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Ethnic Studies Pedagogies is an open access online journal committed to critical race, decolonial, and ethnic studies movements, bridging public pedagogies with PK-12 contexts. We invite submissions using critical frameworks and methodologies that theorize, investigate, and reflect upon the ecologies of power and resistance both inside and outside the PK-12 classroom.

All submissions are reviewed by editorial board members, scholars, together with teachers and community members. We invite submissions from scholar-activists, educators, organizers, and students in the form of scholarly research, archival histories, action research pedagogies, testimonios, photo essays, and art.

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ISSUE THEME

“Struggle Builds on Struggle”: Resistance and Organizing Through Ethnic Studies II

LEAD EDITORS

Marisol O. Ruiz & Nancy Perez

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In Appreciation,

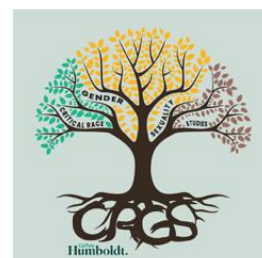
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Highlands University



Editorial Commentary

Struggle Builds on Struggle II

Marisol O. Ruiz, New Mexico Highlands University & Cal Poly Humboldt
Dulcinea Lara, New Mexico State University
Manal Hamzeh, New Mexico State University

Adbusters asks Pepe Mujica (ex-president of Uruguay) “Do you think humanity can change?” Pepe Mujica answers: “It could change. But the market is very strong. It has generated a subliminal culture that dominates our instinct. It’s subjective. It’s unconscious. It has made us voracious buyers. We live to buy; we work to buy. And we live to pay. Credit is a religion. So, we’re kind of screwed up.” (Adbusters, 2025)

It is about learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. For the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master’s house as their only source of support. (Audre Lorde, 2020, pp. 41–42)

Audre Lorde’s call in 1979 guides/grounds us, especially those of us working in United States institutions of higher education, an exclusionary and racist system—indeed one of the quintessential “master’s houses.” We might place Lorde’s call alongside Mujica’s lament about capitalism’s hidden, violent forces to fortify us as we keep building toward the possibility of liberation within our work- work that emerges from the academy but is not guided by it. Using our subversive tools within the master’s house, we practice liberatory education in public institutions, asserting that their funds are the peoples’ monies and, at the same time, subverting their “secret” policing practices that expel, exclude, and mostly omit most students from public education. Liberatory and subversive practices like these expose the bluntness of authoritative regimes within U.S. institutions—and it is increasingly evident that some so-called leaders are willing to comply or capitulate to the regime. Therefore, now is a crucial moment to expose the violent academic systems in which we live and labor while remaining guided/grounded by the calls and wisdoms put forward by the refusers and resisters, those of us who are not seduced by institutional dressings that attempt to veil colonial underpinnings.

In the California State University system, there is a “time, place, and manner” rule that enables policing and surveillance of university students’ protests. Such policies and practices contradict the right to freedom of speech and the fundamental purpose of public protest (Maldonado-Torres, 2016). We are seeing students protest university policies and administrators’ decisions and orders that uphold U.S. empire’s hegemony enabling research and teachings that support wars, the prison industrial complex, land theft, and exploitation. These students are being punished for “disrupting learning,” although they are often practicing what they learn at universities when their consciousness is heightened, and eyes and hearts opened.

Surveillance and punishment—arresting students—supplants the purpose of “higher learning” as students’ mounting calls to stop the genocidal war against the Palestinians since 2023 gain visibility, efficacy, and power on university campuses across the U.S. As we write, the first student political prisoner, also a Palestinian U.S. resident and student at Columbia University, Mahmoud Khalil, has been abducted by “secret” police without charges and detained at an ICE site. Faculty continue to be castigated and even fired for teaching Palestine, all activities that violate the basic credo of institutions of higher learning—to profess and enhance higher knowing. As part of this resistance, we call for collective action that obligates us to envision and create new ways of being in solidarity and thinking together to imagine freedom anew and craft our vision of abolitionist spaces and practices, in this moment.

Although, as Ethnic Studies scholars and liberatory-minded peoples, we have always named and exposed these colonial violences and traced their histories—the “newness” of this moment is that the democratically veiled facade has been arrogantly ripped off and now we can see clearly what we are up against—or rather, what has antagonized covertly is now carrying out its intention overtly and arrogantly. We assert that under these new/old colonial adjustments and productions (Maldonado-Torres, 2016), education is itself a continuous act of resistance and liberation.

Newly emerging authoritative control over our speech, ideas, pedagogies, and literal movements is foundational to buttress the “master’s house” Audre Lorde wrote about, and we see it so clearly today as policies are exercised that fire, abduct and disappear, imprison, threaten, and silence our colleagues and students. U.S. universities are becoming part of the prison/military and ICE industrial complex by reproducing coloniality within the teachings and research efforts of higher education. If we are going to continue building struggles on past struggles, as a way of honoring and engaging the trajectory of Ethnic Studies, we must build a world of solidarity and liberatory movements with nourishing and loving communities inside and outside of these institutions. Simultaneously, as infiltrators within the “master’s house,” we must refuse addictions to colonial “bait” that results in complicity and instead utilize public funds to do the struggle work, based on our fierce liberatory pedagogies and co-created knowledge/meaning-making in/with our communities. Also, as part of an abolitionist morality in the current struggle, our obligation is to reclaim liberatory public learning spaces within the “master’s house,” inviting students to a decolonial praxis to co-build and co-imagine living around and outside the “master’s house.” This decolonial liberatory praxis requires building with communities, locally and internationally.

In our lifetimes, we have borne witness to cyclical distractions issued by the so-called democratic U.S. government vis-a-vis never-ending policy reforms that trick us into believing that there are “two sides” and there can be no other way—a “third way,” let’s say, except to watch the pendulum sway. This call for another way, a third way, is demonstrated by the struggles and demands by the Puerto Rican movement, Black Panther, Black Berets, Third World Liberation Front, Chicanos Unidos Por la justicia, Chicanos Communication Center, etc. . . . All of the grassroots movements that called for a “third way” in the 1960s and ’70s in the U.S. taught us that at the start of their struggles, they opened fissures in the dominant colonial U.S. system, created liberatory opportunities, and simply implemented what they wanted and desired. They did not ask for a permit to protest, recall a corrupt politician, or open new educational programs- the calls were not reformist or cautious of upending violent structures and systems that purportedly cared for people. They were calls to self-sustainability and solidarity toward healthier and happier ways of living. We wonder if these calls from decades ago are what we should revive and what those calls sound like

today as we consider a struggle-on-struggle approach. To refuse the rules, to upend the terms of the nationalist game, and to just do what we desire and deserve, does this seem radical? Or does this sound like what the current fascist administration is doing as it works to destroy decades of working peoples' gains so the elites, the 1% of this nation, can thrive?

We feel in our gut the urgency to look at the old "wisebooks" as guides for future action, return to basics, and refuse the seduction that we've "made it" and instead, disobey, refuse, and not seek permission from anyone. Our will to re-imagine and re-create strategies while being guided by tried tools, like grassroots local media groups such as El Grito del Norte and El Grito Newsletter in New Mexico, El Gallo in Colorado, and other land-based platforms for organizing and encouraging communities through truth-telling. We need to go back to working with/as communities to be self-sufficient, responsive to each other and to ourselves, and work toward building community that, unlike institutions that instill competition and fear, will help us heal and grow trust, solidarity, love, and move us toward the world we want to inhabit—one without a master's colonial house, its logics, and tools.

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Superpowers

Marisol O. Ruiz

I wish I had
real, real
badass
super
powers,

so I can zap! zap! zap!
all those
haters,

all those
VIOLENT PREDATORS,

those Capitalist
Extractors of mother earth,

PUSHERS of the
dirty dollar and
the smoking mirrors of
bitcoin and crypto.
Zap! Zap! Zap!
gone

Those addicted to war,
who love to commit
genocide
on the innocent
Zap! Zap! Zap!
gone.

Those capitalist
gas lighters
who want to
capitalize on
the
air we breathe,
calling it
the
Carbon Trade Market
Zap! Zap! Zap!
Gone.

The deceptors
who destroy
the land that

feeds us
with their
Hydrogen energy production
falsehood,
and their
fabricated terms:
Pink hydrogen-
gray hydrogen.
Falsifiers,
fraudsters.
Zap! Zap! Zap!
Gone.

Those imperialists,
assassins
who love to
massacre whole towns
and
villages
for their rivera.
Zap! Zap! Zap!
Gone.

Zap! Zap! Zap!
to all those
who consistently

WAGE war on
the people,
land,
air, and
water.

Killing people abroad
with their bombs,
AI and
drones.

While
they kill
us slowly

Contaminating
the air we breath
through tritium venting,

Selling us
produced water
and calling it

clean
when it all came
from
oil and gas
companies.

By testing their
nuclear weapons
on our communities
and disposing of it
in our neighborhoods,
towns and villages.

They invest in the moon
While we perish

With my superpowers,
all those invested in
Exterminating Life
will be zapped away.

So, we can
Be free

So, we can
restore,
revive, and
replenish
mother earth

So, we can live in solidarity
with one another
work together to
extinguish VIOLENCE
From our lives
And vocabulary.

Where all living beings
can live in peace
and with dignity.

Disrupting Colonial Logics: Transformational Resistance Against SB 17 and the Dismantling of DEI in Texas Higher Education

Angela Valenzuela, University of Texas at Austin
María Del Carmen Unda, University of Texas at Austin
Julio Mena Bernal, University of Texas at Austin

Abstract

This ethnographic study examines how students, faculty, and grassroots organizers across Texas mobilized in response to Senate Bill 17, a 2023 law banning diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs in public higher education. Grounded in Solórzano and Delgado Bernal's (2001) framework of transformational resistance and decolonial theory (Mignolo, 2007; Valenzuela, 2019, 2021), we trace four key strategies: the formation of pro-DEI organizations, digital narrative reclamation, embodied refusal through legislative protest, and the cultivation of intergenerational coalitions rooted in mutual aid and political education. These efforts exemplify transformational resistance—a mode of political engagement that confronts injustice while building new models of democratic practice and collective care. As ethnographer-activists, we write not only as analysts but as witnesses to a movement. Drawing on participant observation, policy analysis, and social media ethnography across two legislative sessions, we argue that what emerged was not mere opposition, but a collective assertion of dignity, democracy, and historical memory in the face of epistemic violence (Spivak, 1988). This study challenges narratives that frame DEI as divisive, offering instead a counter-story of resistance rooted in justice, care, and refusal.

Introduction: "We Were There to Resist"

The morning of April 6, 2023, was cool and breezy—the kind of air that felt charged with purpose. I, María Del Carmen Unda, woke up early to a phone call from a member of Texas Students for DEI. Their voice carried both urgency and calm: "Would you be willing to print the testimonies for today's hearing?" Without hesitation, I said yes. It would be my honor. That morning, I moved with intention. As the coffee brewed, I centered myself—grounding in ritual, prayer, and the presence of my ancestors. I called upon the women who had come before me, who had spoken even when silenced, who had stood firm when institutions tried to disappear them. I carried their strength with me as I stepped into the day. I walked into my office at the College of Education at UT Austin before sunrise, printed out the testimonies—each page a cry for belonging—and made

my way to the Texas Capitol. The building stood tall, an enduring monument to exclusion. But we were there to challenge that legacy. We were there to resist. (Unda's fieldnotes, April 6, 2023)

I, Julio J. Mena Bernal, entered the Capitol already weary from weeks of late-night labor. But this exhaustion was deeper—an ache from watching the state codify exclusion into law. LGBTQ+ youth, immigrants, students of color—all under attack. The bills moved through the legislature like bricks stacking into a wall. Yet I showed up, fueled by the memory of every student I had ever mentored, especially those who walked into higher education spaces feeling unwelcome, unseen, or unsafe. I showed up for them. I took notes, I handed out testimony slips, I moved through corridors like a ghost with purpose. Every step, every whisper, every name called in testimony was an act of refusal. (Mena Bernal's fieldnotes, April 6, 2023)

Meanwhile, I, Angela Valenzuela, made my way to the Capitol with both a sense of dread and a need to sound the alarm on SB 17 and its companion bill, Senate Bill 2313. These were not just policies; they were ideological assaults. Their language masked their intent, recalling echoes of McCarthyism and the Red Scare. They sought to criminalize diversity, equity, and inclusion—the very principles that safeguard academic freedom, protect vulnerable communities, and cultivate educational justice. On that day, I carried not only my protest but also the grief of watching our public institutions turn against their missions, and witnessing increasing numbers of faculty of color in my own small circle at UT either planning on leaving the university or just having done so. (Valenzuela's fieldnotes, April 6, 2023)

Together, these fieldnotes offer a window into our ethnographic approach: one rooted not in detachment, but in embodied presence, historical memory, and resistance from within. This is not a story observed from the sidelines. It is a collective account of co-struggling, co-theorizing, and refusing to disappear under the weight of state repression.

Our study documents the grassroots resistance that emerged in response to SB 17—a 2023 Texas law banning diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs in public higher education. Drawing from Solórzano and Delgado Bernal's (2001) theory of transformational resistance and Mignolo's (2007) concept of the colonial matrix of power, we argue that communities across Texas did not merely protest the law. They built new infrastructures of care, coalition, and counterpower.

Using critical ethnography, social media analysis, and policy tracking, we identify four interrelated strategies that defined this resistance: the formation of new pro-DEI organizations, the use of digital platforms for narrative reclamation, the occupation of legislative spaces as acts of embodied refusal, and the cultivation of intergenerational, cross-sector coalitions rooted in mutual aid and political education. These responses constitute what we term transformational resistance—a form of political engagement that not only opposes injustice but builds new models of democratic practice and collective care. As ethnographer-activists, we write this not only as analysis, but as testimony. This is the story of how Black, Brown, and allied communities across Texas refused silence—and dared to build a different future in the shadow of erasure.

Together, our stories mark the beginning of this ethnographic journey—an account of transformational resistance from within and against what Mignolo (2007) and Valenzuela (2019, 2021) refer to as the “colonial matrix of power.” Ours is a testimony not just of resistance, but of a refusal to be erased. This is a story of what happens when communities confront the colonial matrix

of power in real time: not as an abstract theory, but as a daily, grinding force that shapes what we teach, who gets to speak, and what gets remembered.

Even before SB 17 was signed into law by Governor Abbott on June 17, 2023, its chilling effects were already reverberating across Texas campuses. Administrators began dismantling DEI programs months in advance, citing “legal caution” or “compliance” (Zamora & Valenzuela, 2023). But what we saw—and lived—was a quiet betrayal of shared governance, academic freedom, and the moral imperative of care that DEI programs provided. The haste with which institutions folded to political pressure was not just disappointing—it was telling. Rather than standing firm on values like academic freedom or equity, many institutions acted out of fear, legal caution, or political alignment. As Zamora and Valenzuela (2023) and Valenzuela (2024) report, the university’s quick retreat was neither neutral, nor inadvertent. It revealed instead complicity, recklessness, and the very systemic biases that DEI programs are designed to address (also see Bingamon, 2024).

This study documents the community response that followed. Through grounded ethnography, policy analysis, and digital media tracking, we tell the story of how students, faculty, and community partners came together to resist. This is what transformational resistance looks like in the face of legislative repression, weaponized ambiguity, and orchestrated campaigns of erasure.

What Is Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion? A Review of the Literature

Since the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, efforts to institutionalize diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in U.S. education have aimed to address systemic disparities and expand access to opportunity. In higher education, DEI refers to a constellation of initiatives and policies intended to improve campus climate, broaden participation, and dismantle structural barriers for historically marginalized populations—including students of color, first-generation students, LGBTQ+ students, students with disabilities, and others who face compounded forms of exclusion. Scholars emphasize that while DEI frameworks alone cannot dismantle the deep-rooted legacy of racism and inequality in U.S. education, they remain essential to fostering equitable learning environments and promoting institutional accountability (Gurin et al., 2002; Claville, 2024; Trolan & Parker, 2022). As Denson and Chang (2009) note, DEI programs have contributed to increased student engagement, retention, and satisfaction, particularly among both underrepresented and underserved groups.

Drawing on Smith’s (2020) influential framework, we understand DEI efforts in higher education as organized across four overlapping domains: The first is representation. Who is present in higher education—who applies, is admitted, graduates, teaches, and leads—remains a central concern. Despite modest gains in student access, faculty diversity remains stagnant (Doane & Unda 2023). Scholars point to persistent underrepresentation of Black, Latinx, and Indigenous faculty, especially in STEM fields and at elite institutions (Garces, 2013; (Griffin, Pérez, Holmes, & Mayo, 2011). The second is campus climate: DEI initiatives often focus on shaping the lived experiences of students on campus—through cultural centers, mental health resources, affinity spaces, and community-building efforts. These are crucial for retention and student well-being, especially in predominantly white institutions (Harper et al., 2024; Grant & Ghee, 2000).

Third, curriculum and pedagogy are a third area of focus. While DEI staff do not typically control academic content, they frequently support faculty through trainings, co-curricular programs, and

student-led forums that address implicit bias, center marginalized perspectives, and promote service learning (Cruz & Giles, 2000). Courses in Ethnic Studies, Gender and Sexuality Studies, and related fields have played a central role in institutionalizing critical inquiry around race, power, and belonging. A final area is institutional structures and compliance. DEI offices have played a vital role in ensuring legal compliance with federal civil rights protections, such as Title VI, Title IX, and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Contrary to claims that DEI efforts impose a rigid ideology, many initiatives are essential for upholding civil rights protections and ensuring equal treatment under the law (Claville, 2024). DEI is both structural and affective, woven into the fabric of institutional practices, student support systems, curriculum design, and the rhetorical commitments universities make toward fostering inclusive excellence. Far from being coercive, these efforts are often the very mechanisms by which institutions live up to their stated values of fairness, representation, and justice.

Despite these contributions, DEI has been deliberately politicized and mischaracterized as “divisive” and “discriminatory.” This coordinated, well-funded ideological campaign was revealed in an in-depth investigation by *New York Times* reporter Nicholas Confessore (2024), who exposes the machinations of a broader white supremacist movement aimed at dismantling DEI and multiculturalism more broadly. Internal documents he secured from groups like the Claremont Institute reveal strategies to reframe terms like “DEI,” “CRT,” and “social justice” as threats to national unity, using language such as “divisive” and “discriminatory” to undermine public support and justify restrictive legislation.

An added weapon in their arsenal is supplying conservative legislators with model bill language, fueling white supremacist, grievance politics playing out most recently since the murder of George Floyd and the momentary success of the Black Lives Matter movement, as maintained by Jefferson and Ray (2022). If for a moment, these events shook the nation’s conscience about enduring, systemic racial inequality in America. What intensified instead was what Jefferson and Ray (2022) term, “white backlash.”

By this, they mean the violent backlash, both symbolic and real, followed by laws designed to weaken the political power of Black—and by implication—Brown communities while reinforcing the dominance of white political interests. Today, this pattern continues through the anti-DEI agenda, which not only seeks to dismantle efforts toward equity and inclusion but also works to enforce a narrow, sanitized version of American history. These efforts aim to preserve the comforting mythology of uninterrupted racial progress—a narrative many find reassuring, even as it obscures the realities of systemic injustice.

While critics conflate DEI with ideological indoctrination, research overwhelmingly shows that students benefit from learning in diverse environments—both academically and socially (Gurin et al., 2002; Denson & Chang, 2009). Moreover, DEI initiatives are not monolithic; they vary in scope and quality, shaped by institutional context, leadership, and community engagement (Smith & Schonfeld, 2000).

In this study, we approach DEI not as a checklist or bureaucratic function but as a contested and evolving terrain of struggle—a site where battles over representation, power, and belonging are waged daily in ways big and small. The banning of DEI in Texas is not merely an administrative

decision—it is a calculated act of epistemic violence aimed at erasing the histories, identities, and futures of communities long marginalized by higher education. Whether through outright exclusion or the persistent centering of Eurocentric norms and narratives, these institutions have historically failed to serve all communities equitably. This latest policy move deepens that legacy, reaffirming whose knowledge is deemed valuable—and whose is systematically silenced.

Transformational Resistance Theory and the Colonial Matrix of Power

To understand the multifaceted resistance to SB 17, we draw on Solórzano and Delgado Bernal's (2001) theory of transformational resistance, placed in conversation with decolonial critiques of institutional power (Mignolo, 2007; Valenzuela, 2019, 2021). Transformational resistance is not reactive or individualistic; it is political, collective, and rooted in a critical consciousness of structural injustice. It emerges from communities directly impacted by oppression and seeks to remake institutions in the image of justice, care, and belonging.

This framework is especially urgent in an era of increasing repression, where students and faculty are forced to defend the gains of racial justice movements against legislative rollback. Unlike forms of oppositional behavior that manifest as defiance or disengagement, transformational resistance is driven by a vision. It names the harm, confronts the system, and works toward building something new. It does not seek reform alone, but transformation.

To locate these acts of resistance within a broader structure of domination, we invoke Mignolo's (2007) concept of the colonial matrix of power—a global system that defines whose knowledge is legitimate, whose identities are valued, and whose histories are remembered. In Texas, this matrix reveals itself through legislative practices that schedule hearings during teaching hours, limit testimony to two minutes, or feign engagement while checking phones or taking breaks. The message is clear: democratic participation is tolerated but not generally welcomed unless it supports a reactionary agenda.

SB 17 operates squarely within this matrix. With vague, ominous language and terms like “DEI” left undefined, the law wields ambiguity as a weapon. As Valenzuela has documented in countless fieldnotes, even legislators sponsoring the bill struggled to articulate its provisions. In his best West Texas twang, one lawmaker confessed: “It’s not the ‘D’ or the ‘I’ that I have a problem with. It’s the ‘E.’ I believe in ‘equality,’ not ‘equity.’” This quote reflects the racialized logic of colorblindness—an erasure of systemic inequality cloaked in the language of neutrality. “It also reflected a reluctance to say ‘diversity,’” Valenzuela noted during a Black Brown Dialogues on Policy (BBDP) meeting, “suggesting a rhetorical opening—however narrow—for the term ‘diversity,’ since most legislators represent districts that are racially and ethnically diverse.” (Valenzuela, January 20, 2023, field notes).

It also taught us that the word *diversity* is not inherently threatening to many lawmakers, especially when framed in terms of demographic representation rather than systemic critique. Knowing this helped us to develop more nuanced advocacy strategies, ones that emphasized shared values like inclusion and belonging while carefully navigating the ideological minefields that words like “equity” now trigger in the Texas Legislature.

Higher education in Texas—especially at flagship institutions like UT Austin—has long mirrored the colonial matrix of power through the dominance of Eurocentric knowledge systems and institutional ideologies that marginalize Indigenous, Black, Latinx, and non-Western epistemologies. This is evident in curricula, hiring practices, and leadership structures overwhelmingly shaped by whiteness (Nettles, 2019; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017), a condition that de Sousa Santos (2007) characterizes as “epistemic dominance”—a global pattern of privileging Western ways of knowing while devaluing those deemed as “less than,” or “other.” While Ethnic Studies and Women’s and Gender Studies have expanded in recent decades, they often remain structurally peripheral, siloed in co-curricular programming or student services rather than meaningfully integrated into core curriculum, faculty hiring, or institutional governance (Ahmed, 2012; Aparicio, 2013).

At the heart of SB 17 is a deeper aim: to erase the hard-won infrastructure of civil rights under the guise of neutrality. This is what Tuck and Yang (2012) call “settler futurity”—a political project to fortify white supremacy by deleting the tools communities have used to survive and resist. Viewed through this lens, SB 17 is not merely a policy—it is a technology of epistemic violence (de Sousa Santos, 2018).

We turn to transformational resistance not only to track opposition to SB 17, but to understand the creation of alternative educational futures. The organizing practices we document are not spontaneous. They are rooted in historical memory, community wisdom, and the daily refusal to accept exclusion as inevitable. In that refusal lies the possibility of transformation.

Methods

Our methodological approach is grounded in critical ethnography and guided by the ethics of decolonial inquiry. While our study focuses on transformational resistance in response to SB 17 and the dismantling of DEI in Texas higher education, we recognize that these struggles are not isolated (e.g., see Valenzuela, 2024). The Spring 2024 repression of pro-Palestinian protestors at the University of Texas at Austin shares deep structural affinities with the crackdown on DEI efforts, particularly in how both mobilizations were met with heightened surveillance, administrative suppression, and attempts to delegitimize youth-led activism. However, this paper does not address those events directly due to temporal scope, data boundaries, and our commitment to preserving analytical depth in documenting the specific ecosystem of resistance that emerged in response to SB 17. That said, we view these struggles as part of a broader architecture of repression that seeks to silence dissent, erase marginalized narratives, and fortify state-aligned ideologies under the guise of neutrality, efficiency, and order.

We did not observe from the sidelines—we engaged from within. We are scholar-activists embedded in the struggle, bringing our full selves to the work: as faculty, graduate students, organizers, and community educators. We drew on Foley and Valenzuela’s (2005) concept of an ethnography of public policy—one that rejects neutrality and centers the lived experience of those most impacted by policy violence.

Data collection spanned from January 2022 through Spring 2024 and included participant observation at legislative hearings, rallies, meetings, and teach-ins; policy and legislative document analysis; and a social media ethnography of Instagram, Twitter, blogs, and online testimonies. We

engaged with public and private conversations across Capitol offices, living rooms, Zoom calls, and digital group chats. We also recorded fieldnotes, audio memos, and testimonies while protecting participant anonymity where requested.

Weekly debrief meetings allowed us to triangulate our findings, surface emergent themes, and track shifts in language and strategy. We analyzed our data using grounded theory and thematic coding, identifying recurring motifs like institutional overcompliance, erasure, and narrative reframing. For example, rather than defending “D-E-I” as an abstract acronym, we foregrounded its concrete impacts—emphasizing diversity broadly, highlighting support for veterans and students with disabilities, and centering the goal of fostering belonging for all students. Drawing on Michener (2018), we paid close attention to digital resistance tactics, meme culture, and the role of Gen Z organizers in shaping public discourse.

Research Context and Positionality

We conducted this research as scholar-activists embedded in the communities targeted by SB 17. Beyond our academic roles, we serve as cultural workers in a long-standing Saturday school named Academia Cuauhtli (or “Eagle Academy” in Nahuatl) for immigrant, Spanish-speaking children from working-class families in East Austin. Itself an intergenerational, grassroots project, our commitments lie in nurturing liberatory spaces of possibility and cultural affirmation (Valenzuela, Zamora, & Rubio, 2015).

We would rather devote ourselves to building such spaces than responding to state-sanctioned attacks on our communities. Yet the urgency of the moment demanded action. During this period, Valenzuela taught her policy course at the Capitol, Unda worked on a dissertation unrelated to DEI, and Mena Bernal interned in a legislative office. These overlapping roles shaped the contours of this ethnography and gave us direct access to legislative processes. Our positionalities as faculty, graduate students, and organizers shaped the questions we asked, the relationships we built, and the ethical obligations we carried.

We did not observe from a distance. We engaged from within—co-struggling and co-theorizing alongside those most affected. This orientation required us to move beyond detached analysis toward a praxis grounded in reciprocity, trust, and mutual care. It also required holding space for the emotional labor, urgency, and vulnerability that comes with resisting institutional harm. Our methodology, then, is not just data collection—it is a form of solidarity. That said, research came at great personal cost. Organizing and fieldwork took a physical, emotional, and spiritual toll. Unda, for instance, experienced memory gaps linked to stress-induced dissociation (Sandi, 2007). As co-founder of BBDP, Valenzuela simultaneously juggled strategy meetings, research, caregiving as a grandmother, and organizing efforts—a deeply intergenerational commitment. Julio navigated the dual pressures of classroom responsibilities and the unrelenting demands of the legislature, where each passing day brought mounting urgency, emotional strain, and physical exhaustion. Yet he persisted, driven by a sense of duty to his students and his community. These realities shaped our approach and reflect our investment in the work.

In summary, our methodology reflects a commitment to reciprocity and accountability to community, aligning with Smith’s (2002) injunction to approach research as a decolonizing practice—particularly among Indigenous populations—where method itself is shaped by relational

ethics and collective responsibility. We did not treat communities as data sources but as co-theorists in struggle. We shared our drafts, co-presented at town halls, and participated in organizing strategy sessions as part of the research process. Our findings, then, are not simply academic—they are offerings back to the communities who made this work possible.

Findings: The Building of an Architecture of Resistance

The resistance to SB 17 was not spontaneous—it was strategic, relational, and historically informed. Across two legislative sessions and into early implementation, students, faculty, and community organizers mounted a coordinated response that defied the narrative of inevitability and apathy often projected onto marginalized groups.

One key element was the formation of new pro-DEI organizations. Groups such as Black Brown Dialogues on Policy (BBDP) and Texas Students for DEI emerged to meet the moment—intentionally centering intergenerational leadership, intersectional analysis, and public education. These spaces fostered political literacy and collective action across ethnic, age, and institutional lines. BBDP in particular brought together academics, students, civil rights, and grassroots community members using legislative advocacy, research, and public dialogue.

Texas Students for DEI, meanwhile, played a crucial student-led role in galvanizing campus activism and resisting the cultural framing of DEI as ideological indoctrination. Through Instagram and Twitter, they shared strategic messaging, called attention to legislative threats such as SB 17, and framed their resistance as an act of care and solidarity. Their digital presence emphasized the lived experiences of students of color, LGBTQIA+ communities, and first-generation college students, bringing a critical, intersectional lens to a rapidly unfolding policy landscape.

Through intentional alliance-building—between students and elders, between grassroots organizers and civil rights veterans, and between K–12 and higher education advocates—a resilient infrastructure emerged. This coalition did not just resist SB 17; it helped establish an architecture of resistance designed for long-term struggle and democratic renewal. Each of our major findings reveals a vibrant and adaptive movement—one that resists not only the dismantling of DEI programs but also the broader project of epistemic violence that seeks to erase the histories, contributions, and presence of marginalized communities in public education.

Embodied Refusal and the Pedagogy of Presence

On April 6, 2023, more than 100 students, faculty, and community members filled the Texas Capitol to testify against SB 17. While only 43 individuals were allowed to speak, nearly three times that number waited in line for hours, many clutching printed statements they would never read aloud. As one student from UT-Austin whispered to another while standing in the hallway: *“Even if they don’t let me speak, they’ll see I was here.”* (Fieldnotes, April 6, 2023). That quiet assertion captured the ethos of the day: presence as resistance.

The hearing room itself was transformed through collective action. Organizers distributed printed testimonies, stickers reading “Education is a Right,” and coordinated a silent sit-in when the committee delayed proceedings by over an hour. At one point, when Senator Brandon Creighton dismissed a student’s concern as “ideological,” three attendees stood and held signs silently reading

“We belong here.” Though security approached, no one was removed—a calculated act of collective defiance that disrupted the space without escalating confrontation (Mena Bernal Fieldnotes, April 6, 2023).

This was not merely symbolic. Following Judith Butler’s (2015) theory of assembly, participants enacted what we understand as pedagogies of presence—a form of embodied learning and unlearning that unfolded in real time. As testimony after testimony connected personal trauma to the structural violence of the bill, listeners wept, embraced, and responded with affirmations like “say that” and “thank you for your courage.” In that room, grief became pedagogy; vulnerability became instruction. This was collective education—not in a classroom, but in a contested public space.

To document these dynamics, we collected over 70 testimonies submitted in writing, as well as screenshots of blog posts and social media threads reflecting on the hearing. In one widely shared post, a student wrote: “*They made us wait 9 hours to testify. But they can’t erase the way we showed up for each other. We turned that sterile chamber into a classroom of truth.*” (Instagram, @txstudentsforDEI, April 7, 2023).

Digital Resistance and the Reclamation of Narrative Authority

In the absence of mainstream media coverage sympathetic to student and faculty perspectives, activists strategically turned to digital platforms as tools of resistance. Rather than simply communicating, they crafted what we term *counter-narratives of presence and protest*—digital acts of refusal that challenged dominant political messaging while affirming collective belonging.

On March 11, 2023, Texas Students for DEI hosted an Instagram Live teach-in featuring student organizers from UT Austin, Texas A&M, and Texas State. The conversation, which drew over 1,000 views within 48 hours, opened with a land acknowledgment and then moved into testimonies about the psychological toll of SB 17. One student shared, “*We’re told to feel grateful just to be here. But we belong here. And we’ll keep fighting for the next generation.*” (Teach-in transcript, March 11, 2023). This digital gathering functioned as both a mobilizing tool and a healing space—blurring the line between organizing and education.

Other posts became highly visible cultural texts in their own right. On March 13, 2023, @txstudentsforDEI shared a carousel image with the caption: “*Texas is big enough for all of us. Diversity isn’t a threat—it’s our strength.*” One slide depicted the silhouette of a student speaking into a megaphone, superimposed with the words “We will not be erased.” Their caption “Texas is big enough for all of us” became a recurring refrain across coalition events, symbolizing the expansive vision of belonging that animated the movement. The post was shared by over 30 student organizations across Texas, prompting one commenter to write: “*This is the first time I’ve seen DEI framed as love, not just policy.*”

Digital flyers circulated widely through group chats and Instagram stories—especially in the days leading up to the April 6 hearing. One flyer read, “*Testify for your right to exist: Capitol Room E1.028, Thursday 9AM.*” These materials provided not only logistical information but a clear emotional call to action, rooted in dignity, refusal, and care. The design aesthetic—bold fonts, reclaimed public images, and inclusive language—reflected Gen Z’s visual fluency and political intentionality.

As part of our social media ethnography, we archived over 200 posts, tweets, and livestream recordings between February and May 2023. This digital corpus was analyzed thematically, revealing key motifs such as “belonging,” “presence,” “intergenerational care,” “we will not be erased,” and “we are still here.” These frames directly challenged SB 17’s agenda to erase by asserting narrative control and reshaping the terms of public debate.

These digital strategies were not isolated—they were coordinated. At least twice a week, BBDP and Texas Students for DEI shared content calendars, story templates, and hashtags such as #DefendDEI and #TeachTheTruth to build message discipline. In doing so, they enacted what Michener (2018) calls “political literacy through digital mutual aid”—the use of peer-to-peer platforms to teach, mobilize, and build shared analysis under conditions of political threat.

Coalitional Resilience and Intergenerational Power-Building

The anti-DEI agenda in Texas did not simply target programs—it aimed to sever the connective tissue between communities and institutions. In response, a web of grassroots and legacy organizations mobilized to forge what we term *coalitional resilience*: a practice of long-haul organizing rooted in mutual care, cross-racial solidarity, and intergenerational leadership.

Black Brown Dialogues on Policy (BBDP), co-founded by Dr. Angela Valenzuela and Texas NAACP President Gary Bledsoe in August 2022, emerged as a central hub for this organizing. From its inception, BBDP convened bi-monthly Zoom meetings drawing 40–60 participants statewide. These sessions were not passive briefings but strategic workshops—each one co-led by veteran civil rights leaders, student activists, and grassroots organizers. A fieldnote from a February 2023 session captures the atmosphere:

“A UT undergraduate speaks up: ‘I want to testify but I’ve never done this before.’ A retired LULAC organizer replies: ‘I’ve got your back. I’ll review your statement tonight.’ They stay after the meeting to go over line edits and talk logistics. You can see the student’s shoulders relax.”
(Valenzuela Fieldnotes, Feb. 23, 2023)

This dynamic exemplified BBDP’s ethos—intergenerational mentorship not as a programmatic feature, but as a living political practice.

A turning point came during the March 11, 2023, statewide virtual town hall co-hosted by BBDP and Texas Students for DEI. Broadcast live on Facebook, the event featured testimony from students, faculty, and legislative staffers. Over 3,000 people tuned in over the course of the day. One student from UT-RGV, speaking in both English and Spanish, stated: “We are not asking for a seat at the table. We are building our own.” This framing resonated with older attendees, many of whom commented in real-time chat threads: “This reminds me of SNCC,” or “We’re seeing history repeat—and being rewritten” (Virtual Town Hall, March 11, 2023).

The coalitions extended beyond dialogue. BBDP facilitated real-time collaboration between the Texas NAACP, Texas LULAC, and both the Mexican American and Black Legislative Caucuses in the Texas House of Representatives. According to internal correspondence to which we were granted access, BBDP members, working in coalition with AAUP and TLEEC drafted over half a dozen

proposed amendments to SB 17, several of which were taken up by allied legislators, even if ultimately rejected by the majority. This backstage influence rarely appeared in press coverage, yet it shaped deliberations and fortified relationships.

Student-led initiatives also drove coalitional expansion. BBDP NextGen, an offshoot network formed by student participants, maintained direct coordination with @txstudentsforDEI via Signal and Discord channels. These backchannels allowed for rapid mobilization—for example, organizing a statewide response to the final passage of SB 17 within hours with a Signal message, “Here’s the template for social posts. Use #WeStillBelong and tag three people. Let’s flood the feed by 7PM.”

This rapid, decentralized coordination reflects a sophisticated enactment of what Mignolo (2007) terms *epistemic disobedience*—a conscious delinking from colonial systems of knowledge and authority. In response, we introduce the concept of *horizontal political choreography* to describe a form of embodied resistance through which marginalized communities mobilize relationally and spatially to unsettle colonial hierarchies and imagine liberatory futures. Facilitated by social media, this choreography of dissent unfolds not through vertical command but through lateral, improvisational solidarities. Here, social media functions simultaneously as stage and amplifier—cultivating collective visibility, deepening solidarity, and circulating insurgent knowledge that extends the reach and resonance of grassroots movements. To our knowledge, this formulation has not yet been articulated in the scholarly literature.

By Spring 2024, this network contributed to the formal affiliation of Texas AAUP and Texas AFT—a landmark alliance bridging K-12 and higher education labor. Though not solely attributable to BBDP, BBDP NextGen, or @txstudentsforDEI—or the actual Texas State Employees Union (TSEU), to which many of us staff and faculty already belonged—our field observations suggest that the sustained framing of DEI dismantling as both a civil rights and labor issue helped pave the way for broader educator solidarity.

Beginning in 2023, crucial to movement building were UT Professor and AAUP President Dr. Brian Evan’s third Thursdays of the month gatherings at a bar named Tweedy’s, located just north of the UT Campus where those in the struggle get a chance to visit, gossip, strategize, make announcements, see old friends, and make new ones with free draft beer, compliments of the Texas AFT. At one such gathering on October 19, 2023, Angela participated in an exchange among UT faculty where all shared the reasons they became “regulars.”

Person 1 in Humanities to Person 2 in Social Work: “I feel afraid sometimes when I’m on campus, and that feeling goes away when I come.” Person 2: “I know. It’s all weird these days. You never know when another shoe will drop. Person 3 in Education to Persons 1 and 2: “I don’t know. I grew up in an activist family where I’m from and it helps me to feel grounded (laughing), like what else would I be doing? I mean, aside from doing my classes and research, of course!” “The free beer helps,” I added, all four of us chuckling.

True, wonderful friendships are formed at Tweedy’s. This smacks of effective movement building because it is lodged in personal relationships and trust building with UT faculty across the university. I see how our gatherings started with a few faculty and how it has grown. Bridges to TSEU, Austin Community College faculty, other UT Staff, a regular presence of Texas AFT members, my old friends, and the occasional presence of undergraduate @txstudentsforDEI, as well as

graduate students, have strengthened our cause and collective resolve. I always look forward to these gatherings.” (Valenzuela, 2023, Field Notes, October 19, 2023).

Coalitions were not without tensions or disagreements over tactics, media engagement, or messaging. Yet what sustained the work was an ever-deepening foundation of mutual support, principled and responsive leadership, the energy of newly formed relationships, an easy consensus among advocates surrounding our shared cause, intergenerational alliances, and a clear, shared commitment to historical memory and political education. Amid complexity, consensus emerged not from uniformity, but from a righteous commitment to justice that honored difference while sustaining collective purpose.

Discussion

The resistance to SB 17 was not merely oppositional—it was generative. As our findings demonstrate, communities across Texas did not just protest the legislation; they mobilized a vision. Through the emergence of new organizations, narrative reclamation, direct action, and cross-sector coalition-building, we witnessed the enactment of what Solórzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) call transformational resistance: a form of collective agency that is not only reactive but purposefully reconstructive, akin to Kelly’s (2002) notion of “world-making.”

The creation of Black Brown Dialogues on Policy (BBDP) and Texas Students for DEI illustrates how transformational resistance gives rise to alternative institutional forms when existing ones falter. These organizations served as relational infrastructures through which participants built solidarity, planned strategically, and engaged in sustained advocacy. In doing so, they practiced what de Sousa Santos (2018) refers to as the “epistemologies of the South”—knowledge rooted in lived experience, cultural memory, and community care.

Digital resistance further amplified these efforts. While SB 17’s supporters controlled official channels and media narratives, student activists carved out new digital spaces to organize, educate, and counter misinformation.

Occupying the Texas Capitol on April 6, 2023, participants transformed a space historically associated with exclusion into a site of democratic expression. Drawing on BBDP elder Martha Cotera’s (2022) notion of the “power of presence,” and Butler’s (2015) theory of assembly, we interpret this mass testimony not just as a protest but as an embodied resistance.

While Cotera’s (2022) articulation of the “power of presence” draws from a concept that has evolved organically across various fields—including the health professions—her application of it in our community-based work with Academia Cuauhtli underscores a distinct cultural-political ethic: we wield power simply by showing up—whether at board meetings, rallies, protests, or committee hearings. In this framework, choosing not to participate when one is able is not a neutral act; absence forfeits an opportunity to affirm our collective visibility, voice, and world-making (Kelly, 2002).

Similarly, Butler (2015) contends that “the assembly is already speaking before it utters any words” (p. 8), suggesting that the embodied act of showing up in contested space is itself a form of political expression. Ransby (2018) builds on this tradition, arguing that “showing up again and again, even

when it's hard, is a kind of political muscle memory. It builds movements" (p. 3). This notion of presence as power also undergirded the organizing philosophy of Ella Baker, who emphasized community-based, relational leadership where transformation arises not from charismatic authority but from consistent engagement and listening at the grassroots (Ransby, 2003). Together, these thinkers and organizers frame presence not as symbolic but as strategic—a foundational act of resistance that affirms community, asserts agency, and disrupts systems of exclusion.

The coalitions that emerged—linked students with civil rights organizations, faculty with professional associations—modeled what Audre Lorde (1984) called "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house." Rather than relying solely on institutional DEI frameworks, organizers built grassroots alternatives grounded in mutual aid, reciprocity, and shared accountability (Smith, 2012).

Importantly, this movement disrupted common tropes of student apathy and faculty detachment. Students, particularly from Gen Z, demonstrated strategic clarity and moral urgency. Though fewer in number, faculty engaged in courageous forms of advocacy that challenged institutional compliance. Together, they demonstrated that the fight for DEI is not about ideology. It is about the fundamental right to belong, to be heard, and to co-create the future of education. In this way, resistance to SB 17 becomes part of a broader struggle over the meaning of democracy, knowledge, and public higher education. It calls into question the legitimacy of institutions that abandon their most vulnerable members under political pressure, and it affirms the power of communities to imagine and enact alternatives, even while under siege.

Conclusion

This study documents how a statewide coalition of students, faculty, and community organizers in Texas mounted a powerful response to SB 17—a law designed to dismantle DEI programs under the guise of neutrality. Far from succumbing to despair, these communities responded with clarity, vision, and action. What emerged was not just resistance, but a countermovement grounded in transformational consciousness, historical memory, and collective care.

The four key findings—new pro-DEI organizations, digital resistance, legislative presence, and cross-sector coalitions—underscore the ways grassroots activism is reshaping the terrain of higher education. Rather than relying on institutions to protect vulnerable communities, activists built their own networks of solidarity and resistance. They refused invisibility. They refused erasure. And in doing so, they affirmed the right to belong—to learn, to teach, and to transform.

SB 17 is not an isolated law. It is part of a larger ideological project rooted in white supremacist, colonial logics, and settler futurity. It seeks to erase histories, silence dissent, and consolidate power. But as we have shown, resistance to this project is alive—and growing. Students are organizing. Faculty are showing up. Communities are co-authoring a new story of higher education in Texas—one anchored in justice, plurality, and liberation.

As we look ahead, we offer three calls to action. First, institutions must reckon with their complicity. Silence is not neutrality—it is alignment with repression. Second, legal and policy safeguards must be advanced to protect academic freedom and the right to teach and learn. And third, researchers and organizers must continue to document and amplify resistance, both to inform public discourse

and to sustain momentum. In the face of systemic erasure, we assert: we are still here. We are still building. And we are not done.

Appendix A. Timeline

June 22, 2022. National AAUP and AFT form a partnership.

August, 2022. Black Brown Dialogues on Policy is formed.

January 10, 2023. Regular Texas Legislative session begins.

February 7, 2023. Governor Greg Abbott directs state agencies to cease considering diversity in hiring practices.

February 13, 2023. Black & Brown Dialogues on Policy posts on social media for the first time, marking its public launch.

February 14, 2023. BBDP holds a press conference at the Texas State Capitol with members of the Mexican American Legislative Caucus and Texas Legislative Black Caucus to denounce Governor Abbott's anti-DEI stance.

March 10, 2023. Texas Students for DEI publishes their inaugural Instagram and Twitter post, officially launching a statewide student-led movement.

March 11, 2023. BBDP hosts its first virtual town hall on Facebook Live, focused on defending Ethnic Studies and DEI programs in Texas.

April 6, 2023. Students, faculty, and community members fill the Texas Capitol in a mass occupation and testimony marathon against SB 17, marking a pivotal act of embodied resistance.

May 3, 2023. Freedom to Learn Day of Action is held at the Texas Capitol, co-organized by a coalition of civil rights groups, students, and educators.

June 16, 2023. Governor Abbott signs SB 17 into law, officially banning DEI offices and practices in public higher education across Texas.

January 1, 2024. Senate Bill 17 goes into effect, mandating full compliance with its prohibition of DEI programming at public colleges and universities in Texas.

March 23, 2024. The Texas Conference of the American Association of University Professors (Texas AAUP) and the Texas American Federation of Teachers (Texas AFT) was formalized.

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Listening to the Rain: Archiving Latinx Resistance in Humboldt County

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Introduction

This article is not our attempt to provide a historical account of Latinx people in Humboldt County. Rather, our goal is to examine the cultures of Latinx/Chicana/o/x⁴⁸ organizing in Humboldt County, and how these collective struggles continue to be interlinked with past, present, and future community-based movements for social justice. Furthermore, we seek to highlight the role of ethnic studies pedagogies on the mobilizations of the last 20 years. We ask: What are key issues that the Latinx community—both in schools and the local community—have organized around? How has their organizing transformed the Latinx community and contributed to the history of the region? The cultures of resistance that we document are a series of actions that empower our small but growing community to enact change in ways that address the immediate needs of the community, reclaim and transform space, and strengthen the transnational, community cultural wealth in Northern California.

“We Demand”: Latinxs in Goudi'ni, Wiyot Homelands

Goudi'ni (meaning “among the redwoods”), also known as Arcata in traditional Wiyot homelands, is a small rural community in Northern California, four hours north of San Francisco. It is home to several thriving tribal communities (federally recognized) and rancherias (non-federally recognized), which include the Wiyot Tribe, Bear River Rancheria, and Blue Lake Rancheria. Cal Poly Humboldt (formerly Humboldt State University) sits on the traditional homelands of the Wiyot people, where a growing Latinx population resides. From 2010 to 2020, the population of people who identified as “Hispanic or Latino” in the census grew from an estimated 13,000 to 18,500, primarily residing in the communities of Arcata, Eureka, and Fortuna (U.S. Census, 2020). These are rough estimates that do not include people who identify with two or more racial and ethnic identities.

⁴⁸ We use the term “Latinx” with the understanding that while it reflects an attempt to be more inclusive of diverse ethnic and non-binary gender identities, the term still has an exclusionary power in homogenizing experiences and histories, particularly those of Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities. We hope that this article will open conversations on how these dynamics “take place” in the context of communities in Humboldt County so that we can be more critical of its use across spaces.

At Cal Poly Humboldt (CPH), the numbers of students who self-identified as “Hispanic or Latino” were at 1,532 in 2011, hitting a peak in Fall of 2016 with 2,869, then gradually dropping thereafter to 1,750 in 2023.⁴⁹ Despite CPH being designated a Hispanic Serving Institution in 2013, as of 2023, Latinx faculty at CPH represent only 7% of professors and lecturers. Most students attending Cal Poly Humboldt come from Los Angeles (23% in 2023), with many of them also being local to Northern California and the San Francisco Bay Area. We share this to highlight the demographic shifts transforming the racial and ethnic politics in Humboldt, a county that although environmentally alluring remains predominantly white and is still reckoning with its history of settler colonialism, genocide of Indigenous peoples, and Chinese expulsion. Latinx students arrive at Humboldt seeking to continue their education at the university, a dream that is tied to their families and communities back home. This is similar to the Latino diasporic community who also migrate from Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean, and South America to (a) escape circumstances in the region and (b) work to help support their transnational families. CPH student Kacie Figueroa stated:

I’m a CHICANA. Mis padres migraron *para el norte* para la buena vida. Como dicen los gabachos el “American Dream.” Built a family on Miwok land (Riverbank, CA)... After high school graduation (...) I said... “Voy *para el norte* para Humboldt.” NO. Riverbank, the Central Valley cannot own me. There isn’t enough air to breathe here. Pollen and pollution has a chokehold on the Central Valley, with the highest allergy rate from late January to early November. All these almond orchards and still no fresh air. (Figueroa, 2023)

Kacie’s story of migrating further north, just like the migration of her parents to this country to seek the so-called American Dream, alludes to a history of constant movement as a result of a series of displacements and containments. For Kacie, migrating from the Central Valley to attend college in Northern California can be read as her inheriting her parents’ search for the American Dream by attaining a college education, one that becomes increasingly difficult with the changing climate of the region and higher education institutions.

Altogether, the history of the region as well as the changing demographics at Cal Poly Humboldt and in the local community continue to influence the experiences and needs of the Latinx community, and how they have organized towards social justice through time. Drawing on the work of scholars in the field of ethnic studies who critically examine higher education in contemporary society (Ferguson, 2017; la paperson, 2017; Patel, 2021), we propose this archive of movement stories with a purpose in mind: to highlight the link between campus and community struggles which is at the heart of ethnic studies praxis, in hopes of addressing the history Latinx organizing in Humboldt as a moment of renewed activism that builds on student struggles from previous generations. The struggles we speak of here build on the struggles of students in the 1960s and ’70s who sought to transform educational institutions, preceded by uprisings across communities of color organizing against racial violence and the liberation of communities from settler colonialism, U.S. imperialism, and systemic oppression.

⁴⁹ We attribute the decline of Latinx students after 2016 to several social-political factors impacting students and their families, and community members both on campus, in the local Humboldt community, and nationwide. These include the election of Donald Trump in 2016, the murder of Black HSU student David Josiah Lawson in April of 2017 (whose case remains unresolved), the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, and the university’s transition to a polytechnic university which has contributed to declining institutional support for student services and cultural centers impacting retention.

We approach “struggle” as Robin D. G. Kelley defines it, which is “people’s rigorous engagement with each other and differing ideas of freedom” (Patel, 2021, p. 3). To do so, we must be critical of the university as part of a corporate and military machine, one that continuously seeks to trick our demands for social transformation into a neoliberal language of recognition, inclusion, and belonging (Kelley 2016). Furthermore, as we seek to understand the relational character of student–community demands in the last twenty years, we take into strong consideration the work of Roderick A. Ferguson, who points to the university as historically responding to student movements and demands with demands of their own. In his book, *We Demand: The University and Student Protests*, Ferguson (2017) describes these university demands as ones that refortify their commitment to systems of power that keep economically, politically, and institutionally impoverished communities out, and students, faculty, and staff regulated from within. While demographic changes indicate increased visibility of historically marginalized communities and a shift in knowledge production and thought, universities continued their attempts to prevent the full realization of student and community demands by keeping black, brown, and Native faculty and students at low numbers, increasing policing both on and off campuses, and always finding new ways to criminalize student activism (Ferguson, 2017).

In the case of California and the California State University (CSU) system, as Latinx student enrollment increased after the student movements of the 1960s and ’70s, so did tuition costs, which continue to rise sharply since the end of the CSU Master Plan in 1975 (which ended free tuition). This was not coincidental, as was the defunding of public higher education with the increased reliance on the debt economy for funding, followed by what seems to be a relentless series of manufactured CSU budget crises such as the one we are seeing today. These budget crises fall on faculty, students, and their families to bear the brunt, as they are still making ongoing demands to make another university possible, while challenging bloating administrative expenses and punitive actions against student and community demands. These demands, small or large, reflect a desire to listen, to learn, to study, to educate as a form of love to our communities, for a better society and for life, one that comes with struggle already inhabiting the machinery of academic institutions (la paperson, 2017; Patel, 2021).

Pedagogical Implication

Archiving and remembering what happened before us is important as we build community and solidarity with one another. Universities benefit when students do not remember what happened before them because they already know the demands students will give them and are prepared to block them. Students many times replicate and advocate for the same demands previous generations of students focused on. History of our movements is extremely important for students to begin to build on the struggle already laid by previous cohorts. We need to build on movement. This active archiving of our struggle is part of the legacy we impart with one another as we create community cultural wealth in our communities. Our struggle is our community cultural wealth and our resistance capital. Documenting our resistance and struggle helps to build and strengthen a radical movement. In this article, we hope to share and examine key events that took place in Humboldt County from 2006 to 2024 that reflect central themes that the Latinx/Chicana/o/x community committed to social justice organized around. We hope this will serve as a historical, archival piece which will be able to be taken by anyone to see how they can build on the struggle

and continue the fight to reclaim space, visibility, and strengthen our transborder Latinx community with the tools for coalition building and social change.

Community Organizing

“Take one, you take us all”: The 2006 Immigrant Rights March and the 2008 Sun Valley Raid

On May 1, 2006, people marched from different corners of Humboldt County and merged in Eureka, California to create a forceful demand for immigrant rights. Residents came together to protest racialized nativism and xenophobic legislation that sought to enforce stricter penalties on undocumented people. More than 1 million people gathered in rallies across the country, a movement that took decades of organizing across sectors and organizations (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Salas, 2008). Together they strategically coordinated marches in response to increased anti-immigrant legislation, in particular, H.R. 4437—a proposed national bill introduced in December 2005 that focused on reinforcing and further militarizing border control, increasing immigration enforcement measures, changing the penalty for being undocumented from a civil violation to a federal felony, and criminalizing anyone who assisted undocumented immigrants (family members, churches, schools, teachers, organizations, etc.). According to Zepeda-Millán (2017), additional factors laid the groundwork for the 2006 marches to emerge, such as the confluence of neoliberal economic reforms, immigration policies, pre-existing community resources and social movement activism, state and societal nativism, changes in Latino migration, and Spanish-language media outlets.

The 2006 immigrant rights march in Humboldt was made possible by an organizing network that had been building momentum and support for some time. Fernando, who arrived to HSU as a student in 2005, spoke about how ethnic studies courses introduced him to critical insights and frameworks, but also to professors and students who were organizing Acción Zapatista de Humboldt (AZ) meetings. These meetings created a space for engaging intellectual questions around political issues, combining academic work with political life which he described as a practice of insurgent learning. They asked questions like “What does Zapatismo look like locally, in sites of privilege?” The aim was to foster dialogue about Zapatismo within the Humboldt community, and in doing so, organize themselves both in solidarity with the Indigenous Zapatistas and locally, in alignment with local struggles.⁵⁰ Students from Acción Zapatista and allies from HSU gathered on May Day 2006 in support of the immigrant community and the organizations in solidarity.

In one of the only surviving videos documenting that day, you can see Latino/a community members chanting “El pueblo, unido, jamás será vencido” as they marched in front of the Eureka Courthouse. At the same time, students were making the 9-mile trek from the university in Arcata to meet with the community in Eureka, marching along the safety corridor of Highway 101. Midway, they were stopped by the California Highway Patrol who arrested three student journalists (all women) who were recording the march from the back of the group. Video footage

⁵⁰ Originating from the EZLN movement for Indigenous autonomy and liberation, Zapatismo is a political and cultural practice that emphasizes leading by following (listening), walking by asking (dialogue), centered on dignity, hope, and community-building a world where all worlds fit, *nunca jamás un mundo sin nosotros* (never again a world without us). How can we collectively arrive at an agreement about how this should look like in practice? And how can we operate with the understanding that communities already possess the resources for their own transformation?

captures the CHP making the arrests while wielding batons and threatening to use pepper spray on the crowd. The group chanted “Take one, you take us all!” in response to the arrests and demanded the release of the students once they arrived at the courthouse. The police brutality and arrests of the students that day reflected wider demands that linked anti-immigrant legislation and criminalization with racialized violence and hate crimes happening in the community. Over 1,000 people participated in the march that day in Humboldt, a transformative moment for many people (especially Latinxs) to see and experience the overflow of community in an environment dominated by whiteness.

Although the chant “Take one, you take us all!” heard on May Day 2006 referred to demands to release students who had been arrested that day, the shout for solidarity almost served as a premonition for what was to come. Student organizers from HSU continued to organize after the immigrant rights march, forming coyunturas and traveling to Mexico City, Puebla, Oaxaca, and Chiapas. Coyunturas are gathering spaces that facilitate research, analysis, reflection and action “by encouraging participants to name, define, narrate, and act on the struggle that impacts them in the current conjuncture . . .” (Callahan, 2019, p. 381). Coyunturas are sites of knowledge production, a framework for analyzing local events and immediate problems impacting the community, where we listen and arrive at a shared analysis and seek solutions together.

As a result of these coyunturas, students anticipated and prepared for looming ice raids in the Humboldt community. Fernando recalls:

We read it, we saw it . . . we read the newspapers, we saw the economic trends . . . we looked at the historical trajectory. At the time, the war in Iraq was going on, and they were using a lot of the same language. We were looking at it as a “low-intensity war”—just like the “low-intensity war” that was happening in Iraq, we were using that same lens to read immigration and immigration policy as a low-intensity war on undocumented people. Once we took on that frame and that paradigm, and started reading the reports that were coming out in the newspaper, we saw the same language. So when it came to what was happening in Humboldt County, there was a moment when the person in charge of ICE in the state of California said that there was going to be a surge . . . there was a surge happening in Iraq, and he was using the same language making a statement, “Ice was going to do a surge in California.” So we were like, ok—it’s coming here (to Humboldt County). That was the moment—in the context of everything else. (personal communication, 2024)

In analyzing and identifying this intensifying, low-intensity war on the undocumented community, ethnic studies students and community members participating in the coyunturas began doing outreach in the community, particularly targeting Sun Valley Floral Farms, one of the nation’s largest producers of tulips, lilies, irises, and other bulb flowers employing a large immigrant workforce in Humboldt. As one way to make contact and share information with workers, they subversively attended tours set up by the company for tourists as part of an open house event, giving fellow workers their cards with contact information.

On September 3, 2008, ICE conducted a workplace raid at Sun Valley Floral Farms after the harvest season and detained 18 employees, several of them receiving deportation orders. The organizing and networking that had made the 2006 march possible also facilitated the response in support of undocumented workers and their families after the Sun Valley Raid. Students and community

members were promptly called the day after the raid by the workers, and they soon met and got to know each other. Together, they developed Know Your Rights workshops, contacted lawyers, gathered testimonies, and organized informational events and trips to San Francisco to assist individuals who had been served deportation orders. Although the raid had fractured, displaced, and traumatized the community, many of them remained and their stories continue to circulate within the community.

2013 HSI Designation and the “Super Taco” Fight

In 2013, Humboldt State University’s student population met the 25% Hispanic/Latino mark and became a Hispanic Serving Institution. At the same time, Humboldt State University (HSU) had their centennial celebration. During this time, President Rollin C. Richmond bought a painting to be included in the Humboldt Permanent Collection Award titled “Super Taco,” by Ryan Spaulding (2013).⁵¹ It was a painting depicting Latinx kitchen workers at a restaurant called Super Taco. The painting was hung at the university’s student food court where most students ate and socialized. Latinx students began to question the painting, especially its title. Whether it be the name of the restaurant or not, they felt it was offensive and an objectification of workers. To use the word “taco” to refer to Latinos or the Latinx experience is considered a racial stereotype, considering its history and symbolic use to reflect Latinos as culturally inferior and thus perpetuate white supremacy culture.⁵² Students also felt this painting lacked an analysis of how workers are treated in the restaurant industry, displaying a myth of happy workers in a capitalist society.

Ultimately, we were left to ask, what message was this painting offering to this newly designated Hispanic Serving Institution? Students discussed the meaning of this painting in the context of a predominantly white institution that continues to celebrate colonial legacies through their displays of whiteness in the form of visual art, but also the university’s Spanish mission architecture, photography, and archives housed at the university. These examples represent a violent erasure of place-based counter histories, but more importantly, they point to the systemic transformation the university would have to embark on to create a more welcoming and inclusive campus for their more diverse student body. This became a site of contention for students, particularly students of color, who did not want to comply with the university’s narrative of diversity that sought to profit from their numbers, while ignoring their needs and demands for change.

⁵¹ From the Humboldt Permanent Collection Award website: “This award, funded by the University, was established in 1988 as a way to promote the visual arts on campus and develop a significant collection of student work for the University’s permanent collection. The selection of the winner is made by the permanent faculty in the Art Department, thus ensuring collective agreement on the work’s relevance to the current teaching of art at Humboldt and to current issues in the art world.” <https://president.humboldt.edu/artaward>

⁵² The term and its use in popular culture has an extensive history in the U.S. and is considered coded language for explicitly racist messages about Mexicans yet generalized to refer to all Latinx people. One example is the “Yo Quiero Taco Bell” media campaign of the 1990s during a time of extreme anti-immigrant sentiment in California. It also received attention and scrutiny when in 2016, Marco Gutierrez, the co-founder of Latinos for Trump, referred to immigration as: “My culture is a very dominant culture, and it’s imposing and it’s causing problems. If you don’t do something about it, you’re going to have taco trucks on every corner.” First Lady Jill Biden, in a speech she gave in Texas in 2022, referred to the Latino community “as unique as the breakfast tacos” in the city of San Antonio.

Figure 1. "Super Taco" painting by Ryan Spaulding, 2013.



Students from F.R.E.E. (Finding Resources and Empowerment through Education), Black Student Union, Movimiento Estudiantil Chican@ de Aztlán (MEChA), and other student organizations on campus participated in a forum led by the Art Department to question the painting's representation of people of color in relation to the campus community. The conclusion of all these discussions was the need for a more accurate representation of people of color. HSU administrators decided to keep the "Super Taco" painting displayed on the grounds of "freedom of speech" and relocated the painting to the library. Students, staff, and faculty of color on campus felt disrespected considering the school received HSU designation yet were not honoring the demands of Latinx students within the university to bring down the painting and what it represented. Therefore, students demanded a mural where they had the power to narrate themselves how they wanted to be represented. F.R.E.E. led the charge and were granted funding (approved by then President Rollin Richmond in 2014) to create a mural whose depiction would suit their cultural background and would empower students.

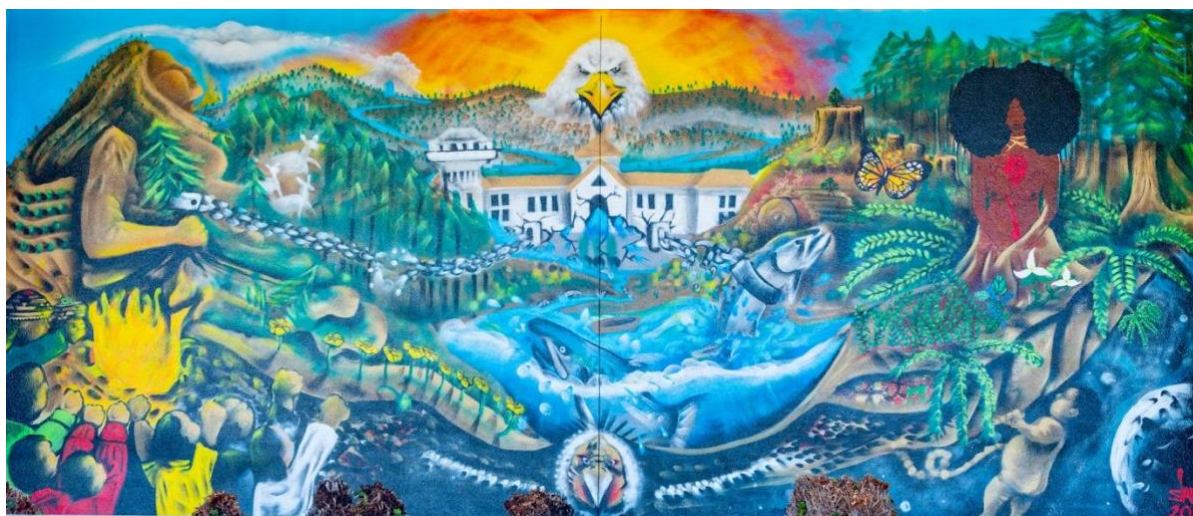
Additionally, Associated Students also joined in making sure the funds were given to F.R.E.E. for the mural to be completed by December 2015. SABA, a descendant of both Dine' & Walatowa people from New Mexico was invited to help design the mural at then Humboldt State University. He engaged students in a visual collective process which began with a collective dialogue and understanding of all communities who demanded representation. Students asked for Indigenous elements to be represented because the campus is on Wiyot land, centering women, salmon, ancestral spirits, water, land, and a ceremony honoring the community. Students, faculty and staff discussed how they wanted the mural to meet the following goals:

- 1) To incorporate Indigenous and other people of color cultural representations that unify students, staff, faculty, tribal and regional communities in Humboldt County and beyond.
- 2) To integrate the participants' (i.e., students') abilities and ideas/images for the mural. This is a collective artistic space, and students have the lead as to what elements to further incorporate into the mural design.

- 3) To apply previous experience developing and implementing collective artistic pieces. Artist has done several projects exercising artistic leadership as well as providing coordination and team building to deliver a mural.

This social justice fight wanted us to take time to look at this mural as an important visual art piece. It seeks to help students think critically about what their education means, how we can humanize our world, and ask questions such as “Is our field a part of the problem, or is it truly helping us humanize the world around us?” and “When our departments are about the destruction and extracting from the earth, how can we help stop these capitalist endeavors and help to cultivate worlds that sustain life?” We can decolonize traditional disciplines and cultivate a spirit where we can sustain and care for people, plants, animals, fish, soil, and water. Where the main focus of education is one of relationality and reciprocity. The finished mural was unveiled during December 2015 in what is now the Gutsurrak Student Activities Center.

Figure 2. *Planting Seeds for Latinx Empowerment*



The Fight for a Sanctuary County

Finding Resources and Empowerment through Education (F.R.E.E.) was founded in 2011 because of a need to educate the campus community about AB 540. AB 540 guaranteed students regardless of status in-state tuition, but many students who qualified were being denied services because Humboldt State University lacked the knowledge, will, and interest to understand how to assist AB 540 students. F.R.E.E. also wanted to yield resources for AB 540 students. During 2012–2013, F.R.E.E. worked towards making HSU an AB 540-friendly and aware campus. They challenged staff and faculty’s willful ignorance and bias specifically against undocumented Latinx students. On June 15, 2012, DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival) was signed into law, giving some students an opportunity to obtain a work permit, which has to be renewed every two years. When the law came out, F.R.E.E. and True North, under the leadership of Renee Saucedo, began helping students apply to be Dacamented. Since community members and students needed to renew their DACA status every two years, they also helped with the renewal status. F.R.E.E. felt that both the changing laws and the unwillingness of people to help AB 540 and Dacamented students warranted an Undocumented Center like other universities had on their campus. Such a

center would be institutionalized to help advocate for undocumented, AB 540, and Documented students and their families.

In 2013, under the faculty leadership of Dr. Cesar Abarca and F.R.E.E., students began to advocate for a center, which was a goal they shared with the larger community. True North and Centro del Pueblo also helped to advocate for a center. Thanks to all their advocacy and immigrant rights organizing, in 2017 Associated Students decided to fund an undocumented center called Scholars without Borders. Once a part of Associated Students, these students and Dr. Abarca created Undocumented Student Ally Trainings (USAT) that were delivered to students, staff, faculty, administrators and/or community members to equip them with understanding state and federal laws that protected undocumented students. These trainings are still available for all who wish to take it, and they have expanded to include a collaboration with CHIRLA (The Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights Los Angeles), which assists with monthly legal assistance and informational workshops.

Centro del Pueblo was founded in 2016 under the leadership of Renee Saucedo and began as a volunteer-run, grassroots community-based organization focused on immigration and on protecting the human rights of migrants. Centro del Pueblo focused on organizing in order to create a more just space for immigrants in Humboldt County so they can live free of harassment, fear, and disruption. Renee Saucedo states why she and other organizing leaders decided to form Centro del Pueblo:

I recognized the urgent need for a Latinx empowerment organization in Humboldt. Many groups offered charity to our community, but none focused on building leaders and challenging the status quo from a Latinx perspective. While the campus had MEChA, we aspired to extend that spirit to the broader community. It was a tough journey as many of the white allies felt threatened by our efforts. Nonetheless, we had the right to self-determination and to create our own organizations that truly represented and empowered us. (Saucedo, 2025)

In Centro del Pueblo, the Latinx community in Humboldt County had more autonomy to decide how they wanted to organize and what they wanted to demand.

When Trump was elected president in 2016, moreover, it devastated the Latinx community and filled them with fear of deportation and family separation. Joleen Ibarra Sanchez explains the way her family felt during the Trump presidency:

Mis papas duraron tiempo para salir y si salían cargaban con el gran susto de que a la mejor ya no regresaban a casa. Tenían varios planes de que hiciéramos si un día los agarra la migra y ya no regresaban. Por ejemplo, me decían que me fuera a vivir con mis hermanos porque nacieron aquí y la mayoría de mi familia son inmigrantes. La puerta siempre tenía que tener seguro por si llegaban a la casa y si alguien llegaba a la casa teníamos que abrir uno de nosotros que nacimos aquí mientras ellos se escondían en un cuarto por que nunca sabemos quien podría ser. Y teníamos que evitar de hablar tanto con nuestros vecinos por que somos los unicos de color en nuestra vecindad y nunca sabíamos en quien podíamos confiar. Fue un tiempo muy difícil y me asuste mucho porque yo y mis primos que viven conmigo todavía somos niños y no puedo imaginar cómo serían nuestras vidas sin nuestros padres con nosotros. (Ibarra Sanchez, 2024)

During this time, families had to have a plan in case Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) decided to return to Humboldt County. Families feared going to school and going out.

Centro del Pueblo was a beacon of hope where people gathered to organize because they did not want to continue to live in fear. Centro del Pueblo organized meetings throughout the county and decided that they would fight for Humboldt to become a sanctuary county. Centro del Pueblo decided that they would put "Sanctuary County" on the ballot for the people of Humboldt to decide. Renee Saucedo explains Centro del Pueblo organizing around this time:

Around 2016, we were deeply engaged in advocating for sanctuary county status. This involved attending board of supervisors' meetings and demanding the passage of a sanctuary ordinance. We did that for over a year, and they kept rejecting our appeals. Our only other option was to push for it to be on the ballot. This was particularly important at that time because of Trump's recent election. We felt a pressing need for a protective measure between the county and ICE. (Saucedo, 2025)

In 2017, Measure K was put on the ballot, and it won in 2018, making Humboldt a sanctuary county. Even though Sanctuary County might be symbolic because there are limitations on what counties can do, this designation gives the community a sense of safety and a place where they can live free of fear of being prosecuted.

Conclusion

Documenting and archiving our histories are important so we can build on historical struggles. In this paper, we have only told a small portion of the history of social justice of Latinx people in Humboldt County. We know there are still stories to be told like the Latinx solidarity movement with Black Lives Matter, the Land Back movement, and the recent 2024 peaceful student sit-in at Siemens Hall at Cal Poly Humboldt protesting the ongoing genocide in Palestine.⁵³ For this paper we did not focus on all Latinx people, but those who generated a culture of social justice, lived in Humboldt County, and believed in solidarity and working in coalition with others. They continue to believe in the collective and seek to make changes where all can live freely with peace, dignity, and are able to exercise their self-determination. They are small but mighty and have worked together to create a safe and vibrant community for themselves, willing and open to have difficult, heartfelt conversations. They are against cancel culture, and against people who seek to divide the movement and act as provocateurs rather than people in solidarity with others, understanding we are not all perfect but willing to change toxic culture. They have hard conversations on appropriation, settler colonialism, and Indigeneity, with the aim of achieving a better world for all of us. Some of these conversations are yet to be had and resolved. Hence, there are stories yet to be told which help to uplift and strengthen the Latinx community in Humboldt County. These stories help the Latinx community understand their historical significance within Humboldt County and how they can build on the struggle of those before them to strengthen the movement at our current conjuncture.

⁵³ For a student reflection on the 2024 student Sit-in for a Free Palestine, see: <https://www.palestine-studies.org/en/node/1656181>.

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Gaza Writes Back: Experiencing “Operation Cast Lead” Through Gazans’ Eyes

Hannah Hurd

I am an undergraduate student majoring in Horticulture and Conservation Ecology at New Mexico State University in the College of Agriculture, Consumer, and Environmental Sciences. I reviewed this book as my final project for the Borderlands and Ethnic Studies Department course: Introduction to Palestine Studies.

Gaza Writes Back: Short Stories from Young Writers in Gaza, Palestine is a collection of short stories by young Palestinian writers in Gaza and compiled to commemorate the genocide enacted by Israel’s military campaign “Operation Cast Lead” (December 27, 2008, to January 8, 2009). The late professor, author, mentor, and poet, Dr. Refaat Alareer (editor) coauthored this book with Wafaa Abu Al-Qomboz, Jehan Alfarra, Sarah Ali, Yousef Aljamal, Nour Al-Sousi, Shahd Awadallah, Sameeha Elwan, Hanan Habashi, Tasnim Hammouda, Elham Hilles, Aya Rabah, Mohammad Suliman, and Rawan Yaghi. To contextualize this writing, the reader needs to know that Operation Cast Lead spanned 23 days in which Israel continually bombed and targeted Gaza, killing over 1,400 Palestinians, causing over 5,000 injuries, and destroying over 11,000 buildings and industries. This was one of Israel’s most overreaching bombardments up to 2014. Still, it never broke the “allegiance, hope, or memories” of Palestinians, nor of people around the world, as young writers both worked through the trauma brought on by the violence enacted upon them and spread the word and their experiences of the current situation in Gaza to the rest of the world in the emerging technological era.



The first thing I read in this book was the “About the Writers” section, because I feel like this is the most important part of the book. We must focus on the Palestinians, as people, rather than only as

a collective, to make a more profound and layered human connection, understand, care, and hence continue to learn Palestine and the Palestinians intentionally. Reading about all the authors of these short stories was very grounding. I learned about their worries and lived experiences, from the everyday reality of seeking basic healthcare, to the Israeli Occupation's abuses of Palestinian children playing on the street, to the direct threats Palestinians face, being murdered by an Israeli "soldier" for merely being Palestinian in Palestine.

I was having trouble starting this book. I was stressed and frozen. But when I opened to a random page, "Spared" by Rawan Yaghi popped out. It is a 3-page story about a boy who watched his close friends' murder as Israeli forces dropped a bomb on them while they were playing in the street. The story was so short and abrupt that I felt as if I had been abruptly awakened from an ignorant sleep. The shock that I felt after I read the short story reminded me of the privileges that I have as I learn about Palestine—although I am doing my best to learn from Palestinians themselves and understand from the inside, I have the physical escape of looking away.

I didn't stop reading after I was shocked awake again by "Spared." The next story, "Canary" by Nour Al-Sousi, is a collection of vignettes of a Palestinian man's life, who himself is never named. The only character with a name in Al-Sousi's story is the little brother, Ghassan, who the Israeli Occupation Force kills for simply chasing a canary near an Israeli settlement. We see vignettes of the main character's life as memories intercut with the present scene, where the main character is a rebel soldier being watched by an IOF "soldier," as she wonders who he is. The story ends just as the canary's call of Ghassan's death warns: "Their eyes met. Fear and frustration flowed. Her finger was on the trigger. His finger was on the trigger. Death carried them both to the unknown."

I decided to read the rest of the short stories after these two, and one that has stuck with me is "Toothache in Gaza" by Sameeha Elwhan, a first-person narrative about a little Palestinian girl with a toothache. After reading everything we have about the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) and the "healthcare" that is "graciously provided to Palestinians" and the general inaction of the United Nations, I felt like I understood the main character's inner monologue. I, myself felt angry for most of the story, as I was connecting the information I knew about the UNRWA with the personal experiences and the individual experiences of Palestinians, who were just as scared to go to the doctor's office as I was when I was kid, but adding on the layers that I never had to.

The glorification and idolization of Israel's Occupation of Palestine has been pushed on me my whole life in the United States; the truth of U.S. imperialism was hidden from me in several ways. The number of people and public figures that I learned about growing up—while I did not learn about Palestine and what these Zionist movements were and are actually doing—highlights the "marketing" or "public relations" of the colonizer and their desire to be supported by the majority of the non-educated, especially in the United States and United Kingdom. I only learned the version of history that they wanted me to learn. The reason I enrolled in this course was because I wanted to take a class that taught me what they didn't want me to know, and through the process of this course, one of the central pillars of the genocide that has been enacted upon Palestinians for decades is the dehumanization of Palestinians. The way to combat this is to engage with Palestinians as individuals, and to learn Palestine on the individual level as well as the global level. Reflecting on *Gaza Writes Back*, I realize that every story that stuck with me is about children. This collection instilled in me the necessity of remembering that children are targeted here—children

who are targeted because they are where resilience comes from. Children are the future of revolution and make up over 75% of the martyrs in Gaza, Palestine who have been killed by the Israeli Occupying Regime.

Endnote

The authors reviewed:

Refaat Alareer was assassinated/murdered, along with his brother, sister, and four of his nephews, by an Israeli Occupation/Offensive Forces (IOF) airstrike, in Northern Gaza on December 7, 2023.

Rawan Yaghi has recently received a Fulbright Scholarship to study journalism in New York as of 2023. She has written for *Mondoweiss*, *The New York Times*, and *The Link*.

Sameeha Elwan, 26, is an English literature graduate from the Islamic University, whose campus was destroyed in the Israeli genocidal war on Gaza, 2023–2025. She has a master's degree in Culture and Difference from Durham University, UK, and is currently a PhD candidate in Comparative Literature and Creative Writing at Murdoch University, Perth, Australia.

Nour Al-Sousi is an English teacher in Gaza.

A Praxis of Relational Thick Solidarity: Building Emancipatory and Mutually-Sustaining Ethnic Studies Communities in Texas

Ethnic Studies Network of Texas Core Team

Abstract

Parents, students, educators, and community members around the country have advocated tirelessly over several generations to expand access to Ethnic Studies courses for K-12 learners. Educational organizers draw strength and strategies from decades of movement work embedded in the liberatory theories of the Ethnic Studies disciplines. In this chapter, we write to honor this history, and to document a specific period of time, during the 2020 COVID pandemic, when the global emotional atmosphere was of fear and grief, compounded by the ruthless murder of George Floyd. Community shutdowns demanded new approaches to education and community organizing, and many were left wondering “but what can we do?” As a team of parents, teachers, and concerned community members, we write to reflect on how we collectively and intuitively came to answer the question. We theorize from our practices in developing the 2020 ESNTX Web Series as an act of mutual nurturance and co-learning and offer testimonios to define our praxis as a relational thick solidarity, examining how the Web Series contributed to the larger ethnic studies movement in Texas and in the country.

Introduction

In 2010, conservative lawmakers in Arizona enacted laws to ban Ethnic Studies, and particularly, a very successful Mexican American Studies program in a Tucson high school. Ethnic Studies (ES) content and courses have always been present in creative and insurgent ways, but a powerful movement to bring ES to public schools nationwide emerged in response to Arizona’s racist legislation (Buenavista, 2016; Choi et al., 2016; Gallagher-Geurtsen, 2016). While the formalities and institutionalization process differs from state to state, a critical mass of diverse community members have continued to demand inclusive and nuanced approaches to ES for K-16 learners. In this chapter, we bear witness to the critical work bringing Ethnic Studies to Texas.

Within this movement, teachers and school personnel evolved curriculum to reflect contemporary social issues, fostering far-reaching implications. This engaged world-reading mode of study (Meyerhoff, 2019) shifts away from notions of assimilation, turning instead toward inclusive perspectives that create an open-ended space for “the enactment of critical pedagogy and praxis [so] that social transformation might occur” (Freire, 1970). While it is one thing to deeply

understand the concepts of critical pedagogy and justice-oriented transformation, it is an involved undertaking to internalize and enact such a praxis within a diverse and engaged collective, especially within regions that have traditionally been hostile or at least suspicious of efforts to create an equitable multi-racial society. Moreover, it is a nearly impossible endeavor to enact this praxis within the current context of state-based censorship and economic abandonment targeting anti-hegemonic epistemes.

In 2020, a racial justice movement arose in the midst of a mass public health crisis. In 2025, multiple communities face deep anxiety over the survival of a neoliberal version of multi-racial democracy on which many of us had grown to depend. Despite these differences, both periods push us to answer again and again: “what can we do?” In this article, we document our work as members of the Core Team of the Ethnic Studies Network of Texas (ESNTX) in the development of the 2020 Summer Web Series in which we worked through a moment of great uncertainty and anxiety to maximize its liberatory and connective potential.

We created ESNTX to “foster... a holistic, culturally sustaining, and socially relevant mode of learning...grounded in ES pedagogy within Pre-K-12, higher ed, and community education spaces in Texas. ESNTX achieves this mission through collective planning and care, grassroots advocacy, research justice, and information-sharing” (ESNTX, 2024). The formation that came to be ESNTX initially emerged in the months that followed the adoption of Mexican American Studies as a Social Studies elective course in Texas in the early fall of 2018. Earlier that year, the Texas State Board of Education passed a motion to consider three additional ES courses for inclusion in the Social Studies TEKS (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills) elective course catalog. These courses were Native American Studies, African American Studies, and Asian Pacific/Islander Studies (TEA, 2018). Formally named in the fall of 2019, ESNTX moved from being facilitated by a single member to being facilitated by a Core Organizing Team by the end of Fall 2020.

As members of the ESNTX Core Organizing Team, we serve as a planning and coordinating hub, regularly engaging with partners, educators, and community members to create spaces for information sharing and agenda-setting within the larger ES social movement ecosystem in Texas, as well as hosting annual events since the summer of 2020 to provide purposeful anticolonial and anti-racist professional development opportunities for teachers. The Core Team operates under collectively developed Points of Unity that include a commitment to relational collaboration and consensus-based conversation and decision-making. We work to develop intergenerational relationships with those who came before, those who are currently doing ES work in Texas, as well as those who will come after. As a network, ESNTX is composed of differently-identifying and differently-positioned students, teachers, parents, and advocates who are moved to create emancipatory ES in Texas, but we engage with ES communities beyond Texas as well. Within Texas, we work alongside both established and emerging ES communities to share information and stand in solidarity as each community develops according to their own needs, approaches, and timelines.

Initially, we began writing to document the specific moments in time, during the COVID pandemic and worldwide George Floyd protests, when communities shutdown and mass community mobilization created the need and opportunity for new modes of study (Meyerhoff, 2019) and of relating to one another. We continue writing to reflect on how our ESNTX 2020 Web Series not only contributed to the larger ES movement in Texas and across the country, but also on how it became central to creating a framework of what we call relational thick solidarity through which

we can understand our different positionalities while generating a collective purpose as we continue to face attacks against DEI in education and work toward the educational models that we wish to see for our communities.

Praxis as Collective Authorship and Learning¹

Our project did not originate from academic literature or formal institutions but instead emerged from a history of anti-racist community organizing, responding to a specific set of circumstances and educational needs. In 2020, we were preoccupied with the verbs of praxis, including being, doing, building, knowing, learning, teaching, and co-existing together in purposeful, mutually supportive ways as a praxis of solidarity. Today, we are able to theorize our practices (Stepney & Thompson, 2020). Core Member Deyadira Arrellano reflected on the dire need for solidarity during the COVID pandemic.

Early one morning my cousin who worked for Google at the time told me something bad was coming and recommended I should stockpile. I didn't want to believe it. I told him we were fine, and I was just at the grocery store and everything seemed fine, but little did I know that would be the last time being inside a grocery store for the next two years. In CA, we kept in touch with our ESNTX family, and this was an emotional lifeline I needed especially as a mother and caregiver. The first year putting the web series together seemed overwhelming but we would come to know all the right people to make this idea a reality. Every person who contributed to the first web series had a gift and the ideas were more than plentiful. Planning this series with people who are so passionate they are willing to do this labor for free was liberating. We were conscious of the different types of labor involved and this helped us stay grounded in working in a manner that does not add a culture of pressure or shame into the group.

The work was powerful in building community and responding to the needs of not only each other, but also to those educators in our community who were struggling to serve our children. In simple terms, we found a way to answer the question “what can we do?” with community-building meetings and a clear educational purpose. We could organize. We could listen to and support our teachers. We could move collectively with gentleness and compassion in fraught, scary times. Since 2020, we've continued to organize in support of Ethnic Studies (ES) in Texas, and made time to think, reflect, and grow. Writing together has allowed us to think collectively and document our work in the area of ES as a practice of critical and anti-colonizing pedagogies and articulate our praxis as a framework of relational thick solidarity. By including best practices and lessons learned, we hope to contribute our approach of non-proprietary community and social-movement building to the greater educational community. Embedded in our testimonies are detailed examples of how our work pushes education toward anti-racism, decolonization, and solidarity, as a collective praxis of emancipation.

Settler Colonialism and Historical Erasure

We foreground our contribution within and against a settler colonial framework. Settler colonialism is the historical and ongoing erasure of Native and Indigenous peoples, culture, and knowledges

¹ We are glad to answer the call, published as we completed our copy edits, to publish in community (Rivera Prince et al., 2025).

from the land, reified through structures (Wolfe, 1999). Formal educational paths established within settler colonial societies uphold the values and priorities of a Eurocentric colonial knowledge system (Calderón, 2014; Dei, 2000; Howard, 2006; Patel, 2014), shaping governance, policy, curriculum, pedagogical practices, perspective, omissions, expected outcomes, assessments, the physical schooling facilities (Muñoz & Proffitt, 2020; Tuck & Yang, 2012) and eventually, the identities of the learners themselves (Calderon, 2014; Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2013). As a part of the greater public schooling community, we recognize the myriad ways that “formal schooling has had far more to do with the project of coloniality than it has with learning, teaching, or co-existence” (Patel, 2015, p. 4). We know to examine patterns of racial disparity—disproportionate disciplinary actions based on race (Bal et al., 2018), disparities in extractive high-stakes testing outcomes and the larger assessment industrial complex (Conn & Tenam-Zemach, 2019), underrepresentation among faculty, staff, administration, and policy makers in racialized communities (Kohli, 2018; Picower, 2009), as well as curriculum that glorifies colonial narratives and erases non-White peoples, perspectives, and (his)stories (Calderon, 2014; Sleeter, 2011; Utt, 2018). Which is also to say, we are intentionally building upon the work of many generations of community-responsive activist scholars who have left a map for us with the gentle reminder that education does not have to look this way.

Core Member Cecilia Sanchez-Hill reflected on how the epistemic violence her students experienced led her to participate more fully within the movement to reclaim knowledge.

In the middle of a US history lesson, an eighth grade Latina student in an urban Texas school district raised her hand and asked me, “Mrs. Hill, did any Mexicans sign the Declaration of Independence?” In the brief moment that I paused and realized that I had already taught more than a century’s worth of US history and had not once mentioned Mexicans, a white male student laughingly responded, “Nope.” I did my best as a first-year teacher with limited content knowledge beyond the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) standards to provide a little bit of Mexican American history. It was clear that such content would be relevant to both students, one who was clearly longing to see herself reflected back in the history, and the other, who at thirteen years old had already formed an opinion of Mexicans as another, undeserving of respect. It was also clear that by the eighth grade, my students had not received a full account of US history and instead they learned an Anglocentric narrative that celebrates a linear progress of white Americans without acknowledging the structures of white supremacy that ensured the subjugation of people of color. These lived experiences as both a Latina student and educator in Texas have led me to dedicate time and energy to ESNTX and our efforts to advance the teaching of Ethnic Studies in K-12 classrooms.

As exemplified by Cecilia’s testimony, we acknowledge and understand the historical erasure and are intentionally building upon the work of many generations of community-responsive activist scholars to build a more inclusive conceptualization of education.

Decolonizing Projects in Education

Decolonial projects in education are not a monolith. These projects spring from multiple geographic and temporal localities, demanding different processes, but universally rejecting the notion that the dominant, Eurocentric way of being and knowing, bolstered by capitalism and rooted in racist violence, is, or should be, the accepted standard or norm (De Lissoy, 2015). For example, through

his explication of the *coloniality of power*, Quijano (2000), describes how the colonial encounter made capitalism possible. He argued that the colonization of the Americas is foundational to the concept of modernity. The project of colonialism and its use of race in the division of labor is critical in understanding today. Before coloniality there was never a unified global system or economy; through colonialism, racism and the division of labor are “structurally linked and mutually reinforcing,” but designed to look like “natural outcomes” (p. 536). Critical to this project, colonizers appropriated resources, erased epistemological heritage, inculcated the colonized into western culture, and affixed themselves as the heroes of the historical narrative, victims of their historical context but ultimately justified in their actions.

While Quijano writes from the *peripheral* lens as a scholar of South America, decolonial theorists each provide a different perspective from which they challenge Western knowledges and the current neoliberal moment (see Harney & Moten, 2013; Mignolo, 2007; Quijano, 2000; Tuck & Yang, 2012, Wynter, 2006). These scholars call for a decentering of Eurocentrism, and a resituating of it amongst other onto-epistemological orientations. Within these projects, “the point is not to find permission to be admitted into the circle of humanity by colonial reasons but rather to transform the meaning of the human in accordance with a nondominative ethical stance” (De Lissovoy, 2015). For this project, a decolonial lens is appropriate as the epistemologies of Ethnic Studies (ES) work to de-center the individualistic, meritocratic logics of white, western, Eurocentric education (Valenzuela, 2019). In the midst of a struggle to undo a neo-colonial re-naming of the Mexican American Studies course, core member Orlando Lara, reflected on how he used his position within the university to assist in the creation of a decolonial and intersectional ES community that cut across university and community institutions.

At the time, I had just completed my first semester as the Associate Director of Comparative Race and Ethnic Studies (CRES) at Texas Christian University, which just a few months before had become the first ES department in the state of Texas. The program, now a department, had emerged through student calls for a Black Studies program and the early energy of social transformation was still palpable on campus. I was encouraged, in other words, to help fulfill the activist and community legacies of ES in my role as Associate Director. As such, I was also finely attuned to how ES could be used to de-mobilize or “water-down” more ethnic-specific ES fields and courses. To some conservatives and moderates, the idea of a multi-racial ES where students are ultimately taught to “get along” is slightly less threatening than ES fields that are organized around existing ethnic identities. The fear, if one takes the Tucson backlash against MAS as an example, is that students might develop too much ethnic solidarity and pride in these courses. In my role as Associate Director of an ES department, I lent my support to the argument that Mexican American Studies was a legitimate academic field that deserved to be respected in its own right. Later that June, the [Texas SBOE] voted in favor of reverting the course back to its original name of Mexican American Studies. By September of 2018, MAS was adopted as the first TEKS-approved ES elective course in the state of Texas and a new ES motion called for new courses. The priority at this point was to develop a much-needed mass implementation strategy for Mexican American Studies. During this time, however, Trinidad Gonzales, a South Texas College history professor, began emailing academic ES departments, asking them if they had any plans to develop the courses named in the new 2018 SBOE motion. Traditionally there has been a separation between K-12 ES and higher ed ES, so when I got his email, I was not surprised to hear that no other academic departments had responded to his query. I was, however, happy to receive the message. It was one of those rare moments when you are called to do something that

you actually want to do and fits your capacities. Working with Dr. Gonzales and Dr. Max Krochmal, then Founding Chair of CRES at Texas Christian University (TCU), that December in 2018, I convened a group of academics and educators who had previously been involved in the MAS advocacy work and similar efforts. We met via Zoom, an online video conferencing service that would, only a year later, come to play a central role in most academic and professional lives.

The rise of ES courses in Texas and the continued legacy of interracial and interdisciplinary coalition building can be attributed to the community leaders that first began to decolonize education from the *escuelitas* of the early 20th century and to the current movements fighting for inclusive education across institutional and community spaces (Barragán Goetz, 2022).

Emergence and Solidarity in Social Movements

As demonstrated by our predecessors and elders, social movements are emergent and fluid. They draw their strength, at times, from being fast and temporary or from having no or very little centralized organization. Sometimes the goals of these social movements are not to modify the existing social system or even to overthrow it, but to create sustainable alternatives that can help make older systems obsolete (Graeber, 2004; den Hond, et al., 2015). Organizations, by contrast, see themselves as effective precisely because they are long-term and sustainable, and to get there, they presume that certain organizational forms and hierarchical structures need to be in place for the organization to reproduce itself and gain social and political legitimacy. Nonetheless, even deeply participatory activist networks hell-bent on bringing social systems to the brink of chaos as their primary “theory of social change” have organizational elements, such as spokes-councils or task-based committees where consensus-based decisions are made (Fithian, 2019). Some anti-hierarchical organizations go further to argue that the social relations one hopes to create should be present in the organizational forms that are used to get there; in other words, that the means *should* prefigure the ends (Graeber, 2004).

If social movements can be both decentralized, loosely connected social networks and interconnected, collective action fields, it is also important to recognize that social movement networks are not free-flowing, ever-expanding borderless worlds (Diani & Mische, 2015). They are composed of social ties that form, stretch, grow, and at times “sever.” In the thick of social emergence, it can be difficult to determine when a social tie is one of “friendship or enmity, of alliance or opposition, or of entailing varying degrees of shared goals, resources, tactics or ideas” (Diani & Mische, 2015, p. 12). This represents both the risk and possibility of solidarity and if one is not going to replicate the surveillance strategies of the state, some risk in association is always at stake.

However, this does not mean that solidarity must be entirely open-ended or presumed: Shange and Lui argue for a “thick solidarity” that is built not on superficial assumptions of unity (we are all in this together), but on a deep and committed effort to understand each other’s histories, as well as the legacies of alliance and of betrayal that cut within and across communities. In U.S. racial politics, this often means acknowledging a long-standing commitment to anti-Blackness even among communities of color (Shange & Lui, 2018). However, this does not mean that we should resort to new narratives of racial singularity that ignore how various forms of racial violence have interacted and shaped each other. In this essay, we argue for remaining attentive to the “infrastructures of feeling” that allow people to “select and reselect” new “liberatory lineages”

across vast geographies of difference (Gilmore, 2017). This is the wisdom that tells us that “not all skin folk are kinfolk” and that sometimes we find our greatest allies beyond our own racial communities. In the past several years, ESNTX has set out to re-generate and build upon these infrastructures of resistance, while creating new relational thick solidarities along the way.

In addition to interrogating the unique histories of racialization that communities experience, this view of relational thick solidarity requires us to be mindful of how racial violence is meted out through both state and non-state institutions and how differently racialized communities have created different strategies of resistance. This means staying attentive to how racialized communities and individuals occupy specific matrices of power and privilege that do not remain fixed and unchanging. In other words, working toward relational thick solidarity means recognizing and reckoning with the racial singularity that white supremacy has forced upon us while working through those deeply embedded barriers to forge new racial solidarities. This is simultaneously intergenerational work and also work that each generation must engage in anew.

Part I: A Brief History of K-12 Ethnic Studies in Texas

While the Ethnic Studies (ES) movement at the K-12 level in the U.S. has been growing for the last two decades, ES has longer and often unwritten histories within grassroots, localized efforts. In Texas, Tejano and Chicano advocates developed and sustained *escuelitas*, community-based schools grounded in Mexican American language, culture, and history for over 100 years beginning as early as the 1860s (Barragán Goetz, 2022). In the early 1970s, the Texas State Board of Education approved a series of courses called American Cultural Studies, including American Indian Studies, Mexican American Studies, and Negro American Studies (later titled Black American Studies) developed by the Texas Council of the Social Studies, which were later allowed to dissolve (Sánchez Hill, 2024). We also hear from elders that MAS courses were taught in the Houston area as early as the late 1990s (Loredo, 2025).

While some states have adopted “Ethnic Studies” courses or even requirements (e.g., California) Texas advocates have focused on creating and advocating for discipline-specific ES elective courses. Spurred by cross-state collaboration with MAS teachers in Arizona in 2010, advocates in Texas led by the *Librotraficante* movement and the National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS) Tejas Foco Pre-K-12 Committee pushed for an elective course in Mexican American Studies in the years that followed.

By 2014, MAS was taught as a special topics course in multiple districts and by the mid-2010s, there was a fully operating MAS Teachers’ Academy hosted at the University of Texas in San Antonio. By 2018, a Social Studies MAS course began moving through the Texas State Board of Education (SBOE). In April of that year, the Texas SBOE voted to change the course title to “Ethnic Studies: An Overview of Americans of Mexican Descent.” A coalition of advocacy groups and individuals across the state including the Texas Freedom Network, the NACCS Tejas Foco PreK-12 Committee, the Intercultural Development Research Association, parents, teachers, educators, community members, students, and most Democrat SBOE members challenged this action. At the

same time (and possibly as a result of) a negotiation with conservative SBOE members, the SBOE considered and voted for a motion that created a pipeline for considering additional ES courses.²

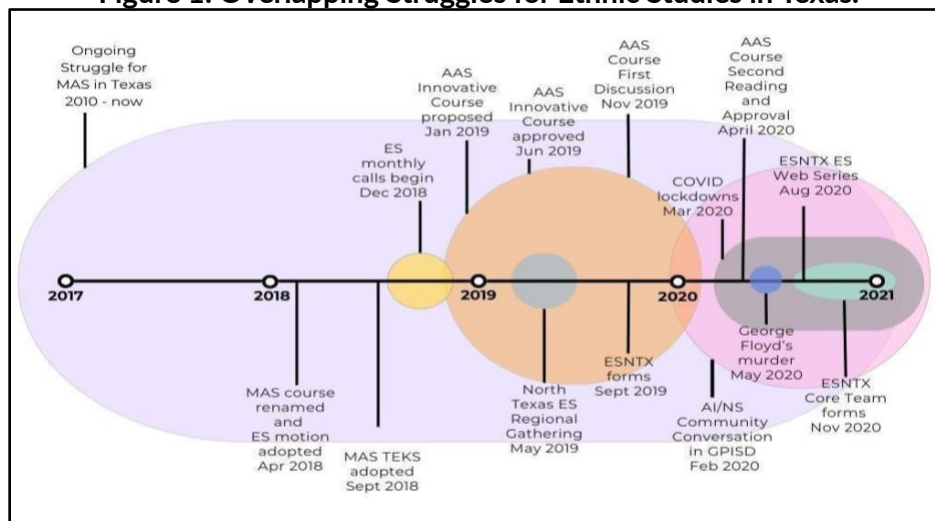
As part of the deliberations, board members acknowledged that an open-ended motion could open the possibility for an endless amount of course adoptions. As a result, the SBOE motion named four specific “comprehensive ethnic studies courses”: Latino studies, African American Studies, Native American Studies, and Asian American Studies, putting Texas on a track to integrate these ES course electives into the state-wide TEKS course catalog.

Through the emergent alliances and ruptures that accompanied advocacy for Mexican American Studies in Texas, an unexpected opportunity arose, one that was almost ignored by ES advocates. While many MAS advocates argue that they had long championed the creation of additional ES courses, in the months that followed the approval of the MAS course, there was no public-facing plan to further develop these remaining ES courses. Nonetheless, whether intentional or coincidental, the advocacy that surrounded the adoption of the MAS social studies elective created a clear opening for future ES courses.

Building an Ethnic Studies Community in Texas

By the late fall of 2018, there were two primary opportunities and challenges in the Texas Ethnic Studies (ES) community. The first was the gargantuan effort of preparing a growing number of educators to teach the newly approved Mexican American Studies course, championed by the annual MAS Teacher’s Academy and the call for local school districts to adopt the course, which was promoted by an annual MAS Summit. The second was the creation of additional high school level ES courses. While no highly publicized effort had yet arisen to address this need, some course creators had already begun to develop a course in African American Studies in Dallas ISD.

Figure 1. Overlapping Struggles for Ethnic Studies in Texas.



Source: ESNTX.

² Advocates would later find out that the motion in April 2018 did not require the SBOE to take the full step of adoption. It merely committed the Texas SBOE to consider these courses for adoption. This opened future courses to the possibility of ongoing delay.

In December 2018, a small group of ES educators and advocates also began holding monthly Zoom calls, largely facilitated by Orlando Lara who was then at TCU in Fort Worth, to discuss the creation of additional ES courses. In January 2019, Prof. W. Marvin Delaney from UT Arlington joined the discussion and informed the participants that a course on African American Studies was being piloted in Dallas ISD and was in the process of being submitted for approval as an Innovative course.³ Later that week, Deyadira Arellano and Orlando Lara attended a Dallas ISD school board meeting where the board voted to approve the Innovative Course application that would be submitted to the Texas SBOE later that month. Orlando and Deyadira also met one of the course creators, the then director of the Dallas ISD Racial Equity office. Later that year, Prof. Dulaney and Robert Edison began working with Dallas ISD to develop teacher workshops in preparation for the African American Studies courses' second pilot year.

Orlando and Dee continued to convene the monthly ES Zoom conversations and by May of 2019 worked with Cecilia Hill and CRES staff and volunteers to host an in-person, multi-day North Texas Ethnic Studies Regional gathering that included K-12, community college, higher ed faculty, and community members. The gathering opened with a panel of Social Studies coordinators and TCU CRES faculty who described their ongoing Ethnic Studies projects, including a new lead for the African American Studies innovative course project in Dallas ISD and a Fort Worth ISD curriculum overlay for Latina/o Studies. The gathering then broke into four field specific strategy sessions, where participants discussed the current needs and future visions for each K-16 Ethnic Studies field in North Texas. In the session on Native and Indigenous Studies, participants planted the seeds for a future conversation on Native American Studies.

The African American Studies innovative course was approved in June 2019 and by the fall of 2019, the small planning committee named itself the Ethnic Studies Network of Texas. Later that year, they began meeting with District #13 Board Member Aicha Davis and Dallas ISD reps to support the review and adoption of African American Studies as a TEKS-based course. In November 2019, together with Dallas ISD educators ESNTX mobilized community testimony on behalf of the course's "first discussion" before the SBOE. More than 30 testifiers traveled from throughout Texas in what one testifier described as "a class in African American Studies... here and now."

In February of 2020, Grand Prairie ISD, American Indian Heritage Day, and TCU faculty hosted an event called "Conversation for Native American Studies," which was attended by over 70 participants from 24 different tribal communities. Since this 2020 conversation, a community committee of Native people and engaged allies have continued to diligently refine the proposed course of American Indian/Native Studies as an Ethnic Studies course for all Texas learners, centering the voices of Native and Indigenous peoples.

In April of 2020, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the African American Studies course moved toward full adoption, becoming the second Ethnic Studies course in Texas. In May, the American and global public was shocked to witness the brutal murder of George Floyd via camera phone. In addition to mass protests in the streets, this sparked a mass call for educating oneself on the realities of structural racism, a move that was championed temporarily even by corporations. This put Texas advocates in an unusual position: African American Studies had just been approved

³ This process had begun several months before.

in their conservative state, but there was no infrastructure to offer K-12 training and professional development for the course adoption. This is a common predicament for education organizers who have often had to advocate for ES courses even before there is a critical support structure for broad course adoption or to prepare educators for the racial backlash that can often accompany efforts to transform racial norms. In spite of these logistical challenges, interest amongst teachers, students, and communities was poised to grow by the summer of 2020 when both Mexican American Studies and African American Studies had become state-wide course electives.

Part II: 2020 ESNTX Web Series

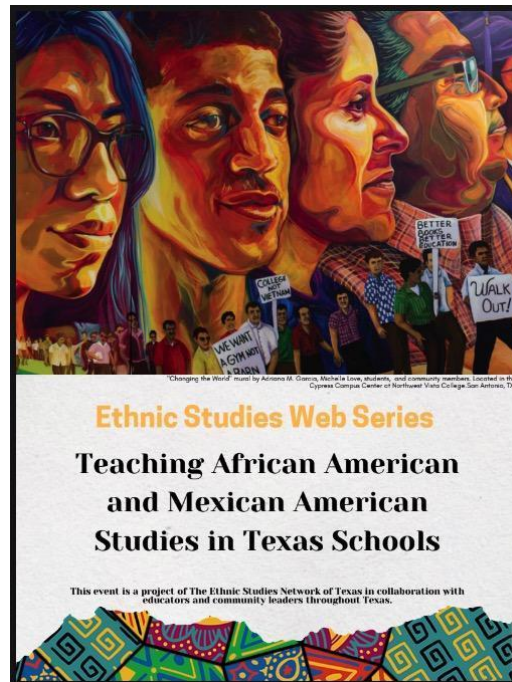
At the K-12 level, Ethnic Studies is most commonly taught as a social studies course, and teachers are eligible to teach the class as long as they have a social studies teaching certification. Scholars who study ES classrooms cite the importance of educators who are fluent both in the *content* and the *pedagogy* of ES (Sacramento, 2019; Saldaña, 2022; Sleeter & Zavala, 2020). Some hold degrees in ES fields, while others bring lived experience to their work, engaging with the content, pedagogy, and embodied epistemologies, or what Moraga and Anzaldúa (1981) call the *theories of the flesh*, that are associated with critical ES forms of critical thinking and analysis that arise from lived experience. For a majority of white teachers without specific training, personal experience, or connection to ES content, the work demands intensive self-guided racial awareness and a commitment to constantly upend dominant whitemainstream content and pedagogies (Sacramento, 2019; Tintiango-Cubales et al., 2015; Utt, 2018). For some, the work is not entirely self-guided, as they may find an opportunity to study ES in community or higher education as a student, taking Mexican American Studies, African American Studies, Asian American Studies and American Indian/Native American Studies courses to prepare. However, to date, there are no state-level accredited teacher education programs for educators who intend to teach ES at the K-12 level.

By the spring of 2020, in the midst of a Covid pandemic and the mass street protests of the brutal murder of George Floyd, and as African American Studies was approved by the Texas SBOE, many community conversations revolved around the question of “but what can we do?” ESNTX decided to shift its focus to address the critical problem of educator preparation. The Dallas ISD Social Studies department had indicated that they wanted to offer African American Studies and MAS in every one of their 39 high schools and shared their need to support educators. Bolstered by the critical energy of the George Floyd protests, new members joined the Network as it began to conceive of using (for us) novel web-based technologies to create a new pedagogical opportunity for Texas educators. Indeed, Core Team member Maria de los Angeles De Santos-Quezada recalled the significance of that moment.

...The pandemic began during the spring semester of 2020, disrupting in-person advocacy and limiting my ability to deepen my involvement as an early advocate for education policy. Then, on May 25, 2020, the murder of George Floyd profoundly impacted society. I wanted to do more than share calls for social justice on social media or attend protests. Advocating at the state level felt crucial in addressing the intersecting pandemics of racial injustice and systemic inequity.

Looking to support the launch of a new course in African American Studies and continue the growth of MAS, ESNTX organized and launched a Summer Web Series in 2020. Nearly 200 people registered and 120 people attended the week-long online event.

Figure 2: 2020 Ethnic Studies Web Series Program.



Source: <https://bit.ly/ESNTXWebSeries2020>

The series combined workshops for Mexican American Studies, African American Studies, and Afro-Latinx Studies. This was one of the first ES professional development workshops and one of the first intersectional K-12 ES workshops to be held in the state of Texas. Rather than follow the somewhat formulaic approach of connecting teachers to content experts, our team purposefully created open-ended spaces for our respective communities to engage the critical pedagogies of ES in multiple ways, from the epistemological to the logistical. Angeles reflected on learning about the efforts of the Summer Convergence by saying that her inclusion, “introduced me to a new kind of activism—one grounded in collectivism and mutual care.”

Core Member Eliza Epstein also reflected on the conditions that led to organizing the ES web series and how participation shaped her view of collaboration and solidarity:

So much has been written about the impacts of the pandemic, and yet so little trauma has been processed, healed. Watching schools close, businesses shutter, and capitalism (sort of) slow down in a collectivist effort towards public health was inspiring. I had been studying education reform for years and seeing, in an instant, how everything could be changed. The pandemic was a cloud, a curtain, a closing. The realness of illness, death, and loss cannot be forgotten. And, the pandemic was also a space for germination, for growth, for change.

In an unintentional way, the district-driven approach to PD faded away as the nascent organizing collective of the ESNTX Core Team brought their efforts to the project. Throughout this work, we were always asking questions about the locations of knowledge and how the combinations of

who and what we centered would enliven, enrich, and trouble/unsettle high school classrooms. For example, we invited a number of university professors to present their work, but also invited school board members, museum curators, parents, graduate students, educators, high school students, community college teachers, artists, and community organizers. What we sought was not just a diversity of perspectives, but a diversity of epistemic locations, of ontological orientations—people who thought and lived methods and stories of freedom.

As scholars building from work for education and liberation that has spanned decades, we approach this project of building a web series, as stewards of a movement. We reach back to the work of those who built the movement, center the goal of being in-relation with those currently in the struggle, who engage in praxis—bringing the theory to life in the work—and remain focused on the future generations.

Patel (2015) calls on educational researchers to examine to whom they are accountable. Building on the work of scholars before her, she frames the importance of reversing the gaze (DuBois, 1898) on educational research to reveal the way that it is “symptomatic, emblematic, and beholden to coloniality” (Patel, 2015, p. 15). Educational partnerships are often theorized as ways to bring together “diverse stakeholders to support “21st century learning.” However, our conceptualization challenges the neoliberal concern for producing employable citizens (i.e., citizen subjects that won’t make excessive demands on the state) and instead centers the potential of grassroots, place-based collaborations that level hierarchies and take an authentically democratic and humanizing approach to learning, honoring and being accountable to our community and youth.

Significance

The ESNTX 2020 Web Series allowed us as a community of educators to envision and enact an emancipatory model of co-learning focused on Ethnic Studies free from the hyper-surveillance of institutions. We moved intuitively to share ancestral ways of knowing and being in relation to each other, examining what it means to be good relations across our many differences. While the eternal struggle in academia is to find ways to enact theory or find patterns of theory in real world practices, our intentional disruption of the direction of the production of knowledge set us free to be and do and know and write and laugh and think collectively. We embodied critical pedagogies and we made justice-centered transformations in our learning circles, moving as a nurturing collective of co-creators of the knowledge. Marissa reflects on her work as an ESNTX Core Team member, and the parallels to the current educational crisis:

In the last five years, as we have looked back on our work, we recognize that in a moment of great social upheaval, in a climate of fear and isolation, we did something of lasting significance. We answered the question of “what can we do?” with a week-long event that brought educators, parents, students, and concerned community members into a circle of learning based in nurturance and mutual respect, honoring the lived experiences of our Elders, and the critical questions of our youth. We engaged in responsive discussion strategies, used small breakout rooms to encourage personal conversations, and wrote collective notes about what and how we were learning from each other. We acknowledged the ancestral peoples and places from across the state and offered words of appreciation and connection across our many areas of interest and expertise. We enacted and embodied all the best parts of what it is to be a reflective, engaged, educator and co-learner in a nurturing educational moment. It felt good to hold space

for our work, and we were surprised how easily it came together. As K-12 teachers, we are bound by the confines of standards and test-driven, content-heavy approaches to teaching. The Web Series reminded me of what it feels like to be included in a learning community led by curiosity, connection, thinking thoroughly, reminding me of what education could be.

Although the specific contexts of racial violence and anti-DEI legislation have shifted over the last five years, ESNTX continues to organize with a unified purpose toward collective liberatory education for all learners. In 2020, we may not have had the precise language to describe the thing we did, but given time to think, to draw, to share time, to organize with each other, today, we call it a praxis of solidarity that rehumanizes education, honoring relational, thick solidarities as the conceptual framework for our collective Core Team and our organizing in support of Ethnic Studies for Texas.

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A Declaration of Identity

Athens Marrón

(a response to Trump's anti-trans executive orders)

I am not who you think I am

I am not 'sick'

I am healing.

I am spirit.

I am not who you think I am

I am not hateful.

I am love.

Even at the expense of my sanity,

I still hold space for empathy

because I believe in my humanity

Even when you see me with disgust,

I am still not who you think I am.

I am not limbs for you to dissect,

beat,

bury,

erase.

I am seeds,

of my ancestors,

barely beginning to bloom.

I am not who you think I am.

I am not dirt you can walk all over.

I am red dust,

you cannot just wash off.

I am not that easy to get rid of.

I am here to exist forever.

I am not who you think I am.

Una Escuela del Pueblo: Escuela y Colegio Tonantzin

Marisol O. Ruiz, New Mexico Highlands & Cal Poly Humboldt

Note: Marcia Medina Garcia painted Tonantzin in memory of Escuela y Colegio Tonantzin, which was in the village of Agua Fria in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Courtesy of Marcia Medina.

Escuela y Colegio Tonantzin operated for 3 months, from June 1973 to September 1973, because it was destroyed by local and state police. Although short-lived, this is an important story for people to know and tell others because it demonstrates solidarity through people working together to create a culturally and linguistically land-based sustaining educational system. Escuela y Colegio Tonantzin speaks to the strong working relationships people developed during the long Civil Rights Movement era to create a school from mutual aid. The idea of a Chicano land-based educational system still lives within the Santa Fe community.

The history of Escuela y Colegio Tonantzin demonstrates the power of people operating in solidarity to create change and thus serves as a powerful lesson for future generations. This idea of a school was community-minded and grounded in Chicane culture, language, and land. This school that taught children and youth to be self-sufficient was driven by mutual aid, and these are still ideas we continue to discuss in communities today. The idea of resisting an education system that has and continues to force Chicane to assimilate, make them dependent on commodities and individualism still exists as we see the fight for Ethnic Studies curricula in our schools.

To examine the history of the escuela, I looked at newspaper articles from the *Santa Fe New Mexican*, *The New Mexico Independent*, and several grassroots newspapers: *El Grito del Norte*, *El Grito Newsletter*, *El Gallo*, *The Militant*, and *El Malcriado*. I also interviewed three people who taught at the school: Samuel Leyba, an administrator, art instructor, and the person who registered the school as a non-profit; Marcia Medina Garcia, an art teacher; and Adelita Medina Garcia, an English instructor and journalist for *El Grito Newsletter*.

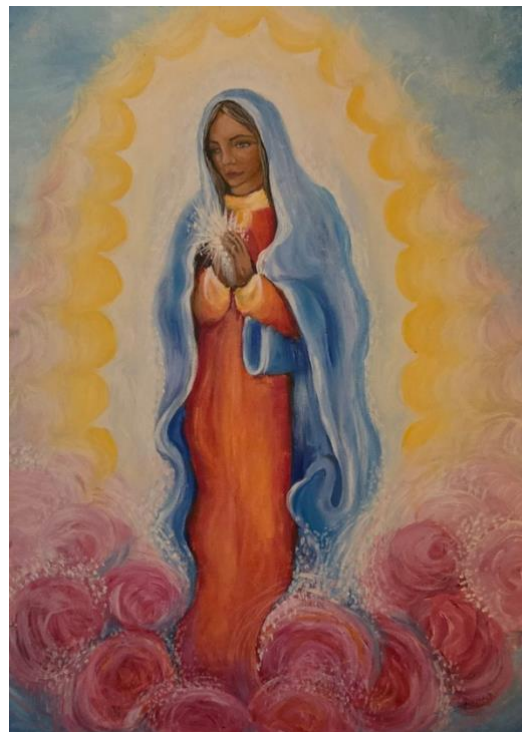


Figure 1. Tonantzin

Note: Escuela y Colegio Tonantzin's mural of Huitzilopochtli, painted by Artes Guadalupanos de Aztlan- Samuel Leyba and Jose (Joey Gomez). Courtesy of Samuel Leyba.

In June, 1973, *El Grito del Norte* announced that Escuela y Colegio Tonantzin, the first Chicano school with its own sovereign curriculum, would open in Santa Fe, New Mexico ("Escuela to open in Santa Fe," 1973). This announcement came a month before the closing of the newspaper. The school was affiliated with Escuela Tlatelolco in Denver, Colorado ("Escuela to open in Santa Fe," 1973). Escuela Tlatelolco served as a model for those working to create their own social justice place-based Chicano school. One month prior, in May 1973, *El Gallo*, a grassroots newspaper from Denver, announced that registration for the school would take place from May to June of 1973 for their first summer session and that it was open to K-21, including elementary, middle, high school, and college students. *El Gallo* also publicized that the school would offer the following courses: Chicano theater, art, music, dance, drama, mural painting, drawing, silverwork, history, science, math, and reading. For more information about the school, people could contact El Comité Central de los Barrios Unidos (*El Gallo*, Volume 5, Number 2, May 1, 1973, p. 9).

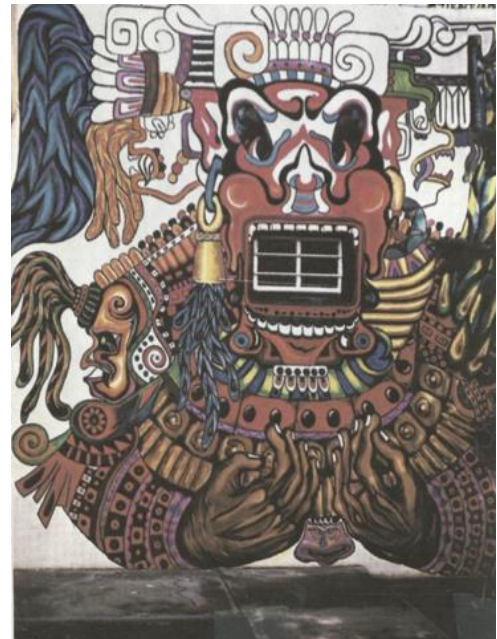


Figure 2. Huitzilopochtli

The school was in a church, which had been a convent (Our Lady of Victory Convent, San Isidro Parish) in the village of Agua Fria, a barrio in the outskirts of Santa Fe, New Mexico ("Escuela to open in Santa Fe," 1973). The school received foundation monies, and teachers at the school volunteered their time because they were committed to creating a Chicane school that served the needs of the youth (Handey, 1973a). Escuela y Colegio Tonantzin was not accredited when it began (Handey, 1973a). But this did not stop the community from beginning their dream of creating a rich, thriving learning environment for the community. Samuel Leyba recalls that the 1970s were a "magical time" because people were ready to work with one another to create the community they wanted to live in. For instance, Leyba learned how to register organizations as a nonprofit, which resulted in many of the non-profit organizations being under his name. Although he was not involved in all of them fully, he contributed by helping to jump start organizations so they could serve the community. Leyba emphasized, "during that time, we were all working together."

Note. Samuel Leyba painted a teenage version of Tonantzin, also in memory of Escuela y Colegio Tonantzin. Courtesy of Samuel Leyba.

Leyba was among a group of young people who sought social change for Chicanos in New Mexico. During this time, people had a community sense of responsibility because many had been part of Young Citizens for Actions, an organization which had been founded in 1963 by Godfrey Reggio (Czar, 2024), who was a mentor to many Chicanos in that organization. Leyba joined the organization when he was a teenager, and he credited Young Citizens for Action with developing his critical consciousness for action. Leyba emphasizes the key word, *action*: “We were not just sitting there talking, we were creating the change we wanted to see happen in our community” (Ruiz, *Samuel Leyba*, 2025).



Figure 3. Teenage Tonantzin

In Young Citizens for Action, Chicanos learned how to organize and put into action the changes communities wanted. They were also reading, learning, and discussing social mobilizations and actions taking place throughout the country. They read and discussed the Black Panthers and Puerto Rican Liberation Movement. They also discussed international struggles happening in Chile, Central America, and Tlatelolco, Mexico. They were eager to put into action what they had learned to serve their community. Chicanos wanted to see changes for poor and working-class folks. Leyba said that when they got together with the community, they discussed their various needs and what they as a community could do about it. This is why they created many organizations that would serve the needs of the community, including: El Comité Central de los Barrios Unidos; La Clínica de la Gente, which was co-founded by Godfrey Reggio; Barrio Arts Inc.; and Artes Guadalupanos, an art co-op that painted community murals in Santa Fe and Las Vegas, New Mexico. They also created a Community Law Center for the people. All these nonprofit organizations were to be run by the community to serve the people. These organizations were created with the clear purpose of protecting and uplifting the working-class Chicanos communities who had often been taken advantage of by the legal, health care, and educational systems, all of which are systems of power that continually disenfranchise the community instead of helping to heal, educate, and uplift them.

Comite Central de los Barrios Unidos had an idea of having a school where children learned about who they were and the importance of their culture both in Mexico and New Mexico. El Comite Central de los Barrios Unidos was inspired by Escuela Tlatelolco, which had begun in 1970 in Denver by the Crusade for Justice, who were themselves informed by the Mississippi Freedom Schools. They regarded Escuela Tlatelolco as the first Chicane school which operated under a Chicane philosophy, which was based on cultural pride, knowing one's history, art, dance, theater, music, math, literature, and science, but also grounded in social justice and community responsibility. As a setting, however, New Mexico differed from Denver in terms of its geographical location. Adelita Medina, who did her student teaching in Escuela Tlatelolco, recalls that the

major difference she saw was that Denver was in an urban setting and that Chicanes did not speak Spanish. She reminisces:

In New Mexico I grew up in an extended family (uncles, aunts, grandparents) in what they call caserías. We spoke New Mexican Spanish. We shared one big kitchen. We did not have running water nor electricity; therefore, we needed to grow our own food, caring for animals, cleaning the acequia, fixing the adobe in our home and going for leña (wood) to warm our homes and cook our foods. We had land but we were poor, so we had to be creative as we thought about ways to survive as a family and community. (Ruiz, *Adelita Medina*, 2025)

New Mexican Chicanes grew up in rural settings where they learned to care for the land and be self-sufficient because many times, goods and services were inaccessible due to economics and being in a remote location. Therefore, rural New Mexican Chicanes' educational philosophy added land responsibility and being self-sufficient because one cannot depend on institutions to fulfill their needs. For instance, this self-sufficiency included the importance of knowing how to build a house and an horno (oven) from adobe and understanding the importance and their responsibility with the land and people. Here we can see how the intention was on teaching students to be independent, as well as to work in solidarity as a community with the ability to build homes for themselves and the entire community, rather than being taught to be dependent on culture developers, most of whom had little interest in working or living within the community.

The founders wanted their school to reflect on what it meant being land-based people. The first issue of *El Grito del Norte* in 1968 begins with a photo of the land, titled "Our struggle begins with la tierra." The caption under the photo explains the Chicana/o philosophy of being land-based people:

La tierra es nuestra madre—the land is our mother, life itself. It provides our food and much more. . . . People have no need for fences or Private Property signs. For us, as for los Indios, the land wasn't real estate, something to buy and sell, own and exploit. It was nuestra madre and our homeland, that place of origin that today we call Aztlan. ("The movimiento in Nuevo Mexico 1968 to 1973 in *El Grito* photos," 1973)

This quote exemplifies the philosophy the school wanted to operate under, one that questions the institutions that perpetuate power's ways of thinking. Rather, the school illustrated how the founders had decided to build communities and educate their youth on the importance of a land-based philosophy. Such a philosophy grounds children and youth in the importance of their responsibility to take care of the land because it nurtures our bodies and is where we learn to be in community with one another, sharing and caring for one another's needs.

We can see this type of Chicane philosophy in the July-August 1973 issue of *El Grito del Norte*, which featured youth making adobe at Escuela y Colegio Tonantzin.

Note. “The movimiento in Nuevo Mexico 1968 to 1973 in El Grito photos,” 1973.

In contrast, U.S. schools perpetuate a Eurocentric middle-class system based on individualism, that any action/ labor must be compensated with money, with a dependency on others for service, viewing the land as a commodity, a resource to be extracted for raw materials based on power. Chicanes wanted to nurture youth to be self-sufficient, rely on themselves with a sense of community responsibility, and learn how to take action within a capitalist system. They wanted children and youth to not wait for others to create the changes they wanted to see happen, but for them to take actions they deemed necessary for their communities to thrive. They wanted children and youth to believe that they were able to make those powerful ideas of freedom into reality. They modeled this when they retold the story of how they had been granted a building in order to create the school. The educators at the school were role models of this type of possibility.



Figure 4. Making Adobes

El Comité Central de los Barrios Unidos took over the convent in the village of Agua Fria, because it was an empty building that no one was using in order to create the first Chicane school in New Mexico (Ruiz, *Samuel Leyba*, 2025). Once El Comité Central de los Barrios Unidos took over the convent; discussion ensued with the archdiocese until finally the building was granted, and this is how the Chicane community began the school. People in the community came together to make the school a reality and before they opened the school, the community worked together to condition the building so it would be a flourishing Chicane learning environment. The school began in the summer of 1973 with 75 to 80 K-21 students (Montgomery, 1973c). However, in another article, Celina Garcia, a drama teacher, recalled that 85 to 110 students had attended their school in that summer (Handey, 1973a). Therefore, in the summer of 1973, between 80 and 110 students were able to immerse themselves in a Chicane philosophy and curriculum which sought to empower people. Escuela y Colegio Tonantzin had signed up 350 students for the fall, which would have begun on September 4, 1973 (Handey, 1973a).

Yet the students who had signed up to attend Escuela y Colegio Tonantzin would not be able to experience a Chicane school because on September 3, 1973, during the Santa Fe Fiestas, 75 police officers urgently descended upon the school with their weapons drawn, shooting at the school for 45 minutes (Wall, 1973). *The Militant* and *El Malcriado*, two grassroots newspapers, reported in depth that Santa Fe police had attacked the school, killing Linda Montoya, a young 19-year-old. The *Santa Fe New Mexican* detailed a battle between militant Chicanos and the police in which Paul Carrillo and officers Robert Holland and Manuel Moya were all wounded (“SF 7 Trial Recessed until Monday,” 1974).. *El Grito Newsletter* stated that 7 young young Chicane men—Eugene Romero, Paul Carrillo, Geronimo Garduno, Jose Morfin, Joe Gomez, Tom Espinoza, LeRoy Ortega—were charged with assault with intent to commit murder (*El Grito Newsletter*, 1974). If found guilty, they each could have faced 2 to 10 years in prison (Handey, 1974a). Deputy DA Bruce Kaufman was the prosecutor in the case (*El Grito Newsletter*, 1974).

With obvious bias, the *Santa Fe New Mexican* reported the September 3 shootout between the school and police, but during the trial that began on January 23, 1974, it was proven that the police had been the only people shooting (*El Grito Newsletter*, 1974). On September 12, 1973, it was unveiled that the bullet that had killed Linda Montoya came from Santa Fe police officer Anthony Griego ("Bullet Traced to Police Gun," 1973). It was shocking to everyone in the community that the school had become such a threat. Teaching and learning represented a danger to the established Santa Fe New Mexican schooling system; consequently, the school became the target of Santa Fe police. The DA wanted to introduce files police reportedly had gathered on September 4, 1973, when they entered the school, such as the book, *Mao's Little Red Book*, pamphlets on guerrilla warfare, and literature on the Cuban revolution (Handey, 1973a, 1973d). However, Ms. Garcia, the drama teacher, stated that these items had been brought by the police themselves, hinting that DA Kaufman had been fabricating evidence (Handey, 1973a).

In the end, Judge Campos did not allow the DA to enter these files as evidence because they had been retrieved on September 4, 1973, without a warrant, which was required since Santa Fe police captain George Craig stated that he did not consider Escuela y Colegio Tonantzin an active crime scene (Handey, 1974d, 1974e, 1974f, 1974h). The DA needed to use the "evidence" gathered by police in order to reach a conspiracy conviction (Handey, 1974b, 1974d). DA Kaufman's behavior is an example of how the larger Santa Fe community wanted to stop this school from coming to fruition by any means necessary, such as labeling it as a communist indoctrination school to discredit their merits. An example of how Santa Fe police wanted to justify their violent actions upon the school was by trying to demonstrate that the Chicanos at the school had also been shooting at them. Santa Fe police claimed that they had found "two rifles and two pistols buried in an adobe pit near the convent" (Handey, 1974b). But many of the teachers and administrators of the school believed this evidence supposedly uncovered by police had all been fabricated. Proof of this was when fingerprint expert John Barone testified that he could not lift fingerprints from the bullets nor the pistols. In addition, Santa Fe police captain Alfred Lucero swab tested the hands of the defendants yet found only "inconclusive" results, meaning there had been no evidence of gunpowder on their skin (Handey, 1974e). Judge Campos repeated several times during the case that they should have obtained a search warrant to search the premises of the school during daylight hours of September 4 even though he still allowed a .25-caliber pistol as evidence and box of .25-caliber bullets, despite conflicting stories of when and where the Santa Fe police had obtained this evidence (Handey, 1974e).

The DA also wanted to bring into evidence marijuana plants, pot, and peyote the Santa Fe police had found at the school. Because they did not follow protocol and obtain a warrant, though, the judge did not allow it. El Comité de los Barrios Unidos were appalled that they had brought this as evidence because la Escuela y Colegio Tonantzin had made it one of their goals to educate people about the dangers of consuming drugs. This sentiment can be summed up by Robert Garcia, a volunteer teacher, who stated that this incident had been intended to discredit the school (Handey, 1973a). In another interview, Garcia elaborated his perspective on why the events of September 3 took place:

Now tell me this, would a school trying to straighten out dropouts and little glue sniffers—a school concerned with drug abuse—grow pot? It seems unlikely. It was an excuse. It gave them a chance to destroy our art—all acts of rage. Remember this also—the man in Agua

Fria that wants us to close the school is named Mier, Gilbert Mier. He's the brother of Fernando Mier, Deputy Chief of Police of Santa Fe. (Wall, 1973).

The community in Agua Fria felt that they were being set up. Therefore, the school community said they would do their own investigation of the incident because they did not believe they would receive the justice they deserved. In addition, Adelita Medina, an English teacher at the school and a grassroots journalist with *El Grito Newsletter*, was not allowed access to report on the incident. Therefore, organizations that came to help in the investigation were Black Berets of Albuquerque, La Clinica, Peoples Health Corps of Albuquerque, Co-op Canoncito, El Grito Los Padres from the Catholic Church, and Juan Jose Pena (Handey, 1973a). All these grassroots organizations told a very different narrative from mainstream media outlets like the *Santa Fe New Mexican*. This is why *El Grito Newsletter* (March 1974) has the most complete story of what happened on September 3, 1973, as well as the trial that ensued.

One of the main differences in reporting is how *El Grito Newsletter* humanized the people who had attended and worked at Escuela y Colegio Tonantzín. Samuel Leyba recalls September 3, 1973, like it was yesterday because it was so traumatic to the whole community. He recounts that on that day when the violence happened, they had had a celebration that included parents, children, teachers, and community members. Samuel Leyba was not at the school when the incident arose because he had taken two students home. When the shooting began, there were families at the school, but they all managed to escape through the back (Ruiz, *Samuel Leyba*, 2025). *El Grito del Norte Newsletter* (1974) reported that September 3, 1973, was a "night of terror" that would be remembered forever by the families, students, and educators who were at the scene.

Families and school officials said that when Santa Fe police had been shooting at the school, someone had yelled for the police to stop shooting and Lt. Luis Romero had told them to come out with their hands up, and only then did the shooting stop. Then, as they had all been preparing to walk out of the school, police began shooting again; officers claimed that they had seen flashes of gunshots through the window and so they began shooting again. As the people in the school were walking out, one fateful bullet hit Linda Montoya. Gene Romero ran towards the police to get help for Linda. They called the ambulance, which took Linda to the hospital where she died four days later. Linda Montoya had been visiting the school that day and celebrating with the community. The newsletter ends the article with, "Que Viva Linda Montoya!" (*El Grito Newsletter*, 1974).

After police arrested the seven Chicanos, people began organizing for their release. The trial was supposed to take place in Santa Fe, but the community wanted it switched to Estancia, New Mexico, a place that was like Agua Fria and where many community members believed the young defendants would have a fair trial (Ruiz, *Samuel Leyba*, 2025). This made it difficult for community members to attend, but during this time people had organized themselves and they would not be deterred from attending and showing support for the "Santa Fe 7." Samuel Leyba said he drove a van and took people back and forth to Estancia so the community could participate and serve as witnesses in the trial. He also wanted the seven Chicano brothers in jail to feel supported by the community (Ruiz, *Samuel Leyba*, 2025).

Judge Santiago Campos had scheduled the 19-day defense hearings to begin on January 23, 1974. The trial lasted 16 days (Handey, 1974a). Just as the prosecutor in the case, Deputy DA Bruce Kaufman, was extremely hostile towards the defendants, this case helped to expose the lies from

the Santa Fe police department and the disdain they had for the Chicane social justice community (*El Grito Newsletter*, 1974). Samuel Leyba remembers feeling optimistic because they had just created a Community Law Center for el pueblo and there were eight lawyers all seeking to take on the case, so they decided to work together to defend all seven people. This is unheard of, “when have you ever heard of eight lawyers defending seven people?” asked Leyba (Ruiz, *Samuel Leyba* 2025). The eight lawyers were successful in their defense of the Santa Fe 7, as they were freed and all charges were dropped. It was in the trial that they learned that all the bullets fired had come from police and it was proven that no gunfire had come from the school. The shocking part of the case was how many police officials came to the scene that night. *El Grito Newsletter* reported that 80 police officials from city, state, and sheriff’s departments were at the scene. The police testified that they began shooting because they had seen gunfire from inside and this was their justification to send a volley of bullets at the school. The eight lawyers defending the case were able to show clearly that the people in the school had been unarmed and were never thinking about shooting at police; rather, they had been celebrating in conviviality with school officials, students, families, and community members (Handey, 1974i).

Additionally, the defendants were also able to prove that officers Holland and Moya were most likely hit by bullets from other lawmen. For instance, Lt. Luis Romero testified that it was possible for them to have been hit by police fire. On March 12, 1974, the SF 7 were found innocent—they were all free to go home with their familias and keep organizing. Samuel Leyba believes they won the case when the defense lawyers showed the jury how a beautifully painted plaster of paris carving of Tonantzin had been destroyed by Santa Fe police, demonstrating who were the true aggressors. The questions to ask ourselves were: *Why would anyone destroy Tonantzin so viciously, tearing her to pieces? What was the Santa Fe police department trying to convey with this action? Were they sending a message of assimilation and obedience?*

What is shocking about this story is that during the trial it was also uncovered that Holland had gas grenades and an AR-15 (*El Grito Newsletter*, 1974; Montgomery, 1974b). It was shocking to the community how many firearms had been shot at the school—miraculously, more people were not hurt or killed. The submachine gun being brought to a school where families were present made community members feel that the police were there to seriously harm and even kill them. The question to ask is: *Why would anyone bring that much weaponry and police officers, if their intention were not to close down the school?*

The story of Escuela y Colegio Tonatzin is a testament that to be educated, independent, social justice minded and community responsive was a threat to the state of New Mexico. This case shocked the community of Santa Fe, New Mexico. After the incident on September 3, the community of Agua Fria took a week to put the school back together and leave it open for afterschool programs. Also, some community members and others who provided funding to the school actually believed the police narrative that the school had actively engaged in shooting at police. As a result, the school lost some of their funding and support. Samuel Leyba responded, “We have made it without money before. We can make enough money to pay the bills and there will not be a closedown” (Montgomery, 1973c). Leyba expressed the spirit of the people willing to work for the community without being monetarily compensated but for the greater good of people living in Agua Fria. He demonstrated the belief of mutual aid in order for the community of Agua Fria to thrive. Although they tried to keep it open, in the end, the trauma and lack of money outweighed their ability to maintain the dream of a Chicane school. Nevertheless, community

organizers had conversations with the archbishop and organized so the space would be given to another community organization serving the people, La Clinica de la Gente. At the time, La Clinica needed to expand as more people were utilizing their services. In turn, the space where la Escuela y Colegio Tonantzin had been later home to La Clinica de la Gente (*La Clinica, Archbishop ink deal-1974; "La clinica solves problem," 1974*).

Although the school was short-lived—lasting from June to September 1973—the idea of a Chicane school would still live on in the hearts and minds of the community. The school represented hope for the working-class Chicane community of Agua Fria because it would be a school created by them that would be responsive and relevant to New Mexican Chicane land-based people who sought to develop in K-21 students a social justice consciousness and culture that would be rooted in land and community responsibility. A school which would teach children to think for themselves and have a positive self and community esteem and responsibility. They wanted to foster in youth a commitment to community responsibility that would help fight for clean water, soil and air which would guarantee their livelihood and future generations. A culture which taught people not only academic needs but also practical things like how to build adobe homes, clay pots, and cooking their indigenous foods, Chicane New Mexican tradition. The purpose of creating their own Chicane school was for self-sufficiency and for youth to enact sustaining practices with the responsibility to pass down this knowledge to future generations. Adelita Medina (English teacher) and Marcia Medina (Art teacher) recalled the incident and felt lucky that on that day they were not in Santa Fe, or they believed they would have faced the same fate as Linda.

La Escuela y Colegio Tonantzin was short-lived, but they wanted to provide a dream for children, youth, and families to see another form of curriculum that was not “gringo based” but featured Mexican and Chicano culture as stewards of the land and responsible for the community's livelihood and survival. Adelita Medina taught Chicane literature and journalism, and Marcia taught Mexican and Chicane art. Despite being short-lived, the school was an example of a possibility—that a school like this could exist and that they had made a difference in the lives of families and children. Adelita Medina and Marcia Garcia Medina remembered that they had been surprised there was not more of a protest and moral outrage from the community against what had happened in Escuela Tonantzin. They believe it was because the incident made people fearful, including the fact that the state had used 80 police officers to shoot at the school with no consequences or arrest of any police officer, that police had fabricated evidence about the curriculum, illicit drugs, and guns to discredit the school, and then arrested and incarcerated seven innocent Chicanos. They were able to see clearly how the state would deal with disobedient Chicanos who wanted to create their own school. Nevertheless, this did not deter all people from attending the court case in Estancia, New Mexico nor from continuing to fight for a school that would teach Nuevo Mexicano/ Chicane curriculum which was based on the continuation of their culture, struggle, self-determination, and land-based curriculum. This incident propelled Chicanos Unidos por la Justicia to create Escuela Antonio Jose Martinez, the next Chicane school in Las Vegas, New Mexico (Ruiz, *Adelita Medina*, 2025; Ruiz, *Marcia Medina Garcia*, 2025).

Lesson Plan

This article can be used when teaching about the Civil Rights Movements, especially showing how Chicanos in New Mexico were making a difference in education. Next, I show how one can align this article with standards (using Ethnic Studies and NM Standards as an example), activities in which one can engage students and critical questions one can ask students.

Teaching Ideas

Ethnic Studies Standards: 7 Cs of Ethnic Studies (Liberated Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Consortium, 2021)	
The story of Escuela y Colegio Tonantzin:	
a. Cultivates by emphasizing community actualization and self-determination. b. Critiques showing the relationship between institutions of the legal, policing, schooling, racism and capitalist systems. c. Challenges dependency on the educational system and demonstrates how communities can create an educational system/ institution that helps communities thrive. d. Connect: asking us to question ourselves to past and contemporary resistance movements that struggle for a socially just education system. e. Conceptualize: promoting a collective narrative of transformative resistance, critical hope, and radical healing by showing how community solidarity was able to build a thriving school.	

New Mexico Standards	
HS New Mexico History: Theme 6: Civil Rights	
Anchor Standard The student demonstrates an understanding of:	Performance Standard <i>Therefore, the student is able to:</i>
History 15. Historical Change, Continuity, Context, and. Reconciliation.	9-12.NMH.38. <i>Analyze the civil rights era in New Mexico using multiple perspectives.</i>
Inquiry 26. Communicate and Critique Conclusions.	9-12.NMH.7. <i>Construct arguments using precise and knowledgeable claims, with evidence from multiple sources while acknowledging counterclaims and evidentiary weaknesses.</i> 9-12.NMH.8. <i>Construct explanations using reasoning, correct sequence, examples, and details with significant and pertinent information and data, while acknowledging the strengths and weaknesses of the explanations given their purpose</i>
CIVICS	
Civics 2. Processes, Rules, and Laws	9-12.Civ.25. <i>Evaluate sources to determine how people use and challenge local, state, national, and international laws to</i>

	<i>address a variety of public issues</i> 9-12.Civ.28. <i>Evaluate the U.S. justice system over time and its impacts on policy, society, economics, and individual rights.</i>
Civics 4. Roles and Responsibilities of a Civic Life	9-12.Civ.37. <i>Participate in civil discourse to promote greater understanding around historical, contemporary, and future opportunities and obstacles.</i> 9-12.Civ.38. <i>Use historical data and evidence related to various actors' interests and motivations to determine their influence on contemporary issues.</i>

Materials Needed	
HEAL NM https://healborderlands.org/ , Los Jardines Institute https://losjardinesinstitute.org/ , and Highlands University have uploaded Santa Fe New Mexican Newspaper articles, <i>El Grito del Norte</i> and <i>El Grito Newsletter</i> , and video(s) of people who taught at Escuela y Colegio Tonantzin.	
Unit Lessons- (Most of the activities listed here can be conducted in a group)	
● Create a timeline by using the Santa Fe New Mexican Newspapers about Escuela Tonantzin (Students can work in groups by putting together each article by month) ● Analyze and write a brief on how the Santa Fe New Mexican Newspaper recounts the story of Escuela y Colegio Tonantzin. (reading and analysis of <i>El Grito del Norte</i> and <i>El Grito Newsletter</i> can be conducted in groups and writing can be individual) ● Read and analyze how <i>El Grito del Norte</i> and <i>El Grito Newsletter</i> depict the story of Escuela y Colegio Tonantzin. ● Listen to the oral histories about their experience at Escuela y Colegio Tonantzin. How have their stories impacted your understanding of the story? ● Read: "Una Escuela del Pueblo: Escuela y Colegio Tonantzin," by Marisol O. Ruiz- Did she capture the story correctly? What is missing? How would you have written the story? ● Write about the summer of 1973 when you attended Escuela y Colegio Tonantzin in Agua Fria, New Mexico. (Individual) ● Explain how Santa Fe New Mexican newspaper and grassroots newspaper (<i>El Grito del Norte</i> and <i>El Grito Newsletter</i>) communicate the news. Which communication style do you prefer and why? Are there grassroots newspapers in your community? Why or why not? How would you rewrite the story? (Group discussion)	

- Deep thinking time: Write what you have learned about the educational and justice system? Is it just? Why or why not? Why did people feel the need to create their own school in Agua Fria? Do you think people now want to create their own school? Why or why not? If people do want to create their own How has this story impacted, you? Explain. (Individual)
- Create a multimodal presentation on how you would create your own school. Write the purpose of why you are creating this school and why it is different from what we have now? What should students learn and why? (Group work)
- Write a grassroots newspaper article about something that is happening in your community. Decide in your groups what story you need to tell? Who will you interview? What pictures will you take? Will it be bilingual/ trilingual? And how will you put your newsletter together? (Group work)

Questions	
Compelling Question:	Why is there compulsory schooling? What are the consequences if we refuse to go to school? Should we be forced? Why or why not? If we were not forced to go to school, then what would you do with all those hours spent in school?
Staging the Question:	What did they teach at Escuela y Colegio Tonantzin? Why do you think the police began shooting at the school? Why do you think this incident happened? Do you believe the police acted in the interest of people? Would you have wanted to be a part of Escuela y Colegio Tonantzin ? Why or why not ?
Supporting Question 1:	What are we being taught in schools? What is the purpose of students needing to learn the content taught in schools? Are we learning? Would you change what is being taught? Why or why not? If you could change what is being taught, then what would students learn?
Supporting Question 2:	Why did Escuela y Colegio Tonantzin want to change what is being taught in school? Why did they feel the need to have a Chicano school? What did they teach in that school? And why was this important for the community?
Supporting Question 3:	Why is the curriculum taught in school so contentious? Why is it important to learn about the land, language and culture? Do you see this in the curriculum you are being taught today? Why or why not? How have newspapers transmitted the news about your community and school? How does the story of Escuela y Colegio Tonantzin connect to current conversations about ethnic studies, cultural pride, race and racism?

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New Mexico Education Policy: A Work in Progress

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As this edition goes to press, the battle over education in New Mexico continues. In 2014, two mothers – Wilhelmina Yazzie and Louise Martinez – separately filed lawsuits against the state claiming its schools were not providing their children with a constitutionally guaranteed sufficient education. In 2018, 2020, 2021, and 2025 the courts agreed, and ordered the state to develop a comprehensive plan for education that would provide all students with an education that is sufficient for them to succeed in either a career or in college that is culturally and linguistically responsive.

That still has not happened.

Education in State Law

When the New Mexico State Constitution was adopted in 1912, policies regarding education were included. The Education Clause required that “a uniform system of free public schools sufficient for the education of, and open to, all the children of school age in the state shall be established and maintained” (NM Const., Art. XII, §1). The constitution went on to address the education of non-White students through the Children of Spanish Descent Clause. “Children of Spanish descent in the state of New Mexico shall never be denied the right and privilege of admission and attendance in the public schools... (and) they shall forever enjoy perfect equality with other children (NM Const., Art. XII, §10). Additionally, the constitution included a provision that required teachers to be bilingual in the Spanish Teacher Training Clause. “The legislature shall provide for the training of teachers... so that they may become proficient in both the English and Spanish languages, to qualify them to teach Spanish speaking pupils and students in the public schools” (NM Const., Art. XII, §8).

However, laws and policies have been adopted throughout the years that conflict with the constitution. In 1925, a policy was adopted that allowed “County school boards... may provide separate rooms for the teaching of pupils of African descent and such pupils may not be admitted to school rooms occupied by pupils of Caucasian or other descent” (Section 55-1201, NM School Code, 1925). In all, schools in nine communities around the state became segregated. Another, the Gadsden School District in Southern New Mexico opted for complete segregation, choosing to bus Black students 30+ miles away to Philips A.M.E. Church in Las Cruces rather than teach Black students in any of their schools. After *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), Gadsden’s superintendent agreed to let Black students return to the district only after a meeting with their parents and a guarantee that there would be no trouble (personal communication, B. Boyer, Aug. 13, 2021).

Bilingual/Multicultural Education Act

Long after *Brown v. Board*, state legislators began adopting a series of acts intended to embrace the longstanding myth of three enduring and co-existing cultures in New Mexico - Native, Hispanic, and White ("Our diversity is our strength", n.d.). New Mexico became the first state in the country to approve a **Bilingual/Multicultural Education Act** in 1973. Revised in 2004, the act aims to ensure equal education opportunities for students in New Mexico. This is to be achieved by encouraging school district to:

- (1) use the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the students in a bilingual multicultural education program;
- (2) provide students with opportunities to expand their conceptual and linguistic abilities and potentials in a successful and positive manner; and
- (3) teach students to appreciate the value and beauty of different languages and cultures (§22-23-1).

However, the act stops short of requiring school districts to develop a bilingual multicultural education plan (NMSA 1978 §22-23-5, A). The hope is that districts will be lured into creating such a plan by offering special funding. The Public Education Department admits, only 64% of New Mexico schools have instituted such plans. And, of the \$42M allocated for Bilingual and Multicultural Education programs, only 3% were actually spent on BMEP expenses (NMPED, 2024). Legislators found "districts do not fully understand how to properly assess, place and monitor students in bilingual multicultural education programs so that students may become academically successful (NMSA 1978 §22-23-1.1, C).

Much of New Mexico education policy is touted as being grounded in a series of education acts adopted by the legislature but, as has been successfully argued in court, few of the tenets included in these acts have actually been implemented.

Indian Education Act

In 2003, legislators adopted the **Indian Education Act** which established the Indian Education Division of the Public Education Department and an Indian Education Advisory Council. Amended in both 2007 and in 2019, it was created to "ensure equitable and culturally relevant learning environments, educational opportunities and culturally relevant instructional materials for American Indian students enrolled in public schools" (NMSA 1978 §22.23A-2(A)). The act has consistently come under fire from the state's 39 Tribes, Nations, and Pueblos arguing that it has never been fully funded or implemented. Some Indigenous leaders have gone so far as to say the biggest threat to Native children in New Mexico is public education (Pecos, 2022).

Hispanic Education Act

New Mexico was the first state to adopt a **Hispanic Education Act**, doing so in 2010. The act was designed to "create education systems that improve academic outcomes for Hispanic students, foster parental involvement, and build collaborative mechanisms... to close the achievement gap, increase graduation rates, and promote post-secondary success" (NMPED, 2025b). Even though it was adopted in 2010, a full-time Hispanic Education Act liaison was not hired by the Public

Education Department until 2022. New Mexico is a minority-majority state with 64% of New Mexico students in K-12 identifying as Hispanic. By its own admission, “91% of students that participated in Hispanic Education Bureau supported arts programs felt inspired to do better in school” (NMPED, 2025a).

Black Education Act

New Mexico lawmakers responded to the increased focus on racism in the classroom following the murder of George Floyd with the adoption of the **Black Education Act** in 2021. The act requires racial sensitivity and anti-racism training for school personnel and requires NMPED to “develop programs, curricula, and instructional materials that recognize and teach Black Culture” (NM House Bill 43). Critics claim that, while the act was a “beacon of hope for New Mexico’s Black and African American students” it has fallen short due to a lack of compliance and more unkept promises (Watson, 2024).

Yazzie/Martinez v. State of New Mexico

In 2014, two mothers – Wilhelmina Yazzie and Louse Martinez – separately filed suit against the State of New Mexico claiming it had failed to provide their children a constitutionally mandated sufficient education. Together with 24 other parents and three school districts, they successfully argued that the state had violated its own laws by “failing to provide... programs and services necessary to make (students) college or career ready” (Martinez et al., & Yazzie et al. ⁴v. State of New Mexico, 2018, p. 3). Four student groups were specifically identified in the consolidated cases: students with disabilities, Native students, English Language Learners, and students from low-income families. Given the intersectional nature of student identities, that meant almost all students were covered by the case.

In issuing her ruling, the late judge Sarah Singleton found that the New Mexico Public Education Department had “failed to meet its supervisory and audit functions to assure the money (that) has been spent so as to efficiently provide... programs and services.” Additionally, the state had not “properly exercised its authority to ensure that districts are properly prioritizing and funding programs and services... through district allocations” (Yazzie/Martinez, 2018, p. 3). She found that the PED had not given the school districts a framework to use in providing a multicultural education and that the State had not implemented the NM Indian Education Act, the Hispanic Education Act, or the Bilingual/Multicultural Education Act. She also found that programs like full-day PreK, extended learning time, and culturally and linguistically relevant curriculum and instructional materials are effective, but not available to all at-risk students. Subsequent to the ruling, the state funded a study of the status of its schools. It determined that “students who face barriers in school success – including poverty and systemic racism – are not exceptions in New Mexico; rather they are the norm” (Oakes et al., 2020, p. v).

The case has been back to court several times since the initial ruling, and each time the state was found out of compliance. Most recently, in April 2025, the court again found the state had not complied with its order. In the latest hearing, Judge Matthew Wilson said, “A court-ordered plan

⁴ While Martinez et al. v. State of New Mexico was the first case filed, the consolidated cases have come to be known as the Yazzie/Martinez case.

would provide guidance to the Legislature and the executive branches of government, particularly when making difficult budgetary decisions that need to survive political and economic shifts” (Romero, 2025). The judge set a series of deadlines for development of the plan with a final document to be on his desk by November 2025.

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"Decolonizing Education in New Mexico: Addressing Systemic Barriers and Epistemic Violence Against Native American Students"

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Abstract

Shaped by centuries of settler-colonial policies, New Mexico's education system continues to marginalize Native American students from K-12 through higher education. Despite the 2018 Yazzie/Martinez ruling, which declared the state's education system unconstitutional for failing marginalized students, reforms have largely been symbolic, leaving systemic inequities intact. In this article, I examine the persistent barriers faced by Native students, including underfunding, cultural erasure, and epistemic violence. Drawing on Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) and Fanon's concept of ontological dissonance, the analysis highlights how Western academic paradigms devalue Indigenous knowledge systems and perpetuate colonial hierarchies.

Key findings reveal that tribal schools receive significantly less funding than their non-Native counterparts, contributing to outdated resources and inadequate teacher preparation. In higher education, Native students encounter a double bind: they are penalized for adhering to cultural practices while being forced to assimilate into institutions that dismiss their epistemologies. High attrition rates and widespread imposter syndrome are traced to systemic neglect rather than individual failings. In terms of performative reforms like land acknowledgments and tokenistic "culture days," I argue that these measures fail to address structural inequities or promote Indigenous intellectual sovereignty.

I conclude with actionable recommendations for decolonial reform, such as using tribal-controlled funding models, abolishing remedial tracking systems, and redistributing land-grant revenues to support Native students. By centering Indigenous voices and values, this research advocates for an educational paradigm shift that dismantles colonial logic and fosters true equity for Native learners in New Mexico and beyond.

Introduction

New Mexico, a home to 23 federally recognized Native American tribes and nations, embodies a paradox of educational equity. While its state constitution enshrines the right to a "sufficient

education” for all children (*Yazzie/Martinez v. New Mexico*, 2018), systemic barriers continue to stifle the academic trajectories of Native American students, particularly in higher education. Nearly 150 years after the establishment of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School—a model of forced assimilation that sought to “kill the Indian, save the man”—Indigenous learners in New Mexico remain ensnared in an education system that perpetuates epistemic violence, ontological erasure, and axiological dissonance (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006). In this article, I argue that despite legal victories like the landmark *Yazzie/Martinez* ruling, which declared the state’s education system unconstitutional for failing marginalized students, New Mexico’s higher education institutions remain complicit in reproducing colonial hierarchies. These structures manifest in high attrition rates among Native undergraduates, widespread imposter syndrome, and the marginalization of Indigenous knowledge systems.

The challenges facing Native American post-secondary students cannot be disentangled from New Mexico’s history of settler colonialism. For centuries, tribes such as the Navajo (Diné), Pueblo, and Apache have resisted policies aimed at erasing their languages, cultures, and sovereignty. The 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which annexed New Mexico into the United States, marked the beginning of state-sanctioned educational oppression. Designed to assimilate Native children into Euro-American norms, federal boarding schools severed intergenerational knowledge transmission (Adams, 1995). Even after the 1975 Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act granted tribes greater control over schooling, New Mexico’s public education system remained chronically underfunded and culturally hostile. Today, Native students graduate high school at rates 10% below the state average, and only 34% enroll in post-secondary institutions—a figure 20 points lower than their white peers (NM PED, 2023; NCES, 2022).

The 2018 *Yazzie/Martinez* decision exposed these disparities as constitutional violations, compelling the state to overhaul its education model. Yet, five years later, reforms have prioritized performative gestures—such as tokenistic “culture days”—over substantive investments in Native teacher recruitment, infrastructure, or curriculum decolonization (*Santa Fe New Mexican*, 2023). For post-secondary students, this negligence translates into a profound preparation gap: Only 12% of Native high school graduates meet college readiness benchmarks in math, compared to 38% statewide (ACT, 2022). Those who enroll in universities confront a double bind—high achievers face accusations of “acting white” or abandoning communal values, while underprepared students internalize imposter syndrome, often attributing academic struggles to personal failure rather than systemic neglect (Lee et al., 2021).

This crisis demands analysis through intersecting theoretical lenses. Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit), as articulated by Brayboy (2005), centers colonialism’s enduring impacts on Indigenous education and emphasizes how schools function as “sites of spiritual and intellectual genocide.” Complementing this framework, Fanon’s (1952) conception of ontological dissonance elucidates the identity crises Native students navigate when Western institutions demand assimilation into epistemologies antithetical to their worldviews. For instance, Western science’s privileging of individualism and empiricism clashes with Diné concepts of *Hózhó* (harmony), which situate knowledge within relational, land-based practices (Schwarz, 2013). Similarly, axiological conflicts arise when universities valorize competition and credentialism, alienating students whose communities prioritize collective well-being over individual achievement (Guillory, 2009).

In this article, I interrogate three philosophical questions:

1. Epistemological: What constitutes “knowledge” in New Mexico’s higher education system, and how do hegemonic academic standards devalue Indigenous ways of knowing?
2. Ontological: How do Native students negotiate dual identities as tribal members and scholars within institutions that historically sought to erase their cultures?
3. Axiological: Whose values dominate campus cultures, and how do these hierarchies constrain Native intellectual self-determination?

To address these questions, I drew upon legislative records, student narratives, and comparative case studies, including the failure of the 2019 New Mexico Indian Education Act to meaningfully improve college completion rates. In this study, I also critique recent “decolonial” initiatives, such as university land acknowledgments, as symbolic gestures that lack material reparations—a pattern scholars term “settler moves to innocence” (Tuck & Yang, 2012).

The implications of this research extend beyond New Mexico. By centering Native voices and epistemologies, this article contributes to global Indigenous movements for educational sovereignty, from Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission to New Zealand’s Māori-led curriculum reforms. I conclude with policy recommendations to dismantle systemic barriers, including tribal-controlled funding models and land-grant tuition waivers, arguing that true equity requires nothing less than a decolonial overhaul of higher education itself.

Historical Context

The educational oppression faced by Native American students in New Mexico today is inextricably tied to five centuries of colonial violence, broken treaties, and systemic erasure. To understand the roots of contemporary inequities, this section traces the trajectory of Indigenous education from pre-contact knowledge systems to the failures of the Yazzie/Martinez era, contextualizing how settler-colonial agendas reshaped—and continue to constrain—Native intellectual sovereignty.

Pre-Colonial Foundations: Indigenous Pedagogies of Land and Community

Long before European contact, the Ancestral Puebloans (500–1600 CE) and later Diné, Apache, and Pueblo nations cultivated sophisticated education systems grounded in reciprocal relationships with the environment. For instance, the Tewa people practiced kiva-based learning, where adolescents acquired ecological knowledge through oral storytelling and participatory ceremonies (Ortiz, 1969). Similarly, Diné Hózhóójí (Walking in Beauty) principles integrated mathematics, astronomy, and ethics into daily life, such as weaving patterns that encoded cosmological concepts (Witherspoon, 1977). These systems emphasized collective well-being over individualism, with education serving as a means to sustain cultural continuity rather than a tool for economic mobility—a stark contrast to the Euro-American models later imposed.

Colonial Disruption: Missions, Reservations, and Forced Assimilation (1540–1928)

Spanish colonization introduced the first wave of educational violence through Franciscan missions (e.g., San Felipe de Neri in 1706), which sought to replace Indigenous languages and spiritual

practices with Christianity. The 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which annexed New Mexico into the United States, accelerated cultural genocide via federal policies.

Boarding Schools: The 1868 Treaty of Bosque Redondo mandated Navajo children's enrollment in off-reservation schools. By 1900, New Mexico housed 12 federally funded boarding schools, including the Albuquerque Indian School, where students endured corporal punishment for speaking Native languages (Lomawaima, 1994).

Curriculum as Erasure: Textbooks taught that Native histories "ended" in 1890 with the "closing of the frontier," while vocational training confined Indigenous learners to menial labor (Adams, 1995).

Land Theft as Pedagogy: The Dawes Act (1887) allotted communal tribal lands to individual Native families, conditioning land retention on English literacy and the abandonment of cultural practices. By 1930, Pueblo nations had lost 75% of their pre-1848 land base - a material loss that destabilized place-based education (McKenna, 2021).

The 1928 Meriam Report condemned these policies, noting that 98% of Native students in New Mexico dropped out by eighth grade, but reforms remained superficial.

The New Deal to Civil Rights: Contested Progress (1934–1975)

The Indian Reorganization Act (1934) nominally ended assimilationist policies, yet New Mexico resisted tribal self-determination. For example:

Day Schools: Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) day schools on reservations, such as the Santa Fe Indian School, retained assimilationist curricula; only 3% of Navajo students progressed to high school in 1950 (Philp, 1999).

Voting Rights: Despite the 1948 *Trujillo v. Garley* ruling that struck down New Mexico's ban on Native voting, literacy tests and gerrymandering suppressed voter turnout. In 1964, McKinley County (66% Native) had 1 polling site per 1,200 square miles, versus 1 per 20 square miles in the majority-white Bernalillo County (NMNCA, 1965).

Termination Era Backlash: The 1953 Termination Act pressured tribes to relinquish federal recognition for "autonomy." This policy immediately led to the 1954 closure of the Albuquerque Indian School, a move that displaced 200 students without alternative plans (Reyhner & Eder, 2004).

Self-Determination and Persistent Neglect (1975–2018)

The 1975 Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act authorized tribes to operate their schools, yet chronic underfunding stifled progress.

Funding Disparities: In 2020, federal per-pupil spending for BIA schools was \$8,300, compared to \$12,400 for New Mexico public schools (NCAI, 2021).

Standardized Testing as Colonial Tool: No Child Left Behind (2001) penalized schools like Crownpoint Community School (Diné) for low test scores, ignoring the fact that 90% of students spoke Diné Bizaad at home (McCarty, 2009).

Higher Education Barriers: While the 1972 Indian Education Act created scholarships for Native students, by 2015, only 11% of Native adults in New Mexico held bachelor's degrees—half the state average (U.S. Census, 2016).

The Yazzie/Martinez Era: Litigation Without Liberation (2018–Present)

The 2018 Yazzie/Martinez ruling exposed the state's violation of its constitutional mandate to provide an "adequate education" for Native students. Key failures included:

1. Teacher Shortages: 40% of Native-majority schools had uncertified STEM teachers in 2022 (NM LFC, 2023).
2. Digital Redlining: Only 14% of Navajo Nation households had broadband access, hindering virtual learning during COVID-19 (NM Broadband Program, 2021).
3. Cultural Tokenism: Despite the 2019 Indian Education Act mandating a Native curriculum, 78% of teachers reported no training in Indigenous pedagogies (*Santa Fe New Mexican*, 2023).

Post-Yazzie legislation, like the 2023 Tribal Education Trust Fund, allocated just \$50 million for language programs—one-sixth of the estimated need. Meanwhile, the state's Public Education Department allocated \$1.2 billion to charter schools, 90% of which enrolled fewer than 5% Native students (NM PED, 2023).

Education as a Continuation of Colonial Logics

From Spanish missions to the Yazzie/Martinez aftermath, New Mexico's education system has functioned as a mechanism of dispossession, replacing Indigenous epistemologies with hegemonic frameworks. The state's refusal to fully fund tribal schools or honor treaty obligations reflects what Wolfe (2006) terms the "logic of elimination"—a settler-colonial drive to erase Native futures. These historical patterns directly inform the ontological crises and imposter syndrome plaguing Native students today, as explored in subsequent sections.

Philosophical Analysis: Epistemic Violence, Ontological Dissonance, and Axiological Hegemony

The challenges confronting Native American students in New Mexico's higher education system are not merely logistical or financial—they are philosophical. This section interrogates the epistemological, ontological, and axiological dimensions of Indigenous students' experiences, revealing how Western academic paradigms perpetuate colonial hierarchies and undermine Native intellectual sovereignty.

Epistemology: "What Constitutes Knowledge?"

Western academia's privileging of positivist, empirical knowledge marginalizes Indigenous epistemologies rooted in relationality, oral tradition, and land-based practices. For Diné scholars,

Hózhó (harmony) frames knowledge as a holistic balance between mind, body, and environment, contrasting sharply with Eurocentric disciplinary silos (Schwarz, 2013). Yet New Mexico's universities routinely dismiss Indigenous ways of knowing as "non-scientific." For example, a 2022 thesis at New Mexico State University (NMSU) on Navajo ethnobotany was rejected for relying on oral histories rather than peer-reviewed literature—a decision critiqued as "epistemicide" by TribalCrit scholars (Brayboy, 2005).

The Yazzie/Martinez mandate for a "culturally responsive curriculum" has done little to address this hierarchy. A 2023 audit found that 89% of STEM syllabi in NM universities exclude Native contributions, such as Pueblo adobe engineering or Zuni agricultural techniques (NM Higher Ed Dept., 2023). This erasure reinforces what Battiste (2002) terms "cognitive imperialism," where Indigenous students are forced to legitimize their intelligence through colonial knowledge systems.

Ontology: "Who Are We?" Negotiating Identity in Colonial Institutions

Native students navigate a dual ontological reality: affirming tribal identities while assimilating into institutions historically designed to destroy those identities. Fanon's (1952) concept of "colonial alienation" manifests when students like J. Begay (Diné), a chemistry major at UNM, report feeling "split in two"—honoring kinship obligations during ceremonial leave while adhering to rigid attendance policies that penalize absences (Interview, 2023).

For LGBTQ+ Native students, this dissonance intensifies. Two-Spirit learners, whose identities embody fluidity in many tribal cosmologies, face erasure in gender-binary campus systems. At IAIA (Institute of American Indian Arts), 43% of Two-Spirit students reported being misgendered by faculty, leading some to abandon their programs (IAIA Climate Survey, 2022). These struggles reflect what Vizenor (2008) calls "survivance"—a simultaneous act of survival and resistance against ontological annihilation.

Axiology: "Whose Values Matter?" The Clash of Ethical Systems

Higher education's axiological framework valorizes individualism, competition, and credentialism, clashing with Indigenous values of reciprocity and community stewardship. For instance, UNM's grading system rewards individual achievement, yet many Native students prioritize collective success, such as mentoring peers—a practice unrecognized in tenure-driven faculty incentives (Guillory, 2009).

Land-grant institutions like NMSU exacerbate this conflict. While their missions claim to "serve all New Mexicans," their agricultural programs often prioritize extractive practices over Indigenous sustainability models. In 2021, NMSU patented a drought-resistant crop strain developed from Pueblo techniques without tribal consent, profiting from Native knowledge while offering no royalties (*Albuquerque Journal*, 2021). Such acts mirror what Tuck and Yang (2012) critique as "settler moves to innocence"—performing inclusivity while maintaining extractive economies.

Synthesis: Colonial Continuities in Post-Yazzie Policy

New Mexico's education reforms remain philosophically incoherent. The 2019 Indian Education Act claims to "honor Native cultures" yet allocates <1% of state education funding to tribal colleges

(NM LFC, 2023). Similarly, universities adopt land acknowledgments while leasing acknowledged territories to fossil fuel companies—a hypocrisy that Navajo scholar M. Benally (2022) calls “decolonial theater.”

These contradictions reflect a failure to engage with Indigenous philosophies on their terms. Until policymakers center Native epistemologies in curriculum design, ontologies in student support, and axiology in institutional priorities, higher education will remain a site of “intellectual colonization” (Smith, 1999).

Educational Inequities: Systemic Failures from K–12 to Higher Education

New Mexico’s Native American students navigate an education system rife with structural inequities that begin in crumbling K–12 schools and escalate in higher education institutions ill-equipped to address their academic, cultural, and financial needs. These systemic failures—rooted in centuries of settler-colonial policy and perpetuated by performative reforms—create a pipeline of dispossession, where Indigenous learners are set up to fail before they even reach college. In this section, I expand on these inequities, grounding arguments in data, lived experiences, and theoretical frameworks like Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) to demonstrate how systemic neglect reinforces colonial hierarchies.

K–12 Systemic Failures: The Foundation of Disadvantage

1. Chronic Underfunding and Its Consequences

- **Per-Pupil Disparities:** In 2023, tribal schools received \$9,200 per student, compared to \$12,000 for non-Native public schools, despite serving populations with higher poverty rates (NM Legislative Finance Committee, 2023). This gap translates into dire resource shortages.
- **Textbook Inequity:** Schools like Crownpoint Middle School (Navajo Nation) use science textbooks from 1998, which erase Native contributions to fields like ecology (NM Public Education Department Audit, 2022).
- **Technology Gaps:** Only 14% of Native-majority schools have 1:1 device programs, versus 89% in Albuquerque’s affluent Northeast Heights (NM Broadband Program, 2023).
- **COVID-19 Amplification:** Remote learning exacerbated disparities. In the Zuni Pueblo, 40% of students lacked home internet, forcing them to study in parking lots near tribal offices—a stark contrast to suburban districts, where 95% had broadband (KOB News, 2021).

2. Teacher Shortages: A Crisis of Colonial Neglect

- **Uncertified Staff:** In the Navajo Nation, 55% of science teachers lack certifications, compared to 22% statewide. At Cuba Independent Schools (serving Navajo and Pueblo students), one single math teacher serves grades 7–12 (NEA New Mexico, 2023).
- **Turnover and Trauma:** High attrition (35% annually in Gallup-McKinley County) stems from inadequate housing and cultural isolation. A 2022 survey found 68% of non-Native teachers in tribal schools felt unprepared to address historical trauma linked to boarding schools (UNM Center for Education Policy Research, 2022).

3. Culturally Irrelevant Curriculum: Erasure as Policy

- Tokenism in Reforms: Despite the 2019 Indian Education Act, 82% of Native students report never studying treaties like the 1868 Navajo Treaty, which defines federal education obligations (Narraguinne et al., 2023).
- Impact on Outcomes: Schools integrating Native languages, like Kha'p'o Community School (Santa Clara Pueblo), boast 90% graduation rates—30 points above state averages for Native students (NPR, 2022). Yet only 12% of Native-majority schools offer such programs due to underfunding.

Post-Yazzie/Martinez Policy Failures: Litigation Without Liberation

- The 2018 ruling exposed systemic neglect but spurred minimal action:
 - Tribal Education Trust Fund: The 2023 allocation of \$50 million covers just 7% of needed language programs. Meanwhile, Arizona's similar fund invests \$500 million annually, demonstrating New Mexico's apathy (NM Indian Affairs Dept., 2023).
 - Bureaucratic Barriers: Tribes face labyrinthine grant processes to access funds. The Jicarilla Apache Nation spent \$120,000 in administrative costs to secure a \$200,000 literacy grant—a 60% loss (Tribal Leaders Institute, 2023).
 - Charter School Inequity: State-funded charters, like Albuquerque's Mission Achievement, enroll <2% Native students but receive \$15,000 per pupil, while tribal schools scrape by on federal Impact Aid (NM PED, 2023).

Higher Education: A System Stacked Against Native Success

1. Remediation and Bias

- Placement Test Inequity: At UNM, 62% of Native students are placed in remedial math due to ACT/SAT thresholds that ignore cultural context. For example, geometry questions assume familiarity with Euclidean terms, not Navajo spatial concepts like Hózhó (Diné Education Study, 2021).
- Case Study: María (Diné), a pre-med student, spent her first year retaking high school algebra while juggling work-study, delaying her entry into core courses (Interview, 2023).

2. Financial Aid Shortfalls and Workloads

- Unmet Need: Tribal scholarships cover 14% of average college costs (\$4,200 vs. \$30,000), forcing 53% of Native undergraduates to work ≥30 hours/week—twice the rate of their white peers (CARE Report, 2023).
- Ceremonial Penalties: At Diné College, 41% of students face GPA penalties for attending ceremonies like the Night Chant, which conflict with rigid attendance policies (Begay et al., 2021).

3. Cultural Dissonance on Campus

- Curriculum Erasure: STEM syllabi omit Native innovations, such as Chaco Canyon's astronomical alignments, reinforcing the myth that "science" is a Western invention (Ortiz, 2020).

4. Settler-Colonial Logics: Testing, Curriculum, and Erasure

- Standardized Testing as Violence: The SAT's emphasis on "individualism" and "nuclear family" passages alienates students from communal cultures. Navajo students often score 200 points below state averages in critical reading (Lee & Quijada Cerecer, 2016).

- **Land-Grant Exploitation:** NMSU's agricultural programs profit from Pueblo dry farming techniques without tribal consent, mirroring the extractive logic of the Morrill Act (1862), which granted Indigenous lands to universities (Albuquerque Journal, 2021).

TribalCrit and the Path Forward

TribalCrit (Brayboy, 2005) frames these inequities not as accidents but as intentional colonial projects. New Mexico's education system remains a tool of "intellectual genocide," replacing Indigenous epistemologies with hegemonic norms. Until then, Native students will continue to navigate a system designed to erase them—both physically and intellectually.

The research reveals how New Mexico's education system perpetuates colonial logic through policy neglect, cultural erasure, and epistemological violence, creating profound barriers for Native American students. Below, we present key findings across four themes, followed by a discussion contextualized within Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) and settler-colonial frameworks.

Findings

1. Systemic Underfunding as Colonial Continuity

- **K-12 Disparities:** Tribal schools received 23% less per-pupil funding than non-Native schools (\$9,200 vs. \$12,000), resulting in 40% lacking functional science labs and 65% using outdated textbooks (NM LFC, 2023).
- **Higher Education:** State scholarships for Native students covered only 14% of annual costs, forcing 53% to work ≥30 hours/week, correlating with a 25% dropout rate (CARE Report, 2023).
- **COVID-19 Impact:** In the Navajo Nation, 78% of students lacked home internet versus 5% in affluent Albuquerque suburbs, widening the preparation gap (NM Broadband Program, 2021).

2. Cultural and Epistemic Erasure

- **Curriculum Violence:** 89% of STEM syllabi excluded Indigenous knowledge (e.g., Chaco Canyon astronomy), while 82% of Native students reported never studying tribal treaties (Narraguinnep et al., 2023).
- **Standardized Testing Bias:** Navajo students scored 200 points below the state average on SAT critical reading, with passages privileging Eurocentric concepts like "individualism" (Lee & Quijada Cerecer, 2016).
- **Language Suppression:** 68% of IAIA students reported code-switching to avoid ridicule for using Native languages in class (IAIA Climate Survey, 2023).

3. Imposter Syndrome and Ontological Dissonance

- **Academic Preparation:** 62% of Native undergraduates required remedial math, versus 33% of white peers, with 74% attributing struggles to K-12 neglect (UNM Analytics, 2023).
- **Identity Policing:** High achievers like J. Begay (Diné) faced accusations of "acting white," while 41% withheld ceremonial practices to avoid academic penalties (Interviews, 2023).

4. Policy Failures and Resistance

- Post-Yazzie Neglect: The 2023 Tribal Education Trust Fund covered only 7% of language revitalization needs, while 90% of charter funding flowed to schools with <5% Native enrollment (NM PED, 2023).
- Land-Grant Exploitation: NMSU generated \$2.1 million annually from patents based on Pueblo agricultural knowledge without tribal revenue sharing (*Albuquerque Journal*, 2021).
- Counter-Narratives: Schools like Kha'p'o Community (Santa Clara Pueblo) achieved 90% graduation rates via Pueblo-led curricula, yet received 30% less funding than state charters (NPR, 2022).

Colonial Logics in Policy Design

TribalCrit (Brayboy, 2005) frames these findings as manifestations of the “logic of elimination,” where underfunding and erasure function as tools of settler futurity. For example, the state’s allocation of \$50 million for tribal education—while permitting \$1.2 billion for charters that same year—reflects Wolfe’s (2006) assertion that settler colonialism “destroys to replace.” Similarly, standardized testing’s cultural bias exemplifies “cognitive imperialism” (Battiste, 2002), where Indigenous intellect is measured against colonial benchmarks.

Imposter Syndrome as Structural, Not Individual

The high prevalence of imposter syndrome (68%) challenges psychological models that attribute self-doubt to personal insecurity. Instead, students internalize systemic neglect as personal failure—a phenomenon Lee et al. (2021) term “structural gaslighting.” When María (Diné) retook remedial algebra despite mastering sheep-herding logistics, she confronted epistemic hierarchies that dismissed Indigenous knowledge as “pre-academic.”

Resistance and Survivance

Despite barriers, students and tribes enact survivance (Vizenor, 2008). Kha'p'o Community School’s success demonstrates the transformative potential of tribal-controlled education, while IAIA students’ code-switching reflects tactical resistance to assimilation. Yet these efforts remain unsupported by state policy, echoing Tuck and Yang’s (2012) critique of “moves to innocence” that romanticize resistance without redistributing power.

Toward Decolonial Praxis

1. Tribal Funding Sovereignty: Adopt Alaska’s model, where tribes directly manage 100% of state education funds allocated to Native students.
2. Abolish Remedial Tracking: Replace placement tests with portfolios assessing community leadership and traditional knowledge.
3. Land-Grant Reparations: Redirect 10% of endowment revenues from Morrill Act lands to tuition waivers for Native students.

The implications of this research underscore the urgent fact that educational “equity” in New Mexico remains a colonial project until Indigenous nations control resource allocation, curriculum

design, and pedagogical standards. Without centering on Native sovereignty, policies will continue to replicate the violence of Carlisle's assimilationist classrooms.

Conclusion

The enduring educational inequities faced by Native American students in New Mexico are deeply rooted in the state's colonial history and perpetuated by systemic neglect. Despite landmark rulings like *Yazzie/Martinez*, which exposed constitutional violations in the education system, reforms have largely been superficial, prioritizing symbolic gestures over substantive change. Native students continue to encounter chronic underfunding, culturally irrelevant curricula, and epistemological violence that dismisses Indigenous knowledge systems. These barriers manifest high dropout rates, low post-secondary enrollment, and widespread imposter syndrome, underscoring the structural nature of these challenges rather than individual failings.

Through the lens of Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) and settler-colonial frameworks, in this article I highlight how New Mexico's education system functions as a mechanism of dispossession, reinforcing colonial hierarchies and undermining Native intellectual sovereignty. The privileging of Western academic paradigms over Indigenous epistemologies creates ontological dissonance for Native students, forcing them to navigate dual identities while assimilating into institutions that marginalize their cultural values. Moreover, axiological conflicts between Indigenous principles of reciprocity and higher education's focus on individualism further alienate Native learners.

To dismantle these colonial logics, I advocate for transformative decolonial reforms. Recommendations include tribal-controlled funding models, land-grant reparations, and the integration of Indigenous epistemologies into curricula. By centering Native voices and values, these measures aim to create an equitable education system that not only acknowledges historical injustices but actively works to restore Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination. True equity requires more than performative gestures; it demands a fundamental reimagining of education as a tool for liberation rather than assimilation.

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Haiku, for Leonard

Demetria Martinez

Praise the blackbird flying
free on the far
edge of dawn

Praise us unshackled
mending trails
of broken treaties

Praise ancient women
crushed velvet skirts
post-colonial

moccasined men
rewriting life sentences
drumming away the dark

into the day as dough
dances on oil
frybread

frijoles, red chile
you dreamed us beautiful
Lakota, hallowed, Peltier

be thy name.

Operation Black Rhino

Santa Ana Ethnic Studies Art Class



Demetria Martinez Biography



Demetria Martinez is a poet, writer and activist based in La Cienega, New Mexico. Her books include *The Block Captain's Daughter* (University of Oklahoma Press), a novella about Albuquerque, New Mexico activists, and winner of an American Book Award. Her widely translated novel, *Mother Tongue* (Ballantine), was inspired by Martinez's 1988 federal trial in connection with allegedly transporting Salvadoran women refugees into the country; she faced a potential 25-year prison sentence. In the course of the trial, the US government attempted to use her poem, "Nativity," against her. A reporter on topics related to religion who was covering the faith-based Sanctuary Movement, she was acquitted on First Amendment grounds. Other books include two poetry collections (University of Arizona Press); *Confessions of a Berlitz-Tape Chicana* (University of Oklahoma Press); a children's book, *Grandpa's Magic Tortilla*, co-authored with Rosalee Montoya Read (University of New Mexico Press); and *Let Them Work*, an ebook co-authored with former Oklahoma Senator Fred Harris. Demetria Martinez received the 2011 Luis Leal Award for Distinction in Chicano/Latino Literature. Her forthcoming book, coauthored with Susan Sherman and titled *Poetry in Dangerous Times*, will be out in the fall.

Nativity: For Two Salvadoran Women, 1986-1987

Demetria Martinez

Your eyes, large as Canada, welcome
this stranger.
We meet in a Juarez train station
where you sat hours,
your offspring blooming in you
like cactus fruit,
dresses stained where breasts leak,
panties in purses tagged
Hecho en El Salvador.
Your belts, like equators,
mark north from south,
borders I cannot cross
for I am a North American reporter,
pen and notebook, the tools
of my tribe, distance us
though in any other era I might
press a stethoscope to your wombs,
hear the symphony of the unborn,
finger forth infants to light,
wipe afterbirth, cut cords.
You tell me, *It is impossible
to raise a child in that country.*
Sister, I am no saint.
Just a woman who happens
to be a reporter,
a reporter who happens
to be a woman,
squat in a forest, peeing
on pine needles, watching you
vomit morning sickness,
a sickness infinite
as the war in El Salvador,
a sickness my pen and notebook
will not ease.
Tell me, Por que estan aqui?(accent over a and i)
how did you cross over?

In my country we sing
of a baby in a manger,
finance death squads,
how to write of this shame,
of the children you chose to save?
*It is impossible to raise a child
in that country.*
A North American reporter,
I smile, you tell me you are due
in December, we nod,
knowing what women know.
I shut my notebook,
watch your car rock
through the Gila Wilderness.
A canoe hangs over the windshield
like the beak of an eagle
as babies turn in your wombs,
summoned to Bele (accent mark over e)n to be born.

Poetry is Not a Luxury: A Four-Year Reflection on Spoken Word Pedagogies and Transformative Rigor in Chicanx Studies

Jisell Camarena Ramires
Lariza Campos Flores
Nicholas F. Centino
Cristian Trujillo

Abstract

Inspired by the words of Audre Lorde, this article examines the pedagogical use of creative writing and spoken word poetry as a core strategy to build communal kinship and strengthen engagement with assigned texts at a four-year public university during the COVID-19 pandemic. At California State University Channel Islands, 1st year participants in the Michele Serros Living Learning Community (MSLLC) were instructed using the practice of Spoken Wor(l)d Art Performance Activism (SWAPA), a pedagogical approach rooted in the theory and politics of US Third World feminisms. Developed by scholar Chela Sandoval, SWAPA is a method that challenges passive consumption of text and performance and calls upon artist and audience alike to draw upon a 'mestiza consciousness' and be willing to be an active witness to each other's creativity, resilience, and brilliance. In this practice, students engaged in a form of "transformative rigor" through their in-class performance of spoken word poetry and witness reaction/reflection circles. Through student testimonios, alumnus of the MSLLC share their reflection on how this pedagogical approach shaped their skills and perspectives in subsequent years leading to graduation.

Like at many institutions of higher education, life for the campus community of California State University Channel Islands (CSUCI) was up-ended by the onset of the COVID-19 global pandemic. Ushering in unprecedented challenges to students, staff and faculty alike, COVID-19 laid bare and exacerbated pre-existing conditions plaguing the academic success of students from historically underrepresented communities. According to a report released by the UC Davis School of Education, 70% of California college and university student respondents missed class due to prevailing stressors brought on by the pandemic (Reed et al., 2021). Challenges to the effective recruitment and retention of BIPOC students, issues related to housing/food insecurity, and a

litany of other debilitating issues were amplified and compounded by this unprecedented global health crisis.⁵

Inspired by the words of Audre Lorde, this article examines the pedagogical use of creative writing and spoken word as a core strategy to build communal kinship and strengthen engagement with assigned texts in the Michele Serros Living Learning Community (MSLLC) at California State University Channel Islands.⁶ Written collaboratively between students and educator, the experiences of participants in the Michele Serros Living Learning Community (LLC) of 2020 are explored as they persevered towards graduating from CSUCI with bachelor's degrees in Chicana/o Studies. This work focuses on the use of spoken word pedagogies introduced in MSLLC as a vital tool in what we term "transformative rigor," an empowering approach to student engagement, community building, and critical thinking. As such, this article will detail from a pedagogical perspective, our class's work in 2020 to craft, adapt, adjust, and evaluate the use of spoken word in the classroom in a way that was: (a) intended to be accessible to first generation college students, (b) effective in its efforts to encourage students to engage with course readings, and (c) rigorous in its expectation of a deep and textured level of understanding of the author's words. Offering reflection, three of our student participants share their own unique "testimonios" as Chicana/o Studies majors graduating in 2024.⁷

CSU Channel Islands and The Michele Serros Living Learning Community

Colloquially referred to as "CI," CSU Channel Islands is Ventura County's only public 4-year university. Located on the site of what once was the Camarillo State Mental Hospital, CI was originally a satellite campus of CSU Northridge. CSU Channel Islands was established as the 23rd campus in the CSU system in 2002 and grew steadily as it met the needs of often underserved student populations, many of whom were first generation college students, non-traditional students, transfer students, student parents, student veterans, and other historically underrepresented groups in higher education.⁸ In 2008, the Chicana/o Studies Program was established at CSUCI with vocal support and pressure from the local community anchored in neighboring Oxnard, California, a city with a rich history of social justice and anti-racist activism.⁹ By 2010, CSUCI had been designated as a Title V Hispanic Serving Institution by reaching the 25% threshold of students identifying as Hispanic or Latina/o/x. That percentage would later rise to

⁵ Studies examining this phenomenon nationally include Kirk et al. (2023), Gillyard et al. (2023), and Francois et al. (2024).

⁶ Lorde (1984) writes: "For women, then, poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action. Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought. The farthest external horizons of our hopes and fears are cobbled by our poems, carved from the rock experiences of our daily lives" (p. 34).

⁷ Our approach to testimonios is informed by Tara Yosso's work on critical race counterstories and Georgina Guzman's (2019) work on feminist pedagogies in praxis.

⁸ These efforts were recognized in 2019 when CSUCI was awarded the "Seal of Excelencia" by the nationally-based non-profit organization Excelencia in Education for its efforts to close the education equity gap, especially for Latinx students (Lamb Gregory, 2019).

⁹ For a sprawling look at Chicana/o community activism in Oxnard and other areas of Ventura County see Barajas (2021).

50% by the time Dr. Centino became a faculty member on campus in the Chicana/o Studies Program in 2017.¹⁰

The Michele Serros Living Learning Community (MSLLC) was established in 2016 to support the academic success and effective integration of incoming 1st-year students into university life at CSUCI. Named for Michele Serros, a trail-blazing and celebrated Chicana author/poet from Oxnard, the MSLLC was established to “engage students in critical dialogue on educational empowerment, creativity, community advocacy, multiculturalism, social justice and equity, and foster a sense of familia and support.”¹¹ As learning communities tied to CSUCI’s Mission Pillar of Multiculturalism, The MSLLC along with the Bedford and Dr. Irene Pinkard Living Learning Community were unique in their explicit focus on BIPOC student interests.¹²

Students in the same learning community or living-learning community took designated sections of two courses together in Fall, and most continue with at least one course together in Spring.¹³ Of the courses taken in the Fall, MSLLC students enrolled in a 1st year seminar designed to provide skills necessary for the college experience (UNIV 150) and an introductory course in Chicana/o Studies (CHS 100). In Spring, students took an American History course (HIST 270) satisfying a general education requirement. Additionally, the student participants were assigned Embedded Peer Mentors, many of whom had been participants in previous First-Year Learning Communities. As a *Living Learning Community*, students were also supposed to share a hall in on-campus housing with a Resident Advisor. Faculty and staff working with CSUCI’s learning communities were provided with support and training at the Washington Center for Improving Undergraduate Education at Evergreen State College.

Consisting of about 29 students, the MSLLC participants of 2020 were overwhelmingly Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x with 8 male identifying students and 21 female identifying students. Furthermore, most of the student participants were first generation college/university students. These MSLLC participants in 2020 were a part of the first class of CSUCI students to begin their university experience fully under the conditions of the COVID-19 global pandemic. According to enrollment data, nearly 53% of CSUCI students that semester were Pell eligible with 65% of the total student population identifying as women and 56% identifying as Hispanic or Latina/o/x. Moreover, 61% of CSUCI students were the first of their families to attend a college or university and 80% came from Santa Barbara, Ventura, and Los Angeles County. Strikingly, of the 6,943 students enrolled at CSUCI that semester, only 143 students identified as African American or

¹⁰ As a public university, enrollment and demographic data at CSUCI is readily available. *California State University Channel Islands Fall 2017 Total Enrollment*. California State University Channel Islands. <https://www.csuci.edu/ir/campus-numbers/documents/enrollment/fall-2017-demographics-02oct17.pdf>

¹¹ CSU Channel Islands (2024). *Living Learning Communities*. <https://www.csuci.edu/housing/apply/living-learning-communities.htm#MicheleSerros>

¹² There is a growing body of work on the successes of Learning Communities as high impact practices for BIPOC student retention, including Johnson et al. (2020), Chism Schmidt and Graziano (2016), Huerta and Bray (2013), and Lardner (2014).

¹³ A special thank you to Raul Moreno Campos and Elizabeth Villa, the co-instructors in the MSLLC in 2020, and Marie Francois, our Learning Communities director.

Black, only 18 students identified as Pacific Islander or Native Hawaiian, and only 10 students identified as Native American/Alaskan.¹⁴

In 2020, CSUCI offered primarily online courses in the best interest of public health and safety. For incoming 1st year students, the outbreak of the coronavirus that previous winter gravely impacted their senior year in high school. Many of these students faced canceled classes during the lockdown quarantine, only to have them quickly pivoted to online formats of questionable quality. Others lost their opportunity to walk in their high school commencement ceremonies as high-attendance public gatherings were largely eschewed. As many students expressed via social media, this was more than the loss of a ceremony, but rather the loss of a sense of closure to what many historically underrepresented students find as an arduous journey navigating the K-12 educational pipeline. As such, these student participants faced overwhelming odds and obstacles to their student success even before beginning the college and university experience.

The SWAPA Method in Remote Conditions: Building Virtual Bonds of Kinship and Communication – Testimonio by Nicholas F. Centino

For many years, Chicana/o Studies at CSUCI was the only Ethnic Students program at CSUCI consistently offering courses that analyzed and articulated concepts such as race and racism, white supremacy, self-determination, liberation, and decolonization. By the onset of the global pandemic, Chicana/o Studies had only just recently been granted independent departmental status on campus. As a program under the History Department, our ability to operate administratively was severely limited without an official chair nor an independent budget to serve with.¹⁵ Furthermore, being under History reinforced false notions that Chicana/o Studies, and by extension all Ethnic Studies, was only a sub-field or niche interest of a traditional (read white) social science/humanities discipline.

Despite recent considerable growth in Ethnic Studies offerings on campus, including the establishment of a Black Studies minor and new hires in Asian American Studies and Native American/Indigenous studies, the Chicana/o Studies at CSUCI still consists of only three tenured/tenure track faculty members and 3-4 lecture faculty members any given semester.¹⁶ As such, working with the Michele Serros Living Learning Community is a rotating responsibility usually consisting of two year terms for our tenured/tenure track professors. The 2020 class of the MSLLC was my second year working with this group and my second year using the pedagogical practice of Spoken Wor(l)d Art Performance Activism (SWAPA) in this introductory level course.

A performance, a method, an art, and an exchange, the practice of Spoken Wor(l)d Art Performance Activism, or SWAPA, is rooted in the theory and politics of US Third World/ feminisms. Developed

¹⁴ Demographic and enrollment data for CSUCI are available through the university's enrollment dashboard. <https://oneci.csuci.edu/t/IRPEGuest/views/FallEnrollmentpublic/EnrollmentDashboard?%3Aembed=y&%3AAid=1&%3AisGuestRedirectFromVizportal=y>

¹⁵ In lieu of a chair, our program had a "coordinator" position that performed all of the administrative tasks of a department chair but without equal compensation. Some may consider this cultural taxation.

¹⁶ This growth can be attributed to activism on and off campus especially by Black faculty staff and students and the passage of AB1460 calling for all CSU students to complete 3 units in Ethnic Studies prior to graduation.

by scholar Chela Sandoval, SWAPA is a method that challenges passive consumption of text and performance and calls upon artist and audience alike to draw upon a 'mestiza consciousness' and be willing to be an active witness to each other's creativity, resilience, and brilliance.¹⁷ In the SWAPA method, students are asked to examine their weekly assigned reading with a keen eye for passages from the text that move them. In turn, those passages serve as the inspiration for the student's own original creative expression, most often in the form of poetry intended for spoken word. Students composed their spoken word poems in reaction to the way that the author's words "moved" them, on a mental, visceral, and spiritual level.¹⁸ The spoken word SWAPA's are then performed weekly in class. Fellow students, then offer their own reaction, that informs the performer of how their creative work subsequently moved the student listener, or witness. These reactions were termed "witness reactions" or just "witness" for short. In this way, the SWAPA method allows a critical engagement with core themes and concepts of an assigned text as those ideas are integrated into class engagement and discussion at every level of the exercise. From (a) the initial selection of the inspiring passage, to (b) the crafting of the creative work, to (c) the in-class performance and witness reaction/reflection circle, students are engaging the ideas presented by the authors as a multi-dimensional base by which their own engagements are able to reflect and interface with. At the end of the semester students compile their SWAPAs into a poetry book prefaced by a short 3- to 4-page reflection assessing their experience in the class.

For many of my students, the prospect of writing poetry in a university course initially seems like either a chore or busy work. Others came to the class with the notion that poetry was an ephemeral luxury reserved for the privileged. When brainstorming titles for this article, Audre Lorde's work, "Poetry is Not a Luxury" continuously echoed loudly to me. Far from a luxury for my students, poetry in the form of SWAPA pedagogically served as a vital outlet for the MSLCC students to engage with course text in a way that held them accountable not only to their reading assignments and their authors, but to each other as a learning community. In this way, SWAPA provided transformative rigor, a way that challenged the class to root their observations in the text of Ethnic Studies scholars whilst discovering their own voice through the course of that conversation. Furthermore, this disruption of normative classroom pedagogies, what Eddy Francisco Alvarez terms "Jotería Pedagogy," speaks to ethnic studies' roots in intersectional justice movements against racism, misogyny and homophobia.¹⁹

While the practice of SWAPA seemingly follows a rather simple process, it relies heavily on a great deal of care and consideration on the behalf of the instructor in often complex ways. In becoming familiarized with the practice, students have to be guided on what to independently look for in the readings. Students are asked to be self-aware of their own reactions to ideas, themes, and concepts in the readings in ways that other approaches to learning may not. Furthermore, the different ways

¹⁷ In an interview with Osa Hidalgo de La Riva (2016), Sandoval describes SWAPA as "a way of communicating and creating connections between people that is based on older rituals where councils of people came together to experiment, to speak truths that they are then able to share, transform, and reshape as the collective changes and grows."

¹⁸ Students are free to interpret what these terms mean for them.

¹⁹ Alvarez (2014) writes "Jotería pedagogy is challenging but transformative, requiring innovative and brave efforts to facilitate nonhierarchical, vulnerable, and critical spaces of learning for both teacher and students. It is about enacting survival in the classroom, instilling a process of decolonization of the mind, body, and spirit. It is a way of teaching that addresses intersectionality, makes room for diverse perspectives, and validates the affective and emotional lives of students."

in which students react to course content through their SWAPA's leads to a constantly shifting terrain in the classroom. The practice of SWAPA relies on an instructor's hyper-vigilance for exciting opportunities to unpack course content from a multiplicity of angles brought forth by the students themselves. For many students, SWAPA is the first opportunity they have had to tie broader themes explored in the readings to their lived experiences; their truth. For these reasons, SWAPA, as a pedagogical practice, thrives on a level of rigorous engagement that goes beyond a simple skimming of the text. While considerable leeway is afforded students in terms of what they turn in—with an understanding that not every assigned text is going to speak to them every week—ultimately the MSLCC students were able to deliver work that was insightful, thoughtful, or more often than not, a clear reflection of the types of conversation that the authors are hoping to engage with their readership. Several examples have been woven into the student testimonios in this article.

In approaching crafting an online version of my Introduction to Chicana/o Studies Class, I debated whether to continue to use the SWAPA practice for the MSLCC. Because the practice relies on transforming the classroom environment into a shared space of poetry and art, I was unsure how that would translate to an online format. Nevertheless, after conversations with peers and mentors, I decided in favor of incorporating SWAPA into the class with a few modifications to accommodate the conditions of distance learning.

The overall course was largely built around user-friendly asynchronous modules using Canvas, the standard online learning platform at CSUCI. Students accessed readings, responded to threaded discussion forum prompts, and uploaded writing assignments to Canvas. I provided recorded lecture presentations, written feedback on assignments, and sometimes joined in on and provided perspective in their discussion forums. Students were also tasked with completing an original SWAPA each week based on the assigned readings which were then turned into me on Canvas. Additionally, students were asked to sign up for 2 to 3 weeks to perform their SWAPA's for the class in weekly synchronous class meetings solely dedicated to the practice of SWAPA. These synchronous sessions typically were scheduled for 20 to 30 minutes as student energy and focus typically waned after a half hour.

In designing the format for the synchronous class meetings, I tried my best to prioritize accessibility and user-friendliness. At the time, it was estimated that 62% of California college and university students dealt with unreliable internet connections and 65% lacked a quiet place to attend to coursework in their home (Friendman et al., 2021). As such, I chose to use an alternative format to Zoom, which was gaining a reputation for devouring internet bandwidth, especially in homes with multiple family members online at the same time. In searching for an alternative, I settled on Discord as the platform to use. At the time, Zoom was a relatively new and unfamiliar platform, while Discord, known mostly through its usage in and amongst gaming community members, was a little more familiar to students. Additionally, Discord, when used in an audio format, required significantly less bandwidth and was much more accessible for students whose only access to online apps and features was by using their cellular data.

Using the chat feature, students posted their witness reactions to student performers in real time, with a handful of volunteers sharing their reactions verbally. One downside of Discord was the failure of being able to capture witness reactions, as well as the learning curve of joining a Discord server and accessing our synchronous sections. With the improvements to the stabilization of

Zoom and its now hegemonic use across campus, I now use Zoom for the practice of online SWAPAs with students capturing their witness reactions through online applications like Jamboard and Padlet that can be saved and used by the students in crafting their end of semester reflection papers.

One challenge that I faced in employing this pedagogy online was in working with students to craft work that was an honest expression of their truth, but also did not retraumatize them nor serve as surrogate for actual care with a trained provider. To be sure, the act of writing can be *healing*, but SWAPA's intent is not to supplant mental healthcare, a resource all too often made inaccessible for historically marginalized community members. I am not a clinician, or a licensed therapist, nor would I claim to be or ever represent myself as such in class. However, with assigned course readings that explore topics such as historical trauma, racism and misogyny, as well as homophobia and transphobia, it would be irresponsible and impossible to ask students with resonant experiences to "turn off" that part of themselves and to engage in a solely academic reflection exercise. At the same time, any university classroom, let alone a virtual one, is not the best environment to unpack deep wells of trauma, personal, generational or otherwise exacerbated by the conditions of the pandemic. In this way, I tried to make the classroom environment one in which students could bring fuller senses of their total being and multiple subjectivities, but also deeply stressed and advised the students to always put their self-care first. The themes and content of assigned readings were always broadcast ahead of time and in certain cases are accompanied with trigger warnings. Students were regularly reminded to engage in self-care and were always afforded the choice to opt out of assignments that may be triggering or touch on topics too spiritually and emotionally taxing to engage with at that moment.

In their end of semester reflection papers, several students noted that SWAPA's provided them with a creative and refreshing way to engage with course content, especially given the often-chaotic nature of remote learning in this new era of COVID-19. For my efforts, I received the President's Award for Teaching and Innovation that same year. As COVID-19 restrictions relaxed, the university faced new challenges of precipitously declining enrollment and austerity measures proposed system wide.²⁰ Curious about how the practice of SWAPA may have impacted the MSLCC students, I reached out to past participants four years later as many were approaching their last year at CSUCI. As such, MSLCC alumni Jisell Camarena Ramires, Lariza Campos Flores, and Cristian Trujillo began working on this article over the course of academic school year 2023–2024. We revisited the end-of-semester reflection paper they wrote in MSLCC and engaged in a metatextual dialogue using these papers to revisit our collective experiences in 2020, as well as explored how lessons learned that semester continue to shape us all these years later. We decided to take a collaborative approach to describing the overall class experience with individual testimonios provided by each of us detailing ways in which SWAPA helped us weather a (post)pandemic education. In this way, we aspire to add to a growing body of literature giving voice to historically underrepresented students and faculty in higher education examining the lasting impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the resilient, creative, and collaborative ways we leverage our strengths to achieve our goals.

²⁰ From 2019 to 2022, CSUCI's enrollment dropped 20.4% with a projected loss of \$8 million dollars of state funding (Murtaugh & Biasotti, 2023).

Where Do I Fit in Chicana Studies? Testimonio by Lariza Campos Flores

To say freshman year of university was an “adjustment” is an understatement. August 2020 was one of the toughest times I had to overcome. COVID-19 was a world-altering pandemic that has, unfortunately, been a part of our lives since March 15, 2020. Being a first-generation high school graduate in June 2020 meant I did not get a high school graduation, already diminishing my hard work. That also meant that those of us who were transitioning to college did not get a new student orientation, dorming experience, or proper first-year support. Everybody was learning, and everybody was doing their best, and this was especially true for me.

During my freshman year of university at CSU Channel Islands, I did not feel prepared to go into my first semester. I applied to live in the MSLCC in on-campus housing in the Fall of 2019 when filling out college applications. I chose to opt in to live in the living learning community because, in my head, that would allow me to meet like-minded peers and help create a sense of community. However, due to COVID-19, we did not physically move onto campus, making it very hard to connect with those in the LLC. The students living in the Michele Serros LLC would only see each other in classes, but in all honesty, no one saw each other. I recognized two to three names in my classes in the first year, but we had no interactions outside of the classroom. It all felt so unreal and not in a good way.

It wasn't until my first class in Chicano Studies, “Intro to Chicano Studies,” that I was able to feel a sense of community/support. It wasn't because it was a Chicano Studies class but because of the tools I gained by the end of the class. Coming straight out of high school, I was used to the straightforward banking model of education coined by Paulo Freire (1968). That banking model made the last couple of months of high school tough through a screen. I genuinely believed that college would be the same. To my surprise, that was not the case. Professor Centino had the class reflect on the assigned readings and lectures in a unique way. We were to reflect on the week's readings with a SWAPA, a creative piece created to reflect on what we learned. One of the main concepts in SWAPA is listening or reading, finding a line that speaks to the listener/reader the most, and engaging through that line. Engaging meant we were creating a poem or spoken word piece that shows the connection between the line and the listener. When it came to creating the pieces, I chose to focus on what was real to me: work.

Our Own Boss

He always dreamed of owning his own business, becoming a self-employed man.
His own boss.
(Serros, 1998, p. 22)

Go to school they say,
We want you to do better.
Get a degree,
So you don't have to clean houses.
Focus on what matters most,
Distractions aren't good for the mind.
We dream for our Dreamers to make their own realities.
Our parents, tios and tias want to be their own boss,

Some reach their goal, others, not lucky enough.
My tia, reached her goal. A restaurant she opened.
It took some time.
She came from Mexico, dishwasher, then a cook, but finally, she bought the restaurant.
Twenty years later it is still standing,
a source of income for seven families.
One of those being mine.
Because of her hard work and her dream, I can help pay rent, bills and...my nails.
Many of us choose to follow the money because, in a way, we want something we never had.
So we listen.
We go to school, we get the degree, construction, paint, hard jobs, lots of money.
We go to school, we get the degree, teacher, lawyer, hard jobs, lots of patience.
We go to school, we get the degree, doctor, nurse, hard jobs, lots of passion.
We do all the right things, we get all the degrees, yet they make it so hard for us to reach our
dreams.
Our own boss. That's all we want. We've put up with the disrespect, no benefits, and minimum
wage,
We want to live a life we wish our parents and grandparents had.
A life full of dreams turned to goals, turned to achievements.
A life of being your own boss.
A life of being my own boss.
A life of being our own boss.

The above piece was inspired by a poem by Michele Serros herself. This SWAPA was one of the first times that I felt I was enjoying college. Being able to connect my personal life to my schoolwork created a space where I could reflect on my everyday life but continue to make connections to the struggles of Mexican immigrants and their experiences in the American system. I felt proud to share that my Tia, another brown woman, was able to thrive against the odds. It was also important for me to talk about my Tia's success in my education as she was a huge support to me, including financially.

At the beginning of the semester, August 2020, when I learned I would have to create poetry, I was frightened. I was afraid because I had never been in touch with my creative side before and did not consider myself a creative person. On top of the creative fear was the fact that we had to perform our work for the class. I learned a lot about myself as a creator. Ideas did not come easily to me when it came to creating something from nothing, whether it be a drawing, poem, or story. However, this course forced me to develop a skill that I have learned to appreciate. Looking back at my work from that course, I still believe that SWAPA is a well-grounded form of reflection. My favorite readings of the semester came from *Chicana Falsa* by Michele Serros. A lot of what I grew up feeling is characterized in Serros' work. I experienced my own form of identity crisis in my childhood in the sense that I felt I wasn't Chicana enough, as Serros expresses.

Era Pocha

MEChA don't mean shit, and that sloppy Spanish of yours will never get you any discount at Bob's market. (Serros, 1998, p. 17)

"Eres bien pocha,

¿Cómo vas a hablar con tus primos cuando vayas a visitarlos?"
I understood it, but that wasn't enough.
I liked Spanish music, I sang it,
But that wasn't enough.

We went to Mexico and I was so happy to see my cousins,
Pero no hablaba.
They would ask me questions, I knew what they were asking me,
But I knew little Spanish.
"Esta nos salio bien Pocha" my tio would say.
I was embarrassed, I tried I really did,
But my primos didn't understand me.
I couldn't talk with them for a month, no me conocieron,
No los conocí, I was sad.
Back home, I noticed things.
In school, they spoke English,
In school, I spoke English
The homework was in English,
My mom didn't know English.
En la casa, they spoke Spanish, but they never taught me.
How was I supposed to learn?
I heard it so I understood it,
But no one ever took the time to help me learn it.
So I listened to more Spanish music, all kinds of music.
I read books in Spanish, all kinds of books.
I watched television in Spanish, all kinds of novelas.
I wrote in Spanish, all kinds of stories.

The next year I went to Mexico, I spoke.
I was excited I could communicate with my family.
My mom, surprised, "Desde cuando hablas?"
"Pues yo me enseñe."

