Creando lazos

Exploring a Pedagogy of Cariño within Puentes Hacia el Futuro and a Broader Migrant Rights Movement

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Abstract

This project explores the groups and processes that come together to create the space of Puentes Hacia el Futuro—the education after school program of a community-based organization serving the Latinx migrant population in Philadelphia—with the intention of highlighting the affective processes at play. Building upon six semesters of volunteer work with the organization, this project centers cariño and love as effective modes of operation within a space that serves Philly’s migrant community, which is one of many migrant communities under attack by the Trump administration. Centering intimate, individual-based frameworks of change can be difficult; not only do CBOs and NGOs operate within a donor funding structure that demands measurability and tangibility, but larger activist movements can often center change at the macro level. However, through participant observation, interviews, and analysis of materials used for the program, this project explores how cariño is an active, embodied practice that drives the success of Puentes hacia el futuro. More broadly, it challenges us to think about what we consider activism or social justice work and how we measure success or efficacy within these efforts. Furthermore, this thesis explores the creation of lazos—or binding forces and forms of relationship building—as a key and foundational process located at both the local (Puentes) and broader (migrant rights movement) level.
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More than ever before, this has been a year I have truly felt what revolutionary mothering can look like. I have been carried, supported, pushed, mothered by an entire community. To the finish line that felt far away, and [back] to myself again and again.

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I was asked to give a “pitch” for Puentes to my peers in my education course. The point was not to convince someone else to come to our field placement, but rather to give a short description of the work they could expect to be immersed in if they visited. Love, I said. Love work, I would add, thinking about the ways love must be shown and enacted, as well as the high energy levels of the children that can sometimes cause stress within the session. It is work to act through care and love consistently.

Having worked with elementary-aged students for the previous three and a half semesters now, I knew that it was naive of me to expect anything other than high energy levels, shouts of excitement, the pattering of running feet, and the occasional pencil thrown across the room. And still, for about fifty minutes, the goal was to get our kids to finish their homework. There had to be a balance between the wrangling in of emotions and getting our work done—we needed to meet kids where they were at (Gutiérrez et al. 2017). Apart from the occasional spur of the moment decision, like spending time outside if the day was warm, our afternoon structure was pretty consistent. Snack time from 3:05 p.m. to 3:25 p.m., homework time starting between 3:30 and 3:40 through about 4:30, and reading and activity time through 5:15, our release time. I had gotten to know my kids because of the semesters we spent together, the time we had spent growing together. So I knew that on one particular day, Jesus was having a rough day. He ignored me when I tried to give him his Puentes lanyard and sat without speaking to anyone for a few minutes. I asked about his day, how he was feeling, but he was not responsive. I gave him space for the remainder of snack time.

We all made it to our classroom, half walking half running up the stairs in the usual way that children who are eight years old do it. Because the program is based in a public school, we run our sessions in classrooms that belong to other teachers. The children know that, for this reason, they should not be touching the teacher’s supplies. But every time we went into the classroom, they ran towards the teacher desk, admiring the stickers and decorations she had. Or they ran to the whiteboard, which was always filled with posters and notes. We put our backpacks down by one of the walls and they took out their homework folders—some were a solid color, others were themed, like Transformers or My Little Pony. Homework time was not usually a “fun” time for the kids, apart from the occasional group that
liked to compete to see who could get their homework done the fastest, especially when they were all in
the same class. After a few minutes of walking and jumping around, grouping up and making jokes in
both Spanish and English, most of the kids were at a desk with their homework out in front of them. At
the time, we had about eight kids with three to four tutors. This made it so that each tutor had about two
to three kids, depending on the amount of support the kids needed that day. We divided ourselves up.

Jesus took this transition as an opportunity to take out his soccer ball from his backpack, and he spent the
next five to ten minutes kicking the ball around the classroom, refusing to sit at one of the tables and start
his math homework. In trying to get the rest of the group settled in, we let Jesus roam around the
classroom. But once the kids started with their homework, I approached Jesus. My approaching him was
read as initiation of tag, so he began to run. I chased him as he ran for the door, but this only made him
run around even more.

With this, I said, “Jesus, ‘amos a hacer la tarea.” He laughed, said no.

“Mira, todos los demás están haciendo su tarea— ¿Y tu porque no?” I continued, asking him why
he was not doing his homework.

He paused for a second, looked around the room, realized everyone else really was doing their
homework. The other kids were focused on their homework, not minding him. He started to walk around
the room again.

“Bueno pues, okay. Aquí me espero,” I told Jesus, I will wait for you here.

And I waited in the spot I had first approached him. I sat down at some point. He noticed that I
was not going to continue chasing him and noticed that the other kids and tutors were focused in on
homework time. He paused, seemed to think a bit, and started walking towards me. I took his folder out
of his backpack and then we walked to one of the desks. He sat down, I placed his folder down, and he
took his homework sheets out of the folder.

“Thank you for coming with me to the desk. Do you know why I’m asking for us to do our
homework?” I asked.

“Yes,” he said, “because you care about me.”
I open with this to show one of the key moments that brought questions of care, or cariño, and love into my thinking. Particularly within nonprofits, which depend on outside funding and donations to continue, it is difficult to center affective, immeasurable processes such as cariño. Furthermore, these are processes that work at the micro-level, therefore challenging theories of change that center macro-level courses of action. However, this ethnographic thesis will be an attempt at demonstrating the social and political work of frameworks of love and cariño when creating a system of support for migrant children and children of migrants living in South Philadelphia during the Trump era. More broadly, it challenges us to think about what we consider activism or social justice work and how we measure success or efficacy within these efforts.

Learning care

Until recently, whenever Puentes came up in a conversation— about managing my time, about my schedule, about my interests— I would explain that I kept going back semester after semester because I loved working with kids. Puentes gave me the perfect opportunity to remove myself from Haverford for a bit and immerse myself into a familiar space— familiar because I have two younger siblings with a ten to twelve year age gap between us, and familiar because I had already been engaging in after-school tutoring work with elementary aged students through my siblings’ school. I loved and missed being around kids.

I had not given myself the space to reflect upon some of the deeper reasons of why exactly I kept returning semester after semester, for a total of six semesters since Spring 2016. I just loved working with kids— but was there more than that?

It took me almost two years to realize that it was more than enjoying spending time with children. Reflecting upon my own experiences as a child of migrants, as a child who was consistently in and out of after-school programs through eighth grade, I began to draw connections between the work I was engaged in— in this case, Puentes— and my upbringing.
In wanting to invoke the private into the public, the intimate into the distant, the personal into the academic, I wrote about my mother. Exploring the relationship between my mother and me led me to explore the broader structures that impacted our realities intertwined. I tried to trace our fights, our arguments, the time that had to be spent apart— in essence, I tried to make sense of our relationship. Migration was the lens I needed to take on.

Migration as a lens meant understanding our tension as a result of the twelve plus hour work shifts she had to work because of her status as an undocumented woman. It meant understanding that this work set-up created an insane amount of stress and pressure that could not be left at her workplace. It meant understanding where her emotions and temper came from. Most importantly, it meant situating her mothering practices within a broader context of fear, stress, and external pressures.

Cynthia Dewi Oka writes:

Mothers and caregivers— particularly those who are poor— tend to be absent from the hubs of revolutionary struggle. They are busy making and defending homespaces; strategizing for the next check, the next hour, the next meal. They are out there demonstrating that it is possible and beautiful to continue under the most hostile and precarious conditions, even when they have to do it alone (Gumbs, Martens, and Williams 2016)

Not only can mothers and caregivers be absent from the “revolutionary struggle,” but they can also be absent from homespaces themselves. But as she highlights, I recognized the beauty of my mother’s efforts at continuing to mother me within the context and structure that was forced upon her as an undocumented woman within the U.S. Recognizing this beauty, while situating it within the ugly and painful, I came to develop a new reading of her mothering practices. Loretta J. Ross and the editors of the anthology Revolutionary Mothering: Love on the Frontlines define mothering as, “the glad gifting of one’s talents, ideas, intellect, and creativity to the universe without recompense,” (xv). In other words, mothering is a practice. While my mother may not have been bringing me into activist or revolutionary spaces in the ways Ross lays out, her mothering was the bridge between all that I could learn and all that she could pass down— her aprendizajes, learned through her relationships, homespaces, and the experience of migration. Crucial to this practice were “the practice[s] of creating, nurturing, affirming, and supporting life,” (9). All this I understood through looking back on our relationship with a lens of migration.
Her mothering did not look like the “ideal” mothering I saw on television or heard about in different social circles. Her acts of care also did not mirror traditional ways of demonstrating care. But I knew she cared about me—she migrated for the idea of me, she worked and fought for a life for us in this country. Her care was present in every moment of our relationship. This process forced me to challenge my conceptions of care.

How did I show care? How did I enact it? In what spaces did I feel it all around me? Care how I understood it, moved beyond a passive “I care about you” type of situation. Care was more than a short letter, more than a singular conversation, more than the occasional check-in. In what spaces did I and my surrounding community “acknowledge the creative power of transforming ourselves and the ways we relate to each other” (Gumbs, Martens, and Williams 2016)? I looked at my friendships, my relationships with faculty and staff on campus, and my different on and off campus engagements. I turned to Puentes, in part after being explicitly drawn to care after my encounter with Jesus; in situating this commitment within a framework of care, I began to recognize that it was more than just an after-school tutoring program. For me, specifically, it was more than just an opportunity to go into South Philly and spend time with kids. What were the different facets of care I was engaging with?

Since my initial engagement with Puentes, I knew that it served the Latinx migrant community in South Philly, but this time I began to situate the in-session experiences within this context as well. What realities impacted the families of these children, and how did they come into our afternoon sessions? I asked myself these questions and then thought about what care could look like within this context. And by filling these spaces with care, what would work with migrant children or children of migrants mean, if we returned to the *Revolutionary Mothering* editors’ conceptions of the extensions of mothering and care?

**Background**

Between the 1990 census and the 2010 census, the population of Latinx individuals increased by 110% (Philadelphia Research Initiative 2011). Within this increase, there is an estimated amount of 30,000 Mexican nationals within South Philadelphia (“Who We Are” n.d.). Taking a more localized approach, many of the initial Mexican migrants coming to South Philadelphia originate from San Mateo.
Ozolco, Puebla. This town originally had 4,000 residents; about 2,000 of those are now in South Philadelphia (Kennedy 2018). While Puentes broadly serves migrants coming from a variety of different countries, many of the families in PHF are Mexican, with some who are Central American.

The origins of Puentes lie with the observations of three doctors working in emergency rooms. Dr. Steve Larson, Dr. Jack Ludmir, and Dr. Mathew O’Brien grew frustrated at the large quantity of admitted patients with preventable problems, most of which were Mexican immigrants. In many ways, this was similar to the conditions of Mexican migrant farmworkers in Kennett Square, Pennsylvania, a situation that Steve Larson had been working at in the 1990s. Migrants in Philadelphia were “working in low-paying jobs, lacking health care benefits, and facing linguistic and cultural barriers,” (“Who We Are” n.d.). Drawing heavily from the community itself and from the needs they voiced, the doctors teamed with community practitioners to provide health care and educational programs, “all while focusing long-term efforts on addressing the social determinants of health,” (“Who We Are” n.d.). In addressing the social and economic factors surrounding the lives of the South Philly migrant community, rather than remaining only within a medicinal approach, Puentes is acting through a framework of the social determinants of health.

Understanding education as a social determinant of health, Puentes de Salud created Puentes Hacia El Futuro, which translates to “bridges towards the future.” Before any of its future programs were added, Puentes Hacia el Futuro was designed as a singular program for students in elementary schools. Over the past three years, the education program has expanded to include an early childhood education program, a middle school after-school support program, and a youth leadership program for high school students. The goals of the youth education programs are as follows: “to create a rich, safe, and fun learning environment for students ages 3-18 and their families; to support our students’ overall positive development, including their academic, emotional, and social well-being; to holistically support students’ families through a multi-faceted offering of education and services,” (Kennedy 2018). To achieve these goals, coordinators and tutors work through a framework that is culturally-relevant for the children, encourages dual-language practice, and uses social-emotional learning techniques. My project is primarily
based on their elementary-age program, but conversations with staff members consider the other programs under the Puentes Education Programs umbrella (early childhood education, middle school, and high school).

Beyond the educational structure and goals, Puentes de Salud’s director of education, writes about a pedagogy of love that is at the root of the work within the youth education programs. Statistics of Mexican immigrants living in South Philadelphia cannot inform us of the experiences of marginalization and oppression experienced by these communities based on their race, class, and legal status. She writes, “[in] working with communities that are underserved and have experienced or do currently experience trauma, consistency is key,” (Wolkoff 2017). This “consistency” comes in the ways that love influences the work of all team members involved in these education programs. This pedagogy of love is the entry point through which I engage with the Puentes de Salud education program of Puentes Hacia el Futuro (PHF).

**Positionality**

My engagement with PHF began as a follow-up engagement after a 2015-2016 winter break field study trip to the U.S.-Mexico border, sponsored by Haverford’s Center for Peace and Global Citizenship (CPGC), where we studied migration and borderlands through an applied academics framework. This trip was the first time I had studied migration academically. Through this CPGC engagement, I viewed Puentes as an organization that was created as an intentional response to the violence towards migrants that extends beyond the border—a violence that I was only able to name as such after this experience.

While my trip with the CPGC allowed me to integrate migration and borderlands experiences into my academics, this trip did not introduce themes of migration into my scope of thinking. First and foremost, I am a child of Mexican migrants. This experience has impacted my identity in so many ways, thus it is a crucial aspect of the framework and set of experiences through which I am engaging with the Puentes education programs. My identity subsequently impacts how I create the afternoon sessions for my group of students at PHF.
This identity has also pushed me towards exploring topics within communities of Latinx migrants. I have directly experienced or witnessed the impacts of migration within the United States—I have witnessed the different forms of marginalization that come with being Mexican, working-class, and undocumented. Because these identity markers have so shaped the experiences of many of my family members, I have consistently kept the experiences of these communities in mind in the different spaces I participate in.

Methods

This thesis explores three processes: the experiences of racial, ethnic, and class-based marginalization of children of migrants within schools; programs outside of the formal school structure created in response to these unique realities; and the ways in which these spaces are constructed. In order to explore these different sets of experiences, my research will include a combination of qualitative data collection methods.

An ethnographic exploration of how care is mobilized as a tool within PHF, an informal afterschool education program, first requires me to explore the experiences within formalized school structures. I will present these experiences through self-reflection and interviews with volunteers (current or former) at Puentes who identify as children of Latinx migrants. In vocalizing their experiences, I am defining these interviews as testimonios. As defined by Linda Prieto and Sofia Villenas (2012), “testimonios consist of life stories usually told by a person from a marginalized group in society, to an interlocutor who can write down and disseminate them. The testimonio has an overtly political intent…and to impel others to take some form of action,”(2012, 414). In including this testimonio—and in entrusting me with their stories—I will be exploring the experiences of children of migrants in schools while also creating a call to action for this project. We can turn to Normal Klahn (2003), as quoted by Prieto and Villenas (2012), who says “‘the narrator becomes the voice, her own, of a self who recollects her memories and those of others in her community,’” (415). In other words, we can consider that my interlocutors extend the boundaries of testimonio into a method employed by the self. Through this framework, I will situate my own experiences within the testimonios of my interlocutors.
My personal voice and experiences will carry throughout my project, since my identities are interwoven with PHF. As I continue volunteering, I will engage in formal ethnography, voice-recording in-session observations at the end of each of my afternoons with the children and talking field notes. A separate section of the journal is reserved for any memories or specific instances over the previous four semesters that I have been volunteering at PHF. Though formal ethnographic research began in the Fall of 2018, my two years of experience within PHF I had prior to beginning field research informed my research questions and subsequent frameworks. Engaging in this method of fieldwork will allow me to observe how Puentes sessions are created by the volunteer team on that given day. By combining these observations with one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with members of the Puentes team, I will be able to explore the following question: how do we as volunteers understand the needs of our kids within these two-hour afternoon sessions, and how do we respond to them?

Understanding these needs is reflected by the ways in which we interact with the children in our classes but also through the materials that we bring into these sessions. For this reason, I will directly engage with the content and materials provided for supplementary activities. While PHF, for example, creates the space for kids to complete their assigned homework, the volunteers have a level of freedom in designing how the session outside of this set homework-time is used. What books do we want to introduce into our reading activities? What coloring pages do we present to the children during free time as we approach the end of our afternoon? These are the questions that will frame my analysis of material brought into each space. While I already have a familiarity with the material used by PHF, I will gain clearer, more precise documentation of this material by organizing the PHF office, photographing the shelves of books, and writing down key themes noticed in the books.

To situate my observations of sessions and materials, I will conduct semi-structured interviews with the individuals creating the programming and atmosphere, including volunteers, coordinators, and the director of education, for a total of seven different individuals. My previous experience as a PHF volunteer tutor allowed me to identify these different roles as necessary components in creating the Puentes education programs. Each individual and their different position will provide a new perspective
into the creation of these spaces. Furthermore, by including people at all levels, I am working within Puentes’ horizontal model and belief in creating community. Each individual and position is essential.

In deciding what or who to name, I have ultimately to utilize the actual name of the nonprofit while replacing interlocutor’s names with pseudonyms. Over the past decade, Puentes de Salud has broadened its reach, with numerous local and national news articles, an HBO documentary, and transnational presence through conferences. For this reason, I decided to keep the organization’s name. However, I have decided to use pseudonyms for each of my interlocutors in order to maintain a level of privacy.

**Methodology, or una metodología de cariño**

In much the same way that I am exploring the mobilization of care, I am also working through a methodology of care. A methodology of care is one that looks towards the margins; it seeks to uncover and center stories that are not told. It requires consistency, conversation, and connection with interlocutors. Most importantly, it requires an awareness of social structures impacting the community one is working with.

This methodology of care is heavily informed by a woman of color, radical, feminist approach. Foundational to my understandings of this methodology are Gloria Anzaldúa (2012), through her methods of creating new epistemologies, and Mónica Russel Y Rodríguez (2007), who forces the personal and home-based learning into that which we consider formal and academic. Three anthologies are also foundational to my understandings of care: *Telling to Live: Latina Feminist Testimonios* (The Latina Feminist Group 2001), which conveys interpersonal care among the Latina Feminist Group through its process of creation and centering of stories; *Chicana/Latina Education in Everyday Life: Feminista Perspectives on Pedagogy and Epistemology* (Delgado Bernal et al. 2006), which presents cariño in practice and as a response to the marginalized experiences of Chicanas and Latinas in higher education; and *Revolutionary Mothering: Love on the Frontlines* (Gumbs, Martens, and Williams 2016), which transgresses the biological boundaries of motherhood and situates the experiences of mothers of color as experiences through which we can understand mothering as a practice fundamentally rooted in care. Each
of these individuals and contributing authors have contributed a piece to my methodology of care, which I have extended into a methodology of cariño within an education-research framework.

From these Chicana, Latina feminist theorists, I situate my research as a project that starts with an observation of a practice, to then theorize it, in order to ground my work through what C. Alejandra Elenes describes as “the epistemological validation of everyday life as a key source of knowledge,” (Delgado Bernal et al. 2006, 216). In centering the everyday experiences within the Puentes education programs, as well as the lives of those who create these programs, I am working through a framework of care (Gumbs, Martens, and Williams 2016). Care, or cariño, is something that is embodied—it is seen, heard, but most importantly, felt (Prieto and Villenas 2012; Gumbs, Martens, and Williams 2016; (Soto et al. 2009). An exploration of care, then, requires me to work outside of the bounds of that which is theorized—or the academic knowledge—and more towards a framework that allows me to feel and explore the embodiment of care. Cariño specifically will be used within the context of education research.

Necessary to my metodología de cariño is looking towards the fringes of the society that I live within. As a self-identifying Chicana, I live at the intersection of two nations, “between two countries, two social systems, two languages, two cultures,” (Anzaldúa 2012, 7), I am standing alongside the fringes that hold my family and community—witnessing, or “travelling side by side…walking alongside [them],” (Smith 2016, 205). Grappling with two different sets of identities created internal tumult. But a perspective through an integration of these two sets leads to a unique form of knowledge production (Harrison 2008). As Anzaldúa (2012) argues, it requires “putting history through a sieve, winnowing out the lies, looking at the forces that we as a race, as women, have been a part of,” (104). My sieve has come with entering spaces of higher education; here, I gained theories and vocabularies to understand the experiences around me and was able to identify the “concrete material forms of oppression,” (7). A methodological framework of borderlands pushes us as thinkers to look towards the borders in whatever space we are working within— the border is a zone of injustice, or, as Jason de León describes, a “space of exception— physical and political locations where an individual’s rights and protections under law can be stripped away upon entrance,” (De León 2015, 27). A borderlands methodology, however, necessitates
the realization that some—not all—of the violence experienced by migrants within the U.S. is enacted at the border, which allows me to situate Puentes as a site that experiences border violence.

A methodology of cariño also requires me to look outside of the bounds of tradition. Thinking of the limits in academia, I pull from the anthology *The Chicana M(other)work Anthology*, which is a compilation of radical essays on the topic of mothering. Irene Lara (2019) models this approach in her reflections around the politics of citation. She writes: “I needed to do a better job of never forgetting myself and always acknowledging my sources, the material and spiritual footprints paving the way before any of my scholarly citations,” (226). Before any of the radical womxn of color theorists I draw from, my understandings of cariño are rooted in my mother and the women who have mothered me throughout various moments of my life. I hope to honor this lineage throughout my thesis.

**Literature Review**

My research on the use of cariño within an afterschool program for children of Mexican and Central American migrants is situated within the literature on societal perceptions of children; border theory that transcends physicality and temporality; and education spaces and programming as sites of social reproduction and, subsequently, social change through pedagogies of love and care. Considering that this is a project centered around programs for children, my work will first argue against the rhetoric and conception of kids as “just kids.” However, I depart from standard and canonical explorations of children—most commonly within the formalized discipline of Childhood Studies—through an incorporation of cariño as both a point of analysis and a methodological framework for approaching my work. In this way, my work is situated within an anthropological exploration of care, beyond its analytical origin within female-oriented psychological studies and its more contemporary understanding of care-work, or domestic work. Rather than contributing to either of these bodies of literature, this project is situated within explorations of cariño as an active and engaged practice employed within PHF. Within the literature on schools and education, my work will position itself at the intersection of schools as sites of social reproduction, cariño, and schools as sites of social change.

*Kids as just kids*
A report carried out in 2002 by the Search Institute aimed to understand the relationship between U.S. American adults and youth (Scales, Benson, and Mannes 2002). The report asked a series of questions to both adults and youth regarding the intergenerational interactions between unrelated adults and youth. While there were many shared values, discrepancies of more than 10%—specifically within those categories separate from school—were found between the percentage of adults who say they or someone they know engage with youths in a certain way, and the percentage of youth who say adults engage with them in a certain way (Scales et al., p.3). This can be explained through articles that explore levels of youth participation or youth-adult interaction within youth planning groups, which often detail a troubled relationship in spite of the desire of adults to “do something” with youth (Checkoway, Pothukuchi, and Finn 1995; Freeman and Aitken-Rose 2005). In other words, though efforts at youth integration into planning processes exist, the social conditions of such planning meetings or operations are not conducive to allow for the equal collaboration of youth.

This localized relationship represents broader society’s relationship to its children and youth, which is one based on unequal status or alienation (Alparone and Rissotto 2001; Frank 2006; Hendershot 2004). While much of the previously cited literature approaches the topic of youth engagement as one to be argued for on the basis of citizenship or psychological developmental benefits, at the core of all this work is the belief that kids are not just kids; instead, they are intelligent people with agency. The previously cited work also has as its target groups “youth” rather than “children,” therefore indicating an age difference between these cited works and the project at hand. The methods of youth integration into planning processes or program development cannot be transcribed onto groups of children within the age range of PHF in the same way; therefore different ways of adult-child collaboration within programs are required. Within this different method, however, lies the same belief that children are, as June Jordan (2016) describes, “serious…capable young people, worth knowing, worth knowing about,”(17). However, previously cited literature demonstrates that this belief is not enough to translate into the honest integration of and perspective towards youth and children.
Previous work around children has encompassed ethnographic explorations of child-rearing practices or those within the fields of psychology, nursing, etc. (Kehily 2008; LeVine 2007). Robert A. LeVine (2007) provides a historical overview of such ethnographic work, tracing how it has changed and where it is today. He details medically-oriented work towards children, child-rearing practices written by Christian missionaries, and developmental psychology studies. More recent canonical work includes the Six Cultures Study (Whiting et al. 1963) which collected data across six different communities to be compared along the lines of child-rearing practices and psychodynamic patterns resulting from childhood experiences, thereby calling attention to the cultural variability of childhood. LeVine cites numerous examples to, upon conclusion, argue for an extension of their findings into larger theoretical, conceptual work that could be useful across Anthropology as a discipline. But in neither of these cited studies is there an ethnographic exploration of the non-familial, non-child-rearing spaces created for children.

Beyond the border

With the start of Trump’s election campaign, we witnessed a rise in public consciousness and discussion surrounding immigration into the United States (“5 Key Facts: Online Discussion of Immigration in The Trump Era” 2017; “The Trump Effect: The Impact of the Presidential Campaign on Our Nation’s Schools” 2016). Consequently, this has also meant a hyper-visualization of the physical border, especially when we consider Trump’s constant discussion about “building a wall” (Los Angeles Times staff 2016). However, this rhetoric has been met with immigrant rights social advocacy also appearing within media outlets.\(^1\) Apart from this, there is also a wealth of scholarship and writing exploring the border as site and the experience of crossing (Cantú 2018; De León 2015; Ferguson 2015; Urrea 2004; Wilson and Donnan 1998).

Border studies as an area of research began with the border as site, or a physical boundary (Griswold Del Castillo 1984; Kearney 1991; Paasi 2009; Quintero and Piñeiro 1988). Jason de León’s

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\(^1\) A hashtag search can direct us to a series of social media advocacy campaigns as well as different movements, protests, and action events. Examples include: #FamiliesBelongTogether, #IAmHome, #NotAfraid, #WithDACA, #AbolishICE
(2015) *The Land of Open Graves* is similarly about violence towards migrants as it exists in the desert that is a physical extension of the walled or fenced border. Through a focus on the U.S.’s policy of Prevention through Deterrence (PTD), he is able to highlight the culpability and active attempt by the State towards creating a space of death within the desert, which has now been made into a multiple mile wide border between Mexico and the U.S. By pointing to U.S. immigration policy as the factor behind this extension of the border and the subsequent deaths while crossing, as well as providing a detailed ethnography of the act of crossing, he builds from previous work within border studies, which traditionally focused upon the idea of borders as “international boundaries between nation-states,” (Alvarez 1995, 449).

A similar hyper-visualization occurs in the representation of borders and migration. During the summer of 2018, conversations around migration reached a peak with Trump’s policy of separated family detention at the border. Most news pieces and public commentary coming out of this period incorporated a visual representation of the physical act of separation, the literal border, and/or images of families and children crying (Goddard 2018; The Editorial Board 2018; Wagner and Rocha 2018). These visual portrayals of the border culminate into what Nicholas de Genova calls “the border spectacle,” which necessitates the physical border as “the exemplary theater for staging the spectacle of ‘the illegal alien’ that the law produces,” (De Genova 2002, 436).

One of the key components of departing from the physical border within border studies is the process of contextualization. When tracing the origins of U.S. policy towards Latin America within the context of the Cold War, Lars Schoultz (1998) traces his evidence two centuries prior and points to the deep-rooted sentiments of Latin American inferiority that U.S. state officials hold, thus exemplifying that

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2 See also Frontlines’ “Separated: Children at the Border” (aired July 31, 2018, available at: https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/separated-children-at-the-border/) , which features visuals of the border, migrants crossing the border, as well as migrants and families held in detention centers. While the focus of this documentary was, indeed, “children at the border,” it highlights my argument that when we think of “border” we immediately think of the physical border demarcating the U.S. from surrounding countries, in particular Mexico.
Chavez’s Latino Threat Narrative (2013) is not limited to everyday, social spaces but, rather, can also extend into the government. If it is racism that is at the root of the creation of the physical border and policies like prevention through deterrence (De León 2015), then the same violence that is caused by the border and its policies can be traced to different sites outside of the territorial border. My project engages in this process of tracing, following the works within border studies that have fundamentally stepped outside of a border’s territorial demarcations.

These bodies of work allow my project to situate schools, for example, as sites of border violence beyond the border through the existent practices of school segregation (Mezzacappa 2018; Quartz 2014). In this extension, however, the border is still territorialized. While de Genova argues that the “border is effectively everywhere” (2013:1183), it is only everywhere where it is enforced, which one can argue is informed by Schoultz’ methodology of historicization, specifically towards racism. He goes so far as to mention the “social condition of deportability,” (2013:1189), but does not step outside the physicality or territoriality of borders as Gloria Anzaldúa, for example, does. In describing a confrontation with the physical border, she extends this “1,950 mile-long” border as an “open wound running down the length of [her] body,” (Anzaldúa 2012, 24). She speaks of borders in language (2012:75), a border that is felt between one’s desires and one’s traditions (2012:38-41), a border separating oneself from consciousness (2012:70). Though her conversation centers around Chicanas, or children of Mexican migrants, this same theorization of border can be applied to undocumented migrants, as does Leo R. Chavez (1992). Chavez turns liminality into a noun (Chavez 1992:61). The internalization and experience of illegality in the eyes of the federal government (Chavez 2013:28) is now carried from space to space, period to period. My project situates itself within this conception of the embodied border as its site of departure.

*Schools as sites of both social reproduction and social change*

Writer Nikole Hannah-Jones argues that America’s schooling system is part of our country’s racial caste system, citing schools as sites of segregation “64 years after the Supreme Court said that ‘separate but equal’ is unconstitutional in Brown v Board of Education,” (Mezzacappa 2018). Through this framework, schools, then, become sites that witness the interplay of larger social forces perhaps
understood as being outside the boundaries of schooling. One such example is housing inequality, with many scholars arguing for the correlation between housing inequality and what Hannah-Jones would describe as school segregation (*Choosing Homes, Choosing Schools* 2014; Gingrich and Ansell 2014; Lipman 2008). What is fundamentally at play here is the reinforcement of hegemony, power, and privilege.

Émile Durkheim establishes the connection between changes in society to changes within schools (1977). Social issues such as housing and wage inequality, gentrification, racism, or legal status—among many others—are all lived out within schools. In his revealing ethnography, sociologist Shamus Khahn (2010) provides a glimpse into how St. Paul’s Academy, a prestigious American high school, acts as a site of social reproduction. Employing Pierre Bourdieu’s definition of social reproduction as “hereditary transmission of power and privileges,” (1977) Khahn argues that despite the changing nature of broader society—in reference to post 1960s global social movements—the institutions of the elite exist in such a way that keeps the elite among the elite through a process of ease. Educational studies have paved the way towards formally exploring how teaching practices and classroom environments can replicate these norms; however, these studies among Latinx communities are typically carried out at the later stages of education (Delgado Bernal et al. 2006; Prieto and Villenas 2012; Valencia 2011; Yosso 2006). My work will look towards the early stages of education and understand that Puentes children also experience the manifestation of greater social forces within the walls of their schools.

In the case of ethnographic explorations of Latinx student’s experiences in education, these pieces have primarily relied on interviews (ibid). However, as Allison James challenges us to rethink how we represent children in our research, this project moves away from gaining information and insight through interviews, and will, instead, be seeking to understand the processes involved in combating these forms of social reproduction. In the anthology *Funds of Knowledge: Theorizing Practices in Households, Communities and Classrooms* (1992), editors Norma Gonzáles, Luis C. Moll, and Cathy Amanti argue that “learning is bound within larger contextual, historical, political, and ideological frameworks that affect students’ lives,” (ix). PHF, as an extension of children’s formal learning sites, is within this
educational model, particularly in its target population of primarily Mexican immigrants. As an informal space of education, PHF fundamentally works through the framework of *funds of knowledge*, or the belief that “people are competent, they have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them that knowledge,” (ibid, ix-x). However, this project must be situated within a theory of cariño to understand how the PHF model is shaped to fit the needs of a Latinx, predominantly Mexican, migrant population (Gumbs, Martens, and Williams 2016; hooks 1994; Thompson 2017).

*Outline*

I now look to my previous six semesters of experience with Puentes and understand it as more than just an afterschool, education tutoring program. It is a program that provides a space of care for migrant children and children of migrants; in this, it simultaneously serves the entire migrant community. Love and care-work, enacted by all members of the Puentes community, facilitate the building of communities through a network of lazos— or connections and ties—, invite homespaces into spaces of learning, and begin to create spaces of hope, healing, and radical imagination.

Throughout carrying out research and writing, I have drawn from Eve Tuck’s (2009) elaboration on traditional ways education research is carried out in underserved, or what she calls “less dominant,” communities. At the center of my argument are forms of radical cariño and love, which are radical precisely because of the communities they exist within. However, Tuck critiques the education research that is done on indigenous communities— the benefits of the research do not outweigh the costs, for it centers the “damage” of these communities “in order to achieve reparation,” (413). This is what she calls damage-centered research. Tuck challenges researchers to craft our research around desire rather than damage. She defines a desire-base framework as: “concerned with understanding complexity, contradiction, and the self-determination of lived lives,” (416). Engaging in this framework of research, however, does not mean that we should not include the damage, or violence, inflicted upon communities. Rather, it is including both. Tuck continues: “by documenting not only the painful elements of social realities but also the wisdom and hope,” (416). This thesis is thus a multi-layered presentation of the experiences of migrant communities within Puentes Hacia el Futuro. While it is essential to situate
Puentes within the broader border violence that affects it, it is even more important to show how the community is responding and how we can continue to invite the community into our collective, world imaginings.

The first chapter will set the context that frames Puentes; here, I trace theorizations of the border and border violence and continue to explore contemporary theorizations of the border that transgress spatial and temporal boundaries. I provide ethnographic accounts within Puentes and present conversations with different members of the team to demonstrate how border violence impacts this education nonprofit. The second chapter will argue for an approach to migrant-rights work through frameworks of cariño, drawing the connection between the multigenerational impact of immigration policy and the subsequent need for multigenerational healing specifically within the context of education. I will present examples of the different ways in which cariño exists within Puentes and how a pedagogical framework of cariño can counter education research that argues for salvic-like programs like No Child Left Behind on the basis of deficits, or damage (Lyiscott 2019; Tuck 2009). The third chapter accepts this care-work as a necessary departure point for imagining the future of migrant-rights activism specifically and social justice work broadly, through a framework of radical mothering. It presents the implications of working through alternative conceptions of activism and challenges us to think through our personal theories of change. Thus, for this project, I explore the different forms of work that practices of cariño produce within the organization of Puentes Hacia el Futuro, ultimately motivated by a desire to recenter children in our social justice work as members of the future generation and world we are enacting change for. I argue that the multigenerational impacts of violent immigration policies necessitate an activist movement that, at one level, pays close attention to the children affected and, at another level, roots its practices in love and care—practices which we learn from our homes and communities.
Chapter 1: Violence Beyond the Border

My second and third semesters at Puentes were in the 2016-2017 academic year, the period surrounding the presidential election and then the inauguration. I was working with second graders at the time. While on Haverford’s campus I could not avoid politics, I initially viewed my Puentes sessions as a space where I could escape this constant talk about politics. I had decided to continue volunteering at Puentes beyond the initial first semester because I enjoyed being with the kids. By the end of each of our afternoons together, I was both exhausted and re-energized. But at the time, I was not considering Puentes within a larger space of reality— I was viewing it as something separate because that was what it was for me.

Sometime during that year in one of our afternoon sessions, we were all on the carpet drawing. Having learned that my group of kids enjoyed drawing and coloring, I came prepared with a new set of coloring pages every week. They requested princesses and dinosaurs, transformers and forests, calaveras and animals. If we had enough time at the end of the day, I would take out the coloring sheets and let them choose which one they wanted to work on. This was also our opportunity to do all the talking we were not doing as freely during homework time. As second graders, they usually did not restrain themselves when talking, but I had started to notice that the talking during drawing sessions was much more free-flowing— they were so preoccupied with drawing that they did not seem to filter or doubt themselves.

I cannot remember what provoked this conversation, but Trump came up during this particular drawing session. I was caught off guard, naively thinking that he would not make it into a second-grade class. The conversation started along these lines: “My parents said that Trump was going to send everyone back to Mexico.” We switched from a discussion about Trump and his threats and our families in Mexico. Deportation was a scary thing to talk about, and I was not sure how to navigate the conversation.

Early into the Fall semester, around mid-October, we had a similar experience with the group. On October 28th, 2016, I wrote in my journal: “I work with kids in Puentes and sometimes think that I was
not sufficiently trained to work with these kids who come with unique experiences. For example, at random moments, someone I am working with will make comments like ‘My dad isn’t here anymore, he’s in Mexico now.’” I felt a lot of stress at the time, feeling like I was not sufficiently prepared to respond to these comments and in these situations. I felt guilty in both cases, as if there was something I should do but did not know how or even what.

In both moments, my difficulty in responding came from both the shock of realizing children were in tune with the political world around them and the shock of the relative ease and lightness through which they talked about the threat of deportation. I could not understand the switch from coloring cartoon pages, to talking about Trump and family separation, and back to coloring. When engaging in this brief conversation, the kids did not appear in distress. The first comment made by Francisco about something he had overheard his parents say was met with nods and “yeah’s” in agreement, saying they had also heard that. But to accept this surface-level reaction and engagement with topics of deportation and family separation is to remain within a narrow conception of border violence and its subsequent effects. This approach is also contrary to the belief in children as intelligent individuals, viewing them instead as passive beings.

Recalling these moments with Courtney, the PHF Program Coordinator, during our interview, she states, “I think they pick up and are so sensitive to all of this...there’s a level of stress to students talking about Trump or all of these little comments that come up.” Engaging in short discussions about Trump over coloring bright Transformer figures and different animals may not initially be read as stress. But these children are “perceptive,” Courtney continues. They are conscious of the world around them and how it impacts their family—Courtney talks about the experiences of families having to go through school bureaucracy when trying to find a time to speak to the school therapist and the different ways immigration specifically impacts some of the Puentes families. Talking to college-aged children of migrants provides another lens into this side of the impacts of migration.

So to merely accept that the larger Trump reality is one that also affects children is not enough. In this chapter, I argue against the belief that the current realities surrounding the border and the subsequent
different manifestations of this violence are a direct product of Trump’s era of overt racism and xenophobia. On the contrary, I am arguing that the current experiences of migrant families in the U.S. broadly, and South Philly specifically, are products of the strands of violence that the U.S. has historically enacted to Latin America. Presenting a series of ethnographic examples of manifestations of border violence within Puentes can demonstrate the possibilities of historicizing borders for the purpose of expanding into a transtemporal and transpatial framework.

**Photographing Trump effects**

The amount of national coverage this set of policies received can, to an extent, be traced to Donald Trump’s emphasis on immigration and border enforcement (“The Trump Effect: The Impact of the Presidential Campaign on Our Nation’s Schools” 2016). This past summer of 2018 stands as a prominent example of the level of this hyper-visualization. In June 2018, Trump’s zero-tolerance policy manifested in the form of family separation upon detainment at the border. This meant that parents and children were detained separately. Coverage of this policy contained photographs that often focused on children— in many cases, they were photographed crying or standing alone. If not in this position, they were photographed in their parents’ arms or clinging to them— parents were captured in their moments of fear. The physical border fence or border patrol officers stood as backdrop to this moment of separation. The visual composition of these photographs made it so that viewers would feel— feel pain, shock, anger. The figure of the child is understood and portrayed as one of innocence (Katz 2008), and in these particular photographs, the figure of the child is mobilized to draw attention to the border. Susan Sontag (2003) and Liisa Malkki (1996), though approaching the topic of photography from different fields, both argue about the violence that comes with *showing* trauma, or other forms of violence. Who was it for and what was the purpose? Furthermore, how would migrant families respond to these type of visualizations?

In framing photographs of family separation as such, I do not wish to minimize the attention placed not only on these photographs but on the border as a whole. The dissemination of these photographs drew widespread attention to a growing reality, one that could no longer be ignored. The
prominence of these photographs made it so that people could no longer look away. Though much of the discussion around family separation condemned the actions of Trump, there were also comments that, for example, argued for the responsibility and ownership of these parents in placing their children in danger. However, Leo Chavez (1992) shows us that this second type of comments was not unlike previous waves of rhetoric surrounding Latinx migrants.

And yet, one of the main effects of this summer’s hypervisibility of the border violence was a reinforcement of the false idea that contemporary border violence was a direct product from the Trump administration. Below is a Tweet from Senator Dianne Feinstein that illustrates this notion.

Her opening sentence of “This isn’t who we are” creates a separation between the current moment in history and anything before that. For her, and the thousands of individuals that liked and retweeted this post, the border violence of summer 2018 came directly from the administration, who heads this particular moment in national history. A stark visualization and the subsequent social commentary created by the call to emotions made it easy for people to look towards the Trump administration for change. The administration was at the immediate cause and subsequent pause of this policy, but the emotions underwriting this “zero tolerance” policy were not unique to this moment in history. The danger in believing this lies in an inability to think critically and broadly about change.

Reparations framework within migrant communities
The moment I described at the opening of this chapter is one of many similar moments in which the border has made it into Puentes. Around the 2016 elections, Trump made his way into the classroom, beyond the moment described. I met initial mentions with my hesitation: at the moment, I was unsure if the kids completely knew what they were talking about when saying the words “deport” or “deportar.” In many ways, a part of me remained in the spatial, temporal framework of border violence—that is, violence occurring at the border in the moment of crossing. Or a violence that followed undocumented migrants into different physical spaces of their lives, such as the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV), medical offices, etc. Even this latter perspective remained in a framework that could not let me consider the border violence making its way into our Puentes sessions, with migrant children or children of migrants.

In writing about a reparations framework within the context of Jamaica, Deborah Thomas (2011) calls for a historicizing of the conditions of criminalized communities— for “a focus on structural, rather than cultural, lineages and inheritances” (6). This is particularly important for criminalized communities when considering the narratives of violence that are attached to them: to understand the racialized, gendered processes creating violence, “hidden histories must be publicly acknowledged,” thus constructing a new form of knowledge production that engages with these violent, hidden histories (5).

Applying this framework within the context of migrant communities—or thinking more locally to the conditions of Puentes families—requires us to think about the origins of their migration. Here, I also draw from Sima Shaksari, who challenges our focus on migrant and refugee rights; instead, she argues, we should be thinking about the forces behind this creation of identity (Shaksari 2018). This process of deep historicization and questioning can be impeded by the hypervisualization of border violence, for it directs attention and activism towards responses that can immediately address the humanitarian issue (found at the border—a physical, observable site) at hand. Throughout this project, then, I have been asking myself: what was I oblivious to as a result of remaining within my previous understanding of border violence, while working with migrant communities? What histories can explain
not only the violence surrounding our physical border but also the violence in migrants’ countries of origin?

One of my initial responses when being introduced to concepts of historicization was asking myself, “How far back do I look to?” A reparations framework is simultaneously a “reorientation” (Thomas 2011, 6) of how we understand history, precisely because it seeks to legitimize previously de-legitimized, or erased, narratives of history (Trouillot 1995). Useful in this process is Lars Schoultz, who explores U.S. policy towards Latin America in his book “Beneath the United States,” (Lars Schoultz 1998). Ultimately, after exploring the three key driving forces of U.S. policy towards Latin America, he argues that these forces can be traced to racism and a perspective built upon inferiority, both of which he traces to two centuries prior. No aspect of U.S.-Latin America foreign policy can be fully understood unless it is seen through these two components of racism and inferiority. We can read Schoultz approach as an extension of Chavez’s “Latino Threat Narrative”; by writing directly about state policy, Schoultz introduces a new space within which this same narrative can take place, beyond Chavez’s discussions around public speeches and media. More specifically, this framework takes us directly to state actors and policy. The question is, then, what spaces inhabited by undocumented migrants are impacted by policy and state actors?

The reality is that these spaces are limitless, especially when considering the growing population of undocumented migrants and their children (Cohn 2015). Roger Rousse (1991) posits that migration challenges the “social nature of space” (11). Along this vein, he points to Americo Paredes and Guillermo Gomez-Pena, who both understand the border as more than a physical space or demarcation. Rouse works through their interpretation of the border as a meeting, or confrontation, of two different cultures—occurring anywhere away from the border. Identifying different sites of confrontation, or what Rouse describes as “miniature borders” (17), we can venture away from the physical demarcation of the border. Perhaps more importantly, we can also begin to inculcate both historical state actors and deeply ingrained societal perceptions into the creation of the migrant or refugee identity or experience, as Shakhsari urges us to do.
Beyond spatiality

Thomas’s framework of reparations presents a process that can be used to step outside of the physical border when theorizing and identifying sites of violence against undocumented migrants. By engaging in a process of historicization, we can identify and isolate the driving forces of the border and border violence to then trace it elsewhere. A simultaneous reading of Rouse (1991) and Chavez (1992) scaffolds upon this approach by presenting the border as “expanding,” or creating a visual of multiple miniature borders, therefore explicitly connecting the underlying forces of our physical border to the different sites creating similar environments of violence for undocumented migrants.

When migration came up explicitly in conversation, several of my interlocutors commented on the relative intangibility of the effects of migration. For Alison, the Education Program Director, one of her first learning experiences, prior to her engagement with Puentes, was a relationship with someone she later learned was undocumented. Experiencing daily life with this person provided her with a set of experiences she “was not keyed into, all the way to the larger [experiences], down to the smaller [experiences], like opening up a bank account.” While she credits her formal background in Education, this relationship was her first encounter with the effects of migration, it was “a big part of [her] learning curve.” Engaging in even the smallest of tasks, like opening up a bank account, taught her more than what could be learned in an academic setting or through research.

Returning to the hypervisualization of the border as the site of violence, the way one learns or hears about border violence is different than what Alison recalls as her encounters of learning— they do not take place at banks, for example. But her relationship provided a “confrontation” (Rouse 1991), one that allowed her to visualize the scope of the physical border her friend had directly encountered. In many ways, Puentes has continued to expand her conceptions of the effects of migration, or the different manifestations of border violence. Recalling a previous experience, Alison shared how a dance practice for a quinceañera she had been invited to be a part (for one of the older girls in Puentes) ended with a ride home from the family. She recalls:

There was some sort of sports game, so a lot of the roads were closed, there were a lot of police officers there, and this was October of 2016, so right before Trump was elected. So the mom took
this very circuitous route around and I remember for some reason the kids were like ducking down in the car as we passed the police officer and just that— for me being in that space, like I’m the only documented of-age person in this setting or just like, what do we do, what do I do...that's such a small thing that I just never had to think about, so just thinking, where does that happen on a map or what does that look like...it’s not a specific place, it’s like a bubble that you carry with you

Trying to identify physical sites where the effects of migration are lived out was difficult for Alison to conceptualize. Being in the same “orbit” of the families in Puentes, as she described, for almost five years allowed her to see beyond the physical boundary and effects of the border. A reading of Foucault helps attempt to understand how the border undergoes this expansion beyond the physical demarcation directly between two countries. Foucault's (1995) disciplinary mechanism is one in which “power is exercised without division...each individual is constantly located and examined,” (Foucault 1995, 197). This mechanism is particularly constructed to normalize the abnormal in society— within the disciplinary regime, fitting within the norm is the ultimate goal of power (193). Within the context of migration, we can distinguish between those who are, by Foucault’s measures, normal and those who are not. The title of Leo Chavez’s book provides a layer of understanding: “Shadowed Lives” (1992). Undocumented migrants, by existing in the shadows, are outside of what Foucault calls “the norm” (184). To exist in the shadows is to be outside of the legal, state vision— an absence of papeles makes it so that people cannot participate with the state in the same way that someone who is documented can. Within Puentes, the shadows can be felt in the school’s bureaucratic processes, making it difficult for families to get the support they need.

**A rose, bud, and thorn**

These conditions created through an undocumented status carry an impact beyond the individual directly living out the conditions. In migrant families or mixed-status families, the experience of being a child of undocumented parents is impacted by the same conditions their parents face, i.e. the accessibility of federal or state programs and authorities, isolated social networks, and poor work conditions (Capps 2007; Yoshikawa 2011). While the cited works illustrate some of the structural effects or experiences of this reality on children, volunteering at Puentes has allowed me to witness and reflect upon more intimate and small-scale effects of migration as experienced by the children of migrants or mixed-status families.
In many occasions similar to the one listed at the start of my chapter, I have been silenced by comments made by the children I work with, unsure of how to respond or where to take the conversation. There was never only one way that migration stories made it into the space: these stories came during coloring-time, a child would mention something while doing homework, or something in the space would spark a comment.

Trying to facilitate storytelling and conversation among my first graders, I have been trying to engage them in “rose, bud, thorn” activities at the start of our sessions. The idea is that the children can pick either of these to talk about based on their past day or the past week. One week this semester, one of the boys, Gustavo, shared a thorn: his cousin’s dad had gotten arrested and sent back to Mexico, and he had not seen him in a long time. Almost immediately after sharing this, he became distracted with the boy sitting next to him, engaging in a completely different conversation, similar to the moments described at the beginning of the chapter. During homework time we went out into the hall to talk for a bit. He informed me that this was not something recent; it had occurred some time ago, and the boy who shared this “thorn” had no specific memory of it— it was more of a story he remembered hearing from someone in his family. While at one level I wondered about my group’s understanding of the “rose, bud, thorn” activity, at another level I wondered what had made this boy think about that story, or memory, in that particular moment. In her teacher-research manual, Cynthia Ballenger (2009) describes these moments that catch us off our guard as “puzzling moments.” Rather than reasserting the task at hand, the directions, or explaining to the child how their interpretation of the activity was incorrect, Ballenger would call for a pause, an observation, and a wonderment. These puzzling moments where the children seem to randomly insert anecdotes about family deportation or separation, only to then quickly shift attention or engage in light conversation about the topic, are the moments that have caused me to wonder about the different ways that border violence can manifest itself.

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3 Rose, bud, thorn is a speaking activity, usually used as an ice-breaker. Based on the previous day or week, we can choose to talk about a rose (something positive), a bud (something we are excited about), or a thorn (something that has upset us in some way)
Speaking with my college-aged interlocutors provided an opportunity to unpack these puzzling moments. When talking about how we experience our parents’ migration stories, Veronica, Beto, and Liliana all bring up a sense of unease when trying to work through their positions as documented children of undocumented parents. Both Veronica and Beto recalled a recent tweet by someone who is undocumented:

Their engagement with their family’s migration stories has changed over the last few months or years, with both of them reflecting more on how they engage with the larger migrant rights movement. Engaging with them in discussion around this tweet, I was also grappling with this reality, reflecting upon my last few years participating in different migrant rights work. We wondered if any of our actions or engagements could have been the ones @ChavezTheRapper had in mind with this tweet. Focusing on one aspect of the tweet, Veronica states,

“not that we understand their experiences or have lived them, I agree but I feel like there's also a certain, not trauma but there's also a certain embodiment of like—I mean we are what our parents raised us to be, right, like partly?”

Here she is drawing attention to the unseen effects of migration and border-violence that our parents carry and inadvertently may pass on to us. She explains her point by tracing the different generations in one side of her family, with one of the external factors being migration to the States and how this impacted relationships, and, subsequently, how these impacted relationships shaped the relationship between her and her mom. She states: “there's just things that you carry in your body that don't necessarily go away, all of it is woven together.” In stating this, she is exploring the multigenerational effects of immigration policies, or what Laura E. Enriquez (2015) calls “multigenerational punishment,” (940). She defines this
as “a distinct form of legal violence wherein the sanctions intended for undocumented immigrants extend into the lives of U.S. citizens,” (940). Through our social ties and day-to-day interactions with undocumented family members, citizen children of undocumented parents “witness and share in the punishments and risk-management strategies produced by laws,” (941). And while much of the scholarly work emphasizes the developmental and psychological effects of this form of legal violence, the observations and testimonies I present an ethnographic account of these effects and how they show up not only across different times periods in someone’s life but also different spaces.

**Entering the “orbit”**

I entered Puentes at an interesting point in time: one semester before the 2016 presidential elections. The emails I received from Puentes—the information that was circulating throughout even the course of these two semesters—was different. A search through my inbox during the first semester there (Spring of 2016) will mainly turn up reminder emails. However, the following semester, we received emails about how to support kids and their families following the results of the election. From that point onwards, our emails have consisted of community updates, different ways to become engaged in the work of migrant rights in Philadelphia, or events in the community related to migrant rights. A tracing of the content of emails sent to the Puentes volunteers and staff demonstrates an increase in recognition of the scope of the effects of migration. Should volunteers not independently develop a deeper awareness of issues surrounding migration, these emails serve as another pathway to this understanding. In our interview, Courtney reflects upon some of the discrepancies in her expectations before joining Puentes as the PHF program coordinator and the reality she has experienced in this position. In recounting one particular experience, she states:

Seeing how viscerally it plays out...I didn't know how prevalent it would feel at a place like Puentes and how many families would be facing this or dealing with this and definitely not all but it comes up every week, a student that’s upset about something or, I learned last week that one of our student’s dad was deported and then came back over Thanksgiving and surprised the family, so I didn't know that it would come up for me every week in a different way

The level of migration effects Courtney was witnessing were effects beyond the “miniature border zones” Rousse (1991) speaks of; in other words, beyond the effects rooted in space, such as housing segregation,
exploitative jobs, or lack of school funding at the local public schools. The effects Courtney was referring to were those rooted in the transtemporal and transpatial realities of migration, carried in how a student feels during their afternoon at Puentes. Making this connection between a student’s mood or behavior with their home life, or external realities, has been a crucial part in the approach of Alison and Courtney, the two coordinators of the education program. Working with youth in urban settings, education scholar and community worker Shawn Ginwright (2015) argues for the necessity of hope and healing as target points when thinking about work with Black and Brown youth. He asks: “How might key features of social emotional learning such as grit, gratitude, and purpose support learning when kids come to school hungry in the morning, dodge bullets during lunch, and fear the police as they walk home in the afternoon?” (16-17). This question draws attention to, first, make the connection between how a child might be behaving in learning settings to what they are experiencing in their external, larger realities. With this in mind, as part of her orientation to the position, Courtney describes a process the previous coordinator engaged her in: the former coordinator had made a family tree, so part of Courtney’s responsibility was “learning everyone’s names and their parent’s names and learning relationships and who picks up who and also personal circumstances...” She described this part of her responsibility in such a way that communicated the difficulty and tediousness of this work. In listing the different aspects one after the other with little to no pause in between, Courtney communicated the amount of work involved here—it is a continuous process, precisely because situations are constantly changing. But she recognizes the importance of the work. She says: “the work is very oriented around the kids and their personal lives so a lot of listening and trying to absorb that knowledge [is necessary], and in knowing that knowledge I’ll be able to pick up on things [in the future].” This ability to pick up on things is what allows Courtney to be the point person for all the elementary classrooms when the tutors and team leaders cannot determine what is causing a child to feel upset, or the person to call if tutors need extra support. Her ability to understand how each of the children is feeling is rooted in her knowledge of their home life, or the aspects of their life that we cannot directly see in school and in the program.
Alison would describe this work as entering the community’s “orbit.” To enter someone’s orbit is to become part of their day-to-day; it is about presence. Furthermore, if the team aims to gain a holistic understanding of how a child is experiencing Puentes, there is also a need to understand the other parts of a child’s orbit, which include their homelife. Having been a part of the Puentes team for almost five years now, Alison recognizes that they have created a “long, shared history.” They have created orbits with each other in their lives. This has been further established through experiences she has shared with Puentes families outside of the Puentes space—experiences which she describes as “lazos,” or ropes that connect, bring together. Being part of birthdays, family dinners, or cooking lessons creates shared memories, or “moments that tie [them] together over time.” Being “woven together” in this way—into each others’ lazos or orbits—has allowed Alison to “develop a much more complex understanding of their lives, development, and families.” This deeper conocimiento or understanding of children’s personal lives also creates the connection between broader border violence and violence against migrants to what she witnesses within her work at Puentes.

But what Alison and Courtney, or even Madison, a three-year volunteer and team leader, and I, have in common is an extended relationship with Puentes. Each of us has now been with Puentes for a minimum of four semesters, with Madison and I working with the same group of students for at least two consecutive semesters. The forming of lazos or the creation of shared orbits is mitigated through this extended relationship. Cynthia Ballenger (2009), a teacher-researcher, presents different case studies and what they allowed her to learn about teaching and working with marginalized students. Necessary to recognize, however, is that these are lessons she was able to grasp through being with the same group of students for extended periods. With a high volunteer turnover rate, what is being lost within the potential of Puentes? In highlighting some of the different ways that the border, or migration effects, are felt within Puentes, I hope to have presented the idea that these are effects that cannot always be pointed to or felt. With this in mind, I am pushing to imagine addressing the effects within the same level—the intangible, the felt. And while every individual coming in contact with Puentes is capable of—and indeed demonstrates—profound levels of care, there are limitations to the healing relationships that can be built.
with the children when there is a high volunteer turnover rate, a larger reality that will continue to be explored in the conclusion.
Chapter 2: Cariño

“Thank you for coming with me to the desk. Do you know why I’m asking for us to do our homework?” I asked Jesus. He responded: “Yes— because you care about me.”

Until that moment, I do not think I had explicitly stated, “I care about you.” In retrospect, I regret that it took me so long to vocalize the care that I felt as soon as I met the children. But it was only after I had more down-time— remember that working with second graders does not come with down-time— that I thought, what ways was I communicating or showing care?

This moment occurred during my fourth semester at Puentes, the fall semester of my junior year— I had known the kids I was working with at the time since they were in first grade, and they were now in third grade. Junior year fall semester was particularly important: the previous academic year (in the Fall) I had experienced my worst semester, worsened by the election of Trump; but in the Spring, I experienced my most beautiful, fulfilling, and challenging semester thus far. This was the semester I was in Bryn Mawr’s Migration and Borders 360 course cluster, a cluster of three courses across various disciplines. This semester was really the first time I began to study migration and borders in an academic setting, but the structure of the 360 (with fifteen of us talking the three courses together) made it so that we were invited to speak from personal experience. This particular experience prompted me to situate myself, my family, my upbringing within theories of migration and borders. It is what allowed me to begin to make the connection between migration theory and what I was engaged in on and off campus. These conocimientos carried over into the following semester, Fall semester Junior year, where I continued to trace the effects of migration and borders on my life.

I walk us through this process to situate Jesus’s comment within my state of being and thinking at the time— at the moment that he made this comment, I was already beginning to trace the extensions of the border and how border epistemologies were developed and passed down across time and space. Where before I had explained my involvement with Puentes as coming from a place of loving to work with children, I now began to situate my participation within a broader line of connected work rooted in a desire to engage in migrant and [anti]border knowledge and activism.
The missing piece was cariño—cariño and love are the acts and feelings that connect working with PHF, engaging in the larger migrant rights movements being a part of border epistemology, and continuing my process of self-conocimiento. I argue that if we want to address the transtemporal and transpatial forms of violence that impact PHF (as a community and organization), we must respond with an approach that parallels how violence shows up—transgressing time and space. Cariño matches the intangibility of the border, along with the subsequent national publics that also transgress time and space.

A National Public Built on Hate

Trump’s stories of migration reinforce narratives of threat and criminality surrounding undocumented immigrants, particularly those coming from Latin America. In citing several examples of instances in which an undocumented immigrant allegedly hurt an American citizen, Trump is presenting America as a singular victim—a victim of the crimes of migrants he labels as “illegal aliens.” While it is important to situate Trump’s rise to power within a larger history of racism and discrimination from which this country is built on (Rosa and Bonilla 2017), it is also important to acknowledge the emotions or reactions that his presidency has validated. In the immediate days following his election, we witnessed an increase in hate crimes (Okeowo 2016); since his election, we have also witnessed a surge in protests and counter-protests, in the form of alt-right rallies (Coaston 2018; DuPree 2017). His campaign and presidency have been defined by different strands of xenophobic, discriminatory, racist rhetoric—this is his Message, or what Lempert and Silverstein (2012) define in Stolee and Caton (2018) as the “simultaneous act of referential meaning and sociopolitical indexicality,” (150). Stolee and Caton define Message as the topics he discusses, as well as what he communicates through his particular choice of Issues, or how he “inhabits” his Message to say something about his character (Lempert and Silverstein 2012: 2). The position of President situates Trump and his rhetoric within a position of power. Though his average job approval rating is at 39% (Gallup Inc n.d.), he is situated within the center of a public, or a broader discourse.

Michael Warner’s (2002) discussion around publics and counterpublics is pertinent to understanding the harm of Trump’s migration stories; subsequently, it is vital in situating the national
context surrounding Puentes. Though referring specifically to written texts, Warner describes a public as a
“space of discourse organized by discourse itself” (50) and is realized through the “active uptake,” or
“mere attention” (61) of an audience. In other words, a public comes into being “by virtue of address,”
(61). Applying Warner’s theorization of publics to the presidency of the United States of America, it is
not far-fetched to consider the rhetoric coming out of this seat as creating a public, a reality that is even
closer to Warner’s conceptions through the use of social media and other forms of telecommunication.
Because we are all living in this nation—irrespective of citizenship—we are a public of the nation,
represented by the President; Warner’s assertion that simply “mere attention” is constitutive of a public
was satisfied when all major broadcasting stations chose to air Trump’s national address from the Oval
Office (referenced above). When a public that is delineated through discourses of xenophobia and anti-
immigrant sentiment becomes the national public, the impacts of the Message extend beyond the legal
and institutional actions that align with such a rhetoric—the implications now exist within the spaces
between the audiences of this public. Returning to Trump, the effect of his Message of migrant
criminality and exclusion—based on alleged attacks against America, as shown in the above excerpt—
extends beyond the individual perpetrators in question.

Also constitutive of publics is what Warner describes as the temporality of a text’s, or
discourse’s, circulation (66). He continues: “Circulation organizes time. Public discourse is
contemporary, and it is oriented to the future; the contemporaneity and the futurity in question are those
of its own circulation,” (66). Though we can measure some of the effects of Trump’s anti-immigrant
rhetoric (as demonstrated above), it is impossible to measure the lived and felt impacts, precisely because
the circulation of this discourse is aimed towards the future. If we consider that Trump’s Message is to
affect the future, I turn to what I believe is a mark of the future: children. Additionally, considering the
transgression of time and space within the conception of publics, we must imagine responses—or
counterpublics, defined in the proceeding section—that are also unbounded by time and space.

The hateful Message of Trump’s national public serves to prevent groups of individuals from
engaging with the “discursive arena” (Fraser 1990, 61) of this public. This exclusion, or what feminist
theory considers “the mechanics of erasure” (Blackwell 2011, 4), leads to the formation of counterpublics, which Nancy Fraser defines as “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (67). What are the counterpublics being formed in response to Trump’s mechanisms of erasure? More specifically, how are children—who are at one level continually overlooked on the basis of age (refer to Literature Review) and are also key targets of Trump’s Message—considered within the construction of these counterpublics?

**Countering Hate**

While we can measure the rhetoric of hate and false information in the stories making up this public (Sargent 2019), there is not yet a way—if at all possible—to measure all of the impacts that these stories have on migrant communities and families. Rather than seeking out to measure the effects of these stories, I wish to contextualize the counterpublics created within Trump’s public, specifically those that align with migrant rights and anti-border discourses. Warner (2002) describes counterpublics as follows:

[a counterpublic] maintains at some level, conscious or not, an awareness of its subordinate status. The cultural horizon against which it marks itself off is not just a general or wider public, but a dominant one...The discourse that constitutes it is not merely a different or alternative idiom, but one that in other contexts would be regarded with hostility or with a sense of indecorousness (86).

As explained previously, the public that is the dominant one is rooted in discourses of xenophobia, advocating for the construction of a border wall that would stand as a lasting monument of racism. Pro-immigrant or anti-border discourses can be regarded as hostile within this national public, especially when considering the notions of criminality and danger that Trump attaches to immigrants, particularly those coming from Mexico and Central America.

In counter-response to the national public, we have witnessed a variety of movements: feminist, anti-fascist, anarchist, environmental, and migrant-rights movements are among a few of the counterpublics that have been formed. When theorizing the potential of a Black counterpublic in the 90s, Michael Dawson (Dawson 1994) argues that “Black political thought cannot be fully situated within
American liberalism,” (205) thereby challenging contemporary theorists who argued that a Black counterpublic that positioned itself within American liberalism as a source of opposition of white supremacy could not exist. The reason for this, he argued, was that only “nonliberal theoretical perspectives [emphasized] the primacy of community,” (202) which was essential to the construction of a powerful and potent counterpublic. This leads me to then ask: How do we create community within a counterpublic? Returning to children, how do we create community with and around the children of migrants being affected by the futurity of the national public?

Important to the notion of community is the presence of emotion, which is absent in Warner’s conversation around publics and counterpublics. When applying ideas of public and counterpublics to our contemporary national setting, it is difficult to avoid emotion. The deportations and family separations precisely created by what is now our national public necessitate the consideration of emotion.4 This project is then an attempt to contextualize the creation— the “expressive corporeality” (57) and embodiment— of these counterpublics through the lense of community and emotion, as they exist within Puentes hacia el futuro.

Dawson (1994) points toward the often overlooked feature of an institutional base for counterpublics— the spaces that provide forums, room for debate, and hold various discourse communities (207). He goes on to critique the movement towards the creation of a Black counterpublic in the 1970s, outlining the different small sects that broke off from group after group. I consider Puentes as one such institutional basis for the counterpublics created in response to the nativist national public. The ability of Puentes to draw people in from a variety of backgrounds and professions first prompted me to consider this as a potential site of theorizing what factors or components are crucial to creating a broad-based coalition, or counterpublic. Tutors come from schools across the Philadelphia region through a variety of networks: public health, education, community development, Spanish departments, migrant

4 Here, it is important to note that deportations and family separations are not unique to the Trump administration. The Obama administration, for example, has the highest number of deportations to date. The difference, however, is the image and visibility in these acts.
justice work, to name a few. It also draws community partners specializing in art, sex-education, coding, and mental wellness. I am arguing that at the crux of all these backgrounds, experiences, and projects is an effort to work with and support the children through love and cariño, which are affective processes that are necessary to the creation of a counterpublic that seeks to meet a public in its unbounded state; both the national public and cariño transgress time and space.

Defining Care through cariño

I am defining care through a blending of traditional conceptions of the ethics of care, care as conceptualized within education research, and radical womxn of color theorizations of care. In a broader framework of care theory, care is centered around relationship building, or social organization (Brodkin Sacks 1988; Ginwright 2015; Held 2013; Thelen 2015). Within education research with communities that Gutiérrez et al. (2017) would consider “less dominant” (30), cariño is introduced as an effective approach to implement within the classroom— “it addresses the need for pedagogy to follow from and flow through relationships,” (Valenzuela 1999, 21). Furthermore, situating cariño within education emphasizes a look into how knowledge is developed and how it is passed on or forward. “Cariño,” although the Spanish translation of “care,” thus carries different connotations than “care.” Angela Valenzuela (1999) presents the necessity for this distinction through her conversation around aesthetic care and authentic care. While teachers give aesthetic care to students who value academic-based content and practices, authentic care looks beyond stereotypes and tracking to value the student as an individual, or person. Prieto and Villenas (2012) define this form as cariño, or “an authentic notion of caring,” (423). Though I am not an educator in the institutional capacity, I am nevertheless working within a site of education. In working with children, I am in a similar position to many of the teachers producing this theory around cariño. Furthermore, it is precisely the geopolitical context surrounding Puentes that necessitates a theoretical framework that is radical in its nature of relationship-building.

But cariño is difficult to measure— it cannot be physically felt, or pointed to. In this relative intangibility and immeasurability, presenting an ethnography of cariño within Puentes becomes a challenge. How do I discuss something that cannot be seen or physically felt? I return to my encounter
with Jesus: how did he understand my care for him? Reflecting upon my interaction with the third graders at the time, I cannot point to moments where I explicitly communicated my care, perhaps with an “I care about you.” And yet, it was felt, known. There was something about my interactions with him and maybe the rest of his peers that prompted him to consider me as someone who cares about them. I chose to see these children beyond an aesthetic care, or a care rooted in how much they followed directions and completed their homework. The reality was that many (understandably so) did not at all enjoy homework. But we are tasked with the necessity to see and treat these children with cariño, an authentic love and desire to get to know the children.

To understand the workings of cariño within Puentes— for example, how my cariño for the children was communicated, felt, and trusted and the subsequent effects— I first turn to the intersection of care theory within labor, kinship, and disability studies. Virginia Held (2013), a political philosopher, traces the ethics of care to basic relationships between persons, specifically to the necessity of caring labor in the maintenance of such relationships. Held centers “empathy, sensitivity, trust, and responding to need,” (10). Working with children, however, complicates how these processes are engaged with— it necessitates what Tatjana Thelen (2015) would describe as the “creative power of care,” or of communicating the feelings outlined by Held. It means that we as volunteers cannot explicitly ask the children important questions that would allow us to better understand how to support them— questions like, “How has migration impacted your life?” or “How can we create a space where you feel you can bring in familial and cultural funds of knowledge?” as we may potentially be able to do with a group of older individuals. Instead, we must take it upon ourselves to learn how to most effectively and lovingly invite these stories of migration into the space, how to engage in cultural dignification within larger structural contexts of cultural delegitimization, and how to embody and communicate cariño.

I understand cariño as a set of practices rooted in love, within and towards communities under attack. Encounters with my students at Puentes demonstrated that this process starts with what Patricia Hill Collins (2000) describes as “talking with the heart,” (262) which she attaches to a caring epistemology used by African-American women to combat the ideas forced upon a community by White
oppressors. “Talking with the heart” is precisely why we as tutors are trained to speak positively to our students— rather than saying, “You are not supposed to be doing that” we should instead say, “Would you like to work on this with me instead?” It is why we commend and applaud first graders for lining up in a straight line in the hectic cafeteria that is filled with three to four different afterschool programs during snack time from 3:00pm to 3:30pm. “Talking with the heart” is throwing a high-five party when one of our kids successfully completes a math problem all on their own, or sitting in silence with a child who is feeling upset. According to Collins, to talk with the heart is rooted in three characteristics: “the value placed on individual expressiveness, the appropriateness of emotions, and the capacity for empathy,” (264). A key component of this caring epistemology is the position of African-American women as a community under attack. Beyond the act of talking against the violent structures, it is also about “the way” care is presented (264). This framework allows us to begin to depart from understandings of care as “simple trusting relationships and mutual expectations and bonds between individuals,” (Ginwright, 121). Instead, understanding care as cariño moves us from simple relationships to radical relationship-building rooted in authentically knowing someone within a larger context of violence. Within Puentes, I am situating cariño within broader contexts of nativist, xenophobic, and racist attacks.

As outlined in the previous chapter and this chapter’s section on national publics, migrants are under attack by the federal government. Legal and juridical attacks are creating conditions of violence that subsequently affect the children of these migrant families, irrespective of citizenship status. By instilling a climate of fear among undocumented migrant communities and engaging in defunding programs and executive orders, the government has effectively neglected their duty in the provision of basic services, thus rendering care-work all the more necessary and radical. In discussing the destruction of social and political infrastructures among black communities across America, Shawn Ginwright writes:

“In response to the state’s neglect of facilitating basic social welfare, some community organizations have sprung up to serve as a buffer to mitigate what Wacquant (2001) refers to as the penal state— the omnipresent influence of state institutions such as police, schools, and prisons who in concert encroach upon urban life through surveillance, zero tolerance policies, and imprisonment in the name of public safety...The penal state threatens the vitality of networks of care in black communities,” (121)
It is precisely these conditions of violence and attack that render care-work as radical. Radical feminist and scholar Alexis Pauline Gumbs illustrates this point through the framework of mothering, which she considers radical through the acknowledgement of “the creative power of transforming ourselves and the ways we relate to each other. Because we were never meant to survive and here we are creating a world full of love,” (Gumbs et al. 2016, 23). We are creating a world of love within a classroom—a world created through stories, colorings, drawings, conversations, and books. Through the inflection and tone of our voices and the ease of our touch in a high five, pat, or hug. In responding to the needs of the South Philly migrant community through frameworks of love, we are “challenging the subordinate social position” of migrants that the national public places them in (Beauboeuf-Lafontant 2005, 442). Ginwright (2016) adds to this, elaborating on how care is a radical act because it “facilitates healing” within political, structural violence (121). As I continue to learn about the impacts of migration, education theory, and theories of change, I ask myself how I can create spaces of healing within the context of Puentes, spaces that ultimately “promote cultural integrity, community and individual survival, spiritual growth, and political change under oppressive conditions,” (121). Cariño and love are foundational to the creation of these spaces, and they are crucial to the process of even considering these conversations as applicable to the children. As Prieto and Villenas (2012) argue, the basis of all learning is rooted in cariño—the love I had for Jesús was felt, and this authentic care allowed him to trust me enough to guide him through an afternoon of Puentes. Within the context of Puentes, cariño shows up in the practices between the team and families we serve, the creation of our afternoon sessions, our interactions with the children, and our efforts at working within an awareness of the broader, framing sociopolitical context of migrants in the United States.

**Care as counterpublic**

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5 This is a framework akin to care but that I am distinguishing. I am applying frameworks of care and love within how we treat and interact with less dominant communities, and later applying frameworks of mothering to how we extend upon this care to mother a movement or an idea.
At Puentes, this counterpublic is most evident by way of stories, or the counterstories that are told, witnessed, and passed down. Its holistic approach to health makes it so that all members of the community are involved in the program in some capacity. Within the education sector of Puentes, parents, children, schoolteachers, Puentes staff and volunteers, community activists, and artists are all involved. The capacity, potential, and transmission of stories within this context, then, is significant. While stories of migration are exchanged within families, neither I nor members of the Puentes team I have spoken to have been listeners of such stories. Recalling inherited conocimientos and educating myself about some of the realities that the physical act of migration, I recognize that these migration stories can be traumatic in their telling and reliving. These stories, or conocimiento\(^6\) of the experiences of migration, can be passed down by migrants in other forms: by way of inviting someone into one’s lives, speaking about home, or even snippets of the migration story (compared to a story told in full, a life story).

But these stories become counterstories, precisely because they are situated within such a hateful climate. In their radical nature of telling, living, and passing on, they are examples of cariño. Today’s counterstories of migration are those that honor the act of migration and the telling of stories in whatever way migrants so choose. Cariño as a method of migration counterstories, then, also requires listeners, or allies, to honor the silences in these migration stories, recognizing that there are reasons for these silences. Within the Puentes team, this means taking it upon ourselves to fill in some of these gaps in such a way that better prepares us to work with the children of these families. Simultaneously, to enact cariño as a counterstory is to pass on the aprendizajes of migration to future generations. While this is an act primarily shared by the parents of the children, what can we as a team at Puentes do to honor the experiences and backgrounds our children are coming from? How do we encourage the reflection and incorporation of migrant funds of knowledge (Moll et al. 1992; Yosso 2006) into spaces of education, or into publics? These are the questions I have undertaken and will continue to explore.

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\(^6\) Literally translating to “awareness,” conocimiento, or consciencia, is a Chicana feminist concept that indicates a process of sociocultural and political awareness of “nondominant” (Gutierrez et al 2017, 30) groups and a subsequent methodology of those occupying this space (Delgado Bernal et al. 2006)
Encariñar a la comunidad

Staff and volunteers at Puentes take it upon themselves to educate themselves to some of the surrounding circumstances of migration as experienced by the families in South Philly. These efforts I read as acts of cariño, for they place the work of learning about some of the nuances of families’ migration experiences within South Philly on the staff and volunteers rather than the members of the community themselves. This form of caring labor within the relationship between families served by Puentes and the Puentes team begins with the passing down of snippets of stories and experiences and continues into how we as team members respond to this knowledge—this labor process rests on the idea that the relationship is necessary, since all persons are “interrelated,” (Held, p.10).

Held situates her ethics of care within an acknowledgment of this reciprocal relationship—if Puentes families are demonstrating great acts of cariño, how can we as a team reciprocate, or further create a relationship to each other (Gumbs, Martens, and Williams 2016: 41)? What can our acts of care look like? If radical acts of care and love are described by June Jordan as rooted in “a serious and tender concern to respect the nature, and the spontaneous purpose, of other things, other people…”, (Jordan 2016, 11) respecting the nature of other people, more specifically the migrant families, is respecting the lazos that they do or do not seek to create.

At one level, an already present desire to engage with the migrant community in South Philadelphia is what drives individuals to become involved with Puentes, as was the case with Beto. Getting to know his students and, through them, the nuances of the community, was Beto’s first step in establishing a connection with the community. While Beto is a child of Mexican migrants himself, the people that make up the Puentes team and volunteers are diverse, coming from a variety of racial, ethnic, and professional backgrounds. For those individuals that may not have had prior exposure to some of the realities of migrant families, they actively seek opportunities to prepare themselves to work in this context.

For example, Courtney, the education coordinator for the elementary program, Alison, and Madison returned to their experiences studying abroad in Latin American countries, where the experience
was useful for them both language and culturally-wise. Within her major studying non-profit and community-based education programs, Madison has taken the opportunity to do more research on Latinx students and with Latinx scholarly journals to better understand the approach that Puentes takes. Alison, coming from an education background that provided her with many field experiences during her time in college, drew from her field placements, particularly one with Mexican immigrant mothers at a daytime school. Courtney paid close attention to the broader political forces around migration and worked closely with the previous education coordinator to learn some of the different family trees and background stories of the children at Puentes. In each of their cases, they put the learning that had to happen in order to best prepare themselves on their own shoulders, rather than on the community members themselves.

Similar to Beto, I felt that my position as a child of migrants provided me with a deep level of understanding because of our shared backgrounds. I began to consider what topics I as a child of migrants wished I could have been introduced to, or what conversations I wish would have happened sooner. I approached my kids with a “what would I have wanted?” mentality, specifically as I thought about what kind of conversations to bring into our afternoon sessions. Encountering educational research, however, made me realize the potential dangers in viewing our experiences as parallel. To this, Gutierrez et al (2017) states: “Failure to capture the regularity and variance in communities, the nuanced textures of community members’ lives, and the ingenuity that is inherent in human activity contributes to flawed research [and] poor educational and social policies and practices,” (31) and while I was not carrying out research at the time, I wondered about the potential drawbacks of the approach I had taken. In seeing our experiences as similar, I risked an absence of engaging in processes of mutual learning— what could the children teach me that, if working hierarchically, I may not be able to see otherwise? In sharing about her own learning experiences within Puentes, Alison talks about learning how to be in a community. She says: “I’ve learned how to be part of a community, and what that means in a beautiful and unique sense of community and how they have grown and change over time...they’ve inspired or awoken in me this really great capacity to love.” While we may learn about the experiences of migration through an approach que es cariñoso, we can also learn about ourselves and how to relate to each other. Learning about love— not
only within a surrounding context of violence but also from a community that the national public villanizes— and vocalizing this process is powerful, for the same reasons that it is difficult to center love and cariño as Puentes’ main reasons for success.

The care that I felt I was enacting was pulling from my own experiences, but June Jordan reminds us that a fundamental act of care is recognizing people for who they really are (Jordan, p.15). I still let my personal connection as a child of migrants influence the relationship I have with my Puentes kids, but I also now actively listen to what they are telling me: in bringing up their sibling that lives in Mexico, I invite a conversation to talk about our siblings. In talking about the snacks they do not like at school, we, instead, talk about what foods we do like and what we like about them. Within these moments, my cariño looks like a focus and perspective on the individual children, a belief in their agency and what I can learn from them— taking this as another way to continue learning about migration while maintaining a practice of reciprocal learning with the communities that we work with.

Encariñarnos: los niñxs

Beyond even how the team treats each other, the children, and their families, the cariño that I see among the children is both illuminating and yet another opportunity to learn from.

One of my favorite parts of the afternoon has always been snack time. As a team leader, I am the one waiting for the kids at our table at 3:00 p.m.; our table stays the same for the year and only changes at the start of the new school year. The cafeteria has a lot of gray, brown, and black. The floors are black, and the walls are made up of thin bricks smoothed out by a coating of paint and shine— red/brown bricks at the bottom half and then white filling the top half. The kids add excitement to the relatively boring room.
Snacktime was my favorite part of the day. As a team leader, I loved being the first one the kids saw during Puentes. Our energy levels were rarely consistent from week to week, but this half-hour window allowed me to check in with the kids and just talk to them outside of homework time. *How was your day, how was school today, how are you feeling, anything exciting?* These were some of the questions I would ask each of my kids. The more they saw of me (semester after semester) the more they would open up to me. Many of them would also start our afternoons with a hug. Kati, part of my first group of kids, was always the one to update me the most thoroughly; she loved talking one-on-one, being one of the girls who was more shy. Three years later—even after accusing me of betraying her when she realized I came back to Puentes but not as their tutor—she continues to say hello to me and chat with me for a few minutes during snack time.

Sometimes my first group of first graders would break into little groups, often a boys group and a girls group. But they would come together during snack time, often sharing their snacks and lunches. They would trade a taco for a piece of quesadilla, a torta half for a barrita de fresa o piña (an unequal exchange), a bite of a sandwich for some chicharrones or chips. Nelson and Jesus always brought the most intricate, full-packed meals—toperes de arroz con pollo, un caldo de carne, or sopecitos. Their families would consistently drop off some food. And they were often the ones to offer up (sometimes a little unwillingly) a bite or two. Watching them trade food was really amusing, but it also reminded me of the deep cariño they had for one another, which was sometimes hard to remember based on how they could treat each other sometimes.

What I see more of this semester is a relationship between older siblings still in Puentes and their younger siblings also in Puentes. Three of my current first graders—Daniela, David, and Gustavo—each have an older sibling in Puentes. Daniela’s sister, Julia, is in fifth grade and David and Gustavo’s older sisters are in fourth grade, the same group that I started with three years ago. Daniela’s sister and her best friend will come to our table every day during snack time. Julia hugs Daniela, sometimes surprising her from behind. She brings over a snack if Daniela does not already have one—fruit and bolis are her favorites. They do a quick check-in, and the entire time Daniela is gazing up at her sister, responding to
her questions and also checking in on her sister. Julia says good-bye with a kiss on her head, and then she heads over to the fifth-grade table with her best friend. David and Gustavo’s older sisters, Vanessa and Julissa, come and sit at our table every Thursday during snack-time. Similar to Julia, Vanessa and Julissa come stocked with snacks for their younger brothers. On one occasion, Julissa had not stopped by yet to check in on Gustavo. Vanessa noticed that he did not have a snack, so she offered him the remainder of her pretzel.

Because snack-time is so different than other moments in our Puentes afternoon schedule, I have been able to see different sides of the children. Without the stress of homework and the perfectionist anxieties that can sometimes affect them during drawing and art activities, the children interact with each other in a much kinder way— más cariñosamente. I feel that this is, in part, because they are also treating themselves with much more kindness, consequently making it easier to treat others with kindness.

Reading so much into the exchange of food can seem silly, but food as I have known it is a marker of community-building. We gather around food, and food becomes the unit of gathering— in family reunions, in collective mournings, in celebration, in remembrance. During Puentes, food facilitates a check-in— it says ¿cómo estás, estás bien? Aquí estoy para ti. Food is how they nourish each other, both literally and figuratively by way of communicating the cariño that they have for each other in even offering a bite of their home-cooked, warmly delivered food.

Creating spaces of cariño

Walking into Southwark Elementary School on any given day, one can see remnants of any given cultural holiday. In March there were Chinese dragon sculptures and hand-drawn pictures of festivities, all still up from Lunar New Year. Next to it, the walls are decorated with assignments about Black History Month and Women’s History Month. Back in late October and November, there were altares and strands of papel picado decorating the halls, in honor of Dia de los muertos. On the walls were short paragraphs written by students that explained how they celebrated Dia de los muertos. The interior of the building is filled with murals representing beauty in difference. Outside on one of the walls of the parking lot— which is also one of the biggest walls in the surrounding area— is an all-encompassing mural
depicting faces of children coming from different backgrounds. Puentes exists within this physical space. Most of the children participating in a Puentes program attend Southwark during the day.

Southwark as a public elementary school is severely underfunded. It ranks among the top 1% of public schools in the state for students that are eligible for free or reduced lunch, which indicates the surrounding community’s income levels (“Southwark School Profile (2018-19) | Philadelphia, PA” n.d.). Within this context, then, I read the inclusion of a variety of cultures and histories as acts of cariño: within an institution that is neglected by the state, teachers and communities are reinforcing the necessity, importance, and validity of these families through visible reminders and monuments of affirmation. At the same time, the school often does not provide the resources to create these reminders—there is simply no funding. For this reason, then, families are allowed—invited—to create their respective objects of remembrance and honoring. In the case of Dia de los muertos, for example, a Puentes mom came in. She is the mother of a child currently in fourth grade, Nelson. Having worked with her son for about four
semesters, we exchanged hellos as I was heading towards the Puentes office. She had brought in the table cloths, flowers, photographs, foods, and candles, all items that are typically placed within an altar. She had even managed to create multiple levels, trying to create as faithful an altar as possible. Her hands were gentle with the placement of each object on the different layers.

That afternoon, one of the tutors for fourth grade, Edwin, also ran into her in the hallway and excitedly asked her if she wanted to speak to the fourth and fifth graders about altares and Dia de los muertos. At the end of the afternoon, he shared that it was a beautiful experience to be a part of and that the kids were excited to engage with the discussion. He expressed a surprise upon realizing that the kids were not super familiar with the details of the holiday, which further assured him that this was something important to bring into the space. In recognizing this importance, Edwin was recognizing the cultural fund of knowledge children in Puentes brought forth with them. Vélez-Ibáñez and Greenberg (2005) define these funds of knowledge as “strategic and cultural resources...that households contain. These funds not only provide the basis for understanding the cultural systems from which U.S.-Mexican children emerge, but that they are also important and useful assets in the classroom,” (47).

Similarly, the Puentes curriculum that is in place for the summer program reflects this awareness through its “anti-bias framework and culturally resonant text selection,” which is evidently put into practice through a look at their library (pictured in the following chapter). The purpose of this approach is to create a mirror-windows structure: a mirror into the children’s own lives and a window into other cultures that they may encounter at Southwark or different periods in history. These efforts to not only remain culturally sensitive but to encourage the presence of a child’s home culture are markers of cariño because they work within a larger structure that makes it difficult for children to bring in their cultural or home-based funds of knowledge.
Chapter 3: Beginning to Theorize a New Direction of Migrant-Rights Activism and Social Justice Work

On Sunday, April 14th at 10:00 a.m. one section of the PHF fifth graders, along with their families, came to Haverford. A Haverford senior fine arts major, Alyssa, had been working with this group of students over the past semester as an art teacher. Once a week, she came into Puentes to engage with the students in discussion and creation, culminating in the creation of their own art pieces to place in an exhibit. On Sunday morning, we came together to see the exhibit, located in Haverford’s Visual Culture and Media (VCAM) building, room 201. The exhibit was titled: “Lo mítico y lo en peligro” and involved each of the students making an alebrije-style animal of their choice out of recycled materials. In the glass art holder located to the back of the room, overlooking the rest of VCAM from the second floor, was a row of alebrijes. There were eleven total alebrijes, with five of them having been made by Alyssa. Among the alebrijes made by the children was a blue elephant, a purple and blue dog-horse-unicorn crossover, a red and black bull, and a purple-green-blue-glittered koala-corn (a koala-unicorn crossover).

When the families walked into the room, the alebrijes were all lined up. The families and children sat in chairs in a half-circle, facing the glass container.

Alyssa asked the children questions about the process of making it, what their favorite part was, whether they had heard about alebrijes before. Similarly, she asked the parents to share their experiences with alebrijes specifically or Latin American art in general. While the children were relatively shy and the initial conversation was not as filled with discussion as perhaps was hoped, the parents took photograph after photograph of their child standing by their art piece. My first grader, [Dulce], came along with her sister, [Jackie]. I asked her which alebrije was her favorite. Excitedly, with an expression that seemed to say, “How could that even be a question?” she pointed to her older sister’s elephant, admiring it from one foot below the glass container.

When everyone began to sit back down in their chairs, Courtney opened up the space to any parents who had questions for us, the college volunteers. A college Q & A ensued shortly after, with children and parents asking about what was the most difficult part about being in college, or how to pay
for it, or where to go to for support. The Q & A itself is a visible representation of the more profound of bringing Puentes families into this elite, private, liberal-arts college outside of Philadelphia. The very presence of these families that are pushed into the nation’s shadows within an elite college is powerful; it can be read as a testament to their resilience—a marker of possibility and radical world imaginings that do not make a situation like this inconceivable. And Alyssa’s description of her learning process during this experience is also a testament to the potential of spaces that incorporate children: when creating a space, activity, or idea around children honestly and genuinely, we open ourselves up to the possibilities of learning from these imaginative, intelligent children. Furthermore, the exhibit was private and open only to the families of the students and Puentes volunteers, reminding us that there are spaces that are not meant to be open to everyone. Rather, there are spaces that exist to nurture lazos, or ties within a specific community that are crucial to the development of social networks and frameworks of support for communities under attack.

This section will continue exploring the purpose and effects of creating these spaces with children that foster radical world imaginings. Much like the decision to keep this event private, the building of lazos, or relationships, is an intimate process—one that necessitates the honest inclusion of children, as autonomous individuals and not passive beings. The lazos that are created and nurtured within the Puentes community through love and cariño can lead us to a conceptual framework of radical mothering, which pushes us to imagine how these intimate processes can impact the direction of migrant rights and social justice work.

**Tutoring as activism**

Though I was not explicitly carrying out ethnographic research with Puentes during the summer of 2018, I was living and working in Philadelphia. Being on the Puentes listserv and having Puentes-affiliated friends on Facebook kept me informed of how Puentes and the immigrant community in Philadelphia were responding to the national news. The education program coordinator at the time, Patty, called me one afternoon during the summer, asking if I was able to privately tutor an elementary-aged student that had recently arrived from Guatemala, in preparation for starting school in the Fall. While this
could have happened any other summer, having this particular experience during the summer of 2018—
amid the national news of family separations—created a clear connection between engaging in this work
to a form of activism. By separating families upon detainment, the idea was that people considering
migration would hesitate or forego the act of migration entirely.7 Thus, the act of ensuring a recently-
arrived migrant child would be as prepared as possible for the coming school year appeared to me as an
act of defiance against the deeper message of the policies of the Trump administration. In tutoring this
soon-to-be Philly school student, Puentes was equipping him with the tools he needed to be as successful
as possible.

The definition of “activism,” according to dictionary.com, is as follows: “the doctrine or practice
of vigorous action or involvement as a means of achieving political or other goals, sometimes by
demonstrations, protests, etc.” The mainstream definition of activism was then one that involved direct
action, often in the form of bodily engagement through protests or demonstrations. But the digital age has
ushered in new interpretations and understandings of what activism can look like; now there is hashtag
activism, online coalition building, and online narrative construction (Chatterton and Pickerill 2010; Earl
and Kimport 2011; Yang 2016). Beyond the online platform, geographers Paul Chatterton and Jenny
Pickerill (2010) have also explored the everyday forms of activism that are entering broader
understandings of activism. They say:

...rather than this kind of pure, romantic figure of resistance, what our findings point to is an
altogether more complex and often contradictory process of activist-becoming-activist through
trends that include the rejection of binaries between activists and their other, an embracing of a
plurality of values, a pragmatic goal orientation...(479)
Radical queer, feminist, and disability theory have also been key contributors to the changes in how
activism can be understood. Anthologies by womxn of color such as This Bridge Called My Back
(Moraga and Anzaldúa 2015), Revolutionary Mothering: Love on the Frontlines (Gumbs, Martens, and
Williams 2016), and Chicana Motherwork (Caballero et al. 2019) provide further example of everyday
forms of activism in their stories and writings about the ways womxn support each other and create

7 This is a policy known as Prevention through Deterrence
communities. Across these different writings, I saw patterns of cariño. Working individually with the recently-arrived child from Guatemala would also require cariño, not only to ease him into the new environment but also to invite him to pull from his vast cultural funds of knowledge. The different ways in which Puentes calls on us to engage with migrant rights prompts us to reframe how we look at activism. In conversations and writings about the migrant rights movement in the U.S., there is an emphasis on activism centered around mass mobilizations and protests (Bloemraad and Voss 2019; Martinez 2015). But what I am presenting here is a look into the intimate processes of creating and nurturing lazos across communities, which can then lead to political mobilizations and activity in later generations.

The process of creating and sustaining a lazo with Jesus was a slow process—it required consistency (at least two and a half semesters’ worth) and a lot of individual, one-on-one work. It was difficult at times, especially when we did not have enough volunteers for each of the kids, which meant that I sometimes could not dedicate enough time to working individually with students. But somehow, I was able to communicate and demonstrate the cariño I felt for him. Perhaps it was through always bringing out the soccer ball when we had time to play outside, or coming in on Thursdays with exact coloring pages he requested, or the teamwork we had when reading a book together. The trust we developed allowed him to lead me in the direction that he wanted to go while allowing me to reel him back in when needed.

**Children Remember**

Stuart Aitken’s (2018) review of the evolution and involution of children’s geographies provides us with an interpretation of different academic disciplines’ perspectives on children and their role in the world. Where children were once understood as beings who understood the world as 1) multiple worlds and 2) were influenced by Piaget’s developmental stages, disciplines now tend to work within the area of “children’s studies” as, what Aitken describes as, “a challenge to what we think we know about young people,” (5). The area’s primary emphasis on developmental stages demonstrates that there was a view of children as being passive beings, unaware. But encounters of recall and memory with Puentes children, as
well as reflective conversations with different members of the Puentes team, stand as evidence that children do, indeed, remember and rely on childhood experiences at later stages of their lives. In listening closely to the moments these memories are shared or expressed, what do we stand to learn from them?

Previously, I discussed a moment during “rose, bud, thorn” where one of my current first graders shared a story of a deportation of one of his extended relatives as his thorn. What I learned upon speaking to him later was that this was not a recent event, but rather a story he had heard a while back—one that he was also not present for. We could not determine when this exactly happened, but I later wondered about how he had heard this story. Was this something directly told to him? Was this something he overheard but perhaps was not meant to hear? Story-memories shared during rose, bud, thorn varied across topics. These comments and stories were almost always “dropped” into the conversation, left hanging in the air as isolated comments and not necessarily continued. The children who shared would move on to whatever was on their mind next or continue focusing on what they had in front of them; similarly, the children listening would not comment—these realities were not uncommon for them and did not necessitate to be inquired upon. While the children were perhaps not intending to start a conversation about deportation, for example, the act of sharing and openly commenting on this issue forces whoever is listening to think critically about what brings this to their attention. It challenges activists working within migrant rights to consider ways in which to respond—if we believe Ginwright’s assertion that a key component of political activism is healing (9), what do these moments with the Puentes children teach us about creating spaces of healing?

It stands to wonder about the effect that these story-memories have on the children in their current lives or their future lives. Interviews with Beto, Veronica, Liliana, and Miriana illuminated this issue. What memories or experiences are recalled over our conversation that was focused around their experiences at Puentes and identity as a child of migrants? In three out of four interviews, I identified a small expression of frustration at the absence of migration stories passed within their families. At the same time, the students I spoke to do not push their families to share their migration stories. Beto explains, “I understand there's a lot of trauma that comes with that, and I ask my parents about that, and
they tell me something real small and then they move on, like they don't want to talk about it, which is perfectly fine and I understand.” In each of our cases, there is some ambiguity with the story of how our families came to the U.S. But, once again, as much as the sharing of snippets of stories is an act of cariño, our acceptance of the stories we are given is also an act of cariño. This intimate exchange of stories is a method of nurturing lazos within relationships.

At another level, each of these volunteers spoke about different aspects of their families and communities that inspired them, without being explicitly asked to do so. Beto reflects upon what has driven him to engage in the different spaces of migrant rights work he is a part of: “[I attribute] all of my success and the way that I am to the migrant community, like I've always had, not necessarily privilege, but I've always fed off their emotions for wanting to come to the US, and I've used that motivation and it's become my own motivation…” Veronica spoke of her father, who “had to do it all by himself.” Reflecting upon the financial status of her family, Liliana recognizes that although they have always been working class, they “have always had food and clothes,” saying this as if in admiration of her parents for ensuring they were safe. Miriana reflects upon the moments where her older sister and father would try to help her on her homework. Within each of their reflections on life as a child, there is both a recognition of the difficult position their families were in and what can be described as an amazement and awe at how their families siguieron. The negative impacts of legal status within this country are real (Brown et al. 2011; Enriquez 2015; Yoshikawa 2011; Pratt 2012); so are the funds of knowledge that come from these communities.

**Extending a lazo through storytelling**

it’s just really different when you're in someone’s homespace and you have an image of what a big part of their life is like...it just gives you, one, information that’s useful, just practical on a coordinator level, like so and so can come do this because this kind of stuff, it’s like a moving map, but also much beyond that, in a figurative or emotional sense, it’s another one of those lazos that puts you together, like remember that one time a few years ago, that thing happened...I think it builds the trust a lot more and it certainly builds my understanding [of the families and community]...these kinds of experiences have really nuanced and detailed the way I express the frontlines, on the ground report of anything, bilingualism, literacy, etc...

Alison, spoke about some of the instances in which she was invited into what she describes as the orbit, or the spaces surrounding one’s life, of Puentes families’ lives. Whether it was being invited to birthday
dinners, into someone’s home for cooking lessons, to be a madrina at someone’s quinceanera, or simply a part of a conversation, Alison reads these instances as great acts of trust. These moments present her with the opportunity to fill in the silences in Puentes families’ migration stories in such a way that does not require them to re-tell their story— con cariño, a process that no longer remains “simply affective,” (Beauboeuf-Lafontant 2008, 255). During volunteer orientations, she provides the team of volunteers with a story about a father dropping off his children at the summer program, saying “te encargo a mis hijos.” While she provides this story as a way of communicating the trust and responsibility we as tutors have over the children we are volunteering with, her telling of this story is also a sign of the cariño that she reads in even being entrusted with responsibility for parents’ children. Ultimately, these stories are valued because they allow us as a team to honor the cultural funds of knowledge the children can bring into the space— understanding different parts of their families’ stories allow us to think about how to create a space where the children feel like they can bring in these stories.

The lazos, or ties that weave lives together, that Alison speaks about are how migrant families in the Puentes community share their experiences and stories to members of the Puentes team. During my time volunteering with the organization, there has not been a moment in which family members came to an orientation session, for example, to talk about their community. This is not asked of them. Recognizing that a constant telling and re-telling of migration stories can become a re-living of them, we refuse to place these parents in that position. Instead, family members— migrants of the community themselves— invite members of the team into their orbit, which these members can then use as frameworks for their approach to the program. They extend a lazo, and it is up to us to reach for the other end and establish this connection— a process that necessitates cariño by way of seeing people as they are and not what national publics may construct them as. At the end of each semester, families will come together to host an end-of-the-year party for Puentes, including their children and the volunteers. Families will bring, among many other dishes, tacos, tostadas de tinga, espagetti, quesadillas, and pastel to Southwark, where we can all share a meal over conversation. For the past few years, families have come together with the Flesicher Art Memorial to host a Dia de los muertos celebration in South Philadelphia, opening up to the entire
community and the Puentes volunteers. Being invited into these kinds of spaces allow Madison, a six-
semester long volunteer, to develop a deeper level of understanding and connection to the children and
families she is working with. She states:

Meeting their families there and being able to see them there...so that I could talk about it with the
kids but also just to get a better understanding of what the culture of the community is like,
understand what that looks like in Philadelphia

The invitation into these spaces is a continuation of the creation of a lazo within Puentes. Remember that
lazos tie, bring together, create a loop of reciprocity and love. There is a level of trust that is involved in
the decision to invite members outside of the community. And ultimately, this greater awareness of where
the children are coming from allows Madison to develop a greater framework of cariño within her
classroom: in understanding the socio-cultural background of her children, Madison understands them in
a different setting and can work towards honoring their cultural funds of knowledge, or cultural wealth.
Tara Yosso (2005) defines this process as a way of “shifting away from a deficit view of Communities of
Color as places full of cultural poverty disadvantages, and instead focuses on and learns from the array of
cultural knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed by socially marginalized groups that often go
unrecognized and unacknowledged,” (69). A key component of cariño is learning how to meet children
where they are and not imposing one’s beliefs or ideas about them onto them— not only is the act of
extending an invitation into these spaces an invitation to create a lazo, but it is also an example of
developing a framework of cariño to carry into the classroom.

These lazos are ultimately invitations to witness one’s life and create shared experiences. The
anthology Chicana/Latina Education in Everyday Life: Feminista Perspectives on Pedagogy and
Epistemology provides different conceptions of stories and storytelling through centering the “everyday
teaching and learning that takes place in diverse communities,” (144). Stories can be heard, felt, or
witnessed— Villenas (2006) describes this borderlands pedagogy8 as the experience of “teach[ing] and

8 Borderlands pedagogy not only indicates the physical territory between two nation-states, but also “the cultural
sensibilities and ethnicities, between citizen and ‘alien,’ between generations, between diverse mothering
practices...” (Villenas 2006, p. 147)
learn[ing] through body and words,” (147). In other words, the stories of migration not verbally told to us by the Puentes families can be communicated via the body and everyday actions. In visiting families’ homes and participating in different cultural community events, we are invited into families’ life story, which Vivian Lee Dills (1998) argues are not only verbal or oral but also embodied. In combination with the silences, these all become part of a larger “performative narrative” (Villenas 2006, p. 150). Alison, being my interlocutor who has the most time with Puentes (five years) gave several examples—at times unknowingly—of moments in which she has been entrusted into these life stories. While she talked about moments of being invited to families’ homes and birthday celebrations, she also talked about a much more intimate experience that, while it occurred outside the space of Puentes, gave her a layer of understanding to a larger, nuanced life story about being undocumented—a story that would be crucial for her work with Puentes. After graduating from Haverford College, she began to romantically see someone who she later found out was undocumented. This relationship created a lazo between the two individuals, a tied-relationship built around love and trust that subsequently allowed for the (nonverbal) sharing of a life story as an undocumented citizen.

These lifestories can be read as acts of testimonio, which Prieto and Villenas (2012) define as stories which are “told by a person from a marginalized group in society….that name the workings and abuses of institutional power, the human costs, and our collective sobrevivencia,” (414-415). Testimonios—in fitting within a larger politicized framework—are radical; they demand action. But this transmission of life stories, of experiences of institutional abuse, are not always passed down in the same way within migrant communities. Speaking to some of my interlocutors who identify as children of migrants echoes how Puentes parents bring in their experiences as undocumented migrants into the space—there is a certain level of silence.

Within mixed-status families, cariño is the act of passing down stories and cultural knowledge from migrant families to their U.S. born children, and then the processes through which we, their children, continue the rippling effects of this knowledge transmission. Cariño is, after all, a relationship built around authentically knowing a person—understanding the stories that make up one’s life is
essential to this process, for it can stimulate conversation, curiosity, and trust within the classroom (Moll et. al 1992, p. 175).

I introduce a concept of cariño when thinking about how migration stories and aprendizajes are passed down because, as Veronica states, “migration stories weren’t ever told...they weren’t really a thing.” Beto echoes that reality, stating that “within [his] own family, [they] didn’t talk as much [about migration].” For Liliana, there are gaps in her family’s history that while she may not know about, she “does not ask about, because [she] understands that this is a traumatic experience.” Liliana’s second point highlights, then, why we can consider the ways in which we have inherited or learned about the snippets of our migration histories as acts of care. To further understand this, we can turn to theoretical conceptions of the border as a borderzone and an experience (N. De Genova 2013; De León 2015; Rouse 1991), outlined in the previous chapter. This allows us to contextualize the experience that our families had as migrants, at the border and beyond, as they continued to carry the identity of “migrant”—a process that allows us to recognize these story-snippets as acts of care in their efforts to contribute to our personal histories. Situating these conversations within the stories that do or do not exist within Puentes allows me to understand that the ways in which parents seek to engage with Puentes is beyond the passing down of stories and narratives of migration; it is through the creation of lazos with people from different communities, people that perhaps we can think akin to the interlocutors Prieto and Villenas (2012) describe as those “who can write down and disseminate [the testimonios],” (414). Perhaps in this case, the recipients of these lazos—the invitation into people’s orbits—are those who can help create the space that will be shared by their children, a space that will be influenced by the shared snippets and experiences of migration.

In a similar way that the invitation into migrant families’ homes and community events is read as an act of cariño, Madison’s active seeking of these spaces—as when she attended the Dia de los muertos festival—can also be read as acts of cariño, for she is doing what she can to best prepare herself for her work with children of migrants and their parents by reaching out for the lazos offered up by the families. Ultimately, these lazos establish the trust that is needed at the foundation of future political activity and
are in direct opposition to the Trump administration's efforts at separating communities on all fronts: at the physical border, within communities, and within movements.

**Alternative Funds of Knowledge**

Creating a program away from the deficit-based framework Tuck (2009) challenges is a move towards drawing from alternative funds of knowledge, outside of those that are considered the traditional funds. Sociologists who have worked on social capital theory have argued that it is the knowledge (Bourdieu and Passeron 1970) or structure (Stanton-Salazar 1997) of the middle and upper classes that are considered to be the acceptable, or verified, forms of capital for larger society. Gloria Anzaldúa agrees, stating: “Theory originally meant a mental viewing, an idea or mental plan of the way to do something, and a formulation of apparent relationships or underlying principles of certain observed phenomena which had been verified to some degree...Theory, then, is a set of knowledges...” (Anzaldúa 1990: xxv). But she also offers a challenge, thus setting the stage for a radical, womxn of color epistemology:

“Some of these knowledges have been kept from us—entry into some professions and academia denied us. Because we are not allowed to enter discourse, because we are often disqualified and excluded from it, because what passes for theory these days is forbidden territory for us, it is vital that we occupy theorizing space, that we not allow whitemen and women solely to occupy it. By bringing in our own approaches and methodologies, we transform that theorizing space,” (xxv)

Thus, an alternative fund of knowledge necessitates theorizing from perspectives outside of those of the middle to upper classes, or those in power. Within education spaces like Puentes, it is important to situate approaches to program development within alternative funds of knowledge, specifically the ones found in their communities. Furthermore, this project is also an attempt at demonstrating how educators (because though Puentes exists outside of the formal schooling system, the team continues to educate) can shift their approach towards centering the children they are serving when thinking about enacting change through education. School segregation legally ended with the end of Jim Crow, but racial and cultural-based forms of separation still exist within different schools, evidenced through tracking policies and perceptions of students not “caring” enough for school often based upon cultural deficit frameworks (Delgado Bernal et al. 2006; Rendón 2009; Valenzuela 1999; Yosso 2006). Within Puentes, evidence of the use of alternative funds of knowledge comes in the form of the sources that are used to create the
space. Drawing from these cultural funds of knowledge is also another layer to the greater effort of allowing the children to act as agents of their own education (Gillen 2014). At a material level, the books that have been incorporated into the Puentes library represent the communities the children are coming from as well as the communities of their peers outside of Puentes.

Our library has steadily grown during the six semesters I have been a part of Puentes; I have also seen a greater diversity in the books I can bring into the class and work with. Before I head down to the cafeteria to wait for my group, I spend a few minutes looking through these book crates for about four to five books that the kids could then choose from. I select some in English, some in Spanish, and the topics are always very different. The cases on the right are organized by grade level and are all in English. The cases on the left are broadly organized by level and are all in either Spanish or bilingual formats. The mission statement of the umbrella Puentes Education program broadly considers “education as the most important social determinant of health.” The Early Childhood Education Program and Summer Literacy Program emphasize literacy, hence our necessity for books in both languages. The guide that is used by the Summer Literacy Program is created through an “anti-bias framework and culturally resonant text selection [process]” (3). Below are some of the texts that can be found in our library:
The books reflect a variety of themes, from different forms of music to the campesino movement and Dolores Huerta; from Rosa Parks to Frida Kahlo. The guide continues: “text selection is crucial to enfranchising historically marginalized students,” (3). Around dia de los muertos in the Fall of 2018, I read a book that was about this celebration to our group of first graders. The book was at a higher level, so I did a read-aloud of the book, engaging with the children through the pictures and through sharing about moments we connected to the book. I talked about the ofrendas I had seen growing up and asked them about the ones they had seen at home. We talked about the candies and pan dulce placed at the ofrenda and then just talked about our favorite postres. On another occasion, we read a book about a form of music found in the Dominican Republic (D.R.), and while none of the children in the group are from the D.R., we talked about different forms of music we like, which then led to me playing a bit of cumbia and mariachi during our play-time towards the end of our afternoon session. Rather than “enfranchising,”
I would describe this process of careful text selection as an invitation— an invitation to pull from what we know and love from our communities and homes, an invitation to share more about ourselves, and to ultimately get comfortable with the feeling of being our whole selves.

Working with children in general, but more specifically with children of migrants, pushes people to think creatively about social justice work. More than introducing social justice topics into the class through books, for example, what is crucial to an applied practice of drawing from funds of knowledge is a focus on the agency of the very children we are working with.

**Radical Mothering**

To attach a framework of radical mothering to the work that exists within Puentes, we need to expand our understanding of mothering towards one that exists outside of biology. In laying out a manifesto of mothering as revolutionary praxis, Cynthia Dewi Okay describes this “not as a biological function, but as a social practice,” (51). If we consider mothering as a social practice, then, it does not become difficult to analyze the effects of cariño within Puentes through this framework. Cariño, after all, is an essential component of mothering. In creating the space of our two and a half hour session together, the team engages in acts of mothering: at the root of the team’s efforts towards creating a space that honors different cultural funds of knowledge— including the careful selection of books and materials, the consideration of topics we bring in for discussion, the close listening and observation of [life]stories— is an effort to support and nurture our group of students. To describe this process as radical mothering, I borrow from Tamara Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2008), who introduces the idea of “politicized mothering” and describes it as being founded upon teachers’ authentic caring (252). Exploring the approach that a group of Black woman take as teachers, she argues that these educators enact a maternal approach to their work. This is an approach that is centered around authenticity, or cariño, and around the building of connections and relationships. It is strange, at first, to consider that I, or we, mother the children at Puentes. To mother children that are not ours is not to disregard their caretaker (biological or not). Rather, to mother the children at Puentes is to recognize the children’s abilities and potential (255), to feel things deeply alongside of them (253), and to allow them to inspire us (Talibah 2016).
However, in much the same way that I have structured this thesis, a key component of radical mothering is what Beauboeuf-Lafontant describes as a “political awareness that shapes such maternal concern,” (252). She continues, saying: “Political clarity contributes to caring by demonstrating the stakes involved in resisting societal imperatives not to care for subordinated children,” (255). The acknowledgment and recognition of the sociopolitical realities surrounding Puentes is a key reason for the necessity of radical mothering, which is radical precisely because it is challenging the broader public’s or system’s attacks on vulnerable communities, in this case the Latinx migrants living in South Philly being served by Puentes. Conditions of structural violence (Farmer 2004) necessitate affective, effective processes, which the Puentes team brings in the form of mothering. This political clarity and acknowledgement was explored in Chapter 1. But what is also telling is a connection to some of the team member’s own experiences of mothering when discussing how and when they learned care, or cariño, from.

When explaining some of the different ways in which she tries to support the kids at Puentes, Courtney says, “I try to think about what would I want to hear, what is something that my mom or a friend... told me or way they've treated me that’s helped me feel better...” Similarly, Alison shares, “that concentration and focus that you're important and I care about what you're saying and what you think about and thought about and felt and what did you do at school and what was interesting...just feeling that I mattered to [my parents], and that's something that resonates a lot, I find that that’s my style with the kids.” Though a key component of radical mothering is a separation from the traditional conceptions of a mother and motherhood, creating the connection between team members’ caretakers and their forms of showing cariño confirms the presence of mothering practices within Puentes. However, it is when we think of Puentes as one piece within a larger puzzle of national politics that we can further expand our conception of mothering.

While one can mother a child that is not their own, one can also mother oneself (Gumbs 2010) and can mother a movement (Gumbs, Martens, and Williams 2016). In the same way that we support and nurture our group of Puentes kids, we nurture the idea of a world where no human being is illegal, where
Black and Brown youth can feel safe in their schools, and where children of color’s cultural funds of knowledge are honored. Where borders do not exist and the violence that creates them does not follow the individuals crossing them. These radical world imaginings can and should begin with children, for they are the bearers of that imagination. Not only does this mean that we as individuals who work with children need to think creatively on how to engage them best, but we also need to remain conscious of the moments in which we are excluding them from our social justice work. In mothering the children of Puentes, how are we mothering the larger migrant rights movement?
Conclusion

On April 11th of this year, a Thursday, I came into Puentes for my weekly session with the first graders. One by one they arrived at our table. David tried to walk so that I would not see him approaching and then scared me from behind; Daniela followed suit and then appeared right next to me with a big smile on her face. Gustavo and Daniela had snacks that they had packed, and David was waiting for his older sister in fourth grade, Vanessa, to come back from the store with some snacks. In the meantime, I ran through some of the usual questions I ask the kids when first seeing them: how was your day, how are you feeling, anything exciting happen today?

As we were approaching 3:30 p.m., it was time to go upstairs. One of the most important parts of our day came up: who was going to be line leader? I asked the kids, and all of their hands shot up in the air. I chose Gustavo, since he was the first one to raise his hand. I told him, “Okay, you’re going to be line leader, but you know what that means. It means you have to make sure you have a line— tienes una linea?” With a transformers book in his hand, he walked towards the end of the table and waited for his line, urging his peers to get in his linea. He waited for my cue to start walking and continued looking down at his book as he walked forward and up the stairs to our class. Every so often, I would remind him to check his line. “Gustavo, tienes linea?” He would stop, look up from his book, and check his line. It was one of the straightest lines I had seen all semester, so I began recording and praising them, “qué línea tan bonita, wow, se la voy a enseñar a Courtney y Ali.” They giggled at my comments. When we got to the hall our classroom was in, they still had a line. Gustavo was still looking at his book but would switch between the book and his line. They all got distracted by the window in front of our class and took a moment to run to it and look outside. “Okay, ‘amonos adentro— we will go outside later in the afternoon.” Gustavo was the first one back in line, and when he saw that no one had followed, he said, “mi línea, mi lineaaaa” and urged his friends to get back in his line.

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Foucault has said: “Where there is power, there is resistance.” An extension from this statement can be “existence as resistance,” which is a claim that has been taken up by numerous less-dominant
(Gutiérrez et al. 2017) communities when describing their struggles and resistance-work. It has been
difficult to present a picture of multi-status families and the different ways legal status impacts every
member of the family. How do we honor the strength of our families without romanticizing? How do we
present the structural constraints and forms of violence without contributing to a deficit-framework?
Perhaps one way is through centering children and the work they engage in.

In conducting fieldwork on the customs and practices of child-marriage with a community in
Rajasthan, India, anthropologist Vinay Kumar Srivastava (2014) posed the question of whether children
were or were not individuals. He points to “the structural opposition of the children’s world, where the
individuality of each child precipitated, and the adult world, which was its antithesis,” (159). When
reading this, I thought: what would it look like if we did not separate the two worlds? Perhaps a reason for
this separation is what Alison James (2007) traces as an absence of the belief in children as individual
political agency is often left unidentified because children themselves are not able to articulate their
everyday life politics,” (290). But if we centered children in the programs we create for them— centered
them in their world-making— perhaps we would be able to view them not only as individuals but also as
political actors.

Over the past two semesters, I have been frequently starting off our afternoon sessions at Puentes
with the “rose, bud, thorn” activity, which creates the space for reflection, a chance for each of the
children to share a story or anecdote (as well as the tutors, with reciprocity in mind), and a chance for me
as team leader to gauge the emotions and feel of the children in that afternoon. I have only begun to
explore what working through this framework of individual and political child agency can look like in
practice, but this activity is one of my attempts at encouraging the children to create the structure that they
want in that moment and to decide for themselves what they want to share and talk about. However, I
have noticed that this negotiation of space has been facilitated by my continued presence in Puentes for
several semesters, in particular with two different classes.
While some of the violent structures surrounding the migrant community that Puentes serves are tied to the border, the organization of Puentes Hacia el Futuro can also be subject to its own violence. As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, Puentes experiences a lot of benefits: Courtney explains how it is this status that gives Puentes a lot of flexibility and freedom in how they organize and run their program. But part of what comes with being an NGO, or non-governmental organization, is a deep reliance on volunteers—Courtney elaborates on this reality, saying:

“it’s just hard because the positions aren’t paid, so we’re relying on college students, so a lot of their class schedules aren’t figured out until right before the program starts. Sometimes we have folks that are super dedicated and involved and like shift their schedule around puentes, and then other times we have folks who are really great, but the second there’s a class that they want to take interferes with puentes times, which is legitimate, we just don't see them again.”

During my six semesters at Puentes, I have witnessed a consistent rotation of volunteers. However, Courtney informed me that the levels of return for following semesters among volunteers vary. Three of my interlocutors and I had had at least two years of experience working with Puentes. With each of them, we reflected on the different feel that we experienced with the kids the longer we were with them and just showed up. When describing what ethos Courtney tries to impart on the tutors during orientation, she says, “our goal is to keep students safe to cultivate community and to make them feel cared for and supported.” It is difficult to create community and encourage cariño when the kids are experiencing so much turnover. She recalls a few instances where tutors feel bad that their students may not know their names after two months. But she needs to remind them, she says, that there are “new tutors not just each year, but each semester, and each day of the week.” The basis of my argument is centered around the importance of love and cariño in the creation and nurturing of lazos across communities, subsequently creating a potential for change into a larger sphere, scale, and generation. But fostering love and cariño is a difficult process—time, patience, and consistency are crucial to creating these emotions. For this reason, I wonder about the effects or potential of Puentes, which fits within this larger framework of a greater nonprofit industrial complex. Courtney shares these concerns, adding: “I would almost go so far

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9Nonprofit Quarterly (2017) defines a 501(c)(3) as: “a charitable organization, named after Internal Revenue Code Section 501(c)(3), which gives such organizations tax-exempt status.”
as to say it’s almost like a trauma for the students to have so much turn-over in their support systems.”

When I returned from studying abroad in the Fall of 2018, Kati was surprised to see me— not necessarily surprised to see me back at Puentes, but surprised to know that I would not be working with her group (the fourth graders) that semester. “You betrayed us!” she accused. And no matter how I tried to explain to her that people’s schedules made it so that three returning team leaders for fourth grade were all only available on one single day, in her eyes, I was still someone that had betrayed them. Eventually, we reached a point where she no longer felt like she had to accuse me each time we saw each other. Now, we say hi and talk about our days whenever we see each other. But at times, she still asks me why I am not with them, why I have to be with a different group. As Courtney was sharing her thoughts, I kept thinking about that initial encounter I had with Kati, where she refused to even engage in conversation with me because of that sense of betrayal.

Only one of the people that I interviewed was at Puentes for only one semester. Another is only in his first semester, but he has plans of returning during the following semester. I noted a difference in how people approached Puentes; the longer they had been with it, the more they established links between Puentes and the surrounding political context and migrant rights movement; or their own identities to the identities of the students they were working with. While this thesis has sought to explore the positive affective processes at play when creating the physical and temporal space of Puentes, it will not ignore the reality that this reading and analysis of Puentes is not one that is experienced or recognized by all of the team or community. However, this issue is not unique to PHF; possible approaches require structures in place to 1) provide financial incentive and support for some full-time staff, and/or 2) ensure that PHF volunteers gain a training or orientation where they are introduced to the realities of the communities they will be working with as well as frameworks of social justice that can provide a lense through which to engage with the organization. The difficulty in ensuring these two steps is indicative of the larger nonprofit industrial complex.

And this is exactly why cariño and love, though difficult to quantify, become some of the best tools we have as social justice advocates and workers within migrant rights work.
But when doing this type of work, children need to be an integral part of the process. In fieldwork with a largely migrant-run community advocacy group based in one of San Diego County’s poorest districts, Fernando J. Bosco (2010) explores how “children practice forms of political activism and advocacy work through their participation in school, neighborhood, and other community networks,” (382). Six semesters at Puentes has shown me how children bring in their cultural and home-based funds of knowledge into different aspects of their afternoon. I have seen them demand individual attention when they are not feeling like themselves, a process that often involves taking time to understand what other aspects of their world is impacting multiple facets of their realities. I have witnessed community-building through the relationships children establish amongst each other—connections between the Puentes team and the children’s families, or the Puentes program and their respective schools, or amongst the families themselves. I turn to Bosco (2010) for a foundation. He states:

“My argument for thinking about the relations between children and activism is two-fold. Besides re-considering who can be considered an activist, what is required is a re-imagining of what activism is, including new ways of thinking about what actions, doings and performances count as political activism,” (387).

Listening to the children’s verbal and nonverbal communication pushes us as participants in the larger migrant rights movement to, as Liisa Malkki (1996) says, “do better,” (398). Perhaps we have viewed activism as public actions rooted in using our body as a tool, or weapon. Perhaps we have passively engaged in different migrant-rights groups. Perhaps we have discounted working with children as political work. And most importantly, perhaps we have not considered children as capable actors who can determine how they want to create and experience a space. I agree with Bosco’s call of doing better, and I extend his argument by necessitating care and love-work as central to the new direction of our conceptions of activists and activism within the migrant rights movement.

The love and care I have witnessed in Puentes has come from all sources: from the co-founders and team, the volunteers, the community organizations collaborating with Puentes, and the parents. It has especially come from the children, which is most evident in how they treat each other. Moments where only they know how to explain a math concept to one another, where they guide one another in a book that is in a language they are not as confident in; moments where only they know how to soothe each
other’s pains. Being part of this space has granted me to witness one chapter of a larger [life]story belonging to a Latinx migrant community in South Philly. What would a movement, or social justice work, look like if we allowed these moments to influence our direction?

Considering this theorization of storytelling within social justice movements can leave us wondering what the concrete effects or products are of engaging in this work. The reality is that working at this intimate level may not elicit the results we are typically searching for when engaging in larger movements. Walking alongside of or listening to someone’s stories, or creating spaces for children that invite these stories into the room, does not present a linear path to change. However, the change I imagine is one that is rooted in love and cariño and that takes into account all members of a community, including and perhaps especially children, who movements typically act in the name of but do not center in their efforts. As Jay Gillen (2014), radical educator, prompts us to think about, if our goal is to create new worlds—ones that honor every human being beyond borders—we must engage in the imagining of a world that does not yet exist. And crucial to this process are children. A crear lazos...
Bibliography


