of our desire to provide epistemological solidarity, we struggled to support Laura's knowledge values. For instance, I claimed that Laura could understand and be understood through Walnutbrook's ARD process. Laura, who had been involved in the ARD process for the last year, knew that staff in the ARD process would speak and listen in a way that invalidated Laura's epistemology. In other words, when I narrated a meeting in which Laura would speak and be understood, a color and class blind notion without taking epistemological privilege into account, I was not taking seriously Laura's claims that she was not being understood in the meeting and thus I was not standing in epistemological solidarity.

Elizabeth got closest to offering (e)pistemological solidarity. By prompting Laura, agreeing with Laura's view of events and encouraging action, Elizabeth demonstrated both special attention and a willingness to act that are so important in solidarity.

Figure 6.1 Elizabeth's actions interpreted through caring and solidarity theory

Elizabeth's actions	Interpreted as caring	Interpreted as solidarity
1) Prompting Laura's narrations	Interactive attention – She is paying attention to Laura's epistemology	Special concern – Laura's epistemology is special
2) Agreeing to Laura's view of events	Caring disposition – She is willing to trust Laura's epistemology	Mutual identification – She identifies with Laura's epistemology
3) Encouraging action	Caring act – She is willing to act based on Laura's epistemology	Shared goals – Willing to share goals based on Laura's epistemology

The advantage of including caring theory in epistemological solidarity work is that it clarifies the affective components of different aspects of solidarity (See Fig. 6.1). It is not that interactive attention is the same as special concern, but rather that interactive

attention is an important affective component of special concern. Elizabeth demonstrated

special concern when she was listening to Laura's stories and encouraged Laura to share

them with others. Interactive attention, or caring, on its own, was not an act of racial

solidarity. Amanda, Jennifer and I were demonstrating caring relationships and actions

with Laura by listening and meeting with her. Elizabeth, in what I consider an important

differential technique, helped transform this class and color blind narrated caring into

moments of solidarity by privileging her shared experiences, be it by agreeing with her or

encouraging her narration of particular stories they had already shared. Shared class blind

and color blind racial narratives turned affective caring into a solidarity based on the

acknowledgement of the shared personal relational (e)pistemological narratives.

Conflicting relational (e)pistemologies: Elizabeth accepts Laura's differences

While we were setting up Laura's special education meeting, Elizabeth and

Jennifer had been working on a separate project that followed up Elizabeth's work with

the apartment residents, As Elizabeth had talked to several other mothers about their

apartments, she had discovered a story that had disturbed her. A group of managers raised

the rent and when people questioned why they were being charged more rent, the

managers told them that if they were not quiet, they would be reported to immigration.

Elizabeth took this information to Jennifer who in turn called a renters' association for

advice. The association offered to call the mangers in question to inform them that they

were acting illegally. After these calls were made, Elizabeth let us know that the

managers had promised to return the money. Elizabeth passed this information along to

three mothers and all three were promised that the money they had over-paid would be returned.

During this same time period, Elizabeth continued to work closely with Jennifer. She volunteered to pass out papers, distributed snacks to students taking the TAKS and attended all of Jennifer's parent meetings. Laura did support Elizabeth's actions but did not want to volunteer with her. Additionally, she had failed to follow through on her son's behalf. Elizabeth expressed her frustration to Jennifer. She said that she had told Laura what she needed to do after the ARD meeting, but that Laura had not picked up the doctor's forms Walnutbrook needed and gave excuses for her inaction. Elizabeth had offered to accompany her to get the forms, but Laura had refused to commit. Laura also missed critical appointments; she had failed to show up at another doctor's meeting the previous week, and when Elizabeth had then called her on her cell, her excuses were flimsy and somewhat far-fetched. Elizabeth felt that Laura had been obviously lying and that she had just not wanted to go. Elizabeth was concerned that Laura would not show up for any of her follow-up ARD meetings.

The realization that Laura did not have to feel comfortable in school and might not even act in ways that Elizabeth would act were important realizations for Elizabeth. After the ARD meeting, Elizabeth struggled with making sense of Laura's reluctance to come back to the school. Initially, she bought into the narratives of staff and faculty, which placed all the blame on Laura. They suggested she was irresponsible and would not follow through with her commitments. What this narrative failed to take into account was the fact that the school was a hostile space for Laura. Not only was Laura's PRE

narrative one of having a negative relationship with schools, but also when Laura came to Walnutbrook, staff and teachers treated her like she didn't know or understand how to help her son academically. This is not a space that was comfortable for Laura, as she explained before the ARD meetings. Despite Elizabeth hearing and even repeating this narrative, this was still a difficult perspective to internalize because her PRE, her truth, had wholeheartedly bought into a positive, class blind, parental involvement narrative. "Yo me siento útil cuando ayudo en la escuela (I feel useful when I help at school)", Elizabeth repeated. In bringing Laura to volunteer with her, she was hoping that Laura would feel useful; it was difficult to make sense of the fact that she did not feel useful. While in the end, I was unclear how much she understood of Laura's negativity toward schooling, she would at least accept that Laura felt bad at school and would stop trying to force her to come.

Elizabeth felt quite a bit of tension as she tried to decide how much to encourage Laura to do. On one hand, Elizabeth felt that Laura should care about her son by coming and volunteering and advocating for her child. On the other hand, she was coming to terms with the fact that Laura demonstrated care for her child in other ways, as she detailed during the pre-ARD meeting. 'Care' was a term whose contested symbolism was connected to different actions. Within the parental involvement narrative Elizabeth narrated, volunteering in the school showed 'care'. Laura demonstrated care by coming to school and making sure that her son received appropriate educational services. While organizing tried to challenge the PI conception of 'care' to mean organizing on behalf of your child's school, it still remained a color and class blind term that did not address the

inequitable epistemological privilege present in schools. Elizabeth critiqued these color and class notions of care through critical act of caring, attention and action that more fully validated Laura's epistemologies and provided special education services for Mario.

Caring about the socially marginalized

Elizabeth cared about the schooling that her friend Laura's child received. Elizabeth went and found Amanda, Jennifer and I who also cared about working class, Latina voice in the school. The problem was that our color and class blind narratives of care did not always take into account power differences when building solidarity. Especially when it came to epistemology, Amanda, Jennifer and I felt that we *knew* the correct way to organize, teach or work with the system without recognizing that our knowledge had to be relational. In the process, Laura's knowledge of her own son was often ignored because we did not recognize how her socially marginalized position invalidated her epistemology in the spaces in which we were trying to get her special education services.

Elizabeth critiqued these color and class blind epistemological narratives by spending time to act with Laura as she tried to advocate for her child. While working with and paying attention to how Walnutbrook treated Laura, Elizabeth not only built a special trusting relationship that led to moments of solidarity, she also learned to have greater respect for Laura's relational epistemologies. Thus, when it came time to advocate for Laura's epistemological narratives, Elizabeth knew how to help Laura prioritize what she thought important. Elizabeth's differential technique was rooted in the time she spent with Laura since she learned some of the ways that power relations

devalued Laura's knowledge and so she knew when and how to advocate for Laura's

epistemological priorities.

Conclusion: Latino Critical Race Pedagogy in relational organizing

In the process of critiquing racial systems at Walnutbrook, I reflected on a pedagogical orientation that helped me to privilege working class Latina epistemologies as I collaborated with working class Latina leaders and organize to critique and challenge the racial systems and dominant racial narratives in the school. I refer to this pedagogy as *Latino Critical Race Pedagogy*. By pedagogical orientation, I refer to a set of beliefs that guide how I think about teaching (Freeman & Freeman, 1994; Gillis, 2010).In the context of relational organizing, my beliefs about teaching not only impacted how I communicated how I thought we should organize the school, but how and why we should critique, build relationships and privilege oppressed voices. By using a Latino Critical Relational Pedagogy (LCRP) in relational organizing, I was privileging a pedagogical orientation that integrated my beliefs in the importance of racial critique, relational organizing and accessing Latina epistemologies.

This pedagogical orientation emerged from my work at Walnutbrook. As I worked with leaders to critique the dominant racial ideologies and systems, I found that there were certain pedagogical approaches that supported racial critique and the use of Latina epistemologies at Walnutbrook. As I reflected on these approaches, I recognized that it was not these relational organizing and differential techniques per se which framed our approaches, but rather the beliefs which we discussed throughout our organizing efforts. In this conclusion, I discuss how these beliefs emerged from research literature and our ideological critique at Walnutbrook to inform Latina Critical Race Pedagogy in

relational organizing. I then end this dissertation by discussing some of the implications

that this pedagogy had in our praxis, returning to the chapter 3 garden action as an

example in practice of the successes and challenges we faced as we approached relational

organizing through a LCRP lens.

Racial critique in the community organizing for school reform literature

Latina Critical Race Pedagogy emerged from the praxis of relational organizing

and differential techniques, i.e. the conversations and actions that I shared with

organizers and leaders at Walnutbrook about the multiple, specific, integrated oppressive

systems at the school and community. I found that these conversations and actions often

returned to reflections and a critical engagement with several areas in the research

literature that have engaged with questions of organizing, education, racial critique and

Latina epistemology. In the following section, I discuss this literature as it refers to the

formation, situation and relation of LCRP to relational organizing and educational

research literature.

LCRP emerged from a racial critique of relational organizing. It is situated within

a community organizing for school reform literature which has substantively

problematized the role of race in organizing (Warren, 2001; Williams, 2005). Researchers

have found that when community organizing engages with schools with a population of a

high percentage working class, students of color, schools have demonstrated academic

improvements and increased community participation (Fabricant, 2010; Mediratta, Shah,

& McAlister, 2009b). Research evidence though has been uneven whether relational

organizing has significantly challenged the racial inequities which are endemic to many of these schools (O'Connor, Hanney, & Lewis, 2011; Shirley, 2002). Much of this has been due to a research approach which has focused on providing an initial survey of organizing actions, successes and challenges (Gold, 2002; Mediratta, Shah, & McAlister, 2009a; Shirley, 2009). This study adds to a growing research literature examining racialized practices within organizing (Dyrness, 2011; Simmons, Lewis, & Larson, 2011) by focusing on the impact of racial systems on Walnutbrook and the relational organizing actions within that school.

In order to describe and critique racial systems at Walnutbrook, I drew from racial systemic (Feagin, 2006), and more specifically, from racial ideological literature (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). Racial ideological literature has described how systemic pressures impact the perceptions of racial inequities within education in the United States (Barr & Neville, 2008; Danns, 2008), but most of these studies have relied on questionnaires and surveys which define ideologies at a set time. While there is a growing literature analyzing the use of racial ideologies in educational practice (Johnson, 2005; Lewis, 2001; Picower, 2009), there is not as extensive a literature that documents Latino racial ideologies (Cobas & Feagin, 2007; Juarez, 2008). By describing Latino racial ideologies within the praxis of school organizing for school reform, I am able to contribute to the understandings of the role of racial systems within Latino schooling as well as situating LCRP within an effort to promote a Latino racial ideological critique.

We accomplished this racial critique mainly through a narrative dialogic analysis of leaders' situated lives. While most of the literature on community organizing has

emphasized how the strategic use of relational capital has enhanced the power of community-school partnerships (Mediratta, Shah, & McAlister, 2009a; Shirley, 2009), my study joins a new group of literature which describes how narrative practice challenges or fails to challenge racial inequities within this form of organizing (Sobel, 2004; Su, 2007). More specifically, researchers have described how narratives shape racialized Latino participation in organizing (Dyrness, 2011; Simmons, Lewis, & Larson, 2011), though rarely are researchers organizers in the action. As an organizer advocating for working class Latina counter narratives, I provide an -emic perspective to the challenges I faced as an organizer narratively challenging color blind ideologies within a school. By focusing on these narrative practices, I was able to describe how joint critical analysis was able to impact racial systemic change in schools as well as situate LCRP in the narrative experiences of the organizers and leaders.

In using narrative racial critique, our organizing related LCRP to Freirian pedagogical praxis. There is a growing history of Freirian critique of racial oppression (Haymes, 1995; Leonardo, 2009). While community organizers also have a history of employing Freirian critical praxis (Chambers, 2004; Rubin & Rubin, 2008), there is not as much research in their use of Freire in racial critique (Allen, 2006; Olivos, 2006). On the other hand, there has been increasing interest in the Freirian critique of intersected oppressions, including race, in the educational realm (Leonardo, 2005; Rossatto, Allen, & Pruyn, 2006), with particular attention to the use of Freirian praxis (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2003; Miller & Hafner, 2008; Shor, 1992). Of particular interest, is Jenning and Lynn's Critical Race Pedagogy (Jennings & Lynn, 2005; Lynn, 1999) which combines

racial critique with Freirian praxis. Their approach is instructive because it acknowledges the endemic nature of race, the intersected nature of oppression and the fact that epistemologies are racialized. That is, they privilege African American epistemological perspectives within a Freirian praxis. By describing relational organizing practices as attempts to encourage participants to dialogue and 'read their world', I relate LCRP to Freirian praxis, especially as it relates to critiquing and acting on intersected forms of racial oppression.

In order to privilege Latina epistemologies within relational organizing, I relied on Chicana and LatCrit perspectives of knowledge construction. Researchers argue that working class Latinas have learned to make situated sense of their contexts since they are a product of multiple, intersected forms of oppression that are products of specific spaces (Anzaldua, 1987, 2002; Sandoval, 2000). Based on this situated standpoint, educational researchers argue that educational practitioners need to privilege Latina lived experiences, especially through personal narratives (F. Gonzalez, 2001; Huber, 2009). Given this reality, Chicana educational theorists have described subjugated forms of knowledge construction, specifically counter stories (Blum & de la Piedra, 2010; Knight, Norton, Bentley, & Dixon, 2004) and epistemologies (Cammarota & Romero, 2009; Delgado Bernal, 1998) which challenge dominant racialized systems of thought in their specific contexts. Despite this work, research still documents how schools have overwhelmingly devalued working class Latina forms of knowledge and researchers continue to call for educational practices within schooling which describe positive epistemological practices with Latina parents (Auerbach, 2007; Olivos, 2006; Ryan,

Casas, Kelley-Vance, Ryalls, & Nero, 2010; Villenas, 2001). By describing Chicana relational epistemologies and racial counter narratives as differential techniques in relational organizing, I am able to situate LCRP within efforts to privilege subjugated Latina narratives in educational spaces.

LCRP emerged from a description of relational organizing at Walnutbrook that situates itself within a growing racial critique of the role of organizing institutions in schools. Specifically, we privileged working class Latina racial ideologies and epistemological narratives in organizational praxis. Through critical narratives, we related pedagogical perspectives to Freirian and relational organizing praxis, which itself is growing to engage with intersected oppressions in schools. By engaging and privileging Latina narrative critiques of racial systems within relational organizing, LCRP situates itself in a diverse, growing literature that aims to provide more equitable schooling through racial critique.

Challenging the racial narratives and systems at Walnutbrook and City Alliance through three pedagogical orientations

LCRP emerged in the context of organizing efforts to critique the dominant racial systems of relational organizing at Walnutbrook. In efforts to identify and critique these ideologies and the social systems that supported them, we found that there were organizing practices and pedagogical approaches which aided in supporting a community critique of these ideologies. In particular, we found that specific pedagogical orientations helped in privileging the working class Latina epistemologies and techniques, which were

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so often ignored at Walnutbrook. In this section, I describe how LCRP emerged from a critique of the two dominant racial ideologies at Walnutbrook, serving to help us understand the impact of these ideologies and how we might be able to work with working class Latinas to challenge these ideologies and the inequitable racial systems they supported.

Two of the dominant racial narratives we encountered in relational organizing at Walnutbrook were City Alliance's broad-based narrative and Walnutbrook's bureaucratic narrative. By focusing on broad-based organizing, CA framed a narrative that tended to ignore racialized systems, did not provide spaces in which challenging racial systems was valued and even lacked a language through which to discuss racial inequities. CA and its organizers consistently stressed the need to build a broad base and to work with everybody, creating narratives in which race was ignored. In their trainings, they stressed finding issues that crossed racial boundaries and avoiding racialized issues as divisive. This devalued creating spaces where issues of racial inequity could be discussed. This also failed to provide a language and alternative ideological framework through which to discuss and imagine more equitable racial systems. While broad-based organizing has challenged and discussed race (Orr, 1999; Shirley, 2002; Su, 2007), CA's framing of race promoted a color blind institutional ideology which discouraged organizational challenges to racial systems.

Walnutbrook Elementary also derailed attempts to challenge racial systems by insisting on exclusively bureaucratic approaches to problem solving. When discussing systemic issues like behavior and academics, staff and teachers discussed the over-riding

importance and consequences of individual responsibility both in committees and in practice. In fact, participants were often encouraged to individually take responsibility and deal with district bureaucratic processes like turning in paper work or going to meet individuals in the district hierarchy. These procedures and individual practices masked relational processes in which middle class whites and systemically organized institutions like the PTA or a homeowners' association had more power to exert in having their demands and concerns acknowledged, considered and met. In other words, color blind bureaucracies masked a school system in which individual, working class people of color were forced to work their way through a bureaucracy while middle class, whites talked to their friends in power or organized to influence those who occupied higher positions of the bureaucracy.

In order to critique these color blind ideologies, relational organizing pedagogical orientations privileged the necessity of building relationships and relational understanding of social systems to build more equitable critiques of oppressive institutions and their dominant ideologies. City Alliance offered a relational, organizing model so that institutional members were in spaces that promoted working together despite institutional bureaucratic forces that narrated individualized problem-solving. CA instructed organizers to provide individualized and group support so that leaders could learn to challenge and critique bureaucratic hierarchies and relationally dialogue about these oppressive systems. It created a connection to multiple institutions, including other schools, churches and unions so that these oppressive forces were observed and critiqued within larger systemic forces. CA's relational organizing practices critiqued bureaucratic

ideologies by not only spotlighting their individualistic nature, but by also providing an

institutional system in which to foster a pedagogical orientation that critiqued and acted

to create more relational organizing practices in schools.

City Alliance's relational organizing techniques reminded me of Freirian critical

pedagogy. Individual meetings were spaces that encouraged dialogue between oppressor

and oppressed (Freire, 1970, 1997). Relational house meetings could turn into cultural

circles in which participants narratively problem posed the world in which they live

(Freire, 1973; Freire & Macedo, 1987). Institutional house meetings served as spaces of

problem-posing praxis, in which oppressor and oppressed acted together to challenge the

inequitable social structures around them (Gadotti, 1994; Shor, 1992; Soto, 1997). Just as

importantly, Freire underlined that his problem-posing approach was not a method, but

rather a philosophical approach (Freire, 1970; Freire & Macedo, 1987), so I began to

understand relational organizing techniques as pedagogical tools with which to engage

oppressed, working class Latinas at Walnutbrook. By understanding and integrating

relational organizing pedagogical orientations and techniques with a Freirian problem-

posing praxis, I was able to privilege a critique and challenge of the social systems that

oppressed working class leaders.

As organizers began to work with working class Latinas through this relational

dialogue, it became apparent how broad based and bureaucratic color blind ideologies

ignored, obscured and devalued Latina leaders' perceptions of racialized oppression at

Walnutbrook. To engage with Latina epistemologies, we drew on pedagogical

approaches that valued and encouraged the expression of Latina forms of knowledge

through the narratives that formed the basis of relational organizing. Through individual meetings, we listened and discussed counter-stories which valued alternative interpretations of Latina schooling at Walnutbrook (Blum & de la Piedra, 2010; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). In our relational house meetings, we created relatively safe spaces in which Latina leaders shared narratives about their lives (Anzaldua, 2002; Dyrness, 2011; Villenas, 2001). In our action house meetings, we promoted differential techniques situated in Latina personal experience which challenged racial systems at Walnutbrook (Delgado Bernal, 2006; Sandoval, 2000). Through pedagogical approaches that privileged Latina epistemologies, we narratively critiqued color blind racial ideologies to work with working class Latina leaders to challenge racial systems.

In order to address the dominant racial narratives of broad based organizing and bureaucracies, I primarily drew upon three pedagogical orientations. I drew upon a relational organizing orientation to build relationships and organizing actions among Latina leaders. I used Freirian problem-posing to dialogue about the oppressive systems Latina leaders faced in the organizing actions. I privileged Latina epistemologies through counter narratives and the praxis of differential techniques. These pedagogical orientations allowed me to work with working class Latina leaders and organizers to critique the dominant color blind racial ideologies and challenge the racial systems they obfuscated.

Latino Critical Race Pedagogy in Relational Organizing

By integrating pedagogical orientations found in Freirian praxis, relational organizing and Critical Race Pedagogy, I came to view the possibility of a relational organizing pedagogy that worked with working class leaders of color to challenge institutional racial systems at Walnutbrook. I refer to this pedagogy as Latino Critical Race Pedagogy in relational organizing. LCRP in relational organizing is pedagogy that privileges Latino epistemologies to critique intersected racial systems. It privileges a relational approach so that organizers and leaders work towards realizing more equitable relationships both within the organizing and within the institutions they inhabit. LCRP focuses on critiquing the oppressive racial systems through dialogue about their world. It privileges Latina epistemologies, which describe racial oppression through the personal stories of its leaders. By validating the racial systemic critique of its oppressed participants, LCRP provides an opportunity for more inclusive visions of equitable schooling systems (See Figure 7.1).

Figure 7.1 Components of Latino Critical Race Pedagogy

Pedagogy	Role in Latino Critical Race Pedagogy
Relational organizing	Teach organizers how to build equitable relationships between organizers and leaders as well as among institutions. Use relational organizing techniques to promote working class Latina narratives and their leadership in challenging racial systems
Freirian problem-posing	Work with leaders and organizers to critique racial systems and integrated oppressive social systems. Use dialogue and cultural systems to elicit personal narratives, descriptions of leaders' oppressive systems and ideas on how to challenge them.
Latina epistemologies	Work with working class leaders of color to elicit Latina epistemological concerns. Use personal narratives, subjugated ideologies, counter narrative and differential techniques to critique institution and imagine more equitable schooling systems.

LCRP in relational organizing pays particular attention to the relationships that are established in institutions and in community organizing for school reform. It is through relationships that LCRP examines and works toward more equitable organizing structures and systems. In particular, this approach values relational (e)pistemologies which critique racialized relationships and system and envision more equitable systems within the organizing or the schooling system. Ultimately, relational networks and relational critiques are seen as forms of institutional power which need to be continuously examined and built up in order to make the best use of the multiple strengths and perspectives of the diverse membership of the organizing community.

LCRP uses Freirian problem-posing through dialogue to critique the diverse intersected oppressions that institutional members experience in their communities. Specifically, leaders narrate and analyze how social systems impact their personal primary concerns by dialoguing about personal stories. By specifically bringing up race and providing a language and critique through which to narrate racial systems, leaders can include discussions of race in their critique of the intersected oppressions within the institution, the organizing and in their lives. Finally, LCRP demands that these intersected oppressions are critiqued through collective praxis led by oppressed institutional members so that critique is not simply relegated to narrative analysis, but also acted upon the institution to challenge the inequitable systems which impact the leaders and their children.

Finally, Latina CRP privileges the situated oppression of working class Latinas as it makes sense of its organizing contexts. LCRP validates Latina epistemologies through

continual relational dialogue since oppressed leaders often face different forms or differently expressed oppressions in the multiple spaces of institutional organizing. By seriously critiquing leaders' experiences through and with their personal narratives, Latina leaders' ways of making sense of their world are privately and publicly validated. This ensures that Latina voices are not only expressed, but also given the societal and institutional power that they so often lack in schools and organizing institutions.

Due to the endemic nature of racism, two components of LCRP need to be continuously applied throughout an organizing action: racial critique and relationship building. A continuous racial critique is crucial because the endemic nature of racial systems means that participants continually narrated new color blind interpretations throughout the duration of the organizing. Yet, a continuous racial critique also provided the means to disrupt dominant racial narratives at any time throughout the action. Through continuous racial critiques, organizational leaders can identify racial systems and provide alternative racial ideologies through which participants can explain and challenge inequities.

While critique can be effective throughout the organizing, relationship building through personal stories was also constantly necessary. This meant that critique remained grounded in the specific contexts of the participants' lives. Since racial systems and ideologies expressed themselves very differently in various contexts, organizers had to constantly keep these relational narratives present to critique the multiple contexts of participants' lives. By keeping individual and house meetings going, leaders can continuously learn of multiple oppressive contexts and how dominant systems adapted to

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our subjugated racial ideologies and systems. By combining relational narratives with a critical racial approach that linked people's lives to an institutional racial system, LCRP encourages participants to engage in a critical examination of their institutions. This critical examination provides the space, narrative and language through which leaders can discuss race and its role in perpetuating inequities at the school.

Organizing racial narratives within the garden action

To place the Latino Critical Race Pedagogy in its organizing context, I conclude this dissertation by returning to the garden action discussed in chapter 3. By returning to this case study, I convey the successes and challenges that I faced, describing these organizing practices within my praxis.

The first meeting of teachers and parents to create a hands-on garden left me frustrated. During the previous month, I had been working closely with teachers and parents to find an issue around which members of the Walnutbrook social justice community could unite. I had met personally with new leaders who were excitedly waking up to the possibility that they could join with other members of the Walnutbrook community and work together to critique schooling and come up with alternative curricula that supported a more progressive vision of education. Not only had we found an issue that reverberated with a broad base of both parents and teachers, but also we had been able to narrate the issue as an alternative to a test-based curriculum, which I personally found harmful to Walnutbrook's students. I had reminded them continuously that as leaders of this action, it was up to them to include Latina voices and individuals at the center of the organizing, and had personally convinced Paquita and Carolina to attend

the meeting. Despite all this work at inclusivity, Latina voices had been ignored at the meeting and their ideas of creating a Mexicana huerta set aside.

The irony was that almost everybody else at the meeting, including Paquita and Carolina, considered the meeting a success. Teachers and parents had successfully counter narrated an organizing action that brought the desires and wishes of a silenced community to fruition. This leadership core had build relationships with those in power and created a new vision based on a community of alternative voices that they could now turn into action and reality. This was how broad-based organizing was supposed to work.

I had understood broad based organizing as a means to find ways to build relationships among a community that supported goals to make schools more equitable. Yet in supporting all community members, I had followed a color blind narrative that obscured how some Walnutbrook community members had greater access to the relational organizing techniques because of their already privileged status at Walnutbrook. Unlike working class Latinas, teachers and middle class parents did not have to build as many relationships or learn to narrate broad community narratives because of their privileged position in the community. As I walked out of that meeting, with insight into my lack of critique, I had many doubts and questions as to how I should have organized, taught or led that action. I wondered whether I supported the wrong people for the action leadership, whether I should have forced Melinda and Amanda to build stronger relationships with Paquita before the action meeting or whether I should have been more vocal during the meeting to advocate for a Mexicana huerta. I wondered

whether I had been a responsible organizer and researcher as I advocated for the garden action and racial equity at Walnutbrook.

Latino Critical Race Pedagogical successes and challenges in organizational praxis
"Never, ever do for others what they can do for themselves."

Industrial Area Foundation's Iron Rule (Chambers, 2004)

One of the key goals of Latina Critical Race Pedagogy in relational organizing is to develop working class Latina organizers so that they take leadership to speak, critique and lead organizing actions with other leaders and organizers. With this in mind, IAF's Iron Rule is a key pedagogical maxim since so many organizers are tempted to organize for their working class Latina leaders as opposed to letting them learn and act on their own. But as a pedagogical approach, the Iron Rule is challenging because organizers have to decide for themselves what and how much institutional leaders can do on their own. Leadership tasks like critique, research, narration and speaking up, as well as the more visible tasks of planning a meeting, confronting a teacher or holding individual meetings are often much easier for the organizer to accomplish alone or to find other leaders to carry them out rather than guiding working class Latina leaders through the struggle of learning to advocate and organize through these techniques. Throughout my ethnography, I was often torn not only about whether I was doing too much or too little for Walnutbrook's leaders, but which leaders I was working with and how I was researching and building relationships with them. Much like the Iron Rule, LCRP was a

challenging approach in which I often struggled with other leaders to find effective ways to privilege, guide and dialogue with critical Latina voices in order to narrate dialogic actions that challenged the racial systems and dominant narratives at Walnutbrook.

For example, in this first garden house meeting, we had mixed success in privileging Latina epistemologies within the garden action. On one hand, by specifically seeking out working class Latina leaders like Paquita and Carolina who I knew to be interested in the garden, I was able to dialogue and build relationships that supported and validated Latina concerns about the science curriculum at the school. Together, Paquita, Carolina and I were even able to critically acknowledge that white teachers would be a challenge to work with due to the fact that they often ignored Latina concerns. Nevertheless, we were still able to dialogically create a space in which their epistemological concerns fit into the gardening action. By selectively deciding with whom to hold individual meetings and by critically narrating a space within a school issue which acknowledged racialized relationships, I was able to work with Paquita and Carolina to narrate their epistemological concerns so that we could envision a way through which they could get their concerns addressed in an organizing action.

