

The Politics of Reform in an Era of "Texas-style" Accountability: An Interview with Angela Valenzuela

Introduction

Angela Valenzuela is an associate professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction and the Center for Mexican American Studies at the University of Texas at Austin. Dr. Valenzuela is a mother of two children with research and teaching interests in the sociology of education, race and ethnicity in schools, urban education reform and educational policy. She is the author of *Subtractive Schooling: U.S. Mexican Youth and the Politics of Caring*, winner of both the 2000 American Educational Research Association Outstanding Book Award and the 2001 Critics' Choice Award from the American Educational Studies Association. She is also editor of a volume titled, *Leaving Children Behind: How "Texas-style" Accountability Fails Latino Youth*. Dr. Valenzuela also serves as Education Committee Chair for the Texas League of United Latin American Citizens, the nation's largest and oldest Latino civil rights organization.

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The following interview emerged from a mutual interest in understanding the nature and politics of school reform in an era, as Angela Valenzuela so pointedly asserts, of "Texas-style" accountability. We were particularly interested in discussing the implications, underlying narratives and motifs of education policy at the state and federal level. In light of these concerns and their role in shaping—individually, socially and civically—the communities we serve, we felt it necessary to end our discussion on a more personal note, with Angela sharing her views and experiences on actively transforming the status of education.

NJ: Angela, let's begin our discussion with your home state of Texas. Earlier in the year, troubling news reports made it into the national spotlight regarding an alleged test-cheating scandal in various major school districts, such as Dallas and Houston. These reports suggest that so-called high-achieving schools in poor communities of color are actually the result of institutionalized test-cheating methods. Are these allegations valid?

AV: Nathalia, I want to begin by saying that what is happening in Texas should concern us all. The Federal No Child Left Behind law, after all, is modeled after the Texas accountability system. So what happens in Texas matters. Regarding our present cheating scandal, affecting approximately 400 schools across our state, the allegations are indeed valid and they constitute the tip of the iceberg. These findings were obtained by a *Dallas Morning News* investigation of cheating in HISD (see Joshua Benton, "DISD Probing TAKS Scores," *Dallas Morning News*, January 7, 2005). Specifically, they looked at suspicious scoring patterns. It is my understanding that the *News* conducted statistical analyses of high-scoring schools that defied predictions based on a range of school characteristics, including the socio-economic status of the children and the percent of English language learners at the school. For example, in one Dallas-area elementary school where 40 percent of the students are English language learners, the school's third-graders finished in the bottom 4 percent of the state in reading. In stark contrast, their fourth graders had the second-highest scores, beating out children in more than 3,000 Texas schools. First place went to a Houston magnet school for gifted children. So, cheating was easily deduced. Clearly, not all high-achieving schools in communities with this profile cheated, but it's safe to say that many did.

NJ: How then would you characterize this phenomenon and the underlying factors that have resulted in such practices?

AV: The systemic problem here is that the testing system doubles as an "assessment" or more to the point—testing and monitoring system—monitoring the behavior of the adults in the system. You see, testing is really a subset of a larger category termed assessment where these can and should take many forms beyond testing to include such things as portfolios, exhibitions, demonstration products, performance tasks, and other authentic measures of students' work. In fact, these other indicators provide an effective counterweight to ratings-focused accountability systems because of the corruptibility of a single score. In other words, you can't parcel out from a single indicator the extent to which that number was achieved through excessive coaching or not, giving schools that do an unfair advantage, albeit in this very narrow and thus distorted sense of a score about which little of school quality can actually be inferred. Similarly, if children who are "liabilities" to school ratings are either pushed out of school or quietly allowed to "drop out," a percentage score of the number of students meeting the cutoff standard on a test will never reveal this despite a direct though hidden, if not buried, correlation.

NJ: So the monitoring affects the integrity of the score. Are there other ways that these dual functions of testing and monitoring hurt children?

AV: Absolutely. Particularly in poor and minority schools that are subject to the "gaze" of the central office, what I term, "Texas-style accountability," works to control the behavior of the adults in the system by pressuring them to perform. The rhetoric gives the impression that all children are finally being taught; however, the reality is that this edict often translates into a dumbed-down, routinized, test-driven, ratings-focused pedagogy. Under these circumstances, a fragmented and regimented instructional context becomes the norm. Although the state focuses on more egregious manifestations of cheating, I maintain that a test-driven curriculum should also be construed as institutionally approved cheating. For starters, kids are robbed of a meaningful education that equips them with critical tools for citizenship. So, if defined this way, cheating is a ubiquitous feature of schooling throughout our state and nation. Logically, this suggests a need to separate these two systemic functions—that is, of testing and monitoring the behavior of the teachers and principals in the system.