In the SWAPAs I created, I touched on themes about identity within culture, our relationship with Mother Earth, and the uneasy relationship with the political climate of 2020, which still stands today. All those topics are themes I am still passionate about. Through this course and the SWAPAs I created, I unconsciously developed the topics that, as a student-researcher, appeal to me. Although we are reflecting on coursework, we are still humans, and the core of SWAPA is to connect with the human who wrote or spoke what we are reflecting on.

Chicano Studies at CI has work to do in expanding its horizon, however, Chicano Studies has taught me a lot about why I want to become an educator. Since there was no other Ethnic Studies program at CI, Chicano Studies does its best to educate us about our historically marginalized communities, yet that is not enough. This is why I believe we need more educators in the world who learn and teach all forms of Ethnic Studies. In our communities, the "minority" is the majority, and as I have learned in my Chicano Studies courses, the American system was not created to see us succeed, so we must become the new generation of leaders in order to see everyone succeed. This starts

with transformative education tools used in the classroom. Here, I presented the SWAPAS from my "Intro to Chicano Studies," which I am very proud of. They touch on themes relevant to 2020 and today. As a future educator, I hope to implement SWAPA in order to engage students with assigned content as a form of expression and connection.

Land of the Free

Who said the free? Not me?
Surely not me? The millions on relief today?
The millions shot down when we strike? (Hughes, 1935)

Land of the free, do you think?
Land of the free, I don't see.
Land of the privileged, I see.
Land of the lucky, you think?

Freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly they say,
But is it freedom really?
He is a man, she is a woman.
He has a beard, she wears a hijab.
They both get stopped because all Muslims are bad, they say.

The anthem plays, he kneels.
A peaceful expression, of a brutal reality
He hates this country, so disrespectful, they say.
1954, 1992, 2020.
So close, yet so far.
Freedom Riders, Rodney King, George Floyd.
The pain, the blood, the beatings, the police.
Together we stand, together we fall. The cops, the people, against us all.
Land of the free? What do you think?
Land of the free, I don't see.
Not then, not now,
Not a day goes by, that we don't wonder why,
Why we are not free.

Straddling Borders: Poetry of a Chicana (Testimonio) by Jisell Camarena Ramires

You know what you are? / A Chicana Falsa.
(Serros, 1998, p. 1)

What Am I?
Depends on who's asking.
I am a pale Mexican-American,
A Chicana, if you will.
Whose roots originate from a little *pueblito*,
Just on the outskirts of the city of Morelia.

And yet I am so much more.
I am a perfect blend of both cultures.
Bailando to the rhythms of *Banda El Recodo*,
And singing alongside the voice of Billie Eilish.
Where Spanish was my first language,
And yet, I speak English best.
Even so, sometimes I am not good enough.
Struggling to fit in both cultures.
Where Mexico labels me a *Fresa*
Because I am not raw enough for the culture.
And where America does not want me
Because of my Mexican descent.

And yet, here I stand
In full armor
Ready to conquer every battle
Regardless of who the opponent is.
Because no matter what I am,
It is who I become that matters.

Being a Mexican-American young woman in America has never been quite easy. Ever since I was young, having the ability to express myself was never my strongest skill. Living in a traditional Mexican household, my father expressed himself very little and so I often looked to my mother for emotional guidance. However, writing has always been an emotional outlet with no restrictions or judgments. Having the ability to write poetry as a way of expression was not entirely new for me, but I have had the ability to further discover and analyze different aspects of my identity through it.

Through my poetry, I often express my identity and experiences as a Mexican-American young woman. However, I have not always embraced my culture as I do now. By using poetry as a means to express myself, I have further acknowledged my circumstances and how they have shaped who I have become. Living in America, there are constant beliefs and predisposed ideas of what the Mexican community is like, and when it comes to many aspects of my life, I do not necessarily fit into these notions. Yet, I am a walking representation of what the Mexican community is *capable* of. As I express through my poetry, I am much more than meets the eye. I am a pale Chicana who embraces every aspect of her culture, while also acknowledging my life in America.

Racism

The belief among young whites that racist things happened in the distant past and that it is unfair to hold contemporary whites accountable for them illuminates broader currents in our culture. (Lipstitz, 1998, p. 21)

Racism is defined by injustices.
The injustices faced by people of color
And yet it fails to hold society accountable for those actions.

Racism goes beyond past actions,
It goes beyond prejudices.
Racism is not just the way in which a man of color is denied,
But it is also the reason for which a white man is accepted

Because it is not as visible to the eye as it once was,
They believe they can write it off as history.
And yet racism is still just as prevalent.
It is a system that works towards the downfall of minorities,
And the uprise of the superior few.
A system created by the white man for the benefit of the white man.

A system embedded in every aspect of society
From way up to way below.
And so will require the strength of many to take it down.
The strength of the minorities.
Because through all of the injustice minorities have faced,
One thing is clear,
We are strong and we are resilient.

Importantly, it has not been merely written poetry that has allowed me the opportunity to reflect on my experiences and be introspective but rather the ability to practice SWAPA in a space that welcomes inclusivity and diversity like the MSLLC. These two distinct and complementary spaces have created an atmosphere that has allowed me, a queer Latina student, the ability to critically analyze my surrounding world, as well as granted me the tools necessary to push for change. In a world dominated by ideals reflective of Donald Trump's presidency, meritocracy, and the American Dream that predominantly view America as a great country filled with great opportunities, the practice of SWAPAs and spaces like the MSLLC create opportunities to analyze and dismantle the reality of an unjust government and social system.

For instance, in his book *Think Big: Make it Happen in Business and Life*, Donald Trump boasted: "Hard work is my personal method for financial success. You can do it too" (Cillizza, 2019). At first glance, such a statement does not appear problematic, and yet it is. One can see that meritocratic sentiments are often shared within popular discourse by those who likely faced little struggles related to race, gender, social class, etc. (i.e., Donald Trump). Meritocracy often fails to acknowledge the very real struggles that people of color face on a day-to-day basis within the United States. Unlike Trump, people of color do not get the luxury of simply working hard and achieving financial success. Meritocratic American ideals establish a false sense of opportunity for people who are not at the top of the social hierarchy, and disregard very serious issues that many experience at the hands of discrimination and prejudice. Unfortunately, meritocratic sentiments are shared amongst the masses enough that they can be found within many aspects of American society, even within ideas like the American Dream.

Through different expressive means and welcoming spaces, like SWAPAs and the MSLLC, I have had the opportunity to truly gain an understanding of surrounding issues that not only relate to social and political issues but also ones that consider academic spaces and the importance of knowledge. Moreover, I must acknowledge that spaces created by the practice of SWAPAs and the

MSLLC have provided an even greater opportunity to flourish in programs like that of Chicana/o/x Studies. The ways in which all these distinct practices and spaces have complimented each other have created a space for me to appreciate the importance of creating and acquiring knowledge when pushing for true systematic changes.

The Shortcomings of Education

Some teachers will teach what their predecessors taught me forty years ago....
(Loewen, 1995, p. 18)

You are the bearer of all knowledge
You paint a picture of this beautiful America
And spend years teaching us your history
A history that is filled with lies and hidden truths
A history that is never questioned, just accepted
A history that neglects to represent the diversity of this beautiful America
A history that was created by the white man for the white people
You fail to reevaluate what you teach
You fail to question what you were taught
You fail to show the hideous America
You hide the hideous America
I will not merely accept your truth
I will question your history
I will search for the truth of others
And I will teach, not what you taught me
But the true history of the beautiful and hideous America

For instance, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by Paulo Freire is a significant resource which has often been referenced in a variety of these spaces. Freire writes about a couple of significant concepts, including the contradiction between the oppressors and the oppressed, as well as how it may be overcome. Through understanding Freire's analysis of oppressors and the oppressed, I have come to better understand my role in holding those in power accountable, as well as the efforts needed to change the fabric of an exclusionary American society. Specifically, Freire (2017) states, "the oppressors, who oppress, exploit, and rape by virtue of their power, cannot find in this power the strength to liberate either the oppressed or themselves" (p. 26). Freire goes on to explain how the responsibility of bettering the circumstances of the people of color comes down on the people of color themselves. However, he also explains that "to surmount the situation of oppression, people must first critically recognize its causes, so that through transforming action they can create a new situation, one which makes possible the pursuit of fuller humanity" (Freire, 2017, p. 29). Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* provides people, including myself, with a distinct perspective on social hierarchies and the efforts needed to change it.

Moreover, I have been given the tools to examine the circumstances of my family and the ways in which it has impacted me. As a child of two parents who immigrated to the United States from Mexico, I have often understood the disadvantages that my family often experiences to an extent. However, through spaces created by the practice of SWAPAs, the MSLLC, and the Chicana/o/x

Studies program, I have been able to reflect more deeply on the circumstances that surround us. For instance, before I began my higher education journey, I often believed in the American Dream and all the opportunities that could be at my disposal. However, that was not necessarily the case.

I originally understood that the American Dream meant that, through hard work, my parents had the ability to achieve a level of success that they could not in their home country, and therefore so could I. However, I have come to understand that the American Dream holds similar beliefs as meritocracy, and often lacks any understanding of the circumstances of those who seek it out. In my critical view, the American Dream, like meritocracy, promises a chance at opportunities for prosperity without acknowledging profoundly serious issues engraved within American society, such as racism, classism, sexism, homophobia, etc. Unfortunately, such beliefs and lack of understanding of social inequalities and injustices are some that I have seen even my own parents express.

Since I was a young girl, my father has always pushed for me to prioritize my education in the belief that that will be enough to ensure my livelihood, that that will be enough to avoid any struggles I may experience otherwise. However, I have come to understand that my journey will not be without its own struggles, many due to my identity, my gender, my social standing, and my sexuality. Although my parents' hopes are optimistic and motivational, these hopes at times lack an understanding of my circumstances within American society, and the way my identity affects it. Moreover, the American Dream also tends to promote the assimilation of those seeking to pursue such a dream into American society and culture. To be successful in the United States is to be white, or at the minimum as close to white as you can be. Therefore, pursuing the American Dream can mean that one gives up important cultural identities to be accepted within American society and subsequently given opportunities to succeed.

Reaching My Hand Out

This must now reset and re-shine a light on this disparity related to social determinants of health that are experienced by the Latinx community.... (Gamboa, 2020)

We are strong, beautiful people,
We are built to overcome even the worst of obstacles,
We are made to endure the worst to make a living,
But we are belittled and oppressed.
And yet we strive.

We are given the leftovers,
We are given the scraps that nobody else wants,
We are given little resources,
And told to make do.
So, we do.

Nobody comes to our aid,
Nobody provides us with help.
And although we are strong,
We are mortal humans

Who will one day disappear.

We are no better than you,
And you are no better than me,
And so, I reach my hand out to you
In hopes that you will reach your hand out to me.

My journey as a Mexican-American young woman navigating the complexities of identity and systemic injustices has been one of profound growth and introspection. Through the lens of poetry, I have explored the complexity of my heritage, the pervasive nature of racism, and the false promises of the American Dream. My ability to reflect on these topics has been nurtured and deepened by the inclusive and supportive environments of the Michelle Serros Living Learning Community and the practice of SWAPA. Moreover, the exploration of my identity has revealed the beauty and challenges of being a Chicana in America. It has shown me that I am not defined by the labels others place upon me but by the strength and resilience I embody. Understanding the deeply ingrained systems of racism and the shortcomings of our educational institutions has empowered me to question, challenge, and strive for true and lasting change. No matter the obstacles that cross my path, as I have been taught, *si se puede*.

Opening Pathways of True History During Worldwide Shutdown, Testimonio by Cristian Trujillo Music vs. Hate

How does one conquer hate?
How does one spread love and positivity when people keep bashing them with hate?
How can one be hateful when others are trying to spread that love?
Is there a simple solution to dissolve hate?
There is none
But there is a way to stop the spread of it
Music
Powerful music made by poets, political activists, and thinkers
When a song that starts playing, you forget everything
You forget the past, the present and are just in the moment
How the rhythm moves your body
How the lyrics make you think and wonder
Feeling every step of your foot
Bob Marley said it the best
“One good thing about music, when it hits you, you feel no pain”

The title of this SWAPA is “Music vs. Hate” and I wrote it in reaction to an assigned reading in Chicana/o Studies 100 that explored how music can be used as a form of resistance and protest. While this was my first Chicana/o Studies class, it wasn’t my first experience with Ethnic Studies. I had already taken my first Ethnic Studies at Summit Public High School: Rainier back home in San Jose.

In all honesty, Chicano Studies was initially not something I was interested in. As a Bay Area youth, I was drawn to the history of African Americans in the United States, especially that community’s resistance to over-policing and state sponsored violence. In middle school I created an educational

pamphlet on the impact of the vicious beating of Rodney King in 1991 as a class project. In researching the violence committed against King and the subsequent acquittal of the police officers that beat him, my eyes were opened to the persistence of police brutality and its impact on the Black community. In fact, when I was in elementary school, Oscar Grant was murdered at the Fruitvale BART station just 40 miles from where I lived.

From there I dove deeper into African American history, learning about the lasting effects of slavery and Jim Crow laws, as well as the efforts and activism of figures such as Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, and Rosa Parks. As my SWAPA points to however, I was also drawn to the poetry of hip hop and the ideas expressed and shared by the artists. Despite being a Gen Z kid, my upbringing consisted of a plethora of '80s and '90s rap by artists such as Wu-Tang Clan, Nas, and A Tribe Called Quest. As a kid, these were only songs that my mother listened to when they would come on the radio. However, as I got older, I started to understand that it was much more than a song. Artists like Tupac and N.W.A. used their music not just to highlight issues of police brutality, racism, and discrimination, but also to spread messages of resistance and empowerment. Going with the themes in my poem, "Music vs. Hate", music has the power to conquer hate and spread positivity, and artists use music to channel their experiences and emotions to inspire change and hope. My mother played a huge role in my learning of African American history. I loved talking to my mom about anything. If I had a question about how the world works, she was the person I would talk to because she challenges my way of thinking and encourages me to ask the hard questions. I would ask her different questions, not just about African American Studies, but also about society, law, government, and politics, and how those institutions affect the African American community. We would even get into how people think, morality, and why things are the way they are. I appreciate her for that because she is a major reason why at such a young age, I had a lot of knowledge about these different topics that most others didn't at the time. It was also just fascinating to learn about because up until that point, I had only learned about American history which tended to leave out people of color like me.

Brown Boy

I am a brown boy
A brown boy with dreams of being something better than his parents
A brown boy who wants to live in that "American Dream" he sees in the movies and not that
gangster he sees in them
A brown boy who just wants to live his life worry-free someday
But how can that happen when there are people against him
People who destroy his confidence
People who say he won't make it far in life
People who say he should go back to where he came from even though he came from the same
place they came from
People who tell him that he should go back to the field
People that say "He's just a little brown boy"
Yeah, he's a brown boy
But nobody knows how far this little brown boy can go

Once I graduated from high school, I wanted to become an Ethnic Studies major. However, since CSU Channel Islands did not have a Comparative Ethnic Studies program at the time, I decided to

stick with a similar major and become a Chicano Studies major. However, the conditions of my first year at a college campus were far from ideal for a first-generation college student. COVID-19 changed the lives of many people in the world, my experience was no different. My high school senior year was cut short, I was struggling with my mental health, stuck in a house for a year plus with no indication of the pandemic slowing down, and week after week there was another part of the world on fire. It even got to a point where I avoided the news all together because it seemed as if it was just getting worse day after day, week after week, month after month. As a first-generation college student, my first year was already nerve wracking, terrifying, and as hectic as you can imagine, especially with the pandemic and everything else that was happening in the world. My thoughts were running a million miles a minute through my head, thoughts that I wanted to express but didn't know how to. That was until I took my intro to Chicano Studies class where we learned about SWAPAs.

My SWAPAs were heavily inspired by the pandemic and other issues in the world at that time. From the news, police, government, racism, etc. One topic that was my inspiration came from at that time was police brutality, specifically about the cases of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. Much like everybody else, I was angry, frustrated, and disappointed at our government, police, and our justice system. I joined numerous protests in support of Black Lives Matter, George Floyd, and Breonna Taylor, expressing my disappointment in our society. However, emotions were still high even after the protests, so much so that I tried to find different ways to express my thoughts and emotions. That is when SWAPA was introduced to me. It was a way for me to express my thoughts and emotions, good and bad. Although I am not a poet nor do I think I created the greatest poems that exist, the SWAPAs I created were used as a powerful way to express my goals, disappointments, happiness, and sadness. Whether I was facing mental health challenges, the pandemic, police brutality, or the government, it was all written down into poems that showed my emotions.

Looking back at the poems I wrote in my freshman year, many of the topics I wrote about are still relevant today. It seems nothing has changed since I first wrote these poems. There still continues to be challenges of racism, discrimination, injustice, and inequality in the world. We have not made any progress, and in some cases, have even gone backwards. However, that doesn't mean we should lose hope or give up. If anything, it means we need to take more action. We should not be sitting and watching the world burn in front of our eyes, we must continue to make change in whatever ways we can. In my case, I am hoping to change the world by pursuing education so I can educate others and future generations. In order for us to create change, we must educate ourselves because if we do not learn our history, we are doomed to repeat that history.

Educational Politics

They say students are the future of this country
Why is that?
Because we go to school to learn things?
Yeah, we go to school to learn what $y=mx+b$ is
But what about the important things?
What about slavery?
What about the Holocaust?
What about racism and Jim Crow laws?

What about the real side of Christopher Columbus?
What about the history that made America what it is today
Why can't we learn that history about the oppression and racism that people of color are still
fighting to this day?
To prevent those same issues that happened centuries ago
Time and time again, those same problems are still happening today
But because not all of us are educated in the subject, there is still oppression, racism, and bigotry
We must learn our history, so history won't repeat itself

When I first entered college, I did not know what I wanted to pursue after graduation. However, throughout my 4 years at CSU Channel Islands, I learned new concepts, ideas, and theories from the diverse people I encountered both on and off campus. Hearing about their experiences and perspectives provoked new thoughts and questions that I hadn't ever considered before. These questions weren't just about things that happened in the past, but about how our society functions in this very moment. Originally, I hoped that when I finished the "student" chapter of my life I would start a new one as an educator. I envisioned a path that allowed me to inspire future generations to develop even newer concepts, ideas, and theories that challenge our society's inequities. Those future generations could use those lessons to change the world and create a better one. However, certain realizations have made me question whether being an educator is the right path for me.

During my sophomore year, my dad asked me, "would you be able to live and provide for yourself and for your future family on a teacher's salary?" At the time, my old high school government teacher moved into a small and humble studio apartment in my parents' backyard. He only said he would be there for a year until he can find his own place he can rent out. He's still there 6 years later. Was this what the future had in store for me as well? My dad's question was one that I couldn't answer truthfully at the time. It led me to question whether a career as an educator was worth it, or if I also needed a backup plan - a safe job to fall back on. As graduation neared, I worried about my future after college.

One day, in expressing my concerns to my mom, she told me, "You're gonna graduate and get a college degree. After that - it doesn't matter what you do. As long as you have that piece of paper that says you have a college education, anyone will hire you." Those words have stuck with me ever since. My mom helped me realize that with my degree, I am not narrowly limited to any particular career path. I have the agency to chart my own way. This was an important lesson because it taught me that I am not confined to the types of jobs that Chicana/o Studies or Ethnic Studies graduates are assumed to be suited for. Instead, my BA offers me a greater sense of freedom to explore my career options or change directions if need be.

Although I have stayed true to my plan to become an educator after I graduate, I learned that the knowledge and wisdom I've gained go far beyond what I gained or can offer in a classroom. In many ways, the everyday people I encounter in my community have inspired and provoked my intellect just as much as my teachers and professors. These people have included my parents, friends, co-workers, as well as random people on the street. They didn't need a classroom to inspire me, so who's to say I need a classroom to do the same for someone else? As someone who is an inspiration of mine, Tupac says, "I'm not saying I'm gonna rule the world or I'm gonna change the world, but I guarantee that I will spark the brain that will change the world."

Conclusion

In crafting this article, our team went through a lengthy collaborative process of writing and revision aiming towards a balance of consistency and shared tone on one hand, and individual voices and unique perspectives on the other. Despite the added pressures of assignments and other responsibilities related to their looming graduation from CSUCI, our student team members remained remarkably focused and dedicated to completing this project, including presenting this a preliminary draft of this article at the annual meeting of the National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies to the plenary ballroom.

It was at that conference that we realized that despite the isolating nature of online learning, the kinship and community building initiated by the practice of SWAPA in their first year provided an avenue for students to develop trust and familiarity not just with Chicana/o Studies faculty, but with each other as survivors of the COVID-19 university experience. While our team of authors consists of only four individuals, the topic and content of this article was also developed through the conversations and discussion our teammates had broadly with other peers, classmates, faculty and staff at CSU Channel Islands and beyond. Despite the challenges presented by COVID-19, we are eternally thankful for the connections and community we forged in a time of challenges and uncertainty.

Looking toward the future, our team discussed how they imagined incorporating aspects of SWAPA into their work as educators, writers or cultural producers. As most of our student team members envision themselves working in the K-12 system, Nicholas asked whether they considered using SWAPA with pre-college students. We discussed some of the challenges that may be faced in facilitating SWAPA with youth still developing their emotional intelligence. However, we also acknowledged that those same challenges are also present with college and university students as well, especially first-year students like those in MSLC. Ultimately, we coalesced on the importance of how SWAPA calls on students to view themselves not solely as reluctant and passive consumers of dominant narratives, but rather to see themselves as scholars and artists in their own right, a valuable reminder for students of any age.

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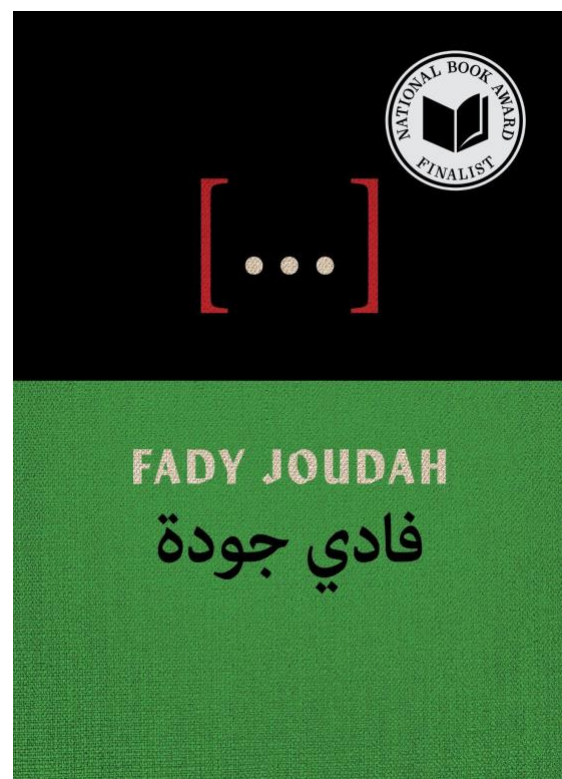
Reading Fady Joudah's [...]: Never Losing Sight of the Palestinians' Humanity

Jonah Holguin

From the perspective of a 24-year-old U.S. university undergraduate student—learner on/of the borderlands, and one committed to the liberation of Palestine—I found poet Fady Joudah's [...] to be one of the most devastating and necessary works I've encountered about Gaza. This collection, written during the first months of Israel's 2023 military assault on Gaza, does what US media headlines cannot: it captures both the scale of the genocide and the unbreakable humanity of Palestinians living through it. The empty brackets of the title [...] immediately struck me as a powerful representation not only of how Palestinian voices are systematically erased, but also of the West's strategic blindness to the Palestinian plight, making the poems that follow all the more vital.

The untitled poem opening Section IV confronts complicity with devastating clarity. The accusation, "You who remove me from my house have also evicted my parents and their parents from theirs," lays bare how the Israeli dispossession and displacement of Palestinians compounds across generations, making the Nakba not a historical event but an ongoing present. The final questions of the poem, "How is the view from my window? / How does my salt taste?" force readers to confront the intimate violence of settler colonialism—not just the theft of land, but the casual cruelty of occupying homes where family photos still hang, of cooking in kitchens where the scent of Palestinian meals lingers. The poem reveals how colonization demands not just physical removal, but the erasure of an entire way of being.

The poem "Dedication" is one of the most heartbreaking pieces I've read about the current atrocities. Its repetitive "To those . . ." structure creates a relentless litany of loss, memorializing everyone from children killed before receiving birth certificates to elders who survived 1948 only to witness their descendants' erasure. Lines like "To those who composed songs and sang them to the syncopated thuds of annihilation" offer the reader more than statistics, instead uplifting the



humanity of Palestinians, those indiscriminately targeted by Israel, refusing to reduce the martyred to arbitrary numbers. The poem's unflinching documentation—naming specific places, such as the Omari Mosque and Saint Porphyrius Church—gives concrete weight to statistics that often feel abstract when reported accurately by the media.

"Sunbird," the collection's closing poem, transforms the political slogan "from the river to the sea" into something lyrical and alive. The imagery of a bird moving between "gleaming river" and "glistening sea" beautifully asserts Palestinians' deep connection to their land, not as a territorial claim but as an ancestral relationship that predates and outlasts occupation. This ecological perspective feels particularly urgent as Israel systematically destroys Gaza's olive groves, farmlands, and water sources. The poem's shift between "all that we / to all that me" captures how collective identity and personal survival intertwine under siege.

This book, masterfully written by Fady Joudah, strikes a balance between documentation and defiance. Between scenes of horror, Joudah preserves moments of Palestinian joy: weddings held during power outages, children playing in bomb craters, and the stubborn persistence of olive trees. These aren't just poetic flourishes—they're acts of resistance against dehumanization. The poems also model how to create language to counter oppression, whether by exposing euphemisms like "humanitarian pause" or reclaiming phrases like "from the river to the sea" from racist fearmongering.

As an activist committed to the liberation of Palestine and as a reader of poetry, I will return to Fady Joudah's [...] collection often. I will also share it with and recommend it to my comrades and family, and to all those who are seeking to learn Palestine or are students of the humanities, law, history, political science, education, ethnic studies, and liberation studies. Fady Joudah's [...] clearly articulates the brutal and painful truths of the logics, regimes, and practices of settler-colonialism that apply to Palestine and far beyond it, showing how violence repeats through institutional bureaucracies, language, and time. But most crucially, Fady Joudah's [...] reminds us that solidarity isn't just about opposing Israel's crimes—it's about centering Palestinian life, grief, and joy. In a media landscape that reduces Palestinians to statistics and erases them with "bothsidesism" debates, Fady Joudah's [...] ensures that its readers never lose sight of the humanity of Palestinians.

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The monster

Marisol O. Ruiz

This monster
stomps
on us,
committing
genocide.

A genocide
that does
not
cease to
extinguish
its hate.

Its fire
kills,
kills,
kills,
burning us
to the
ground.

A genocide
which tries to
justify itself . . .

STOP,
no one can
justify
the
assassination
of the
innocent.

I see
this genocide,
I ask,
I scream,
I write,
I read,
I think,

I join the marches,

and
divestment movements.

We denounce and denounce,
realizing

we are up against
a vicious
MONSTER,
a voracious
MONSTER.

It's a MONSTER
who wants to
kill us
gobble us up
and
make us
disappear.

They want to
silence
our love
for life,
land
water,
people.

But we will
never cease
to exist.

We are the
solidarity
movement.

We will not
stop
until
Palestine
is free
and
genocide is
no longer
someone's
lived
experience!

Learning and Healing Through the Teachings of the Girasol

Jacqueline M. Manzo. University of Colorado, Boulder

Abstract

In this article, I examine how the *Girasol* youth leadership development program is interwoven with *feminista* ethnic studies pedagogies as a means of dismantling oppressive paradigms and enabling BIPOC femme-identified youth to seek their sacred selves through ancestral-based teachings and *conocimientos*. In navigating this research, I intentionally used methods and frameworks that reflect decolonial processes to center the experiences of the youth participating in the *Girasol* program. I also intentionally used methods and frameworks that would allow me to be my most *authentic* self as I navigated multiple roles: as a researcher, mentor, community member, and a new mother to an infant. Examining how the *Girasol* program impacts the lives of Latinx youth illustrates the importance of culturally relevant programming, especially for system-impacted youth. I also share the founders' intentions and intersections between the *Girasol* program and *feminista* Ethnic studies pedagogies. In conclusion, I propose the *Girasol Epistemology*, a framework to capture the *Bodymindspirit* transformation youth undergo as a result of the *Girasol* teachings.

Keywords: Spiritual Activism, Ethnic Studies, Femme-identified Youth, Healing, Youth Programming, Conocimiento

Introduction

"If you don't understand yourself and how to heal, you will repeat mistakes and not advocate for yourself." -Youth Participant in the Girasol Program

During one of our *Girasol* ("sunflower") sessions, a youth shared the quote above in response to a group question. I was inspired by her comment because it illustrated how healing is not only a means of understanding and (re)finding oneself; it is also a means of equipping oneself for a better future (where one does not repeat the same mistakes and can advocate for oneself). Her comment captures why the *Girasol* program is vital to the future of our youth. The *Girasol* program is a healing-centered, culturally and Indigenous-based youth leadership development program, it serves as a rite of passage to support and guide our young women and femme-identified youth to seek their sacred selves. After observing the program in 2021, I was invited to complete the program and graduate along with the youth. Following that, I attended the National Compadres Network (NCN) training through the Denver Healing Generations Network (DHGN) and received my certification to teach *Girasol*. Through co-facilitating several groups (including my own *Girasol* group), and observing over 60 participants complete the program, I can confirm that *Girasol* has a positive impact on our youth. For this reason, I believe that programs like *Girasol* can impart and

guide youth to enact *spiritual activism* because when youth are embraced in the community and are exposed to ancestral-based teachings and *conocimientos*, they take on specific ways of thinking and being that reflect what I term as the *Girasol Epistemology* (Anzaldúa, 2002; Knecht & Aviña, 2023). The *Girasol Epistemology* draws on Gloria Anzaldúa's seven stages of *conocimiento*, to frame and capture the *bodymindspirit* transformation youth (especially those who are system-impacted) might undergo as a result of the Girasol program.

Background

More than half of Girasol's participants (54 percent) know someone close to them or are personally involved in the criminal legal system.²¹ Pasko and Denious (2021) bring forth the experiences of Latina and white girls inside and outside the criminal legal system (i.e., pathways to delinquency, court involvement, and diversion programming) and contend that, despite their high visibility in the criminal legal system, Latina girls are neglected in research. Looking into scholarship on this particular experience, I recognize the paucity of research (Belknap, 2021; Cotto, 2006; Flores, 2016; Lopez & Pasko, 2021). As Flores, Santos, and Camacho (2021) point out, feminist scholarship and research on young women of color overlook Latina experiences in the criminal legal system.²² As a result, these authors challenge the Black-white binary²³ in academic literature by highlighting the gendered, socioeconomic, and racialized experiences of Latinas who have been involved in the criminal legal system—especially Latinas who go “on the run” from legal authorities in the Southern California area. Flores's (2016) research identifies that Latinas' first interaction with police is usually a result of their experiences and challenges at home. He contends that wraparound services, like formal probation, lead to the girls experiencing more sanctions; which, in turn, results in girls spending more time at El Valle Juvenile Detention Center. As of 2024, Latinos account for 19% of the U.S. population and, within correctional facilities, they represent 20% of the population (Prison Policy Initiative, 2024).

In *The Invisible Women: Gender, Crime, and Justice*, Belknap (2021) discusses the factors that we must consider in understanding how women and girls become criminalized and end up in the criminal legal system. She suggests that instead of having specific programs (i.e., on sexual abuse,

²¹ I utilize the term Criminal Legal System instead of Criminal Justice System to ensure that the language I utilize reflects how I see this institution not as a justice peace maker, but instead, as a project designed to protect and prioritize colonial logics and white supremacy. Recommend reading: Bryant, 2021; Cardoza, 2022.

²² Flores, Santos, and Camacho (2021) and Pasko and Denious (2021) are chapters in “*Latinas in the Criminal Justice System: Victims, Targets, and Offenders*,” they use the term *Latina* women and girls to reflect the term used by the contributors and those they work with who are system-impacted and system-involved. Within my research, I utilized the term *femme-identified* youth, unless the youth specifically identified with another term (like *Latinx* or *Latina*). The Girasol curriculum believes in “*In Tloque Nahuaque*” a Nahuatl concept that embraces and honors all people just as they are: it represents and creates safe spaces that speak on behalf of the needs and identities of all people, including members of LGBTQ2S community. *Femme-identified* youth can be of any gender. *Femme-identified* can be considered someone's gender and/or gender expression.

²³ This by no means negates the fact that Black women have shaped the field of carcerality—in fact, abolitionists like Angela Y. Davis, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Beth E. Richie, Mariame Kaba, and Treva B. Lindsey (and many more) have contributed immensely to our understanding of the prison industrial complex, the importance of community programs (Project NIA, INCITE! and so forth) and our understandings of abolition as a theory and daily practice!

childhood trauma, Intimate Partner Abuse, etc.) for women and girls *already* in the system, it would be “preferable to have a society and network of agencies that are educated about these gendered based abuses and other traumas to deter their occurrence and encourage earlier reporting by victims” (p. 406). This emphasizes the significance of education as a preventative measure and the importance of community. In addition, Belknap (2016) identifies three primary factors that contribute to the role that labeling plays on women and girls’ potential and actual criminalization. First, the intersections between gender, race, class, immigrant status, and mental illness as “potential risks for being labeled a delinquent or adult offender and/or being placed in a situation of being coerced or forced into violence (often self-defense) or criminal activities” (p. 406). Second, how institutions and agencies work together (or don’t) to worsen the situation of marginalized women and girls. Lastly, the impact of parental and/ or peers’ parental incarceration increases youth’s risk of offending.

Mental health is a crucial component in understanding the experience of system-impacted youth as “researchers estimate that between 67 and 90% of detained and adjudicated youth meet criteria for at least one mental health diagnosis, and almost half for two or more comorbid psychiatric disorders” (Desai, 2019, p. 640). Justice-involved youth are 30% more likely to have PTSD compared to the general population, up to 93% have experienced trauma, and 70% will meet the criteria for a mental health disorder (Abram et al., 2004; Desai, 2019; Dierkhising et al., 2013). System-involved youth are more vulnerable to system-generated trauma, i.e., trauma directly caused by the legal system (Ryan et al., 2006). Desai (2019) argues that the juvenile justice system is a socially toxic environment and that, “being system-involved takes a toll on a person’s spirit, body, mind and context [...] and system-involved youth are struggling to find wellness and well-being” (p. 652). He suggests that programs that are culturally relevant, trauma-informed, and holistic²⁴ possess the ability to counter the negative experiences youth suffer as a result of the current criminal legal system.

With these realities in mind, research and praxis on the experiences of system-involved Latinx women and girls is not only necessary—but crucial—in understanding the importance of collaboration in envisioning an abolitionist²⁵ future. Girasol supports this effort by offering youth-

²⁴ Desai (2019) employs the Native Relational Worldview model of wellness, that centers on spirituality and balance to understand how trauma affects system-involved youth by disrupting their emotional, mental, spiritual, and physical well-being. Their findings were based on a YPAR project with system-involved youth and their allies.

²⁵ I define abolition not with the goal of a utopian world (our world is non-linear and is based on patterns, that is, a place of constant change) but instead, as an ongoing process, where we re-envision our ways of relating to one another and all of our relations (humans and non-human relatives). It’s about building anew. I don’t see prisons closing tomorrow, or even in my lifetime, but I do see us creating new relationships and ideologies that address the root causes of violence and harm, through accountability and responsibility. This in turn, will establish structures of care, support and healing—away from the institutional process of *disappearing* people. Cherise Morris, a Black spiritualist and poet, believes that we should look towards Indigenous cosmologies and practices to guide us in revisioning a future without prisons and policing and does so through the example of the African cosmology of Bântu-Kôngo. The belief system of the Bântu-Kôngo viewed “crime” as a *symptom* of a failing system— it meant that someone in the community was suffering— and therefore—the whole community suffered. The Bântu-Kôngo did not have systems like prisons or policing, they depended on systems of collective care, “It was the community’s responsibility to support the economic, social, mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being of all community members, to engender a sense of belonging and being that opposed the sort of systemic violence and exploitation which creates crime in the first place”

specific teachings designed to remind youth they are sacred, that is, that they have a purpose in life. To achieve this, we create a healing space where femme-identified youth (ages 13 through 18) can embrace their culture, ancestral histories and teachings, and engage in creative movement and art projects.

Girasol: “It showed me how to heal”

“Not enough people my age know how to heal themselves, including me. Therefore, it’s needed. Especially in people of color my age, I just feel like we’re more lost.” -Girasol youth participant (at the start of the program)

Situating the Girasol Program

The Girasol curriculum was developed by Maestra Debra Camarillo, Maestra Susanna Armijo, and Maestro Jerry Tello. Their work is supported through the NCN²⁶ whose mission is to, “strengthen and re-root the capacity of individuals, families, and communities to honor, rebalance, and redevelop the authentic identity, values, traditions, and Indigenous practices of Chicano, Latino, Native, Raza, and other communities of color as the path to the honoring of all their relations and lifelong well-being” (National Compadres Network, 2024). Although the NCN is based in Northern California, it currently has strong connections to Colorado through Frida Soto (who is well known for conducting Girasol programs), John Perez and JoJo Padilla at the DHGN, and other Denver-based non-profit organizations. The Girasol program was implemented and conducted in Denver, Colorado in 2021. Since then, it had not been offered in the Boulder County area (that includes regions of Colorado from Longmont, Boulder, Lafayette and so on) and I saw an opportunity to expand its offerings to the Northern Front Range as the basis of my doctoral research.

Girasol, the name of the program, was chosen intentionally and is the basis for the first session. The Girasol has the ability to be able to transform and absorb radiation and toxic metals from the soil, as seen done after the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. For Girasol participants, this symbolizes how they too can transform the harms of colonialism within themselves, at home, and in their communities. As a heliotrope flower, the Girasol is always seeking the sun. Girasol participants are taught to seek the “light” in their lives and follow the teachings when things get tough. The Girasol is also an edible, medicinal, and a sacred element to many Indigenous communities. For example, the Mexica people used the Girasol (*chimalxochitl*) as an offering to the war and sun god Huitzilopochtli; Native Americans used the seeds to make cake, mush, or bread (Mexicolor, 2024; National Sunflower Association, 2024). Originating from North America and Mexico, the plant was domesticated sometime during 2600 BCE and is still considered an important plant to this day (Mexicolor, 2024). Girasol participants are taught that many of the plants and foods we eat and use medicinally were cultivated by their ancestors and carry teachings. I find that our youth gain strength and healing in knowing their history and their connections to all that is around them.

(p. 10). Morris’s example can guide us in understanding that abolition was once experienced and therefore, can be experienced again. Abolition is hope in action. Abolition is embracing and living-in-love.

²⁶ Please visit the National Compadres Network for more information:

<https://nationalcompadresnetwork.org/misson-purpose-history/>

The program's curriculum is premised upon the healing philosophy "*La Cultura Cura*," (culture cures) a framework that engages with the teachings of our Latinx and Indigenous ancestors who emphasized the importance of sacred values, traditions, and interconnected relationships as the foundation for cultural healing, identity, and strength. More specifically, the Girasol curriculum is situated in Mexica/Nahua spiritual ways and Native American traditions; an example of how teachings have been shared across tribal and linguistic lines. Girasol draws upon the knowledge of elders and relatives from the First Nations of the Americas to remind our youth of their vital role within our communities and families.

Platicamos with the Founders of the Girasol Program

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the intentions for Girasol, I reached out to Maestra Debra and Maestra Susie and Maestro Jerry for a Zoom *plática* (the creators of the Girasol program) and have summarized what they shared in the next excerpts.

Maestra Debra Camarillo

Maestra Deb shared that for her, it was after the *National Listening Tour*, during which she got feedback on a previous curriculum she created and learned what the curriculum did not address. Maestra Debra wanted to create a curriculum that could speak to and support women and girls, no matter who they were, so they could direct their own lives and be prepared for life's challenges. Maestra Debra shared that if one does not know who one is, then life can be difficult, which is why she felt that the Girasol curriculum had to start with the foundation of "*Yo Soy*" (I am). She elaborated that these teachings are "ceremony" and must begin with the self—which is inextricably linked to our ancestral past. In many communities, like Chicanx communities, the colonial process of de-indigenization has resulted in youth struggling with their identities. Maestra Debra described this by sharing that, "they (youth) don't have a sense of who they are and not because they don't want to, but you know because there's a lot of distance between traditions and them" (personal communication, June 16, 2024). For her, Girasol is embracing the concept of reciprocity, that is, honoring who we are and our Indigenous ways; it is important to remember and embrace that we are always in relation to everything around us.

Maestra Susanna Armijo

For Maestra Susie, three events inspired and brought her to co-create the Girasol curriculum. First, in creating healing spaces for women and girls, Maestra Susie was inspired by her own experiences as a young person who needed a safe place and space to guide her through difficult times. In Girasol, her own experiences are interwoven with the teachings and serve as an example of healing for the youth. She also shared that she noticed there were constant themes coming up during her counseling sessions with different facilitators, and stressed the need to develop something to address the issues of today, to address the "*Present Traumatic Stress Disorders*," and used this as a guide to what Girasol needed to teach (personal communication, June 16, 2024). Girasol became the *medicina* to remedy the issues of today.

Lastly, Maestra Susie danced as a Mexica dancer for the Nobel Peace Prize Laureates in Rome in the early 2000s. This coming together was centered around "a call for peace," where drums and dances were featured from around the globe. During our *plática*, she described this lovely experience and how the Native American drum, African drum, Japanese Taiko drum, Aztec drum,

Celtic drum, and more, were all present, and when the drums started playing together, everyone came out and began dancing in a circle to their own rhythm. She described that she could hear her drum despite the symphony of all the drums playing, “all the beats blended, it was so miraculous! I will never forget the feeling of looking around that circle and seeing everyone represented and everyone dancing in harmony together to the heartbeat of their own drum. I was like you know what, we *can* get along. We *can* come together and see each other, meet each other, share, and dance together. It's *not* an impossible dream. It is possible! If everybody is on the right page dancing to their rhythm and being willing to come and dance together” (personal communication, June 16, 2024). Maestra Susie's experience speaks to the possibility of solidarity when we are able and willing to come together and honor who we each are as individuals and as a community.

Another great example of how beauty can emerge from working together in unison is how both Maestra Susie and Maestra Debra shared how much gratitude they had for all the guidance and support Maestro Jerry (renowned for introducing “La Cultura Cura”) had provided during the creation of Girasol. As a group, they worked together to create Girasol and ensure that this *medicina* would bring healing to our communities.

Curriculum Structure and Content

The Girasol curriculum consists of thirteen sessions lasting around two hours each (I always stayed an additional thirty minutes to catch up with youth who stayed after the program). Girasol serves middle to high-school-aged femme-identified youth. Youth from all backgrounds are sought for the program, and in my specific Girasol group, I had youth of Mexican, Chicanx, and Indigenous (Native American and Mayan) backgrounds. To maintain the fidelity of the program, Girasol groups are suggested to be capped at fifteen youth. In my research, I found it difficult to turn away interested participants and graduated sixteen Girasol youth (at points of the program we had 18 youth participate). The number of interested participants in my particular Girasol group demonstrated that youth in the Boulder County area are seeking culturally relevant programming and want to heal!²⁷

The curriculum is organized into four sections: Teachings from the Heart, Teachings of the *Pañuelo*, Intergenerational Teachings, and *Roboso* Teachings. Each session emphasizes the four core values of the program which consist of **Conocimiento**: Acknowledgment and Positive Cultural Identity Development (Dignity); **Entendimiento**: Understanding of their Sacred Purpose (Respect); **Integración**: Integrating Bilingual/Bicultural values (Love); **Movimiento**: Safety, security, and Interconnectedness (Trust) (Camarillo, 2020).

²⁷ For this Girasol group to exist, it was necessary to work alongside community practitioners who shared their resources and believed in this work. I had immense support from teachers, like Dr. Martinez, who let me sit in her class and share the background of Girasol with her students. I also want to give a huge shout-out to Jennifer Díaz-Leon, Hernando Perez (TĀP PĪLAM COAHUILTECAN NATION), Maya Padilla (Northern Arapaho and Mexico), and Jessica Perez (Afro-Indigenous), who ensured that our group had a space to meet and supported the youth at their graduation. I would not have been involved with Girasol had it not been for my dear friend, Frida F. Soto, *achingona* in all the ways possible. John Perez and Jojo Padilla also supported this Girasol group immensely and made sure I was certified in teaching the curriculum. Many blessings to you all. It takes a village to care for and support our youth in their healing journeys

Each session begins by forming a *circulo* (talking circle), a pedagogical practice done in many Ethnic Studies spaces as a way to honor every voice in the circle. Sitting in *circulo* “symbolizes and encourages sharing of ideas, respect of each other’s ideas, togetherness, and a continuous and unending compassion and love for one another. The circle symbolizes equality of members in the circle” (Bagele, 2020; Camarillo, 2020; Huton, 2011). To begin, we passed around a sacred object to symbolize a “talking stick”— in our Girasol group it was a sunflower, and it indicated when someone had the *Palabra* (credible word/oath). The talking stick also symbolized our collection of knowledge, it represented our group and our journey together; the talking stick holds power as it is passed around from youth to youth (Bagele, 2020). Having the *Palabra* signaled to the rest of the group to focus on what the speaker was saying and to show respect to our fellow Girasol by listening and responding when necessary. The practice of sitting in a *circulo* and passing the talking stick is inherently an Indigenous practice, and in my research, it reinforced a decolonial method and methodology (Bagele, 2020; Fierros & Bernal, 2016). One youth shared how the *circulo* made them feel:

It feels like everyone is listening to you way more and that you also hear and learn way more being in a circle because you guys face each other and pay attention.

Our introduction of sitting in *circulo* and starting each session with checking in with each other established a safe space for our youth; it created a home away from home. One youth shares what these practices meant for them:

This program was different by showing you are welcomed, keeping a safe space for us to have fun and learn new things every day, it made you feel like it was home and even make new bonds.

This kind of testimony serves as a reminder that some of our youth have limited spaces and places where they feel “safe” and can have “fun” and “learn things every day” and illustrates how these teachings create healing spaces we desperately need. To further illustrate these teachings, I have included a short sample of Session 6: “Healthy Healing Waters,” to explain how we teach the youth to “water” their *bodymindspirit* (Camarillo, 2020; Lara, 2002).

Session 6: “Healthy Healing Waters”

The Conocimiento for this teaching is to explore our connection to water; given that sixty percent of the adult body is water, we explore the implications this has for our bodies, the earth, and all our relations (Water Science School, 2019). It is important in this session that we as facilitators articulate water not only through scientific means (protective waters for the embryo in the womb, bodies of water on earth, as a cultivator of growth, to survive and so forth) but also as a sacred symbol and ancestral relative. We begin each session by asking the youth, “How did you water yourself this week, and if you didn’t, did someone else pour into you in a good way?”. We ask this question at each session as it allows us to reflect on our self-care (or lack thereof) for that week. It is also an opportunity for the group to hear how other youth care for themselves or are cared for by the people they love. The following are some examples of what the youth shared when asked how they watered themselves (March 13, 2024):

- “I watered myself this week by going to the gym.”
(this youth started going to the gym and was always excited to share her progress with the group)
- “I watered myself by going to all my classes this week.”
(this particular youth was struggling with truancy at school and made it her goal to graduate)
- “I watered myself by quitting choir.”
(the group laughed at this response since this youth made this statement so proudly. We were shocked, but she went on to explain how the choir teacher was toxic and she could not stand him anymore. Instead, she joined the school band, where she now plays *Mariachi* music. The rest of the group shared their excitement for her– as did I)

The *Entendimiento* for this teaching is to examine how the *Body Keeps the Score*, that is, how our bodies store our experiences and what manifests as a result (Van der Kolk, 2014). We share with youth the idea that their inner emotional and mental state can be seen as “water” flowing within them. We explain how this water can become stagnant, frozen, or toxic, and how that can affect their well-being. We then encourage them to reflect on how they can restore balance and get their waters flowing again, especially during challenging experiences like loss, a breakup, or an act of racism. It is in these *pláticas* that they open themselves up and share what they have been through and how they move (or are moving) through some of the tough times in their lives. As part of the session, we provide teachings and *medicina* so that youth can incorporate them into their lives, in hopes that they (re)gain balance; a practice we hope they use and share moving forward.

A worksheet is then passed around where youth identify and write down what in their lives causes their water to boil, be toxic, be cold, or be nourished (see Figure 7.1 for an example of one young participant's response). The worksheet encourages them to first reflect on their own and then share as a whole group. After everyone shares, we move forward to discuss how *healthy pride* can support us in bringing our water and *bodymindspirit* back into a healthy balanced state²⁸ (stepping away from ways that further harm us) (Lara, 2002).

The *Integracion* for this teaching is creating *Agua Florida*: an ancestral medicine used to open our hearts, comfort us in sickness, reset one's energy, cleanse a space, raise our vibration, and cleanse our altar (Camarillo, 2020; Seidelman, 2019). Each youth makes their own *Agua Florida* and takes it home (please see Figure 7.2 for an example of their healing waters). One youth shared their feelings about this session:

When we did the healing water it was so amazing because it's something new, it was a totally new experience. Looking for the ingredients and what it helps for was amazing.

²⁸ Healthy Pride (Camarillo, 2020): Purpose (You have a sacred purpose); Responsible (You have the ability to respond in a healthy way); Interdependency (You can connect with others–walk where you are loved); Development (You will experience new ways to old wounds); Enthusiasm (You come from a greater source and you can accept support if you allow it)

Figure 7.1. "Our Waters" is one youth's worksheet for Lesson 6.

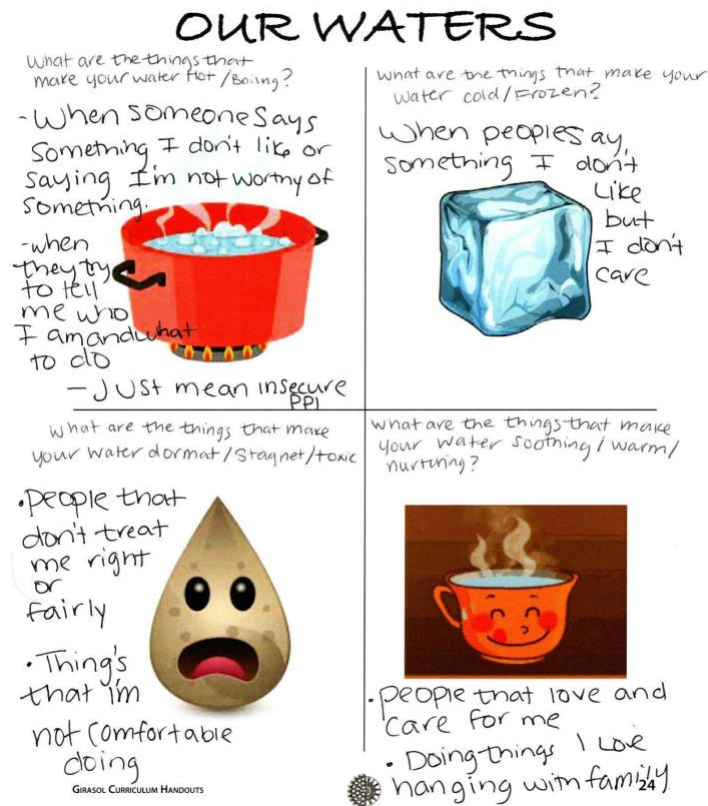


Figure 7.2. The Agua Florida made by youth in Lesson 6: "Healthy Healing Waters." The house above the waters is from a different teaching.



The Girasol Epistemology: Nemachtilli and Feminista Ethnic Studies Pedagogies

"I am most likely keeping this [Girasol teachings] with me and my life and teaching this to my future kids." -Youth Participant (at the end of the program)

Not a School Program

In many cases, schools and classrooms are not creative and imaginative spaces, but places where many of our young people, more specifically BIPOC youth, will first interact with the criminal legal system (Flores, 2016; Morris, 2016; Rios, 2017; Sojoyner, 2016). Schools have become an institution where youth's opportunities are so often "enclosed" through oppressive ideological and physical structures of control (Sojoyner, 2016). In this light, I believe Girasol attracts youth because it is not a traditional after-school program; it is a community-based program that offers teachings that engage with culture, creativity, history and spirituality. Youth are connected to Girasol in a meaningful way and name their tensions with traditional schooling by referencing how the program makes them feel:

One youth shared:

"I feel connected to it [Girasol] in many ways and it doesn't feel like a class."

Another youth shared:

"It [Girasol] teaches me about my ancestors and so much more stuff that other programs don't teach."

Similarly, another youth shared:

"I feel like this program feels more like a group of mutuals. It feels more comfortable than being in a class."

The youth's comments also reveal a deeper element that is often absent in traditional classrooms—the ancestral spirit. According to Rodriguez (2005), administrators and politicians have put pressure on teachers to produce in a way that limits their creativity, eliminating the spiritual and human elements in the classroom. He uses the Nahuatl term *Nemachtilli*, which translates to *the spirit of learning*, along with its counterpart *the spirit of teaching*. According to Nemachtilli, teachers can recognize and bring out children's innate gifts, talents, and callings in order to inspire a love of lifelong learning and feelings of sacredness. To Rodriguez (2005), the human and spiritual element of the classroom is about having natural, connected, vibrant, and imaginatively connected teachers supporting their students in being creative and curious, challenging, countering, and wanting to learn more (Rodriguez, 2005).

This is not the reality of today. Many youth are excited and relieved when school is over or dread going to class and are struggling with school truancy. This is especially true for Colorado as the state is witnessing record-high levels of absenteeism, where nearly one in three students is chronically absent (Patterson, 2024). Learning has taken up a new meaning that does not reflect our everyday lived experiences, and it is slowly catching up to us and manifesting itself as a medical condition(s):

I'm convinced these issues [ADD and Alzheimer's Disease] are not just chemical imbalances and genetic propensities (other than the fact that we now have several generations suffering through these maladies). These are the results of life imbalances; the slow erosion of the mind, heart, and spirit; the push to maximize profits, gain power, waste the earth, with little thought for what we leave behind. (Rodriguez, 2005, p. 45)

With this in mind, I believe teachings from ethnic studies can play an important role in balancing and healing life's imbalances, by creating spaces and places within academia to embrace Nemachtilli. To be in a Nemachtilli state is to seek and live-out our sacred purpose. Ethnic studies did that for me; it created a space where I could heal and taught me to embrace the spirit of learning and teaching.

Ethnic Studies Holds Us Together

Ethnic studies explores how systems of domination function in the everyday lives of people of color, as well as how we can cultivate new possibilities for social change when we stand up to challenge normalized oppression. In a research context, Fong (2008) identifies four founding concepts that distinguish ethnic studies research from traditional discipline. First is the importance of incorporating the community into the research process in order to see both facets (the researcher and community members) as working hand in hand in addressing community concerns. Second, ethnic studies provides an interpretive and protective agenda for those who are being studied (their social and ethical treatment) and what the end-product of the research produced (ensuring it serves the community). Third, it is important to question objectivity and neutrality by paying attention to *what* questions are being asked, *who* is asking the questions and *how* the questions are being asked in the research. Lastly, with a focus on social change, ethnic studies seeks to "document injustice and survival, promote cultural tenacity and vibrancy, highlight unequal power relationships, influence policy, and work to provide a more accurate picture of the United States past and present" (p. 4). These concepts emphasize how ethnic studies is and always will be for the community. As for the future of ethnic studies, Dominguez et al. (2023) state:

The future of ethnic studies will be attuned to hope; to the relational, the spiritual, and proleptic possibilities. The future of ethnic studies will invite youth and families to be co-creators of knowledge, teachers to facilitate empowerment and healing, and scholarship to speak with humility and solidarity. The future of ethnic studies is now; etched in the prefigurative world-building and liberatory love that guides the varied, contextual, and creative projects it engenders. (p. 4)

The hope shared in this testimony is lived through the Girasol program, a space of healing for the youth, facilitators and communities they represent. As a researcher and community member, I sought out *feminista* ethnic studies pedagogies (Pláticas, Bodymindspirit, Conocimiento) as a means to situate the specific epistemological perspectives that the program embraces to facilitate spaces of healing embodying what I am referring to as the Girasol Epistemology (Anzaldúa, 1999, 2015; Delgado-Bernal et al., 2023; Fierros & Delgado-Bernal, 2016; Lara, 2002; Rodriguez, 2005).

Pláticas and the Path to Conocimiento

In “Vamos A Platicar: The contours of Pláticas as Chicana/Latina Feminist Methodology,” Fierros and Delgado-Bernal (2016) distinguish pláticas as a methodology and provide researchers with its five principles to follow. First, the research must draw upon Chicana/Latina feminist theory. In my research, I draw upon Critical race theory, Critical Indigenous theory and Chicana feminist thought to create and conceptualize a research study that draws attention to the ways systems of oppression impact youth and how we can facilitate spaces of healing. Second, “a plática methodology has a relational principle that honors participants as co-constructors of knowledge” (p. 111). In Girasol, the facilitator(s) and youth meaning-make the healing process together, which is based on our own knowledges and experiences. Third, the lived experiences of the contributors are drawn in as part of the research inquiry, not only as a means of data collection, but to influence the very foundation of the research. In Girasol, we welcome all facets of the youth into the group to take part in the healing process. We do not ask youth to separate their identities to “fit in”; we ask them to come as they are and be open to having a fluid discussion about who we are and how we can heal. Their contributions are the foundation of the program.

Fourth, a plática methodology provides a potential healing space. In Girasol, youth identified that this particular space allowed them to *desahogarse*, to “unburden” themselves. This co-created safe space gave us the opportunity to think, theorize and act through how we move past our pain and traumas and move forward in a good way. Lastly, the fifth element is the importance of trust through reciprocity, vulnerability and researcher reflexivity. As Girasol facilitators, our vulnerability and ability to share our own stories is vital in leading by example and building *confianza* (trust). This is the only way the Girasol program can succeed. As facilitators, we must be reflexive in the ways we move in the Girasol space. As a researcher, I knew I would have to take on additional preparations and responsibilities in order to be *presente* in my bodymindspirit so I could be ready when youth shared their life with me and the group (Lara, 2002).

My research and facilitating Girasol were in some ways answering my *scholarly prayer*, and they became a way to combine the parts of myself that academia worked so hard to separate (Lara, 2002). I used my bodymindspirit knowledge to build a bridge between academia and the community I come from by working together with community practitioners to co-create a healing space for our youth, especially for our system-impacted youth. The Girasol program led some youth to embrace their bodies, forgiveness, and spiritual activism:

One youth shared:

“Just in general the ways of healing and the hurt I feel out of nowhere and where the emotions and feeling are bottled up in my body it [Girasol] helps me understand myself and people around me more.”

Another youth shared:

“Yes it’s [Girasol] has made me rethink other people’s actions”

And another youth shared:

“I like the person I have started to become, and I don’t want that to change.”

As a result of the program, I created the Girasol Epistemology to capture how the teachings can enact consciousness raising and what this means at the grassroot level. I wanted to expand the path to *conocimiento* beyond theoretical paradigms to incorporate what this means in our

everyday lives (Fernández & Magaña Gamero, 2018). The Girasol Epistemology can become a framework for other youth programs that are facilitating and creating healing spaces. The following are examples for three stages of the path of *conocimiento*, along with corresponding questions:

Figure 7.3. The Girasol Epistemology

The Girasol Epistemology 		
The Stage	Questions	Examples
<i>El Arrebato:</i> "A rupture, the shattering of subjectivities and experiences" (Anzaldúa, 2002)	- What do youth identify as their rupture(s)? - How can these ruptures lead us to further harm or enable us to enact healing? - Traumatic events in life that youth share out loud or that they journal	- Participants in the past have experienced abortions, family deportations, expulsions or suspensions from school, a traumatic experience, a family loss, a break-up that they shared was a "low point" in their life.
The Stage	Questions	Examples
<i>Nepantla:</i> The clashing of the new and the old- a liminal space- a borderland waiting to be embraced. (Anzaldúa, 2002)	- What contradictions might have arisen once they began Girasol programming, that is, once they began to receive the teachings, how did this enact new ways of thinking or being? - How have the teachings impacted them, or how have they embraced the in-between zones? - This can happen throughout the program, after each session check in and see where youth are at in their <i>bodymindspirit</i>.	- One of the participants in the program shared that because of probation she can't smoke anymore since she does not want to get "caught up" with her probation officer, but the path she has been walking has been centered around smoking. She had to navigate this <i>in-between</i> space, that is, this limbo state of whether or not to smoke or not to smoke. The teachings of the Girasol taught her that she needs to be honorable and follow through with her promises. - In being in this state I asked what tensions did this bring for her and how can this potentially lead to walking a new path?

The Stage	Questions	Examples
<i>Putting Coyolxauhqui Together:</i> In this stage, it is time to bring the pieces back together and begin to feel hope. Your soul begins to return to its body. (Anzaldúa, 2002).	-How are the participants using the teachings of the program to put themselves back together, to heal the wounds (their Arrebato(s)? -We can see this through the art pieces in the program, see what they create and how it connects back to their Arrebato(s) -We can also see this through what they share and how they come to understand their situation through a different perspective.	- Participants have shared that they used some of the teachings in dire times. For example, during one of the sessions we create medicine bags and one of the participants mentioned that she took her medicine bag to school and felt good knowing it was in her backpack. She shared she felt that the medicine bag was protecting her through her hard times. -Another participant saw forgiveness differently and framed it as a way for her to move on and begin to heal, it was not necessarily for the other person.

Conclusion

“I feel like I was able to improve every aspect of my life with Girasol. Academics, my social life, my emotions, my physical and mental health.” -Youth Participant (at the end of the program)

More than half of Girasol's participants (54 percent) know someone close to them or are personally involved in the criminal legal system. Research shows that culturally and gender-responsive programming can support youth who have been exposed to system-generated, interpersonal, and intergenerational trauma to embrace transformational healing and raise participants' critical consciousness (Desai, 2019; Haskie-Mendoza et al., 2021). I sought to understand how Girasol could inspire youth to feel sacred and how this, in turn, could help system-impacted youth access transformative healing. After witnessing many youth complete the program, and co-facilitating the program myself, I can confirm that its teachings have the power to guide youth to embrace their sacredness and for some youth to enact spiritual activism (Anzaldúa, 2002).

As a researcher, I adopted feminista ethnic studies pedagogies (through pláticas, bodymindspirit, and the path of conocimiento) to best capture the unique experiences youth undergo in the program. I created the Girasol Epistemology as a means to capture the transformation youth can undergo in Girasol, in hopes that other youth programs utilize or think through how their youth journey through the different stages of consciousness. The Girasol Epistemology is a framework that extends the path to conocimiento beyond theoretical paradigms to capture the praxis experienced by the femme-identified youth who are exposed to the gendered, cultural, and

Indigenous-based teachings of the program (Anzaldúa, 2002; Fernández & Magaña Gamero, 2018). I conclude with a youth's statement about their experience with Girasol:

I think after Girasol it was really brought to my attention how important it is to “water yourself” and take care of yourself every day and every week. It's also taught me the importance of connection and being vulnerable. I was really able to be vulnerable in this program. I felt comfortable sharing a lot of shit that's happened, and I know it's okay and other girls won't judge because I know if I share my truths, some other girls can relate in silence, it'll help them not feel so alone. Lastly, I think Girasol has really taught me to “take up space” because I think it's really discouraged amongst young women. Girasol has taught me to use my voice.

This kind of testimony serves as a reminder that this program has made not only a difference in her life, but in the life of many femme-identified youth who experienced the Girasol program.

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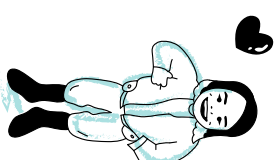
Pacific Beach Club

Santa Ana Ethnic Studies Art Class



TRUNG'S
ETHNIC STUDIES
PEDAGOGY

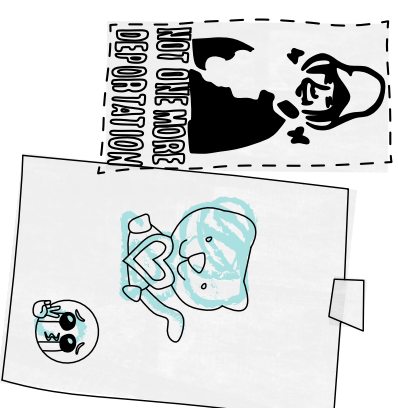
THE POSSIBILITIES AND STRUGGLES
OF TEACHING ETHNIC STUDIES IN K-12 SCHOOLS



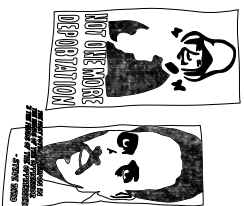
Ms. Trung (pseudonym), Teacher
Josephine H. Pham, Researcher
Esther S. Ho, Illustrator

Author's Statement

Our personal relationships with Ethnic Studies educators and organizers, passions for storytelling, dreams for collective liberation, and lived experiences as Asian American women and women of Color brought us together for this project. Bringing together our crafts and skillsets as scholar-educator-activists and drawing from research findings from a broader study on the day-to-day professional experiences of K-12 Ethnic Studies teachers of color, we developed a comic to capture a fuller portrait of one teachers' humanity and practices. Ms. Trung. At the same time, we were able to experience individual and collective healing through the act of generating new knowledges with one another. Designed as a form of "research activism" and as a pedagogical tool for teachers, teacher educators, and educational leaders, our comic aims to radically orient readers differently to learning and engaging with scholarship through creative expression. The comic form enables multimodal communication of theories, complex research findings, and critical perspectives on Ethnic Studies pedagogies in K-12 public schools. Our art-based research intentionally interweaves multiple aspects of Ms. Trung's narratives and practices across time periods and places to maintain our relational and ethical commitment to confidentiality while showcasing recurring interconnected themes of surveillance, organizing, resistance, and BIPOC life. We created this in solidarity and with care for Ms. Trung and other K-12 Ethnic Studies educators, and hope that this comic uncovers truths and renews political and pedagogical clarity for them as it has for us.



HI THERE! I'M MS. TRUNG (MA ASIAN AMERICAN STUDIES)
FOLLOW ALONG IN MY JOURNEY TEACHING ETHNIC STUDIES IN
K-12 PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

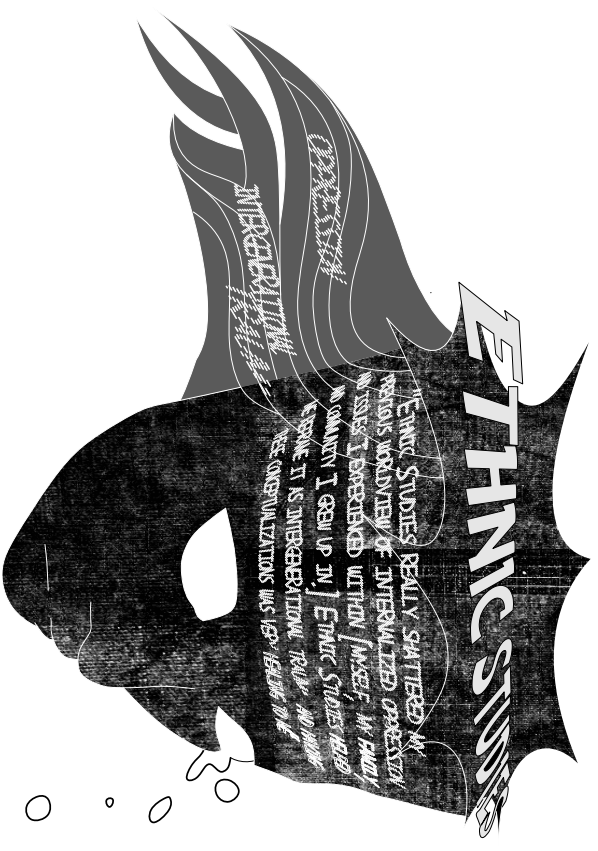


I IDENTIFY AS SOUTHEAST ASIAN AMERICAN WOMAN
AND AS A WOMAN OF COLOR.

I AM A COMMUNITY ORGANIZER, A FORMER ADJUNCT PROFESSOR
AND I'M BILINGUAL IN VIETNAMESE, SPANISH AND ENGLISH.

DISCLAIMER: THIS RESEARCH IN GRAPHIC CONTEMPORARY
FORM IS BASED ON THE RAW EMOTIONS AND TRUTH OF AN EDUCATOR.
PLEASE ENGAGE WITH CARE.

YOU MIGHT ASK: WHY DID YOU DECIDE
TO BECOME AN ETHNIC STUDIES TEACHER?



I WAS STUDYING ASIAN AMERICAN STUDIES, DOING COMMUNITY
ORGANIZING AND IMMIGRATION ADVOCACY + WORKING WITH
FORMERLY INCARCERATED PEOPLE.. THIS BECAME THE CENTER OF HOW I
CAME TO VIEW **ETHNIC STUDIES** AS AN **ABOLITIONIST WORLD**



- AT TIMES...

