

A Barrio pedagogy: identity, intellectualism, activism, and academic achievement through the evolution of critically compassionate intellectualism

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In this paper we forward our experiences and understanding of how we have used critical race theory (CRT) in our classrooms; more importantly, we bring forth the voices of students as a method of conveying the impact of our CRT classroom exercises. These exercises are parts of three structures that we created to counter the reality of racism and subordination within the American education system. These creations are: the Social Justice Education Project (SJEP); the Critically Compassionate Intellectualism Model of Transformative Education (CCI); and CCI's Third Dimension. An explanation and description of the SJEP and CCI are forthcoming in the next section of this paper, and in last section of this paper we explain CCI's Third Dimension.

Keywords: barrio; pedagogy; identity; intellectualism; activism; academic achievement; race; Chicano; Critical Race Theory; critical pedagogy; critically compassionate intellectualism

Introduction

The following was a dialogue that took place with one of our Chicana students. We believe that it establishes the context in which our educational *lucha* (struggle) is occurring. In this dialogue Tina is responding to a question about her educational experiences. Her forthcoming response offers a portrayal of the racially hostile environment that she experienced in schools and the deep and painful impact these they had upon her:

- Tina: You don't feel good about what is happening to you... kinda like something bad happened to you, and then they blame you and say it's our fault. Then you feel, ah... you feel really bad, and you start feeling like you shouldn't go back, like you need to stay away. Even though it's not good to not be in school, at least when you are not there you don't have that feeling, but then you start feeling guilty because you know you need education for a better life.
- Romero: Is there one word that you think defines this feeling?
- Tina: Damn, that's hard... [silence] the only word I guess is violated. I guess it could be like when women are raped, something is taken from them. In school they take our minds and our souls; they violate us with the way they try to give us school. (Romero 2008a, 163)

It is horrifying to think that young women would use rape to articulate her educational experiences. Moreover, this is even more egregious when one considers that this young woman who in the past has been physically raped, and now she unveils the

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psychological violence that she faced on daily basis in our schools at the hands of the administrators, teacher, and staff-members.

The social justice education project and the critical compassionate intellectualism model of transformative education

Tina was a member of the Social Justice Education Project's (SJEP) first student cohort. The SJEP provides students with all social science requirements for their junior and senior years of high school. The SJEP supplements the state mandated standards with advanced-level readings from Chicana/o studies, critical race theory, and critical theory. The intent is to help students enhance their level of critical racial, cultural, historical, and social conscious through a curriculum that meets state standards that affords students the opportunity to develop a more sophisticated critical analysis.

The youth voices within this paper were gathered with the intent of constructing the counter-narratives (Delgado and Stefancic 1993) or counter-stories (Delgado 1989) of these Chicana/o students. Counter-narrative or counter-stories are a critical race theory (CRT) methodology used to recount and re-document the realities and understandings of people they have racially and/or socially excluded from the traditional narrative.

The voices in this paper were gathered through informal interviews, open-ended focus group interviews, open-ended interviews, and informal talking circles. These multilayered methods have helped us develop a rich and deep understanding of the communal ground within the experiences of the students within the SJEP. The voices that we have focused upon are representations of this communal ground. In addition, these voices are the foundation of the epistemological, ontological, and intellectual agenda of the SJEP, the Mexican-American/Raza Studies Department, and our Critically Compassionate Intellectualism Model of Transformative Education (Cammarota and Romero 2006; 2008a).

The students that are represented within paper were students within southwest unified school district (SUSD), a district that is 56% Latino and 30% Anglo, with an enrollment of nearly 58,000. Over the last nine graduating class within SUSD the Latino enrollment has declined by anywhere from 32% to 49%. This means that from the time a Latino graduating enters SUSD school doors as freshman, their overall enrollment when it is time to walk across the graduation stage as seniors has been reduced by as much as 49% (class of 2000) to as little as 32% (class of 2007). SUSD's Latino graduating class of 2008 suffered a 38% loss of enrollment. Each of the students in this paper had dropped out at least once, none of the students were considered college bound by site personnel, each faced significant social and familial hardships, and each struggled with the irrelevance of school.

Before we move forward it is important to mention that as we have attempted to illuminate the realities of our students' experiences, and the likelihood that others within our system may be facing the same experiences. Despite personal and district-statements, the actions of our system have failed to rise above the level of rhetoric.

Through *Tezcatlipoca*, a Chicano Indigenous epistemology/concept/principle that speaks to a critical reflection of self, family, and community that calls for the liberation of the mind and spirit, we help our students create their counter-stories. These counter-stories help us understand that the experiences of Tina and our students are a reality – a reality that is perpetuated by a state of racialized hegemony that becomes

one of primary variables within the ontological and epistemological understanding of not only our students, but all students. This racialized understanding allows people to believe that the experiences of our students are an isolated abnormality, it allows people to excuse themselves from the dialogue because they are uncomfortable, and allows for the re-articulation of racism that gives racists the opportunity to use the words of Dr Martin Luther King as tool of their oppressive projects.