NJ: It sounds like you're suggesting that a more holistic and less punishing evaluation system of student achievement would take care of issues related to the corruptibility of a school or district rating, as well as the tendency to reduce the state curriculum to that which appears on tests.

AV: I wish the answer here were a flat and simple yes. Let me first say that yes, a more just and valid assessment system would include multiple, authentic forms of assessment in the mix when evaluating students for decisions that are of a high-stakes nature. By this I mean either promotion/retention or graduation/non-graduation. States vary in the extent to which they have high-stakes at these levels. In Texas, we have it all with high-stakes existing at grades 3, 5, and 8, as well as at the historic exit level—currently at the eleventh grade. Secondly, yes, to separate out these functions of testing and monitoring teacher effectiveness would reduce, if not eliminate distortions in school ratings that are attributable to this current linkage in many of our states.

The complication here is that high-stakes testing plays out at two major levels. The first is the part that I've been focusing on, that is, the individual student level and how they are evaluated. Fortunately, under NCLB there is latitude here and states can implement authentic assessment systems where tests count for a percent of the total evaluation of the student. So with state leadership and support, holistic forms of assessment that are more diagnostic and less punishing can happen.

At the second level, the tying of testing and reporting requirements to the receipt of federal Title I dollars means that virtually every school and district in the nation is Texas—at least at this level. That is, if schools have children attending them who merit and need Title I dollars – and most schools and districts do, then they are subjected to high-stakes consequences. For example, if these schools fail to meet what the government terms, Adequate Yearly Progress or AYP for two consecutive years, students are allowed to transfer out at the school's expense. Schools could also be reconstituted or shut down altogether. This is a very punitive approach that on the basis of a single indicator promises to harm the most vulnerable students who are concentrated in these schools. It's really absurd to think that measuring schools is the same as fixing them in this design.

NJ: Angela, your comments instructively draw our attention to the multiple actors involved in this system: the school, district, state and federal government. Turning back to our discussion on cheating, I would like for you to comment specifically on the role of the state in this equation. After all, we've never witnessed this level of intrusion.

AV: There are several different angles to this, but to relate it back to cheating, what is obvious is how our state officials behave in a self-serving and convenient manner. By this I mean that they export the critique to the districts by letting a district like the Dallas or Houston Independent School District take the fall and get blasted with all the negative press. This is clearly preferable and necessary in order for the state to not concede the fact of a fundamentally flawed accountability design and the need for a drastic overhaul.

Mind you, this is one of several crises that the state has had to manage historically. In the late 1990s, for example, the state found widespread evidence of cheating through an analysis of erasure marks on tests. Attesting to the systemic pressure to cheat, this happened in the context of an easier examination (Texas Assessment of Academic Skills) at a time when the test scores had reached all time highs, as compared to the current context of a more difficult examination (Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills). If the framework itself weren't compromised, pressures to cheat would have been isolated incidents rather than scandalously widespread.

NJ: If we expand the definition of cheating, as you suggest, to include teaching to the test and narrowing curricula, and we agree that this is occurring system-wide, how can anyone be held accountable, if you will, for cheating?

AV: Good question. And I would like to answer this by critiquing further the state's response to cheating and also by troubling further the notion that any accountability for present cheating is possible in the context of the current design. These days, state officials in Texas talk about the need to get rid of the "few bad apples," as if the problem were reducible to the improprieties of only a handful of corrupt individuals. The parallels to Abu Ghraib are striking in terms of how the state chooses to handle violations in both instances—that is, by individualizing the problem as if the conditions for such violations were not themselves created by institutional policies and practices. Unlike Abu Ghraib, however, the "few-bad-apples" hypothesis overlooks how teaching to the test and a focus on test-prep can be a very caring response to children. This takes me to my other point about the non-possibility of a real accounting for cheating within the existing policy framework.