BEING AN ETHNIC STUDIES TEACHER OF COLOR CAN FEEL VERY **LONELY** & **MISIDENTING**



WHY?

IT CAN FEEL DOWNDATING WHEN THE HUMANITIES AND LITERATURES OF PEOPLE OF COLOR ARE TREATED AS SEPARATE FROM ETHNIC STUDIES CURRICULA AND INSTRUCTION...

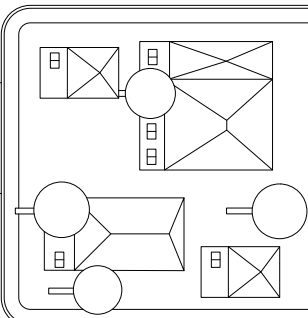
SO I SEEK COMMUNITY IN OTHER SPACES BY FINDING LIKE-MINDED ETHNIC STUDIES TEACHERS AND ORGANIZERS, AND I'M PART OF A RACIAL AFFINITY GROUP WITH OTHER ASIAN AMERICAN TEACHERS.



WHEN WE INCLUDE LITERATURES OF PEOPLE OF COLOR, WE HONOR OUR OWN SHARED DIVERSE AND INTERSECTIONAL STORIES FROM THESE COMMUNITIES OF COLOR.

Now...

I CURRENTLY TEACH ETHNIC STUDIES AND US HISTORY AT A SUBURBAN PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL.

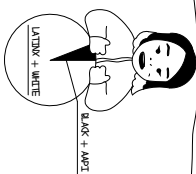


BEFORE...

I USED TO TEACH IN AN URBAN SCHOOL SERVING PREDOMINANTLY STUDENTS OF COLOR, AND I **LOVED** WORKING THERE.

IN MY NEW SCHOOL, IT'S SO DIFFERENT TEACHING ETHNIC STUDIES HERE ESPECIALLY WITH AFFLUENT WHITE STUDENTS.

MY CURRENT STUDENTS ARE PREDOMINANTLY LATINX AND WHITE, WITH A SMALL PERCENTAGE OF BLACK AND ASIAN AMERICAN PACIFIC ISLANDER STUDENTS.



WE LOVE ETHNIC STUDIES!

"ETHNIC STUDIES TAUGHT ME TO LOVE MYSELF MORE." ETHNIC STUDIES PROMOTES SELF-LOVE AND STUDENTS' CONNECTIONS TO THEIR IDENTITIES.

I TEACH A 'MAINSTREAM SECTION' AND A SECTION FOR NEWCOMER STUDENTS DESIGNATED AS "INVITED ENGLISH PROFICIENT" & "ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS"

WE WERE HAVING A GROUNDING FOR DISCUSSIONS ON RACE AND TALKING ABOUT HOW WE CAN COMMUNICATE WHEN HARM HAS BEEN DONE. WE CAN USE "I STATEMENTS"

HOW DO WE TAKE ACCOUNTABILITY FOR THE HARM WE HAVE CAUSED? IT WAS A SERIOUS CONVERSATION...

I FEEL WHEN BECAUSE

MS. TRUNG THANK YOU FOR PROVIDING LANGUAGE TO EXPRESS HURT

THERE WAS A GROUP OF FOUR PRIVILEGED WHITE STUDENTS JUST ROLLING THEIR EYES...

STUDENTS OF COLOR WHO APPRECIATED THAT CONVERSATION WERE SITTING ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE ROOM ENGAGED WITH THE DISCUSSION

MAINSTREAM STUDENTS

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TEACHING NEWCOMER STUDENTS JUST ONE PERIOD BEFORE MY MAINSTREAM STUDENTS WAS COMPLETELY DIFFERENT

THE PERIOD BEFORE WITH THE NEWCOMER STUDENTS...

TEACHING ETHNIC STUDIES IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS
REQUIRES US TO ATTEND TO A WIDE RANGE
OF STUDENTS' LEARNING INTERESTS AND NEEDS.

FOR EXAMPLE:

WE WATCHED A VIDEO WHERE A POLITICIAN
FROM POLAND HAD SAID:

UKRAINIAN REFUGEES CAME TO MY HOUSE,
I WELCAME YOU TO MY HOUSE.

A LATVIAN STUDENT RAISED HIS HAND AND SAID

I DON'T THINK HE REALLY MEANS THAT, HE'S JUST
SAYING THAT BECAUSE HE WANTS POLITICAL POWER.

WHILE OTHER STUDENTS ARE STILL
DEVELOPING THEIR CRITICAL LEAS
HE UNDERSTANDS "YES, THAT'S RACIST."

HE HAS LOTS OF LOVE FOR HIS CULTURE & PASSION FOR TOPICS ABOUT RACE.
WHENEVER WE LEARN ABOUT RACIAL INJUSTICES, HE GETS HEATED ABOUT THE TOPICS..

BUT HE ALSO GETS BORED.

AND IS WORKING THROUGH INTERNALIZED PATRIARCHY.
WHEN LEARNING ABOUT UNEQUAL PAY BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN,
WE ASKED IS IT JUST OR UNJUST?

I'D BE LECTURING...

"THAT'S BECAUSE MEN WORK HARDER!"

AND HE WOULD
START SINGING.

IM BORED
LA LA LA BLAH LA LA LA
DOO DOO LA LA LA



AND DURING PARTNER ACTIVITIES IN MY U.S. HISTORY CLASS,
HE'LL START PLAYING AROUND WITH HIS FRIENDS.
THEY PUSH EACH OTHER AND PULL EACH OTHER'S HAIR.

HE HAS A BIG HEART AND LOVES ETHNIC STUDIES..
HE'S BEING DIFFICULT, BUT HE'S A GOOD LEADER..

ANOTHER EXAMPLE...

AND FOR A WHITE STUDENT WHO CARED ABOUT LGBTQ ISSUES...
...AND WORKING THROUGH HIS OWN WHITENESS,

AT THE BEGINNING OF SCHOOL TERM

WE GOT OFF ON A REALLY GOOD FOOT.
HE WAS SO EXCITED TO LEARN
ABOUT ETHNIC STUDIES

"I WANT TO LEARN
ABOUT SOCIAL JUSTICE
ISSUES!"

HE EVEN STARTED A
SOCIAL JUSTICE
CLUB.

"WILL YOU PLEASE
BE OUR ADVISOR?"

I SAID YES! AND
I'M STILL THEIR ADVISOR.

BUT NEARING THE END OF SCHOOL TERM

HE TOLD ME:

"YOU'RE PUSHING SOME NARRATIVE--
YOU'RE NOT GIVING STUDENTS ROOM
TO THINK A CERTAIN WAY."

ADMIN INTERVIEWED
OTHER STUDENTS TO ASK
IF THEY FELT THAT VALUES
WERE BEING PUSHED ON THEM.
STUDENTS SAID:

"NO, I FEEL I CAN HAVE MY OWN VALUES!"

HE EXPRESSED SO MUCH HATRED
AND FEELING DISTRESSED IN
HIS CLASS.

THIS SITUATION DOESN'T MAKE ME QUESTION
THE WAY I TEACH ETHNIC STUDIES BECAUSE I KNOW MY
CURRICULUM PIONEERS STUDENTS OF COLOR AND THAT'S MY PRIORITY
BUT BEING HIS FAVORITE TEACHER FOR A SHORT TIME THEN SEEING
HOW THE CURRICULUM MADE HIM 180 IS HARD TO PROCESS.



FOR EXAMPLE:

A WHITE TEACHER CALLED A BLACK STUDENT THE N-WORD.

DID HE JUST?

I SAID THAT OUT LOUD...

THEY SAID:
AND SOME BLACK STUDENTS STARTED ORGANIZING A GROUP -
I ASKED THEM, "HOW CAN I SUPPORT YOU HERE?"

MANY OF THE STUDENTS WERE TALKING ABOUT IT.

WE'VE BEEN ORGANIZING THE STUDENTS CAN YOU HELP US ORGANIZE THE ADULTS?

SO I ORGANIZED PARENTS AND COMMUNITIES. WE WENT TO SCHOOL BOARD MEETINGS TO REALLY JUST SPEAK UP

LET US SUPPORT EACH OTHER AND OUR STUDENTS.

WHAT HAPENED WAS NOT OKAY.

WHAT ACTION ITEMS CAN WE TAKE?

NO IT WAS REALLY BEAUTIFUL, HAVING PARENT ORGANIZING WITH THE STUDENTS.

MS. TRUNG

I WOULD PRACTICE ADULT ALLYSHIP BY ATTENDING THE STUDENTS VIRTUAL MEETINGS AND CHATTING ENCOURAGEMENTS LIKE:

MS. TRUNG, 11:03 AM

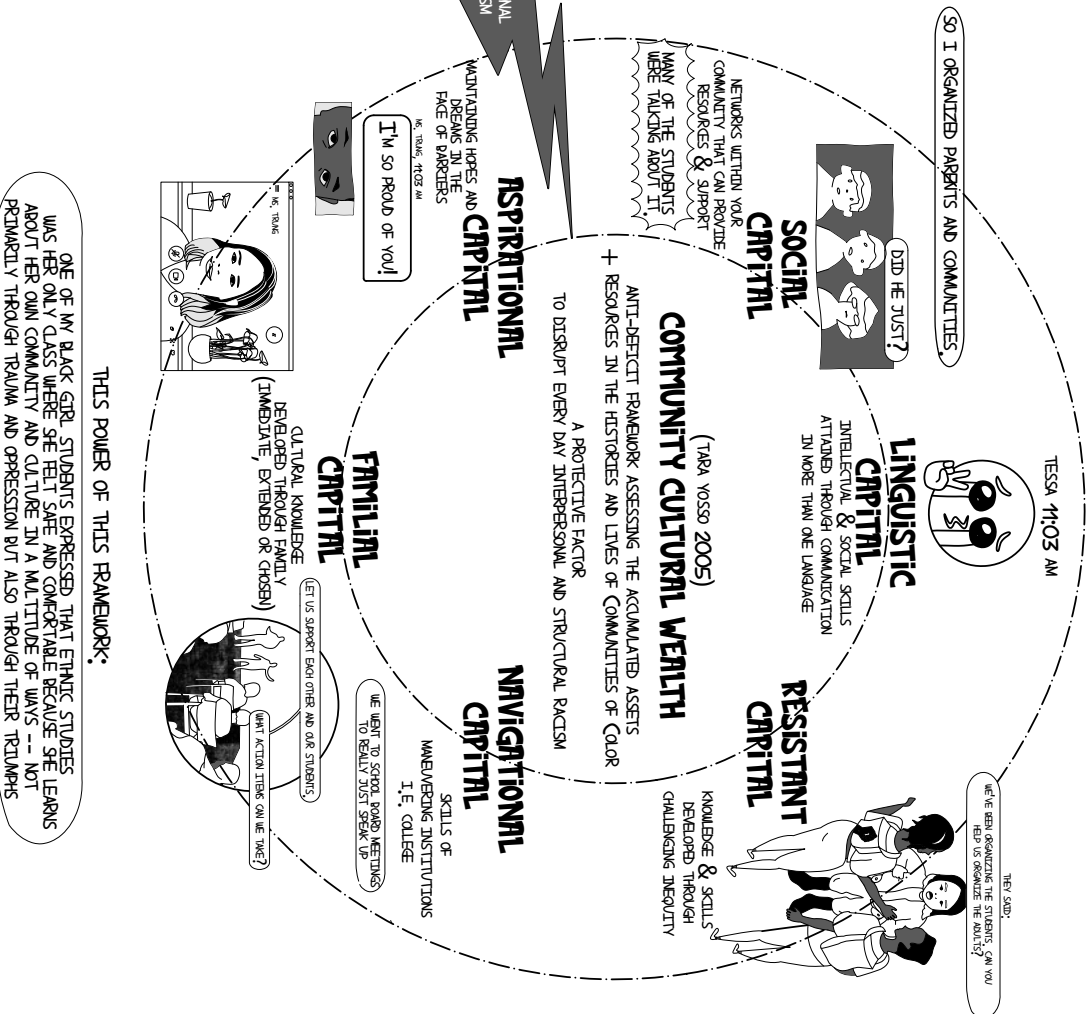
TESSA 11:03 AM

I'M SO PROUD OF YOU!

STUDENTS MANY YEARS LATER TOLD ME "HAVING YOUR SUPPORT REALLY CHANGED THINGS." "YOU'RE THE BEST TEACHER I'VE HAD EVEN THOUGH YOU AREN'T MY TEACHER."

THIS BROKE MY HEART -- THE SMALL ACTION I DID WAS SO MEANINGFUL TO THEM. IT SHOWED THEY DIDN'T HAVE THAT SUPPORT IN THEIR DAY-TO-DAY AT THEIR SCHOOL.

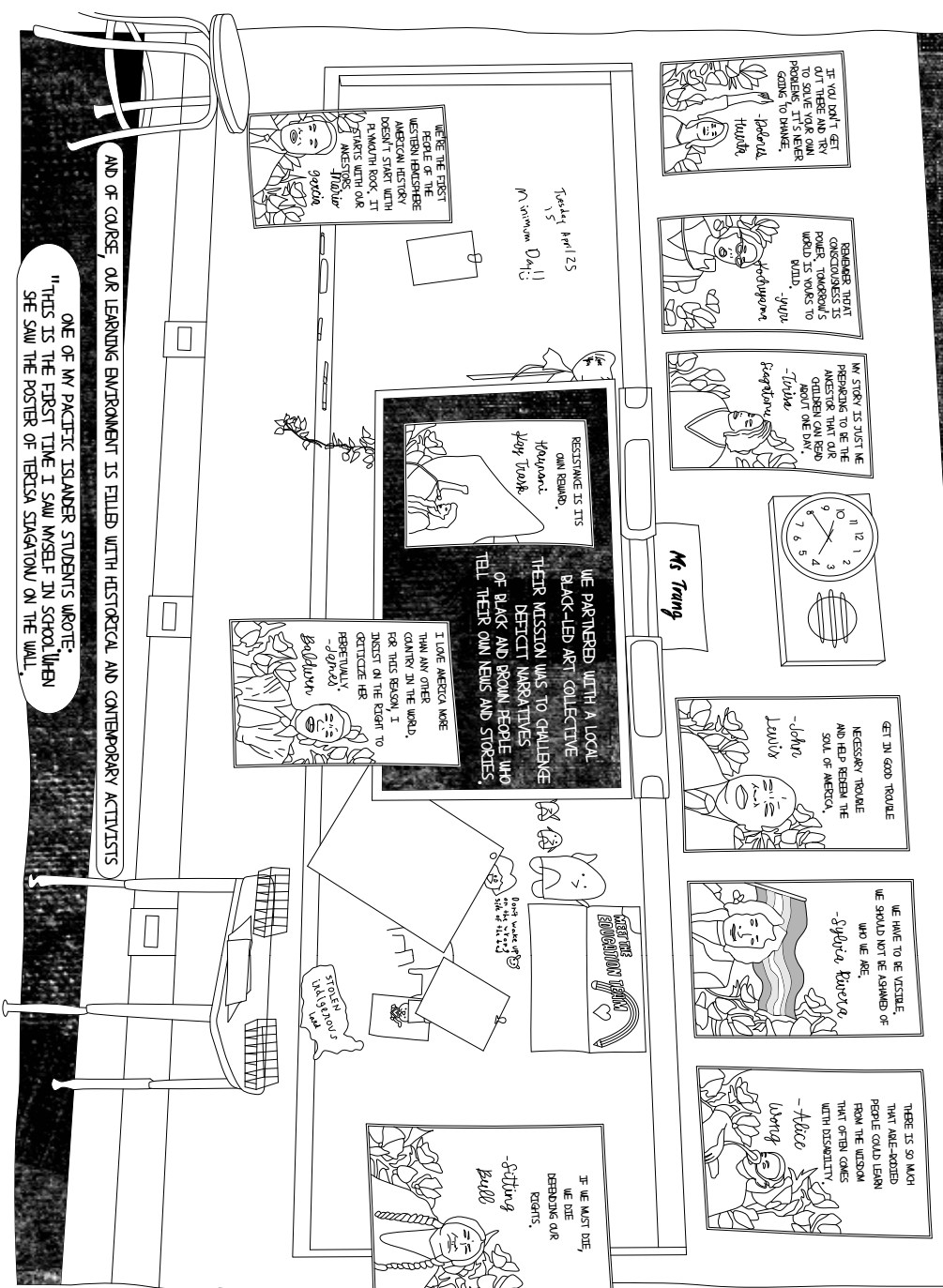
IN THIS SITUATION, WE NATURALLY DREAM FROM
COMMUNITY CULTURAL WEALTH TO COMBAT THIS OPPRESSION
& NURTURE THE STUDENTS' TRANSFORMATIONAL RESISTANCE.



IT'S IMPORTANT TO ME TO INCORPORATE COMMUNITY KNOWLEDGE AS PART OF ETHNIC STUDIES CURRICULUM

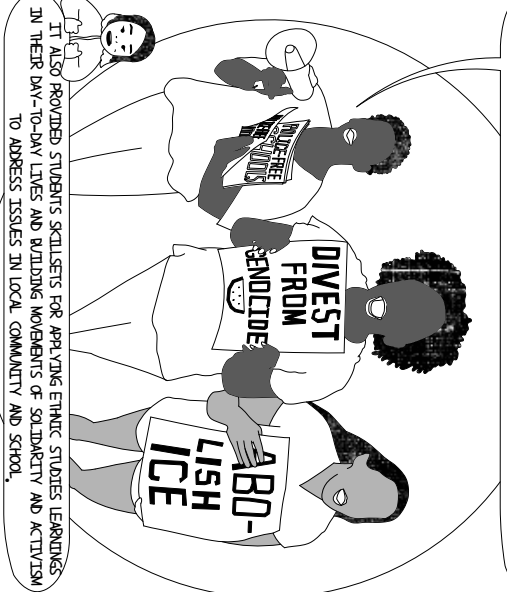
I DO THIS BY BUILDING WITH LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS, LEARNING ABOUT ISSUES, AND HAVING STUDENTS RESEARCH COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

THIS LOOKS LIKE STUDENTS CONDUCTING RESEARCH PROJECTS TO IDENTIFY ASSETS OF LOCAL, HISTORICALLY BLACK COMMUNITIES



LEARNING ABOUT ETHNIC STUDIES IN CLASSROOM AND LOCAL COMMUNITY SETTINGS GAVE STUDENTS A FRAMEWORK FOR SEEING THE BEAUTIES, HUMANITY, AND RESISTANCE OF BLACK, INDIGENOUS, PEOPLE OF COLOR.

BLACK ART EDUCATION GAVE ME HOPE THAT A WORLD WITHOUT PRISONS IS POSSIBLE.



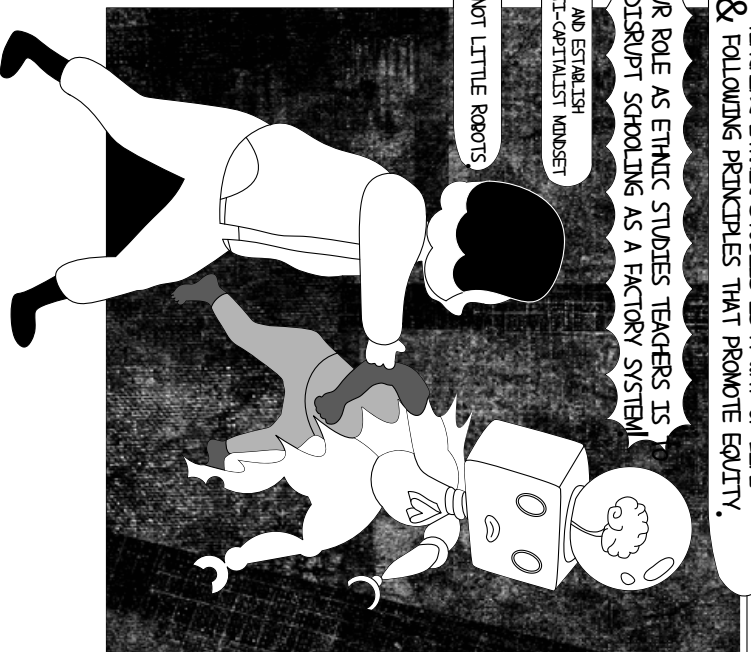
IT ALSO PROVIDED STUDENTS SKILLSETS FOR APPLYING ETHNIC STUDIES LEARNINGS IN THEIR DAY-TO-DAY LIVES AND BUILDING MOVEMENTS OF SOLIDARITY AND ACTIVISM TO ADDRESS ISSUES IN LOCAL COMMUNITY AND SCHOOL.

TEACHING ETHNIC STUDIES IS A WAY OF LIFE
& FOLLOWING PRINCIPLES THAT PROMOTE EQUITY.

OUR ROLE AS ETHNIC STUDIES TEACHERS IS
DISRUPT SCHOOLING AS A FACTORY SYSTEM!

AND ESTABLISH
AN ANTI-CAPITALIST MINDSET

OUR STUDENTS ARE NOT LITTLE ROBOTS



WHETHER THE STUDENTS JOIN IN BECAUSE THEY COME FROM A LEGACY OF FREEDOM FIGHTERS,
OR IF THEY WERE CURIOUS ON THE PATHWAY TO DISCOVER IT ON THEIR OWN
OR IF THEY TOOK ETHNIC STUDIES BECAUSE IT WAS SIMPLY A REQUIREMENT ---
SEEKING THEM TRANSFORM THEIR MINDSET AND HEARING THEM SAY:

I FEEL A LOT OF LOVE FOR MY CULTURE!

THIS SHIFTED MY LIFE TRAJECTORY <3

I THOUGHT THAT I WAS JUST BAD AT SCHOOL AND NOW I
REALIZE THAT I CAN BE GOOD AT SCHOOL AND CRITIQUE
THE SYSTEMS THAT LED ME TO THINK OTHERWISE

IS WHY...

I TEACH ETHNIC STUDIES.



BEING AN ETHNIC STUDIES TEACHER IS AN ONGOING
EXPERIENCE OSCILLATING BETWEEN REIMAGINING
EDUCATIONAL JUSTICE AND NAVIGATING THE REALITIES
OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS.
THIS CAN BE VERY ISOLATING AND IT IS IMPORTANT TO
BE IN DIALOGUE WITH KINDRED SPIRITS ON: 'HOW WE
TAKE CARE OF OURSELVES TO FEEL TOGETHER IN OUR
LONELINESS!'

ETHNIC STUDIES TO ME IS MORE THAN JUST A CLASS, IT
IS LIKE A WAY OF LIFE.

MY PAST WORK IN COMMUNITY ORGANIZING
PREPARED ME WELL FOR TEACHING ETHNIC STUDIES. IT IS
SOMETHING THAT CANNOT BE TAUGHT ONLY THROUGH A
GUIDE OR A SAMPLE CURRICULUM.

IN REALITY,

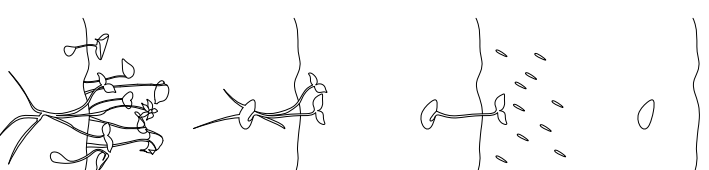
ETHNIC STUDIES IS CONSTANTLY BEING CONTESTED OR CHALLENGED.
IT IS A CONSTANT STRUGGLE TO BUILD A POWERFUL ETHNIC
STUDIES EDUCATION AND MAINTAIN ITS INTEGRITY WHILE
PROTECTING AND CARING FOR OURSELVES.

AGENCY IS IMPORTANT!

I TRY TO SET BOUNDARIES, AND I MAKE AN EFFORT TO
FIND SPACES THAT GIVE ME JOY AND NOURISHMENT.

ALWAYS AND INTO THE FUTURE,

ETHNIC STUDIES HAD A POWERFUL ROLE IN MY OWN LIFE,
AND I HOPE TO RECREATE THAT EXPERIENCE FOR
STUDENTS. TEACHING TRUTH TO POWER CAN BE BOTH
EMPOWERING AND HEAVY,
AND I REMAIN COMMITTED TO OUR...



COLLECTIVE STRUGGLE FOR LIBERATION.

China Town

Santa Ana Ethnic Studies Art Class



Unlearning and Transforming Educational Harm Through Zine Making

AJ Thomas, Texas Woman's University
Mariela Nuñez-Janes, University of North Texas

Abstract

Conceived of and written in the aftermath of the passage of Texas' SB 17, a law banning DEI initiatives in public institutions of higher education, this article offers a pedagogy of zine making as one potential avenue for self-exploration, expression, and empowerment for students in an increasingly polarized and politicized educational context. Drawing from the work of feminist and anti-colonial theorists, as well as our own personal journeys within and outside of the academy, we discuss the transformative potential of creative work in educational spaces and imagine an approach to pedagogy that disrupts traditional academic norms and hierarchies in favor of empathy and solidarity. Focusing on zine making as an artistic medium and form of knowledge production due to its counterhegemonic history and attention to accessibility in regard to creation and distribution, we hope to encourage readers to explore zine making as a means of fostering critical thinking, self-reflection, and communication skills both in and beyond the classroom.

The Spring 2022 semester started like any other. Classes resumed after a winter break and professors were assigned graduate students to help with large courses. We came to know each other in this context, as a professor and instructional assistant for an undergraduate class, Latinos in the U.S., taught in one of the largest public universities in Texas. Under the façade of business as usual in Texas higher education there was great uncertainty. Students and professors were still trying to navigate the realities of post-pandemic teaching and learning and the Texas legislature prepared for its 88th legislative session where Governor Abbott promised to “root out ‘woke agendas’” (Svitek, 2023). As we navigated these uncertainties and tried to address students' needs, we found solidarity in our deeply shared frustrations with the ways in which the institution worked against us and our students. We found connection in trying to navigate the injustices our students experienced daily, and we began to realize that, as instructional assistant and professor, we were disrupting the ways in which students are dehumanized by our academic institutions as we unlearned our roles and prescribed relationship.

In this article we offer a critique of conventional modes of knowledge production in higher education as we imagine a more expansive anti-colonial pedagogy through zine making. We rely on continuous reflection and ongoing dialogue about our experiences to explore moments of disruption in our relationship in the context of legislative attacks against Critical Race Theory (CRT)/Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) and LGBTQ+ students. Through an exploration of feminist and womanist theory and discussion of zine-making, we focus on how our teaching and

our participation in efforts to push back against these attacks became opportunities for resisting and unlearning epistemic violence.

The Anti-Woke Context

A campaign, which Micah Pollock and John Rogers (2022) call the “conflict campaign,” against anti-racist and social justice teaching is being waged in K-16 classrooms. As of June, 2024, 85 anti-DEI bills in 28 states were introduced and 14 became law within a year (Chronicle Staff, 2024). Generally, the bills prohibit university DEI offices, mandatory DEI training, and diversity statements and identity-based preferences for hiring and admissions. They follow significant gains resulting from college student and university faculty demands for representation made in part as a consequence of the consciousness raising from the 2020 U.S. and global uprisings following the killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police.

Texas was among the first states to approve an anti-DEI law, SB 17 in 2023, after it approved SB 3 in 2022, a law that censors classroom instruction and school conversations about race, gender and systemic oppression. Texas SB 17 expands these limitations to higher education by prohibiting: DEI offices and programming, hiring, assigning an employee or contracting a third party to perform duties of a DEI office, mandatory DEI trainings programs or activities, requiring or soliciting DEI statements, and giving preference on the basis of race, gender, ethnicity or national origin to employment applicants, employees, or participants. In addition to SB 17, the Texas legislature also signed into law SB 18, which weakens the protections of tenure by providing ultimate authority to grant or revoke tenure to those without disciplinary expertise. During the 2023–2024 academic year in Texas, universities had to figure out how to interpret SB 17 and SB 18 to meet the state of Texas deadlines for compliance.

To comply with SB 17 our university was the first one in the state to announce its closing of the campus Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility (IDEA) office during the summer of 2023. In May, 2024 the Texas Subcommittee for Higher Education led by the author of SB 17, Senator Creighton, convened a special hearing, to assess Texas universities’ compliance with the new law. Despite the fact that the hearing was scheduled while some universities held their commencement exercises and others faced increasing militarization and surveillance resulting from demonstrations demanding that universities divest from Israel, 200 people submitted written or in-person testimony, with all except one outlining the devastating impacts of SB 17 (personal, email to author, May 15, 2024).

When we met, SB 17 and SB 18 were introduced to the Texas legislature. Like other Texas campuses, most students, faculty, and staff were largely unaware of the bills, while others naively assumed that they would never become law. We began discussing the bills because we knew their approval would impact us personally and professionally and because the class we were teaching fit the curriculum targeted by the bill. Students in our class also started asking questions as they followed the headlines about SB 17 in the news. There was a chilling effect on campus that continues to this day, driven in part by the university’s minimal communication about plans for compliance with the bills.

Our discussions about the bills, what would happen to our class, and how our professional and personal futures would be affected, led to conversations about broader impacts, particularly about

our previous and present experiences with systemic forms of violence in the academy. These conversations often started as ways to share information, in the absence of any, and to discuss multiple strategies about how to cope and navigate challenges. Through them, we learned about our lives inside and outside the university and filled our identities as professor and graduate student with humanity. Although Mariela's identity as a professor is always accompanied with the description of being a Latina 1.5 generation immigrant anthropologist, in academic spaces she only shares the lived detailed realities of that experience with a few trusted colleagues and students. Meanwhile, AJ tries to be outspoken about their experiences and difficulties navigating life as a white, queer, trans, neurodivergent, mentally ill graduate student trying to cope with histories of abuse and family violence—things many in the academy are, unfortunately, quick to dismiss as irrelevant. Together, we hope to create opportunities for reconciliation and healing within educational settings through holistic approaches to pedagogy that recognize not only the complexity but the importance of students' lived experiences.

Figuring out ways to teach and cope while navigating the attacks, uncertainty, and fear created by SB 17 opened up opportunities to disrupt the expectations we each held of our roles in the university. We challenged who has knowledge and power in our classroom and in academic spaces, related to each other as people, and practiced solidarity. We watched the hearings and legislative debates about SB 17, sometimes late into the night, and heard our own state representatives say racist, sexist, and homophobic things to justify their attacks against DEI. We found comfort, camaraderie, and solidarity by talking about what we heard, sometimes sharing information, research, and scholarly ideas to counter our legislators' arguments, and provided mutual reassurance against their hate speech. One example of these disruptions is AJ registering Mariela to vote in her very first election. Sharing with AJ the very personal and traumatic stories of over 40 years of struggles with U.S immigration nurtured connection and trust allowing Mariela to cede the power to AJ to symbolically culminate her process of regaining U.S. citizenship. The nuances, mutual connections, and solidarity we shared in our roles as advocates for ourselves, each other, and others, were in part inspired by this story and led to their expression in the zine we will be discussing here.

Unlearning

These moments of collaboration, conversation, and disruption offered a meaningful and enlightening experience for each of us; it was through this work together that we began to recognize more clearly both the harm done to us in educational spaces and the harm we had unwittingly been reproducing in our own instructional practice. These realizations inspired us to continue, with more awareness and more intention, the lifelong process of decolonizing consciousness, which Laura E. Pérez (2019) describes as unlearning, challenging, and healing from the inflexible, "other-centered," binary modes of thinking that so often characterize Euro-American epistemologies, as well as reestablishing trust in our intuition and creative impulses (p. 206). An important part of this ongoing work, for both of us, has been recognizing the ways in which systems of education, especially in the United States, are explicitly designed to uphold the status quo, largely through the enforcement of "traditional" Euro-American academic norms that perpetuate epistemic and ontological violence against those who do not fit the prescribed mold of "Scholar."

The archetype of the Scholar is shaped by discourses—like those surrounding "excellence" and "rigor," which are often touted as core values of educational institutions—that create and reinforce

hierarchical structures and attempt to define who is and is not “fit” to succeed in these settings (Bejarano & Soderling, 2021). Such discourses are often rooted in Eurocentric, racist, classist, and ableist definitions of “excellence” positioning marginalized groups as subjects rather than producers of knowledge and demanding assimilation in exchange for entry into academic spaces (Bejarano & Soderling, 2021; Lee, 2017; Lorde, 1984; Morrison, 2019). Many scholars throughout the years have written about the emotional and, at times, even physical pain that results from this type of forced assimilation. In one poignant example, feminist writer and educator bell hooks (1994) recounts her experience with such attempts at silencing, where students of color were “made to feel that [they] were there not to learn but to prove that [they] were the equals of whites” (p. 5). This competition to conform to dominant culture deprived, and continues to deprive, students from marginalized backgrounds of a meaningful, empowering educational experience; instead of learning to write, speak, and theorize from their own social locations, they were, and in many regards still are, expected to filter their lives, experiences, and knowledges through hegemonic social and philosophical lenses.

This push to conform to dominant culture is especially common, in all levels of education, when it comes to expectations regarding language, writing, and knowledge production. Knowledge is meant to be produced and shared through “scholarly” writing—a medium characterized by the use of “proper” English, a strict linear narrative style, complex sentence structure, and, often, dense, jargonistic, hard-to-access vocabulary (Ahmed, 2000; Anzaldúa, [1990] 2009; Flores & Rosa, 2015; hooks, 1994; Ngũgĩ, 1986). For many people who have experienced marginalization, conforming to these standards of “proper” writing—which are, intentionally or unintentionally, rooted in racist, classist, ableist norms—involves suppressing their authentic voices in favor of learning to speak the language of the oppressor (Anzaldúa, [1990] 2009; Lorde, 1984; Ngũgĩ, 1986; Pérez, 2019). In this way, as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (1986) notes, establishing control over systems of education is one of the most powerful tools of colonialism and imperialism because it alienates youth from and breeds contempt for their languages, cultures, communities, and selves (pp. 28–29). This systematic silencing and deprivation of voice is a tactic of disempowerment and control that is commonly used, even today, within all levels of education to uphold existing power structures.

Women of color feminist writers have long highlighted the importance of voice as a site for resistance, urging us to consider who speaks and writes, who listens, and why—as well as who does not speak or write, why, and how we might begin creating space for those who have traditionally been excluded from discourse (Ahmed, 2000; hooks, 1994). Philosopher and writer Gloria E. Anzaldúa ([1990] 2009) explores these questions in her discussions of silence, of adopting the language of dominant culture, and of learning to speak authentically and against the grain; she describes the disempowerment, the feelings of despair and disembodiment, that result from being denied access to one’s authentic voice, as well as the power and possibility that come from opening the proverbial floodgates. As our discussions about SB 17 continued and our concerns regarding legislative attempts to exert control over educational spaces across the country increased, we began sharing examples of our own experiences being silenced by and assimilated into hegemonic culture through systems of education. Mariela talked about the physical and emotional pain of learning English as a second language and losing the ability to speak the language of her discipline in her mother tongue. AJ, in turn, expressed their mounting frustration with academic ableism and writing conventions that leave little room for the inner workings of their neurodivergent brain. Through these conversations, we developed a sense of solidarity and began to wonder what might be done to mitigate these harms for current and future students.

Becky Thompson (2017) offers an in-depth reflection on the epistemic and ontological violence brought on by pedagogies rooted in and reinforcing hegemonic cultural norms. She describes the painful “splits” she experienced as a graduate student—moments of disembodiment that left her feeling like she had ransomed off parts of her body in exchange for a chance at success in the world of academia (Thompson, 2017). Tyrone Simpson (quoted in Thompson, 2017) expresses a similar sentiment, describing the PhD as “verification that you have been willing to be out of your body for an extended period of time” (p. 64). These experiences of emotional and spiritual dismemberment are not an exception, but rather the rule in a system of education predicated on the supposed separation of mind from body from spirit that characterizes post-Enlightenment Euro-American thought and culture (hooks, 1994; Pérez, 2019). We have, many times, shared with each other our own experiences of pain and frustration, particularly in the context of the hypocritical stances of our shared discipline, anthropology; for a field predicated on understanding and valuing diverse ways of knowing and being, we continue to be disappointed by the unwillingness to acknowledge the downsides of traditional (Western) academic norms that we have encountered.

Various scholars and practitioners throughout the years have suggested that it is possible to learn to cope with and begin healing from the epistemic and ontological violence wrought by the neocolonial, neoliberal academy by working to mend the splits between mind, body, and spirit (Anzaldúa, ([1990] 2009); hooks, 1994; Pérez, 2019; Thompson, 2017). For example, Thompson (2017) recounts the difference she observed in her students and their writing once she began encouraging what she calls “embodied writing” (p. 37), writing that makes room for emotion, personal narrative, and experimentation with form and nonlinear structure; as students came to find and strengthen their own voices and writing styles, problems with grammar and organization began to disappear. She proposes this sort of embodied writing as a potential avenue toward the healing of the painful “splits” she had experienced as a student. This raises the question: what might happen, what might change, if we allow students to begin producing and sharing knowledge through other embodied, creative mediums?

Enter Zine Making

Philosopher and activist Grace Lee Boggs notes that young people are becoming increasingly disillusioned with the state of education in our country, “crying out for another kind of education that gives them opportunities to exercise their creative energies because it values them as whole human beings” (Boggs & Kurashige, 2012, p. 12), rather than one that treats them like products moving through a factory, future cogs in the capitalist machine. Boggs highlights not only the importance of developing new cultural images with the potential to help us shift our collective mindset from one dominated by capitalist, colonial/imperial, neoliberal values toward one rooted in practices of solidarity, compassion, and transformation, but also the role art and artists might play in bringing about this shift (Boggs & Kurashige, 2012). As Gloria E. Anzaldúa ([1990] 2009; [2002] 2009) and Laura E. Pérez (2019) discuss, imagination, creativity, and more “artistic” mediums allow people to express ideas and experiences that cannot adequately be put into words—especially words that are recognized/recognizable by institutions of education as theory or scholarship. In this way, creative work may lay the foundation for both individual and collective healing and transformation by offering space for people to begin bridging the gap between mind,

body, and spirit and to consider counterhegemonic narratives and imagine new possibilities (Pérez, 2019; Ponce de León, 2021).

We chosen to explore zine making as pedagogy because zines are a form of creative expression that have a political, counterhegemonic history and require far less training and fewer resources than other artistic mediums (Duncombe, 2017). Zines initially emerged as part of a radical subculture committed to challenging dominant norms through the repurposing of common items and cultural symbols from hegemonic artifacts into means of questioning one's social, political, and/or economic circumstances (Duncombe, 2017; Hebdige, 1979). The creation and distribution of zines provided an opportunity for people feeling alienated from dominant culture to develop networks through which alternative discursive and critical spaces emerged (Duncombe, 2017; Hebdige, 1979); these critiques are expressed, as Dick Hebdige (1979) argues, through the transformation of cultural symbols and their meanings in a way that goes against "nature" and interrupts the process of "normalization" (p. 18). These transformations are significant in that they disrupt the mechanisms by which hegemonic aesthetic practices and ideologies replicate themselves, shaping our perception of the world so thoroughly that it can be difficult to conceive of another way of being (Hebdige, 1979; Ponce de León, 2021). Zines, as creative practice, offer an avenue for transformative self-exploration and expression by fostering, at least within their pages, the kinds of alternative realities their creators wish to embody (Duncombe, 2017).

While not all zines are explicitly political or intended to be educational, the discontent they express and the worlds they imagine are often rooted in sociopolitical, cultural, or economic commentary. In fact, zine making as a medium is based on an amateur (from the Latin "amator," meaning "lover"), do-it-yourself (DIY) culture that inherently rejects dominant aesthetics and capitalist ideals of mass production and consumption (Duncombe, 2017; Hebdige, 1979). Zines require both fewer physical resources and less technical skill than many other artistic styles—and, unlike more traditional approaches to art or scholarly writing, zines are more about the content and message than the form (Duncombe, 2017)—making them an ideal option for classroom spaces, particularly in contexts where authentic forms of self-expression are repressed. Additionally, the movement of zines challenges traditional structures of knowledge production and distribution; zines are often made in or for community and are meant to be spread freely, creating a way of sharing information that is, in many ways, both more dialogic and more accessible than institutionalized modes of communication. While zines may not have as wide an audience as modes of mass communication, we argue that their creative, more personal nature makes them easier to connect to and more moving for the people they do reach—perhaps this is part of why zines seem to have reemerged as a popular informal educational tool in recent years.

It is, of course, important to consider the ways in which zine making can be and has already been appropriated into dominant cultural institutions (as is the case when, for a brief time, zines were considered "trendy"), but we prefer to think of zine making as a way to provide students with the tools to produce and share knowledge in a way that feels more personal, relevant, and accessible, even if the production and dissemination of this knowledge takes place largely outside of the classroom. We believe zines, as a pedagogical practice, can offer space for students marginalized within systems of education—and feeling the effects of the epistemic and ontological violence brought on by norms surrounding learning and knowledge production—to express themselves more freely and authentically. In fact, the co-creative processes of knowledge and meaning making that often go into zines may help students foster a sense of empathy and solidarity that can work

to counter the alienation, individualism, and competition that characterize so many contemporary educational institutions; such a pedagogy feels especially needed in a time when education at all levels is subject to political attempts at censorship and erasure of students' historical and cultural realities. In the following paragraphs, we will provide an example of our vision of zine making as pedagogy.

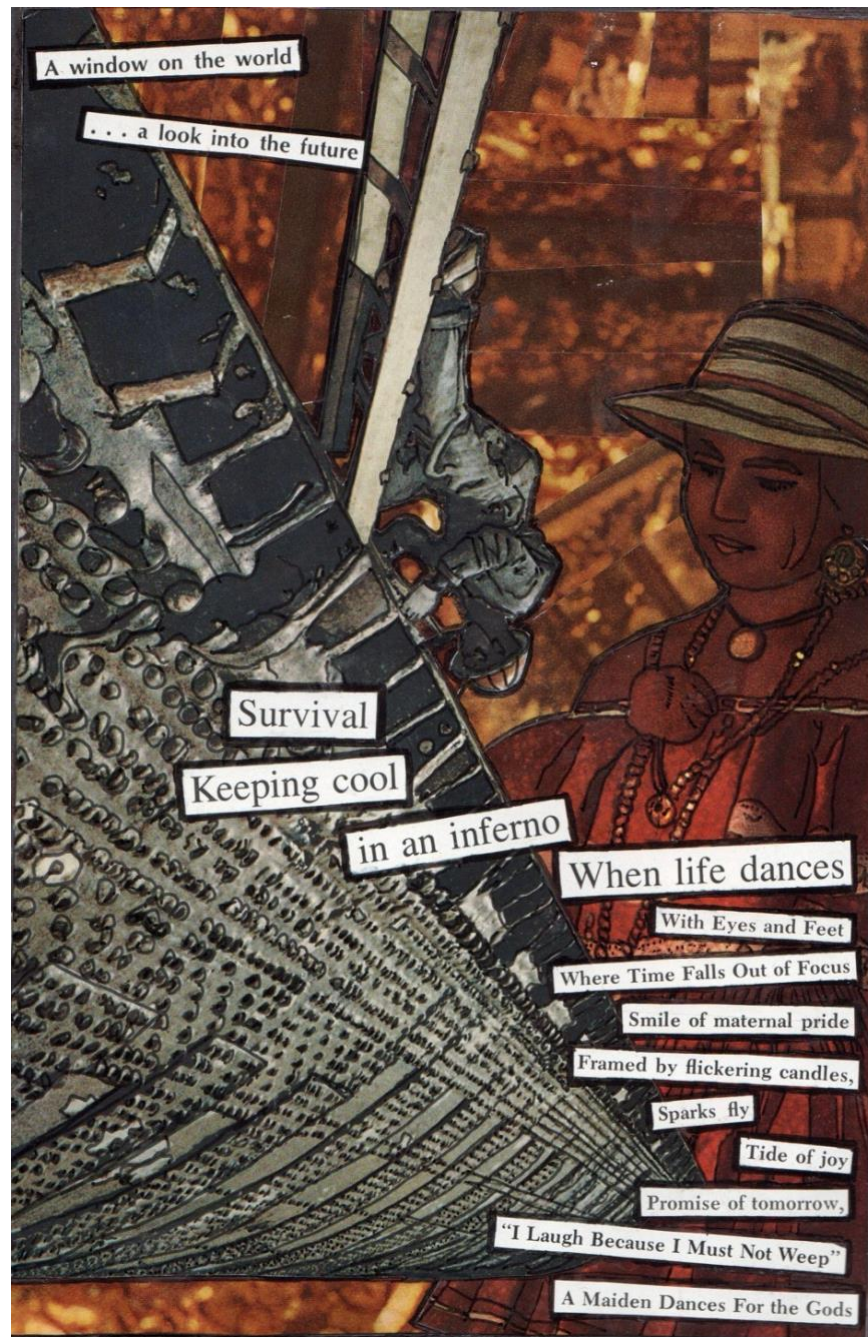
Our Zine

Originally conceived of in response to Clelia Rodríguez and Josephine Gabi's (2023) question, "who are you without colonialism?²⁹", our zine combines personal narratives of learning and unlearning with sociopolitical commentary on the mechanisms and effects of colonialism and imperialism. The zine was made using issues of National Geographic magazine from dates significant to each of our personal narratives; this method was chosen as a way to transform a publication with a long history of colonial practice and a close tie to the discipline of anthropology into a medium for questioning coloniality and imagining a different way of living. Each page in the zine was created from a single National Geographic volume corresponding with central moments in our respective life journeys. The pages—which were designed to represent some of the major relevant themes from those periods in our lives—were then organized in a nonlinear fashion, illustrating the story of Mariela's decades-long journey back to U.S. citizenship and AJ's reflections on the ways they have begun to unlearn, cope with, and heal from the forms of colonial domination and oppression that have shaped their life both in their favor and to their detriment. Our two narratives cross over in April 2023, a time when both of us achieved personally significant victories in pushing back against laws that erased our personhood and became active in efforts to support diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility. We chose to organize the zine in this way to highlight the moment when our journeys intertwined and to emphasize that healing and growth often involve both looking back and moving forward.

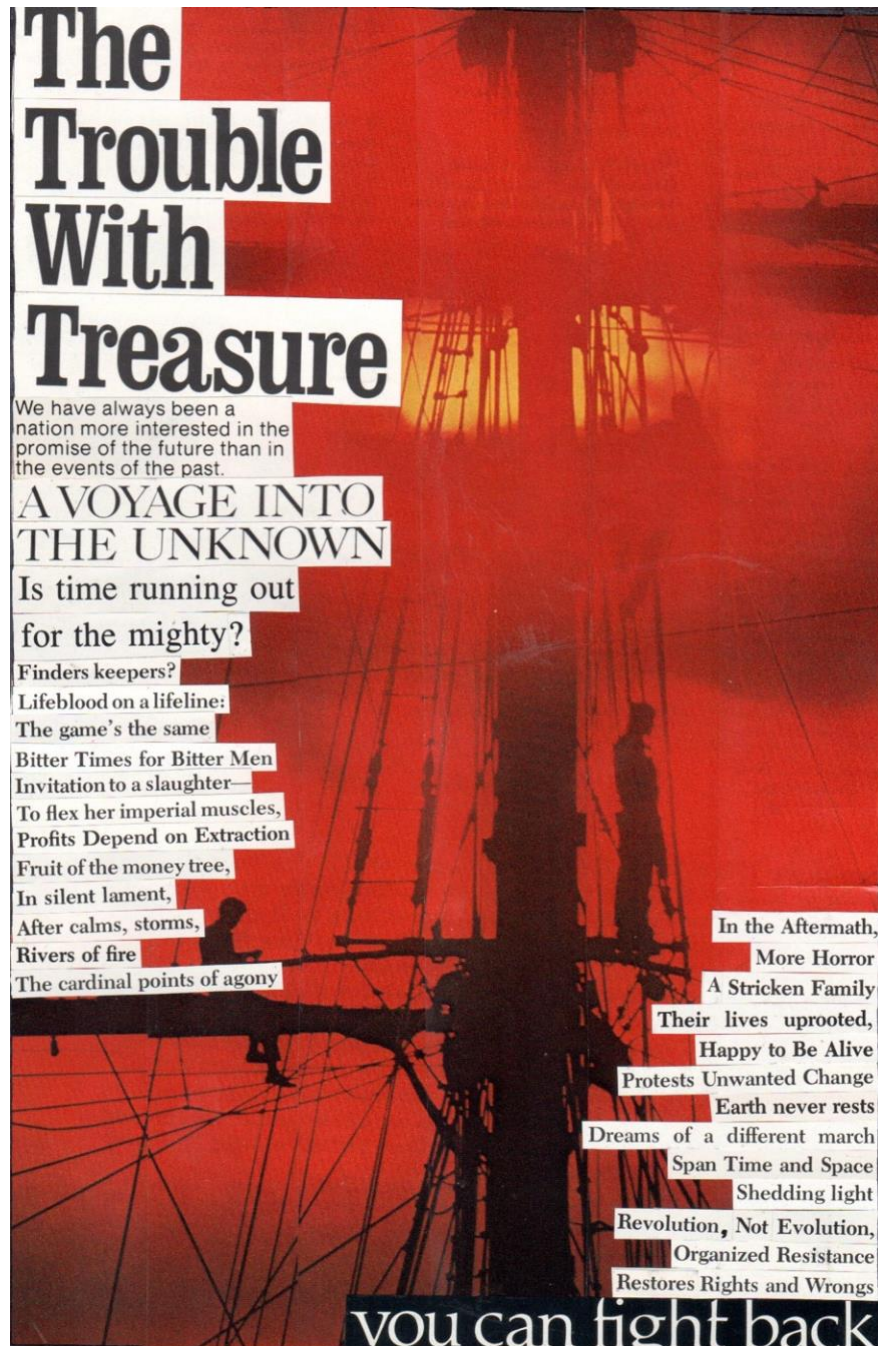
We began with Mariela's written narrative, "I am not Anyone's Citizen," in which she details four pivotal years in her immigration journey; included along with these accounts are images of personal moments, redacted documents, a letter from an immigration attorney, and forms from the U.S. Departments of State and Justice. From this narrative, we drew themes related to the violence of colonialism and imperialism, loss, resistance, resilience, and hope, which we attempted to incorporate into the zine pages. AJ's story was not quite as straightforward—they realized fairly quickly which moments from their life they wanted to highlight but it took them much longer to figure out what exactly they wanted to convey. Ultimately, their story ended up being more introspective, reflecting on the messy process of untangling and unlearning the hegemonic cultural, social, and political narratives they had grown up with; their pages represent major shifts in their life's trajectory and explore more (inter)personal themes such as abuse, trauma, and mental health. To us, this project as a whole represents an act of solidarity, offering an example of people with vastly different lived experiences and at different places in their own journeys learning from and working to support each other. That said, while these are the ideas that resonated with us as we were working on this project, they are far from the only interpretations—we believe the meaning

²⁹ We submitted an essay to the call for papers for this volume; in response, the editors pushed us to center and imagine our experiences outside of colonial frameworks. Although our essay was not included in the published book, it was their suggestion that led us to continue reflecting deeply and, ultimately, inspired the zine we discuss in this article. We are grateful to Clelia Rodríguez and Josephine Gabi for pushing us to delve deep and outside of colonial boundaries.

of art is as much in the interpretation as in the making and we value this co-creative element of artistic mediums. For this reason, we encourage our readers to approach this zine with an open mind, considering the themes discussed above but still allowing yourselves the space to develop your own interpretations and make your own meanings.



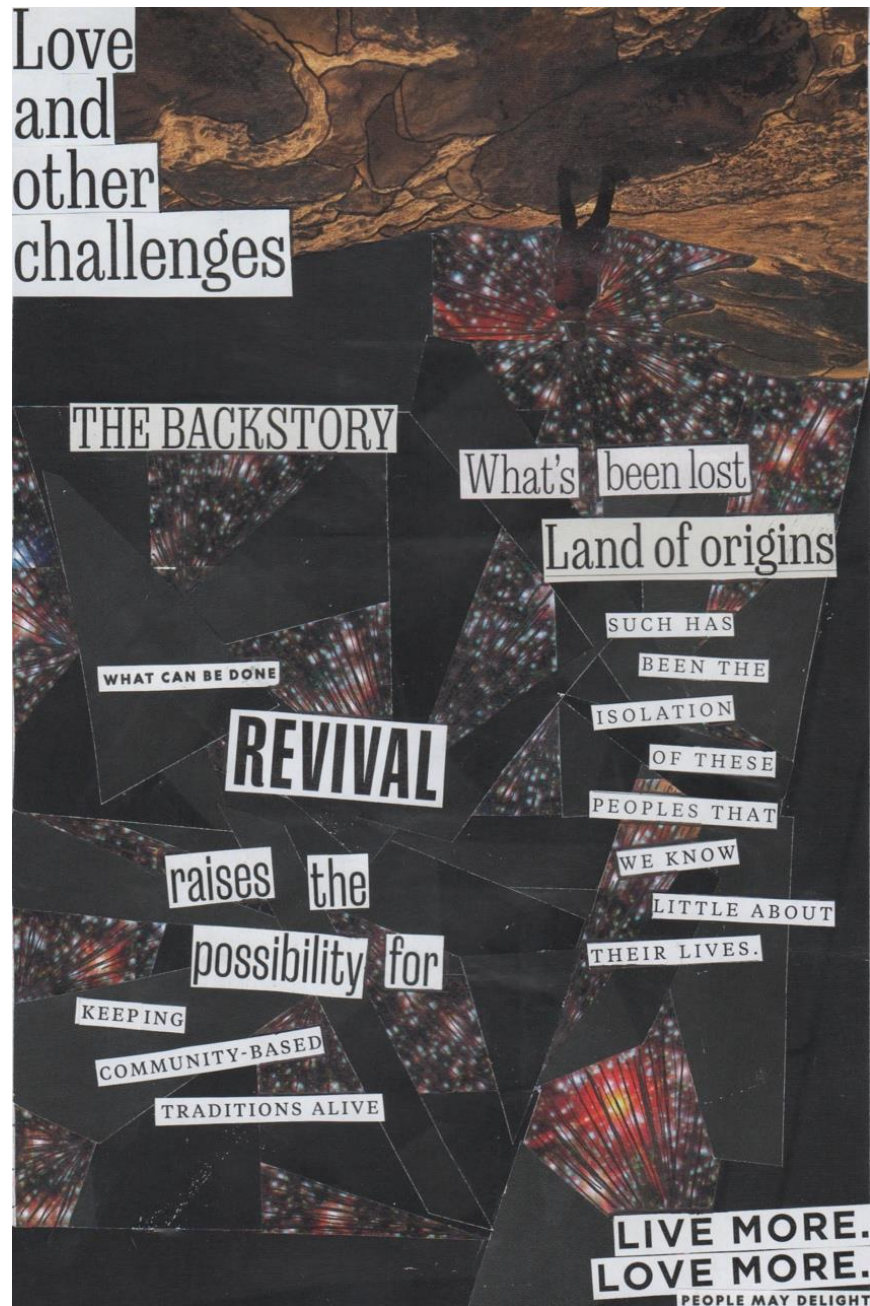
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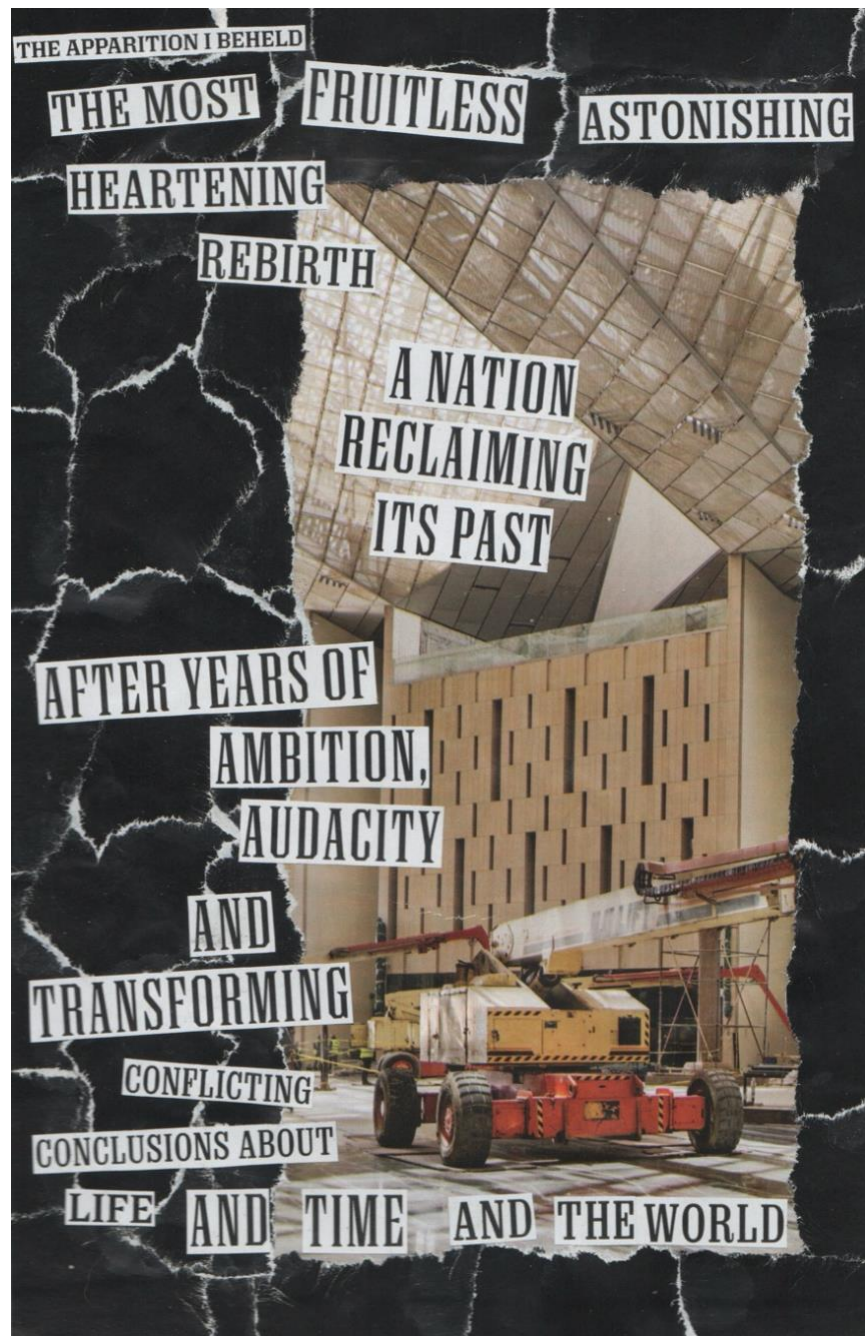
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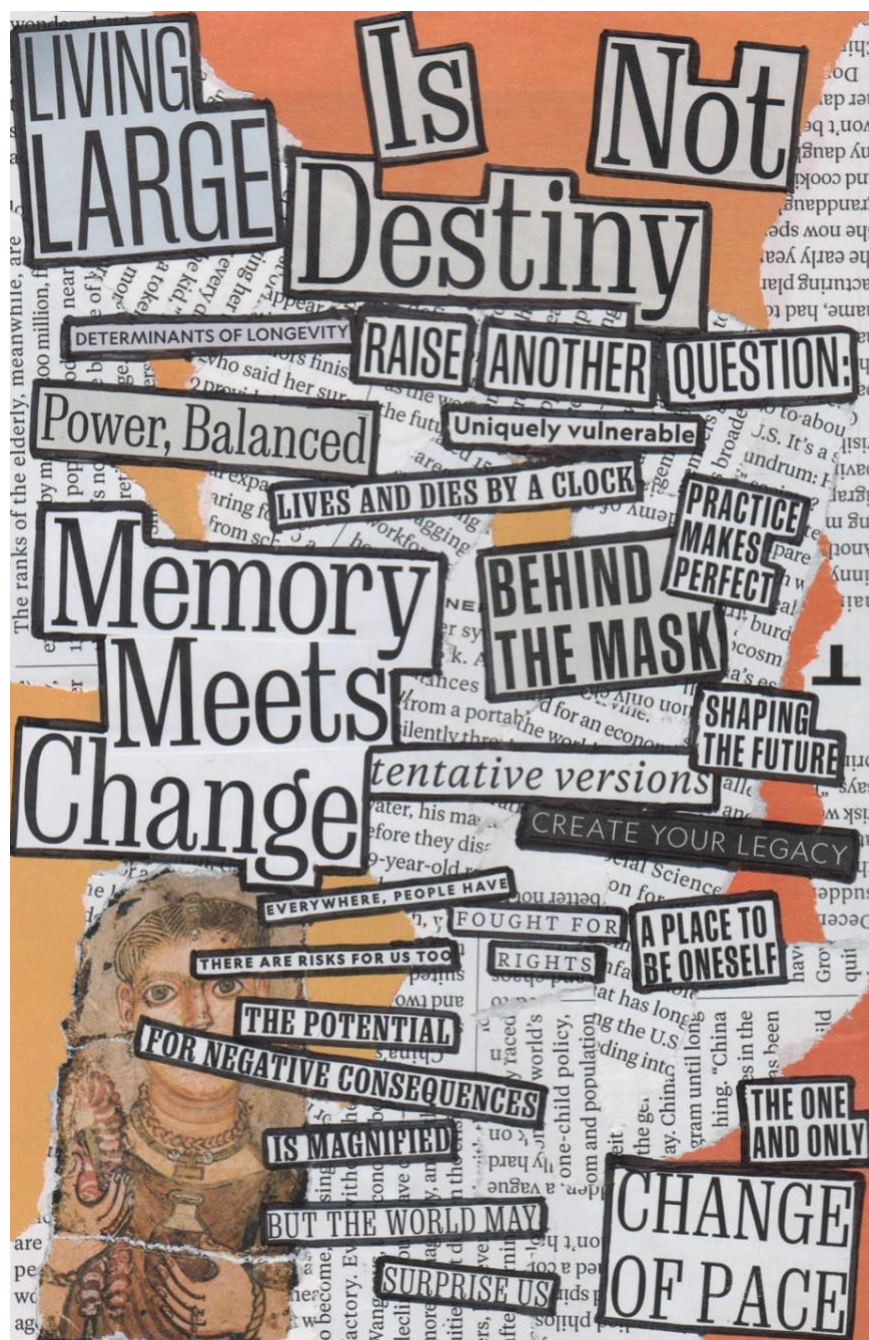
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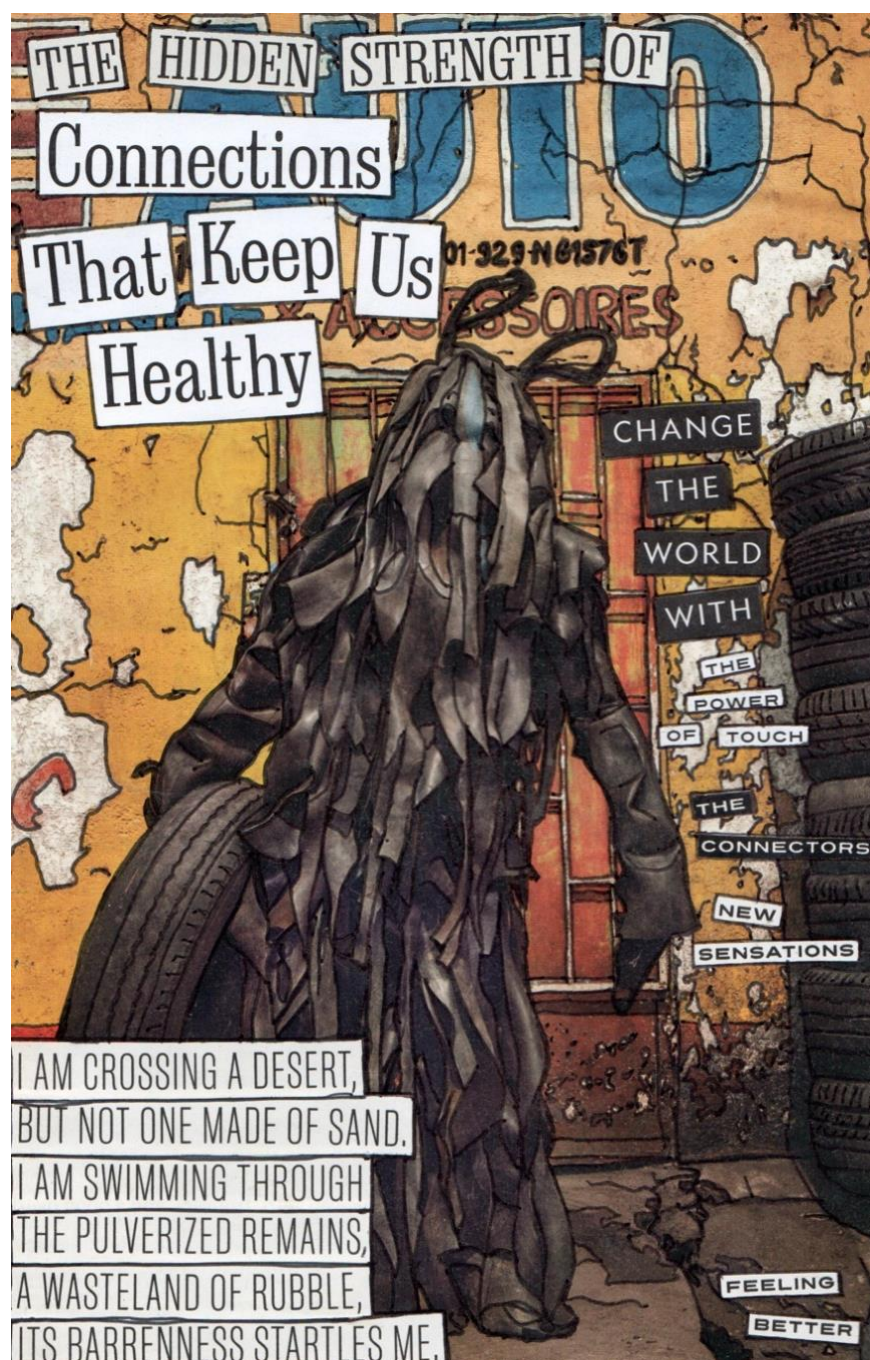
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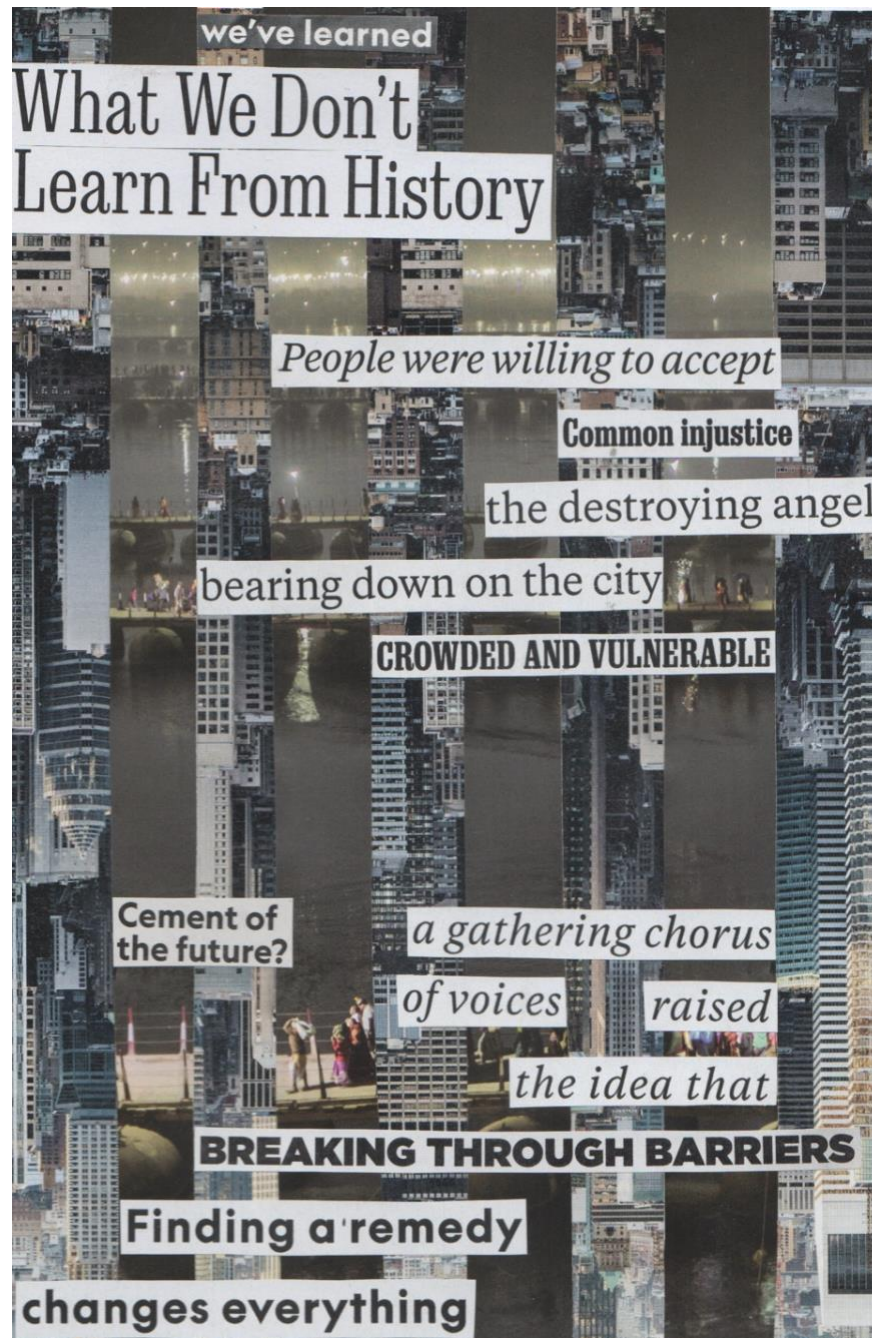
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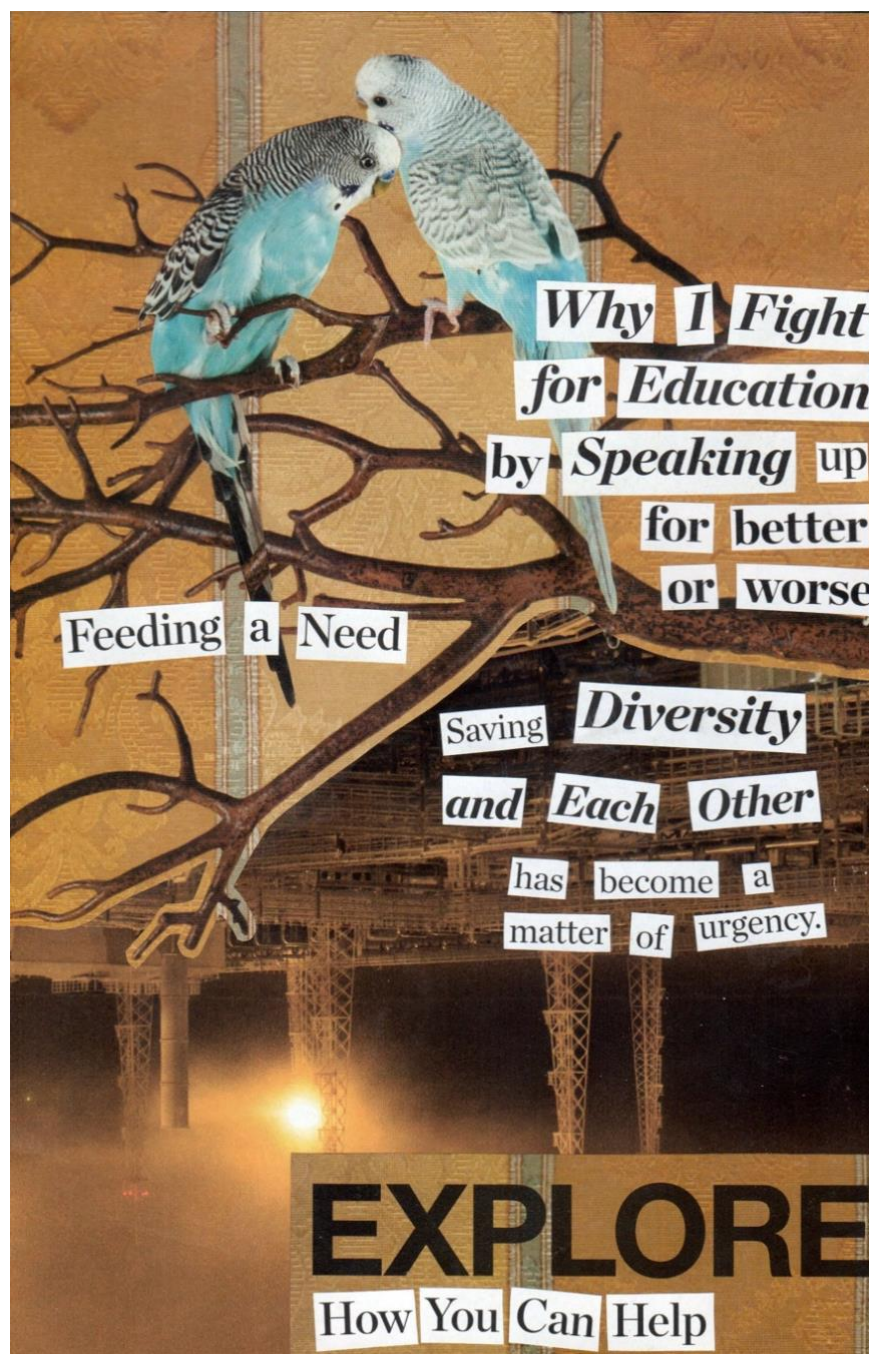
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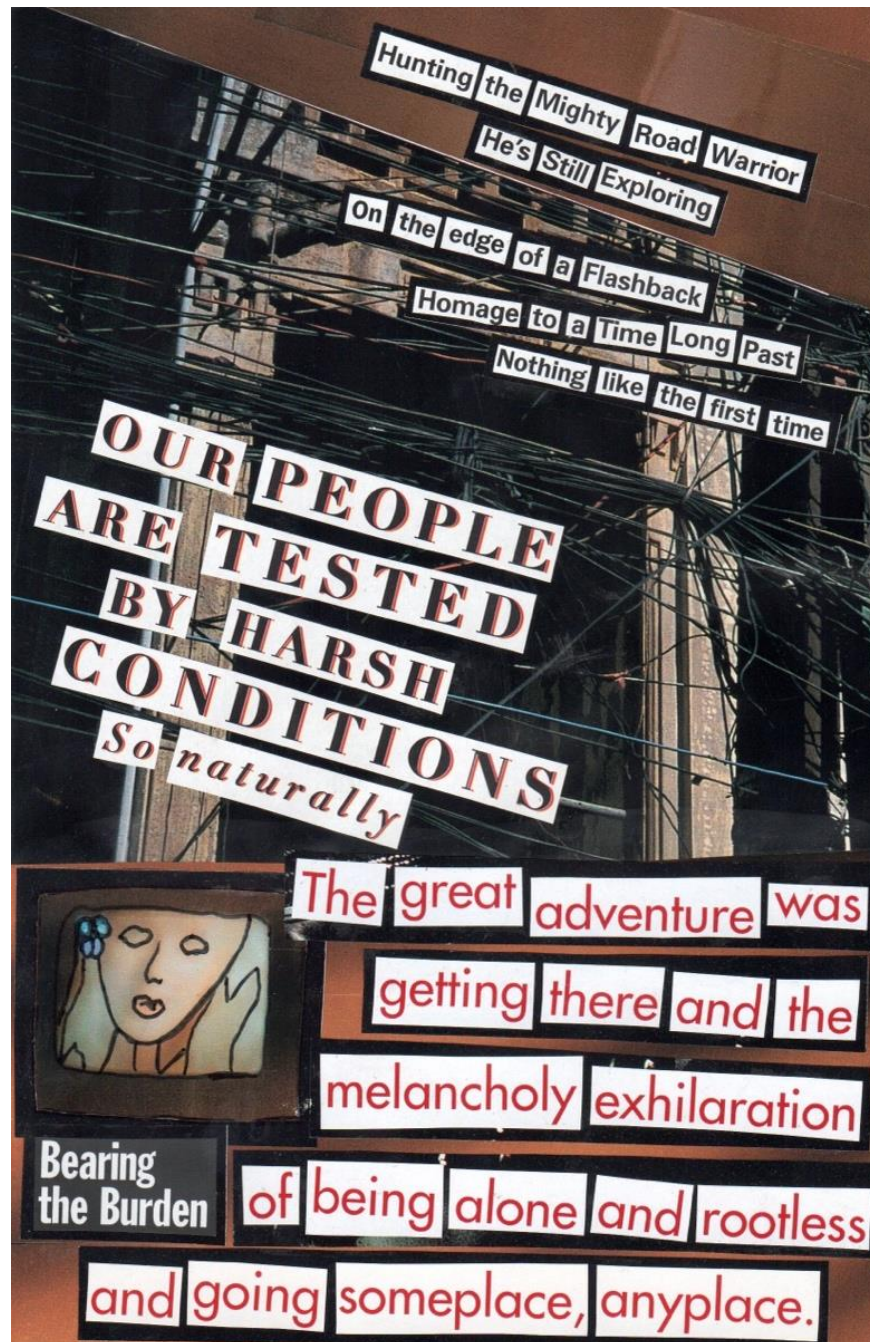
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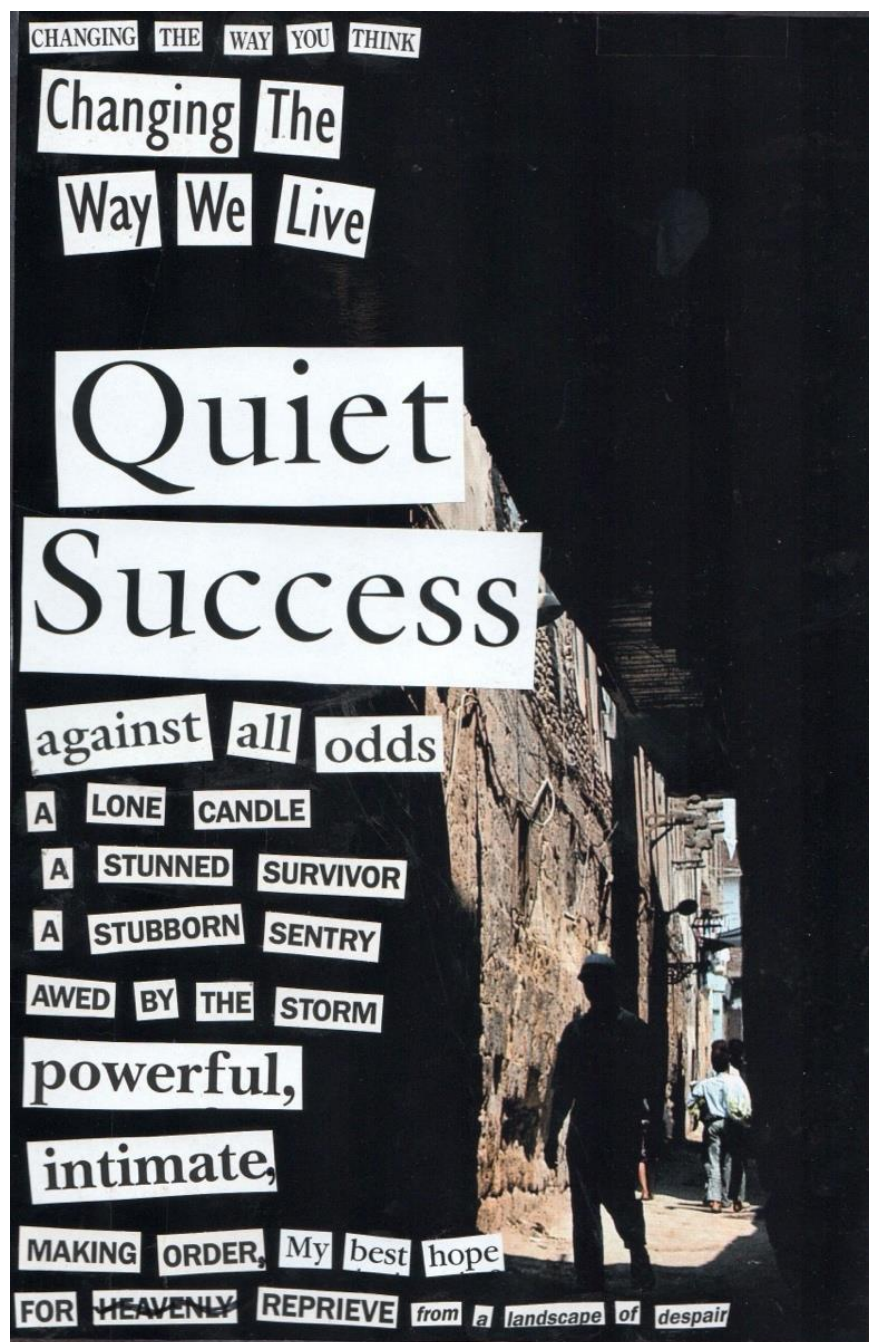
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Thoughts to End With

