Article

Treat a Cop Like They Are God: Exploring the Relevance and Utility of Funds of Gang Knowledge Among Latino Male Students

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Abstract
Latinos represent 20% of the more than 1 million gang-associated youth in the United States. This study explores how gang associated Latino males use their funds of gang knowledge to navigate their urban schools and communities. The findings highlight how Latino males build relationships and exchange information with each other, endure and persevere during juvenile incarceration, how youth interact with law enforcement, and how youth advance their status in gangs. Educators must learn how to anticipate and support gang-associated Latino males to understand their social worlds they bring into schools.

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> If a cop ever stops you don't say anything—just be smart, listen . . . only talk when they talk to you, don't give them any attitude or anything! Because the cop will either take you to jail for the rest of your life and they can kill you and they will get away with it, because the cops can do anything they want to you, so treat a cop like they are God because that's what they want, because with the gun and the badge - they think they can do whatever, when they technically can and they can't at the same time.

This quote from Gabe is an example of the *funds of gang knowledge* that many urban Latino males in this study have acquired. Gabe and the others use these varied forms of knowledge as a survival tool on the streets, in communities where youth routinely spiral into a *prisonization* process (Lopez-Aguado, 2016). For many communities of color, there is a long history of a relationship with the prison system and gangs. Some youth accept that going to juvenile hall and/or to prison is natural—and something they may have to experience as part of growing up (Durán, 2013; Lopez-Aguado, 2016; Rios, 2017; Vigil, 1988).

Much of the existing literature on marginalized male youth of color provides multiple lenses on how urban contexts affect their trajectories, including the relationship between gangs and deviance, the mistreatment in schools and communities, and the school-to-prison-pipeline (STPP; Milner & Lomotey, 2014). Other scholarship on urban education has focused on examining what happens inside schools by taking a closer look into the teaching and learning process, specifically considering how curriculum and pedagogical practices can be created to help marginalized students facilitate their understandings of how they can overcome barriers to academic achievement, self-determination, and social change (Cammarota, 2004; Howard, 2003). We contribute to these emerging discourses on marginalized Latino male youth in urban schools by focusing on—and treating youths' *funds of gang knowledge* as—key intellectual resources that educators can tap into and help humanize and provide context to the lives of vulnerable and marginalized groups (Paris, 2012; Irizarry & Brown, 2014), primarily Latino male gang-associated adolescents. Should educators continue to disregard and dismiss gang knowledge, it will only serve to reinforce the isolating experiences for gang youth in schools and would counter the recent efforts by educators to promote culturally sustaining pedagogies into urban spaces (Howard, 2010; Paris, 2012; Irizarry & Brown, 2014). We are aware that some gangs are violent and engage in criminal activities that shake the foundation of communities (Patton, Leonard, Eschmann, Patel, Elsaesser, & Crosby, 2017). But, contrary to what most of the available scholarship and attitudes toward gangs suggests, funds of gang knowledge

should be seen as tools for educators to build trusting relationships with Latino boys and young men, rather than promote a pathway into juvenile justice systems (Durán, 2013; Rios, 2011; Tapia, 2011; Vigil, 1999; Pyrooz & Sweeten, 2015).

A majority of the literature on the STPP highlights the mechanisms that contribute to the social reproduction of youth of color in urban communities. Within these arguments and attitudes from educators is the utilization of deficit-oriented and one-dimensional frames that perpetuate that boys of color, and those associated with gangs, are terrorists, deviant, incapable, and not worthy of any educational investment (Colón & Sanchez, 2010; Flores-Gonzalez, 2005; Lopez, 2003; Noguera, 2003). However, the reality is that Latino youth, especially males, are vanishing from the educational pipeline (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009), where less than one in two Latino males graduate from U.S. high schools (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2015). The numbers are even more dramatic for gang-associated youth who are 30% less likely to complete high school compared with their non-gang peers (Pyrooz, 2014). Thus, this article aims to provide a nuanced and multifaceted perspective to understand the complexities of vulnerable lives and on humanizing their experiences. The purpose of this article, then, is to challenge the existing "politics of representation" (Holquist, 1983) of Latino males in continuation school settings.[1] To do so, we employ a *funds of knowledge* (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992) approach to describe and examine the pedagogical relevance and utility of the gang-specific knowledge and experiences that are embedded in the students' lives. We urge educators and schools to recognize these types of *funds of gang knowledge* as viable, valuable, and legitimate sources of information that many Latino male students must acquire and use to survive, and that educators can use as opportunities to forge a deeper understanding of their students' daily lives (Cammarota, 2004; Moje, 2000). Specifically, we aim at answering the following research questions:

> **Research Question 1:** What are Latino males' attending continuation school funds of gang knowledge?
> **Research Question 2:** How can educators use students' funds of gang knowledge to build trusting relationships?

Findings from this article are expected to refine existing theories and to begin to build underpinnings to incorporate funds of gang knowledge into pedagogical and curricular practices. Latino males' experiences and identities inform their sources of life-knowledge that should not be watered down or disregarded by educators (Carrillo, 2016; Huerta, 2015). Furthermore, this

study highlights the critical need to change the perspective of vulnerable Latino male students. Indeed, the students in this study experience hardships associated with the *prisonization* process through their incarceration in juvenile facilities or familial imprisonment, but utilizing deficit models will only disseminate the belief that incarceration is the next logical step in the life course of many other urban young Latino males. Finally, this article reveals that there is significant educational value in utilizing students' funds of gang knowledge to serve this particular group of students in an urban continuation school. Educators must skillfully tap into these resources if they aspire to help Latino males to accomplish their educational and occupational goals. Failing to utilize these sources of knowledge may continue to perpetuate inequities in the educational system.

Literature Review

Historically, on all of the indicators of academic achievement, educational attainment, and school success, primarily Black and Latino males are strikingly distinguished from other subgroups of students by their consistent underperformance (Noguera, 2003, 2012). These patterns are so common and widespread documented by existing research that focuses on the criminalization of urban youth, the STPP, and the reasons why Latino males join gangs. In this review, we attempt to interpret the existing scholarship that examines these topics.

In recent years, local, state, and federal officials, as well as private foundations, have called for urgent measures to subvert these trends and reverse the patterns (Noguera, 2012). As a result, some scholarship (e.g., Howard et al., in press; Huerta, McDonough, & Allen, 2018) has concentrated its efforts on documenting what successful schools do to support these students. Furthermore, there is a growing number of studies documenting the many ways that urban youth (e.g., Latino males) resist their oppressing conditions (e.g., Cammarota, 2004; Moje, 2000). This body of work has inspired the design of pedagogical practices that bolster students' resistance to the structures that negatively impact their educational trajectories. These studies remind us that the problem is not urban youth of color but how they are served (Noguera, 2012). This point must be made clear to urban educators, especially those who have fallen into a deficit trap and continually blame the students they serve for their failures or, by extension, their families and communities. Indeed, poverty, crime, gangs, underfunded schools, and unaffordable housing are endemic to some neighborhoods who pose formidable challenges. However, schools that are successful with Latino boys make clear

that educators can counter and even overcome these obstacles when they work closely with families and communities to co-construct curriculum and design positive learning environments that meet the needs of the youth they serve (Cammarota, 2004; Howard et al., in press).

Criminalization of Youth in Urban Schools

The criminalization of students is operationalized by zero-tolerance policies to combat urban violence that shifted institutional responses to student fights, tardiness, and student–educator conflicts (Hirschfield, 2008; Huerta, 2016; Lopez, 2003), and it means students are arrested, suspended, or expelled for disputes with teachers, counselors, or administrators for often minor infractions. These new institutional attitudes and behaviors lead to the constant "push out" of students before diploma completion (Losen, 2015). The bureaucratic actions of educators gradually contributed to the STPP (Losen, 2015), where low-income Black and Latino children are treated like adults, children as young as 8 years old were handcuffed and arrested for fighting or talking back to teachers (Ferguson, 2000), and would then be sent to juvenile correctional facilities for abnormal or aggressive behaviors (Kelly, 1993; Muñoz, 2005). The presence of gangs further "pushed" educators to embrace the criminalization of urban male youth and unintentionally redirect students to prisons instead of educational systems (Conchas & Vigil, 2012; Durán, 2013; Vigil, 1988, 1999).

Gangs and Latino Youth

Latino male youth have multiple motivations to join gangs during their adolescence such as tensions between parents, perceptions of racism and discrimination in schools, community violence, and poverty, which all contribute to an adolescent's feeling of marginalization (Curry & Spergel, 1992; Estrada, Gilreath, Astor, & Benbenishty, 2016; Rios, 2011; Vigil, 1988, 2003). If one of the spaces previously listed is void of a nurturing and caring adult, the young man will locate others, including gang members, who can fulfill the gaps necessary to feel validated (Vigil, 1988). One could assume schools would provide the personnel and space to welcome and embrace students who are marginalized. However, most teachers and other educators are not prepared or supported to make significant changes to alter the "oppressive practices or structures" in schools to meet the various needs of gang-involved students, and instead further marginalize this group to the fringes within schools (Moje, 2000, p. 682). Whether educators are aware or not, the streets have encroached on neighborhood schools (Vigil, 1999) and "the streets

[remain] the arena for what is learned and expected by others to gain recognition and approval" (Vigil, 2003, p. 230). Educators must resist, often, visceral responses to gang-associated youth and instead see an opportunity to humanize and provide support to an individual who lives turbulent and vulnerable social conditions that require outside intervention to create a space of equilibrium (Paris, 2012) instead of simply relinquishing students to continuation schools (Hernandez, 2017; Huerta, 2016).

Continuation School Culture

With gang context in the background, we focus on continuation schools which are an extension of this street arena to build funds of gang knowledge for Latino males. Our focus on continuation schools is grounded in the fact that educators are more likely to critically scrutinize Latinos who are identified or perceived as gang members, and teachers, in this setting, search for opportunities to excessively suspend or expel students from traditional schools (Kim, 2011; Malagón, 2010). Often, educators are more likely to view continuation school students as troublemakers (Kelly, 1993), whether the student is gang involved or not.

Continuation schools have a long history in the United States, and the contemporary model of small and adaptive curriculum and learning environment are traced to the 1960s for students who were not successful in traditional comprehensive school settings (Kelly, 1993). Since then, some alternative schools have transformed into "dumping grounds" for students with academic and disciplinary problems (Brown, 2007; Muñoz, 2005), where the curriculum is often unengaging and unchallenging for students, which further exacerbates their academic disengagement (Brown, 2007; Malagón, 2010). The lack of planning and high-quality guidance counseling is primarily related to educators not "caring" about the students or valuing their perspectives and experiences (Muñoz, 2005). Some models of alternative schools only allow students to be enrolled for short-periods of time to fulfill the required suspensions or expulsion mandates of 20 days to 3 months or longer based on the school discipline policy violation (Malagón, 2010) and the students' academic performance in said school (Huerta, 2016). Other alternative schools allow students to permanently transfer and complete all requirements to earn their high school diploma (Hernandez, 2017). However, each school district and state vary in policy allowing students to complete their studies in alternative schools (Lehr, Tan, & Ysseldyke, 2009).

Our study continues this non-deficit perspective to provide needed nuances to the lives of Latino male youth. This group, as others in urban spaces, continues to be a target for mistreatment by the hands of educators, local law

enforcement, and policy makers to disregard the individual and community assets they possess. Urban schools, especially continuation schools, can make the difference in the lives of Latino males who are marginalized and relegated to the fringes of educational spaces. Due to various demands and unfocused training on gang youth, educators struggle to see gang members as children, but instead as "thugs" or "street terrorists" with little hope to change. Most often, teachers and other school personnel are unable to see the various assets, strength, and resilience that gang-associated Latino male youth must endure in the multiple inequitable social structures that impede their growth and development that cause fractions in both groups abilities to forge trusting relationships with youth who need attention and support.

Conceptual Framework

(Dark) Funds of Knowledge

It has been over 20 years since the term *funds of knowledge*—the existing resources, knowledge, and skills embedded in students and their families (Moll et al., 1992; Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992)—emerged in the K-12 literature. The research on funds of knowledge has become a standard reference to signal a "'sociocultural' orientation in education that seeks to build strategically on the experiences, resources, and knowledge of families and children those from low-income neighborhoods" (Moll, Soto-Santiago, & Schwartz, 2013, p. 172; Rios-Aguilar, Kiyama, Gravitt, & Moll, 2011). After decades of research, what we know is that the funds of knowledge generated, accumulated, and transmitted by households bring ample possibilities for facilitating the academic success of underrepresented students' education (Kiyama & Rios-Aguilar, 2017). Indeed, it is the connection between teachers' pedagogical approaches and families' sociocultural, linguistic, and intellectual resources what makes this approach appealing, relevant, and very much needed (Moll et al., 2013).

While most of the available scholarship on funds of knowledge highlights the generous nature of resources inherent in the lives of marginalized students (and their families and communities), some researchers have begun to provide examples of different types of funds of knowledge available to youth. For example, Gallo and Link (2015) described the existence of politicized funds of knowledge and the influence in schools. They developed the concept while examining the knowledge and experiences with immigration and deportation that children and families undergo in and out of schools. Others have merged critical race theory and funds of knowledge to understand how formerly incarcerated individuals negotiate college-going practices (Giraldo, Huerta, &

Solórzano, 2017). They argue educators' need to familiarize and recognize this type of knowledge in order to better respond to sttudents' needs. Similarly, Zipin (2009) coined the term *dark funds of knowledge* to describe the challenging knowledge(s) embedded in the lives of marginalized students. Indeed, Zipin (2009) was the first to recognize the absence of students' "dark" and "difficult" life experiences from classroom discussions and activities. Most often, he argued, educators feared integrating students' dark funds of knowledge which centers as a consciousness of crime, drugs, and violence in students' communities and households. These examples signal the need to consider all sources of funds of knowledge, including the vulnerabilities—difficult challenges for living that impact youth and several other household members (Moll et al., 2013) embedded in students' lives and not to focus on their deficiencies.

While we find Zipin's concept and rationale valuable, we also think there is a high risk of utilizing the term *dark* to describe students' funds of knowledge. The risk is to fall again into a deficit mentality and then start attributing "bad" or "dangerous" labels to the varied knowledge(s) these students possess. Instead, we argue that it is more productive to utilize the concept of *Funds of Gang Knowledge*, which is a continuum from less to more complex and controversial knowledge and shows the different shades in knowledge and resources. This expanded notion includes both the funds of knowledge that Moll and colleagues have discussed at length in their research *and* all the more "difficult" knowledge(s) that are also part of students' vulnerable lives.

Challenging Knowledge(s) as Sources of Funds of Gang Knowledge

Moll and González (1997) stressed the importance of having educators "transform students' diversities into pedagogical assets" (p. 89), but Zipin's (2009) work highlights the deep fear and "institutional denial" (p. 321), which prompts teachers to hold steady the imaginary boundaries of student's home communities filled with poverty and crime to not be blended into schools. Teachers want to maintain schools as "safe spaces" for their students to escape the harsh realities of their communities (Gallo & Link, 2015), but the strong presence and gradual integration of gangs into schools cannot be denied (Huerta, 2015; 2016). However, we seek to push the theoretical conversation forward by introducing the notion of *funds of gang knowledge*. They include the sharing and preservation of symbols, knowledge, and skills essential for growth and economic survival. As one accumulates funds of gang knowledge, Latino youth may learn about gang networks, drugs, and alcohol; strategies to engage law enforcement; and methods to ease the

Table 1. A Sample of Funds of Gang Knowledge.

Names of Rock County Based Gangs by Ethnicity	Gang Initiation Requirements
• African American based • Latino based	• Jumped into gang (13 s to 1 min) • Family Relationship • Robbery • Continuous evaluation of commitment (are you down?)
Names of Graffiti Crews and Their Relationships	*How to Interact With Law Enforcement and Other Officials*
• Various crew meanings • How graffiti crews merge and expand to new communities	• Activate knowledge about rights • How to act proper in front of probation officers, lawyers, and judges
Regional Affiliation of Gangs and Graffiti Crews	*Parent, sibling, or extended family member embedded in gangs*
• Norteños (XIV)—Northerner Mexican-origin gangs • Sureños (XIII)—Southerners Mexican-origin gangs	• Father • Mother • Aunts or uncles • Brothers and sisters • Cousins
Knows How to Advance Their Status in Gang or Graffiti Crews	*How to Survive or Prepare for Juvenile Incarceration Facilities (Juvenile Hall, Holding Cells, or Juvenile Campus)*
• Fight or kill rival gang members • Recruit more members into their group • Write more graffiti around city • Sell larger quantities of drugs • Not allow oneself to be punked	• Stay active and busy in juvenile hall and camps • Don't get punked by other youth • Be aware of rapists • Juvenile camps do not compare to adult prisons
	Knowledge of Drugs and Alcohol
	• Drug wholesale and retail value • Drug measurements • Marijuana • Pharmaceuticals • Methods to combine drugs and/or alcohol

transition into juvenile hall facilitates (see Table 1 for a description of funds of gang knowledge available in our sample). The ambition to focus on funds of gang knowledge is rooted in previous researchers' calls to highlight how adolescents "create their own social worlds and funds of knowledge"

(Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011, p. 167). Latino males embedded in gangs create parallel forms of funds of gang knowledge that can be used not only for social and economic survival, but for positions of power, resistance from racial oppression, and perpetual marginality in schools and the broader community.

Similar to the original funds of knowledge study, the funds of gang knowledge embedded in students' lives (see Table 1) showcase how they operationalize and use their skills related to their social context of urban schools and communities. This furthers how they learn to "[deal] with changing, and often difficult, social and economic circumstances" (Moll et al., 1992, p. 73). Gangs similar to households must "exchange goods, services, and symbolic capital, which are part of each [gang's] functioning" (Moll & González, 2004, p. 443) to maintain its daily functioning and survival in different spaces.

(Dark) Funds of Knowledge as Pedagogical Assets

Moje (2000) focused on gang literacies or knowledge as an asset which can be drawn from and used in a meaningful manner to help educators understand how to support young adults better. The youth in her study attempt to navigate multiple challenging spaces including schools and communities. The concept of gang knowledge as an asset creates an interesting paradox for adolescence, as they are masters of gang information and can manipulate the information to navigate their communities but are unaware of the unintentional consequences to further marginalize them in the eyes of educators (Moje, 2000). When teachers interact with gang youth or perceived gang members, schools are more willing and often eager to remove these "bad" students from their schools or further push them to the prison pipeline (Noguera, 2003; Rios, 2011; 2017).

In an attempt to better understand how youth resisted their oppressive circumstances, Cammarota (2004) literally "traveled" with a sample of Latina/o students through the multiple worlds they inhabited in their homes, school, and neighborhoods. His ethnographic study has helped scholars and educators to understand Latino males' acts of resistance better (e.g., cutting class and dropping out of school). He found that Latino youth assess the role of education in their resistances—whether they perceive education as helpful or hopeless—has much to do with the interconnecting of multiple sociocultural forces defining their societal positions and thus the distinctiveness of their struggles to impose their conceptions of identity and status (Cammarota, 2004). His study suggests that educators and policy makers can support Latina/o resistances to oppression, criminalization, and assumed deficiency by facilitating their documentation of the life challenges and survival techniques of family members. These forms of knowledge are already existing in

their households and communities and include funds of gang knowledge. Cammarota (2004) further states that "learning about the struggles and successes of the previous generations within their families and communities can inspire Latina/o youth to resist the societal expectations of failure by undertaking their own struggles for personal transformation" (p. 71).

With similar intent, Zipin, Sellar, and Hattman (2012) designed an action research project to help public middle and high school teachers in high poverty regions in Australia to develop a pedagogy that considered community funds of knowledge. A funds of knowledge approach was used to take a fuller account of diverse and complex spaces of socio-historical life in these spaces. Zipin et al. (2012) found that many students who live in these urban regions did experience dismal violent effects of poverty and racism. In fact, students gave heartbreaking testimony of the dark funds of knowledge available to them. These varied sources of challenging knowledge startled (and terrified) teachers (Zipin, 2009). Zipin et al. (2012) argued that, along with other funds of knowledge, knowledge of difficult lived spaces (or what Zipin labels as dark funds of knowledge) can and should be put to use as assets for curriculum work (Zipin, 2009). They suggest educators have rich curricular conversations about how students can use their agency to re-contextualize potential new futures from their senses of lived realities. In other words, educators should help students valorize their funds of knowledge *and* to develop the capacity to aspire and to imagine more hopeful ways of being and living. Another idea of using a funds of knowledge approach is to ask students to carry out curriculum projects that involve residents and family members and to re-imagine collaborating with them to envision a hopeful future together. Sadly, schools impose severe institutional sanctions against making such dark sides of students' lifeworlds curricular and teachers might tend to avoid the emotional work of knowing their students in sad and sometimes frightening contextual ways (Ovsienko & Zipin, 2007). One of the most important implications of their work is the pedagogical use of the diverse knowledge(s) through which learners in these spaces could re-imagine hopeful forms of community life. Below we highlight the multiple qualitative research methods used to study Latino males' fund of gang knowledge in a continuation school setting.

Method

Site and Participants

The site serves between 75 and over 300 students during the academic school year. This number fluctuates monthly based on school suspensions and expulsion, which result in the transfer to Anderson Behavioral School (ABS), a continuation school. A majority of the ABS students attending are low-income

and primarily Black and Latino males. The student data represent one case study culled from a much larger data set of Latino male students attending three continuation middle and high schools in Rock County School District (RCSD). In the larger study, all students ranged from seventh to 12th grade and were individually approached and recruited, either presented with a flier or heard class presentations about the purpose of the study. To be eligible to participate in the larger study, the student had to self-identify as Latino, male, and attend a continuation school. Individual student and/or parent/familial gang membership was not a part of the criteria to be eligible for the study (see Table 2 for participant information).

Coding and Analytical Approaches

Analyses for this article come from semi-structured interviews and participant observations of 13 Latino male students. The larger study was not derived from funds of knowledge framework or exclusively focused on gang information. We analyzed this group of students attending ABS because a large number of students embedded in gangs or graffiti crews compared with the other two research sites. The first author conducted all participant interviews and observations. The questions focused on when students first learned about gangs or graffiti crews, if their peers or familial networks were involved in those groups, and what their aspirations were after graduating from high school. The interviews length ranged from 20 to 60 min. Each interview was transcribed verbatim and then verified for accuracy before being uploaded to Dedoose 7.0.23. Participants were observed before, during, and after school; during classroom instruction; nutrition breaks; and during the searching process before entering school facilities. The first author used a humanizing research technique to forge respectful and trusting relationships with the participants (Paris, 2011, 2012). The first author would observe and sometimes participate in the student physical education course and play basketball, lift weights, and other moments he would sit with them during nutrition breaks and share his snacks with the students. The culmination of these activities created a trusting relationship between the participants and the first author.

   We used Moll et al. (1992) original funds of knowledge and Saldaña (2013) theoretical underpinnings to develop our coding structure to identify the individual, familial, and community forms of students' funds of knowledge to build our funds of gang knowledge framework. This included reoccurring themes that students valued on the streets, but also had application in schools. These topics mirrored resources, knowledge, survival, exchange, and skills, but grounded in an urban street context. The interviews were electronically coded using Dedoose to identify various funds of gang knowledge. We then

Table 2. Student Participants.

Name	Nationality	Age	Grade	Reason expelled	Gang embedded	Family member(s) gang embedded
Carlos	Mexican American	16	11	Drug possession	No	No
CJ	Mexican and Honduran	19	12	Fighting with student	No	Yes
Emanuel	Mexican American	16	10	Drug possession and vandalism of school property	Yes	Yes
Frank	Mexican American	17	10	Drug possession and graffiti tools	Yes	No
Gabe	Mexican American/ Native American	16	10	Threatened school personnel	Associate	Yes
Hector	Central American	15	10	Drug possession	Associate	Yes
Jorge	Mexican American	15	10	Threatened school personnel	No	Yes
Julio	Mexican American/ White	16	11	Violence against school personnel	Yes	Yes
Manny	Mexican	15	10	Under the influence of drugs	Associate	No
Oscar	Mexican American	17	12	Drug possession	Yes	Yes
Rafael	Mexican American	16	9	Fighting with student	Yes	Yes
Ronald	Mexican American	14	7	Fighting with student	Yes	No
Santiago	Mexican American	18	12	Drug possession	No	No

used an inductive and deductive analysis to allow the original funds of knowledge and the study data to illustrate the unique traits and nuances of gang knowledge (LeCompte & Schensul, 2013). Traditionally, member checking is

used to ensure participants have a voice in how their words are represented and this is salient when working with vulnerable and marginalized populations through the research process. To ensure the accuracy and validity of the interview data, students were approached and asked to clarify different items from their individual interviews (Seidman, 2013). During the research process, relationships and trust were mutually developed (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014; Seidman, 2013). Hallett (2013) pointed to the emotional and spiritual needs of vulnerable participants before sharing the researchers' perspectives of the subject's life experiences and encourages not to perform member checking to protect participants' well-being. We followed Hallett's suggestions and did not share a version of this article with the participants or discuss the benefits of their funds of gang knowledge. We acknowledge the delicate balance of honoring our participants' voices and informing the larger education community about this students' powerful voices that *need* to be heard and recognized.

Trustworthiness

The value of trustworthiness cannot be understated in the research process. Miles and colleagues (2014) suggested the use of various data collection points corroborate the findings and analysis of qualitative studies. Although we focus on participant observations and interviews in this article, the first author uses multiple qualitative tools to understand and gain perspective of ABS students' experiences including photos, reflexive fields notes, institutional documents, and student-written narratives. Also, Miles et al. (2014) encouraged the use of study participants who possess different levels and depth of understanding of their communities, and we did so as evident in Table 2 that shows students' personal or familial involvement in gangs and graffiti groups (see Table 2). The staggered representativeness of the participants allows for the increased trustworthiness of the findings (Miles et al., 2014).

Positionality

Some of our biographic characteristics contributed to the research approach we used in this study. Specifically, the first author is a postdoctoral scholar in education who has personal connections to gangs in his friend and familial networks, which provide additional tools, *cultural intuition*, to gain the trust of the participants (Delgado-Bernal, 1998). The second author is a researcher who has studied the educational and occupational trajectories of several groups of marginalized students (including youth and adults who have had contact with the justice system) from a non-deficit perspective. We realize that we may bring specific views and beliefs about this particular group of

students (Milner, 2007; Peshkin, 1988). Aware of our potential biases as we collected, analyzed, and interpreted data, we tried to remain reflexive. We, the first and second author, also engaged in peer debriefing (Creswell & Miller, 2000) throughout the data coding and analyses process. This activity allowed another opportunity to refine coding strategies, analysis, and framing of the arguments of the article. The peer debriefing process also helped in processing the limitations of this project that we had not yet considered.

Findings

Graffiti Art

Frank is a member of a tagging crew for less than 1 year. He has attended more than 15 schools in multiple states throughout his life. Frank is unsure about his future goals or career path, or as he says, "freestyling life," but he enjoys art, drawing, and graffiti. Frank's advanced graffiti skills caught the attention of a tagging group, who recruited him to join, and he did so without question. The tagging crew provides opportunities to further Frank's funds of gang knowledge about graffiti skills. Frank shares, "[The graffiti crew] tells me how to do my letters better . . . Just [how to improve] my letter spacing and stuff [to refine the aesthetic]". Frank's skills are valued, and others in the tagging crew can validate his commitment to improving the art style.

Frank's tagging crew is providing opportunities to learn new techniques to improve his graffiti and accumulate new funds of gang knowledge. He would actively use the new graffiti art information, "I used to get practice [spray] cans and I used to practice [at my house] . . . on plywood." The graffiti symbols and styles are honored not only by Frank but also his tagging crew as they will use their funds of gang knowledge to increase not only their status within the community by writing more (Moje, 2000). The quality of the graffiti on streets, freeways, and trains is a critical method to promote their group.

Emanuel demonstrates his creative and unique nuanced talents through his graffiti styling, and also leadership within his tagging group. These funds of gang knowledge are necessary for the spaces where he operates, but not valued by his teachers who believe he is, "nothing but a fuck up." Below are examples of a teacher responding to Emanuel's graffiti on pieces of paper during a class session:

> [The teacher] was like, "Why are you tagging on the paper?" And I'm like, "It's on paper. Why are you trippin'?" And he's said, "I don't get you fucking kids— you guys are just retarded as fuck, tagging on walls, saying it's art." I was like, "It is art, you just don't see it. I see it." He's like, "you're nothing but a fuck up" and I got mad.

Not all teachers can appreciate the artistic value of graffiti styles created by Latino males, which is a missed opportunity to forge a relationship with students. Emanuel attempted to reason with his teacher by stating the graffiti art was on paper, which means he is not destroying school property, because other students write their graffiti art on books or etched into the desk or windows. Emanuel claims the teacher said he was "retarded" for believing his graffiti is a form of art. Moje (2000) stressed these written literacies are important for youth to demonstrate their abilities, but also a new form of knowledge of creative expression. Emanuel left school for multiple weeks because he was so upset about the negative teacher interaction. Malagón (2010) would describe Emanuel's resistance as a self-defeating response to "the oppressive conditions [in schools]" (p. 68). Although he did not use the words, we believe he was emotionally hurt because he was unable to stand up to the teacher for being disrespectful toward him due to the response. The examples above highlight how peers and teachers respond toward those individuals who possess funds of gang knowledge related to graffiti art. Nevertheless, it helps position why youth, particularly Latino males, may not trust educators to disclose their gang or graffiti crew status and instead choose to feel valued and supported by peers. Emanuel highlights how educators sometimes are unable to see a students' perspective as they try to explain their funds of knowledge to adults unfamiliar with gangs and graffiti crews.

A different perspective is that teachers could stress art not only is subjective and interpretive but also is not as complicated or controversial as the funds of gang knowledge continuum we present in this article. Jose, Emanuel, Frank, Manny, Oscar, and Rafael all shared experiences writing graffiti for their essential groups. Teachers could use students' art skills as creative forms of resistance in school settings (Garcia, 2015). Original resistance is teacher–student activities that allow students to develop a socio-political awareness of their communities and intersecting identities. For urban youth, this can be an opportunity to not only explore community conditions but also how gangs evolve and remain a staple in urban and low-income communities.

Knowing How to Survive or Prepare for Juvenile Incarceration Facilitates

Being Latino and involved in a gang leads to a higher probability of incarceration (Tapia, 2011). Below, Julio discusses his tagging crew peers describing juvenile hall and youth camp as "kiddy camp," practically comparing juvenile camp to a recreational summer trip.

> Interviewer: Does being in a crew help you learn a lot about the juvenile justice system?
>
> Julio: Oh, yeah. I know the whole inside of [the juvenile hall facility]. I know where E4's at. I know E6. E7.
>
> Interviewer: What does that [represent]?
>
> Julio: The [holding] units that you go in when you locked up. When I was locked up I already knew a lot of people in there already. And then there was haters in there, too.

Julio is familiar with the layout of the juvenile hall facility, which may have eased his transition into the setting. He also pointed out his relationship with people he is friendly with, and also others who are "haters," which may create additional tension. Julio further discusses his experiences in a juvenile youth camp.

> Interviewer: Can you give me some examples of the type of stuff [your tagging crew members] would tell you?
>
> Julio: [My friends would say], "detention is whatever . . .[Youth Camp] is kiddy camp . . . Prison is way worse than all of that shit" So when I was going to [Youth Camp], I'd be like "All these fools [my friends] been over here, so if they did it—I could do it, too."

The messages Julio received from his tagging crew friends about the juvenile facility influenced him to see the juvenile hall and youth camp as an effortless experience. Julio held onto the adage, "if they did it—I could do it." This motto may have helped him rationalize the easiness of juvenile youth camp. He further elaborates his experiences:

> "What the fuck do I need to start crying and being all sad for? Just because of . . . being locked up." Once you get locked up, it's not cool. There's a lot of stupid kids [at ABS] that haven't been through nothing. They just get in trouble one time and think they're hard (tough). They'll [say], "Oh, I got locked up" and it was [that] they were in [central] booking for like five hours. That's . . . nothing . . . when I went to [Youth Camp], I [said,] "Oh, this ain't nothing. It's only for six months." But then, like, my first three weeks up there, it was sad. 'Cause you miss your family and being home and eating when you want to and doing whatever you want. Going to sleep [at home] when you feel like it.

Julio is the youngest member of his tagging crew, so he is still learning and growing his funds of gang knowledge. Julio differentiates the nuances of incarceration by highlighting others who have simply held in "juvenile

booking" offices. He understands the distinction and the role of gang funds of knowledge in preparing for different spaces and environments.

We provide examples for school counselors to build on the students' previous experiences in juvenile facilities. Emanuel, Julio, Oscar, Rafael, and Ronald spent previous time incarcerated in juvenile detention and facilities. School counselors and psychologists should host mentoring sessions for students to channel their emotions from being recently incarcerated. Often there is a stigma in low-income and minority communities for seeking mental health support, so schools can provide peer and professional services to give students outlets to process their emotions. If not, students may continue to have outbursts in classrooms when challenged by teachers or others who are attempting to be authoritative with them. We provide further examples in a later section. These sessions must be facilitated by professionals with licensed and tested training, and educators must recognize there are limitations to how they can help youth as not everyone can meaningfully engage and support gang-associated Latino males.

Teachers' Deficit Reactions to Funds of Gang Knowledge

Gabe is not in a gang or tagging crew, but has been actively recruited for years by his gang friends, but does not want to make a full commitment to that lifestyle. Gabe recognizes schools are unable to see any value in the funds of gang knowledge he possesses, and states, "Because [gangs are a] positive thing in certain situations, [but] not everything calls for blood . . . schools are close[d] minded . . . and school systems, they are never really going to change." Gabe understands at the school system level, there are impediments to change and adapt to the needs of students involved in gangs. Concurrently, he knows gangs are only "positive thing[s] in certain situations," as he identifies the dichotomy and the tension of funds of gang knowledge and schools.

Manny has amassed complex and nuanced funds of gang knowledge, but he is not an official member of the Latino gang in his neighborhood. He grew up with the younger members of the gang and supports them during fights with rivals, helps write gang graffiti, and is mentored by *veteranos* (original gang members) in the neighborhood about his life and future goals. He believes teachers can only see gangs as unfavorable, "[Teachers] just want to see [gangs] that way . . . As in a negative way." Some teachers quickly dismiss the thought that gangs or graffiti groups can provide positive and supportive moments for their members (Durán, 2013; Moje, 2000) and may remove the human element of these organizations. When teachers do this, they risk the chance to learn how these groups sometimes provide the

validation or care that is not available in the students' homes and merely focus on the perception of Latino male gang youth as malevolent individuals.

Emanuel is a graffiti crew leader and past gang member and believes teachers are only able to see gangs and tagging crews as "terrorists" and destructive in the community. He has been involved in gangs and graffiti crews for more than half of his life and remembers being initiated into a gang at age 7 or 8 years old. Emanuel shares his thoughts about teachers' views of gangs and graffiti crew members:

> [Teachers] think us, gangs and [graffiti crews], we are just out here to terrorize the community. We're not out here to harm innocent people. We are just out here to do our thing, protect our block, and defend it against other rivals. But [teachers] don't see it as that. They just see it as destroying shit.

Emanuel is not timid about challenging or fighting rival tagging crew members. Students may fear and distrust sharing their gang status or funds of gang knowledge with educators because of being reported to school leaders (Moje, 2000). Valenzuela (1999) documented the limited trust and involvement between teachers and Latino students, and the focus on gangs adds another level of complexity to this relationship, as students may be removed from school or further pushed to the margins (Vigil, 1999), which may lead to dropping out of school. Rafael shares his fear of being reported and then sent to the Dean of Students' Office for his gang affiliation.

> Because a teacher can't really tell who is in a gang or not . . . Teachers [have] called me before telling me, "Oh, are you in a gang?" And, I don't say, "Yes," because [the teachers] will say, "Oh, he's in a gang . . . Go to Dean [of Students] or something."

Teachers struggle and are unable to determine which Latino male youth are in gangs and students often have the awareness to not disclose to their teachers because of the possible result of suspension, expulsion, or additional educational neglect (Moje, 2000). Teachers should consider humanizing these students as gangs are only a fraction of the adolescents' identity (Bubolz & Lee, 2018; Huerta, 2016; Moje, 2000) and instead should see how these youth feel valued and are mentored by other adults in gangs (Hagedorn, 2017). The tension remains about how do educators navigate the potential ethical dilemmas posed by students who are known and active gang or graffiti crew members? We elaborate more on these tensions later in the article. Although gangs are on a continuum from violent to benign

groups (Vigil, 1988), teachers may use this historical knowledge to have students examine their communities (Hagedorn, 2017). For example, teachers may incorporate class-assignments to read autobiographies from previous gang members turned academics or public intellectuals to show the achievement of others. Finally, if the youth are seeking out mentors in their communities and are gravitating toward gang members, what role can the schools serve to fill the void of positive mentoring relationships?

Knowing How to Interact With Law Officials

The importance of "knowing" how to interact with police is paramount for Latino boys and young men in this study, and they use their funds of gang knowledge to avoid arrest, unexpected beatings, or mistreatment by law enforcement officers. We position the current context of overpolicing boys of color in schools and communities to help others understand why these skills are necessary, relevant, and meaningful for this group of students.

Oscar has long-term aspirations to attend community college and then transfer to a 4-year university and then pursue law school to work with juveniles similar to himself. Oscar is the youngest of four siblings and the only one on track to earn a high school diploma. His older brothers were gang embedded for over 10 years and spent multiple years incarcerated and unemployed. Oscar has been a member of a tagging crew for over 4 years, previously held in juvenile facilities, and has sold drugs to supplement his single mothers' low wages from the service industry. He regularly draws from his funds of gang knowledge when he interacts with police, and in the example below, he presents his argument against the police who are trying to search him illegally.

> I have used [my constitutional rights] before. My 5th and 4th [amendments] too. [The police] always [have to] read your *Miranda Rights* before they arrest you. You have a right to an attorney, and I was like "I want an attorney and I plead the 5th [amendment]." And from there I sit quietly. [The police] tried searching me, and I like "You're not gonna search [me]. I'll use my constitutional rights for you to [not] try to search me. Until my lawyer is present, I won't allow for the searches unless there's probable cause."

Oscar does not hesitate exercising his rights to prevent police from trying to search and arrest him illegally. He shared various examples of police stopping and harassing him without probable cause over the years. Police questioned how and why he possesses such knowledge about his constitutional rights, but he does not share that he learned this information from his tagging

crew and the Internet. The ability to draw his funds of gang knowledge empowers him not to feel as if he is being taken advantage of by the police but also prevents him from being disrespected or "punked" by the police officers who often try to manipulate the law in their favor. Oscar recounts his probation officer talking about other Latino male youth on probation and how the juvenile justice systems perceive his community:

> When I see my probation officer . . . he'll [say], "Hey, these kids, they are the fuck-ups, they don't do nothing . . . [they] ain't gonna make it . . . you wanna keep acting like that [ignorant and stubborn] . . . that's how society wants [you] to be . . . Like a piece of trash . . . but that's how he treats all of his kids."

Oscar does not appreciate how the probation officer was depicting other Latino youth, and replied, "Like it's all about living and learning. We make mistakes and people sometimes learn from their mistakes." Oscar is aware he has made many mistakes, and that is why he is on probation, but he does not appreciate other youth being lumped in a group of "pieces of trash," as he sees himself changing and hopes others can change too. Oscar and others know how to interact with police and other law enforcement personnel. In this example, Oscar shows he can draw from his funds of gang knowledge to cooperate with police officers and also his probation officer to advocate his position.

Gabe was "born into gangs," so he has built his funds of gang knowledge throughout his lifetime. His father and step-father are from rival gangs, his best friends are in African American gangs, his siblings have previously been incarcerated for various reasons, and his mother is affiliated but not actively involved in gangs. When Gabe discusses his interaction with police, he shared the following story:

> Couple of days ago, I was stopped [by the police] because I was out past curfew. I was with my girlfriend, my little brother and a couple of friends . . . we all got stopped and my friend had a jug of vodka, we are under age, so we can't drink—but shit happens . . . and [the police officer] saw that [bottle of vodka] and he pulled the gun out, he un-holstered it . . . and put it on the car . . .

Gabe's father helped him build his funds of gang knowledge about how to act respectfully toward police officers because they feel superior and believe "they are God" and should not counter those ideologies as the results are either being arrested or killed without recourse to the police officer. This

information possibly passed through Gabe's mind as this continues with the interactions:

> I told the cops, "No, we are sorry, this is my backpack, we were at a party earlier, we just set [the vodka bottle] down, that's not even ours, you can dump it, you can do whatever, that's cool . . . We are just walking her home . . . she lives [in another neighborhood] . . . I am not going to let her walk home alone . . . I am not that type of dude . . . I am definitely not letting my girlfriend walk her alone at night."

Gabe was respectful and apologetic for violating curfew and possessing alcohol as a minor and worked to portray himself as a caring person and gentleman simply walking his girlfriend and female friends home after a party because of his concern about their safety. He stressed the police officer could dictate the next steps of their interactions by being allowed to "dump" the alcohol, and continues to angle his gentleman position.

> [The police officer said], "Okay, we understand," he had holstered his gun and he just dumped the [vodka] bottle, and then said, "All right, we are not going to take you guys to jail, we are not going to keep you here, call your parents, and see what they want to do, if they want to let you guys walk home," and so they called all of our parents and they all said, basically we could walk home, except for mine. My mom wanted them to take me to jail [to teach me a lesson].

This moment highlights not only the tension Latino males experience with law enforcement (Durán, 2013; Rios, 2011) but also the need to have the skills to navigate often stressful encounters with police officers (Brunson & Weitzer, 2011). As Gabe disclosed, the police officer unholstered his weapon and placed it on his vehicle which can send clear messages to Latino male youth about who is in a position of authority and controls the situation. Gabe's funds of gang knowledge allowed him not to be arrested that evening. However, if he acted differently, the outcomes might have been grave as stressed by his father in the opening quote, "treat a cop like they are God because that's what they want," which helped Gabe and others understand the power dynamics between himself and local police officers to avoid incarceration or worse—death.

The student interacts with institutional agents on a daily basis, whether these agents are police, teachers, or probation officers, and the students understand there is a power differential between themselves and the adults. Gabe and Oscar both recognized the potential outcomes of disrespecting police or probation officer, the trajectory it will place them on. In the future, these students will understand how to use these underlying information to use

for future job placement, as they will have to interact with others in power in their workplace, communities, or other spaces.

"Can't Punk Me!" Knowing How to Advance Status in Gangs or Graffiti Crews

For over a year, Rafael has been deeply embedded in a Latino gang with his two brothers. Although Rafael wants to attend a 4-year college in the future, he feels immense pressure to maintain his gang allegiance to protect his siblings from rival gang members, "I just had to [join a gang] because I saw my little brother [involved] and I can't leave my brother out." Rafael is reserved and quiet during most class periods, and hardly engages in the loud, boisterous disruptions caused by his male peers. But simultaneously, he must maintain a strong demeanor not to allow himself to be punked or belittled by others in school, the community, or any other spaces to maintain the "code of the streets" (Rios, 2011, 2017). His street and school reputation matter as gangs and tagging crews have a strong presence in ABS. He shares an example of someone trying to challenge him in the classroom.

> Yeah, I got to tell them [what gang I am affiliated with]. I can't be like a wussy, you have to man up, tell them [what gang you are connected to]. There was this one person [in school], and I told him, "What's up?" But he didn't want to get in trouble, so he sat back down. He just wanted to say, "What's up?" I was like "What's up dawg?"

Rafael cannot allow himself to be disrespected or punked in the class by a potential rival gang member. The "what's up?" is a method to challenge someone and determine the others' toughness. Rafael indicated he was ready to fight the other student in class if needed but did not further pursue this because it feels he "punked" the other student. The funds of gang knowledge permeate throughout the school and community, and youth understand they must "man up" as Rafael said. He also stated, "I can't be a wussy," and in order to save face, but also helps advance his status within his gang. He had to openly challenge the other students because he has little choice but maintain his reputation.

Gangs and tagging crew promote a level of social delinquency, which includes fighting and violence in or near schools, or online (Curry & Spergel, 1992; Patton, et al., 2018), which helps members protect their neighborhood but also increase their street status. Below, Julio shares an example of his tagging crew engaged in a rumble with rivals behind their traditional comprehensive high school. He provides an example of how a fight developed with a rival tagging crew at another high school:

One time . . . some kid came and bumped me [and said,] "Where you from?" and . . . I was like "Fuck where you from homie," and then he [said], "Let's meet up after school," so I called up my homies and then [they and the rivals arrived at the school in cars at the same time] and they're all, "What's up, fuck where you are from!" So I get out [of the car] and I was like "Get up out the car—What up?" so I punched the [car] window, the window breaks, and then I start punching this fool in his face, and then he pulls out a knife, so I stepped back, I stepped up on the [sidewalk] curb and kick [through] the [car] window, I kicked him in his neck. And then he [stabs] me [in my leg] . . . and I was [bleeding] everywhere! . . . I tied my [injury] up with my tank top and we just went down [to the gang neighborhood], 'cause the homie used to live right there. We were just chillin' . . .

The above case highlights how Julio activated his funds of gang knowledge during and after school to prevent himself from being "punked" by another person and lead the charge against the other group and sustained an injury. Another person physically hurt Julio, and the damage not only can be a symbol of his commitment to his peers and tagging crew but also allows him to increase his reputation within the tagging crew and possibly at school. It is essential to understand how Julio, and others males in this study, form and locate their funds of gang knowledge. For instance, Julio joined a tagging crew, which in his mind is a positive step forward compared with being involved in a traditional gang as his entire family is gang embedded. Julio's father spent over 10-years of time incarcerated for his gang involvement. Julio began accumulating his funds of gang knowledge as young as 3- or 4-year-olds when he started using sidewalk chalk to write the local gangs name on the different surfaces. This was not a malicious action, but only emulating the words, pictures, and symbols he saw in his low-income apartment complex. Whether a Latino young man is refusing to be belittled or punked, fighting rivals, or learning new tagging skills, the culmination of these experiences all contributes to their funds of gang knowledge to improve their reputation and status in a gang or graffiti crew.

Discussion

As shown in this article, challenging knowledge(s), and specifically funds of gang knowledge, are part of students' lives. This knowledge can be relevant and productive in school settings if educators thoughtfully and courageously incorporate gang knowledge into the curricula and school discourse to engage learners, particularly Latino males. As Moje (2000) and Zipin (2009) argued, some issues need to be carefully thought when attempting to incorporate

these students' difficult identities and knowledge(s) into schools. For instance, there may be ethical issues of sensitivity to learners' (teachers' and counselors') structures of emotion, identity and self-esteem, and legal risks to self and school. Also, there may be a set of institutional constraints that do not allow teachers to utilize these sources of knowledge as parents and outside community members may fear the glorification and validation of gang knowledge, for instance, the need to cover certain content in class, mandatory testing, and lack of professional development opportunities. In spite of these structural conditions, we claim that not incorporating these funds into the teaching and learning processes, particularly in continuation schools, may stimulate the creation of more barriers and sanctions to these students who already feel marginalized (Moje, 2000). Whether educators decide to acknowledge students' funds of gang knowledge formally, the current position of teachers and other school personnel may be to continue to perpetuate existing deficit discourses and inequities toward gang-involved youth. The need to push against social norms, school counselors, and psychologist may use funds of gang knowledge to conceptualize new strategies to address trauma and other possible exposure to violence in supporting gang-associated Latino male youth. Thus, it is important to enter this discussion with students with support from either community based organizations or other mental health professionals to broach sensitive topics with respect and a humanizing perspective. If not, students will continue to operate with the "code of the street" and use their funds of gang knowledge with or without the permission of educators, as the students must balance their commitments to their gangs and school. Listening and understanding the students' viewpoint and experiences may shed light on why Latino males and other boys of color do not trust the police and other social service professionals.

Again, educators must recognize their limitations, ethics, and preparedness to engage youth who may be in rival gangs or graffiti crews. Not every teacher or educator is capable of understanding the potentially hostile street tension that may be unwelcomely introduced into the classroom because of the ill-preparedness of an educator or be prepared to hear difficult stories of violence, trauma, and death. We suggest, as Zipin (2009) does, that it takes conceptual and analytic depth, creativity, courage, and extraordinary support, and we add *confianza* (Moll et al., 1992) to make funds of gang knowledge productive in this urban school setting.

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Note

1. Continuation schools sometimes are referred to as alternative or behavioral schools, which serve students who have been removed from traditional comprehensive school environments due to academics, behavior, suspension, or expulsion (Brown, 2007; Kelly, 1993).

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