The shortcuts that teachers and administrators take are easy to rationalize—even in a genuinely selfless manner. Here's how it goes. You, the teacher, want job security and this is typically of immense concern and interest to the children and their parents as well. A context of turnstile teachers and principles is clearly of no benefit to anyone. However reduced or narrowed the state curricula, you definitely want your children to learn and progress to the next grade level. And you may especially want them to do so when such resources as a print-rich curriculum and certified teachers are in short supply. Why should children be held back when one, the test is the obvious ticket and two, the resources that correlate to the outcome are in short supply? Particularly in under-resourced schools where teachers often lack experience and where children are "chancy," teaching to the test and even testing to the test—where district- and teacher-made tests mirror standardized tests—become acts of survival. I'm not condoning any of this. I'm simply highlighting the perverse logic and related behaviors that are set into play by the current accountability framework.

NJ: Test prep and teacher caring are rarely explicitly linked. Can you elaborate more on this?

AV: Sure, let me share with you a personal experience with this. And I have permission from my older daughter's previous fourth-grade teacher to share this. Now, my daughter is in a very good public elementary school that serves upper middle-class families in southwest Austin. Her fourth-grade teacher is a very experienced, seasoned professional who imparts her craft, albeit with extraordinary effort, in the face of numerous state and district mandates. The year that my daughter was in her class, she kept meticulous notes on how much time she dedicated to test preparation, administering the test, and reviewing the results

of the test. Test preparation involved a slew of not only state- but also district-mandated exams. She calculated dedicating upwards of 90 hours of test preparation, administration and review—hours that would otherwise have gone toward instructional time. She further claimed that to have done differently would have been an injustice to the children in her classroom. She indicated that a lot of unfortunate exam errors track back to children's lack of familiarity with test formats and that the children's minds, bodies, and fingers have to be disciplined in order for them to complete the physical and technical aspects of the task.

Now, my daughter's teacher didn't rob her students of curricula or a quality education. She still imparted her vast subject-matter knowledge by providing students with daily after-school enrichment opportunities that most of the children took advantage of, effectively extending the school day another hour-and-a-half. While her efforts are praiseworthy, no reasonable parent or school official can expect this level of commitment from any member of their staff—especially without paying for it. And so a systemic absence of teachers who make up for the sacrifices to instructional rigor because of an excessive focus on test-prep is harmful to all of us in the long run.

There are clear instances, you bet, when the deliberate dumbing down of the curriculum is a clear violation of professional ethics. This would have to be investigated on a case-by-case basis. On the whole, however, I would say that an excessive focus on tests and testing is logical, reflecting in fact the priorities of state and federal policies.

NJ: Moving our discussion forward then to the role of the federal government, what can we make of the Bush administration's No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act? This act places a systematic testing regime with an accompanying system of high-stakes accountability as the centerpiece of its educational reform platform. Former Secretary of Education Roderick Paige often lauded NCLB as the "Brown v. Board of Education" ruling of the present.

AV: NCLB makes a mockery of *Brown v. Board*. *Brown* sought to end legal school-based segregation based on race. NCLB takes us further away from that goal by encouraging the further segregation of our already segregated schools. Despite pervasive and chronic inequities, for example, all public schools are expected to set AYP goals in order to meet 100 percent proficiency in reading and mathematics by 2013-2014. While this is a laudable goal, it is an impossible one to achieve when other factors that also predict achievement outcomes remain unchanged.

Nearly all of our states, for example, have huge resource gaps between rich and poor schools. We have massive teacher shortages and many lack proper certification for those classes that they do teach. Many of our schools have decaying infrastructure and are in need of working toilets, water fountains, and efficient air conditioning and heating systems. Tragically, it is these schools that have the greatest distance to travel in order to meet AYP goals. Low performance levels in these schools will further make them unattractive to many teachers who make choices to hedge their bets on higher performing, often Anglo, schools. And who can blame them? In such schools where the children are "easier" to teach and where the "low performing" label is less likely to disgrace everybody into submission, greater personal stability and satisfaction can be attained. In contrast—and except for a handful of true warriors in poor, minority schools—many will become dumping grounds for teachers and administrators with few options before them. This will result in greater polarization by race and class with diversity itself becoming a liability.

NJ: So you see a widening gap, further widening the differences between the rich and the poor, as well as between Anglos and children of color. Bilingual education is also a hard-won gain of the Civil Rights Movement. What has been the effect on bilingual education?