The SJEP, Mexican-American/Raza studies and our Critically Compassionate Model of Transformative Education (CCI) were created to counter the racist injustices that take place within our educational system. The CCI model was co-constructed and defined by the students from the SJEP's first cohort. The model's foundation is established upon three areas: curriculum, pedagogy, and student–teacher–parent interactions. According to our students this foundation has help them develop a strong social, cultural and historical identity that has allowed many of them to develop for the first time an academic identity, which also has helped the students develop a strong sense of academic proficiency (Romero 2008a). For many of our students, especially those in this paper, their experiences within the SJEP and with the CCI help develop the belief that education was something that could be theirs. Additionally, we have discovered that the students in our SJEP who experience the CCI pass our state's high stakes exit exam at a higher rate than all other similarly situated non-SJEP/CCI students at the four sites where we have the SJEP and use the CCI. Also, over the last four graduating classes our SJEP/CCI students graduate at a higher rate than similarly situated non SJEP/CCI Anglo students at our four sites (Romero 2008a).

In addition, we have used the understanding gained from critical race theory (CRT) as a foundation to our educational praxis (Freire 1994). CRT has helped us and our students construct educational experiences that deliberately center the issues of race and racism that adhere in American schools, and in American society. Within our focus have been the under representations of students of color (Latinos, African-Americans, and Native Americans) in: advance placement courses (Solorzano and Ornelas 2002, 2004), gifted and talented education, honors courses, and specialty magnet courses. Also, our students have focused on the overrepresentation of students of color in: shop courses, exceptional education, suspensions, referrals, etc. In addition, our students have focused disparity of programming, and the privileges extended to students in those programs.

CRT has confirmed our belief that we are able to foster within our students the understanding that they, their parents and their communities possess and construct a wealth of knowledge and capital (Delgado Bernal 2002; Yosso 2005, 2006), and are the fundamental facilitators of critical transformation (Romero 2008a, 2008b).

Critically compassionate intellectualism's third dimension

In the forthcoming six sections we describe the elements of the CCI's Third Dimension. CCI's Third Dimension came about as an attempt to more fully understand and explain the essence of CCI. The six elements of this Third Dimension were examined in Romero's (2008a) unpublished dissertation, and this paper is the first attempt to highlight these elements, and how they were experienced by our students. The six of elements of CCI's Third Dimension are:

- (1) The nurturing of blossoming intellectualism (*Xinachtli*) through authentic caring.

- (2) *Pedagogy de los barrios*.
- (3) Students as creators of knowledge.
- (4) Focus on collective and individual agency.
- (5) Organic intellectualism.
- (6) Academic and personal transformation.

The nurturing of blossoming intellectualism (Xinachtli) through authentic caring

Blanca believed that the convergence of critical race theory, critical pedagogy and authentic caring (the CCI model) led to a greater sense of relevance, a stronger critically racial consciousness, and a deeper sense of education that is built upon hope, family, and love. This experience is different from the text-driven, silent, lifeless, and artificial classroom experiences that had filled her education life prior to the SJEP and the CCI model:

That stays with me. Like I said, it wasn't just like another class where we just sit in class and there's a teacher in front and the whole banking education... It was more interaction and more like student and teacher. We got to know the teacher more, you got to know their life, and we got the chance to fight for a better life; that usually doesn't happen. (Romero 2008a, 172)

Through a Chicana/o epistemology and a sense of cultural intuition, the CCI teacher, along with students and parents, have a greater capacity to create an authentic caring educational environment that is constructed upon appreciation and respect for the Chicana/o community, its culture, and its historic struggle for educational equality (Cammarota and Romero 2006; Duncan-Andrade 2005; Gonzalez 1997; Sanchez 1997; Spring 1997; Valencia 2002, 2005; Yosso 2006). This appreciation and validation of students and the knowledge that they bring is known as *Xinachtli* (Chee-nach-tee). *Xinachtli* is a Chicano Indigenous epistemology/concept/principle meaning a process of nurturing the *semillas* (seeds) of knowledge. In this sense, the implementation of CCI is a process wherein students and their knowledge are acknowledged as precious *semillas*. Moreover, CCI reaches deeper into the students being by using *Xinachtli* as a platform upon which students are critical of their own epistemology and ontology.

A few of the primary exercises used in CCI classrooms are as follows: 'My history', 'Four tables', and 'I am' poems. The 'My history' is usually offered during the second or third week of school, after some SJEP context has been built and after student-teacher relations have had time to materialize. This exercise consists of five sections: 'The history of my life', 'My family's history', 'My history at high school', 'My views of my community and the world', and 'My future'. Each section includes a series of questions from which students choose what to address. Moreover, these questions are simply starting point or thought provokers. For many of our students, these questions are the first engagements of the critiques of their epistemology and ontology. We strongly encourage that teachers invest in some one-on-one time with students as they explore their responses, and, in some cases, as they reinvent the questions they are answering. It is in this space that we believe that dialogue is critical. Through dialogue we help students through their questioning process, as we introduce questions to their questions or as we answer our own epistemological and/or ontological questions.