Despite foregrounding Latina epistemologies privately with both Paquita and Melinda, we were not able to have Latina epistemological concerns validated publicly. For instance, Paquita and Carolina were not able to voice their huerta narrative in the garden meeting. They were also unable to force garden action leaders to engage in a public critique that would have acknowledged how their epistemological concerns had been shut out from the garden action. While I considered voicing the huerta narrative

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myself and even tried to engage in critique, both decisions clashed with the Iron Rule. Instead, I worked with Paquita and Carolina in a separate space to create a critical huerta narrative and organizing action.

When it came to building more equitable relationships that provided greater systemic power for working class Latinas, there were also mixed results at this garden meeting. Through a series of individual meetings with me, Paquita and Carolina built a relationship in which they could support their own desires to build a garden. This relational support was provided in multiple forms. Initially, they supported each other's visions of a huerta and critiques of racialized leadership at the school. They then supported each other with each other's physical presence in the uncomfortable space of the garden meeting. Finally, they would support each other in analyzing their role in the garden and deciding to take action by planting a huerta. A continuous, critical relational presence supported through multiple individual meetings that critiqued Paquita and Carolina's actions in the space of the garden provided multiple opportunities to critique their social systems within an affective environment that supported their critique, subjugated ideologies, counter narratives and ultimately, their organizing actions.

Yet I also provided multiple opportunities for Paquita and Carolina to build relationships with other working class, Latina leaders as well as with Melinda and Amanda. While it may have been normal for many people to resist getting to know people outside their own circles, this discomfort was exacerbated at Walnutbrook by the racial systems in place, so I struggled with how much to push leaders to meet and work with other leaders who I thought supported their desires at the institution. The lack of a

relationship between Amanda and Paquita would ultimately lead to distrust and ignorance on Amanda's part of Paquita's goals. It would take over a year for a relationship to form and for the two to work together on other actions. Likewise, Paquita and Carolina chose not to build relationships with other Latina parents, so they received little parental support for their huerta despite my knowledge that there were many parents who wanted to plant their own huertas. While the challenges of building an equitable relationship with Lynette were qualitatively different from building an equitable relationship with another Latina parent. This difference highlights how, as organizers, we encouraged each other to build relationships, but how and with whom we built these relationships impacted the critical actions and narratives of our organizing actions.

The systems we elected to critique and how we did our critique also impacted our ability as organizers to challenge racial systems. For instance, it took us almost a month of multiple critical dialogues among Paquita, Carolina and me to be able to critique the anti-TAKS garden narrative. Yet, by constantly returning to Paquita and Carolina's narratives and experiences in the garden we were able to discern patterns of oppression that did not make sense when we analyzed them through the anti-TAKS narrative. Just as importantly, we helped Paquita articulate her own counter narrative, how it critiqued the anti-TAKS narrative and how it imagined a different set of actions. We were also able to imagine where and how we could turn those critiques into action. Through a process of critical dialogue, we were able to validate Latina leaders' experiences of oppression, connect them to racial systems and discern a racial critique which made sense of these

situated experiences as a way to imagine alternative praxis and actions that challenged

Paquita's racialized access to curricular decision making.

Yet, there were so many forms of intersected oppression in so many multiple

spaces, it was often difficult to prioritize which systems to critique and when. While

Paquita, Carolina and I were busy critiquing the anti-TAKS garden narrative, we were

also participating in a Parent Involvement narrative that promised an equitable education

to her great grandchildren as long as she was involved. In reality, this was not what

happened. Not only did we fail to critique this PI narrative when it came to Paquita's

family, we found out that many of the people who had power over the children's

education were involved in the organizing in other forms. We had had the time and

opportunity to build an action over ways to address the schooling failures involving

Paquita's great grandchildren, and yet we had prioritized other narratives. Over the next

year, we would prioritize Paquita's family and their schooling would improve, but it took

an action of continuous racial critique to prioritize these academic concerns that were

easily distracted by other crises that occurred in the school. Furthermore, critiques took

time to develop and discern, so without continuous individual and house meetings, we

often found ourselves thinking we were addressing a situation that we were ignoring.

Since our time for relational critique was limited, it was important to continuously

prioritize our issues to make sure we were serving the most important epistemological

concerns of our Latina leaders.

By continuously dialoguing with working class Latina leaders, we were often able

to address epistemological concerns that were being ignored or oppressed by racial

systems and narratives at Walnutbrook. Yet, in order to make sure we privileged crucial Latina epistemological concerns we had to carefully negotiate how and when we dialogued with which leaders. While we built relationships among each other, we also had to find ways to continuously build new relationships, often having to make difficult decisions about with whom we needed to work with to critique key racial systems. Ultimately, the decisions of which systems we decided to critique and the manner in which we would critique them led our understanding and organizing actions, so the kinds of dialogues and narratives in which we engaged proved crucial to our relational organizing. While LCRP provides opportunities to privilege oppressed voices and an integrated critique of oppressive social systems within relational organizing, it also offers many challenges which organizers have to negotiate together in order to take advantage of these opportunities.