AV: Yes, so it's not just an issue of race and class, but also culture. Indeed, minorities' language rights, as you mention, were a tremendous achievement of the Civil Rights Movement. If you look at the Department of Education's webpage for any such acknowledgement in this regard, you won't find it. And this, too, is exceedingly tragic for we know from literally decades of research that well-designed and well-funded bilingual or dual language education programs work phenomenally for English language learners.

Against this immense scholarly backdrop, it is apparent that neither leadership nor policies at the federal level truly seek the betterment of the Latino community. If they did, the highly compatible and indeed, necessary goals of biliteracy, bilingualism, and high academic achievement would constitute an explicit focus. Instead, we witness a 180 degree turn away from the language rights of either indigenous or minority communities. This abandonment at the federal level is itself enshrined in the Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA) where measuring each student's progress in learning English is its explicit focus. I am sure that this is not a misstep and that folks at the federal level knew exactly what they were doing when they eliminated its predecessor, the Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs (OBEMLA). OBEMLA had its

challenges, too, but with its near-exclusive focus on children's rapid acquisition of the English language, Latinos' rights to biliteracy in their own native, U.S. tongues are scarcely a blip on the OELA screen.

NJ: What is potentially mystifying here is the general premise of NCLB that testing and accountability and the disaggregation of student results based on race, socio-economic status (as a proxy for social class), and language proficiency will equalize schooling for the most marginalized student populations.

AV: I refer to this as the "visibility hypothesis." While it is indeed often the case that the simple act of making inequities visible encourages a concerted effort, including resources, to those areas of the curriculum and student body in greatest need, the "high-stakes" aspect of the equation runs opposite of equity goals. That is, if the goal is to get the schools to improve, why must the students bear a primary burden of change in the system with their promotion or non-promotion, or their graduation or non-graduation? Moreover, why would we as a society hold children to high stakes when this practice is widely regarded as harmful, invalid, and unethical not only by all educational associations of any repute, but also by the makers of the tests themselves. Nathalia, go to the McGraw-Hill or the ETS website and you will read that tests should never be used as the sole or primary determinant in making decisions on students' behalf that are of a high-stakes nature.

Circling back to my earlier commentary on civil rights, No Child Left Behind appears to embody the historic goal of commanding restraint on discriminatory practices in schools. Yet this analogy, too, is a stretch. To begin with, NCLB was literally foisted on communities throughout the land. Not only was there no organic cry for test-driven reforms—and there wouldn't be due to our nation's blatantly racist history of testing minorities—this legislation was undemocratically forced on local communities. I should know. I have been involved in grassroots struggles in Texas for a long time now.

As much as test-based accountability is heralded as an efficient, business approach, I fail to grasp the basis for this claim. Why would anyone ever hold the customer—in this case, the student—responsible for the quality of the product? Inasmuch as teachers are held accountable, why would anyone hold the "lowest level workers" in the firm responsible for the product when they do not control either the finances or the flow of finance that correlate to the outcome? Yet this is what teachers are implicitly required to do. I'm not letting teachers off the hook for falling short on their own responsibilities. I have already addressed this in my prior writings. My first book, *Subtractive Schooling*, is precisely about the

systemic disconnect between non-Latino teachers and predominantly Latino children. Instead, I'm calling for greater proportionality in terms of on whom the responsibility for change relies. It's simply untenable that the weakest actors in the system, the teachers and the children, should carry this burden. So it's not even a good business model.

NJ: Going back to where we began this interview with Texas and cheating, do you see similar testing "faux pas" and the reduction of challenging curricula happening on a national scale, especially since the federal government is mandating for all states a system of testing and high-stakes accountability?

AV: Yes, I do envision a proliferation of blunders nationally and especially in places like Texas that have the more punishing systems. I hesitate to refer to these as blunders though when such "accidents" are institutionally contrived. A more appropriate characterization is that of a factory model system designed to reproduce societal inequalities along the existing lines of race, class, English language proficiency, and disability. Because children filling these categories become, in effect, "liabilities" to school ratings, the disaggregated categories mentioned earlier end up creating invidious distinctions, confirming age-old stereotypes about children of color being unteachable or uncaring toward school. And these children who have already been victimized by historic neglect get further objectified with their worth reducing to a number on a piece of paper.

I should also say that uniform testing systems at the state level defy our incredible diversity. If the ultimate political and logistical goal is to rank all of our nation's children on a single metric, then the need for uniformity trumps any goals for diversity that we may have held through the end of the last century. For statistical comparison is not possible without uniformity in measurement. Children's cultural, linguistic, and community-based identities become irrelevant since it is they who must conform to the school rather than schools who must accommodate to them. Thankfully, there will always be exceptional cases. I refer instead to general tendencies and trends.