This process within 'My history' is not overly complex; however, the depth that we are searching for is often deeper than students are accustomed. Nevertheless,

students should be encouraged to ask questions of regarding their questions, and to ask questions about their answers, and as they dialogue with parents and other family members, students should be encouraged to ask questions of thoughts and perspective held by family. A few simply but provocative questions are: ‘Why do you believe this?’ ‘Where did that belief come from?’ ‘Who does that belief benefit?’ ‘Who are we?’ ‘Why do we do these things?’ ‘What is our identity?’ ‘How was our identity constructed?’ In our experiences, we have watched students search deep for the meaning of their responses and the responses of their family members.

As students start to construct their histories or counter-histories, it is important that teachers build in both group dialogue time and one-on-one time with students. The group dialogue will cover many questions and concerns, and will help students towards a greater social, cultural, and historical reality because these are their counter-histories. However, the one-on-one after a more intimate dialogue is often needed when covering authentic social realities. Moreover, these processes give each student the opportunities they need to construct their counter-histories. This is often the introduction to the notion of counter-narratives or counter-storytelling (Delgado 1989). Counter-stories are the stories that counter the majoritarian story that legitimizes the Anglo story as the ‘American’ story. It is important that our students understand that their stories and the stories of their families and communities are legitimate ‘American’ stories and that they are significant and vital component of the fabric that makes America and Americans.

This ability to remake or recreate their schooling experiences offers Chicanas/os with the opportunity to realize and/or strengthen their humanity. It is for this reason that engaging students in the Chicano epistemological practice of Tezcatlipoca is vital. In this liberatory moment students are moved toward realizing their humanity through self, familial, and community critical reflections. Without their humanity, Chicanas/os struggle to gain a critical consciousness. Without humanity and a critical consciousness, these students become the premier prey for cultural and capitalist predators (McLaren and Gutierrez 1995).

You guys were like our tíos... like my dad even. There was that love, there was that cariño, there was that touch; you guys could relate to us, it was a relief. Finally, somebody that understood where we were coming from; we didn’t have to make this big ‘ol explanation to try to make you understand us... There was still that type of security and it was there and a lot of love, a lot of love for all of us to you guys and from you guys to us because you guys show it to us how much you guys went through for us. You guys did... *hicieron lo imposible* [did the impossible]... to make us get back on our feet and to make us want something out of life. (Romero 2008a, 206)

‘Four tables’ is an extremely effective exercise that Romero picked up along the way. The four tables are constructed as follows, in Figure 2.

In this exercise our students analyze and interpret a list of: concepts, theories and key words that become the theoretical foundation of our courses. These concepts, theories, and key words include, but are not limited to the following: *hegemony, social reproduction theory, theory of surplus equality, schooled by social class, cultural capital, subordinate group, dominant group, colonization, inequality of language theory, racial justice theory, resistance theory, race, racism, class, strategic conjuncture, oppression, fatalism, privilege, subtractive schooling, agency, transformation, resistance, dystopian parody, habitus, scapegoat, and power-knowledge*. As race conscious Freirean educators we have studied and directly experienced the same

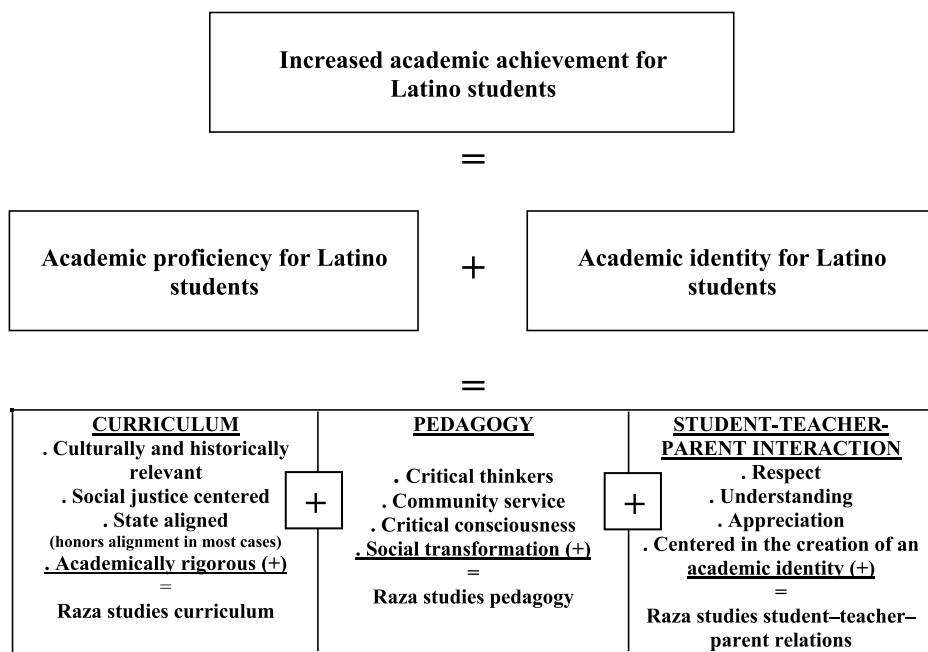


Figure 1. Critically Compassionate Intellectualism Model of Transformative Education.