There are, of course, still many questions regarding the implementation of a methodology/ pedagogy of zine making, but we believe in the potential of this art form to create the space for both inner and social transformation, as discussed in this essay. Ideas do not need to be distributed at large to have an impact and zines, through their focus on self-expression and sociopolitical commentary, as well as their non-institutionalized distribution networks, may represent an avenue to transform traditional educational spaces into sites of liberatory practice (hooks, 1994). Not only do zines have the potential to provide both students and educators a medium through which they can meaningfully engage with topics that are currently being targeted and censored by state legislatures, they also offer an important creative outlet for students to envision their futures with the freedom to imagine their worlds on their own terms.

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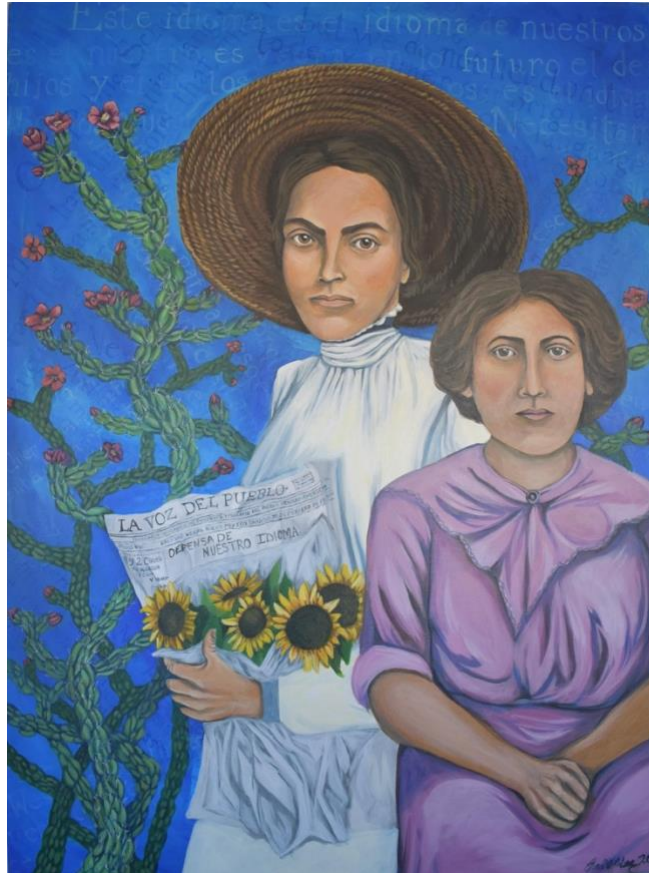
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La Voz (2020)

Elena Valdez



La Voz depicts two mujeres of New Mexico history: Aurora Lucero (later Aurora Lucero-White Lea) and Fabiola Cabeza de Baca. Lucero, in the middle, clasps a bouquet of sunflowers wrapped in *La Voz Del Pueblo*, a Spanish-language newspaper for which her father, Antonio Lucero, was an editor. “Defense de nuestra idioma,” located under the newspaper title, references her speech, “Shall the Spanish Language be Taught in the Schools of New Mexico?” which was also published in Spanish. Cabeza de Baca sits at Lucero’s left, her hands folded together. In the background stretches a blooming cholla, a cactus native to northern New Mexico, across the fading words from Lucero’s speech.

The two Nuevomexicanas appear in the painting together because they attended the New Mexico Normal School at the same time, separated by only a few grade levels. Both went on to become writers and educators involved in folklore studies. While their connection with each other remains understudied, a note in Lucero-White’s *Los Hispanos* (1947) suggests they may have provided feedback on each other’s writings, as Cabeza de Baca Gilbert is thanked “for reading the manuscript.”

Let Us Speak: Aurora Lucero's Speech and the Spanish Language of New Mexico

Elena V. Valdez, New Mexico Highlands University

When the territory of New Mexico was considered for statehood in the decades following the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo in 1848, which ceded much of what is now the US Southwest to the United States, the linguistic and ethnic identities of the territory's inhabitants were regularly cited as reasons not to admit New Mexico to the union (Nieto-Phillips, 2004). In 1910, Congress proposed an Enabling Act that would have both required English-only instruction in the schools and people to speak, read, and write in English to be employed in government (González-Berry, 2002; Gallegos, 2014). The act was criticized for attempting to circumvent the political power of the Spanish-speaking community and deny their children an education in their heritage language.

A teenager by the name of Aurora Lucero was among those who spoke against the bill that would enable New Mexico to become a state. In a speech at an oratorical contest in 1910, Lucero answered the question she posed in her title, "Should the Spanish Language be Taught in the Schools of New Mexico?," with a resounding yes, though not without the shadow of Spanish coloniality and its oppressive impact on the Indigenous people of New Mexico. Following Lucero's oral delivery, the speech received considerable attention and was published in the *New Mexico Normal University Bulletin* in January 1911 (Gallegos 2014; Meléndez, 1997). The speech thus became part of a larger genealogy of Mexican American literary and print culture that critiques the English-only, white heteropatriarchal order and invites us to explore the racialized, classed, and gendered nuances of *Latinidad*.³⁰ Put in conversation with contemporary policies and primary sources such as the 2025 Executive Order 14224, "Designating English as the Official Language of the United States," the speech provides ample opportunity to examine how



Materials courtesy of Thomas C. Donnelly Library, New Mexico Highlands University.

³⁰ See Gallegos (2014), for an analysis of how Aurora Lucero and her Nuevomexicana/o contemporaries repositioned themselves within the broader US context during the early twentieth century. See also Rivera (2022), for an analysis of Lucero's later contributions to the Depression-era Federal Writer's Project and her promotion of the Spanish fantasy heritage. See Nogar and Hohn (2022), for information about Anna Nogar's digital humanities project on Aurora Lucero.

language has figured into ongoing debates about citizenship and belonging in the United States, that is, who is entitled to what protections, who has political power, etc.

Given our current political landscape, Lucero's speech is more relevant than ever. According to a report issued by the U.S. Census Bureau in 2022, the number of people who speak a language other than English has nearly tripled from forty years ago, with Spanish being the second most common language spoken at home (Dietrich & Hernandez, 2022). The same report describes how the federal government has used language data to allocate funding for students who are developing their English-language skills and to support language services for speakers of particular languages under Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act. Though Executive Order 14224 has been considered largely symbolic, history suggests we should worry about the rationale behind it.

I adapted the lesson that follows from one I have implemented in my own high school US History courses and a presentation I delivered as part of a panel titled "Diversifying Folklore Studies and Education: Sharing and Creating Inclusive Folklore Pedagogy" at the 2024 American Folklore Society Conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Teachers should feel free to revise the lesson to meet the needs of their students and to align with their local content-area standards. This lesson may be easily incorporated into units on westward expansion, the Progressive movement, cultural and political controversies, and so on. Before directing students to complete the formative tasks, which are ordered deliberately, ensure students are provided the included background information and any material that may help situate the lesson within the broader historical unit.

Procedure

1. Begin with the bellringer to assess student's prior knowledge. Consider using the question, "How does the language you speak affect the way other people see you?" or "How do people feel about languages other than English being spoken in the United States?" Students should write down their responses, then share with a partner. Ask two or more groups to share their responses with the class.
2. Provide students with background information on the Spanish-speaking communities of New Mexico and Aurora Lucero's speech. Supplement the information with additional context if needed.
3. Determine how students should tackle the formative tasks. Should you read and annotate the texts as a class? Should you then ask students to answer the questions in small groups (3 to 4 students) on large sheets of butcher paper so they can later present their answers to their peers? Should students work with a partner but submit their answers on their own worksheets? Teachers must facilitate the formative tasks in a way that is best for their students.
4. Facilitate the formative tasks using the primary sources and questions provided.
5. Introduce the summative task for students to complete individually. Be sure to demonstrate how to fold the zine and provide ample materials to support your students' creativity.

Essential Question

How has language figured into national debates about citizenship and belonging in the United States?

Staging the Question

How does the language you speak affect the way other people see you?

Key Vocabulary

neomexicano, nuevomexicano, assimilation, citizens, culture

The Spanish language was introduced to the region that is known as New Mexico by colonizers in the sixteenth century. The Spanish-speaking communities established as part of Spain's colonial project remained in the region through the Mexican War of Independence (1810-1821) and the U.S.-Mexico War (1846-1848). From the mid-nineteenth century to today, many neomexicanos, or nuevomexicanos, have labored to maintain their culture and Spanish language, despite ongoing pressures to assimilate into the mainstream culture of the United States. Language became a point of contention as the territory of New Mexico was considered for statehood over the course of sixty years. For many Americans, the people of New Mexico were perceived as too different to be true citizens of the United States. When statehood seemed inevitable for the territory by the early twentieth century, Congress proposed an Enabling Act that would require English be the official language of government and education in New Mexico.



Materials courtesy of Thomas C. Donnelly Library, New Mexico Highlands University.

During an oratorical contest at the New Mexico Normal School in 1910, a sixteen-year-old named Aurora Lucero delivered a speech that responded to the language requirements in the Enabling Act. Lucero's speech, "Should the Spanish Language be Taught in the Schools of New Mexico?," makes several claims about the Spanish-speaking people of New Mexico and their language. These claims reflect the historical context in which Lucero delivered her speech and some of the biases that have existed about and among the Spanish-speaking people of New Mexico.

Lucero was a descendent of the nuevomexicano upper class who is remembered for her involvement in the fight for women's suffrage and for her accomplishments as writer, educator, and folklorist. Years after she argued for Spanish-language education, Lucero (later Aurora Lucero White-Lea) wrote several books on Hispano folklore and traditions of New Mexico, including *Los Hispanos* (1947) and *Literary Folklore of the Hispanic Southwest* (1953). Her legacy demonstrates

the complex ways in which many people of Mexican descent mediated their positions as both the colonizers and the colonized in New Mexico during the early twentieth century.

Shall the Spanish Language be Taught in the Schools of New Mexico? (1911)

by Miss Aurora Lucero

The territory of New Mexico has undergone many changes, politically and socially, it has solved many problems; and now, upon the eve of statehood, a new problem is being discussed in every hamlet, village and city: "Shall the Spanish language continue to be taught in our public schools?"

It seems beyond all doubt that New Mexico is soon to take her place as one of the states, in the grand sisterhood of commonwealths of this mighty union. That boon which for 60 long years she has sought in vain seems now within her reach, and to all appearances she has but to extend her hand in order to gain it; yet, in her enthusiasm and eagerness to obtain it, she must not forget that she has problems to meet and solve such as no other state ever had.

In order to understand this problem thoroughly, let us state the peculiarities of our achievement. There is to the south of this rich and vast domain a population of more than 60,000,000 people, all descended from the Spanish Conquistadores. To the north, are found the homes of at least 90,000,000 of another people, nearly all of Anglo-Saxon blood, speaking an entirely different language. New Mexico is the meeting ground of these representatives of the Romanic and Germanic races, and no one can fail to see, even now, that their amalgamation is but a question of time. What the final outcome of such a union will be, of course no one can predict with absolute certainty, but if it be true that history repeats itself under analogous conditions, then we may venture the prediction that a new race will spring from such a union that will far surpass either of its factors in all those traits and characteristics that make man better fitted for high responsibilities. The past history of these two races is a record of glorious deeds and notable achievements. Both have in their natures elements of greatness, and the union of the calm, business like spirit of the Anglo-Saxon with the sanguine, chivalrous enthusiasm of the Castilian will be such a blending of all that is best in human nature that we fail to see how anything better for the wealth of humanity could possibly happen.

A difficulty presents itself at the very beginning; no matter how eager one may be that a new race should people these plains and hills, his hopes will be blasted if the essential means are ignored, means efficacious to the desired end. One of these is the cultivation of a thorough acquaintance, one with the other—the Anglo-Saxon with Castilian—the Anglo-American with the Spanish-American. How can this be done unless each understands the other's language?

In New Mexico, English and Spanish are the leading languages of the territory. The English language is the language in which the great bulk of the business of the country is transacted. The Spanish language, the language of the Spanish-Americans, the language of the Cortezes, the De Sotos and the Coronados, has been for more than three centuries the home language of the territory. Now, however, it has been proposed by the president and the congress of the United States to deprive the territory of this language; that is, they seem to wish to break into fragments at a single blow this strong and marvelous link in the chain of events, which has connected and held together the history of the Old and New Worlds; for this is exactly what the Spanish language

has done, is doing, and will continue to do as long as it is not eliminated from the public schools and driven out of the territory.

In the act enabling New Mexico to become a state, passed by congress, it was provided that none except those who speak, read and write the English language with sufficient correctness shall be eligible to the legislature of the new state, or to any of the state public offices. It is claimed by some of those who passed this act that the Spanish-American will become a better citizen by depriving him of the use of his vernacular. In resorting to such a course, it would seem that the contrary effect might be produced in him by the unwarranted interference of congress with his natural rights, and instead of becoming a better, he might be made a worse citizen. Yet the Spanish-Americans of New Mexico have never been bad citizens. They have more than once proved their loyalty to the government and their love for the "Stars and Stripes," as their conduct in the Civil and the Spanish-American wars, and in many of the Indian wars, abundantly testifies.

It is impossible to understand why, in view of such a record, the people of New Mexico should be so unceremoniously deprived of a right which flows from the very essence of their manhood, for the right of language in man is a God-given right, and as such it is guaranteed and secured to him by the federal constitution when it declares that the natural rights of all men are inalienable. To single out New Mexico, then, for such unprecedented treatment, at the very moment that she is welcomed into sisterhood, is not only a gratuitous insult to the intelligence of her people, but it is also a proceeding as untenable in principle as it seems to be outrageous in its intent.

Man is by nature fond of distinction in anything that is praiseworthy. Everybody loves the praise of others, and to obtain it tries to become as accomplished as he can. We are accustomed to recognize the superiority of the person who has a command of one or more foreign languages. Consequently, as an accomplishment in the individual, the study of languages should be encouraged in its citizens. Why, then, should this most enlightened nation prevent the study of the Spanish language in the schools of the majority of the people, and especially since it is as cultured and refined as any of the modern languages and far surpasses them in dignity, beauty and majesty?

A few Spanish words are sufficient to set in motion all the finer and nobler sentiments of our nature. Take, for instance, the entrancing and patriotic image pictured by Espronceda when, in appealing to the Spanish people to rescue their country from the regime of the pusillanimous Charles IV who was absolutely dominated by France:

Del centro de sus Reyes los pedazos
Del suelo ensangrientado recogía,
Y nuevo trono en sus robustos brazos
Levantado, a su Príncipe ofrecía.

This passage from Espronceda is but a single, isolated instance of the richness of Spanish poetry. Pathos, tragedy, indomitable courage, patriotism, and the passionate appeal to action—all are eloquently and sublimely compressed into four short lines.

There is a host of Spanish writers who have beautified and ennobled Spanish literature to at least as high a degree as have the Chaucers, Drydens, Miltons, Byrons and Websters, uplifted the

English language. We have our De Vegas, Calderons, Escriches, Castellars, Bellos and Arboledas, whose talents make them fully the compeers of the best Saxon bards and prose writers and whose pens have made Spanish literature the delight of scholars in every age and clime; while towering above them all stands the colossal genius, the author of "Don Quixote," whose superb merit is universally acknowledged and whose fame is rivaled but not surpassed by that of the great bard of Avon.

Yet this grand array of illustrious scholars, not to mention a vast number of others not less brilliant, will be lost to the youth of New Mexico when the Spanish language ceases to be taught in her schools.

Then consider the great commercial importance of this language. Besides being spoken in Spain and the Philippines, it is spoken in all countries south of the United States. These countries offer an unlimited field for the investment of American energy and enterprise. The advice of Horace Greeley to the young men of our country: "Go West," was heeded and the West became a blooming garden and a mighty empire; but the West is now filling up rapidly and those young men must soon turn south to these Spanish-American countries. If then we would cultivate their friendship and good will, get them to do business with us, admit us into their society, we should be able to greet them with a "Cómo está usted?" as well as that they should be able to greet us with a "How do you do?"

Our public schools must have the Spanish language for the same reason that other modern languages are taught in them; they must have it as the inseparable companion of her sister, the English; they must have it if we wish that our youth shall be fully prepared to meet the duties which are awaiting them in all the Spanish-American countries—duties which they will in vain try to perform, without a thorough knowledge of the Spanish language.

The Spanish language is the language of our fathers, it is our own language, and must be now and hereafter the language of our children and our children's children. It is the language handed down to us by the discoverers of this New World. We are American citizens, it is true, and our conduct places our loyalty and patriotism above reproach. We want to learn the language of our country, and we are doing so; but we do not need, on that account, to deny either our origin or our race or our language or our traditions or our history or our ancestry, because we are not ashamed of them; and we will not do it, because we are proud of them.

The Spanish, next to the English, is the language most widely spread throughout the world; and though now the sun sets on the dominions of the actual successor of Charles V., it does not set, nor will it ever, on the dominion of the Spanish language. It is spoken in the far-off Philippines, and far along, from frozen mountain peaks to blooming valleys, it leaps with ever-increasing echo from Mexico and Central America down to the Straits of Magellan. All the islands cradled in the bosom of the Atlantic rejoice in its grandeur and its majesty. Lastly it is spoken, written and sung in Spain—romantic Spain—the land of knighthood and the mother of heroes, the power that saved Europe from the fate of the Roman Empire, the hand that first unraveled the mystery of the sea, to give a New World to civilization, and to hoist the ensigns of Christianity on the Teocalis of the Incas and the Montezumas.

Such is the language against which it is proposed to close the doors of the public schools of this territory. A language with such a record, such a history, such traditions and backed, as in the Spanish by the moral influence of so many civilized countries, deserves a place not only in the public schools of New Mexico, where it belongs by inheritance the right which three centuries of permanency therein give it, but in the best colleges of the United States in the proudest seats of learning in the world.

Therefore, in the name of all that is noble, grand and beautiful in the literature of the world; in the name of the broadening of the fields of our business interests, and in the expansion of trade relations with our immediate neighbors; in the name of the Anglo-Saxon youth of this territory who are everywhere endeavoring, with an earnestness fully worthy of the excellent cause to learn the Spanish; in the name of the rights which the people of New Mexico have as citizens of this great republic; in the name of its duty to them, as contracted most solemnly before the world at Guadalupe Hidalgo; in the name of honesty and justice, let us by all means see to it that the Spanish language is not driven from the public schools of New Mexico.

Formative Task I

Read the article "[Come Right In, Says Uncle Sam](#)" by Arnold M'Adams. The article was published on July 22, 1910, in the *Evening Times*, a newspaper of Grand Forks, North Dakota. Answer the questions below and provide textual evidence to support your answers

1. How does the article describe the territory of Arizona?	
Textual Evidence	
2. Why should the United States allow Arizona to become a state, according to the article?	

Textual Evidence	
3. How is New Mexico different from Arizona, according to the article?	
Textual Evidence	
4. What concerns does the article express about the population of New Mexico?	
Textual evidence	
5. How does the newspaper represent the differences between the Arizona and New Mexico territories with the two pictures?	

Formative Task II

Read and analyze Aurora Lucero's speech, "Shall the Spanish Language be Taught in the Schools of New Mexico?" (1911). Answer the questions below and provide textual evidence to support your answers.

1. How does Lucero describe New Mexico in her speech?	
Textual Evidence:	
2. How does Lucero describe the "Spanish-Americans" of New Mexico?	
Textual Evidence:	
3. Why do you think Lucero describes the Spanish-speaking people of New Mexico this way? Explain.	

Textual Evidence:	
4. How does Lucero include or omit Indigenous people in her argument? Consider her reference to the "Teocalis of the Incas and Montezumas." What assumptions does she make? Do her assumptions resemble any claims made in the <i>Evening Times</i> ? Explain.	
Textual Evidence:	
5. Why should Spanish continue to be taught in the schools of New Mexico, according to Lucero? What claims does she make?	
Textual Evidence:	
6. What is the most compelling claim that Lucero provides? Why is this most compelling to you? Explain.	
Textual Evidence:	

7. How does Aurora Lucero's speech challenge the claims made in the <i>Evening Times</i> ? Explain.	
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Formative Task III

Read and analyze President Donald J. Trump's Executive Order, "[Designating English as the Official Language of the United States](#)." Answer the questions and provide textual evidence to support your answers.

1. What argument does the executive order make?	
Textual Evidence:	
2. What claims does the order make to support its argument? Identify at least three claims.	
Textual Evidence	

3. What assumptions does the order make about people who speak languages other than English? Identify at least three assumptions.	
Textual Evidence:	
4. What is the most compelling claim the order makes? Why is this most compelling to you? Explain.	

Summative Task

Create a zine to educate others about Aurora Lucero’s advocacy for the Spanish language during the early twentieth century or how language has figured into national debates about citizenship and belonging. Students may use the template provided to plan the written and visual content for their zines or improvise. Encourage students to incorporate the first-person voice if they feel like interweaving their personal story about language and education into their analysis of Lucero’s speech. Zines may be completed digitally or by hand—let students be creative!

1. Fold a blank standard letter-sized piece of paper (8.5" x 11") according to Daisy Wakefield’s “How to Make Your Own Zine,” or search the web for directions on making a zine with a single piece of paper. Model for students the process of folding and cutting the paper to assemble the zine.
2. Have students unfold the paper and mark each rectangle with appropriate page number. Feel free to share the attached template. Model the process for students again.
3. Have students fill in their zine using the information they already gathered and include relevant illustrations to engage their readers. Share an example of a completed zine. Print and assemble the attached example if needed.

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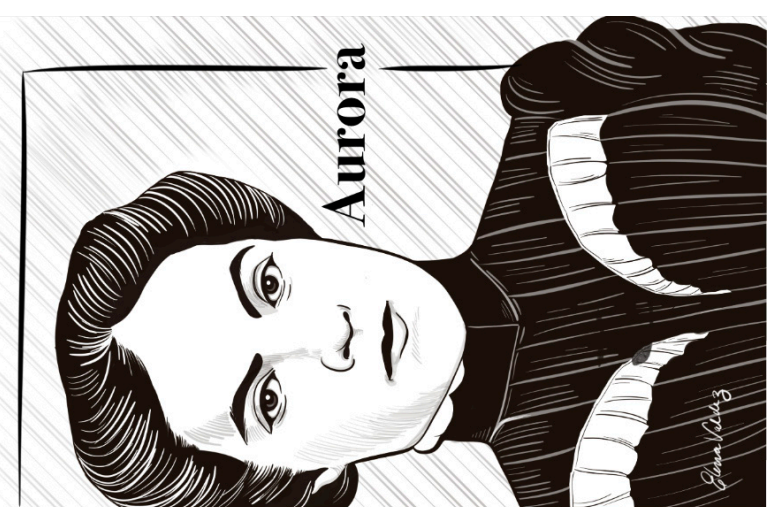
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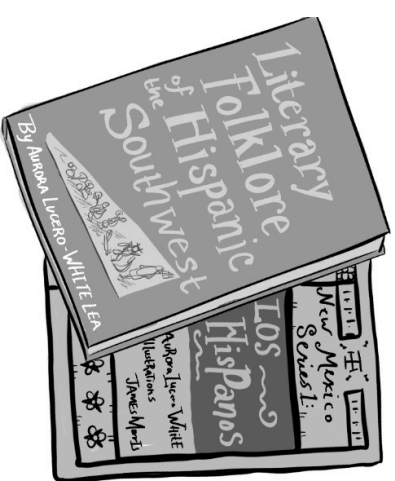
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Still, Lucero's speech helps us think critically about the executive order that recognizes English as the official language of the United States. Her speech challenges the idea that only English-speaking people can be engaged, productive citizens and is an example of how speakers of languages other than English have resisted assimilation into mainstream US culture in the past.

Lucero underscores the humanity of the Spanish-speaking people and their loyalty to the United States. However, as she emphasizes the European colonial roots of the Spanish language to justify why it should continue to be taught in the schools, she separates the so-called "Spanish Americans" from Indigenous people and their influence. In this way, she replicates raced, classed hierarchies.

Aurora Lucero (1894-1963) was a writer, folklorist, and educator who thought it was important to defend and document the culture of Spanish-speaking communities in New Mexico.



When Lucero was growing up in territory of New Mexico during the early twentieth century, the population of the territory was considered un-American and therefore unworthy of inclusion in the United States. In 1910, a writer for a North Dakota newspaper who compared the territories of New Mexico to Arizona noted, for instance, that while Arizona had inhabitants capable of becoming "good American citizens," the population of New Mexico was "very different."

The same year, Lucero rejected the idea the Spanish-speaking people of New Mexico were inherently un-American in her speech, "Shall the Spanish Language be Taught in the Schools of New Mexico?"



Lucero argued Spanish should remain a language of instruction in New Mexico schools due to its economic utility, literary and colonial legacies, and cultural value. She insisted the Spanish-speaking people should not have to give up their cultural and linguistic identities in order to belong in the United States.

"We want to learn the language of our country," she asserted, "but we do not need, on that account, to deny our origin or or race or our language..."

Pláticas on Struggle and Resistance: Understanding the Impact of Censorship Legislation on Ethnic Studies Teachers in Texas

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Abstract

In this paper, we offer a glimpse into the impact of censorship legislation on K-12 Ethnic Studies teachers in Texas, highlighting themes that emerged from pláticas with 17 high school and middle school Ethnic Studies teachers from across the state. Pláticas provide a means of co-constructing knowledge with participants through more informal conversations. Through a lens of racial realism (Bell, 1992), we examine this particular era of censorship in the state of Texas, contextualizing it within the broader national political climate where white supremacy is recentered through censorship legislation that restricted the discussion of race and gender. Key themes that emerged through the pláticas include censorship in the classroom, undue pressure placed on teachers, and an environment of fear for Ethnic Studies teachers. At the same time, there was also an increased dedication to fight for Ethnic Studies statewide. Overall, the themes from these pláticas demonstrate a continued need to support educators in building resistance to censorship legislation at both a state and national level.

Keywords: Censorship legislation, Critical Race Theory, Ethnic Studies, Texas

Introduction

In 2020, during the height of COVID-19, the murder of George Floyd provided the tipping point for an increase in mass protests against police violence and white supremacy in the United States (Fortin, 2021). Legislators reacted to these protests by advancing bills that restricted how gender and race could be discussed in schools. In 2021 alone, there were at least sixty-one bills proposed to restrict “divisive” teaching in the United States, many utilizing the language of an Executive Order from Trump that restricted diversity trainings (Tripodi, 2022). The Texas version of this legislation, Senate Bill 3 (SB 3), was implemented in the Fall of 2021 (Texas Senate Bill 3, 2021).

Amidst the divisive political climate, Ethnic Studies continued to grow in Texas with over twenty thousand students enrolled in these courses in the 2023-2024 school year (Texas Education Agency, 2023). The present study emerged through a recognition of the potentially deleterious

impact of this legislation on Ethnic Studies teachers. Through this paper, we provide initial insight into the impact of SB3 on Mexican American Studies (MAS) and African American Studies (AAS) teachers, as well as emerging resistance to academic censorship.

Literature Review

Ethnic Studies in Texas

Ethnic Studies is a decolonial project that aims to dismantle white supremacy while centering the histories of people of color (Escobar, 2014; Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2015; Valenzuela, 2019). In states where Ethnic Studies courses are offered in K-12 schools, the curriculum has been shown to increase student engagement, literacy skills, sense of belonging, self-efficacy, community engagement, social skills, academic achievement, empowerment, critical thinking, social activism, and self-identity, as well as enhance student-teacher relationships with both white students and students of color (Bonilla et al., 2021; Dee & Penner, 2017; Nojan, 2020; Sleeter, 2011; Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2015).

The process to approve Ethnic Studies courses in Texas began in 2014. The National Association of Chicano and Chicana Scholars (NACCS) Tejas Foco Committee led the organizing efforts, from 2014-2018, to establish MAS as a K-12 course. MAS was approved in 2018 and AAS was approved in 2020 (Scott & Perez-Diaz, 2021). The AAS course was piloted in Dallas Independent School District and an advisory council of 41 members developed the curriculum over seven months (Scott & Perez-Diaz, 2021). Although there has not been legislation to restrict Ethnic Studies in Texas, SB 3 restricted how race could be taught within all Social Studies classrooms.

Censorship and Critical Race Theory

Prior censorship legislation nationally included Arizona's HB 2281, passed in 2010, which effectively eliminated the MAS program in Tucson. HB 2281, like more recent censorship laws, was rooted in claims that Ethnic Studies promoted "terroristic" and "rebellious" acts (Cacho 2010; Jensen, 2013). Previous court cases, including the federal court case that found HB 2281 unconstitutional in 2017, have set precedent to demonstrate that recent censorship legislation may be unconstitutional, violating the fourteenth amendment right of equal protection and the first amendment right of free speech (Cao, 2022; Kim, 2021).

Trump's Executive Order 13950, from September 2020, laid the groundwork for many of the state laws that followed. Legislation in many states mirrored Trump's executive order, but was not implemented until after Biden reversed the executive order (Tripodi, 2022). Christopher Rufo, a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute, shaped the rhetoric of the executive order and later advised on language for educational laws like SB 3 in over ten states (Friedman & Tager, 2022). The purpose of these laws went beyond restricting curricular content, to effectively silence the voices of students and educators of color (Kim, 2021). Within this, Critical Race Theory (CRT) has been co-opted as a catch-all for a broader rightwing agenda (Richmond & Charnley, 2022; Tripodi, 2022), as evidenced by Christopher Rufo's tweet:

We have successfully frozen their brand—"critical race theory"into the public conversation and are steadily driving up negative perceptions. We will eventually turn it toxic, as we put

all of the various cultural insanities under the brand category. The goal is to have the public read something crazy in the newspaper and immediately think “Critical Race Theory.” (Rufo, 2021)

Rufo’s tweet demonstrates the insidiousness of this type of legislation in seeking to create chaos and promote censorship by falsely conflating any conversation around race with a distorted representation of CRT. Although many of these bills do not specifically mention CRT, these laws have been highlighted in the media as “anti-CRT” (Ray & Gibbons, 2021).

What is Senate Bill 3?

SB 3 in Texas and similar legislation nationwide can be seen as a continuation of previous restrictive laws. SB3 has restricted academic freedom under the guise of promoting patriotism, modifying the state standards and education code, as well as creating a civics training program. Modifications to the state Social Studies standards included removing certain standards that highlight the histories of communities of color while changes to the Education Code provided stipulations-related discussions of race in the classroom (Texas Senate Bill 3, 2021). One example of this is included below:

(4) a teacher, administrator, or other employee of a state agency, school district, or open-enrollment charter school may not: (A) require, or make part of a course, concepts that serve to inculcate (B) teach, instruct, or train any administrator, teacher, or staff member of a state agency, school district, or open-enrollment charter school to adopt [...] (vi) an individual should feel discomfort, guilt, anguish, or any other form of psychological distress on account of the individual’s race or sex. (Texas Senate Bill 3, 2021)

Through this example, the subjectivity of the bill is clear. No one’s emotions can be controlled, but such subjective language leaves room for differing interpretations. SB3 can be interpreted broadly, but it “is designed to control and limit the free speech and ideas of teachers, students and state agency employees” (IDRA, 2022). The bill restricted discussing current events and prohibited students from receiving course credit for civic engagement activities (IDRA, 2022), effectively stifling the ability to provide relevant and equitable civics education by preventing students from interacting with community leaders and participating in social advocacy with legislators in connection to school (Blevins, 2022). Many district leaders have interpreted the law more broadly out of fear of repercussion, which has translated to further restrictions and fear for educators in teaching about the histories of communities of color.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

According to Derrick Bell (1992), racial realism postulated that racism had become the norm in the United States. Although race and racism are central to this analysis, we also recognize the importance of viewing them in connection to their intersection with other forms of subordination, such as gender, language, and ethnicity (Crenshaw, 1989, 1993; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). There are four major themes in racial realism: First, racial history in the United States has demonstrated “a pattern of cyclical progress and cyclical regression” (Bell, 1992, p. 98). Second, socioeconomic power is the true force in this country, through which Black Americans have always been close to the bottom. Third, struggle is essential. Fourth, we must understand this reality of

racism in order to create a shift away from this cyclical pattern of subjugation. Dave Stovall (2022) noted that, within the lens of Critical Race Theory, we should expect attacks that stem from white supremacy, such as the censorship legislation. The pattern of cyclical regression would hold that these attacks will continuously happen in different forms until there is substantial resistance to shift away from these cycles of subjugation.

Through this study, we will examine the impact of this moment of regression on Ethnic Studies teachers, as well as the resistance that has emerged in response to the legislation. SB 3 has villainized teachers by creating a narrative that they are somehow harming students by teaching the histories of communities of color. Although this narrative creates notable stress for teachers, many educators continue to advocate for the expansion of Ethnic Studies courses.

Data Collection

In centering experiential knowledge, *pláticas* were used, a Chicana methodology that provided a more intimate way of engaging in dialogue (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016). *Plática* as a method emerged in the late 20th century to document the struggles of oppressed people in Latin America (Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, & Flores Carmona, 2012). *Pláticas* can be data sources, as well as spaces of theorization, with the *platicadores* as co-constructors of knowledge (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016). Central to a *plática* methodology are relations of reciprocity, where both researchers and *platicadores* share their personal experiences and make space for vulnerability (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016). Our identities as women of color on the research team served as a point of departure in sharing experiences as teachers and students in racialized contexts, building rapport through the conversations. *Pláticas* have been used more in higher education research, particularly to examine the intersectional experiences of women of color (Flores Carmona, et al., 2021). Educational researchers have also leveraged *pláticas* to center the voices of parents (Durán et al., 2020), pre-service teachers (Ingram & Palmer, 2023), and in-service teachers (Orozco & Moriña, 2023). We continue in this tradition through *pláticas* with Ethnic Studies teachers in Texas.

Prior to the *pláticas*, we reviewed the websites for all schools in the state of Texas, across all districts in the 20 Texas Education Agency regions, to identify Ethnic Studies teachers. We sent a request to complete an initial survey to all publicly listed Ethnic Studies teachers, as well as administrators for schools where they noted they had Ethnic Studies, but no teacher was listed. The survey consisted of questions about which Ethnic Studies course they taught, how long they had taught, their ethnic/cultural identity, their knowledge of SB 3, and the effect of the bill on their classes.

We sent emails to 67 teachers, comprising all of the Ethnic Studies teachers whose emails were publicly listed. We received no responses from our outreach to administrators. We also posted the survey on the Facebook and Twitter accounts for the Ethnic Studies Network of Texas. Overall, 28 teachers completed the survey, a 42% response rate of all teachers publicly listed, representing 38% of the districts that offered Ethnic Studies statewide. However, a limitation emerged in the inability to reach out to the majority of Ethnic Studies teachers, who are not publicly listed on school websites.

We reached out to all teachers who expressed interest in a more in-depth conversation and held *pláticas* with 17 educators, spending approximately an hour conversing with each one over Zoom

or Google Meets. At the end of each plática we asked all the platicadores to choose their own pseudonyms, which will be used below. Some chose a first and last name, while others just chose a first name. The purpose of the pláticas was to delve deeper into each participant's experience teaching Ethnic Studies and the impact of SB 3 on their pedagogy and curriculum. Data below draws from the surveys with the 28 educators and the pláticas with 17 educators. Statistics provided are from the surveys, whereas quotes are all from the pláticas.

Participants

Of the platicadores, six identified as White, six identified as Chicanx or Latinx, one identified as White and Mexican American, one identified as Afro-Latino, one identified as Louisiana Creole, and two identified as Black. Ten participants taught Mexican American Studies (MAS), six taught African American Studies (AAS), and one taught a general Ethnic Studies course. Twelve participants had taught for 10 or more years, three had taught for six to eight years, one had taught for two years, and one was a first-year teacher. Ten participants taught in Democratic leaning areas of Texas and seven taught in Republican areas.

Data Analysis

Our qualitative analysis was rooted in grounded theory, using MAXQDA to code. Grounded theory was first developed in the late 1960s, and it is a process in which the data guides the qualitative analysis (Saldaña, 2011; Salinger et al., 2008). We initially coded using words or short phrases that encompass each point the participants made, using the platicadores' words when possible through in-vivo codes, guided by some of the initial themes identified by the platicadores themselves (Saldaña, 2022). Once we completed this process, we noted initial categories, which we used in the second round of coding to revisit the participants' words. We then identified themes to organize the categories, which are used to organize the data below. Each transcript was coded by two members of the research team to validate the findings.

Impact of Senate Bill 3 on Ethnic Studies Teachers

For the most part, Ethnic Studies teachers were familiar with Senate Bill 3 (see Table 17.1), with 42% of teachers surveyed saying that they were very familiar with the bill and 25% saying that they were moderately familiar with the bill. Of those surveyed, about half said that the bill did not impact their classroom, while half expressed that it had a negative impact (see Table 17.2).

Table 1. Familiarity with Senate Bill 3 (HB 3979 was the house bill version of the bill proposed and then sent to the state senate to be passed as SB 3)

How familiar are you with SB 3 and HB3979?					
N=28	Very familiar	Moderately familiar	Somewhat familiar	Slightly familiar	Not at all familiar
	12	7	6	2	1

Table 2. Survey responses on the impact of Senate Bill 3

How has this law impacted your classroom or school?				
N=28	Not at all	Positively impacted	Negatively impacted	Unsure
	13	0	13	2

The first theme was that many teachers expressed that they felt censored in the classroom. The second theme, connected to the first, was that teachers felt that undue pressure was placed on them through the law. This led to the third theme of an environment of fear, particularly connected to teaching Ethnic Studies. Teachers who felt that the bill had no impact were often veteran teachers who were willing to push back against some of the restrictions, which will be examined through the final theme of an increased determination to fight for Ethnic Studies. Prominent in-vivo codes from each section can be seen in image 1, highlighting elements of each theme.

Figure 1. Example in-vivo codes for principal themes.

<i>Censored in the classroom</i>	<i>Undue pressure placed on teachers</i>
- every single word needs to be just right and calculated - I have to censor a little bit what I can say - only what's palatable for white students - Dangerous for our country - We shouldn't be restricted - Changes the way history is taught - Very careful about how I'm presenting things - I've been limited - Can't say the words Black Lives Matter	- Walking on eggshells - It gives me anxiety - It's restraining us - You can't teach like that - Kids have questions - Guard is always up - It's a hard class to teach because there's a lot of stipulations - If I use anything from the 1619 project they're going to come after me - I don't feel like I'm being respected
<i>An environment of fear</i>	<i>The fight for Ethnic Studies</i>
- This law is detrimental and dangerous - Even more difficult in a conservative area - Law is a scare tactic - Put my job in jeopardy - Educators are not safe - Road to authoritarianism - Educators are very policed	- Makes me want to fight more for Ethnic Studies - Gave me the confidence to give them what they deserved - I'm not going to be deterred - It's made me more determined - I'm not going to stop teaching what I'm teaching

- Don't want to end up on the news	- I'm actually trying to collect [banned books] - I feel more empowered to empower my students - I want my kids to be the best they can be - Metaphorical middle-finger up to them
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Censored in the Classroom

As noted above, about half of the participants in this study cited SB3 as negatively impacting their classroom. Even participants who stated in the initial survey that the bill did not impact their classroom later reflected through the pláticas on ways that they felt that their classroom or teaching were indeed negatively impacted. Teachers expressed feeling censored in what they could say and in how history could be taught (see example codes in Figure 17.1). One teacher, T'Challa, expressed his frustration about the censorship in teaching AAS:

Between the amount of times that I heard that I cannot teach critical race theory, and how many times I heard, I can't say the words Black Lives Matter in the classroom, it was ridiculous. I almost wanted to do it just because of that. Just because I was told what to do so many times, it was annoying.

T'Challa's comment reflected the frustration that he felt at being censored in his teaching. This was particularly problematic considering that there was not specific language in SB 3 that would prohibit teachers from talking about "Black Lives Matter" or "Critical Race Theory". Although the bill is often cited as anti-CRT, the theory is mentioned nowhere in the law (Texas Senate Bill 3, 2021). Districts have interpreted the bill in vastly different ways, which extend beyond the language of the bill (Lopez, 2021). This particular teacher, along with one other, expressed how the district now required their textbooks be approved and many of the ones they provided were rejected. Such interpretations often promote a further whitewashing of history, illustrating the normalizing of racism as racial realism posits.

Even for teachers who have read the bill, the broad language created additional problems, which Antonio highlighted:

Nobody in public school talked, especially now, about the Texas Mexican War was about slavery. At the end of the day, that's what it was about. Nobody teaches that. Why not? That's my biggest problem with this bill. You don't want to make kids feel uncomfortable. Which kids and what do you not want to tell them? Based on whose perspective and why? You know, what makes one group of kids more important than the other?

Antonio, a MAS teacher, asked important questions about the language of the bill, referencing the section of the bill that modified the Education Code. This portion of the bill is highly subjective in considering what might make a student feel distress based on their race or sex. Antonio's questions highlighted the implication that white children's discomfort is centered more than the discomfort of youth of color. The broad language of the bill has also led to certain books being banned in

several districts, particularly books discussing slavery (Mendez, 2022). One teacher, Kelli, compared this censorship to an authoritarian regime:

We're banning books and as a history teacher I'm like, this is the road to authoritarianism, like we're headed to Nazi era like, what is happening in America? It's frightening. So my guard is always up now you know, I don't feel like I'm being respected as a professional but I think that I can articulate myself enough to where I can defend myself if I have to. But I'm always feeling like I may have to do that.

Kelli referred to the fact that Texas banned the most books of any state between July 2021 and March 2022, prior to legislation enacted (HB 900) in 2023 that created further restrictions on school libraries (PEN America, 2022). She problematized these book bannings, referencing this form of censorship as one that was often part of authoritarian regimes. Although this form of censorship might seem striking, book bans have continuously occurred in the United States for decades. One study conducted in 1963 with 600 teachers and administrators in Wisconsin demonstrated that 22% of teachers had experienced book bannings in their schools (Buttress, 1963), thus further exemplifying the cyclical nature of oppression of the first tenet of racial realism. More broadly, Texas teachers were self-censoring their curriculum and pedagogical practices out of fear, particularly in relation to how race was discussed (Pendharkar, 2022).

Undue Pressure Placed on Teachers

The censorship noted above, as well as additional restrictions, led to teachers feeling undue pressure was being placed on them. This pressure often came through struggles in figuring out how to modify the course to meet the law, while still trying to be an effective teacher (see example codes in Figure 17.1). As with the prior section, the majority of teachers who expressed these sentiments were experienced teachers with ten or more years in the classroom. Kelli expressed this frustration in relation to her AAS course:

Before these laws were passed, I've never felt restricted in my classroom in terms of what I could talk about. Conversations, honest conversations that I could have with my students and then what type of material that I could bring into the classroom, that I would be trusted as a professional in order to do that. What frustrated me about this bill is that it's a lie, [...] we don't teach CRT in K-12 education. What they have done is co-opted the [...] critical race theory label and applied it to anything that is Ethnic Studies essentially you know, it's just history. And you cannot teach Black history, Mexican American history, Asian American history without talking about oppression, white supremacy, all of those things it's, it's what happens. And I have never in the entirety of my career taught in a way that would make a child feel guilty because we use skills.

Kelli highlights the shifts before and after the law was passed, which reflect the patterns of cyclical regression within racial realism. Kelli also cited the section of the law that Antonio referred to, which focused on making a student feel discomfort on the basis of their race or sex. Kelli acknowledged the ways that she felt limited from having honest conversations with students about history. As noted previously, Ethnic Studies is a decolonial project that seeks to center the histories of communities of color (Escobar, 2014; Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2015; Valenzuela, 2019). Kelli referenced her frustration related to the narrative that CRT was being taught in Social Studies

classrooms, noting that this wasn't the case. However, as mentioned previously, this particular bill did not actually mention CRT and the premise of other legislation that does mention CRT is an intentional misuse and weaponizing of the theory.

A MAS teacher, Pelón, expressed that students appreciated teachers who were honest. He felt that the law restricted teacher's ability to teach honestly: "It's restraining us. They're trying to shield kids from talking about controversial issues, but the kids know." Research has demonstrated that discussing civic and political issues in class correlated to a higher commitment to civic participation as adults (Kahne & Sporte, 2007), as well as higher academic engagement (Cohen et al., 2021). Ethnic Studies teachers in this study recognized that the censorship and restrictions that they were experiencing had a negative impact on their teaching. Many felt that they weren't able to be as effective teachers with the law in place. T'Challa expressed this sentiment:

In a truly educationally organic environment, you can't teach like that. You have to allow your students enough space to explore not just their intellectual thoughts, but also their emotional spaces. Especially in the Ethnic Studies classroom. Now, that's easy enough, but the thing that you run into, and if you truly want to be a good facilitator of that class, is that you have to be vulnerable enough to allow the space that your students are going to take up to move you into a different place. And that's where you can get in trouble, because if you allow yourself to totally go, then you can end up in a place where some people are raising eyebrows.

T'Challa emphasized that in an "educationally organic environment" teachers do not have to constantly consider what can or cannot be said and students can engage in authentic inquiry, which is not limited by the law. A central element of Ethnic Studies courses is creating a space to authentically affirm student identities, building off students' own experiences (Dee & Penner, 2017; de los Rios et al., 2015). This becomes difficult to do when teachers feel restricted in what they can say about race and historical inequities. Overall, it was clear that these restrictions created undue pressure for teachers, as they grappled with how to be effective educators within the constraints of the law, further illustrating the impact of structural racism through legislation. This pressure came at a time when many educators were already leaving the field. Data from a survey conducted in 2022 demonstrated that 55% of teachers were considering leaving the profession, with rates even higher among Black (62%) and Latinx educators (59%) (GBAO Strategies, 2022).

An Environment of Fear

The constraints mentioned above contributed to an environment of fear for students, teachers, parents, and administrators. Various Ethnic Studies teachers spoke about not feeling safe and about potential backlash in their schools (see example codes in Figure 17.1). Although most teachers in the study were Black or Latinx, one of the six white teachers also emphasized feeling this fear. This teacher, Joe Smith, also the only non-binary educator within the group, expressed the following: "I would say just in general right now, [...] educators are not safe. Educators are very policed in every way, especially as an Ethnic Studies teacher in a public school." This sentiment of a lack of safety and feeling policed is poignant. After SB 3 was passed, news sources reported that teachers generally felt that the bill created fear and uncertainty (Zou, 2021), with many new educators feeling even more unsure of what they could teach (Ramirez, 2022). An AAS teacher, T'Challa, expressed his concerns:

I'm concerned about what could be said in this class from a student perspective, instructionally? To the other end of the spectrum, I'm concerned about what's going to be said in this class from a lawsuit perspective, I don't want to end up on the news.

T'Challa's concern emerged from what students might say in the class or about the class. Thus, the bill created a fear of students, with teachers now concerned about how the course might be perceived, which could even extend to how students perceived what other students say in the class. Barbie, a MAS teacher, expressed how this influenced her considerations for teaching the course:

I do feel in some ways, not necessarily discouraged to teach it, but I don't want to have that negative aspect because some people see Ethnic Studies as indoctrination or they see that negative aspect to it. So in some ways, I don't want to be associated with it, but at the same time, I think it is important for all perspectives of history to be taught.

Despite the concerns with teaching Ethnic Studies in this political climate, Barbie still recognized the importance of ensuring that diverse perspectives were taught in History. Thus, she ultimately said that she did plan to continue teaching MAS. However, it was clear that the law placed Ethnic Studies in a more vulnerable position, weaponizing language related to race. Teachers recognized that this was a fear tactic and there seemed to be an understanding of the racist roots of the legislation, reflecting the fourth tenet of racial realism.

The Fight for Ethnic Studies

A final theme that arose through the pláticas was an increased determination to fight for the expansion of Ethnic Studies courses in Texas. As mentioned previously, 46% of participants stated that the bill did not impact their classrooms. When delving into this further, it was clear that there was concern about the bill for all teachers, but these teachers had made no changes to their curriculum or classroom as a result of the bill. There was a clear resistance in this, following with the third theme of racial realism in resisting oppression. Teachers who felt able to resist SB 3 were often very familiar with the bill and had been teaching for over ten years (with the exception of one teacher who had only taught for two years), reflecting the fourth tenet of racial realism in understanding racism as a precursor to resistance. This resistance arose through a recognition of the importance of Ethnic Studies for students, a confidence that there wouldn't be substantial backlash in continuing to teach critically, and a commitment to expanding Ethnic Studies. One MAS teacher, Jessica, expressed her reasons for resisting:

I'm not going to not teach this lesson because some people are making a fuss about learning about things like this. I think it's important that everybody learns history. As uncomfortable as it is for some, it's even more uncomfortable for those who have had people in their lives experience this. So, you might feel uncomfortable, but these people are uncomfortable because this is how their grandma's lived. So, I'm not going to stop teaching what I'm teaching, just because our governor says so.

Jessica referenced the previously cited section of SB 3 that stated that teachers cannot teach in a way that would cause distress. Similarly to Antonio, Jessica emphasized that the discomfort that

we should be concerned with was that of students or family members who experienced individual and/or structural oppression. This point was also emphasized by Stovall (2022) in noting that traditional Social Studies curriculum has made young people of color feel bad about themselves “since time immemorial” (p. 425). In continuing to pursue a critical Ethnic Studies curriculum, highlighting histories of oppression and resistance, there was a clear activism enacted within the classroom. Ethnic Studies aims to dismantle white supremacy, centering the histories of communities of color (Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2015). Understanding oppression, as well as resistance, are often a part of this process. Lore Amor, a MAS teacher, emphasized the importance of teaching the truth:

And just knowing that they knew I was teaching them the truth and that they chose to learn this with me knowing that this isn't what I was supposed to teach them. The fact that they either intuitively or honestly through experience with me knew I was telling the truth, knew that this was the truth, it gave me the confidence to give them what they deserve.

For Lore, her confidence to continue teaching Ethnic Studies emerged through student responses. Lore had co-constructed her classroom with students, leveraging their input in how and what she taught. She highlighted an element of student resistance to the law, which was present in three other teachers' pláticas, through which students continued to advocate for critical Ethnic Studies. One white AAS teacher also emphasized the importance of Ethnic Studies courses as her reason to continue teaching the course, mentioning that she had been questioned by other teachers about why she taught the course in the current political context. Allowing student responses to guide the course and content, as well as centering critical thinking in the curriculum, demonstrate some of the ways that these educators enacted a form of organizing within their own classrooms.

Overall, the resistance to right wing attacks on culturally sustaining education, particularly Ethnic Studies, is not new. In 2011, teachers founded UNIDOS (United Non-Discriminatory Individuals Demanding Our Studies) to defend Ethnic Studies in Arizona after House Bill 2281 banned courses (Cabrera et al., 2012). Teachers, community members, and students all played a key role in this resistance (Sargent & McGinnis, 2011). In Texas, Ethnic Studies has not been banned, but SB 3 created an environment of fear in teaching real history. Through this research, it was clear that most Ethnic Studies teachers were continuing to resist, had educated themselves on the law, and recognized that there was room to continue teaching real history. Three of these teachers also continued to organize locally and statewide to expand Ethnic Studies. Several of these teachers more directly enacted racial realism within their classroom in continuing to talk about oppression and resistance with students, as well as engaging in dialogue with students about this moment of cyclical regression, and continuing to push for the expansion of Ethnic Studies.

Conclusions and Implications

In examining the impact of censorship bills nationwide on Social Studies education, but particularly within K-12 Ethnic Studies, it was essential to recognize that the resistance to these bills was about defending historical accuracy (Stovall, 2022). In returning to the lens of CRT, this legislation emerged through the clear patterns of cyclical regression that we continuously experience in regard to white supremacy within the United States. The language of SB 3 was subjective, but the power of the bill emerged through the confusion that it caused, as well as the environment of fear generated through this uncertainty. Teachers recognized that interpretation of the bill was largely

left to districts and thus teachers in more urban and politically liberal districts felt more confident in resisting these laws. Nonetheless, even experienced teachers felt pressured to censor their teaching and curriculum.

Despite the deleterious impact of SB 3, Ethnic Studies teachers continued to recognize the value of these courses, and many teachers did not shift their curriculum. Teachers also recognized the racist intent of the bill, reflecting the fourth tenet of racial realism in recognizing the reality of racism in this current moment in history. These teachers emphasized the goals of Ethnic Studies in seeking to center the histories of communities of color (Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2015; Valenzuela, 2019). Stovall (2022) noted that “teaching is the most political activity in which you could possibly engage” (p. 433). This is particularly true for Ethnic Studies teachers in states with censorship legislation. These teachers have demonstrated a commitment to authentic social justice through continuous struggle, in the face of legislation that restricts historical accuracy, thus reflecting the third tenet of racial realism.

There is a continued need for community members and district administrators to support Ethnic Studies in Texas, as well as in other states with censorship legislation. Although this legislation primarily impacts teachers, it is essential to consider the impact on students in limiting authentic inquiry and critical thinking in the classroom. In Texas, individuals can also request that these courses be brought to their districts, increasing the overall support and valuation of the courses, which provide essential spaces for all students to learn the histories of communities of color, which are still not equitably included in U.S. history courses.

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Resistencia

Marisol O. Ruiz

Palestina,
los fascistas
me
asesinan

pero
renazco
porque
soy
la resistencia

cada vez mas
fuerte!

Palestina libre!

Palestina,
nuestros
corazones
laten

cada vez
mas
fuerte

y nuestra
rabia
crece
intensamente,

crece
al ver la
sangre inocente
derramada.

Somos la resistencia
y no nos rendiremos
hasta
verte

LIBRE!

The Yost

Santa Ana Ethnic Studies Art Class



The Potential Role of In Lak'ech and the Nahui Ollin in Nurturing Social Emotional Learning

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Abstract

This paper explores how In Lak'ech and the Nahui Ollin can serve as potential frameworks in fostering Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) for Mexican American students in U.S schools. By comparing the five competencies of SEL (CASEL, 2015) with In Lak'ech and the four movements of the Nahui Ollin, I discussed how In Lak'ech and the Nahui Ollin cannot only be applied to reach the goals associated with SEL, they can also expand the field of SEL by providing a culturally relevant and decolonized way of approaching emotional learning. I focus on one student *testimonio* to highlight the connection between In Lak'ech, the Nahui Ollin, and SEL.

Key words: Social and Emotional Learning, In Lak'Ech, Nahui Ollin, *Testimonio*

There has been a push by educational reformers for a more holistic education approach that includes emotions as part of students' learning and well-being in schools. These efforts have primarily taken place under the banner of Social Emotional Learning (henceforth, SEL) which first emerged as a thematic and programmatic focus in schools during the 1990s (CASEL, 2015; Elias et al., 1997; Hoffman, 2009; Jones et al., 2017). The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), the United States' leading organization in advancing the practice of SEL into P-12 schools, has largely defined five intended skills when developing students' SEL. CASEL (2015) defines SEL as students demonstrating: (a) self-awareness (being able to recognize and label one's own emotions); (b) self-management (having the capacity to express and manage emotions appropriately); (c) social awareness (the ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others); (d) relationship skills (establishing and maintaining positive social relationships); and (e) responsible decision-making (the ability to make constructive and respectful choices). Many schools recognize the promise of SEL and have begun incorporating SEL into their curriculum.

Proponents of SEL have mainly turned to results showing that developing students' SEL skills can lead to "improvements in social and emotional competence, reductions in problem behavior, and improved academic performance" (CASEL, 2015, p. 31). Educators have used these reasons to not only justify the need for SEL in schools but have also highlighted how at-risk groups can stand to benefit most from SEL (Elias, 2009). Students of Color (SOC) are considered an "at-risk" group who often experience challenging social environments at school (Polleck, 2010; Reyes & Elias, 2011;

Reyes et al., 2013) and have greater risks of not graduating from high school (León et al., 2011). SEL has thus been proposed as an essential “missing piece” to providing SOC with an effective education (Elias, 2009). As such, recent efforts within education research have aimed to make SEL more accessible to SOC.