NJ: Looking beyond the political mantra of equality and "reform with results" through nationwide testing and accountability systems, what do you see then as the main agenda, or agendas, of these shifts in education policy?

AV: In my recently published book, *Leaving Children Behind: How "Texas-style" Accountability Fails Latino Youth*, I analyze Texas' 2003 legislative session in order to answer precisely this question, utilizing renowned scholar, Michael Apple's, framework on rightist political transformations. He maintains the

existence of a dominant economic and political elite with deep and defining commitments to "individual freedom" and "choice." Their primary goal is to modernize the economy by implementing what Apple terms "conservative modernization." He refers to this group of people as neo-liberals.

Neo-liberals believe in free markets and they generally support the notion of limited government except in the case of using government to support free markets. Neo-liberals support vouchers and the privatization of public schooling. Testing regimes further this agenda because—as we are already seeing under NCLB—they discredit the public school system by expecting all schools to reach an unreachable goal of proficiency when the problems with schools cannot be solved by education alone. We also need a range of societal reforms, including effective and affordable health care systems, equitable tax systems, and access to affordable housing, capital, and higher education.

What we are witnessing, Nathalia, is the entire dismantling of the New Deal, the Great Society, and the social welfare state as we have known it. As far as schools are concerned, the new "commonsense" that we are supposed to have is one where we are to relate to schools as individual consumers before a marketplace of options and we are to pick schools just like we pick a car or a pair of pants. And test scores enable this. In fact, this is the only way—through a rational choice perspective—that our current accountability system may be justified as a good business model. If you've shopped for a home lately in Texas, you'll see on the real estate web pages the test scores of the school to which property is zoned listed right next to the square footage of the home that you might purchase. When I contemplate this, it disgusts me, but I may be a minority in this regard.

What is interesting and confusing for many is that neo-liberals—and I believe intentionally so—use civil rights rhetoric in order to justify so-called reform. No Child Left Behind, for instance, is a slogan that was appropriated from the Children's Defense Fund, a civil rights era program, by the business and political right. The right has thus appropriated the discourse of the left and transformed it into the punishing system that we have in place today.

Although there are always many agendas in education, complementary and conflicting, my analysis of the 2003 legislative session made it abundantly clear to me that the ultimate faith by the neo-liberal right is the market itself as the ultimate form of accountability. This is a world where we purchase an education in proportion to our pocketbooks. This is a world where democracy is diminished and we owe nothing to anyone. We are to live for little beyond ourselves and our immediate families and the common good is a romantic notion of the past.

Especially for communities that possess neither effective governmental representation nor political power, this is a world that we cannot afford. A privatized schooling system, the privatizers' ultimate goal, would only foster a culture of consumerism and separation. This violates a core democratic principle that education is about shared governance and growing healthy children, communities, and citizens for a democracy. To the degree that our schools fall short of this ideal, the solution, in my opinion, is not their dismantling, but rather the promotion of a democratic vision and purpose of schooling in a democracy.

NJ: It's time to start winding down our discussion, Angela, and in the spirit of ending on a positive and humanistic note I would like for you to address the following: Given the status of public education as we have discussed, how do we retain hope for change? What is the alternative?

AV: I'll speak from my own experience as a scholar, activist, and teacher in order to suggest why I retain enormous hope for the future of education and the future, in general.

When I first moved to Austin, I did get involved in the legislature, but did so as an individual scholar or professor. While the exercise of bringing my expertise to the fore was helpful, I soon came to realize that my impact would be limited if I functioned as a solo researcher disconnected from community efforts and interests. Simultaneously, I came to realize that I could play the role of democratic facilitator or "cultural broker" between powerful institutions and disenfranchised citizens and non-citizens. Consequently, in 2003, I welcomed the opportunity to an appointed position as Education Committee Chair of the League of United Latin American Citizens—a position that I still hold today. In that capacity, I work with others in the organization, as well as in various coalitions, to address legislative issues related to school finance, bilingual education, school vouchers and privatization, assessment, and higher education access. Some of this experience is captured in the introductory chapter of *Leaving Children Behind*.