Word	Word association
Definition	Picture

Figure 2. Four tables exercise.

conditions as many of our students. These words help us construct themes of our lived struggles and the context and content through which we define ourselves and our lived conditions (Freire 1994). Moreover, these are very words and themes that help us (student, teacher, and in many cases parents and community) construct our transformative critical praxis.

Our praxis helps us to understand that the opportunity to create a picture that is representative of the students' interpretation of the concept, theory or key word is the opportunity to construct new understanding and added meaning. The most critical part of the four tables exercise is the four table dialogue that takes place between student and teacher. In most cases the definition and word association are self-explanatory, but the most meaningful is the student's articulation of their picture that is representative of the word, theory or concept.

A few years back a student that I will call AC was discussing his artistic expression of subordinate group. Drawing from his experiences as a Disc Jockey, AC's picture had a turntable with some small speakers, a control for the volume, and one other knob. I said, 'AC how is this subordinate group?' He said, 'Romero that is all about subordinate group can't you see?' I said, 'Mijo I can't see it'. AC said, 'Romero it is all right there'. I said, 'I'm trying, but how do you get subordinate group from this turn

table with a few controls?’ He responded, ‘OK, look at my dominant group picture, maybe you will get it’. I turned to the dominant group picture; he had drawn a box with three turntables, lots of controls, and two huge speakers. I said, ‘Mijo I still don’t see it’. AC said, ‘Come on Romero look, subordinate group, less power and control: small speakers, one turn table, and only a few controls. Dominate group, more power and control: lots of turn tables, big powerful speakers, and lots of controls. Now do you see it?’ Yes, I did see it, and I did see how AC and other students were reinventing the ways in which each of these concepts, words, or theories could be explained in more meaningful and authentic ways.

‘I am’ poems present another opportunity to nurture greater critical consciousness and to engage in critical praxis. You need a statement about the purpose of the poems, ‘students express where they are situated in the world and what are their deepest hopes and concerns’. These poems offer teachers and students the opportunity for self-reflection and self-discovery. ‘I am’ poems also provide another opportunity for teachers and students to utilize the tri-dimensionalization process by asking them to explore and analyze the past and present conditions that have helped construct who they are at that moment, as well as what they presently see in their futures. After all ‘I am’ poems have been completed, each poem is presented and read in class. Equally important, CCI teachers share their poems with students, which is another opportunity for teachers to reveal their hearts and souls. The reciprocation of thoughts, concerns, fears, desires, etc, presents an opportunity for both teachers and students to establish greater connections, and it provides teachers with the opportunity to gain interpersonal capital with the students.

The expansion of humanistic, social, and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1996) is experienced during ‘I am’ poems. When we say humanistic capital, we are talking about the greater realization of ones humanity, and the socio-human investment and reinvestment that students make in those around them including their teachers, peers, and family. As the students grow in their critical consciousness and their humanity, the capacity of these socio-human investments expands and intensifies. In addition, we use a Bourdieuan lens as we define social and cultural capital, which we define as assets that are developed and enhanced by alliances, group membership or relationship; and education, knowledge or skills that are considered valuable by the dominant group. Moreover, both social and cultural capitals are used by most as tools of upward mobility. However, in our classrooms social and cultural capitals are used between teachers and students as a means of developing a stronger familial like bond.

If students see their teachers as human beings, they are more likely to invest their humanistic capital in that teacher. And, once this humanistic capital has been gained by the teacher, the relationship between teacher and student can become a reciprocating, authentic relationship (Valenzuela 1999). Social capital and cultural capital are gained from the teachers’ understanding and appreciation of the social and cultural assets students bring with them from the homes, barrios, and communities (Gonzales et al. 1995; Yosso 2005; Romero 2008a). The incorporation of these assets into the daily functions of the classroom helps create a scenario in which students can invest greater humanistic capital into their teacher. As a result, the authentic relationship between teacher and student is intensified. The following is an excerpt from our talking circle in which the topic was ‘I am’ poems:

- Olvia: Do you remember when you did those ‘I am’ poems in class last year?
Romero: Yes, I do them every year.

- Olvia: Do you know how much the other students really like doing those? Some would complain because, even though they seem simple, they are real hard.
- Romero: I think that most students have difficulty with the idea that they have to read them in class.
- Lozano: Yeah, students do not like that.
- Olvia: But, it was a lot different in our class because you [AR] read your poem in front of everybody. The part when you were talking about your Dad and you got tears in your eyes really changed everything. You were not this perfect-fake teacher, you were real, you were human. After that day me and a lot of students took our poems home and really thought about what we were going to say. In other classes your students were talking about their poems; I know people were working on their poems in other [classes outside my class] classes.
- Cammarota: So Olvia, what are you saying?
- Olvia: We need to do 'I am' poems, but you guys need to do them too, and you need to read them in class in front of all the students. Like with Mr Romero, after you show your human side, the students will have an easier time opening their human side to you and the whole class. For me and other students, that was when we knew that you were different than other teachers... Basically, we knew that you guys really cared about us as people; you guys wanted what was best for us without judging us, and that helped me and other students to open our eyes and minds to what you were saying and how you were trying to guide us to have more consciousness. (Romero 2008a, 237)

The 'I am' poems gave us the opportunity to reveal ourselves to our students, it gave us an opportunity to show them our souls, to show them that we cry, that we have fears, that we have desire, that we have dreams, and that we can and do love.

This an example of an 'I am' template:

First Stanza

I am (two special characteristics about person)

I wonder

I hear

I see

I want

I am (first line of the poem repeated)

Second Stanza

I pretend

I feel

I touch

I worry

I cry

I am (first line of poem repeated)

Third Stanza

I understand

I say

I dream

I try

I am (first line of poem repeated)

Again, as Oliva said, they appear simply, whoever if one is trying to reveal themselves, the process became much complex and involved. Moreover, the second and

third submission of 'I am' poetry often transcended the template as students felt more and more willing to express the depths of their critical consciousness. Sonia Zumosa transformed her 'I am' poem into the following:

Big Colorful Place

I and the big colorful place,

I see beautiful bright colors, bright flowers blooming with pride, I see nature as green as can be, then I see people.

The people that I see are tall and small, thin and thick. The looks are different and unique in every individual.

I can't help but watch all these people interacting with each other. Some just talk, other people fight with an anger so deep that it fills their head with a rage.

They seem unhappy. The people living unhappy lives know what's going on, they know how it is to live in an injustice [sic] place. Can you really blame them?

But I also notice one thing. I notice how some human beings seem to think their *pinche cabezas* that they are higher than another human being, that they are of big value,

and I notice how they spit in the face of these people whose skin is red and burnt from the flames of the sun and step on the hands that don't stop working, the ones that have blisters and their skin so rough and peely.

I hear the yells; I hear the altercations and the sayings.

They talk about society and illegal aliens coming in left and right to a Whites only place.

We all know who they call illegal aliens, but would they call a person from Europe an alien?

I listen to all this bullshit and I just think to myself.

They express it in the way of whoever doesn't have their color, falls beneath their shoe.

I think of just knocking the s*** out of them with the power that has been building up more and more and asking how does it feel to be down there.

They imagine that people like me are trouble and we evolved just to serve them.

But I try to believe and think positive.

We know their [sic] a lot of people out their [sic], with this attitude, so what do I do? Theirs [sic] only the way to think outside the premises and say something!

Santos Ricardo's 'I am' poem became a poem that advocates for conscious rap to used as a tool elevate the consciousness of the oppressed, and that tool be used as lever to help the oppress rise to the quest for humanization:

Lethal Injection

we call it the land of the free
 or is this hell, every breath that we breathe
 land of pain, suffering, greed and misery [sic]

they haven't gave [sic] nothing to us
 so we have to fight and take it
 everytime, we step, they just hate it

but everytime you hold us down
 will come up twice as strong
 so you better hate it

were [sic] here to stay
 here to play
 here to do those games
 will leave you confused and traped [sic] in a maze

we can't be color on color
 and be self-destructive
 we got to see each other as
 friends and be self-productive

but who will come up...
 luther king and X plus pac
 all stepped [sic] up, got lit up and rid of

and with the microphone piece, all those rappers
 only want to rap about hoes, money and now
 he or she killed that ese or nigga in the streets

I know there will never be peace
 but at least, rap about something positive
 so your fans can here [sic] on your beat

they take whatever they want
 cops, governments, the whole system
 so they are comitting [sic] a theft
 we will rise out of depth, fight till there's no one left

my words are weapons
 deadly as venomous
 porject [sic] my voice into your mind
 with a lethel [sic] injection

Pedagogy de los Barrios

The authentic caring of blossoming intellectuals approach is nurtured through our barrio pedagogy (Duncan-Andrade 2008). Duncan-Andrade through his work with our department has helped us define and name this barrio pedagogy. Within this pedagogy are the Freirean elements of problematization, true words, and tri-dimensionalization (Freire 1994). It is also crucial that we define these critical intellectual engagements as taking place both in the barrio and in the school. Moreover, the third space (Bhabha 1994; Moje et al. 2004) that is created in our classrooms is a convergence of the barrio and the institution. This third space challenges the status quo and

the stereotypes that exist within our educational institutions. This is a newly created pedagogical space that is driven by the need to challenge the epistemological and ontological understandings of our students and in many case their parents. Furthermore, our pedagogy is grounded in the understanding that race and racism are dominant variables within the tri-dimensionalized reality of our students, their parents, our communities, and within us as emancipatory educators (Romero 2008a).