Educators have proposed drawing on culturally relevant practices and resources in the classroom, such as books focusing on the experiences of People of Color (POC) and translating SEL curriculum into a student’s first language (León et al., 2011; Polleck, 2010; Reyes & Elias, 2011), to promote SEL for SOC. While outcomes have been inspiring, researchers have also noted significant critiques regarding SEL’s underlying assumptions and outcomes among SOC. SEL curriculums have been critiqued for: (a) teaching students to control rather than understand their emotions; (b) prioritizing individual skill development; and (c) defining emotions from a white middle-class perspective (Hoffman, 2009; Humphrey, 2013). Expanding on these main critiques, Kaler-Jones (2020) identified how schools’ adoption of SEL curriculums has influenced a growth in anti-Black sentiments, shedding light on how SEL fails to acknowledge cultural variation in how emotions are discussed and expressed amongst POC. In addition, Camangian and Cariaga (2021) highlight the hegemonic, colonial, and dehumanizing nature of SEL, arguing that SEL as currently present in schools continues with the miseducation of SOC. SEL as a vessel of coloniality (Maldonado-Torres, 2007) contributes to the historical Americanization of SOC where they are forced to abandon their cultural ways of being and adopt a white standard of how to exist within society. Given the growing popularity of SEL, proponents need to address these critiques if a true culturally relevant SEL model is to emerge.

While adjustments can be made to existing SEL curriculum to reflect aspects of a student’s identity, as is the case when translating SEL curriculum from English to Spanish (León et al., 2011; Polleck, 2010; Reyes & Elias, 2011), the colonial goals inherent in SEL will continue to exist if nothing is done to drastically change how SEL is framed and approached within schools. In this paper, I first discuss how SEL fits the goals of coloniality by examining the three main critiques of SEL and referencing how each describes aspects of the colonial project. I then propose In Lak’ech and the Nahuí Ollin, two indigenous philosophies commonly used in Mexican American Studies, as a framework that can foster and even decolonize SEL. I end by drawing on a student’s *testimonio*, presented at the end of a summer enrichment program, to reflect the emotional learning a program incorporating In Lak’ech and the Nahuí Ollin in its curriculum can foster for students.

Literature Review

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) describes the process of helping one develop the knowledge and skills necessary to attain social-emotional competence (Weissberg et al., 2015). Social-emotional competence speaks of the ability to understand, manage, and express social and emotional aspects of one’s life “in ways that enable the successful management of life tasks such as learning, forming relationships, solving everyday problems, and adapting to the complex demands of growth and development” (Elias et al., 1997, p. 2). Questions surrounding SEL’s original promise of promoting equity and helping students understand their emotions has generated its fair share of critiques. These critiques can be synthesized into three broad categories: (a) SEL as a means of controlling students’ emotions and behaviors; (b) the prioritization of individual skill development; and (c) the assumption of a ‘universal’ student who is not influenced by culture

(Hecht & Shin, 2015; Hoffman, 2009; Humphrey, 2013; Vadeboncoeur & Collie, 2013). I discuss how SEL's three main critiques promote central tenets of coloniality below.

Controlling Students' Emotions

SEL as a form of controlling students' emotions abides by the assumption that there is a correct way to behave and exist within schools. SEL programs have emphasized teaching students how to control their emotions rather than providing them with the tools needed to explore and understand their emotions. For example, Greenburg and Kusché (2006) highlighted an elementary school SEL program known as PATHS and discussed the SEL skills PATHS focused on developing. In PATHS, desirable emotional outcomes were described as improved self-control, including recognizing emotions, having the ability to tolerate frustration, and moments of decreased aggression in the classroom (Greenberg & Kusché, 2006). The outcomes PATHS emphasized reflects the goals many SEL programs focus on when attending to students' SEL development in schools (Hoffman, 2009).

SEL, enacted as a form of controlling students' emotions, aligns with notions of schooling as a process of acculturation. With Mexican American students, defining appropriate student behavior in schools stems from the deficiency argument (Valenzuela, 1999) which presents the notion that Mexican and Mexican American peoples lack the attributes necessary to be successful in American society. The deficiency argument can be traced back to the colonial project and a concept Aldama (2001) labels as *the construction of the savage*. Labeling people as a savage establishes a distinction between who is and who is not civilized within society. Under a Eurocentric lens, being "European" took on the definition of what it meant to be civilized, hence pushing the argument that white people were not savage. The establishment of the European as "superior" predicated the subjugation of Black and Brown bodies (Lowe, 2015).

Schooling involves the belief that there is a "correct" way to express one's emotions in school which according to Humphrey (2013), Vadeboncoeur and Collie (2013), and Hoffman (2009), is grounded in white, middle-class norms. Since current SEL programs rarely consider cultural variation when approaching students' emotions, ways SOC express their emotions run the risk of being deemed as inappropriate given schools' standards and historical goals of teaching students how to properly exist within American society. A student who deviates from what is perceived to be the "correct" way to express oneself in school can result in remedial attempts to re-teach students the "correct" way to express their emotions which can lead to punitive punishments, such as time-outs or the removal of students from the classroom (Hoffman, 2009). In grander cases, Kaler-Jones (2020) highlights how SOC often face far more severe consequences such as suspensions or expulsions from schools, even having encounters with law enforcement.

Although there are healthy ways to manage emotions, one must shift from a single, universal perspective of managing and expressing emotions to a pluralistic, culturally mediated understanding of managing and expressing emotions. In addition, a greater focus on teaching students to understand, rather than control their emotions, is needed.

Individual Skill Development

Strong support for incorporating SEL into school curriculum has come from the positive impact it can have on a students' academic achievement (Elias et al., 1997). This focus on the individual

student coincides with the historical and current educational climate surrounding accountability, standardization, and measurement (McGuinn, 2006), which came to represent a very influential argument for incorporating SEL in schools (Humphrey, 2013). With research validating the link between increased social and emotional skills and academic achievement, SEL has its needed justification to remain in schools.

The emphasis on improving students' academic achievement has, however, raised questions as to whether schools are focusing more on academic results as opposed to students' actual social and emotional well-being (Elias, 2009). Hoffman (2009) discusses how the focus on skills, measurement, and academic results may neglect "the less quantifiable and perhaps more genuine aspects of emotionality in schooling that inhere in human relationships" (p. 540). Schools tend to prioritize the development of self-awareness and self-management when teaching SEL because they correspond to behavior that supports individual success when it comes to test taking. Focusing heavily on testing emphasizes schools' purpose of promoting ideals of capitalism where students adopt the cognitive skills needed to abide by adult work rules which will greatly position students to be active contributors of the U.S. economy (Bowles & Gintis, 2002).

Focusing on the benefits SEL can have on individual skills speaks to current day narratives around prosperity and success which often glorify the individual and pays little regard to the safety and well-being of others. As seen throughout the development of Western capitalism, Black and Brown bodies have suffered most in the labor force (Lowe, 2015). In addition, the elevation of self-determination in Western capitalist societies foregrounds the needs, desires, and motivations of the individual as opposed to (and as separate from) the community. In effect, this reinforces a vision for success that eschews collaboration in favor of individualism.

A "Universal" Student

Current implementations of SEL programs presume a universal, acultural learner absent of race, religion, and class (Hecht & Shin, 2015; Hoffman, 2009; Humphrey, 2013; Vadeboncoeur & Collie, 2013). This assumption, however, negates the racial and ethnic diversity present in U.S. schools and society. It also fails to acknowledge the role schools have served in the Americanization process of students through policies that push for a monolingual and monocultural student (Gonzalez, 2009; Valenzuela, 1999). This universal perspective on SEL positions Western (specifically white, middle-class) views of emotion as the norm. Thus, SEL can be seen as aiming to establish a narrow view of emotions that ignores the cultural variations that exist when it comes to emotional development, experience, and expression (Humphrey, 2013). For example, Hoffman (2009) states that "not all cultures interpret emotional experience in the same way, nor do they assign the same kinds of regulatory or expressive responses (such as talk) commonly shared by the white, American middle class" (p. 540). By neglecting the role of culture variation in emotionality, SEL programs are promoting a one-size-fits-all approach, creating tension between school and home cultures.

Humanizing Pedagogy through Ethnic Studies

Given SEL's close ties to coloniality, the question now arises, can SEL be decolonialized or do approaches outside of SEL need to be considered when attending to the emotional wellbeing of SOC? Camangian and Cariaga (2021) argue that "social and emotional learning initiatives and other

character education framings are essentially hegemonic policies offering more benign forms of miseducation” (p. 4). Given SEL’s ahistorical schooling, approaches outside of SEL need to be considered to address the colonial factors that negatively impact the wellbeing of SOC.

Researchers have proposed humanizing pedagogy as an alternative to SEL. Humanizing pedagogy not only describes a way for students to reclaim their own humanity, it also motivates students to realize their own agency, all while strengthening their notion of care for oneself and the collective (Camangian & Cariaga, 2021). Care as a critical framework has been effectively introduced by educators within Latina/o/x communities to provide students with a way to navigate hostile White school spaces. Sosa-Provencio et al. (2021), for example, drew on critical notions of care to emphasize how marginalized students can come to a place where their embodied, spiritual, and emotional wholeness is honored. Educators can guide youth of color through issues of power, oppression, and ongoing trauma to a point where they can “transform racialized oppression, (re)build community, and ultimately radiate with joy” (Sosa-Provencio et al., 2021, p. 12). Humanizing pedagogy’s focus on the mind, body, and spirit in the social and emotional learning process transcends the colonial ties that traditional SEL programs promote within schools.

Mexican American Studies (MAS), a culturally responsive curriculum grounded in notions of care, has the potential to not only “resist centuries of colonial power but to heal the intergenerational traumas it has caused” (Villanueva, 2013, p. 26). MAS, as a pedagogical approach, cannot only accomplish what SEL sets out to do, but it can address the shortcomings around SEL and its inability to critique social oppression and promote social justice (Camangian & Cariaga, 2021).

Perspectives

Mexican American Studies (MAS) first emerged in the 1960s to counter the assimilationist practices that Mexican American students encountered in U.S. schools. MAS gained national attention in 2010 when the Tucson Unified School District targeted MAS arguing that it fostered “anti-American” sentiments among the mostly Latina/o/x student population who took MAS classes. MAS was officially banned in Arizona Public Schools despite research showing the positive influence taking MAS had in improving grades and test scores for Mexican American students (Acosta & Mir, 2012; Sleeter, 2011). MAS was seen as a threat that needed to be addressed to maintain the goals of coloniality, as present in the traditional U.S. curriculum, despite MAS unintentionally contributing to the notion that a culturally relevant curriculum can motivate SOC to not only navigate hostile school spaces, but also to do well in their studies.

MAS abides by one guiding principle, *In Lak’Ech*, in order to reflect the “beautiful struggle that is learning and teaching” (Acosta & Mir, 2012, p. 17). *In Lak’ech* is part of a larger poem, “Pensamiento Serpentino,” which was written by Luis Valdez. The meaning of *In Lak’ech* comes from the Mayan definition of what it means to be a human being (Valdez & Martinez Paredes, 2012). It is in *In Lak’ech*’s message where a framework for attending to Latina/o/x students’ emotions can possibly exist.

IN LAK’ECH

Tú eres mi otro yo.
You are my other me.
Si te hago daño a ti,

If I do harm to you,
Me hago daño a mi mismo.
I do harm to myself.
Si te amo y respeto,
If I love and respect you,
Me amo y respeto yo.
I love and respect myself.

The promotion of empathy and integrity is central throughout this short poem and is captured in the eloquent flow of words, shifting between “tu” (you) and “yo” (I), where a connection between oneself and others is identified. Not only does In Lak’ech identify the interconnection present in humanity (Villanueva, 2013; Sosa-Provencio et al., 2021), but most powerfully, the back-and-forth relationship between “you” and “I” positions the other in relation to the self by first emphasizing the other (tu) and then proceeding to include the self (yo). The goal and meaning of In Lak’ech coincides with both the goals of humanizing pedagogy and with SEL. Humanizing pedagogy promotes care for others as well as for oneself. In SEL, self-awareness & self-management are skills that specifically focus on the self while social awareness & relationship skills focus on connecting with others. Responsible decision-making is a competency that can be reflected within the other four competencies as it encourages students to make decisions that have a positive influence on oneself and others.

In introducing a decolonial way of approaching SEL, and potentially identifying how In Lak’ech can positively influence Latina/o/x students’ emotions, CASEL’s competencies should not exist in specific categories. As is promoted in In Lak’ech, the self and the other exist in unison. Recognizing the relationships between the self and others is where SEL skills can be reflected. However, SEL’s skills must exist in a way that reinforces the decolonial message that In Lak’ech conveys.

Another principle that guides MAS is the Nahui Ollin. Acosta (2014) describes the Nahui Ollin as pre-Columbian indigenous knowledge from Mexico which works to reaffirm students’ humanity through the teaching of four concepts. Four concepts define the goals of the Nahui Ollin: *Quetzalcoatl* represents the precious and beautiful knowledge we all have; *Xipe-Totec* represents self-transformation; *Tezcatlipoca* inspires critical self-reflection; & *Huitzilopochtli* promotes the will to act and make a positive individual or social change. There exists some overlap between the goals of the Nahui Ollin and those that CASEL has for SEL.

Table 1 SEL Skills & the Nahui Ollin Comparison

SEL Skill	Nahui Ollin
Self-Awareness	Quetzalcoatl (precious and beautiful knowledge) & Tezcatlipoca (self-reflection)
Self-Management	Xipe-Totec (transformation) & Tezcatlipoca (self-reflection)
Social Awareness	Tezcatlipoca (self-reflection)
Relationship Skills	Tezcatlipoca (self-reflection)
Responsible	Huitzilopochtli (will to act)
Decision-Making	

Proceeding with In Lak'ech and the Nahui Ollin as a framework for approaching students' social and emotional well-being in schools can represent an opportunity of applying curriculum already found in U.S. schools, such as MAS, to reach the goals of SEL. However, it is also important to recognize how In Lak'ech and the Nahui Ollin can stand alone as their own framework for attending to students' social and emotional well-being. Thus, recognizing the impactful work MAS and other programs that employ In Lak'ech and the Nahui Ollin in their curriculum have already been doing for years, way before SEL was institutionalized within U.S. schools.

Methods

To highlight the social and emotional impact In Lak'ech and the Nahui Ollin can have on Latina/o/x students, I draw on data collected during a week-long, summer enrichment program that takes place at the University of Colorado Boulder (CU Boulder) known as the *Aquetza* Academic Summer Program. Aquetza provides high school students with strong ties to the Latina/o/x community with an interactive experience focused on examining the history, literature, health science, and relevant social and political issues surrounding their cultural communities from a MAS perspective. Like a traditional MAS program, Aquetza incorporated both principles of In Lak'ech and the Nahui Ollin throughout their daily practices. For example, Aquetza participants would meet at the start of the day and recite In Lak'ech as a group before proceeding to the class portion of the program. Likewise, Aquetza facilitators would highlight one of the four Nahui Ollin concepts, each day, encouraging students to embody the meaning of Quetzalcoatl, Xipe-Totec, Tezcatlipoca, & Huitzilopochtli throughout their daily interactions.

As part of Aquetza's schedule, students were expected to work on and present a final project which they would present to Aquetza teachers, students, and family members in a culminating event known as a Final Encuentro (Spanish word for meeting or encounter). Several students presented testimonios during the Final Encuentro.

Testimonios have historically served as a way for members of the Latina/o/x community to critique systems of power, while reflecting on and healing from injustices that were once experienced (Brabeck, 2003; Huber & Cueva, 2012; Pérez Huber, 2012). A testimonio's defining feature not only lies in their intent to spread awareness of oppressive conditions, but also in their intent to seek justice from those oppressive conditions (Collins, 1991; Delgado Bernal et al., 2012; Elenes, 2000). A testimonio thus serves as a form of empowerment in its ability to affirm a person's experiences, especially when their narrative goes unrecognized by systems of oppression.

I focus on one testimonio presented by Olivia at the end of Aquetza to capture the emotional impact In Lak'ech and the Nahui Ollin can have on Latina/o/x students. I choose to focus on Olivia because she presented a testimonio where: (a) she identified and reflected on her own or a family member's lived experiences; (b) positive and/or negative emotions emerged from reflecting on lived experiences; and (c) provided hope for a better future. Focusing on one person is a common approach when analyzing testimonios since it allows researchers to center individual experiences and present an in-depth description of what those experiences could possibly mean for the individual (Beverly et al., 2000; Creswell, 2008). In addition, focusing on one person's testimonio also provides the researcher with the opportunity to explore ways in which a person recounts an experience, how they position themselves when recounting an experience, and what overall

message the presenter aims to share in their recounting of events (Baumeister & Newman, 1994; Delgado Bernal et al., 2012; Riessman, 1993). Analyzing Olivia's testimonio also offers the opportunity to assess as to whether In Lak'Ech and the Nahui Ollin were referenced after Olivia spent an entire week hearing of and learning about both principles.

Findings

During the Final Encuentro, Aquetza students each presented, one at a time, while standing at the front of a large lecture hall where Aquetza teachers, students, family members, and members of the surrounding CU Boulder community sat in the audience, respectfully listening to students' presentations. Olivia stood up from her seat when it was her turn to present and proceeded to the front of the lecture hall. Before beginning, Olivia explained to the crowd that she would be presenting a letter she wrote to her parents. Like all students, Olivia paused before beginning, took a deep breath, and presented her letter oftentimes shifting between English and Spanish.

*Queridos Mama y Papa,
Ustedes me trajeron a este mundo. A un mundo plagado con enfermedad, pobreza, sexismo, racismo, y todos los males representados por la cosa anaranjada que ocupa la oficina de la presidencia. Pero ustedes, ustedes representan la luz entre la oscuridad. La cura para la enfermedad, la riqueza entre la pobreza, el feminismo contra el sexismo, y la compassion entre el racismo. Dos historias de resistencia y fortaleza que me han dado todo. Gracias.* ("Olivia Letter to Parents," 2017)

Translation:

Dear Mom and Dad,

You two brought me into this world. Into a world plagued with sickness, poverty, sexism, racism, and all the evils represented by the orange thing occupying the office of President of the United States. But you two, you two represent the light in between the darkness. The cure for the sickness, the wealth in between the poverty, the feminism against the sexism, and the compassion in between the racism. Two histories of resistance and fortitude which have given me everything. Thank you.

From the beginning, Oliva reflects the message of In Lak'Ech as she recognizes the important role her parents have had in her life. Gratitude is reflected in the way Olivia not only credits her parents for giving her the inspiration needed to confront the injustices that plague society, but also in how Olivia sees her parents as a symbol of good in the world. In Lak'Ech is a reminder for how one should embrace the world around them (Acosta & Mir, 2012). Olivia chooses to embrace the world not by succumbing to all the injustices present in the world, but in contemplating on the positive role she can have in society, she thus realizes her own agency to be an agent for positive change (Freire, 2017). Olivia's understanding of systems of oppression not only includes a historical acknowledgement of ideologies that have caused inequality in society such as poverty, sexism, and racism, but it also incorporates contemporary figures like Donald Trump who come to represent a symbol of oppression for many people.

Olivia continues her letter by dedicating a short paragraph to each of her two parents. Olivia embodies Quetzalcoatl & Tezcatlipoca in the critical awareness and knowledge she shows

throughout her letter. As stated in her letter, Olivia recognizes how the systems of oppression she learned about in Aquetza impact the people she cares about the most.

Dad, I know now it's impossible for me to understand what you've been through. Like you always say, you've lived five lives and each one is more complex than the last. However, now, now I am aware of the complication and injustice within the institutional systems of our society. A concept you've always known and experienced, but one I've been too ignorant to recognize. ("Olivia Letter to Parents," 2017)

Olivia recognizes that her father's lived experiences are beyond her understanding. Olivia's emerging self-reflection has helped her come closer to understanding how a loved one can be impacted by systems of oppression. As can be interpreted in her description, Olivia recognizes that at one point, she did not know the extent to which her father has suffered in U.S. society. However, Olivia's understanding of the larger social and political factors in society has helped Olivia in being able to empathize with her father. Olivia's letter also reflects Xipe-Totec in the way she is verbalizing her transformation in front of her parents who are sitting in the audience watching her present.

Critical self-reflection not only contributed to Olivia being able to shift any preconceived judgements of her father, but it also contributed to her adopting an appreciation (and love) of her own self (Camangian & Cariaga, 2021). "I learned to appreciate my indigenous roots and the wonderful language I'm mentioning [Spanish]" ("Olivia Letter to Parents," 2017). Olivia hints at knowing the school policies that have targeted Latina/o/x students throughout history to limit the use of Spanish in classrooms (Valencia, 2011). Olivia further references her transformation by embracing her racial and linguistic identity and relinquishing any resentment she may have had towards her indigenous roots and Spanish-speaking skills.

"The orange thing occupying the office of President of the United States" is a direct reference to Donald Trump who served as president of the U.S. from 2016-2020. Trump's dehumanizing and violent rhetoric against the Latina/o/x community resulted in a rise of anti-immigrant and anti-Latina/o/x sentiments in schools throughout the country. Latina/o/x students not only fear for their own safety in schools but also worry over the safety and well-being of their parents (Costello, 2016). This social and political context is referenced by Olivia who writes about the struggles her mother faces being an immigrant in the United States:

Ser un inmigrante en tiempos modernos es algo muy duro. Gente de piel mas baja criminaliza a nuestra raza. Nos llaman traficantes, violadores, y asesinos. Mentiras que salen como balas a nuestro corazón. Veo el dolor en tu cara, llena de miedo, similar a las caras de millones alrededor del país. ("Olivia Letter to Parents," 2017)

Translation:

Being an immigrant in modern times is something really hard. People with lighter skin criminalize our race. They call us traffickers, rapists, and murderers. Lies that come out like bullets to our hearts. I see the pain in your face, full of fear, similar to the faces of millions around the nation.

Olivia is aware of her mother's fear in a time when anti-immigrant sentiments plague the nation. Echoes of Trump's words spoken when he declared his candidacy for President of the United States

in 2016 are present in Olivia's letter. To frame an entire race of people as traffickers, rapists, and murderers downplays the sacrifices many immigrants make when leaving their homeland in pursuit of better opportunities. Olivia is aware of the sacrifices her parents have made and is once again able to show empathy and solidarity (Camangian & Cariaga, 2021). Olivia is able to view her mother's experience and migration status as a source of inspiration as opposed to reacting and succumbing to anger in response to the negativity and hate facing the Latina/o/x community. Olivia finishes her letter by highlighting the goals her parents have inspired her to pursue:

Ustedes empujan la educación porque saben que es la única manera por cual puedo seguir adelante. Y por eso les agradezco. Quieren oportunidades para mi que ustedes nunca tuvieron en un sistema roto que los fallo [. . .] Estos ojos te ven a ti mama. Una mujer humilde que emigró por mi. Con todo que me han dado, seguire adelante. Because now these eyes. They see success because of your sacrifice. They visualize; un futuro mejor que emergera de nuestro pasado injusto. ("Olivia Letter to Parents," 2017)

Translation:

You push education because you know it is the only way I can continue ahead. And for that, I thank you. You want opportunities for me that you never had in a broken system that failed you [. . .] these eyes see you mom. A humble woman who immigrated for me. With everything you have given, I will continue ahead. Because now these eyes. They see success because of your sacrifice. They visualize; a better future that emerges from our unjust past.

Schooling to get ahead in today's current system is a goal Olivia's parents want her to achieve. Knowledge of obstacles present within U.S. society contributed to Olivia's self-empowerment as she sets out to prove those who have a deficit view of Latinas/os wrong. Thus, Olivia reflects In Lak'Ech by referencing the beautiful struggle that is learning.

Discussion

Interestingly, CASEL's (2015) five SEL competencies can be observed throughout Olivia's testimonio presentation. Olivia reflects: self-awareness in how she describes the pain that comes from being criminalized in U.S. society for being Latina/o/x; self-management in how Olivia expresses her anger and frustration in the form of a written letter but does not let that anger shape her emotional state or decision-making process; social awareness in how Olivia is able to empathize with her parents' experiences; relationships skills in how Olivia has grown close to her parents after reflecting on their struggles; and responsible decision-making in how Olivia aims to pursue her studies to not only improve her life but to change the narrative surrounding Latinas/os and education. While In Lak'Ech and the Nahui Ollin are not frameworks that exist under the umbrella of the traditional SEL model, it does speak to the impact humanizing curricula can have in incidentally reaching the goals of SEL, like students showing an increase in test scores and grades after taking MAS despite still encountering all the challenges that Latina/o/x students face in schools. It is important to note how In Lak'Ech and the Nahui Ollin, as a decolonial model for SEL, cannot only do traditional SEL but go beyond the goals of SEL.

Four tenets emerged in Olivia's testimonio presentation that push the boundaries of what is possible in SEL. These four tenets embody Olivia's mind, spirit, and soul in the way she: *reflected*

on identities; recognized community assets; reflected on struggles; and aspired for positive change. I define the four tenets that emerged below:

Table 2. Decolonial SEL Tenets

Tenet	Description
Reflecting on Identities	Exploring how one's racial identity, ethnicity, cultural upbringing, gender, and migration status influence one's experience in the U.S. For example, Olivia reflected on how her own Latina identity will influence the way she is seen and treated within U.S. society.
Recognizing Community Assets	Recognizing community resources as a form of strength and motivation. For example, Olivia credited her parents' bravery as a reason for wanting to make a positive change within society.
Reflecting on Struggles	Identifying and reflecting on a personal trauma or social issues affecting an individual or group of people. For example, reflecting on the emotional impact immigration policies have had on the Latina/o/x community in the U.S.
Aspiring for Positive Change	Identifying and discussing personal and/or collective goals, hopes, and dreams for a better tomorrow. For example, Olivia wanting to finish her studies to counteract the stereotype surrounding Latinas/os and them not succeeding in the education system.

The tenets that emerged in Olivia's testimonio presentation when centering In Lak'Ech and the Nahui Ollin as a framework for decolonizing SEL address the critiques around needing a form of emotional learning that: (a) centers the self in relation to others; (b) explores the role social and political structures have in shaping lived experiences and emotions; (c) does not center whiteness when discussing emotions; (d) critiques social oppression; and (e) is motivated by social justice.

With the ongoing political backlash against Ethnic Studies programs in the U.S., now more than ever do we need to center the emotional work Ethnic Studies has been doing, in the midst of a growing push for SEL in U.S. schools. In Lak'Ech and the Nahui Ollin can offer a decolonial approach to fostering SEL among Latina/o/x students. In the process, not only does the centering of two indigenous philosophies reemphasize the power of humanizing pedagogy in relation to emotions, but it also promotes a much-needed collective effort in attending to the well-being of SOC.

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County of Orange

Santa Ana Ethnic Studies Art Class



Speaking of Food: Indigenous Language Reclamation Through Fruits of the Earth

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Abstract

Within Indigenous struggles for “collective continuance” (Whyte, 2018) in the face of settler-colonial hegemony, three powerful forms of resurgence are Indigenous Land-based (or simply Land) education models; language reclamation initiatives; and food systems organizing for food sovereignty. In the interest of contributing to Indigenous resurgence generally and the literature of decolonization in agricultural education more specifically, this paper investigates sites where these three forms of resistance converge, sites where Indigenous ways of knowing are engaged through *language* and *food systems* work with young people on the *land*. Reviewing literature documenting projects on Turtle Island and taking a first look at food systems and language projects in Minnesota, the author proposes that gardens, even with the tension of their colonial traces, may be nurturing sites for collective continuance. Gardens may present learning spaces for language revitalization and Indigenous food security in the present to secure Indigenous food sovereignty for the future.

Key words: transformative food systems; language reclamation; land-based education; food sovereignty; Indigeneity; settler-colonialism; collective continuance; decolonization

Introduction

Indigenous languages are in peril globally (Henne-Ochoa, 2021; Hinton, 2011). Food security is a persistent challenge for Indigenous communities (Levkoe, 2019; Patel, 2009). Public education on Turtle Island (so-called US and Canada) fails to meet the needs and interests of the most marginalized populations, including Native Americans (Bagelman, 2018). Settler-colonialism thus continues to take its toll (Carroll, 2015; Wolfe, 2006). At the same time, Indigenous³¹ peoples resist and resurge. “Deficit” conceptions of Indigeneity are taken to task (Bagelman, 2018; Henne-Ochoa, 2021). Within Indigenous struggles for “collective continuance” (Whyte, 2018) in the face of settler-colonial hegemony, three powerful forms of resurgence are Indigenous Land-based (or simply Land) Education models; language reclamation³² initiatives; and food systems organizing for

³¹ Brewer and Dennis (2017) define Indigenous as the following: Indigenous is the highly developed intellectual thinking and doing that distinctly ties past and present relationships of land and life to place.

³² Leonard [Miami] (2020) has developed the framework of language reclamation which he uses “to describe and theorize efforts by Indigenous communities to claim their right to speak their heritage languages and to set associated goals in response to community needs and perspectives” (p. 85). Elsewhere, Leonard (2019)

food sovereignty (Bagelman, 2018; Calderon, 2014; Hinton, 2011; Jarosz, 2014; Leonard 2019, 2020; Tuck, 2014). In the interest of contributing to Indigenous resurgence generally and the literature of decolonization in education more specifically, this paper investigates sites where these three forms of resistance converge, sites where Indigenous ways of knowing are engaged through *language* and *food systems* work with young people on the *land*. When I draw on the work of Indigenous scholar-activists, I, as a settler-scholar, do not claim to be a representative of their communities.

Positionality

I am a middle-aged, cis-gendered, white woman of European heritage living and farming on traditional homelands of Dakota, Hochunk, and Meskwaki peoples. I was born on the land called Mni Sota by the Dakota. I have benefited directly from Indigenous removal, in the form of land holding.³³ I believe my privileged landholding is a function of settler-colonialism which, by design, has a negative impact on Indigenous populations and, not coincidentally, the planet. Consequently, I take it as a personal mandate to critically examine my landholding and to agitate and to work for land reparations for Indigenous peoples. Still, an unavoidable aspect of being a settler and taking a critical stance is dwelling on unsettled and unsettling grounds, crying 'land back' while, as a lover of place, sinking roots ever deeper in the soil. Writing this piece involves critical self-examination. If I may use the metaphor of a "colonial garden" to refer to the planting of ideas in the rows of this paper, I follow Nxumalo (2019) who, while working with children outdoors in British Columbia, writes, "... the sociomaterial asymmetries enacted through presences of settler colonialism, racialization, whiteness, gender, and class are never erased from gardens and are an intrinsic part of my own situated, contingent, and embodied location as a racialized settler immigrant in colonial gardens and colonial garden histories"(p.73). Like Nxumalo, I seek connections that "might emerge and enact disruptions to visions of already demarcated, categorized, 'settled,' and defined colonial place" (p. 73). While I center Indigenous voices in the following examinations of land/language/food-based pedagogical projects, I choose not to leave my own voice behind: if I am implicated in the problems, I become involved in (the search for) solutions.

Food for Thought: On Homeschooling with Traditional Foods

Perhaps all language teachers need pedagogies for learning and teaching that account for living in and through our languages. Ways of teaching that we can feel in our whole bodies, not just our minds. (Hermes, 2016, as cited in Henne-Ochoa et al 2020)

Scholars Toni House and Rebecca Webster, tribal citizens of the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin, may have had similar thoughts to those of Ojibwe language scholar, Mary Hermes (above), when they decided to school their children at home. In *Oneida People's Original Indigenous Instructions as the Basis for Curriculum* (hereinafter referred to as OPC), House and Webster (2021) present a flexible curriculum for Native (in this case, specifically Oneida) homeschooling parents. Because the "original instructions" on which the curriculum is based are for Oneida people, I rely on the words

stresses the difference between language reclamation and "language revitalization" (p. 3), which tends to focus on the language itself, overlooking social factors and power structures which affect language shift.

³³ An expression I use rather than "ownership" because of my own resistance to the ownership of land and the fact that I am one of a collective of persons with rights of access to "our" land.

of the authors to introduce themselves in their purpose of using this practice of giving thanks as a schooling tool. I quote them at length:

We share our story as two Wisconsin Oneida mothers who based our homeschool curriculum on our original instructions. We also belong to the Wolf Clan and have responsibilities to create paths for those who come after us. In creating these paths, we acknowledge the existing paths we follow that were blazed by generations of people who came before us. (p. 188)

....Different speakers from different communities have different ways of giving thanks. Even speakers from the same community will often give thanks in slightly different ways... This article focuses on the Kanehelatúksla? as transcribed by Dr. House's late grandmother, Maria Hinton. Her grandmother worked with other first language speakers to help revitalize and document our language in the hopes of preserving it for future generations. (p. 189)

The curriculum House and Webster offer is based in the Kanehelatúksla?, which is a platform for giving thanks. According to the authors, each of the 18 sections "can serve as a comprehensive, scaffolded, homeschool curriculum for all ages and learning levels" (p. 189). Their interest is to provide a curriculum that meets and exceeds "modern educational standards" (p. 187). OPC focuses on a single example of planting corn as one of the "three sisters" (p. 189) components. The authors also provide examples and discussions of how curriculum might be developed. The sections are read counterclockwise, which is meaningful to the Oneida. Each section opens with thanks given in Oneida.

Figure 1. Sections of the Kanehelatúksla.

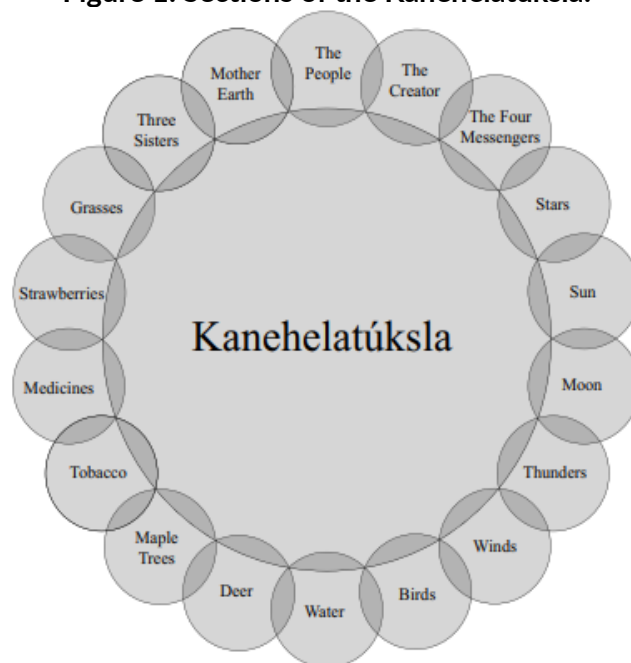


Figure 1. Sections of the Kanehelatúksla.

Source: House (2021, p. 190).

For example:

Three Sisters Áhsł nyaʔtekutłhnu·téleʔ né· tyohł·tú neʔ akwe·kú kákhwaʔ kl·tho
ohwłtsyá·ke. Úskah tsíʔ łwahweʔnu·ní· yukwaʔnikúhlaʔ. Ta· tho niyohtúhak
yukwaʔnikúhlaʔ

(The Three Sisters are the leaders of all the foods here on earth. Let's put our minds together
as one. This is how it shall be our minds.) (p. 192)

The article includes a comprehensive corn-planting curriculum, including a detailed section on
language arts.

Figure 2. Subjects for Planting Corn.

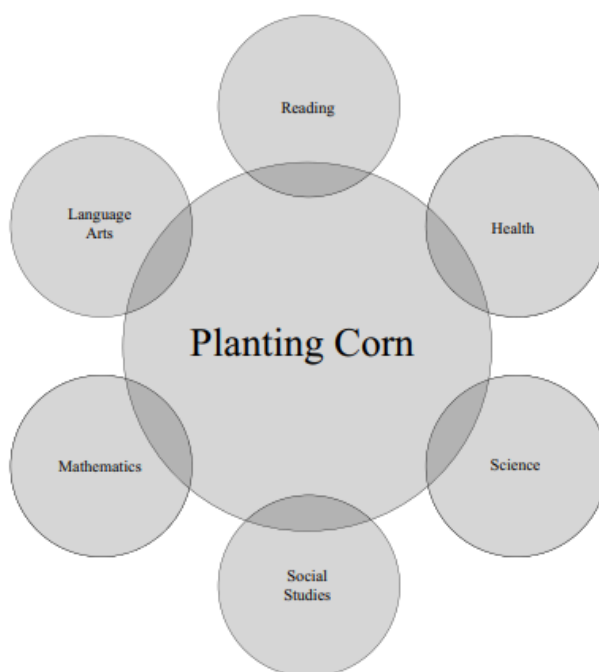


Figure 2. Subjects for planting corn.

Source: House (2021, p. 203).

Along with corn-planting vocabulary and journaling, the authors suggest that “This learning can be accelerated using Total Physical Response [TPR] language acquisition” (Koole & wásakâyâsiw Lewis, 2018, cited in House, 2021).³⁴ Movement might enhance language learning: in other words, this is an embodied approach.

³⁴ TPR is a language-learning method rooted in the premise that physical action combined with language boosts learning (TEFL-NET, 2022). Meyers (2020) notes in endnote #128: “Total Physical Response: A style of learning that combines language input with physical movement, mimicking how babies learn language, reducing inhibitions, and lowering stress (Teacher Tool Kit, 2019). Later in Chapter Seven (Section 7.2.4), Lorna mentions TPR as ‘jarring’ or sometimes perceived as rude in First Nations cultures. At the WSÁNE ́ language nest, they are utilizing it in a way respectful to the culture, that allows for physical connection to

House and Webster close OPC with reflections on homeschooling and on the strengths and weaknesses of their curriculum. While the weaknesses include the facts that parent cultural knowledge and linguistic skills may themselves be in awakening stages, that students still struggle with social acceptance (home is not a panacea), and that state standards still must be met (which feels like a win for colonialism), the authors maintain that the strengths of enhanced connections to culture, language, foods, land and community far outweigh the drawbacks (House, 2021, p. 206). In their indications for further study, House and Webster write, "This type of research could encourage families, communities, and nations to promote environments that socialize society and support diverse environments—linguistically, environmentally, spiritually, culturally, socioeconomically, and racially" (p. 207). The authors close the article thankful for the privilege of being able to homeschool, and with a positive outlook for their children taking on the responsibilities of their clan.

Reflective Digestion

Vignette: It is an afternoon on the farm where I live with my partner and two sons. We are harvesting potatoes, "Kartoffeln." I speak German with my children as a second language in our household. I am fluent, having committed myself early on (age 7) to learning the language that my (settler) grandfather spoke with his grandparents. Wanting my children not to suffer from "American" monolingualism, but rather to potentially gain some facility in language acquisition, I decided to speak my second language with them as much as I could while they were growing up. This turned out to be constant. There was something about having "our" language. And, sometimes, as farmers, we put our bodies into it. In the sunshine of the afternoon, I look for the dried-up stem of a potato plant, pull it up ("tu's aufheben"), and watch the loosened potatoes cascade from the roots ("die Wurzeln"). The boys have two buckets, one for firsts ("die Ersten"), to save, and one for seconds ("die Zweiten"), to feed the compost pile... In a telephone interview with my adult son about such early language learning, I learned that he has a hard time recalling how language grew out of our work together on the land. "I am sure we spoke," he said, "but I can't remember what language it was." To him, learning German in an English-speaking world was easy because "we just did it." And his German is not bad.

I tell this story for two reasons. First is to note how effortless learning, especially of language, may be in early childhood. That Stan does not remember struggling to retain vocabulary words could mean we did something right. In her reflection on homeschooling, Rebecca Webster writes of the detrimental operation of public schooling on her children's psyches. "With individualized attention," she writes, "they don't feel as though they are learning enough to be competitive with other children. What they don't understand is that learning shouldn't be as hard as it had been for them in the public school system" (House, 2021, p. 205). I seize on two of Webster's words: competitive and hard. Her suggestion is that her children did not feel like they were *learning* unless it was so. Learning in the public school system becomes painful instead of joyful. What, indeed, do we learn through pain? If it is the pressure of state standards that prevents fun or play or the effortlessly embodied learning the like of which Hermes (2016) writes, and to which Stan attests, House and

the plant and tree names, and that is an iterative, grounded learning process." She points out in endnote #129 that "kinaesthetic learning [another term for this type of learning] is a tactile learning style where students are engaged in active learning, including physical activities, rather than passively listening or watching" The "passivity" of listening, however, as we shall see, may be debated.

Webster contest this possibility with their robust curriculum. According to them, their curriculum might “exceed” state standards (House, 2021). We might have fun *and* learn, they seem to say. Still, and this is my second note, both House and Webster concede that the fact that their Indigenous curriculum (intended for cultural and linguistic Oneida resurgence) must meet Wisconsin state standards is a kind of blow. They write, “The inherent message is that our ways are not valid unless measured and approved by Western standards” (p. 206). Thus, even though they have self-admitted privilege to school at home and in the ways that they feel are culturally appropriate and healthy for their children, they still feel to some degree *colonized*. What do we make of this? Can we imagine learning that is not subject to state control? Ethnic studies pedagogues, Au et al. (2016) argue that curricular self-determination, particularly for Native nations, is fundamental to decolonizing education. Control over determining what counts as knowledge as much as how that knowledge is gained is a basic to the exercise of sovereignty.

It is possible to learn language *outside of school and schooling constructs*, as substantial writing on linguistics (Clark et al., 2011; Quam & Hamilton, 2020), and Land-based Education (Bowra et al., 2021; Calderon, 2014; Wildcat, 2014) attest. Respecting the beautiful work that House and Webster did—and granting that it has flexibility, when I imagine Indigenous language learning in combination with food production—I admit I do not think of scaffolded lessons that meet state standards. I imagine seasonal and regional vocabularies. Cherokee ethnobotanist Clint Carroll (2015) writes, “One could describe elements of a Cherokee ‘seasonal round’ with the appearance of ripe hickory nuts (the main ingredient in kenvchi) and wild mushrooms in the fall, hunting deer and turkey in the winter, the arrival of wild greens (cochanny, poke, wild onions) in the spring, and the availability of huckleberries and crawdads in the summer months” (p. 143).³⁵ I imagine movement, sensation, reciprocity. Kimmerer (2013) describes the anticipation of discovery, the smell and the flavor of an abundance of wild strawberries, a gift from the earth which she honors with her own gifts. I imagine a learning situation like the one Mississauga Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Simpson (2014) depicts in her emphatic treatise “Land as Pedagogy.” Describing the political resistance within the learning experience of “Kwezens,” a seven-year-old Nishnaabeg girl tapping maple trees and boiling deer meat with her mother and aunts, Simpson writes:

Kwezens learned a tremendous amount over a two-day period—self-led, driven by both her own curiosity and her own personal desire to learn. She learned to trust herself, her family and her community. She learned the sheer joy of discovery. She learned how to interact with the spirit of the maple. She learned both from the land and with the land. . . . She comes to know maple sugar with the support of her family and Elders. She comes to know maple sugar in the context of love. (p. 7)

Kwezens is an example of resistance to colonization because she is there, says Simpson, despite the land being occupied. If we want to recreate the world of Kwezens, Simpson insists, we have to recreate the conditions from which her world emerged, a context of loving relationships enveloped by land. For Simpson (2014), the land is both context and process, and politics are implicit. Decolonization, through language reclamation, through food sovereignty, through educational freedom, is land-based.

³⁵ Carroll (2015) continues, “In short, subsistence—as.... What is lost is an important opportunity for intergenerational bonding, cultural transmission, environmental education, and identity-building that was once a part of the Cherokee seasonal round” (p. 143).

Food as Cultural Sustenance

We are all headed toward the center. (Liz Cates [Dakota], 2022)

Liz Cates has a fantasy about Dakota language learning in Minnesota: “That our only option is not written!” (Interview with author, November 17, 2022). Liz is a lineal descendant of the Dakota through her grandmother. She is one of two people in charge of the education department at NATIFS (North American Traditional Indigenous Food Systems), a non-profit in Minneapolis, Minnesota. I interviewed Liz and her partner, Andy Adams [Minnesotan settler], on November 17, 2022, to learn how they envision bringing food systems work together with language reclamation, and to what degree this work may have a land focus. Until colonizers forced literacy on the Dakota, Cates noted, their language was an oral one that emerged from relations with the land. Liz’s comment that she wants language learning to be “not written” speaks of immersion learning that is experiential, even sensual: I think of Kwezens using language in the woods while sucking maple sap; I think of my son Stan kicking through “Kartoffeln” in his bare feet. Indigenous scholars (Diaz, n. d., 2012; Robinson, 2020; Teaiwa, 2021) write about such non-verbal perceptual experience, *through the senses*, as stimulus for thought and action. I wonder, then, if the pairing of the gastronomical with the linguistic could be likened to the pairing of the physical with the linguistic, as in the TPR mentioned by Oneida scholar Toni House? Cates and Adams, in any case, dream of the potential for food to *stimulate* Dakota language use.

According to Chef Sean Sherman [Oglala Lakota], the non-profit NATIFS, with its mission to “Promote Indigenous foodways education and facilitate Indigenous food access” (<https://www.natifs.org>), has global potential. Mr. Sherman speaks in a short video³⁶ on the organization’s website about the Indigenous Food Lab, a non-profit restaurant model in Minneapolis’ Midtown Global Market which brings “people into the kitchen” to learn not just Indigenous food preparation, but “all facets of Indigenous food systems: farming, agriculture, ethnobotany, medicinals, language...” While Mr. Sherman, now an internationally recognized spokesperson for Dakota foodways, speaks expansively, Cates and Adams in the education department are just finding their words. Cates has been with NATIFS a year, Adams for six months, and, though they have their own values and vision coming out of years of working in Indian charter schools, such as seeing food and language as “inseparable,” as “building blocks of culture,” they wait for guidance from NATIFS’s board of Indigenous leaders before defining their pedagogical strategy.

When asked to speak philosophically about NATIFS’ purpose in bringing food systems work together with language reclamation particularly when land reparations are critical to Indigenous agendas, Cates had a few thoughts to share. She acknowledges that the amount there is to do to decolonize Turtle Island can be overwhelming. Sometimes, she says, she is caught by the thought, “Oh my god, are we doing it in the right order? Do we need to be simultaneously seizing lands and burning forts in order to actually make this happen?” (Interview with author, November 17, 2022). But then she realizes that all components are related; to work on one is to work on all. “Education as a first step, yes,” she says, “But it can come from any angle. We are all headed toward the center.” To that end, or, shall we say, in that direction, Cates and Adams talk about building language curriculum for all ages for intergenerational learning. They want to build on existing relationships

³⁶ “Chef Sean Sherman on Indigenous Food Lab:” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O_aQwCl_qI

with Little Earth, where they take healthy breakfasts to the early childhood program and where there is an elder-youth garden project, and with Bdote Learning Center and Red Cloud School, two Minneapolis schools that have refused government funding for schools lunches.³⁷ “Eventually, we will have curricula that we have built with them,” says Adams (Interview with author, November 17, 2022). Further, they imagine communities incubating language so Indigenous (in this case Dakota) people grow up hearing it before they go to school. Until then, they play around with the “backwards design templates” that Adams finds “colonial-made,” and “lacking.”

Cates and Adams are in the “start-up” phase in developing their part of NATIFS, what they call “a huge endeavor.” It seems that part of this early stage in NATIFS’ decolonizing work will involve naming the colonial constructs to be overcome, constructs that delimit the realm of the possible, such as those that are deeply embedded in curriculum templates, for example. They still feel colonized, just as House and Webster do. While the education department waits for their mandate from the NATIFS board to outline their working pedagogical philosophy, Cates and Adams are echoing the persistent questions in Indigenous language reclamation:

- How can we teach all ages so that children can grow up immersed in their language?
- How can we build the verbal capacity and confidence in adults to use the language in all spheres of life?
- Can we learn language while restoring relationship to land?
- Can we, following Simpson, create “learning environments based in networks of loving, land-based relationships?”
- Can we do this without reproducing colonial constructs?

Food Literacy

Vignette: My first born, Chester, developed his literacy through food production. He has keen taste buds and began developing recipes at an early age. As an “unschooled” child, every interest became curriculum. Chester wrote cookbooks. His first, a classic, tasks the standard English-speaker’s brain, but ultimately pleases both heart and palate: “Lov Fewd.”

I tell this story because it brings together food and literacy...and love, three components that might reinforce each other in an optimal learning environment. But what if the space of your learning environment is one whose outlines speak of generations of displacement, replacement and imposition? Can such “traces” (Nxumalo, 2019) be overlooked or overcome in the interest of Indigenous collective continuance? Should they be? Following Shelley Saguaro (2006), Nxumalo writes, “...there are many variations of gardens in settler colonial places,³⁸ but they are all imbued

³⁷ This is a recent trend in taking a stance against poor-quality, government-issued food commodities.

³⁸ I will be discussing garden projects on reservations. Whether or not reservations can or should be considered ‘colonial’ spaces is complex and certainly controversial. This discussion is outside the realm of this paper. I will say that for the purposes of this paper’s exploration of the role of garden spaces within Indigenous movements toward food security, I wish to assert an underlying and unquestioned respect for the sovereignty of Native nations and their relationships with their lands. However, history has shown that the politics of observing sovereignty have been tenuous *at best*, and that, accordingly, the practices of sovereign nations on reservation lands have been in no small part spatially influenced by or in conjunction with governing bodies of colonizing nations. The garden projects that I consider here have been colonially influenced, despite their being on reservation lands.

with colonial histories, including displacements of people, plants, and animals” (p. 79).³⁹ Throughout the remainder of the paper, I grapple with the notion of gardens as *settled spaces*, as in spaces which recall colonial boundary-making (Nxumalo, 2019; Peach et al., 2020) and which may therefore psychically reproduce colonized relationships based in the Western separation of humans from “nature,” which is antithetical to Indigenous relational ontologies⁴⁰ (Bang, 2017; Kimmerer, 2013). At the same time, I propose we consider the merits of a few Indigenous land-based education projects, documented by critical settler scholars, that rely on both, on *garden spaces* and on wild food programs. I want to proceed on the premise that, yes, as Cates claims, we [as in Indigenous and non-Indigenous critical scholars alike] *are all moving toward the center*.

Ada Smith (2020), a settler PhD student at the University of Montana, noted that Gitxaala people, also known as Git lax m’oon, or “people of the saltwater,” have lived on the northwestern coast of North America without interruption for millennia (p. 49); they continue to learn language from their native speakers of Sm’algyax and to practice traditional foodways despite the increasing challenges that come with remoteness (a 30min flight or 2-hour ferry ride to a coastal island) and settler-colonial pressures.⁴¹ According to Smith, the Gitxaala community leaders believe that “wellness implies wholeness” (p. 53), and have consequently (since 2007) developed a community garden program and a “Food of Our Own” traditional food workshop. Despite the historical “cognitive imperialism” (Battiste, 2000) and “culinary imperialism” (Kelm, 1999 cited in Smith, p. 47) of schools, Smith believes that schools today might instead contribute to “food literacy,” and, through it, to language reclamation and the mental well-being of Indigenous youth.⁴² According to Cullen and colleagues, *food literacy* is:

the ability of an individual to understand food in a way that they develop a positive relationship with it, including food skills and practices across the lifespan in order to navigate, engage, and participate within a complex food system. It’s the ability to make

³⁹ Indigenous peoples have been managing lands as agriculturalists for millennia, which leads me to ask: are they gardeners?

⁴⁰ Noting that what constitutes nature is an important (i.e., critical) discussion that is absolutely relevant to the subject-matter of this paper, I choose not to attempt to present this very dense and heavily contested debate (at least among Western scholars) for lack of space. I will say that I fall adamantly in with the Indigenous standpoint that humans are “natural” beings and therefore cannot have a viewpoint that is *outside* of “nature” (Bang, 2017).

⁴¹ Nxumalo notes that even organic gardening projects which purport to provide chemical-free, optimally healthy produce are “still located within a locus of sociomaterial stratification, racialized class privilege, and individualized neoliberal relations to food access...” (Nxumalo, 2019, p. 76). Smith’s perspective concurs: “Even in a community that is engaged in food literacy efforts with the support of public education, there are larger forces such as political interests and the grasp of corporate food marketing that continue to undermine community goals and actions” (p. 73).

⁴² She writes: “For Indigenous students, learning language and having meaningful cultural experiences early in life provides a foundation for lifelong personal development and formal educational achievement despite continued adverse conditions (Atleo and Fitznor 2010; Cummins 1991 and 1994; Hornberger 2009). This points to important reasons for building upon ongoing efforts to revitalize heritage languages to produce multilingual competence in schooling. Lach Klan School is part of School District 52, which has one of the most progressive Aboriginal Education programs in British Columbia and is the only district in Canada that teaches an Indigenous language to all students. Thus our approach to developing food literacy curriculum aimed to work toward the tandem goals of Sm’algyax language and English language learning and competence at Lach Klan School” (p. 58).

decisions to support the achievement of personal health and a sustainable food system considering environmental, social, economic, cultural, and political components. (Cullen et al., 2015, p. 143)

Smith details some of the challenges and opportunities in developing three *food literacy* resources with teachers and community members at Lach Klan School over the course of a five-week summer program for third graders in 2017: (a) hands-on garden and Gitxaała food activities; (b) Gitxaała foods handwriting and reading worksheets in English and Sm'algayax; and (c) a Gitxaała Summer Foods book in English and Sm'algayax. To remain within the scope of this paper, I summarize Smith's findings about language learning through food systems work. [Yet I make some resource examples available in Appendix A.]

Smith found that integrating Indigenous knowledges into food literacy education is one that is “continuous, ongoing, and contextual, and the desired outcomes are no doubt diverse and unique to particular contexts and places” (p. 56). Combining the Lach Klan summer reading program with food literacy (and thus food security interests) started with guidance from members of the Gitxaała Band Council who were involved in discussions of the objectives of the resources created before, during, and after the summer reading program (p. 59).⁴³ The pedagogy was based upon “Land Education” (Styres, 2013) and “land as pedagogy” (Simpson, 2011) approaches.⁴⁴ The goal was to educate in the out-of-doors, but heavy rains prevented the class from being in the garden more than twice a week. While Smith concluded that the Lach Klan summer reading project was “an example of a specific, local action that addresses global concerns around how Indigenous food sovereignty can be ‘operationalized’ in practice, how Indigenous knowledge is used in food systems education, and the role and relationship of education or food literacy to achieving the goals of food sovereignty” (p. 48), she also identified four categories for program improvement, lessons worth noting. These included:

(1) harnessing local knowledge of “own foods;”

Smith follows Short et al. (2007) in noting that a garden inventory that looks at “healthy” foods falls short of addressing food sovereignty. Culturally appropriate foods, based in collective knowledge of Native foodways, not only improve the landscape and diet, but, in a language program, vocabulary as well.

(2) accessing stable funding for critical garden materials and to support garden coordinators;

Food-growing is labor-intensive. When funding sources are temporary or intermittent, sustainability is weakened.

⁴³ Guidance from leading elders is a theme in developing programming for cultural revitalization; I am taken back to Cates and Adams whose patience with the NATIFS leadership board promises to pay off in the spirit of collective endeavoring.

⁴⁴ “List of Lessons: Garden Introduction: Walk, Listen & Learn; Seaweed (*fucus*//paatsah) Harvest; Planting Seeds; Transplanting Strawberries; Weeding; Mint Harvest/Tea-Making; A Day Indoors: Strawberry Smoothie Celebration & Garden Stakes; Spruce Tree Storytime; Potato Planting; Jarring Salmon” (Smith, 2020, p. 60).

- (3) increasing flexibility in lesson plans and scheduling to accommodate place-based and culturally relevant activities;

At Lach Klan, Smith noted well-established food traditions that happened outside the space/time of the community garden. Furthermore, weather was a constant issue within the garden. She believed intentional development of lessons and plans that were attentive to these factors could have strengthened the program.

- (4) and supporting language and cultural training for educators. (Smith, 2020, p. 65)

As Cates and Adams (Interview with author, November 17, 2022) stressed, many Indigenous language educators are still learners themselves. Attention to consistent training for educators to enrich capacity is therefore important.

Conclusion

The myriad possibilities and politics of integrating Indigenous land and language reclamation with food are tantalizing and complex. I have focused on a few examples of work in a growing field, leaving more detailed exploration of promising approaches such as that explored in Alice Louise Meyers' (2020) dissertation, *Blossoming Multiliteracies: Stories of How W̱SÁNEĆ, Quw'utsun, Gitga'at, and Líl'wat Nations Reclaim Indigenous Languages and Food Systems Through Pedagogies of the Land*, or that reviewed by Brewer and Dennis [American Indian and/or Alaska Native] (2017) in "An Offering: Lakota elders' contributions to the future of food security" for another paper. Meyers (2020) finds that multimodal land-based curricula take students not only out of doors, but encourage, for example, harmonic connections as well as physical connection to plants and land in conjunction with language learning. "Speaking, writing, and singing plant names can be a way of connecting with the plants that reinforces language acquisition," she writes (Meyers 2020, p. 275). Regarding coloniality and gardens, Brewer and Dennis find that gardening on a Lakota reservation, seed saving and trading, preserving and storing cultivated and traditionally (wild) harvested foods are ways of reshaping "tools of assimilation in their image in order to stay connected to the values and spiritual beliefs that sustained their ancestors" (p. 17). Meyers' ways and Brewer and Dennis's whys are provocative and relevant for future work in ethnic studies/decolonizing pedagogies. Indigenous scholars take it for granted that decolonizing work today involves navigating and negotiating colonized spaces, however much less-than-ideal that may be. Indigenous peoples are survivors of colonization (Pewewardy et al., 2018), and their stories of survivance (Vizenor, 2008) offer ways forward. Meanwhile, I offer this paper as my own gesture of compromise within colonial constraints...as an imperfect accomplice working on allyship (Carroll, 2020; Klutts: 2020) ...until we all meet in the center.

Appendix A

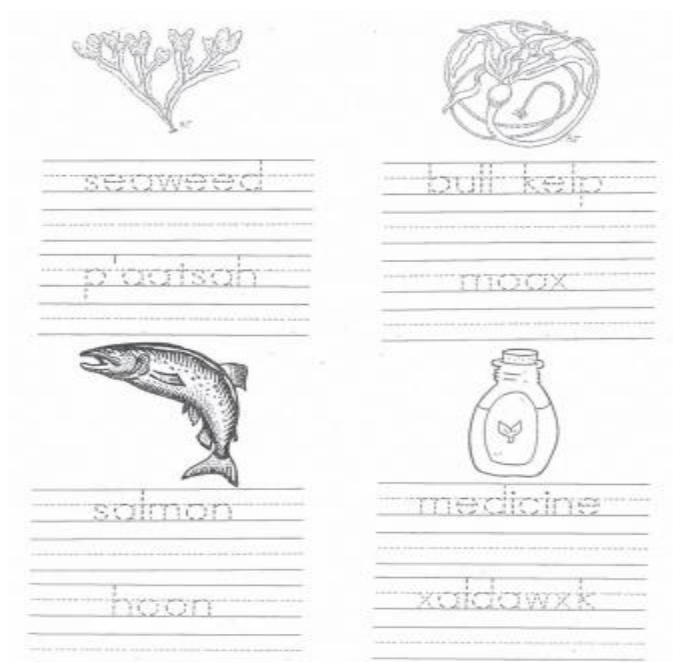


Fig. 1. Sample, Gitxaala Foods Handwriting and Reading Worksheet



Fig. 2. Sample Book Page: Soil/Yuup, Roots/Huust, Salmon/Hoon



Fig. 3. Sample Book Pages: Seeds/Nawa'na, Leaves/'Yens

Appendix B

Table 1. The importance of seasonal local food harvesting and the impact of the Churchill River Diversion⁴

Season	Seasonal traditional food and method of consumption	Health significance as understood by OPCN members	Cultural significance of harvesting and consuming the food	Stories of traditional food-related activities	Perceived damage due to CRD
Summer and winter	Fish (smoked, boiled and fried, dry fish with berries, fish head boiled, fish broth for soup)	White fish is good for diabetes and blood pressure. Jack fish guts are cold medicine. Fish head and broth are good sources of and calcium. (Jennifer Linklater)	Act of fishing teaches us that we need to work hard. (Fisherman Wilbur Wood)	'In summer spending time in the fish camp was like a ritual in the community. Youth loved playing by the beach and chasing fish.' (Louis Dumas)	Continuous fluctuation of water hampers fish egg spawning. Fish taste mushy. People need to travel to inland lakes to fish
Spring	Beaver and muskrat (smoked and boiled meat)	Beaver meat has pain relieving and anti-inflammatory element Muskrat meat is quality protein. (Roger Moose)	Trapping teaches focus, hard work, and respect for elders. Beavers are hard-working and youth must be too. (Elder Ross Moose)	'Trapping beaver and muskrat was a favorite past-time for us before the CRD. We used to catch hundreds of muskrats, now we can only catch a few if we are lucky.' (Steve Durcharme)	Continuous fluctuation of water froze and killed many beaver and muskrat
Spring	Ducks, geese, and other waterfowl (boiled meat and broth for soup with oats)	Duck and goose meat is good for heart health and high blood pressure. (Roger Moose)	Hunting ducks and geese can teach about determination, focus and is a form of meditation. (Barb Spence)	'We always like to save some of our birds for feasts and gatherings. Goose broth with oatmeal is a favorite dish in every gathering.' (Delia Dysart)	Loss of marsh and shoreline changed waterfowl migration paths
Summer	Seagull eggs(boiled)	Good sources of protein and is good for bones. (Barb Spence)	Harvesting seagull eggs teaches the rules of conservation. (Elder Vivian Moose)	'In summer before CRD fishermen used to bring baskets full of seagull eggs. It was a treat for us.' (Barb Spence)	Seagulls lay eggs in small rocky islands in Southern Indian Lake. After CRD many of these islands were drowned

Table 1. Continued

Season	Seasonal traditional food and method of consumption	Health significance as understood by OPCN members	Cultural significance of harvesting and consuming the food	Stories of traditional food-related activities	Perceived damage due to CRD
Summer	Berries (Blueberry, moss berry, raspberry, and cranberry)(mixed with dry meat and fish, raw and making jam with sugar)	Medicines for colds, diarrhea and other stomach problems, diabetes and detoxifying body. (Elder Florence Donkey)	Berry harvesting teaches sharing and caring for family. (Linda Baker)	'Women used to go out for berry picking with their families and children, make tea and socialize all day long sharing their harvest.' (Hilda Dysart)	Erosion of shoreline damaged and drowned berry patches.
Summer	Tea (Labrador, wild mint)	Medicine for cold and headache. (Elder Vivian Moose)	Spending time with medicinal plant is healing, and teaches generosity, peace, kindness and respect for the land. (Roger Moose)	'After you use a medicinal plant, you need to throw it on fire or somewhere safe where people will not walk on it. You also need to leave something behind when you pick them. I still do that. People leave tobacco when they pick wild mint.' (Shirley Ducharme)	Loss of land; shoreline drowned many medicinal plants
Fall	Moose (meat, lard from bone marrow, nose) (Boiled, smoked, dry)	Dry moose meat with berries is good for stomach and bones. (Elder Helen Moose)	Hunting moose teaches responsibility for feeding family and allows for sharing. (Shirley Ducharme)	'The common saying is one should not eat his first kill. This is to teach the young hunter about kindness and sharing.' (Shirley Ducharme)	Erosion creates debris and requires long travel to hunt moose.

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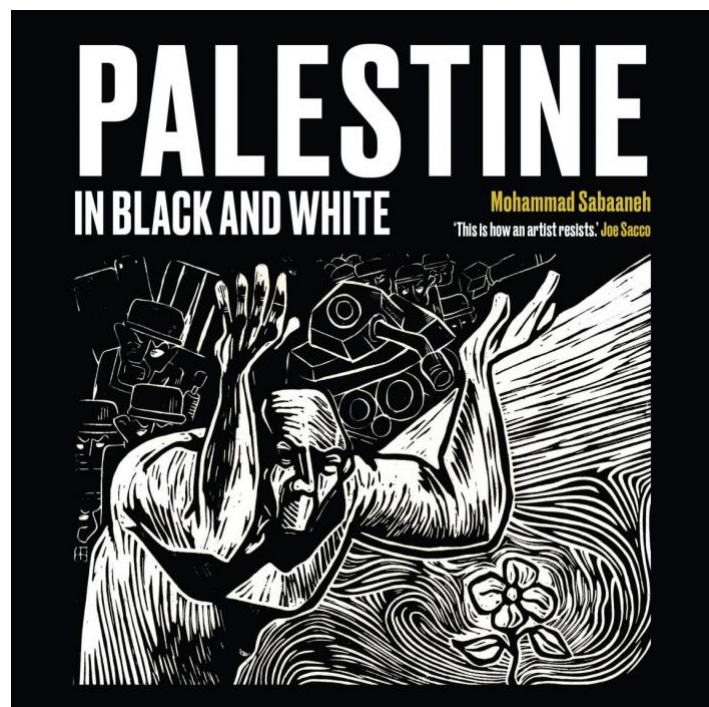
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Bearing Witness Through Ink: A Review of *Palestine in Black and White* by Mohammad Sabaaneh

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I am an undergraduate student at New Mexico State University, majoring in Film & Digital Media with a minor in Borderlands and Ethnic Studies (BEST). For my final project for the BEST course: Introduction to Palestine Studies, I had the honor to review Mohammad Sabaaneh's *Palestine in Black and White* (Saqi Books, 2018). Sabaaneh tells the story of life under Israeli occupation through a collection of stark black-and-white illustrations. The book is a collection of over 100 political cartoons, each crafted in a style that emphasizes contrast, tension, and emotion. Without relying on captions or color, Sabaaneh conveys the weight of everyday violence, the depth of Palestinian resistance, and the emotional impact of exile, imprisonment, and loss.



Sabaaneh is one of the most recognized cartoonists in the Arab world. Born in Kuwait in 1978 and raised in Palestine, he developed an early passion for drawing, inspired by his older brother. Over time, he sharpened his artistic voice into a distinct, bold style that uses visual minimalism to convey powerful political messages. He currently works as a cartoonist for the newspaper *Al-Hayat al-Jadida*, and his work has been featured internationally. In 2013, he was imprisoned by settlers and wrongfully charged with collaborating with Hamas. He spent five months behind bars, including stretches in solitary confinement.

It was during this time, isolated and unsure how long he would be held, that the idea for this book began to form. Sabaaneh wrote: "I spent the long hours thinking about creating a book that would depict all aspects of Palestinian life, through snapshots of both the heroic and the ordinary, which

like a mosaic becomes whole when one sees all the pieces together” (p.9-10). I think that sentence captures the spirit of the entire project. Sabaaneh’s imprisonment exposed him to many fellow detainees, whom he calls “heroes.” They were people who missed the most ordinary things: “lighting a cigarette, conversing with a loved one, basking under the heat of the sun, or sipping a cup of coffee” (p.10). These are the themes he brings into his work, moments that communicate both dehumanization and deep humanity.

The book’s power lies in its ability to speak volumes without a single word. The drawings are direct and clear, but rich with metaphor and symbolism. In one, a group of men and women are shown dancing dabble while shackled together. A checkpoint cuts through the line of dancers, and Israel’s wall stops them short (p. 57). In another image, Sabaaneh depicts a scene at a court. An IOF soldier pulls on a rope anchored on an Israeli judge to choke a shackled prisoner below, emphasizing how the military supersedes “fair trial” (p. 113). Barbed wire often appears, tangled around olive trees, pressed against bodies, and wrapped around entire homes. Each image is carefully composed to say something precise about displacement, oppression, and resilience.

One of the most moving aspects of his work is how much life it contains. His figures are not anonymous victims. They are parents, children, students, and workers. They laugh, cry, resist, and dream. Through these portraits, Sabaaneh makes clear that Palestinian identity is not defined by tragedy, but by survival and community. He neither flattens nor simplifies his subjects. Rather, he presents them as people navigating an impossible situation with courage and love. This human-centered approach sets his work apart from the more abstract or parodical political cartoons common in Western media.

The linocut style, which involves carving an image into a sheet of linoleum, gives the illustrations their sharp contrast and tactile quality. Black ink pressed onto white space creates a visual tension that’s both bold and intimate. The absence of color is perhaps a direct result of his imprisonment while this book was in the works. In a symbolic way, I think his work challenges neutrality by sticking to black and white. It removes any room for nuances. These drawings are not here to balance both sides. They are rooted in the experience of the occupied, the displaced, and the imprisoned. The images are accessible to people of all languages and backgrounds. Viewers need not be experts on Palestine to understand the emotional stakes. The themes of surveillance, family separation, displacement, military violence, and justice are global. The book invites readers to draw connections between Palestine and other struggles for freedom. In doing so, it functions as both an act of testimony and a call for international solidarity.

The book also positions itself within a larger history of Palestinian visual resistance. Artists like Naji al-Ali helped set the stage for Sabaaneh, using characters like Handala to speak out against occupation and corruption. But Sabaaneh’s work is different in tone and technique. His art is quieter, more meditative. There is no speech, no text. Just images. This silence creates space for the viewer to pause, interpret, and feel. The simplicity of the linework invites repeated viewing, and with each return, a new detail might emerge. This quiet intensity makes a lasting impact in a media landscape often overloaded with noise.

Sabaaneh’s own experiences give the work additional depth. When he draws a prisoner sitting in isolation, it is not from imagination, but from memory. He writes briefly in the introduction about the mental strain of solitary confinement and how drawing became a way to stay present. In this

context, the art becomes not only political but personal. It is a form of survival. A way to hold onto one's identity in a system designed to erase it.

