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Marissa Aki’Nene Muñoz

At the beginning of the day the water was warm, and it was flowing smoothly, slowly. You know, you could bathe in it, and just walk into the water, and stay there. But once the sun started going down, you could see even the flow of the water was coming more rapidly, and the water was becoming mas fria, getting colder. And tambien del current and... la marea. The tide would start to get high, you know, during the day, you would stand in the middle of the water, and the water level would be just under your knees. And by maybe 6 o’clock or so, ya, it was up to about mid-thighs, aqui, más o menos. You would get out, because you could feel the current getting stronger.

You already knew, because our parents would tell you, “Te tienes que salir, porque el río es un traidor.” Tú lo ves and it’s flowing smoothly, tranquilito y todo, pero, you get in and get to a certain area, and it has undercurrents, and it pulls you. There is no way to stop from going with the current. So we knew, we were aware, and we took care of what we did. Y decían los adultos también: “¡Hey salte, salte!” “Aye, no, I’m having a good time.” There were a lot of kids at that time. Estábamos todos chiquitos so you know that not everybody would mind. Nosotros oíamos: “No se quiere salir Norma del río!” Y allá van—the grownups would go and get you outta there, because they knew. They knew more about the river than we did. (J. Ramirez, oral communication, February 2, 2016)

This story was shared by my great auntie, my gran Tia Cheffie, as four generations of women and girls from our family sat around the kitchen table, listening, laughing, and taking turns caring for my infant, Ofelia. It provides a beautiful example of how community members think and talk about the river, how the process of remembering calls forward other stories, and how concepts flow into each other within one conversation. The river, which flows almost 1,900 miles from Colorado to the Gulf of Mexico, is called Rio Grande in the US and Rio Bravo in Mexico.

My Tia Cheffie was sharing her memories of the river, deeply embedded within the familial context, speaking to me as great-niece rather than researcher. In this article, I share my educator response-abilities (Kuokkanen, 2007) and responsibilities in the development of a land-and-water-based pedagogical approach called an Indigenous Fronterizx Pedagogy of Water, specific to re-storying the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo as ancestral waters.

My name is Marissa Aki’Nene Muñoz. I am Xicana Indigena, rooted on both sides of my family to the city of Laredo, Texas, on the banks of the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo. On my mother’s side, we trace our roots to the Esto’k Gna, Coahuiltecan, Tlaxcaltecan, and Guachichil peoples of the greater region. On my father’s side, we trace to the Wixairika communities from the Real de Catorce region of San Luis Potosi, Mexico. The Rio Grande/Rio Bravo is my ancestral waters, which serves as a map read lengthwise, connecting my genealogy through countless generations to Indigenous relatives both up and downstream.

In this article, I write as an engaged granddaughter/daughter/mother, fronteriza, sixth-grade teacher, and teacher educator. This project ofrestorying the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo as ancestral waters is based on collective remembering, testimonies, listening, and making connections between the land, river, and the Indigenous communities local to Laredo, Texas. Indigenous knowledge has survived
in our collective memory in spite of detribalization, accounts of Indigenous extinction, and ongoing militarized and carceral border violence.

The purpose of the project was to use re-storying as a creative and intuitive pedagogical practice to guide our way through the intergenerational memoryscape (Riaño-Alcalá & Baines, 2011) to restore and re-story ourselves back onto/into/with our ancestral river and lands. Specifically, in engaging the collective memory of an inclusive binational, intertribal, urban, Native, and Indigenous community of Elders and knowledge-keepers, this project is not focused on the specifics of tribal identity or any particular cultural or language-based epistemology. My goal was to excavate under the many layers of colonial occupation and ongoing militarized border violence to unearth the shared Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing that have survived within my home community, connecting us to our ancestral waters, the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo.