Latino Critical Race Pedagogy in community organizing for school reform

       In this dissertation, I described how relational organizing actions at Walnutbrook Elementary critiqued racial systems at the school. I described how the dominant color blind ideology was expressed through racial narratives at the school and how organizers and staff engaged with working class Latinas who expressed subjugated racial ideologies through racial counter narratives and differential techniques. As a critical ethnography that details the workings of race of community organizing for school reform, this study engages and adds to the educational literature on community organizing for school reform and the practice of racial critique. Specifically, it proposes a pedagogical model

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through which to more fully engage working class Latina leaders in schools and communities. While failing to create a sustained critique of racial systems at Walnutbrook, working class Latina leaders were able to create spaces and organizing moments in which their epistemological concerns were voiced, addressed and through which we were able to offer a vision of more equitable schooling systems at Walnutbrook. By ascertaining that these moments continue to occur within community organizing for school reform, Latino Critical Race Pedagogy offers a consistent approach to challenging inequitable racial systems in schools.

Appendix 1: Walnutbrook demographics

Source: City ISD Official 'Walnutbrook Campus Report Card' (CISD, 2009a)

Student enrollment   189

Student demographics

Economic Disadvantage	91%
Limited English Proficiency	59.3%
Bilingual	50.8%

Student ethnicity
Hispanic	86.8%
White	7.4%
African-American	5.4%
Asian	.5%

Teacher/staff ethnicity (of 23 teachers and staff)
Hispanic	47.8% (11 people)
White	47.8% (11 people)
African-American	4.3% (1 person)

The main point of an individual meeting is that it is an unscripted conversation in which we listen to each other's personal stories in order to learn of each other's perspectives and institutional concerns. When I first met people though, I did prepare a set of questions to guide the conversations and a protocol to explain my research. Here is my initial individual meeting protocol.

My name is Chris Milk and I am an organizer at Walnutbrook. My job is to help the school work more effectively together. I am currently getting to know students' families to see what your main concerns about the school are. I am also a researcher looking at the role of race in the schools, and in organizing in particular. I would like to talk with you for 15-30 minutes about your experience at Walnutbrook. I'd like to learn what brought you to this school, what you think of the school and if there is anything you would like from the school. Is this OK?

Please feel free to answer the following questions in any order. Also, feel free to ask me any questions you may have about me or the school:

1) What are your hopes and dreams for your child after school?

2) What was your school experience like?

3) What concerns do you have about your child in school?

After 15 min: 1) Have you worked with other families, staff or teachers at Walnutbrook?

2) Have you experienced or know of any discrimination at Walnutbrook?

The protocol in Spanish:

Me llamo Chris Milk y soy un organizador en Walnutbrook. Mi trabajo es ayudar a la escuela trabajar más eficazmente juntos. Estoy conociendo las familias de los estudiantes para saber cuáles son sus mayores preocupaciones en la escuela. También soy investigador que está estudiando el papel de la raza en las escuelas, y en la organización particularmente. Quisiera hablar con usted por 15-30 minutos sobre su experiencia en Walnutbrook. Quisiera aprender qué le trajo a esta escuela, qué usted piensa de la escuela y si hay cualquier cosa usted quisiera saber de la escuela. ¿Está bien?

Me gustaría conversar usando estas preguntas como guía. Puede contestar las siguientes preguntas o solo platicar de su experiencia en Walnutbrook. También, me puede preguntar cualquier pregunta que usted tenga sobre mí o la escuela:

1) ¿Cuáles son sus esperanzas y sueños para su niño después de escuela?

2) ¿Como era su experiencia en la escuela?

3) ¿Qué preocupaciones tiene sobre su niño en escuela?

Después de 15 minutos:

1) ¿Usted ha trabajado con otras familias o maestras en Walnutbrook?

2) ¿Usted ha experimentado o sabe de discriminación en Walnutbrook?

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Vita

Chris Milk was born on July 8, 1973 in Bloomington, Indiana, the son of Richard Milk and Olga Bonilla. He grew up and graduated from high school in Austin, Texas. He did his undergraduate studies and graduated with a B.A. in Biology from the University of California at Santa Cruz in 1995. He taught bilingual elementary in California and graduated with an M.A. in Critical Studies in Education from California State University at San Jose in 2001. He continued teaching in bilingual elementary classrooms in California and Texas. He entered the Graduate Program of Cultural Studies in Education program of the Curriculum and Instruction Department within the School of Education at the University of Texas in 2006.

Permanent address: 6812 Crystalbrook Dr. Austin, Tx 78724

This dissertation was typed by the author.