Today, I am regularly called to provide professional guidance to legislators on proposed legislation, as well as expert testimony in various venues. While this has primarily involved my work in the Texas State Legislature, I have also testified in a federal court trial, and am regularly invited to—and frequently participate in—state educational summits where policy matters are discussed.

This level of involvement means that I am not only regularly sought after by reporters, but in time, have been able to cultivate relationships with many of them across the state. For instance, I was part of a very important recent effort to challenge and ultimately defeat school vouchers in the 79th legislative session this spring. I am pleased to say that LULAC played a central role. I am certain that a skillful use of the press, research, and community mobilization efforts had a decisive impact. Albeit with uncomfortably narrow margins in the House votes, our coalition effort proved successful in one of the toughest legislative contexts ever.

My organizational efforts have also stretched to the national level. For instance, I am a convener of the Forum for Education and Democracy. Through this organization, we are attempting to positively impact the No Child Left Behind legislation and to provide a national voice and perspective on how schools can address and challenge such undemocratic policies as high-stakes testing and other top-down mandates. Fortunately, these efforts have brought me into both scholarly and press-related circles at the national level. For example, I have a relationship with education writers in leading newspapers and magazines like AP Newswire, the *New York Times*, and *USA Today*. At both state and national levels, I frequently play the role of either providing reporters with leads or with helping them to frame issues in addition to providing them with actual commentary.

With respect to my work with students, I have had the pleasure of cultivating in them an appreciation for educational policy and the role that civically engaged researchers play in this process. This past semester, for instance, I had all of my students write policy briefs on the legislative issue of their choice. In at least three instances, these actually provided a basis for expert testimony at the legislature.

Because of my passion for policy, in all of my undergraduate and graduate classes, I do what I can to impart my craft. Happily, I find that one can never give students too much information. I find that students appreciate deeply the opportunity to either participate in or observe the willful exercise of knowledge and power. It's cool to see their cynicism against politicians and politics dissolve when they see that the academy not only weighs in on significant policy debates, but that it also does so from a more honest, and non-partisan perspective in comparison to others involved in the policy process.

I've probably gone here into much more detail than you asked, but what's the alternative? It's to not simply possess knowledge but to also act on that

knowledge. Indeed, the very act of speaking truth to power is itself a triumphal, life-giving experience.

NJ: That's a full plate. How do you sustain the energy that all of this must require?

The irony of all of this extra work that expands far beyond the normal duties of the average professor is that I am sure that I have the most fun. It is simply rewarding to be engaged with people at so many different levels, all working for constructive change and not usually for ourselves, but primarily for the next generation. So when you're having fun, it doesn't feel like work at all. Instead, I feel profoundly blessed to know that I am fulfilling my purpose in this life while helping others to fulfill theirs as well.

NJ: Sounds like the important thing for us to strive for is not to be alienated from our labor! I worked briefly in Washington, D.C. when NCLB was crafted and eventually passed into law. Even though I was in the company of activists and organizations who lobbied for the interests of the most marginalized populations, the experience was frustrating to say the least. As you have discussed, the political, economic and social interests of the most powerful groups on the "Hill" tend to override what sound research and theory tells us about making education a meaningful and productive experience for students and communities (here, I am thinking of Kris Gutierrez' work on literacy and learning, along with the work of critical theorist Peter McLaren). But my stay was brief and I have found some refuge in graduate school ever since. How would you characterize your role in these legislative struggles Angela, especially as a Chicana scholar?

AV: Nathalia, because of our community's own vexed relationship to the academy, Chicanas and Chicanos alike have established a set of alliances outside of the academy that served us well in the past and that serves us well today. Chicana and Chicano Studies, in particular, is the fruit of this alliance. And Chicana and Chicano Studies has always been about the fostering of a critical, social consciousness. For all of its limitations related to the careerism that the academy inspires and to which none of us are immune, our origins mean that in our universities, we are among the very few entities that actually have a constituency. If I could point to a primary reason that on some campuses, we may be held in contempt, it is because of this power that we bring to the workplace. It's amazing that we don't use and draw on this power more than we do. So I attribute my role as a legislative and community activist to the *conciencia* and love of community that Chicana and Chicano Studies helped to inspire in me. I'm also the daughter and granddaughter of ministers whose mission has always

included providing help to the downtrodden so it all comes together for me in a nice way. Nathalia, thank you so much for your interest in me and my work. This seems like a perfect note to end on. Muchisimas gracias!

NJ: Thanks to you, too, for all of the important work that you do.