RIVER/BORDER BACKGROUND

I was taught to begin with the ancestral languages so that the land understands when we call it by name. In Carrizo/Comecrudo language, the land is called Somi' Sek (Mancias & Torres, 2015). In English, it is named Texas. In 1848, the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo formalized the occupation of Rio Grande/Rio Bravo as an international border, forever changing how people and communities relate to both the river and water in the region. These connections have shifted dramatically over time, most noticeably in how the mainstream media in the United States has sensationalized depictions of border life with little to no acknowledgement of the river. Further complicating the tension for border communities is the ongoing militarized occupation by the US Department of Homeland Security in response to both the "war on terror" and the "war on drugs" (Fregoso, 2007; Saldaña-Portillo, 2017). The uniformed and heavily armed agents have altered the landscape not only by their physical presence, but by the heightened tension and psychological dominance that permeate all aspects of daily life. For the locals who live in my community, the presence of armored vehicles and machine guns in public spaces make it easy to forget that our life-giving ancestral river is immediately close by.

However, Laredo/Nuevo Laredo community members understand the river, the land, and themselves differently from most mainstream depictions of border life. In the last 40 years or so, within my lifetime, I have witnessed a change in how we know, live with, and talk about the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo in my community. Elders tell stories of when the river used to bring the community together, before border politics split our community into two distinct halves. The river is ever-present in conversations about daily community life, and our collective memory of the river has shaped peoples' bodies, the landscapes, and the ongoing daily practices of the community (Riaño-Alcalá & Baines, 2011). As the younger generations face increased restrictions and very limited access to the waters that nourish all life in the greater region, I was inspired to document the stories of the Elders specific to our Rio Grande/Rio Bravo to restore and restory how our youth understand themselves within the relational ecology we call home.

LEARNING FROM ELDERS

My maternal family is connected to the communities in and around Laredo, Texas, going back 12 generations and beyond to several local ancestral communities. I have been nurtured by Elder relatives and community knowledge-keepers who identify as Indigenous and Native in many ways. I focused on learning from the Elders and community knowledge-keepers to whom I am accountable, inclusive of all of the ways that ancestral knowledges are practiced in the greater territory.

In the literature, I was inspired by collective memory, which seeks to understand how a community subjectively constructs meaning from historical events, which often include interpretations, emotions,
reflections of identity, and political positions (Hom & Yamamoto, 2000). Stories and testimonies are interwoven with the commentary and are framed toward particular ends that serve both individuals and the group. Wertsch and Roediger (2008) explain that “collective memory is more like a space of contestation than a body of knowledge—a space in which local groups engage in an ongoing struggle... to control the understanding of the past” (p. 319). As an academic field, this multiplicity of voices made space for decolonial, anticolonial, and insurgent voices from both sides of our river, as a fraught international landscape of unequal power that is manifest in places, on bodies, and through voices and ideas (Castillo & Tabuenca-Córdoba, 2002). Multiplicity invites multiple authentic meanings.

Collective memory also works to narrate historical events from an embodied and emplaced perspective (Riaño-Alcalá & Baines, 2011), and is automatically positioned as a form of resistance against imposed dominant narratives of history (Seixas, 2004). In contexts of ongoing violence, written records are often systematically destroyed. Oral traditions that include collective memory serve as living archives (Riaño-Alcalá & Baines, 2011) to give accounts of the histories, contexts, and meanings of/with/in communities to counter the dominant colonial narratives, normalized through intellectual colonialism (Castillo & Tabuenca-Córdoba, 2002; Gaudry, 2011; Rodriguez, 2014). Despite these formal narratives, the community remembers both as individuals and as a collective, the unrecorded, undervalued, and unrecognized histories and shared experiences of survival.

By extension, collective memory is not abstract. It consists of embodied and emplaced knowledges, including the multisensory ways that we know where and how beings/bodies move through space and in places. Embodied refers to the critical awareness not only of our bodies in relation to other bodies, but also an awareness of the impact of our surroundings on our physical being (Nayak, 2011). Our bodies are physical receptors and transmitters of relationship to our surroundings, as well as the means through which we understand relationships in space, encoding meaning through learning, emotions, and experiences (Cobos, 2012; Lara, 2014). Similarly, the term emplaced refers to the knowledge held in specific locations, as well as how beings find and/or make meaning in particular spaces as part of the processes of witnessing, remembering, and storying (Riaño-Alcalá & Baines, 2011). Though distinct concepts, the terms are often mutually co-constructed, and within stories of collective memory, provide context and meaningful landmarks for understanding collectively shared experiences.