What also makes the book compelling is its refusal to rely on shock value. There is no gore. No graphic depictions of violence. Instead, Sabaaneh focuses on emotional and psychological weight. A mother presses her hand to a photograph. A child stares at a wall twice his height. These are quiet moments, but they carry enormous force. They ask the viewer to slow down, to reflect, and to feel.

Palestine in Black and White is more than a book of political cartoons. It is a visual testimony, a record of a people who refuse to disappear. Sabaaneh's work reminds us that art is not just a form of expression but also a powerful form of resistance—a tool to remember, to protest, and to build connections.

Palestine

Marisol O. Ruiz

Palestine,
the freedom struggle
is arduously long
100 years
have passed and
yet

still we
fight
endure
die.

Palestine,
you are the story
told by
survivors of
massacre.

you are
the surviving
memories
and
the war trauma
that runs through
us.

Palestine,
you are
the LOVE
that grows within us,
as we fight

for freedom
life
peace
love
dignity

and for a free

Palestine

Linguistic Apartheid: *Testimonios* of Immigration, Labor, Socialization and Schooling Along the Community College Pathway

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Abstract

This study examines the community college experience of Mexican American students as a pivotal step in higher education for minoritized individuals. It critiques deficit views on language, culture, and identity in U.S. education, particularly for English Language Learners. Through qualitative research at an Oregon community college, participants' *testimonios* in *pláticas* reveal themes of laying *raíces* in *el norte*, schooling socialization, and navigating English in a dominant culture. The findings highlight the need for culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogies that integrate students' lived experiences, challenging language ideologies that shape bicultural bilingual learners' educational paths.

Keywords: community college, Mexican American Students, immigrant experience, *testimonio*, *pláticas*, language ideologies.

Mexican American⁴⁵ students have historically faced negative early schooling experiences in the U.S., shaped by cultural, identity-based, and linguistic prejudices (Spring, 2022). In-school challenges include excessive remediation, a lack of bilingual educators and support staff, in addition to external factors like migrant family poverty and rising xenophobia adding to the struggle. Rooted in European colonialism, raciolinguistic ideologies uphold white supremacy by imposing a monolingual standard on Mexican-origin students, framing their language practices as deficient.

These challenges often push them out of school, relegating them to a permanent underclass. Many also leave community college early, raising ongoing concerns (Peña, 2013). Institutional inconsistencies in academic expectations and college readiness create vulnerabilities that derail

⁴⁵ Mexican American in this article is in reference to students born in the U.S. of Mexican descent, or born in Mexico and raised in the U.S. at a young age.

Chicana/o is a person of Mexican origin or descent, but it also can refer to a social consciousness where a person is never closer to themselves than when they are to their community.

Latina/o is a pan -ethnic identity of solidarity amongst people of Latin American origin or descent.

Latinx refers to people of Latin American origin or descent and the term is used as gender neutral.

their educational progress (Smedley et al., 1993). Research highlights the need to examine geographic barriers and social inequalities that limit Mexican American students' access to higher education (Ferrin, 1972).

For Latino students, community college is often their first and last chance at higher education. Studies show that bicultural bilingual curricula—integrating language, culture, and identity—effectively improve retention and transfer rates. A responsive curriculum adapts pedagogy to students' cultural backgrounds, fostering agency and knowledge production (Garcia et al., 2004). Ethnic studies pedagogy further enhances learning by incorporating culturally relevant teaching, nurturing critical consciousness, and fostering supportive academic environments (Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2015). De La Riva (2012) found that when community college curricula value and bridge students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds, they facilitate educational success. She also advises educators to recognize ideological barriers that discourage students from seeking help. The social context of learning influences how instructors relate to minoritized students, and by serving as advocates, they provide critical mentorship. Hodara (2012) suggests that community colleges balance their open enrollment admission with academic standards for language minority students.

Linguistic Ideologies and white Hegemony

Linguistic ideologies⁴⁶ shape beliefs about language use and ability, often serving to justify existing power structures (Silverstein, 1979). Language ideologies reinforce dominant discourses, distorting perceptions of language legitimacy and usage. Mayo (1999) describes hegemony as a social reality enforced by dominant groups through coercion and consent. Regarding language hegemony, Mayo (2014) argues that while a dominant language should be taught, instruction must also address its sociohistorical role in power and knowledge.

Deficit-based views of culture impact how Latinx immigrant students are perceived in schools and communities, undermining their sense of belonging and educational aspirations. These ideologies stereotype Latino students as unmotivated, low-achieving, and lacking basic skills, leading to disproportionate placement in special education (Allard et al., 2014). Research on language testing policies in community colleges indicates that second-language learners are often pushed toward monolingual instruction without opportunities to develop their heritage language (Bunch & Panayotova, 2008). Hill (2008) examines how language perpetuates white dominance in workplaces, media, and public discourse. Hill highlights the intersection of race, power, and language, exposing how everyday speech reinforces racial hierarchies and calling for critical analysis to challenge linguistic racism.

English Language Learners (ELL) and immigrant students face racism in the U.S., particularly targeting their use of the Spanish language, imposed through colonization in the Americas. Dominant white language discourses label certain dialects as unsophisticated, grammatically deficient, and incapable of expressing complex ideas. These ideologies also stigmatize speakers of these dialects, leading Mexican-origin students to internalize negative perceptions, affecting their confidence in communication (Murillo & Schall, 2016). Roth-Gordon (2011) examines “Mock Spanish,” where white speakers incorporate Spanish words into English in ways that reinforce racial

⁴⁶ Linguistic and language ideologies are interchangeable within the folk theory of racism where they are both visible and invisible in forms and functions of text and talk (Hill, 2008).

stereotypes and uphold white dominance. She argues that this practice allows white speakers to control linguistic and racial boundaries while simultaneously devaluing and appropriating Latinx culture. Flores (2015) explores how hegemonic whiteness shapes bilingual education policies, either reinforcing or challenging dominant norms. As a privileged racial category, whiteness sets standards for what is considered normal, proper, and desirable, influencing language use and ideologies. As a result, language becomes a tool to sustain racial stereotypes and inequalities, marginalizing non-white communities.

Raciolinguistics

Raciolinguistics examines how colonial histories link language and race, positioning non-white linguistic practices as inferior. In the 21st century, whiteness continues to privilege certain languages, varieties, and pronunciation patterns (Rosa & Flores, 2017). Deficit views of language learners persist, portraying them as linguistically deficient. Rosa (2016) defines "racialized ideologies of languagelessness" as assessing language proficiency through a monolingual, standardized lens. For Latinas/os in the U.S., bilingual education exists within a restrictive framework. Subtractive bilingualism erases Spanish, while additive bilingualism promotes English—both aiming for mastery of academic English. Failure to achieve this proficiency excludes Latinas/os from national belonging and deepens their struggle due to racial positioning (Flores, 2019). Hill (2008) highlights linguistic inequalities as central to white racism and the maintenance of white public space. Empirical evidence has supported and validated dual-language education. However, dominant discourses often dismiss it, reinforcing standardized English as the norm (Flores & Rosa, 2015).

For Latinx and ESL students in community colleges, instructors and staff must embrace all forms of English as equal and use asset-based pedagogies to expand linguistic repertoires and empower students. This begins with acknowledging that language and its speakers are never viewed neutrally. To dismantle standard language ideologies, anti-racist linguistic and literacy practices must be integrated into curricula (Lawton & de Kleine, 2020). Educators and researchers must also address the political and economic challenges racialized communities face by challenging raciolinguistic ideologies and modifying language practices (Flores, 2020).

Theory, Data, and Methods

This study applies "linguistic apartheid" as a theoretical framework to examine how language ideologies normalize social stratification in education. Ethnic studies further contextualizes power through race, class, and gender (Hu-DeHart, 1993). Many minoritized groups experience oppression through language, a practice rooted in colonialism. The term linguistic apartheid originates from South Africa's segregation policies, which denied native populations access to formal English education, ensuring their economic and social subjugation (Bobda, 2004; Reagan, 1987).

Colonial legacies of linguistic trauma continue to shape modern language ideologies (Greenfield, 2010). However, education has long served as a form of resistance. In South Africa, linguistic co-habitation has elevated marginalized languages, countering the remnants of linguistic apartheid (Kamwangamalu, 2008). In the U.S., linguistic apartheid explains the language subordination of Mexican American students, particularly in Arizona. Isolating English learners in schools reinforces

social stratification both in education and society (Combs et al., 2014). This study explores how language ideologies reproduce social stratification and how linguistic domination in the U.S. is tied to whiteness and institutional racism. It draws from a qualitative case study at A Gathering Place of Peace Community College (pseudonym) in Santiam, Oregon, focusing on 15 Mexican American students. Three students' *testimonios* inform this analysis. The overarching research questions for this study address students' family experiences immigrating to the U.S., and memories of their early schooling and language experiences.

Methodology

Using critical ethnographic methods (Creswell, 2007; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011), this research takes an emancipatory, self-reflexive approach, valuing students' lived experiences as critical knowledge for social change (Cervantes-Soon, 2014; Duncan, 2005). *Pláticas*, a culturally rooted conversational method in Mexican culture, foster trust and community engagement (Fierros & Delgado-Bernal, 2016; Guajardo & Guajardo, 2013). *Pláticas* differ from traditional research practices such as focus group interviews, where exploratory data is sought through multiple participant interviews to triangulate for validity (Hesse-Biber & Leavey, 2011). As a research methodology, *Pláticas* are centered upon reciprocal dialogues where relationships are foundational for cultivating authentic relationships through *confianza*, self-reflexivity, and vulnerability (Flores & Morales, 2021). *Pláticas* are also culturally effective in humanizing the research experience and strategically pivoting interculturally while engaged in traditional research methods such as semi-structured interviews. It is while participating in a *plática* that a *testimonio* can emerge. Chicana feminist methodologies frame *testimonio* as a dialogical process that allows students to voice their experiences, particularly structural violence against marginalized communities (Martínez et al., 2017). *Testimonio* has recently emerged as a valuable tool for studying Latina leadership in community colleges (Elenes, 2020).

The researcher (first author) was introduced to students at a brown bag lunch held at the community college's multicultural center and provided his *testimonio* about growing up in rural northeastern Oregon, and the hardships faced by the working poor Mexican community. In addition, they highlighted the importance of community college and how it is a bridge to higher education. Such vulnerability created trust and respect among the students, where *pláticas* emerged with students interested in voicing their experiences by participating in the study.

Research was collected through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and field notes. Sub-questions asked of the student participants were:

- 1) What is your parents' country of origin, and what was the reason they migrated to the United States?
- 2) What were your family's socio-economic conditions in your early years in the United States?
- 3) What kind of work did your parents do?
- 4) How would you describe your living conditions growing up?
- 5) What was your experience in learning the English language?

Interviews were recorded and transcribed (Richards, 2014; Seidman, 2006). All transcripts were read three times and holistically coded to capture key themes and concepts providing a broad

overview of the data. Such an approach enabled the identification of emerging themes while maintaining the authenticity of student testimonios (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Saldaña, 2015).

Findings

Analysis of interviews, pláticas, and testimonios revealed three key themes:

- 1) Laying *Raíces*/Roots in El Norte – Students recounted struggles their families faced establishing themselves in the U.S.
- 2) Schooling Socialization – Students described experiences of inclusion or exclusion in early education.
- 3) Navigating English In a Dominant Culture – Students reflected on the significance of English proficiency in shaping their identities and opportunities.

Laying *Raíces* in El Norte

Language plays a concrete role in the political economy, shaping economic transactions and political interests (Irvine, 1989). Its commodification is tied to neoliberal capitalism, where language is integral to labor and the worker's place in a capitalist system. Understanding "the language part of work" requires considering both the worker and the social structures they navigate. Language is often framed through the lens of the nation-state, even within globalized industries (Urciuoli & LaDousa, 2013). Participants shared the hardships their families endured as immigrants. Many hesitated to vocalize their struggles, expressing embarrassment over financial hardships and cultural barriers. Flor del Rio recounted her family's difficulties:

When we arrived in Santiam, my dad was the only one working. My brother was hospitalized for three years, and we drove back and forth from Santiam to Portland. My dad's boss provided unstable housing on a dairy farm, and when my brother's doctors urged us to move, his boss refused. My dad quit, and we relocated. We had no money—everything went to hospital bills, medicine, and gas. Sometimes, we had nothing to eat. But gracias a Dios, things got better. My dad found a stable, better-paying job.

Chicano scholars have documented the historical exploitation of Mexican immigrant workers. Often treated as disposable labor (Menchaca, 1995), these communities endure economic hardships that remain invisible to those with class privilege. Their resilience highlights the broader struggle against social exclusion driven by ethnocentrism and systemic inequities (Healey & Stepnick, 2022). Esperanza, another participant, described her parents' perseverance:

My parents have always worked in the fields. My dad came to Oregon first, sending money to us in Tijuana. My mom takes seasonal jobs in restaurants and fields and sells Mary Kay to help. We've been lucky, but when my dad is out of work for months, things get tough. Now, he has a stable job in a dairy, and it's getting better.

Despite financial struggles, Esperanza saw hope in her community college education, recognizing her parents' sacrifices. Valente, another participant, reflected on his family's journey:

When my mom arrived here from Sinaloa, Mexico, she wanted her family to have the American Dream. My dad is from Michoacán, Mexico I don't know much about him [my mom is a single mother they separated here in the U.S]. My mom is a cannery worker and works long hours to provide for her children as best as she can. My mom would provide food on the table as a laborer. But at times we lacked food and clothing, and at times I wore different shoes from goodwill. It was really humiliating as I would get made fun of. Inside of me I would get mad at my mom and wonder why we got born into this lifestyle. I became very resentful towards her, but now I know it was not her fault and she did the best she could to raise us.

Valente's awareness of historical migration trends contextualized his family's experiences, illustrating how Mexican immigrants have long contributed to Oregon's labor force while facing systemic barriers. According to Garcia (2023), Latinos in Oregon increased significantly between 1950 and 1980, particularly in agriculture and service sectors. Between 1980 and 1990, the Latino population grew by 70%, with 33% residing in rural areas. His story highlights the resilience of Mexican immigrant mothers and challenges deficit views that portray them as disengaged from their children's education. Nativist discourses in the U.S. often dehumanize immigrants and fail to acknowledge their labor contributions and sacrifices (Orosco, 2016).

Schooling Socialization

In schools, ethnic identities are socially constructed, evolving through classroom practices, stereotypes, and language use (McGroarty, 2010). Nationalist ideology in language and politics hinders multilingualism and ethnic struggles. Language differences can challenge perceptions of nationhood within social structures (Woolard, 2021). These barriers reinforce dominant linguistic norms, limiting inclusion. Participants reflected on their schooling experiences and how they shaped their sense of belonging. Flor del Rio described feeling unsupported as a Mexican student:

I always felt that teachers didn't see my potential because I was Mexican. They assumed I wouldn't succeed like white middle-class students. In elementary school, I exited the ESL program in third grade, but middle school was tough—I was often the only Mexicana in class. Teachers treated me differently, almost frustrated with how I spoke. I was relieved when I was no longer labeled an ESL student.

Her experience reveals how racialized language biases limited her educational opportunities. In contrast, Esperanza recalled a more inclusive experience:

I don't remember any negative experiences—my teachers encouraged me and told me I would do great things. I attended diverse schools with students from many backgrounds. I loved sharing my culture, like food, music, and language.

Her experience underscores the importance of diverse, integrated schools that value students' cultural and linguistic identities (Grant & Sleeter, 2012). Valente reflected on racialized class ideologies in school:

Learning to read early helped me understand the world. But in third grade, I began experiencing racism. By middle school, teachers labeled me a gang member because of my

brown skin and the way I dressed. I wasn't in a gang—I just wore the same style as others. But after being labeled, I eventually joined one out of anger. I felt alienated—why try in school if I was already judged? Still, my struggles shaped who I am today. Now, I want to help Chicanas/os and immigrant students because I understand their experiences.

Valente's story illustrates how racial biases and deficit perspectives push Mexican American students toward school disengagement, reinforcing a self-fulfilling prophecy (Valenzuela, 1999). His resilience, however, turned hardship into a commitment to support others facing similar challenges.

Navigating English in a Dominant Culture

Mexican immigrants' educational and occupational outcomes vary by age of arrival, with younger arrivals more likely to succeed. Schools play a key role in immigrant integration, serving as primary points of contact with society (Allard et al., 2014; Morales et al., 2012). Nativist rhetoric has long shaped debates on Mexican immigration, linking language ability to immigrant identity. This framing influences public perception and treatment of immigrants (Gallo et al., 2014). This article attempts to holistically highlight the impact of language ideologies on ELL in community college, aiming to dismantle biases that hinder Mexican immigrant students. Through testimonios, participants reveal internalized linguistic and cultural biases in education.

Flor del Rio a community college student, recalled:

I started learning English in first grade in Mexico. When we moved to the U.S., I quickly became the family translator. By third grade, I was out of ESL and in "normal" classes—I never wanted to go back because ESL⁴⁷ students were seen as slow.

Her experience reflects the burden of language brokering and the stigma attached to ESL programs, which she distanced herself from to be perceived as a "normal" student. Esperanza shared, "I don't really remember learning English—it just happened naturally through TV. It seemed easy for me, but I saw many Mexican students struggle in middle and high school." Her testimonio underlines the difference between acquiring social English and mastering academic English, a challenge often overlooked in schools (Ovando & Combs, 2018). She also noted how Mexican students were ridiculed for struggling with English. Valente recalled, "Spanish was my first language, but I picked up English quickly from cartoons and my cousins from California. English was 'cool'—I wanted to speak it right, like in the movies." His experience reflects internalized language ideologies, where speaking English "correctly" became a marker of status, reinforcing social distance between U.S.-born and immigrant Mexicans. This normalized linguistic divide in schools went unaddressed, creating a hidden form of exclusion.

Discussion

The testimonios reveal the struggles of Mexican American students in community colleges, emphasizing the need for culturally responsive education. These institutions must move beyond

⁴⁷ In the United States, English as a Second Language (ESL) classes are designed to teach a variety of language skills to non-native English speakers (also known as English language learners). ESL classes are for the most part English only classes where English language learners (ELL's) are segregated into two- or four-hour blocks of time in a school day (Combs et al., 2014; Ovando & Combs, 2018).

deficit views of language, culture, and immigration by fostering inclusive environments. This includes diversifying curricula, hosting culturally relevant events, and increasing representation among faculty, staff, and administrators. Bridging the social gap between colleges and immigrant communities is crucial to recognizing their dignity and contributions.

Students saw their education as part of a collective struggle rooted in family and community resilience. Their experiences highlight the need to integrate lived realities into education to foster resistance and intercultural awareness (Campa, 2017, 2013, 2010). *Conocimiento*, or self-reflexive knowledge, requires engaging with oneself and others. This means meeting students where they are and challenging internalized prejudices shaped by early socialization around immigration, language, work, religion, education, and class (Jaime-Díaz, 2023; Jaime-Díaz & Dubkin-Lee, 2023; Jaime-Díaz & Ramos, 2023; Jaime-Díaz & Méndez-Negrete, 2021).

Conclusion

By humanizing learning, educators can build trust, validate students' linguistic assets, and challenge internalized biases (Ovando & Combs, 2018). Language ideologies in community colleges have lasting effects on bilingual students' sense of belonging. Such ideologies, shaped by family and society, can undermine self-esteem and reinforce deficit perspectives (Arêgao, 2011; Bornstein et al., 2013). Internalized linguistic biases subject English learners to unrealistic monolingual standards, reinforcing exclusion. Developing critical language awareness enables students to see language's social and political dimensions and empowers educators to challenge linguistic hierarchies (Molina, 2023).

Recognizing bilingualism as a strength rather than a problem shifts perspectives, affirming students' cultural and linguistic identities (Ruiz, 1984; 2010). Inclusive pedagogy dismantles rigid language norms, valuing linguistic diversity over prescriptive rules (Kiser-Chuc, 2022a, 2022b, 2025). Students often enter school with ideological views of "the other" shaped by media and family influences. Teachers play a crucial role in either reinforcing or challenging these hegemonic ideologies (Darder, 2012; Ricklefs, 2021).

Community colleges, serving immigrants and marginalized students, must embrace systemic change to dismantle deficit ideologies, ensuring education becomes a tool for social mobility and justice (Rendon & Valadez, 1993). There is a pressing need for institutional systemic change for the inclusivity of the diverse community within vocational and academic institutions. The training of personnel in being responsive to deficit ideologies of language and learning, and how such views impact and limit social mobility through education need to be further problematized and addressed. The hope is that intersectional realities be considered in serving minoritized students in the pursuit of self-fulfillment along the community college pathway. By being aware and upholding the dignity of minoritized students and honoring their language, culture, and identity through the content in which they are learning, may very well serve as a catalyst for empowering them to go on to pursue a higher education in the spirit of social justice for the common good.

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Santa Ana Ethnic Studies Art Class



Implementing Ethnic Studies in Washington State K–12 Schools: Challenges, Training Gaps, and Pathways for Educator Preparation

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Abstract

Several K-12 public school districts in Washington state are developing and implementing Ethnic Studies curricula. Despite state legislation mandating a model curriculum, there is a significant gap in educators' readiness to teach Ethnic Studies effectively. Current teaching endorsements do not require an in-depth understanding of race, racism, indigenous epistemologies, and decolonial frameworks. Research shows that without proper professional development (PD) in these areas, educators may inadvertently harm students, particularly students of color. The Washington Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) has highlighted the need for PD that promotes anti-racist practices and safe learning environments.

In response, Washington Ethnic Studies Now (WAESN) launched a pilot program in the 2021/2022 school year to develop a K–12 Ethnic Studies specialty endorsement funded by the Professional Educators Standards Board (PESB). The program involved 20 educators and included 36 hours of PD focused on antiracist and decolonial pedagogies. Interviews with participants revealed significant gaps in their pre-service training, especially in practical application and intersectionality. While the pilot increased their confidence, ongoing support is essential. The study emphasizes the need for systemic changes, including a K–12 Ethnic Studies endorsement pathway, to adequately prepare educators. This research underscores that Ethnic Studies is a vital, longstanding discipline requiring dedicated training and attention from policymakers and educational leaders.

Background

Several K-12 public-school districts in Washington state are in the planning phase or implementation phase for Ethnic Studies curricula and courses. The largest school district in the state, Seattle Public Schools, has been developing an Ethnic Studies program since 2017 (Seattle Public Schools, 2018). Legislation at the state level included a mandate to create a committee to design a model Ethnic Studies curriculum for grades K–12 (OSPI, 2019). The Washington Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) assembled a committee tasked with creating a model K–12 Ethnic Studies curriculum per Senate Bills 6066 and 5023. These bills do not mandate K–12 Ethnic Studies but rather suggest it.

Currently, there are no endorsements that require educators to demonstrate a strong understanding of race, racism, indigenous epistemologies, and decolonial frameworks. All of these are key to Ethnic Studies (Calderón & Urrieta, 2019; Fernández, 2019; PESB, n.d.a; Pulido, 2018; Sosa-Provencio et al., 2020; Tolteka Cuauhtin, 2019). As a wealth of research suggests, without professional development (PD) on this transformational curriculum and pedagogy, educators are poised to commit harm to students, especially students of color (Jones, 2020; Keng Hui & Sánchez-Guerra, 2022; Weber, 2015).

The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) (2021) acknowledged the existing gap in the readiness of Washington State educators to teach Ethnic Studies. In their Ethnic Studies framework, OSPI emphasized the need to, “build adult capacity . . . to be anti-racist in [their] practice, and to create learning environments in which students feel safe and supported” (p. 7). The language in the framework continues:

Professional development must precede implementation and be ongoing. Ethnic Studies is not a curriculum. Ethnic Studies is an epistemology, or a paradigm. It requires educators to transform their beliefs about the purpose of education, the cultural and community wealth of their students, and their role in supporting students to achieve success—as defined by their students and families. For these reasons, transformative professional development is vital before any attempts at transformation in the classroom. Professional development must focus on racial identity development of educators and culturally responsive pedagogy. (pp. 9–10)

Additionally, a concept paper commissioned by the Washington State Board of Education (SBE) found that various stakeholders were concerned about the lack of training for educators in Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogies (Patrón-Vargas, n.d.).

In response to the gaps in training for K–12 educators on Ethnic Studies, Washington Ethnic Studies Now (WAESN), a 501(c)(4) nonprofit organization dedicated to expanding Ethnic Studies to every K–12 classroom in Washington State, developed a pilot program for a K–12 Ethnic Studies specialty endorsement funded by a grant from the Professional Educators Standards Board (PESB). The pilot was conducted during the 2021/2022 school year and included 20 participants. Each participant was a practicing K–12 certificated educator or classified instructional assistant. The pilot program consisted of 18 hours of Ethnic Studies PD focused on antiracist and decolonial pedagogies and 18 hours of engagement in a professional learning community, during which participants practiced applying the learning from the PD to their practice and content. The culminating activity of the pilot program was developing a Professional Growth Plan (PGP). PGPs are self-directed professional development tools created by PESB in which educators set goals aligned with certification standards, create action plans, document progress, and reflect on their growth (PESB, n.d.b).

For the pilot program that this study examined, the curriculum incorporated tenets from the concept of pan-Ethnic Studies (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). According to Duncan-Andrade & Morrell (2008), pan-Ethnic Studies, “[has] to begin with the relationship between racialization in U.S. society and the dehumanization of students of color attending urban schools” (p. 134). This means that, rather than taking the traditional Ethnic Studies approach of

analyzing the colonization and exploitation of marginalized ethnic groups separately (i.e., African American Studies, Asian American Studies, Chicano Studies, Native American Studies, etc.), pan-Ethnic Studies examines how asymmetrical power dynamics, rooted in racism, impact all marginalized ethnic groups. As such, the curriculum that the educators in the cohort were provided was constructed to develop this fundamental understanding.

Literature Review

Pre-service Teachers' Previously Held Beliefs as Barriers

Several scholars have sought to understand the impact of pre-service teachers' beliefs on their teaching strategies and engagement with antiracist and/or social justice-oriented curriculum. For example, in a survey conducted by Kreamelmeyer et al. (2016), undergraduate pre-service teacher candidates continued to hold biased beliefs, even after completing one or more courses on multiculturalism. These beliefs included the common assumptions that colorblindness or racial appreciation will solve systematic racial oppression in education.

However, these ideas further systemic racism (Gorski & Parakh, 2020; Ladson-Billings, 2021; Sleeter, 2011). Sleeter's review (2011) concluded that focusing solely on multiculturalism and celebrating diversity without acknowledging and confronting systemic racial oppression led white students to believe that simply knowing facts about a peoples' history and culture would solve racism.

In addressing the persistent exclusion of social justice themes in K-6 classrooms, Hubbard and Swain (2017) examined how pre-service educators' understanding of and commitment to social justice and antiracism shaped their willingness to embed these issues into their lesson plans. A pre-intervention survey revealed that 82% of the 66 participants were unable to name specific systemic factors being challenged by activist communities. Instead, their responses relied on vague, non-committal language such as seeking equality (Hubbard & Swain, 2017). Despite the intervention, follow-up surveys showed minimal shifts in participants' perspectives, underscoring the necessity of sustained, intentional training on social justice and antiracism. As the researchers noted, deeply ingrained ideologies such as protectionism and nationalism, along with fears of backlash from administrators, parents, or communities, remained largely unchallenged (Hubbard & Swain, 2017).

Parallel research highlights the obstacles faced by teacher educators when navigating these topics with pre-service teachers. Allen (2022) explored teacher educators' perceptions of the resistance often exhibited by White pre-service educators during discussions about racism. This resistance frequently manifested in behaviors associated with White-saviorism (see Frey, 2016), which created tension between the educators' efforts to prepare teachers for working with diverse communities and the need for White pre-service teachers to confront their own privilege (Allen, 2022). Moreover, Allen (2022) found that some White teacher educators' reluctance to engage in critical conversations about race further hindered the development of necessary skills and strategies for effectively teaching Black and Brown students.

Expanding the focus, Cherry-McDaniel (2019) challenged assumptions about the inherent cultural competence of educators of color (EOC), emphasizing the pervasive impact of White supremacy in shaping pedagogical practices, even for EOC. Labeling this phenomenon settler teacher syndrome,

she argued that teacher education programs alone cannot adequately prepare educators to adopt culturally responsive or sustaining practices (Cherry-McDaniel, 2019).

Instead, she advocated for the creation of reflective communities of practice as essential spaces for all educators—regardless of racial identity—to deepen their commitment to antiracism, cultural responsiveness, and social justice. This approach, she found, was particularly effective in supporting and retaining EOC, who often face additional systemic pressures within the field (Castro-Gill, 2023; Cherry-McDaniel, 2019).

The Impact of Preservice Teaching Programs

Overwhelmingly, teachers who have completed conventional teacher preparation programs have reported that they enter the profession with few skills to engage diverse student populations. Currently, educators who hold conventional history and English language arts endorsements are teaching Ethnic Studies courses in districts with Ethnic Studies programs (Castro-Gill, 2023). This is problematic, because a study by Gorski and Parekh (2020) found that most teacher preparation programs in the United States offer only one course on what some scholars call, “liberal multiculturalism.” These courses focus solely on diluted understandings of diversity and fail to prepare educators to discuss or adequately critique asymmetric power relations. These programs also lack indigenous epistemologies and decolonial frameworks.

Miller’s (2012) study highlights how the absence of critical coursework in teacher education programs perpetuates pre-service educators’ feelings of unpreparedness. In this study, the all-White pre-service educators identified several deficiencies in their training, including a lack of meaningful discussions on race and racism, insufficient strategies to process the guilt often experienced by White educators, and neglect of the challenges they would face working with diverse student populations. These gaps left participants feeling ill-equipped to navigate the complexities of teaching in racially and culturally diverse settings once they entered the profession as full-time educators (Miller, 2012).

Similarly, Poole-Parilla (2023) found that pre-service educators believed their preparation programs inadequately addressed the needs of Black and Brown students. Participants in her study reported feeling untrained in understanding the cultural and social identities of their students within a broader systemic context. This lack of preparation contributed to stress, isolation, and vulnerability in their early careers. As one participant expressed, teacher education programs often failed to foster an understanding of Black and Brown students “beyond considering who they are in isolation or with differentiation” (Poole-Parilla, 2023, p. 75).

Martell’s (2016) interpretive case study further revealed how the curriculum of teacher preparation programs influences educators’ beliefs and practices around teaching about race. While pre-service teachers recognized the importance of addressing race in the classroom, their orientations differed significantly. White pre-service educators held a tolerance-oriented perspective, believing that teaching cultural elements was sufficient to foster coexistence, with little to no attention paid to systemic inequities. In contrast, equity-oriented educators, largely EOC, focused on addressing systemic injustices, centering their teaching on the historical and ongoing struggles and achievements of marginalized communities. This dichotomy underscores the variability in pre-

service educators' readiness to implement social justice and antiracist curricula and reinforces the urgent need for systemic reforms in teacher education programs (Martell, 2016).

The Role of Teachers in Curriculum

While many standards and education policies are produced on a national level, officially approved curriculum is adopted on state and local levels. It is frequently assumed by these entities that teachers act as objective conduits, transmitting information from an approved curriculum directly to students; however, scholars have found this to be a false assumption. For example, Silver (2022) conducted a literature review of studies completed on how and why teachers supplemented approved curriculum. Silver found that over $\frac{2}{3}$ of K-12 teachers supplemented their approved curricula, and the supplements came mostly from what they called teacherpreneurs, or practicing teachers who sell curriculum materials on websites like Teacher Pay Teacher (TPT) and Pinterest. Silver also found that supplementation occurred most frequently in low-income schools.

This reality proves to be disconcerting because of the findings of the work of Tran and O'Connor (2023) and Hodge (2023). Hodge addressed the phenomenon of hermeneutics and the theory of interpretation in the creation and implementation of curriculum by teachers.

Hodge argued that rather than objective conduits, teachers tend to approach curriculum implementation through varied contexts. The teachers' prior knowledge, area of expertise, varied reading comprehension levels, and other external factors shape how each teacher will interpret and implement approved curricula. Tran and O'Connor (2023) added to this phenomenon with what they called teacher curriculum competence (TCC) which includes a teacher's institutional, political, and philosophical contexts. Figure 1 demonstrates the TCC in which the officially adopted curriculum goes through a process of interpretation filtered through the teacher's curriculum competence and becomes the enacted curriculum, which informs the instructional materials the teacher chooses to implement regardless of officially approved curriculum.

Figure 1 of 1

Figure 1. TCC expressed at different curriculum stages.

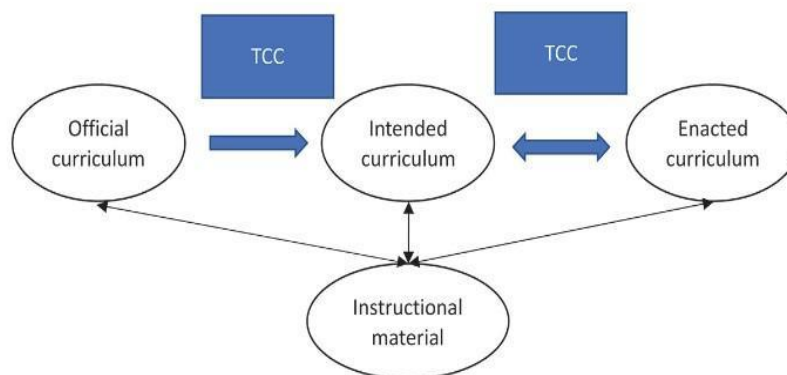


Figure 1.1. TCC Expressed at Different Curriculum Stages

As a result of TCC, the approved curriculum is often significantly modified by omission of certain ideas or supplementing curriculum to meet the interpretation and institutional, political, and philosophical values of the teacher (Hodge, 2023; Tran & O'Conner, 2023). This becomes problematic upon revisiting Silver's (2022) literature review where he found that 89% of teacherpreneurs on TPT, the largest supplier of supplemental curriculum in the U.S., were White, 92% were female, and only 54% of them reported regularly evaluating the materials they sold on TPT. Silver also found that these types of digital materials were generally of low quality with one study rating 70% of U.S. History resources on TPT poor or moderate. The marketization of curriculum has had negative effects on teacher self-efficacy and normalized the use of subpar materials (Silver, 2022).

The demographic of teacherpreneurs on TPT along with the phenomena of the theory of interpretation and TCC create an environment ripe for curricular violence. Because the vast majority of teacherpreneurs are White women, one study found that only 2% of TPT materials included culturally diverse topics, and $\frac{1}{3}$ of U.S. History materials, "make light of painful parts of history or invite students to embody racist, sexist, or xenophobic roles as part of role plays" (Silver, 2022, p. 470). When paired with the lack of preparation to teach about race and racism in teacher preparation programs, racially marginalized students become the victims of curricular violence.

Curricular Violence

Ighodaro and Wiggan (2010) defined curricular violence as an intentional act of altering curricula that poses intellectual or psychological harm to students. Jones (2022), however, argued the Ighodaro and Wiggan definition ignored the implicit violence that can be present in curriculum and the bias of educators. To address the issue of bias educators may hold, Ethnic Studies scholars are moving to define curriculum, itself, to include pedagogy, because teaching Ethnic Studies requires an antiracist and decolonial praxis (Castro-Gill, 2023; Fernández, 2019). Teaching without this knowledge leads to examples of harm recently seen in the news including educators subjecting students to role plays about slave auctions and the experiences of enslaved people (Keng Hui & Sánchez-Guerra, 2022), textbooks spuriously depicting enslaved Africans as immigrants or workers seeking a new life (Weber, 2015), and educators advancing colorblindness as a solution to racism (FAIR, n.d.). Jones agreed, citing the lack of training on anti-bias and antiracism for educators, which allows them to "disregard their own complicity" (p. 2) in curricular violence because their bias is often implicit, leading them to believe their actions are not racist or violent.

For these reasons, I am expanding the definition of curricular violence to include explicitly or implicitly biased learning materials, learning activities, assessments, values of educators, educator practices, school and district policies, and disciplinary measures that result in identity trauma for students and their families. Jones (2022) defined racialized trauma as the embodiment of racialized traumatic events including being the target of racialized microaggressions, harassment, and physical assault. I am expanding on this term by using identity trauma to include intersectionality and the traumatic experiences endured by other marginalized identities, such as gender, sexuality, ability, economic status, etc.

Grinnell College has been curating evidence of curriculum violence with an interactive tool called Mapping Racial Trauma in Schools. The tool includes an interactive map of reported instances of racialized trauma that occurred in schools or related to school events and programming. It also has

a link to an X account where newer reports are posted (Mapping Racial Trauma in Schools, 2021). A conversation with one of the curators of the tool, Dr. Stephanie Jones, revealed that she collected 700 new instances of racialized trauma in the 2023/2024 school year alone (S. Jones, personal communication, June 14, 2024). While many of the instances occurred in the Eastern U.S., the reality cannot be ignored that they are also occurring in liberal bastions in the Western U.S. like Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Seattle (Grinnell College, n.d.). And these are only examples of reported incidents.

Summary

Teachers, regardless of experience level or racial identity, are generally not prepared to teach about race and racism. This lack of preparedness paired with the problematic ways many teachers supplement their curriculum creates curriculum violence leading to identity trauma for K–12 students. Though there has been a considerable amount of research on the preparedness of teachers to teach about race and racism, little to no research on their preparedness to teach Ethnic Studies exists. The decolonial aspect of Ethnic Studies makes it distinct from other antibias or antiracist curriculum, therefore further research is required to understand what teachers need to successfully teach K–12 Ethnic Studies.

Framework

The TIAHUI framework, developed by Fernández et al. (2023), framed this study. The TIAHUI framework employs three intersecting *círculos* to shape educators' praxis: community agreements, the *Nahui Ollin*, and six tenets of decolonization.

The first *círculo*, community agreements, establishes, “the humanizing culture and climate while setting high expectations for conduct and intellectual engagement” (Fernández et al., 2023, p. 75). This is achieved through the integration of three Mesoamerican philosophies: *In Lak'ech* (you are my other me), *Panche Be* (seeking the root of truth), and *Xipe Totec* (renewal through transformation). Together, these philosophies create a foundation for collaboration, mutual respect, and accountability in the learning environment.

The second *círculo*, *Nahui Ollin* (four movements), is described as, “a system of cultural relevance and responsiveness that seeks balance and harmony for self and community through curriculum and content, thus providing structure” (Fernández et al., 2023, p. 75). By centering balance among its four elements, *Nahui Ollin* supports the development of healthy, equitable educational ecosystems.

The final *círculo*, TIAHUI, represents “an Indigenous framework for decolonial and culturally humanizing pedagogy” (Fernández et al., 2023, p. 75). TIAHUI is composed of six tenets:

- 1) Teaching critical consciousness,
- 2) Interconnectedness through student-centered instruction,
- 3) Agency through critical praxis,
- 4) Historical literacy development,
- 5) Unity through community, and
- 6) Intersectional identity development.

This study specifically utilized the six TIAHUI tenets to define the competencies and skills educators require for effective K–12 Ethnic Studies instruction. The data collected from participants were analyzed in relation to these tenets to evaluate the levels of preparedness of the participants following teacher preparation programs and participation in the WAESN pilot.

Methodology

The purpose of this simple qualitative study was to assess how Ethnic Studies PD impacts teachers' confidence in implementing Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy and to identify any perceived deficiencies from their pre-service certification programs. I chose a simple qualitative study because I was interested in teacher perceptions about their ability to teach Ethnic Studies, which is phenomenological (see Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The following research questions were developed to help understand and assess teacher perceptions:

RQ1: How prepared did K–12 educators feel to teach Ethnic Studies after completing their pre-service teacher certification programs?

RQ: How did completing the WAESN Ethnic Studies endorsement pilot influence K–12 educators' perceived efficacy to teach Ethnic Studies?

Study participants were limited to individuals who had completed the endorsement pilot with WAESN in 2022. An invitation to be part of the study was sent out via email to all 20 of the pilot participants. The participants in this study were the first to respond to the request for interviews. The grade and content taught by each participant varied and was not limited to teachers who taught courses officially recognized as Ethnic Studies courses. See Table 1.1. Participants were given pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality.

Table 1.1—Relevant Participant Demographics

Name	Grade	Content	Teacher Preparation Program	Race
James	High School	Social Studies	Western Washington University	White
Lisa	High School	ELA and Social Studies	Seattle Pacific University	White
Marsha	High School	ELA and Social Studies	Antioch University	Asian
Marty	High School	Special Education/Humanities	Long Island University	White
Stacy	2nd Grade	General Education	Antioch University	White
Vicky	High School	Chemistry	Seattle University	Asian

The data for this study were collected from semi-structured individual interviews. The interview questions were open-ended and aligned with the TIAHUI framework and how Fernández et al. (2023) defined Ethnic Studies competencies. See Table 1.2. I asked probing and clarifying questions during the interviews. Follow-up questions were individualized and responsive to the data provided by participants. Participants were asked if there were any other data they would like to have considered that were not covered by the interview questions.

Interviews were conducted and recorded via Zoom, were approximately 30 minutes long, and professionally transcribed.

Table 1.2—Interview Questions

General Demographic Data	
What grade and content do you teach? What teacher preparation program did you complete? After completing your pre-service teacher certification program, how effective did you feel teaching Ethnic Studies?	
TIAHUI Framework Competencies	Interview Questions
Teaching Critical Consciousness	What did you learn from your pre-service teacher certification program about the role of politics in your teaching practice? What did you learn from your pre-service teacher certification program about the correlation between social inequities and conventional education?
Interconnectedness Through Student-centered Instruction	What did you learn from your pre-service teacher certification program about cultural wealth or experiential knowledge? What did you learn from your pre-service teacher certification program about the role of dialogue in student learning?
Agency Through Critical Practice	What did you learn from your pre-service teacher certification program about supporting student agency, specifically to make positive social change in their communities? What did you learn from your pre-service teacher certification program about incorporating family and community cultural wealth into your teaching practice?
Historical Literacy	What did you learn from your pre-service teacher certification program about

Development	fostering co-created learning spaces in your classroom? What did you learn from your pre-service teacher certification program about historical narratives and counter narratives?
Unity Through Community	What did you learn from your pre-service teacher certification program about intersectionality? What did you learn from your pre-service teacher certification program about racial solidarity?
Intersectional Identity Development	What did you learn from your pre-service teacher certification program about supporting students in positive intersectional identity development? What did you learn from your pre-service teacher certification program about positive intersectional identity development for yourself?
Post Pilot Questions How did your participation in the WAESN Ethnic Studies endorsement pilot influence your understanding of the following concepts: - Understanding that teaching is political and we should foster students' consciousness toward transformation and liberation - Students' experiential knowledge should be central to curriculum and pedagogy, and dialogue is an important activity for students to engage in to have a sense of belonging - Students should be provided opportunities to be agents of change in their communities by examining relevant social, political, environmental, and economic issues - Students must have historical context about dominant narratives so they can look for and provide counter narratives - Students must learn about self and others to build solidarity across racial lines in a community responsive way - Educators and students must understand their identities as fluid and intersectional in order to transform and improve their communities After completing the WAESN Ethnic Studies endorsement pilot, how effective do you feel in teaching Ethnic Studies?	

I analyzed the data to identify themes that emerged (see Babbie, 2017; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Coding of data began during data collection to identify emerging patterns and determine saturation. This allowed me to critically reflect on all data as they were being collected. I coded manually using primary and secondary cycles (see Saldaña, 2014). The narratives created by participants were used to support and explain the themes (see Milner & Howard, 2013). Saturation was reached after six interviews, and no further interviews were required or conducted (see Saunders et al., 2018).

This study includes methodological triangulation in the form of member checking of data (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I conducted member checks with participants to verify accurate representation of their contributions. The transferability of the current research is limited by the fact that only participants of the WAESN pilot were invited to participate; however, this increased the dependability of data in that participants had similar levels of experience and expertise on the topic of this study (see Babbie, 2017; Milner IV & Howard, 2013; Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Results

Saturation of data became apparent very quickly during the interview process. All the participants had immediate and clear responses to the questions, leaving little doubt that none of them felt prepared to teach Ethnic Studies after completing their teacher preparation program.

The data resulted in several key themes demonstrating this lack of preparedness:

- Participants had varied levels of preparedness for teaching Ethnic Studies depending on the preparation program they completed.
- Little to no learning occurred on intersectionality or racial solidarity in their preparation programs.
- Learning in their preparation programs focused heavily on theory and not practical application of core concepts of Ethnic Studies as defined by the TIAHUI framework.
- While the pilot increased their confidence to teach Ethnic Studies, participants indicated it was not enough, and they needed ongoing support.

This section will explain each theme in greater detail and provide supporting evidence from the data collected.

Varied Levels of Preparedness

Five of the six participants completed a master's in teaching program at Washington state universities. The sixth participant, Marty, completed their master's in teaching program in New York state. Only one participant, Vicky, reported receiving explicit instruction on Ethnic Studies in their program at Seattle University.

Vicky explained that they were provided one 20-hour course on Ethnic Studies, but the information they learned about teaching in the Ethnic Studies course was in direct conflict with information they were learning in other courses of their program, specifically that what they were taught in their other courses was more aligned with liberal multiculturalism. Additionally, Vicky, who is Asian American, indicated that the disruption created by White students in their cohort who were uncomfortable with the topic made it challenging for them to get what they needed out of the Ethnic Studies course. James and Marsha also explicitly stated they were taught liberal multiculturalism, not Ethnic Studies, in their preparation programs. All other participants reported learning neither, except Stacy who said what they learned was an, " . . . accidental byproduct of some good social studies and other classes . . ." they took.

Stacy and Marsha, who both completed the teacher preparation program at Antioch University, had more positive responses to the questions than the other participants. For example, Marsha reported that seminal Ethnic Studies texts were assigned to them, including Paolo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, along with learning about concepts such as cultural wealth and democratic classrooms, or co-constructing learning spaces. Stacy indicated they were taught to teach antiracist, anti-homophobic, and anti-ableist topics. Conversely, James and Lisa reported that any antiracist concepts they learned in higher education came through their undergraduate programs and were directly contradicted in their teacher preparation programs. Lisa was a History major and James an American Cultural Studies major. Lisa shared that their current Ethnic Studies, antiracist practice, "... came out of the people I worked with ..." and not their teacher preparation program.

Marsha and Vicky shared stories of trying to implement their learning about antiracist practices in their student teaching practice and being punished for it. Vicky stated, "What I really learned from that experience is I have to keep my head down and not cause waves, because as soon as I cause waves, then consequences will be swift and heavy." Marsha was punished for teaching students letter-writing skills by having them write letters to the school district about one of their teachers' unfair grading practices.

No Intersectional Solidarity

While learning about topics such as racial disparities in education, cultural wealth, or the role of dialogue in learning varied between participants depending on their teacher preparation program, one topic that was glaringly missing in all the participants' programs was instruction on intersectionality or racial solidarity. When responding to the question, "What did you learn from your pre-service teacher certification program about intersectionality," James responded, "I don't recall intersectionality ever being mentioned." Lisa said, "None, none." Marsha sighed, "Oh, man. Nothing." Marty lamented, "For a special education program? Not enough." Stacy and Vicky both shared that intersectionality was discussed briefly in their programs, but they were not taught specifically about intersectionality and the role it played in their teaching practice. All the participants agreed that they neither learned anything about their own intersectional identity development nor how to support students in their intersectional identity development.

The responses to the question about racial solidarity were nearly identical to the responses about intersectionality. Vicky reported that anything they learned about interactions between racial groups was heavily steeped in White savior mentality, or the belief that White people need to save people of color from their lives. Marty indicated their program taught the opposite of racial solidarity, citing being taught about the Shaker Heights studies, which pit Black and White families against one another, using socioeconomics as a wedge (see Ferguson et al., 2001).

All Theory, No Practice

Despite the varying experiences of the participants, a common theme among all of their responses is that their learning about topics outlined in the TIAHUI framework in their programs was limited to studying theory. They all agreed they received no instruction in practical application of the topics. James summed up the sentiments of the other participants:

I do recall quite a bit of emphasis—when I say emphasis, there are classes again of like, philosophy of education. There are issues in education, but they tended to be at a certain level of abstraction. It tended to be a higher level of abstraction, right? So, it's almost, so very engaging, very interesting, but then, what do you do with that? That was the missing piece, and I think—maybe didn't necessarily highlight the tension between the technical and the transformational.

Stacy provided the most positive answers about their program of all the participants; however, they, too, reported it was all done in the abstract. When asked about what they learned about supporting student agency, Stacy replied:

I feel like it was something that was really acknowledged as something very important in classrooms, but I didn't feel like I got a lot of specific examples of how to do that besides a classroom charter and co-creating rubrics.

Vicky echoed Stacy saying, "They say that it's good, but I don't think that they did much directly to teach me how to do that." Additionally, Marty, Stacy, and Vicky reported that specific strategies they were taught were done so with classroom management and student compliance in mind, not to teach critical thinking skills or build relationships with students and their families.

The Need for Ongoing Support

All the participants reported feeling more prepared to teach Ethnic Studies in their grade level and content area after completing the WAESN pilot. Stacy and Vicky shared they felt more empowered after completing the pilot to create more learning opportunities for their students and to continue their own understanding of Ethnic Studies. Marty and Lisa both mentioned the need for continued learning, especially from their students. Marsha said the pilot led to a deepened commitment to balance teaching about oppression with teaching, ". . . resistance and liberation . . . struggle, and celebration, and beauty." James admitted that had he not completed the pilot, he would have taught liberal multiculturalism instead of decolonial Ethnic Studies.

Despite the growth reported by the participants, they all agreed they need more. James, Lisa, Marty, Stacy, and Vicky stated one of the most powerful experiences during the pilot was the professional community created for it. Lisa shared:

. . . I just feel like as educators, we are not often in community to grow ourselves for our students. Those things happened kind of in accidental spaces, and I feel like [the WAESN pilot was] a space where this [was] actually happening.

James added, ". . . I think having a cohort . . . helps people arrive at a place where they can interrogate, and hopefully, disabuse a propensity towards sort of a saviorism, or Messiah complex," suggesting a greater level of shared accountability than engaging in this learning individually.

The culminating activity for the pilot participants was the creation of a PGP. Table 3 demonstrates the commitment each participant made to continue their learning to become more effective Ethnic Studies pedagogues. The goals created demonstrate not only a commitment to improving their practice, but to ongoing learning and investigation, as well as re-committing to a student-centered

experience. The fact that Marsha quotes Marty in their goal is also confirmation of the value of learning in a cohort model or professional learning community.

Table 3 - Pilot Participant PGP Goals

Participant	PGP Goal
James	Ethnic Studies is about cultivating humanity and community through love. Gift giving is its expression. The challenge of adolescence is to notice, name, and claim our gifts so that as adults we can give our gifts to our communities. Unfortunately, schooling often teaches provisional self-esteem rather than unconditional self-love. Students learn to “wait for other people, better trained than ourselves, to make the meanings of our lives” (John Taylor Gatto). My professional goal is for students to make meaning for themselves. I want to develop an assessment model that does not simply show what students know, but invites students to share “precious knowledge” they “get” from each other then “give” this to their communities. The criteria for success: students will share their stories of what it means to be human by exploring questions of the heart (identity), head (history), hand (power), and helix (action).
Lisa	I want to create a curriculum that is more Ethnic Studies and student centered that brings in diverse voices and reflects collaboration with educators, families, students, and community.
Marsha	To borrow language from my colleague, Marty, I will “develop consent-based and student-centered competency opportunities.” Primary ways I’ll do this are to reflect and act on student feedback and my individual research to improve my teaching practices, and collaborate with students on creating more and varied ways to demonstrate and self-assess their growth in competencies practices in my classes, committees, advisory, and special programming / all-school events.
Marty	Developing consent-based and student-centered competency opportunities

Discussion

The data collected for this study confirmed previous studies on multiple levels. For example, the beliefs teachers held prior to their teacher preparation program sometimes had a greater influence on their teaching than their teacher preparation programs (Hubbard and Swain, 2017). James and Lisa both indicated this by stating their more radical beliefs about racism and systemic oppression came from their undergraduate learning, and even though James considered himself an antiracist teacher, he admitted that had he not completed the WAESN pilot, he would have taken a liberal multicultural approach to Ethnic Studies based on his prior understanding of it, confirming the research of Gorski and Parakh (2020). Vicky’s story about their White classmates’ resistance to learning about race and racism negatively impacting Vicky’s own learning confirmed the research of Allen (2022).

Each participant shared the lack of coursework on race and racism in their teacher preparation programs, confirming the research of Gorski and Parakh (2020) and Miller (2012). Only Marsha, Stacy, and Vicky stated they had been given explicit instruction on systemic oppression, but all participants of this study agreed anything they learned was limited to theory and not practice, which confirms the research of Martell (2016). This lack of practical application instruction played a significant role in participants' negative perceptions of self-efficacy in terms of teaching Ethnic Studies. It also required participants to supplement their approved curriculum with little to no guidance, or as in Marty's case, misguidance. In Marty's specific instance, the Shaker Heights example they were given emphasized the need for Black Americans to assimilate to achieve economic success, ignoring the legacy of slavery, Jim Crow Laws, and other systemic barriers.

This study builds on previous research by focusing specifically on Ethnic Studies, an antiracist and decolonial curriculum, instead of studying only antibias or antiracist curriculum. This is particularly relevant at this period in time as districts and state education agencies across the nation are approving or considering Ethnic Studies programs, including graduation requirements. The WAESN pilot also demonstrated its significance, because even after completing the 36 hours of professional learning in the pilot, participants reported feeling a need for more and ongoing support. This included the need for collaborative cohort models, which supports the research of Cherry-McDaniel (2019). Some of the benefits of the cohort model cited by participants were having a space where like-minded peers held them accountable to unlearning their biases, co-constructing knowledge, and opportunities for peer learning for understanding and unpacking complex topics like intersectionality.

Teachers in this study, who viewed themselves as antiracist Ethnic Studies educators, admitted they were poorly prepared to teach Ethnic Studies. The literature review laid bare the curriculum violence that occurs when teachers are ill-prepared to teach the concepts included in the TIAHUI framework. To create a successful and sustainable K–12 Ethnic Studies program, these realities must be taken into consideration by education leaders and policy makers. Studies have consistently shown that teachers enter the profession unprepared to engage in challenging discussions about their own identities, their students' identities, the racialized experiences of both, and systemic racial oppression. Teachers are letting us know they need and want training on these topics. An assumption can no longer be made that traditionally certificated teachers, such as history and literacy teachers, are capable of teaching Ethnic Studies.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Ethnic Studies Certification

Currently, as there are no guidelines from the state of Washington regarding teaching Ethnic Studies in K–12 settings, any certificated educator may be assigned to teach an Ethnic Studies course in Washington state. This study suggests that Washington state educators are largely unprepared to do so. I suggest creating an Ethnic Studies certification pathway in which aspiring Ethnic Studies teachers may earn a certificate through a program that provides instruction rooted in pan-Ethnic Studies and the TIAHUI framework. These two frameworks will help educators move beyond liberal multiculturalism, which Ladson-Billings (2021) cites as having no mechanism for sweeping and transformative change and focuses on systems of oppression that negatively impact all marginalized people.

I also recommend that the Ethnic Studies certification be a dual endorsement requirement. Because pan-Ethnic Studies can and should be taught in every subject and grade level, providing opportunities for educators to become dually endorsed would help the implementation of Ethnic Studies as an integrated, interdisciplinary model. The WAESN pilot and this study are evidence that teachers of various grade levels and content areas want to teach Ethnic Studies. Using a stand-alone model invites opportunities to marginalize Ethnic Studies instead of making it a core part of a student's learning experience. Lastly, implementing an integrated, interdisciplinary model for Ethnic Studies will make creating a graduation requirement more feasible as students would be able to meet the credit requirement in a variety of ways.

Further Research

What is often overlooked in studies like this is the Dunning-Kruger Effect (Dunning, 2011) among educators who lack the necessary pedagogical skills to teach Ethnic Studies. The Dunning-Kruger effect posits that people who are least qualified often have higher self-efficacy, because their ignorance on the topic prevents them from recognizing their ignorance (Dunning, 2011). Teachers experiencing the Dunning-Kruger Effect may mistakenly believe they are qualified to teach Ethnic Studies, but in reality, they are committing curriculum violence. A study on the self-efficacy of teachers who are assigned to teach Ethnic Studies but lack training in Ethnic Studies may lead to a better understanding of what is happening in Ethnic Studies classrooms.

More teacher preparation programs are claiming to provide antiracist and culturally responsive instruction. A study that focuses on graduates of these programs may help us understand their efficacy and what gaps, if any, in teachers' understanding of TIAHUI tenets persist.

Disclosure Statement

I provided professional development to the WAESN pilot participants and am a full-time employee of WAESN. One of the participants of this study attended a teacher preparation program in which I taught.

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Fronteras

Demetria Martinez

Algún día las fronteras dejarán de existir
porque demasiadas personas han muerto cruzando
porqué aún más personas han sobrevivido
las paredes se derrumbarán
niños y mariposas monarca
bailarán entre las ruinas
campos de girasoles florecerán
sobre las tumbas de los caídos
sus nombres —María, José, Jesús— serán inscritos
en una nueva poesía que no nos dejará olvidar.

Borders

Demetria Martinez

Someday borders will be no more
Because too many people died crossing
Because still more people survived
Walls will come tumbling down
Monarch butterflies and children
Will dance among the ruins
Fields of sunflowers will spring
Up over the graves of the fallen
Their names--Maria, Jose, Jesús--will be inscribed
In a new poetry that will not let us forget.

Borderlands Mural Series: Homecoming

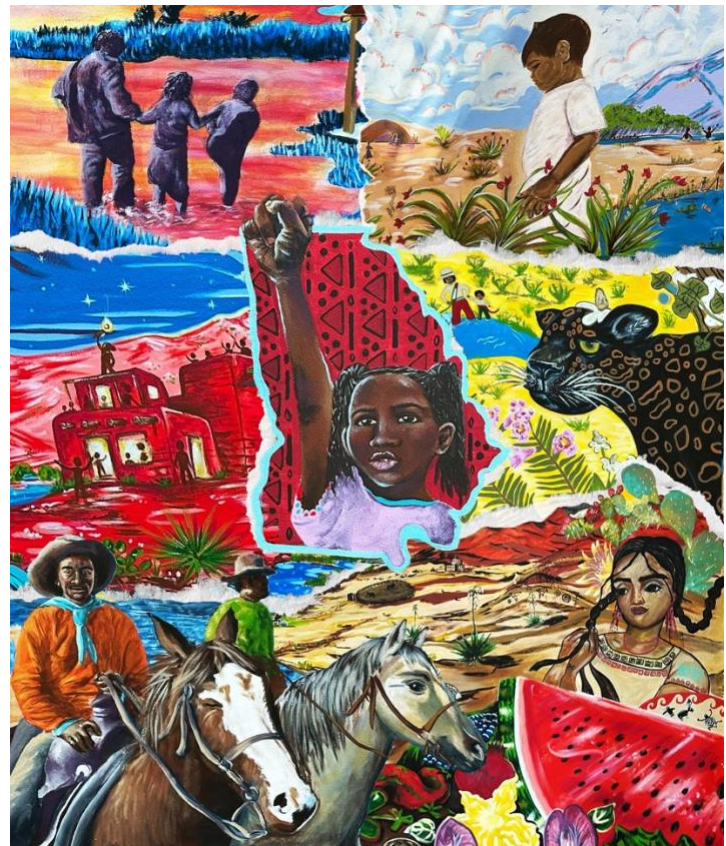
Designer: Alberto Campo

Artists: Norma Chairez, Beatrice Chavez, Celina Corral Arreola, Citlali Delgado, Ryan Duran, A. Billi Free, Al Na'ir Lara, and Saba

Artists' Statement

As artists, we came together to inspire people about the beauty and stories of these homelands. We hope the murals at O'Donnell Hall educate future educators, students, and many generations about what really happened in these lands and what is not often taught in our schools. We hope people feel good when they see the murals and are greeted with color, life, and togetherness.

As a collective of multidisciplinary border artists with multiple identities, we aim to capture what we see around us. We practice art because this is something original peoples do and have always done. This was an organic process. We are learning that collective healing and grieving is important. Healing also comes about by claiming space. "I am whole inside because of my people." Marking this reality is part of our work in these murals.



There are many ways to communicate beyond English and Spanish, including Indigenous languages that we need to learn and honor. Images and art are another way of communicating. We offer these murals to all the peoples who have lived here, who continue to live here, and who will migrate here, so we can all have broader perspectives and knowledges about history, beauty, and vast possibilities in ourselves and each other.

Cover Art Reflection: A Collaboration between Scholars and Borderlands Artists

Dulcinea Lara, New Mexico State University
Manal Hamzeh, New Mexico State University

Angela Valenzuela and Angela Davis' concept of "struggle on struggle" invites us to consider contemporary liberation struggles as scaffolded by previous struggles from another moment in time. The call to action of "struggle on struggle" also invites us to struggle together in solidarity against destructive forces. It is a call to un-erase the historical struggles in one context and bridge them with the recognizable struggles of the moment. It is a call to imagine our co-living now and in futurities of loving, harmony, and abundance on this earth with all beings.

In the Borderlands of southern New Mexico, west Texas, and north Chihuahua, Mexico, our university sits in/on the state and nation, prompting the urgent need to build solidarity. Colonization has shaped this region vis-a-vis militarism, religion, schooling, and state authority. The settler colonial power over our lands and peoples has been maintained through erasures of people's knowledges, ways of being, and histories, as well as people's disobedience, refusal, and resistance to western colonial hegemony.

New Mexican youth do not have many opportunities to learn about individual or collective resistance to empire, by design. Of course, some teachers offer these histories as curriculum, but they are not part of the official text.

In this moment of genocide, climate catastrophe, and autocracy, marking the emergence of Ethnic Studies in our university, we are trying multiple approaches to knowledge co-creation, dissemination, and understanding impact. We are working with play scripts, museum exhibitions, interactive games, mobile education pods, and a mural series on our campus that uplift local artists who might not otherwise be given wallspace by the formal routes and coded ways of naming "expert" knowledge creators.

Our latest mural, *Homecoming/Bienvenida*, featured on the cover of this issue, is the latest Borderlands and Ethnic Studies (BEST) "Borderlands Mural Project" series. It is housed in the lobby of our academic home, the College of Health, Education, and Social Transformation at New Mexico State University (NMSU). Overhanging the first floor above the lobby, the four murals are historical interpretations of Indigenous longevity dating back 20,000 years, as well as three moments of revolution, resistance, and refusal in the 17th, 19th, and 20th centuries. The fifth wall is home to a "fantastical" mural inviting viewers to see themselves in the "now moment" with peoples, animals, plants, and the land—in storytelling, amazement, dancing (breaking to quebradita), sharing

medicine, growing and eating good food, juggling, skateboarding, holding hands, and reflecting their wellbeing, knowledges, and imaginations for social transformation rooted in solidarity.

The *Homecoming/ Bienvenida* mural is rooted in ancestral knowledges about three resistance movements that happened near NMSU: the Pueblo Revolt of 1680, the Mexican Defection of 1848, and the Black Migration West of the early 1900s. It celebrates these lands as the crux of civilization in the western hemisphere, resulting from the uncovering of footprints in what is now called White Sands.

Homecoming/ Bienvenida celebrates the sacredness and people power in this region while inviting guests to imagine thriving futurities. The four upper-level murals unearth the stories of people's dignity and refusals, mostly left out of New Mexico's K-College curriculum. They inspired the visuals in the fifth mural, embodying the pluralities of Borderlands Peoples in the present, and simultaneously, imagining futurities of love, abundance, wisdom, transborder solidarities, and compassion.

The four colors undergirding the upper-level murals represent the Indigenous Medicine Wheel and the Four Sacred Directions: White/North, Red/East, Yellow/South, and Black/West. Intentional prayers are associated with these directions and colors.

Three of the BEST team and eight local artists, including two NMSU art students, collaborated to create vibrant murals that engage all who enter the building.

Ancestral Footprints
17" x 4"



The north upper-level mural, painted mostly in white hues, represents what is now called "White Sands," the sky, and the ancestral footprints.

This mural visualizes life dating back many thousands of years, when the landscape in the Tularosa Basin did not have the gypsum sand dunes but an abundance of water, foliage, and grasslands that

supported Ice Age animals like mammoths, dire wolves, and human life—in the harmony and balance depicted in the mural.

Pueblo Revolt of 1680
35" x 4"



The east upper-level mural reflects the Sun's origin and the Earth's rotation in red hues. The Pueblo Revolt of 1680 is the first of only two successful overthrows of colonizers in the Western Hemisphere.

This mural spans Shiprock, New Mexico, to Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua. It was a lengthy journey undertaken by Pueblo peoples to remove Spanish colonizers from their lands successfully.

Black Migration West, early 1900s
35" x 4"



The west upper-level mural shows transformation, mystery, and shadows in blue and black hues.

This mural honors the Great Migration West, when many African Americans escaped violence and Jim Crow laws in the South, resulting in many families settling in New Mexico. One such family was that of homesteader Francis Marion Boyer, who was instrumental in founding the state's all-Black town, Blackdom.

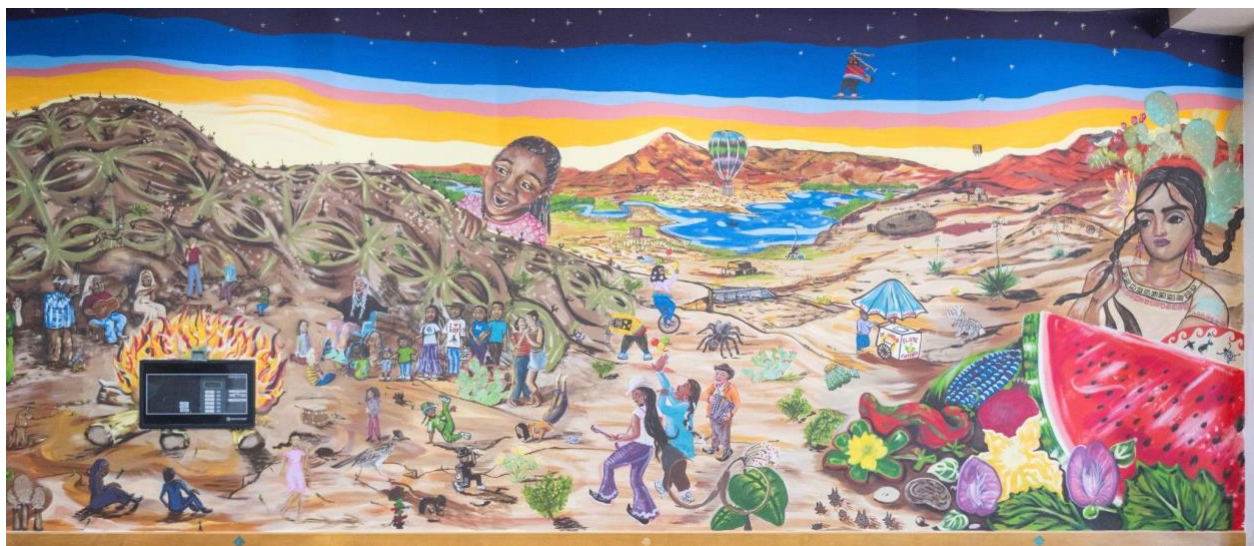
Mexican Defection of 1848
17" x 4"



The south upper-level mural represents abundance and growth in yellow and brings to life the Mexican Defection of 1848.

At the conclusion of the United States' war against Mexico, the U.S. took a huge portion of Mexican territory. Many Mexican nationals who did not want to become U.S. citizens defected back to Mexican territory—a North-to-South migration.

Homecoming
29" x 8"





The lower-level mural is a continuation of the four upper murals. Reflections of origin and landing places with historical elements are included throughout.

The mural includes magical realism and playful elements, such as Tortugas Mountain as a turtle shell, larger-than-life girls pointing to the four directional murals, and communities “conviviendo” like students at Homecoming. The mural is about joy, resistance, and solidarity across borders. People, animals, plants, and landscapes, both surreal and real, gather in a sacred space. Elements of the past, present, and future merge to show people celebrating, and building toward something new.

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Lead Editors: Marisol O. Ruiz & Nancy Perez

COVER IMAGE: "Borderlands Mural Series: Homecoming"

Artists: Norma Chairez, Beatrice Chavez, Celina Corral Arreola, Citlali Delgado, Ryan Duran, A. Billi Free, Al Na'ir Lara, and Saba

Designer: Iberto Campo



ABOUT THE JOURNAL

Ethnic Studies Pedagogies is an open access online journal committed to critical race, decolonial, and ethnic studies movements, bridging public pedagogies with PK-12 contexts. We invite submissions using critical frameworks and methodologies that theorize, investigate, and reflect upon the ecologies of power and resistance both inside and outside the PK-12 classroom.

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