As we reflected upon the voices of the students, it is clear that our true words influenced their ability to find their true words, and through their true words they to tri-dimensionalize their realities. We have interpreted true words to mean the actions that are informed by a high level of reflection that take places through a lens of respect and love (Romero 2008a). Moreover, in a number of cases the students created true words through conflict or through an evolution of understanding that opened the door for the creation and recreation of true words that established for them a transformed reality:

- Ansenia Valenz: I liked the class cuz they helped a lot because like they made me realize that I really need... I need to go to college and if I really want to change and help people... but what can they do? The media, the, what's that word? I can't say it.
- Cami Nieto: Hegemony?
- Ansenia Valenz: Yeah, that word. It prevents people from believing that things can change. People are scared to speak because they think if they make noise or shine the light someone will get them. But after awhile my family, even my mom started to be different. Anyways, my family and me now [we] see things different, and yeah I'm going to be somebody, but somebody who helps. (Romero 2008a, 246)

As we look back upon this process, we understand that in this process we created and recreated new spaces as we demonstrated an appreciation for the each students' reflections and perceptions, and in regards to the actions taken by students we offered guidance that was transformative in action versus those actions that may be self-defeating. Solórzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) have helped us conceptualize and operationalize these transformative actions which for us are those actions that directly name, assess, and engage oppression in a manner that perpetuates social justice.

In this pursuit of social justice we as well as our students constantly engage in the exercises of problemization and tri-dimensionalization of reality. We borrow both exercises of Freire (1994), and we have modified these exercises to meet our needs. The problematization process is broken into four phases: The four phases of the problem posing process are: (1) naming/identifying the problem; (2) analyzing causes of the problem; (3) finding solutions to the problem; and (4) reflecting on the process (Freire 1994). A modification to this process is our deliberate attempt to 'racismize' this process by asking our students to insert the race and racism variables to this Freirean exercise.

It is our belief that in the historical and social reality of the US the exclusion of the racismization process is a huge mistake, and will place us in the role as agents of injustice. Moreover, we add deeper contextualization to the racismization process by helping our students through the tri-dimensionalization of their realities. We describe tri-dimensionalization as the active connection we help students create between the past, present and future, and the meaning it has within our and any other emancipatory project. Blanca clearly articulates this tri-dimensionalization as she is explain her nurturing of an academic identity:

Yeah, the project helped me develop it [an academic identity] more because I didn't have my tía saying 'did you do your homework?' I was on my own. It helped me say 'you're doing this for yourself, for your dad, and your grandmother, and everyone else who struggled with you, and now it's your turn and you have to carry on'. (Romero 2008a, 197)

We see tri-dimensionalization in Tina's explanation of how she developed a deeper understanding of how she could engage and transform her epistemology and ontology, while simultaneously developing her academic identity:

We were being taught way advanced curriculum that you guys would teach at a university, and we were juniors and seniors in high school and reading out of critical race theory books, Paulo Freire. Looking at our own history and culture was really important, it gives you pride and makes you feel like you belong.

It also helped us become Chicanas or Chicanos, the way we see [understand] things was really important. I really liked that stuff, but the critical [pedagogy] stuff was the stuff that really opened my eyes. It helps you to have a deeper understanding, and makes you see through the surface. It helps you ask questions, and helps connect this stuff to right now, our history, and like it helped us connect those things to the future. That is what made it real, like nothing ever before. This made more sense. It helped us understand the fucked up shit we did, *pero* it helped us understand that we could fuck them up if we studied our shit.

If our shit [culturally relevant course work, critical course work and research] was tight, they could not stop us. Yeah, we had to play some of their game, but like you said, nothing is better than beating them at their own game. Look at us now, we won. Look at where we started, and look at me, us, now. Shit, so many of my teachers told me to just dropout. You know they actually told me to drop out, and they told it to Rolando, Ramiro, Ansenia – I mean all of us they told to drop out. The class helped us understand that we could fight them, and it taught us that doing good in school and graduating was the way we could win. But, Romero, it taught us that the way to really win is when we make changes in our community or in our school. (Romero 2008a, 204)

Students as creators of knowledge

Dolores Delgado Bernal (2002) has helped us understand that our students are constructors of knowledge versus simply students who are solely in need of the knowledge that we have to offer. In our state of authentic caring, we have developed what Delgado Bernal (1998) refers to as a Chicana/o epistemology, an epistemology that is reflective of the unique history that arises from the social, political, and cultural conditions that Chicanas/os faced and still face. The intersectionality of these two spaces have helped us recognize and operationalize the epistemology, ontology, and consciousness that leads to the recontextualization of a student's social reality. The students in this study have defined this epistemology and consciousness as being built upon a sense of inferiority, fear, and hopelessness. Most often, all that is created from the oppressor group's epistemology and consciousness is the perpetuation and rearticulation of itself. However, these same students have articulated that in their recontextualized ontology, a different reality is created regarding them and what is possible within their world.

Each of the students in this study articulates their belief that the development of a recontextualized way of knowing and thinking helped them to engage more effectively with the world. Each of the students believes that he or she can and does contribute positively to society; and each believes that he or she has the capacity to

change his or her present-day and future reality. For the unconscious or dysconscious, these recontextualizations may seem insignificant, but for students who were caught in the state of hopelessness and despair, these transformations have led to a new state of hope and critical consciousness. The beauty of this state is the students' understanding that it is from these conditions that they can truly create new truths for themselves (Romero 2008a, 2008b). In this regard, Rolando stated:

At the time we couldn't understand the things they were saying, but now I know. The class, the project, I mean you guys showed the students that we could say something; we didn't have to be scared. We know that we need to stand up. We are conscious, and we need to use our conscience for justice, and to fight racism. Damn Mister, this was the best part, one of the best parts. (Romero 2008a, 121)

Focus on collective and individual agency

Another area of significant impact for our students is the understanding of the agency they possess and can create in the pursuit of anti-racist projects. In explaining the impact and understanding gained from the CCI model, Blanca explained that she now knows that she could help, 'provide a change... to help kids, to help other students see that there are options out there and that we could better our community, to better ourselves' (Romero 2008a, 194). This acting upon and countering of injustice to create change to rehumanize is also framed within a Chicano Indigeneous framework of *Huitzilopochtli* (Weet-zee-lo-poch-tee). In these classes where CCI is utilized, the continuous validation of the students' culture is put forth through the identification and engagement in this process. It is through this Chicano epistemological process of *Huitzilopochtli* that students act upon 'la voluntad' (the will) to be positive, progressive, and creative to bring about justice and rehumanization for themselves as well as for those who have the power and position to dehumanize. This sense of critical consciousness and organic intellectualism are the two strands within Blanca's voicing of the impact that the CCI model had upon her.

Another area that Blanca focused upon is the idea of engagement created by the social relevance of the class and the CCI model. She states that this relevance created a stronger sense of connectedness to the overall experience of the class:

It was very interesting. I just enjoyed going to your class and seeing what experience they [would] have to say about their life. It was an eye opener... it was so relevant to our thinking and our lives. (Romero 2008a, 227)

Organic intellectualism

We have defined transformative actions as the type of interactions that nurture and foster within students, parents and teachers the courage and understanding needed to change the racial and social order inherent within the US educational system, and its society. Through the use of true words these transformative interactions were used as mechanisms to create a war of position and to inspire a strong sense of organic intellectualism within the students, the parents, and the teachers.

The pursuit of organic intellectualism is the means by which CCI students and teachers transcend the liberal notion of being something to everyone, wherein we are nothing to anyone, much less, something for ourselves. Organic intellectualism (Gramsci 1999) is the means by which the oppressed do for themselves, for our own

good. In this process, intellectuals from the barrios, the ghettos and the reservations are nurtured through the lens of CCI with the objective being the attainment of organic intellectualism. Within this process, social and political reality is problematized and racismized through the exercise of praxis, and with the intent of fostering self, social, and structural transformation (Solórzano and Delgado Bernal 2001).

In her explanation of the impact CCI had upon her, it is obvious that the academic identity and academic proficiency that is nurtured within Blanca helped her in her development of her critical consciousness and her sense of organic intellectualism. Her organic intellectualism is evident by her desire to learn more and more as a means of advancing her community:

Yeah, it [CCI] helped me relate to education more. It helped grow stronger in my other classes because I wanted to do something that would help. I felt like doing the work in the other classes would give me a chance to do more for the people; it gave a chance to do more, to help more. I mean, the more I knew, the more I could help. Like you said, the things we learned would become our weapons because our mind and our words would be stronger. (Romero 2008a, 198)

Tina's final statement during her interview centered on the principles within organic intellectualism in that she connected the development of her intellectualism to the development of community and responding to those who are in need:

You guys made us learn to live and love life. You guys taught us that and from now on I'm going to carry those intellectual weapons, like you say, and all the things that I learned from the project to help me succeed in life and to help others. (Romero 2008a, 203)

Academic and personal transformation

In this process, intellectuals from the barrios, the ghettos and the reservations are nurtured through the lens of CCI with the objective being the attainment of organic intellectualism. Within this process, social and political reality is problematized and racismized through the exercise of praxis, and with the intent of fostering self, social, and structural transformation (Solórzano and Delgado Bernal 2001).

In her explanation of the impact CCI had upon her, it is obvious that the academic identity and academic proficiency that is nurtured within Tina helped her in her development of her critical consciousness and her sense of organic intellectualism. Her organic intellectualism is evident by her desire to learn more and more as a means of advancing her community:

The project [CCI] helps us because we learned a new way of thinking. We took the pill¹ [laughing]. Now we can't go back, but this is better because now we see the matrix. They can't fool us. Sometimes it hurts more because we can see everything, well now we can fight it too. Before, we were fighting the wrong way.