**(RE)STORING THE LAND, (RE)STORING THE RIVER, (RE)STORING OURSELVES**

Practices of storying, which includes story-telling and story-listening (Archibald, 2008; Razack, 1993), often encode worldviews, ecological knowledge, cultural norms, ethics, and values to create meaning (Martínez, 1998; Smith, 1999). Restorying speaks back to the dominant narratives to make space for Indigenous knowledges—to recover, remember, and revitalize the cultural knowledges of the community and land. Corntassel, Chaw-win-is, and T’lakwadzi (2009) remind us that restorying is an intervention against colonial narratives that can revitalize individual and collective consciousness. And the use of punctuation in restor(y)ing or (re)storying serves as a grammatical reminder of the mutual processes of the restoration of Indigenous knowledge through storying and restorying.

Nxumalo and Villanueva (2020) use the phrase refiguring presences as a pedagogical practice that affirms Indigenous life, land, and relations as co-constitutive entanglements of human and more-than-human life. I expand on this practice by intentionally referring to humans as beings-in-relation, to shift our attention to the verb of being and to the specific ties and relationships of always being-in-relation to other beings (Bang & Marin, 2015; Cajete, 1994, 2000; Tuck, McKenzie, & McCoy, 2014). Similarly, Indigenous knowledge systems refigure notions of ecology to be relational ecologies, in which a dynamic and responsive network of intra-dependent beings share places, resources, and life within an ecosystem (Archibald, 2008; Cajete, 1994, 2000). The phrase relational ecology makes explicit the decolonial
intervention to interrupt the anthropocentrism and constructed separation of humans from the non-
human world of environmental education (Bang & Marin, 2015; Barrett, 2012; Nxumalo, 2021; Nxumalo &
Villanueva, 2020), and move toward the response-ability (Kuokkanen, 2007) of all beings.

Centering Indigenous knowledge engages a healing process of recognition, creating safe spaces from
which to approach the embodied and emplaced stories of collective memory. In this way, I suggest that
the intergenerational storying, restorying, and sharing of collective memory can help refigure the
presences of the people, land, and Rio Grande/Rio Bravo, restoring our ancestral relational ecologies. By
(re)storying the land and river, we (re)story ourselves, our youth, and collective futures.

WHY WATER?

Water is universal to all life. Water, by its very nature, provides countless stories, metaphors, and
images for understanding. In the specific landscape of the frontera, the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo is the
primary, and often only, source of potable water for a huge watershed community. In the Statement on
Water and Indigenous peoples, presented to the 10th Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum
nurtures, shelters, and nourishes us, and we are spiritually connected through her waterways—veins
and arteries to the plants, animals, places…. Water is sacred, water is life.” In other words, water makes
life possible, not as a process that animates individual humans, but as a spirit that connects us to all
beings in creation, in which humans are small elements in the dynamic system of life. Water does not
bring us to life; the water in us is life. For my home community, the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo is life.

For example, Mrs. Bernal Flores, a knowledge-keeper and retired educator, now lives closer to the center
town, but she recalls the significance of the river to her childhood, growing up in her parents’ home, a
block and a half from the river.

The river? My dad used to take us to it. The river was the playground. I learned how to swim in the
river. My dad would take us fishing…. But my fondest [memory] is at night when I could hear the river,
the sounds of the river. When I would go to sleep, I would leave the window open and I could hear it.
Barely... but you could hear it. Everything... it provided for us and was the significance for us growing
up there. (P. Bernal Flores, oral communication, June 8, 2014)

In Ms. Bernal Flores’ story, we can understand a particular dynamic that is true for many of our
community members who live in/with/near the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo—our river is at once sacred and
forgotten. It nourishes all life, provides us with everything we need to live in the arid landscape, yet
it is no longer a part of daily life in the busy community that Laredo/Nuevo Laredo has become. The
river has not changed. We, as a community, have. In listening to the Elders, we not only remember the
significance of the river, but also who we were/are as people of the river. In a community bisected by a
river, everyone has stories of the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo.

RESPONSE-ABILITY: PEDAGOGY-MAKING AS METHOD

As an educator, I chose to enact my responsibilities and response-abilities as a deeply embedded
participant in this system of intergenerational knowledge. My dual roles as learner (as I was listening to
the stories of my own Elders) and as teacher (as I pass these teachings to the next generation) constitute
the two fundamental aspects of building and nurturing responsive pedagogy. I have come to understand
the first half of the research project, including the travel home, inviting community members, visiting,
listening, and facilitating the interviews to be the Learning Phase of my pedagogy-making process (see
Figure 1).
The second part, the Teaching Phase, included selecting the teachings, building context, representing knowledge, and connecting with learners. While each phase is distinct in terms of whether information is being received or relayed, learning and teaching are mutually constituted, shaped by context in a responsive and reflective pedagogical practice.

![Intergenerational Pedagogy of Indigenous Knowledge](image)

*Figure 1. Intergenerational Pedagogy of Indigenous Knowledge*

Although the goal was to document 10 to 12 life stories, I completed 26 oral histories of lives lived with/in the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo, creating a changing portrait of the river through time. Water, land, and people were central themes in the stories shared by Elders, and I organized and paraphrased their stories into a summary of Water Thinking (Figure 2) and a summary of Border Thinking (Figure 3).
WATER THINKING: River-as-Water concepts (paraphrased)

River as LIFE
- Water as universal to all life
- Water is life. No water is death.
- No river, no water, no Laredo.
- The river is alive.
- River is life, our source of life.
- River as relief from the arid environment
- River as a wild animal that has never been tamed.
- River a baptismal font (literally), a sacred place

River as IDENTITY
- The river is a big part of us, as part of our identity.
- The damage we do to the river, we do to ourselves.
- No water would be our death physically, and also, culturally. Culture lives here.
- River as coded language for locals, as a reflection of the social conditions. For example, “Que mugrero trajo el rio!” [The river has brought such trash here!]
- El rio es lo que une a las comunidades. [The river is what unites the communities.]
- River as the uniting factor between the sister cities, unites each side as one community.
- River as family member. “We speak of the river as we speak of a mutual relative or mutual friend.”
- “El rio es un traidor.” [The river is a traitor]

River as LAND/PLACE
- If there was no river here, the border would have no meaning – It is just another dusty town. The river has the meaning.
- River is a conduit that connects all life, conduit for information, and conduit for culture.
- The river is a map to the medicine, lengthwise. The Rio Grande/Rio Bravo is the basis of our relationship with our medicina, peyote.
- Places holding history and memories – you have to go there to hear the story to understand.
- River sounds are the soundtrack for home, relaxing.
- The river as recreational place, entertainment, adventure, as a playground, belonging to the locals.
- River as a fishing resource.

Figure 2. Water Thinking
BORDER THINKING: River-as-Border concepts (paraphrased)

Border as a THING
- The river/border is an obstacle, a hurdle to overcome
- The bridge is a trap that catches cars in traffic. Walking is faster.
- The river/border belongs to the Border Patrol and government interests.
- River/border is a one-way barrier.

Border as a SPACE
- The river/border as a transition – you don’t spend time there; you go through it.
- River/border as a place where people change. You have to switch your thinking to the other side before you leave.
- River as untouchable. It is just a place for objects to pass over via bridge.
- River/border as boundary to keep people in or out.
- River as protection, a buffer zone.

Border as a MARKER OF POWER
- Oppositional binaries (i.e., first-world versus third-world, legal versus illegal crossing, visible wealth versus visible poverty, good versus bad, Europeans versus Indigenous.
- As an unequal, unfair relationship.
- River/border as a source of income due to the boundary.
- The river as protected by armed security, but this makes it unsafe for people to go there or be there.
- River/border as a place of one-way communication, one-way policy.

Border as ARBITRARY
- Border as the wall that divides two rooms of a house – it’s still the same house.
- Border as unremarkable, trivial, or commonplace – crossing the river/border was like crossing the street.
- The river itself as a neutral ground for the nurses of the Cruz Blanca during the Mexican Revolution.
- The river brings families from both sides together; the border is what tries to keep families and people apart. People will always find a way.

Figure 3. Border Thinking
A secondary analysis included looking for evidence in the stories to explain the shift in perception between River Thinking and Border Thinking, which is paraphrased in Figure 4.

What has Changed in Our Thinking? (paraphrased)

River as UNKNOWN
• River as untouchable, as there is no longer public access to the water.
• Most Laredoans under the age of 50 have never been in the water.
• Border is a place for illegal activity.
• River as external, not a part of us, not us.
• We are disconnected from the ecology.

River as DANGEROUS
• Drowning happens daily.
• Where dangerous people are/go to do dangerous things.
• The Flood of 1954, in which the river was like a thief.
• River is an ever-present danger.
• River is in ever-present danger.
• River used to be for everybody; now it is owned by very few.
• Everybody is suspect, some more than others.

River as COMMODITY
• River as place of commerce and industry.
• As ranching has become more mechanized, there are less people on land and on/in the river in the US.
• The river as powerful political tool – power over water is the power over lives.
• Water is commodity, not a human right.

River as DIRTY
• River washes and cleans away chemical hazards of maquiladoras.
• River as a dumping ground for garbage.
• River as cesspool of unknown combinations of chemicals.
• Raw sewage dumped from both sides.
• River as a morgue, place for dead bodies.

Figure 4. The Shift from Water Thinking to Border Thinking

The progression of Water Thinking to Border Thinking is directly tied to changing policies and increased border security over time. To restory our Rio Grande/Rio Bravo and rivered community is to peel back the many newer colonial meanings, symbols, and understandings of Border Thinking to revitalize ancestral Water Thinking so that the multiple ways of being and knowing are in conversation. As a teacher, I see it as both a responsibility and response-ability (Kuokkanen, 2007) to facilitate that shift through pedagogical interventions. As such, this project moves toward a transformative potential by building an Indigenous Fronterizx Pedagogy of Water from the banks of the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo, to connect our community within our relational ecology through ancestral knowledge.
BUILDING A RESPECTFUL TEACHING PRACTICE

In my current role as a teacher educator in Texas, I have not (yet) had the opportunity to fully implement the Indigenous Fronterizx Pedagogy of Water with youth. There is a natural fit for teachers of ethnic studies, and specifically the American Indian/Native Studies for middle and high school students, in which water could easily serve as the topic for a multi-week unit plan connecting concepts of land, water, family, community, relational ecologies, and culture through interdisciplinary projects. Similarly, for K-12 teachers, different aspects of this Pedagogy of Water can be taken up and integrated into mainstream content as lessons, projects, or short units by purposefully connecting grade level standards and scaffolding with developmentally appropriate and accessible skills.

While the approach to Indigenous knowledges of water is generalizable and important for all learners, the project of collecting local water stories could happen with learners at any grade level, in any community. Understandably, teachers may have to adapt the instruction to address their specific communities, local watersheds, and local Elders and knowledge-keepers according to the local cultural protocols. Mutually respectful relationships and shared knowledge is foundational to this approach; as such, project outcomes and student work could be shared back with community members as a practice of reciprocity and collective nurturance.

To further illustrate the possible ways water stories can be integrated into existing classrooms, consider the following two examples.

**Example 1: Dr. Calderon Porter**
Teachings are not always direct or literal. Oftentimes, the listener is guided to reconsider the relationships between things—inclusive of self, family, community, and world contexts—each in relation to the others.

*The whole of Laredo culture is about the river. Our culture is distinct from any other border town. The way the river separates the cities is a friendly separation.... There are parts of it through ranches that you could walk across. There are parts of the Rio Bravo that cattle walk across, they become international cattle, and nobody likes that [laughing] but you can’t control that. But how are we different from the other sister cities? I think we’re different in what we’re called. Look at what this border did. We are Laredo and Nuevo Laredo. It’s the same name. We are not Matamoros/Brownsville, and we are not Reynosa/McAllen, and we’re not Piedras Negras/Eagle Pass. We are Laredo/Nuevo Laredo, and it’s symbolic that we were one community. (M. E. Calderón Porter, oral communication, June 13, 2014)*

**Teaching Phase 1**
For people who do not live in frontera communities, it is easy to conflate the river and the border because on a map, these two places appear to be inseparable. For community residents who live along the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo, the river is distinct from the border, and each serves a different function, as is made clear in the quote above. In just a few sentences, Mrs. Calderón Porter explains what, for her, is common knowledge—that the river and communities preceded the border. The formation of the border split communities into halves, which we now call sister cities, but for the people living in the communities, it is one big community.

In using the sister cities metaphor, we can understand the interdependence of the communities on each side of the river, related by blood, genealogy, history, and ecology. The river, understood as a life source, is what brings community on each side together, while the border works to separate and divide. Although both may exist in the same relative location across the landscape, we can start to understand the juxtaposition of irreconcilable demands that make life in/on/along/between the two challenging.
The difference between River Thinking and Border Thinking is an essential distinction that gets at the heart of what the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo means in the lives of the Laredo/Nuevo Laredo community members, and how these concepts have shifted within one lifetime.

Based on Dr. Calderon Porter’s account of the sister cities, I would ask students to map examples of the sister cities and connect these lessons to social studies standards related to reading maps or graphic depictions. A companion lesson could include having students research the history of a pair of sister cities and represent significant events on a timeline, showing how the pair of communities has influenced each other. In science, I’d have students examine watershed maps or ecological push-and-pull factors that might move populations back and forth between the sister cities.

**Example 2: Mr. Muñoz**

Some of the land-based knowledge we can learn through the stories is not general, but very specific to particular places in our local river ecology. Mr. Muñoz, a knowledge-keeper, shares:

> Tia Josefa in particular, Tia Josefa was my curandera. She knew to curar de susto, how to deliver babies, she had all kind of herbs in either alcohol or vodka. I knew if it was in a vodka bottle it was stuff that we were going to be drinking. If it was in an alcohol bottle, I had to bring the alcohol, go buy her the alcohol; sometimes it was a whole nickel for alcohol. It wasn't for drinking, it was going to be something that you would rub.

> She would say, “Alright,” she’d hand me a plant and she’d say, “See this plant?” Then she gave me a paper bag, and she’d say, “Fill this bag with this kind of plant.” Or she’d give me two plants and she’d say, “Give me a bag of this and a bag of this.”

> And I remember I asked, “What are you going to use it for?” She goes, “son para mis remedios.” I wish I had remembered and I had asked more questions now. But in her kitchen there was a cupboard that she had with all the remedios. Some of these plants that I would get her they would be in like mason jars. No labels, she’d just do it. She just knew what was for what. So the plants that she would put in mason jars, was for making teas, the plant that she would put in vodka that was going in to mason jars with plants, would be for your drinking, and whatever went into alcohol was going to be for rubbing. So, she had a bunch of them, a bunch of them. Like I said, I never knew what I was gathering, I just knew that I was helping her get some of her medicinal remedies. (O. Muñoz, oral communication, May 10, 2015)

**Teaching Phase 2**

The Laredo/Nuevo Laredo region of the river is one of several critically endangered niches nurturing a rich biodiverse community of species not found anywhere else in the world. Many locals know the flora and fauna and cultivate spiritual ways-of-knowing specific to the community and our local ecology. As a child, Mr. Muñoz knew that some of the plants found on the riverbank were medicinal plants, which his auntie Josefa knew how to use to heal people. Mr. Muñoz’s story reminds us that the land, river, and people are not considered separate entities, but instead, an interconnected network of living beings in the ecologies along the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo. Understandably, the practice of traditional plant medicines is more widespread in communities that have free access to their medicinal plants. Along the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo, the increase of border security has made cultural practices more difficult and dangerous to continue, as our river ecology are the only natural habitats where these local plant medicines grow.

If I were to use this water story in the classroom, I could focus on the development of medicines, ancestral foodways, and holistic health by connecting to a citizen science population monitoring
project, or a habitat restoration effort. We could integrate field journaling and discuss honorable harvesting practices while out in nature. In a history lesson, students could research and illustrate the many knowledge contributions of our local ancestral cultures by creating zines based on different water stories. In science, we could integrate chemistry to address the extraction process, or biology to discuss niches, endangered species, native and invasive species, or erosion of riverbanks.

In both of these examples, we can see how a Pedagogy of Water, including the collection of water stories, and subsequent teachable moments we curate for our students requires teachers to implement a backward design approach to their curriculum (McTighe & Wiggins, 2012). Focusing on the local contexts and making direct connections between students and the community they/we live in requires us to step away from pre-packaged curriculum, which some schools may discourage, but the outcome is worthwhile. Students can see themselves, their community, and their relational ecologies represented and validated in their education, and because of these connections, youth come to understand that they are deeply connected and agentic as both an individual and as a community member.

(RE)STORING OUR RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH INTERGENERATIONAL EDUCATION

The purpose of the project was to document and honor the firsthand lived experiences of Indigenous relation to the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo as ancestral waters. To do so required that I transform my own role from researcher to co-learner, carefully reconsidering each minute detail of being in-relation as a community member, and listening holistically as a granddaughter/daughter/mother. In this way, the oral histories are not referred to as data, but are instead experiences of collective memory, creative resistance, and demonstrations of emplaced and embodied Indigenous knowledge. Community Elders are living archives. Our stories are healing.

In my own notebooks, I’ve drawn many iterations of the following model, which depicts the essential considerations in the development of a culturally relevant Indigenous Fronterizx Pedagogy of Water (see Figure 5).

![Figure 5. Embodying the Indigenous Fronterizx Pedagogy of Water](image-url)
The model consists of four interrelated foundational aspects that are essential to the restoring and restorying process: the holistic identity of students, the holistic identity of educators, land/water-based curriculum, and life-based learning communities. The Indigenous Fronterizx Pedagogy of Water models a process of land- and water-based pedagogy that explicitly reorients our relationship to/with water, by embodying the characteristics of water so that we recognize how connected we are to/by/with the waters in the relational ecologies where we live. Similarly, by approaching water relationally, we remember that we are also response-able and responsible to/for the care of water, not as an inanimate substance, but as the most precious life of which we are a part. In this way, education can drive community-led transformation toward a protection of water as life, addressing the global crisis through many simultaneous and diverse local interventions.

The Indigenous Fronterizx Pedagogy of Water demonstrates the ways that the stories of our living archives—our community Elders and knowledge-keepers—can help shape our collective futures in the service of our collective wellbeing. Education reimagined this way moves away from institutional models of youth development intended to control and assimilate young minds, and toward models of purposeful, culturally sustaining freedom dreaming (Love, 2019). To survive as a healthy community, we need creative, socially aware, response-able community members who can draw on their ancestral knowledge to respond to the new contexts that they will encounter.

**REFUSING TO FORGET**

In this article, I described the process for building the Indigenous Fronterizx Pedagogy of Water from the testimonios of our community Elders. I described the purpose of restorying the river, drawing on the idea of a confluence, as an invitation to keep multiple, simultaneous meanings of the river/border in conversation with each other. I gave shape to the Pedagogy of Water by illustrating the interdependence between the students, educators, land/water-based curriculum, and life-based learning communities as elements essential to the restorying process. I described the characteristics of embodying and inspiriting the Pedagogy as a praxis, so that water is not simply content, but also informs a holistic and culturally centric teaching praxis.

Within one more generation of normalized military occupation and carceral wall structures, our community may not fully remember when our Rio Grande/Rio Bravo held Laredo and Nuevo Laredo together as deeply connected and interdependent sister cities. Future generations may never swim, fish, play, or enjoy the public spaces along the banks of their own ancestral waters because of the normalization of Border Thinking. In response, this project creates an intervention by refusing to forget, restoring and restorying the relationship between the community and Rio Grande/Rio Bravo, so that our youth may understand what our Elders have always known: that water is life. Our Rio Grande/Rio Bravo is our collective lives.
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