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**Maintaining Social Justice Hopes within Academic Realities: A Freirean Approach to Critical Race/LatCrit Pedagogy**

# MAINTAINING SOCIAL JUSTICE HOPES WITHIN ACADEMIC REALITIES: A FREIREAN APPROACH TO CRITICAL RACE/LATCRIT PEDAGOGY<sup>1</sup>

DANIEL G. SOLÓRZANO & TARA J. YOSSO

## INTRODUCTION

Scholars have commented that by the time of his death in 1997, Paulo Freire had moved well beyond his early work in *PEDAGOGY OF THE OPPRESSED*.<sup>2</sup> We understand that position, but we also argue that Freire's early work continues to provide a critical framework for educators struggling for social justice.<sup>3</sup> Freire's early work provides a powerful tool because of its parsimony and simplicity, and because it is "not less complex . . . but simply more accessible."<sup>4</sup> In this article, we merge the critical pedagogical work of Paulo Freire with the critical race and Lat-Crit frameworks.

### I. CRITICAL RACE THEORY AND CRITICAL RACE PEDAGOGY

How can we better understand the role of critical pedagogy in higher education? One theoretical framework that can be used to help answer this question is critical race theory. Critical race theory draws from and extends a broad literature base that is often termed critical theory. In paraphrasing Brian Fay,<sup>5</sup> William Tierney has defined critical theory as "an attempt to understand the oppressive aspects of society in order to generate societal and individual transformation."<sup>6</sup> Indeed, for our purpose here, critical race theory is "a framework or set of basic perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze, and transform

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1. This article is a response to question posed by a participant at the opening plenary session of LatCrit V in Breckenridge Colorado, May 4-7, 2000.

2. PAULO FREIRE, *PEDAGOGY OF THE OPPRESSED* (Myra Bergman Ramos trans., Herder & Herder 1972) (1970).

3. *See generally* BELL HOOKS, *TEACHING TO TRANSGRESS: EDUCATION AS THE PRACTICE OF FREEDOM* (1994).

4. BELL HOOKS, *TALKING BACK: THINKING FEMINIST, THINKING BLACK* 39 (1989) (discussing the goal of feminist theory without mentioning Freire's work).

5. BRIAN FAY, *CRITICAL SOCIAL SCIENCE: LIBERATION AND ITS LIMITS* (1987).

6. WILLIAM G. TIERNEY, *BUILDING COMMUNITIES OF DIFFERENCE: HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY* 4 (Henry A. Giroux & Paulo Freire eds., 1993).

those structural and cultural aspects of society that maintain”<sup>7</sup> subordinate and dominant racial positions in and out of the classroom.<sup>8</sup>

Mari Matsuda views critical race theory as

the work of progressive legal scholars of color who are attempting to develop a jurisprudence that accounts for the role of racism in American law and that work toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of eliminating all forms of subordination.<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, the overall goal of a critical race pedagogy in higher education is to develop a pedagogical strategy that accounts for the central role of racism in higher education, and works toward the elimination of race and racism as part of a larger goal of opposing or eliminating other forms of subordination such as gender, class, and sexual orientation in and out of the classroom.

Critical race pedagogy in education has “at least five elements that form its basic perspectives, research methods, and pedagogy.”<sup>10</sup> They are: (1) the centrality and intersectionality of race and racism; (2) the challenge to dominant ideology; (3) the commitment to social justice; (4) the importance of experiential knowledge; and (5) the use of interdisciplinary perspectives.<sup>11</sup>

#### A. *The Centrality of Race and Racism and their Intersectionality with Other Forms of Subordination*

A critical race pedagogy starts from the premise that race and racism are endemic, permanent, and in the words of Margaret Russell, “a central

7. Daniel G. Solórzano, *Images and Words that Wound: Critical Race Theory, Racial Stereotyping, and Teacher Education*, 24 TEACHER EDUC. Q. 5 (1997).

8. See generally MARI J. MATSUDA ET. AL., WORDS THAT WOUND: CRITICAL RACE THEORY, ASSAULTIVE SPEECH, AND THE FIRST AMENDMENT (1993); TIERNEY *supra* note 6.

9. Mari J. Matsuda, *Voices of America: Accent, Antidiscrimination Law, and a Jurisprudence for the Last Reconstruction*, 100 YALE L.J. 1329, 1331 n.7 (1991).

10. Daniel G. Solórzano, *Critical Race Theory, Race and Gender Microaggressions, and the Experience of Chicana and Chicano Scholars*, 11 INT’L J. QUALITATIVE STUD. EDUC. 121 (1998). See generally Solórzano, *supra* note 7.

NOTE: The authors rely on, and substantially quote from, these two works in explaining these five elements in the five immediately following sections. For the sake of clarity, quotation marks and block quotes have been omitted from these sections. All quotations to other works have been verified.

11. See Solórzano, *supra* note 10; Solórzano, *supra* note 7. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic have compiled three comprehensive annotated bibliographies on critical race and LatCrit theory. See Richard Delgado & Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Annotated Bibliography*, 79 VA. L. REV. 461 (1993) [hereinafter Delgado & Stefancic I]; Richard Delgado & Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Annotated Bibliography 1993, A Year of Transition*, 66 U. COLO. L. REV. 159 (1995) [hereinafter Delgado & Stefancic II]; Jean Stefancic, *Latino and Latina Critical Theory: An Annotated Bibliography*, 10 LA RAZA L.J. 423 (1998).

rather than marginal factor in defining and explaining individual experiences of the law."<sup>12</sup> Although race and racism are at the center of a critical race analysis, we also view them at their intersection with other forms of subordination such as gender and class discrimination.<sup>13</sup> As Robin Barnes has stated, "Critical Race scholars have refused to ignore the differences between race and class as basis of oppression . . . Critical Race scholars know that class analysis alone cannot account for racial oppression . . ."<sup>14</sup> We argue further that class and racial oppression cannot account for gender oppression. This intersection of race, gender, and class is where one can find some answers to the theoretical, conceptual, methodological, and pedagogical questions related to the experiences of People of Color.<sup>15</sup> We also concur with John Calmore in that what is noticeably missing from the discussion of race is a substantive discussion of racism.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, in moving beyond a discussion of race, we must name, define, and focus on racism. For our purpose here, we use Manning Marable and define racism as "the system of ignorance, exploitation, and power used to oppress African-Americans, Latinos, Asians, Pacific Americans, American Indians and other people on the basis of ethnicity, culture, mannerisms, and color."<sup>17</sup> Marable's definition of racism is important because it shifts the discussion of race and racism from a Black/White discourse to one that includes multiple faces, voices, and experiences.

### B. *The Challenge to Dominant Ideology*

A critical race pedagogy challenges the traditional claims that the educational system and its institutions make toward objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity. Critical race educators argue that these traditional claims act as a camouflage for the self-interest, power, and privilege of dominant groups in U.S. society.<sup>18</sup>

12. Margaret M. Russell, *Entering Great America: Reflections on Race and the Convergence of Progressive Legal Theory and Practice*, 43 HASTINGS L.J. 749, 762-63 (1992).

13. See generally Kimberlé Crenshaw, *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics*, 1989 U. CHI. LEGAL F. 139; Kimberlé Crenshaw, *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color*, 43 STAN. L. REV. 1241 (1991).

14. Robin D. Barnes, *Race Consciousness: The Thematic Content of Racial Distinctiveness in Critical Race Scholarship*, 103 HARV. L. REV. 1864, 1868 (1990).

15. For this study, the terms People, Faculty, Scholars and Students of Color are defined as those persons or scholars of African American, Latina/o, Asian American, and Native American ancestry. Chicanas and Chicanos are defined as female and male persons of Mexican ancestry living in the United States. These terms contain a political dimension that this paper does not discuss.

16. See generally John O. Calmore, *Exploring Michael Omi's "Messy" Real World of Race: An Essay for "Naked People Longing To Swim Free"*, 15 LAW & INEQ. 25 (1997).

17. MANNING MARABLE, *BLACK AMERICA: MULTICULTURAL DEMOCRACY IN THE AGE OF CLARENCE THOMAS AND DAVID DUKE* 6 (1992).

18. See generally John O. Calmore, *Critical Race Theory, Archie Shepp, and Fire Music: Securing an Authentic Intellectual Life in a Multicultural World*, 65 S. CAL. L. REV. 2129 (1992); Solórzano, *supra* note 7.

In addition to challenging the way we examine race and racism, Kimberlé Crenshaw and her colleagues have argued that critical race theory also tries "to piece together an intellectual identity and a political practice that would take the form both of a left intervention into race discourse and a race intervention into left discourse."<sup>19</sup> Anthony Cook also stated that "[i]t is this profound critique of norms, background assumptions and paradigms, within which Black progress and regress take place, that gives Critical Race Theory its critical bite."<sup>20</sup>

### C. *The Commitment to Social Justice*

A critical race pedagogy is committed to social justice and offers a liberatory or transformative response to racial, gender, and class oppression.<sup>21</sup> We envision social justice education as the curricular and pedagogical work that leads toward (1) the elimination of racism, sexism, and poverty, and (2) the empowering of underrepresented minority groups. Critical race educators acknowledge that educational institutions operate in contradictory ways, with their potential to oppress and marginalize co-existing with their potential to emancipate and empower.

### D. *The Centrality of Experiential Knowledge*

Critical race pedagogy recognizes that the experiential knowledge of Faculty of Color is legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination. In fact, critical race pedagogy views this knowledge as a strength and draws explicitly on the lived experience of People of Color by including such methods as storytelling, family histories, biographies, scenarios, parables, *cuentos*, chronicles, and narratives.<sup>22</sup> In our analysis, we incorporate the experiential knowledge of Faculty and Students of Color by drawing from inter-

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19. *Introduction to CRITICAL RACE THEORY: THE KEY WRITINGS THAT FORMED THE MOVEMENT*, at xix (Kimberlé Crenshaw et al. eds., 1995).

20. Anthony E. Cook, *The Spiritual Movement Towards Justice*, 1992 U. ILL. L. REV. 1007, 1010 (1992).

21. See generally Matsuda, *supra* note 9.

22. See generally CRITICAL RACE THEORY: THE CUTTING EDGE (Richard Delgado ed., 1995); DERRICK BELL, AND WE ARE NOT SAVED: THE ELUSIVE QUEST FOR RACIAL JUSTICE (1987); RICHARD DELGADO, THE COMING RACE WAR?: AND OTHER APOCALYPTIC TALES OF AMERICA AFTER AFFIRMATIVE ACTION AND WELFARE (1996) [hereinafter DELGADO, THE COMING RACE WAR?]; RICHARD DELGADO, THE RODRIGO CHRONICLES: CONVERSATIONS ABOUT AMERICA AND RACE (1995) [hereinafter DELGADO, THE RODRIGO CHRONICLES]; Enrique R. Carrasco, *Collective Recognition as a Communitarian Device: Or, of Course We Want To Be Role Models*, 9 LA RAZA L.J. 81 (1996); Richard Delgado, *On Telling Stories in School: A Reply to Farber and Sherry*, 46 VAND. L. REV. 665 (1993); Richard Delgado, *Storytelling for Oppositionists and Others: A Plea for Narrative*, 87 MICH. L. REV. 2411 (1988) [hereinafter Delgado, *Storytelling for Oppositionists and Others*]; Michael A. Olivas, *The Chronicles, My Grandfather's Stories, and Immigration Law: The Slave Traders Chronicles as Racial History*, 34 ST. LOUIS U. L.J. 425 (1990).

view data, the research literature, biographical and autobiographical data, and other literary sources to create a counterstory.<sup>23</sup>

### E. *The Transdisciplinary Perspective*

A critical race pedagogy challenges ahistoricism and the unidisciplinary focus of most analyses and insists on analyzing race and racism by placing them in both an historical and contemporary context.<sup>24</sup> Critical race pedagogy utilizes the transdisciplinary knowledge base of ethnic studies, women's studies, sociology, history, law, and other fields to better understand racism, sexism, and classism in and out of the classroom.

In this article, we take each of these five themes and apply them to Freirean pedagogy. These themes are not new in and of themselves, but collectively, they represent a challenge to the existing modes of scholarship. Indeed, a critical race pedagogy is critical and different from other frameworks because: (1) it challenges the traditional paradigms, methods, texts, and discourse on race, gender, and class; (2) it helps us to bring to the forefront and focus on the racialized and gendered experiences of People of Color; (3) it offers a liberatory or transformative method to racial, gender, and class oppression; and (4) it utilizes the interdisciplinary knowledge base of ethnic studies, women's studies, sociology, history, and the law to better understand the various forms of oppression.

Indeed, critical race pedagogy names racist injuries and identifies their origins. In examining the origins, critical race pedagogy finds that racism is often well disguised in the rhetoric of shared values and neutral social scientific and educational principles and practices.<sup>25</sup> However, when the ideology of racism is examined and racist injuries named, victims of racism can find their voice. Further, the injured discover that they are not alone in their subordination. They become empowered participants, hearing their own stories and the stories of others, listening to how the arguments are framed, and learning to make the arguments themselves. It is at this point where the pedagogy of Paulo Freire is most useful for critical race scholars. Indeed, evidenced in the following counterstory, Freirean pedagogy begins with "naming the problem" or, as critical race theorists say, "naming the injury."

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23. See generally Delgado, *Storytelling for Oppositionists and Others*, *supra* note 22.

24. See generally Richard Delgado, *The Imperial Scholar: Reflections on a Review of Civil Rights Literature*, 132 U. PA. L. REV. 561 (1984); Richard Delgado, *The Imperial Scholar Revisited: How To Marginalize Outsider Writing, Ten Years Later*, 140 U. PA. L. REV. 1349 (1992); Ruben J. Garcia, Comment, *Critical Race Theory and Proposition 187: The Racial Politics of Immigration Law*, 17 CHICANO-LATINO L. REV. 118 (1995); Angela P. Harris, *Forward: The Jurisprudence of Reconstruction*, 82 CAL L. REV. 741 (1994); Olivas, *supra* note 22.

25. See generally MATSUDA, *supra* note 8.

## II. CRITICAL RACE PEDAGOGY AND COUNTERSTORYTELLING

In order to integrate critical race theory with critical pedagogy, we use a technique that has a long tradition in the social sciences, humanities, and the lawstorytelling. Richard Delgado uses a technique called counterstorytelling.<sup>26</sup> Delgado argues that counterstorytelling is both a method of telling the story of those experiences that have not been told (i.e. those on the margins of society) and a tool for analyzing and challenging the stories of those in power and whose story is a natural part of the dominant discourse—the majoritarian story.<sup>27</sup> These counterstories serve five pedagogical functions: (1) they build community among those at the margins of society; (2) they challenge the perceived wisdom of those at society's center; (3) they open new windows into the reality of those at the margins of society by showing the possibilities beyond the ones they live and that they are not alone in their position; (4) they teach others that, by combining elements from both the story and the current reality, one can construct another world that is richer than either the story or the reality alone; and (5) they provide a context to understand and transform established belief systems.<sup>28</sup> Storytelling has a rich and continuing tradition in the African American,<sup>29</sup> Chicana/o,<sup>30</sup> and Native American<sup>31</sup> communities, and as Delgado has stated, “[o]ppressed groups have known instinctively that stories are an essential tool to their own survival and liberation.”<sup>32</sup>

We add to this tradition by illuminating the lives of critical educators, who may at times be at the margins of higher education.<sup>33</sup> As a way

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26. See generally Delgado, *Storytelling for Oppositionists and Others*, *supra* note 22.

27. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic have defined the majoritarian mindset as “the bundle of presuppositions, perceived wisdoms, and shared cultural understandings persons in the dominant group bring to discussions of race.” Delgado & Stefancic I, *supra* note 11, at 462.

28. See generally Delgado, *Storytelling for Oppositionists and Others*, *supra* note 22; Raneta J. Lawson, *Critical Race Theory as Praxis: A View from Outside the Outside*, 38 *How. L.J.* 353 (1995).

29. See generally BELL, *supra* note 22; DERRICK BELL, *FACES AT THE BOTTOM OF THE WELL: THE PERMANENCE OF RACISM* (1992) [hereinafter BELL, *FACES AT THE BOTTOM OF THE WELL*]; DERRICK BELL, *GOSPEL CHOIRS: PSALMS OF SURVIVAL FOR AN ALIEN LAND CALLED HOME* (1996) [hereinafter BELL, *GOSPEL CHOIRS*]; BERKELEY ART CENTER, *ETHNIC NOTIONS: BLACK IMAGES IN THE WHITE MIND* (1982); Charles R. Lawrence, III, *The Word and the River: Pedagogy as Scholarship as Struggle*, 65 *S. CAL. L. REV.* 2231 (1992).

30. See generally DELGADO, *THE COMING RACE WAR?*, *supra* note 22; CRITICAL RACE THEORY: *THE CUTTING EDGE*, *supra* note 22; Delgado, *Storytelling for Oppositionists and Others*, *supra* note 22; Olivas, *supra* note 22; Américo Paredes, *On Ethnographic Work Among Minority Groups: A Folklorist's Perspective*, 6 *NEW SCHOLAR* 1 (1977).

31. See generally VINE DELORIA, JR., *CUSTER DIED FOR YOUR SINS: AN INDIAN MANIFESTO* (1969); Robert A. Williams, Jr., *Vampires Anonymous and Critical Race Practice*, 95 *MICH. L. REV.* 741 (1997).

32. Delgado, *Storytelling for Oppositionists and Others*, *supra* note 22, at 2436.

33. See generally Daniel G. Solórzano & Octavio Villalpando, *Critical Race Theory, Marginality and the Experience of Students of Color in Higher Education*, in *SOCIOLOGY OF*



of raising various issues in critical pedagogy, we offer the following counterstory about two professors engaged in a dialogue. One is Professor Sanchez, a tenured male professor at a southwestern university and the other is Professor Leticia Garcia, an untenured female professor at another western college campus. We ask the reader to suspend judgment, listen for the story's points, test them against her/his own version of reality (however conceived), and use the counterstory as a pedagogical case study.<sup>34</sup> The two Professors meet at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association.<sup>35</sup> Their story begins here.

### III. IN AN ELEVATOR OF THE HOTEL SHERATON

It was about 5:30 in the afternoon and I was attending a national sociology conference. The day's sessions were winding down and I was heading to my room for a quick nap. As I was standing in the elevator, the door opened at the mezzanine level and Leticia stepped in. "Professor! You're just the person I wanted to see." We exchanged greetings and Leticia continued, "Can we talk? I have so much to tell you. I just finished my first year as a faculty member and I have so many questions." I was pleased to see her. Leticia was my graduate student, and I chaired her dissertation committee. We co-authored two articles, and I had not heard from her in a couple of months. I replied, "I figured you were really busy with your first-year adjustments, and I was actually hoping to catch up with you here. Would you like a cup of coffee? It's been a long day and I need something to get me started again."

"Sounds great," she replied, "It will remind me of graduate school, discussing theory, research, and practice over coffee. You know, com-

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EDUCATION: EMERGING PERSPECTIVES 211 (Carlos Alberto Torres & Theodore R. Mitchell eds., 1998); Daniel G. Solórzano & Tara J. Yosso, *Toward a Critical Race Theory of Chicana and Chicano Education*, in CHARTING NEW TERRAINS OF CHICANA(O)/LATINA(O) EDUCATION 35 (C. Tejada et al. eds., 2000) [hereinafter Solórzano & Yosso, *Toward a Critical Race Theory of Chicana and Chicano Education*]; Daniel G. Solórzano & Dolores Delgado Bernal, *Examining Transformational Resistance Through a Critical Race and LatCrit Theory Framework: Chicana and Chicano Students in an Urban Context*, 36 URBAN EDUC. 308 (2001); Daniel G. Solórzano & Tara J. Yosso, *Critical Race and LatCrit Theory and Method: Counterstorytelling Chicana and Chicano Graduate School Experiences*, INT'L J. QUALITATIVE STUD. EDUC. (forthcoming 2001).

34. See generally LOUIS B. BARNES ET AL., *TEACHING AND THE CASE METHOD* (3d ed. 1994).

35. See generally Solórzano & Yosso, *Toward a Critical Race Theory of Chicana and Chicano Education*, *supra* note 33. Professor Leticia Garcia and Professor Sanchez are composite characters based on information from numerous interviews, focus groups, biographical, humanities, and social science literature, and personal experiences of the authors. These characters are influenced by Geneva Crenshaw and Rodrigo Crenshaw, the primary characters in several of the works of Derrick Bell and Richard Delgado. See, e.g., DERRICK BELL, *AFROLANTICA LEGACIES* (1998); BELL, *supra* note 22; BELL, *FACES AT THE BOTTOM OF THE WELL*, *supra* note 29; BELL, *GOSPEL CHOIRS*, *supra* note 29; DELGADO, *THE COMING RACE WAR?*, *supra* note 22; DELGADO, *THE RODRIGO CHRONICLES*, *supra* note 22.

pared to now, those days seem relaxing. It sure is different with my own classes and research, let alone my family life.”

As we made our way to a coffee shop, we were able to catch up on the months we hadn't talked to each other. Leticia began to describe her first year in a tenure track position at her university. She was struggling to establish her research program, as well as teach five classes a year. “You know my daughter Victoria is in the first grade, and she's reading a book a week,” beamed Leticia.

I responded, “She has her mother's gifts.” Leticia smiled as I continued, “How's your husband Frank doing?” She replied, “He's still working for MALDEF (Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund) and is looking to set up his own law practice with a group of old community activists.” I wanted to ask her to define “old,” but I figured I would wait until another time.

#### IV. INSTITUTIONAL CONFINES VERSUS CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

We stopped at a small café. Leticia found us a table and I ordered a Colombian blend and a maple scone. “Did you get me a baguette?” Leticia wanted to know. I nodded my head with a smile, “You haven't changed a bit.” Leticia just smiled and I grabbed a stirrer so she could mix more cream and sugar into her French Roast. “This bread reminds me of the *bolillos* I used to buy at the panaderia near my mom's house,” said Leticia. I sighed as I sat down at the table. It really did feel like it had been a long day.

Leticia started right away, “Professor, did you hear the question raised at the opening plenary session yesterday?” “Which one?” I asked. Leticia continued, “Sorry, I guess for me it was the only question. You know, when the panel was discussing critical pedagogy and the article by Stephen Sweet, *Radical Curriculum and Radical Pedagogy: Balancing Political Sympathies with Institutional Constraints?*<sup>36</sup> Well, remember when someone asked the panel, ‘How do we as critical educators maintain a sense of integrity as we attempt to work for social change within the confines of the academy?’”

I responded, “I think I was just getting there when that happened, because I remember the moderator of the panel saying, ‘We'll answer that question throughout the conference.’ And I was confused by her statement.”

“Yes, that was the question she was referring to, and that was her response in the interest of time. But the panel never really got back to it.

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36. Stephen Sweet, *Practicing Radical Pedagogy: Balancing Ideals with Institutional Constraints*, 26 TEACHING SOC. 100 (1998).

I appreciated the question because it raises some very important issues for new professors, and it really hit home for me in my first year of teaching.”

I replied, “In the part of the panel I heard, they were responding to Sweet’s article looking at the dismal state of critical pedagogy in sociology, which raised some important issues that I think educators need to be discussing. What did you think of his article? Does it address any part of the question?”

“Not really,” