

**The Hidden Curriculum of *Canícula*:  
Critical Educational Lessons in Becoming a Mujer**

“I must learn to keep secrets otherwise Papagrande will be angry.  
I listen and obey, learn the lessons of growing up”  
(Cantú 23)

**Speaking Secrets**

In the quote above, Azucena captures the intense and common sensical expectations of a Latinita’s paradigm regarding the construction of female knowledge – or what it means to become a *mujer en la frontera*. “Keeping secrets,” as González notes “is never easy” (46) and simultaneously, it seems to become the key to avoiding unwanted emotions like anger and simultaneously pleasing, or at least, keeping the patriarchy at bay. Even beyond keeping secrets to placate others in her life, Azucena learns that there are consequences to speaking those secrets such as being shamed, creating conflict, appearing *atravesada* and/or positioning oneself as anti-authority. Such consequences have a price that Azucena learns to pay and in the process, she navigates the world of *niñez*, the school of critical educational lessons.

Like Azucena of *Canícula*, I grew up in a family of secrets and *apariencias* – everything was about our appearance to the outside world, *el que dirán*, what others would say. As a young girl, I grew up learning to keep certain things to myself, mainly the stuff of female desire, but as the years passed I began to feel compelled to speak my secrets. Speaking my secrets (González 46) was like setting a bomb to the already fragile walls which seemingly protected our household; that which was once hidden – the unspoken rules, the insidious expectations and the constant denial of female desire—was now exposed for the world to see. This was considered “bad” female behavior, the equivalent of a *malcreada*. However, before I spoke my secrets, I learned how to keep

them. Or, perhaps more accurately, I was taught to keep secrets, quietly absorbing the alchemy of female longing, daughterly appropriateness and family image. This inculcation required an understanding of one's own desires and a nuanced dance that balanced this recognition with an avoidance of its presence.

In many ways, Azucena engages in this dance, intimately intertwined in the work of what Soto's 2010 work calls mastering the "de-mastery of desire" (2), what I recognize as that expertise fostered by the painful internalization of separating the flesh from the spirit, a visceral comprehension that desire is to be tamed and disciplined not explored or celebrated. In Cantú's *Canícula*, I argue that Azucena illustrates the value and heaviness of the "hidden," and that it is within the seemingly quotidian and minute interactions of everyday life that Azucena learns the always consequential and often bittersweet lessons of becoming a *mujer*. Drawing from Chicana Feminist Epistemology, I adopt a combination of the concepts of hidden curriculum and community wealth to illustrate how Azucena utilizes her community cultural wealth to develop familial and resistant capital, ultimately utilizing her experiences of her *niñez* to inform her notions of and foster her fortitude in becoming a *mujer*. I conclude by discussing potential implications of using this type of work in classroom settings for the purposes of teaching and learning.

### **Conceptual Framework**

In this chapter, I combine the educational concepts of hidden curriculum and community cultural wealth to frame the literary analysis and explain the implications of Azucena's experiences. It is important to frame these vignettes in an educational context for a variety of reasons. First, literary pieces are often neglected or replaced by non-

fiction in curricula to assert some type of factuality or objectivity in teaching young people. I believe that Azucena's narratives are accessible, rich and laden with meaning—literary opportunities to engage youth in the enterprise of learning. Second and perhaps more importantly, my experience as an educator, as well as the existing research, has taught me that when a teacher centers her instruction on the lived experiences of her students, students are more likely to respond positively, creatively and deeply. *Canícula* is an ideal vehicle to more effectively engage students in the practice of self-reflection, the importance of personal experience and using one's voice to tell her truth. Indeed, *Canícula* embodies the intent of culturally responsive teaching.

Culturally responsive teaching (Gay 113) treats students as whole children, using their cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles in order to make learning more effective for them learning. Gay notes that culturally responsive teaching “argues that explicit knowledge about cultural diversity is imperative to meeting the educational needs of ethnically diverse students” (107). It is also based on the assumptions that racism creates distorted and negative images of the cultures, histories and possibilities of people of color and that culturally responsive classrooms can create a space where detrimental images can be deconstructed and replaced by positive self and cultural affirmations. In selecting an appropriate conceptual framework for analyzing these vignettes, I knew that it was important to situate it in terms of utility for teacher practice as well as larger sociocultural issues of the meaning behind becoming a *mujer*. As a researcher, I can expound on conceptual ideas but it is equally if not more important for me, to provide real life applications to teaching and learning; using *Canícula* as a central curricular text allows me to do just that.

## **Hidden Curriculum**

And while we tend to view curriculum in narrow terms (the fallacy that it mainly occurs within the four walls of a classroom), I also draw from the concept of hidden curriculum, defined as that which is implicitly but effectively taught in schools that is not usually discussed in an explicit manner yet understood as important (Apple 29), to illustrate how Canícula's depiction of girlhood shapes the understood and sometimes unspoken rules of becoming a *mujer*. While the concept of hidden curriculum has primarily been used within the context of schooling and specifically within the parameters of educational institutions, I utilize the concept of hidden curriculum within the context of community to illustrate the ways in which Azucena gains community cultural wealth (Yosso 77) embedded in a certain Chicana feminist sensibility. And while hidden curriculum is usually framed in a negative light, the hidden curriculum of Canícula is not as straightforward. Apple notes that:

The hidden curriculum in schools serves to reinforce basic rules surrounding the nature of conflict and its uses. It posits a network of assumptions that, when internalized by students, establishes the boundaries of legitimacy. This process is accomplished not so much by explicit instances showing the negative value of conflict, but by nearly the total absence of instances showing the importance of intellectual and normative conflict in subject areas. The fact is that these assumptions are obligatory for the students, since at no time are the assumptions articulated or questioned. By the very fact that they are tacit, their potency is enlarged. (Apple 29)

The hidden curriculum in Canícula reinforces the basic rules about becoming a *mujer* in

Azucena's specific sociocultural context. It establishes the boundaries of childhood behavior which Azucena internalizes. Through instances of conflict, Azucena learns what is regarded as questionable and appropriate. The implicit nature of such moments inculcates Azucena with lessons that hold a silent but lasting power. I argue that Canícula presents a hidden curriculum comprised of critical educational moments, usually rooted in conflict, some that may not necessarily be explicit, but enacted nonetheless through the descriptive narrative of Canícula's portraits of niñez, where the boundaries of girlhood are reinscribed and girlhood experiences comprise a series of critical educational lessons about what it means to become a *mujer* growing up on the *frontera* and the knowledge and skills required to survive that journey.

### **Community Cultural Wealth**

Throughout *Canícula*, Azucena begins to develop and foster community cultural wealth, "an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression" (Yosso 77). Yosso explains that Communities of Color nurture this cultural wealth through at least six different forms of capital: aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital. She notes that,

aspirations are developed within social and familial contexts, often through linguistic storytelling and advice (*consejos*) that offer specific navigational goals to challenge (resist) oppressive conditions. Therefore, aspirational capital overlaps with each of the other forms of capital, social, familial, navigational, linguistic and resistant. (77)

I focus on two forms of this community cultural wealth: familial capital and resilient

capital, illustrating Azucena's overall aspirational dispositions through her longing and desire within her community contexts. As Yosso notes, all forms of capital have an element of aspiration – that strong desire to hope for more.

### **Methodology**

I treat Cantú's vignettes as data, albeit a "fictional" account of Azucena's *niñez*. However, as we are well aware, the ways in which we construct memory are often, if not always, subjective; so, my treatment of these vignettes are not so different from the treatment of "real-life" accounts of personal experiences. As Cantú notes, "we live life in our memories, with our past and our present juxtaposed and bleeding, seeping back and forth, one to the other in a recursive dance" (xii). Furthermore, the significant findings that these vignettes provide substantiate a serious rendering of their meanings and potential implications. Even the seemingly sporadic nature of the text is purposeful and symbolic of the ebb and flow of the feminine self. Cantú stressed that "chronological order had to go; after all, we don't think in clean, clear chronological order; life doesn't happen in neat little packages. I wanted a narrative that, like my memory, worked in a recursive and overlapping fashion" (102). Cantú challenges conventional forms of storytelling in her refusal to follow any linear progression. In keeping with the counter-story of Azucena, she takes her own path in her own time.

Similarly, I employ a Chicana Feminist Epistemology (Delgado Bernal 2), drawing from four sources of cultural intuition, to resist traditional hegemonic ways of knowing and to privilege the narratives of the "other."

Epistemological concerns in schools are inseparable from cultural hegemonic domination in educational research. The way educational research is conducted

contributes significantly to what happens (or does not happen) in schools. In education, what is taught, how it is taught, who is taught, and whose fault it is when what is taught is not learned are often manifestations of what is considered the legitimate body of knowledge. For Chicanas, this is not merely an epistemological issue, but one of power, ethics, politics, and survival. Employing a Chicana feminist epistemology in educational research thus becomes a means to resist epistemological racism and to recover untold histories. (Delgado Bernal 2)

In concert with the conceptual framework of hidden curriculum and community cultural wealth, I use Delgado Bernal's Chicana Feminist Epistemology as my epistemological orientation for analyzing counter-storytelling, the methodology utilized to analyze Cantú's *Canícula*.

Storytelling, "a tool to 'counter' deficit storytelling offers space to conduct and present research grounded in the experiences and knowledge of people of color" (Solórzano and Yosso 28) is used to counter "monovocal" stories that become "master narratives" or "majoritarian stories" which we all participate in. According to Solórzano and Yosso, these stories can be used as theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical tools to challenge racism, sexism, and classism and work toward social justice. These counter-stories offer a challenge to a legacy of racial privilege where dominant stories are presented so that- "racial privilege seems 'natural'" (28).

Within this literary analysis, the majoritarian story is one of whiteness and male dominance. So, stories in which male perspectives and female repression are the norm seem natural while feminist women of color identities ones are seen as disruptions to this master narrative. Using Critical Race Methodology allowed me to analyze Azucena's

counter-storie(s) by focusing on the ever-present salience of Chicana feminism, challenging the typical male paradigm and by placing significant value on the complex navigation specific to Azucena's experiences.

Counter-stories are defined as a method of telling the stories of marginalized peoples. They disrupt the otherwise dominant discourse. These counter-stories are a response to the question of whose stories are privileged and silenced in educational contexts, drawing from the strength of communities of color. Through the use of Delgado Bernal's cultural intuition (2), I examine Azucena's counter-stories are constructed through research data, existing literature (both traditional and non-traditional texts), the researcher's professional and personal experiences (including multiple voices of family and friends). Critical Race Theorists employ storytelling to analyze myths, presuppositions, and received wisdoms that make up the common culture about race. As such, Critical Race Theorists also integrate their own experiential knowledge, drawn from a larger sense of marginalization in the production and co-authoring of these stories. These stories run counter to otherwise hegemonic narratives that impose stories on those that have been othered. The value of counter-storytelling lies in the power of "naming one's own reality" (Delgado 462), rather than having it designated and told from the perspective of another, a likely dominant other. I used the methodological tools of story construction and telling to relay Azucena's narrative. Specifically (as detailed above), Delgado Bernal (7) points out the sources of cultural intuition in educational research: research data, existing literature (both traditional and non-traditional texts), the researcher's professional and personal experiences (including multiple voices of family

and friends). Undoubtedly, my own positionality as a Multiracial Chicana feminist educator speaks to my understanding of Azucena's narrative.

My identity as a Multiracial woman, coming out as a *racial queer*, defined as “the deviation from monoracial categorization, with or without a conscious intent of challenging normative racial constructions” (Chang 107), rather than accommodating to appearances, is about speaking my secrets - telling the truth and taking pride in queering what has been my familial norm, no matter how high the stakes. I am the one in my family who is seen as the “rock”, the pillar, the self-righteous over-achiever with strange feminist and activist tendencies. I am possessed with a mission to tell the truth because I strongly believe that my family and I have suffered and continue to suffer from not doing so. One of the first places I felt safe telling the truth was with my teachers in my classroom because, unlike home, I was rewarded for speaking up. In the classroom, sharing my opinion seemed to correlate to good grades for the most part. At home, articulating my own opinion seemed inappropriate, rude and/or insubordinate. Usually, the first thing I would do on a school morning in my early elementary years upon arrival was to go to my teacher and say, “I have a stomach ache,” and I did. I felt something that I can only put into words now, anxiety. This anxiety stemmed from the stress in my home – my patriotic, paranoid, idealistic and severe father coupled with my brilliant, afflicted, shamed and repressed mother, and the various stressors that accumulate with six children sharing two bedrooms and one bath. My home life was traumatic and chaotic. When I went to school, however, I felt as if I had control over my world. It was a safe space where I could forge my own identity. School has always been my sanctuary.

In an academic setting, I was praised and singled out as superior and gifted. I

thrived in this competitive environment. Reading, doing homework, writing, exploring and anything that took me to an imaginative place came with ease and joy. At home, academic-related chores served as an escape hatch from my familial troubles. I could always say that I needed to go to the mobile library which would visit our neighborhood three times a week (as part of an outreach program) and hide out there in the company of infinite books and a soft-spoken librarian. My scholarship was my ticket out of a house full of pain, duality, religion and strictness. I used it to my every advantage. I yearned for an alternative space. Like Azucena, I longed to find my truth.

## **Findings**

### **Female Longing and Desire**

Throughout *Canícula*, there is a sense of longing. From the heart and mind of Azucena's straddling Buelito's rocking horse, "built from discarded wood planks, painted the color of the red coyoles—red as memories" (6), we understand her burning desire for the "real" thing, the real pony. The tears that suddenly burst from Azucena in the handmade smocking represent her strong sense of wanting. In many ways, it sets the underlying tone for all of the moments that comprise critical educational lessons. The vignettes in *Canícula* provide us with glimpses into the depths of community knowledge and community cultural wealth that Azucena draws from to understand her context and appreciate non-traditional ways of knowing.

These ways of knowing are introduced through the five senses so indulgently captured in *On The Bridge* where Azucena describes the portrait of her Mama, "beautiful and angry, impatient" after a day of shopping in the mercado where the smells vary from the sweetness of fresh produce to the undeniable stench of the outhouse; and the feelings

of money exchanging from hand to vendor and tired legs waiting in lines. These are sensory experiences which are allowable and in fact, easy to divulge in the presence of others. Yet, when we arrive at the end of the vignette, Mami and Azucena buy *Confidencas*, a women's magazine, certainly full of glossy images to consume. Azucena tells us that she will "read a escondidas, during siesta time" (8). "Hiding in the backyard, under the pirul," (9) Azucena fantasizes about the love letters, impersonating the leading star. Interestingly, from an early age, Azucena knows full well that such female desire is to be hidden and only shared among her friends, Sanjuana and Anamaria, in the playground during recess. While the succulence of juicy fruit and the acidity of excrement is experienced in open air, the warmth of love and lust is to be experienced in shadows, hidden from view. This moment, while seemingly innocent, relays the message that for girls, desire is something of the occult world. Indeed, the lessons surrounding being a "good girl" are quite prevalent in Azucena's upbringing.

In *Body Hair*, Azucena is introduced to what physically amounts to a proper girl. At the painful and awkward entrance into puberty, where Azucena describes her "growing pains" (60) which include cramps and other disturbances "for which there was no salve," (60) a reference to a foul smelling ointment that her mami uses to ease her pain but also a double entendre of the word "salve." In other words, there is no salvation from these growing pains, these rites of passage for a growing girl. Once one has passed through that threshold, there is no turning back and nothing that can rescue you from its consequences. Perhaps most confusing and hurtful, are the mixed messages sent from males and females about what is appropriate and not when it comes to girlhood or niñez. When Sarah, the daughter of the Jewish family Mami worked for, loudly proclaims in

Azucena's ear distance that "All I know is unplucked eyebrows and hairy legs and underarms make a girl look like a boy," (60) Azucena breaks into tears. As far as her familial and community knowledge goes, hair is something prized and even attractive for Mexican women. Her (and her Chicana friends') parents forbade such hair removal. She "feel[s] torn; these same 'pendejas' are sometimes my friends and we work on school projects together" (61) – why then are they punishing her for lessons she has learned at home about the female body? Why is there so much drama among mujeres?

### **Familial Capital**

That's the thing about being a mujer. Relationships can get complicated but "above all, women sharing life, tending to each other. Supporting each other. Teaching each other to mother, to survive, to understand, to live" (36). Through the pain and heartache they are your "vecinas" and "comadres" who hold on to all of the little victories, especially those of their children, and find just enough to "barely stay alive" (36). Azucena possesses the community knowledge of sisterhood and *confianza*, where the mundane of every day is discussed in *platicas* and where the little things of each day are raised to the level of importance that they deserve – the stuff of weeping, celebrating and yearning. Familial capital:

refers to those cultural knowledges nurtured among familia (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition (see Delgado Bernal, 1998, 2002). This form of cultural wealth engages a commitment to community well being and expands the concept of family to include a more broad understanding of kinship. (79)

As Azucena observes, "they share it all, offer sympathy and prayers" (37), bringing a

temporal balance to the sufferings of life with a simple acknowledgment of their realities. Like Margarita concludes, “when you give life to eleven children and suffer two miscarriages you don’t take worrying or life lightly. Every day brings its weight of worries and of joys, laughter and tears like sunshine and rain” (44).

Like Mamagrande, whose “pains and joys are buried in her heart” (17), Azucena learns that women carry burdens that are both painful and sources of strength. “The keeping up of appearances, of dignity” (17), she notes, are what keeps Mamagrande exhausted. From the keeping the house sparkling clean, to the daily ins and outs of cooking meals, to the forever dust that lingers in a rancho – a mujer’s attention to the home is paramount. Azucena sees Mamagrande surrounded by children at her feet possessing an understanding of her internal power and the magnetism which that fortitude brings. Azucena notices that for Mamagrande, “the work never stops, her handkerchief a la mano in her apron pocket ever ready for the tears of joy and pain” (17). How does Mamagrande survive such intensity, Azucena must think? Yosso offers an explanation for the source of such resilience:

From these kinship ties, we learn the importance of maintaining a healthy connection to our community and its resources. Our kin also model lessons of caring, coping and providing (educación), which inform our emotional, moral, educational and occupational consciousness. (79)

Azucena is unknowingly receiving her true educación, hidden in the masterful art of her grandmother’s everyday life.

### **Resistant Capital**

Whether by perfecting a home like Mamagrande, chismiando with the other

primas and tías or doing the opposite of what is expected of you, resistant capital “refers to those knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality” (80). Often, these oppositional behaviors are not explicitly rebellious.

Rather, resistant capital can be verbal and nonverbal activity that feeds the female spirit.

The mujeres in Azucena’s life:

consciously instruct their children to engage in behaviours and maintain attitudes that challenge the status quo. These young women are learning to be oppositional with their bodies, minds and spirits in the face of race, gender and class inequality. (81)

In her efforts to talk back to the experiences she finds unjust, Azucena exhibits various agentic and creative types of oppositional behavior. Daniel Solórzano and Dolores

Delgado Bernal note that:

resistance may include different forms of oppositional behavior, such as self-defeating or conformist strategies that feed back into the system of subordination. However, when informed by a Freirean critical consciousness (1970), or recognition of the structural nature of oppression and the motivation to work toward social and racial justice, resistance takes on a transformative form. Therefore, transformative resistant capital includes cultural knowledge of the structures of racism and motivation to transform such oppressive structures. (81)

For Azucena, resistance takes on various forms (here outline what you are going to talk about next and find some more vignette examples).

In *Cowboy Boots*, Azucena explains how she develops an almost sixth sense or *facultad* regarding her knowledge and understanding that Sanjuana, her childhood friend,

had been raped by Tom, the man with the cowboy boots. According to Anzaldúa, la facultad is:

the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface. It is an instant ‘sensing,’ a quick perception arrived at without conscious reasoning. It is an acute awareness mediated by the part of the psyche that does not speak, that communicates in images and symbols which are the faces of feelings, that is, behind which feelings reside/hide. The one possessing this sensitivity is excruciatingly alive to the world. (60)

La facultad is a survival mechanism, a sixth sense that develops as a response to others’ racism, homophobia, sexual violence, and general intolerance. For those who dwell in a borderland, caught between and amongst worlds, la facultad is a well of empowerment, a spiritual haven, that is ever-present. Although “Sanjuana never said anything,” she knew (118). Recalling this memory, she says:

I don’t like cowboy boots. I don’t wear cowboy boots, and in fact when I see a man, especially an Anglo, wearing cowboy boots, I cringe, react like I do when someone scratches the chalkboard with their nails. (118)

Azucena is shocked that she could pick up on anything like this, “since [she] didn’t even know about such things. Mami never talked to [her] about sex” (119). Once again, the hidden curriculum behind Azucena’s mama “[leaving] a book that explained things on top of the chiffonier” (119) implied that things related to sexuality were not to be discussed although there was clearly a necessity for some sort of explanation. This implication is further cemented when Sanjuana is sent away for being impregnated by her rapist.

The next day, after school, I went to her house. Her Mother greeted me saying Sanjuana was gone. She was at her aunt's house in Nuevo Laredo. My friend was going to have a baby and we couldn't even talk. (119)

And, yet, as she is sent to pick up groceries by mama, she still has the resilient capital to go to his store. While she doesn't verbally or physically show her anger and disdain towards Tom, she shows her fortitude through her own passive aggression: "I was so upset I couldn't look at him. Instead, I just looked down as I signed Mama's name for the pound of baloney and the loaf of bread; all I saw were his cowboy boots (120). Time and again, Azucena uses her silence, her power of secrets, to garner strength in the midst of tragedy.

*The Flood* is perhaps the most symbolic of Azucena's memories, recounting the rising of Zacate Creek and the massive evacuation, "a scary flood, threatening and overwhelming" (9). Like the women in her life, continually inundated with the ying and yang of life, they are always ready to evacuate and then, when the time is right, return to their homes. Azucena notes that their homes are safe, "for they sit on high stilts" (9), a figurative and literal reference to the heights to which women will go to ensure the family's security and the resilience which women possess in rising above the flood waters. Azucena begins to identify that strength in herself. She says, "most kids cry but I am courageous" (10). Parallel to life's never-ending cycles, "after the flood Mami and Bueli begin again" (10). They re-tend the garden with only watermarks as reminders of the fear and loss associated with the flood's rage. Resistant capital then "refers to those knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality (80). Mami and Bueli know that there will be other floods and when they come, they will

draw from their resistant capital to inform them on what to do.

There are several ways that Azucena engages with and develops the capital to survive as a *mujer*. However, it is clear that she is vividly aware of one weapon already in her arsenal. As she recounts in *Nacho*, Azucena describes how she inflicts revenge on Nacho after having told on her for a silly interaction involving the throwing of a stone. She boldly exclaims:

How I could tell Mami of the anger, the humiliation, the mixed-up feelings that were held in that stone and in me? She'd never understand. I took my punishment, but already I was plotting revenge. I was going to write him a poem, call him a *chimuelo chismoso*; that'd serve him right. I savored the joy of having everyone laugh at him, as I read the poem at recess. (32)

Azucena recognizes that one of the most powerful pieces of ammunition in her arsenal is writing. The ultimate revenge against Nacho was to show him with words. She savors even the thought of using her words, crafting them onto paper and reading them aloud. Perhaps this is where Cantú and Azucena truly intersect—in this space of authorship. It is also the opening where culturally relevant pedagogy has the potential to make an entrance.

### **Discussion and Implications in the Context of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

Azucena has learned her lessons well. Through the hidden curriculum of her interactions, her environment and her understanding of the world, her community cultural wealth is both built with and on the critical educational lessons she learns about becoming a *mujer*. Through her own cultural intuition, Azucena lives Chicana Feminist epistemology by telling her counter story in non-conventional ways. While she learns

that female longing and desire are notions to be carefully navigated, it is precisely through that navigation that Azucena gains the familial and resistant capital she needs to carry her *niñez* into a world of unknowns. It is indeed a muddy notion – that of becoming a *mujer*. Azucena allows us to enter her world of *niñez* to tease out these dilemmas and also see the critical importance of the skills that are gained as a result of this complexity.

Earlier in the chapter, I discussed my need to connect this text to classroom educators. Here I present various implications from the perspective of teacher education and student learning through the context of culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings 477). Ladson-Billings outlines the three broad theoretical underpinnings of culturally relevant pedagogy: “the conceptions of self and others held by culturally relevant teachers, the manner in which social relations are structured by culturally relevant teachers, and the conceptions of knowledge held by culturally relevant teachers” (477). Generally, teachers who possessed the aforementioned traits demonstrated culturally relevant pedagogy by: seeing themselves as members of the community; believing in the value of experiential knowledge; understanding their pedagogy as unpredictable; demonstrating a connectedness with students; framing knowledge in a critical fashion (always fluid, scaffolded, multifaceted) (478-481). Given these tenets, I provide implications as to how *Canícula* might be used pedagogically in a culturally relevant way.

1. Using texts that intentionally place personal experience at the center of student learning, such as *Canícula*, can yield more engaged learners by privileging experiential knowledge and showing the teacher’s connectedness to the community at large.

2. Discussing female desire in a critical fashion, especially in the context of learning, in a culturally sensitive and empowering way can provide a space for youth to participate in conversations about needs and aspirations.
3. “Speaking secrets” is a process that individuals arrive at in their own time. Connecting with students about difficult, often taboo subjects, requires an intentional development of a safe and open learning environment. Using texts such as *Canícula* can facilitate this opening and lead to valuable, often unplanned, teaching moments.
4. The hidden curriculum of *Canícula* offers an opportunity to consider the ways in which knowledge is constructed both inside and outside of the classroom and specifically within one’s own community.
5. Community cultural wealth should be valued and engaged in classroom interactions and knowledge production as it draws from students’ experiences to construct “new” knowledge.
6. Capital, such as familial and resistant capital, are tools that should be nurtured, explicitly discussed and held to high esteem as a way of valuing experiential knowledge and preparing students to become lifelong learners.

## **Conclusion**

I began this chapter by acknowledging that speaking secrets is not easy. Using Azucena’s narrative in Cantú’s *Canícula*, I illustrated the ways in which Azucena, through specific vignettes, demonstrated how these secrets played out in her niñez underscoring the value and heaviness of the “hidden.” I pointed out that it is within the everyday interactions of community life that Azucena consumed the explicit, unspoken

and tacit messages of becoming a *mujer*. Drawing from Chicana Feminist Epistemology, I used the notions of hidden curriculum and community wealth to illustrate how Azucena utilizes her community cultural wealth to develop familial and resistant capital, ultimately utilizing her experiences of her *niñez* to inform her notions of and foster her fortitude in becoming a *mujer*.

This analysis represents a specific focus on particular vignettes that spoke to the familial and resistant capital that Azucena gained in her coming of age narrative. My decision to focus on the idea of becoming a *mujer* resonated deeply with me as a Chicana feminist educator and indeed, I have found that our young female students, especially Latinas, are hungry for more texts that reflect their own experiences or, at least, connect with them on a critically personal level. The cultural relevance of Cantu's *Canícula* endures, not in spite of, but because of the salience of the critical educational lessons that transcend time and place.

While I value *Canícula* as a poignant literary text, I especially value its utility and power in the classroom. This past summer, I worked with a group of high school freshmen Latinas in a small rural town. I led an intensive writing institute where these girls wrote relatively lengthy autobiographies, more than any of them had ever written, according to our conversations. In order to scaffold the activity, I used vignettes from *Canícula* as models from which to present the craft of writing and the importance of personal experience as literary/academic work. For many of the girls, these vignettes were the first they ever read about a Latina coming of age. I asked them to write a vignette about their own lives, modeling it after one in the book. I was enveloped by what they produced. Indeed, the girls spoke of their secrets; in turn, with each secret that

was divulged, the courage of such disclosure emboldened the other girls – they followed suit in their writing. Rather than feeling afraid of this exposure, the girls communicated the liberation they felt as a result. Those vignettes gave them permission to ground their writing in their community cultural wealth and forge it into a piece of writing. I can think of no better outcome to reading a text than inspiring budding authors to create their own.

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