I love the project, it was great, and it helped me feel smarter and know that I could challenge the teachers, and the project gave the idea that I could help my community, and that is what I am going to do with my life. (Romero 2008a, 203)

When the SJEP was created, the primary intent was not to foster academic proficiency or an academic identity, but, rather, the primary focus is to help students develop their critical consciousness and, through this process, we would attempt to

help the students develop a strong sense of organic intellectualism. I believed that through construction and reconstruction of consciousness and identity, our students would move themselves towards stronger academic identities and higher degrees of academic proficiency (Romero 2008a).

Very seldom, if ever, did we dialogue about doing better in this class, much less other classes. The same is true about the notion of academic identity; the dialogue regarding identity is that of the social, cultural and historic self. In essence we discussed who the students are, where they come from, and what this means in the present day context, as well as how this understanding could transform their lives and help them engage their epistemology today and transform the ontology they will carry into tomorrow.

As a result of this student and teacher transformation, CCI seeks to nurture intellectuals that Said (1994) articulates as constituting 'a clerisy... since what they uphold are eternal standards of truth and justice that are precisely not of this world' (5). CCI in its praxis seeks to nurture intellectuals that are products of the oppressed groups, and who use, for these oppressed groups, all of their skills and power to engage and transform the oppressor group's hegemony. In this engagement is the potential of untested feasibility, or the truth or justice that may exist just beyond the walls of our consciousness.

In this transformation these students fully understood the necessity to commit themselves to a transformational resistance orientation. The nature and scope of their research and the way they have led their lives are articulations of their commitment to social justice and the dismantling of society's structures of inequality.

It is in this tri-dimensionalized state that our SJEP students started to experience greater academic success, and it is therein that our student developed their academic identities. It is in this space that our Oliva began to think about education in a different manner:

Your class got me really interested in learning and like education because, like before, I probably wouldn't have graduated on time because I was already really behind... I had a lot of family problems and I ended up not going to school for a whole year. After I became involved with the project, I had a lot of motivation to get finished, and, like the class, really made an impression on me that without education, without a high school diploma and going on to college, you really wouldn't be successful in life. I did better in all my classes; I think I knew that if I could do all the college assignments in our class, I could do the other BS stuff in my other class. I realized that I wanted an education. (Romero 2008a, 186)

Conclusion

Figure 3 is an image of the evolutionary transformation of the CCI model and its six evolutionary elements.

This model like the first was created primarily through the voices of our students. Our students have been critical in our education about what it means to a liberatory educator. In fact, it is our belief that if it were not for our students our practical and real world knowledge would significantly diminished.

As we evolve in our teaching and as our students better educate us, we look forward to the transformations and evolutions that await us and our students. Moreover, we look forward to experiencing the social and education transformations that will be made by our students, and other students and teachers who are engaged in the pursuit of racial and social justice in the US and all over the world.

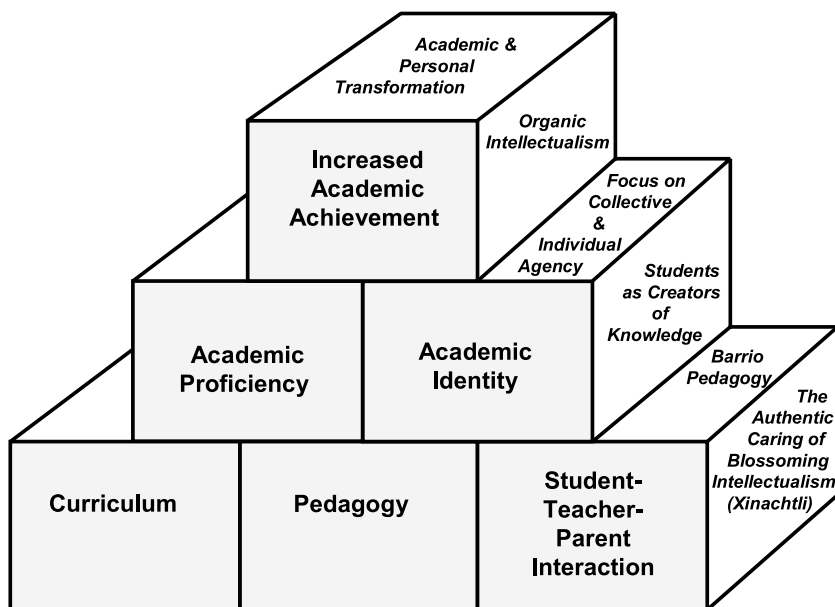


Figure 3. The evolutionary tri-dimensionalization of the critically compassionate intellectualism model of transformative education.

Notes

1. The pill is a reference to the Matrix wherein Neo is asked to take a red or blue pill. If he takes the red pill he will be able to see the world in its truest form; however, if he takes the blue pill he will continue to see the world only as it has been constructed for him to see it. Romero found that this scene helped our students better understand the notion of a critical consciousness. Our students came to understand that if they took the pill of critical consciousness they like Neo who took the red pill would be able to see the world in the most critical or truest form. However, if they did not take the pill of critical consciousness, they would remain in their naïve or magical realities.

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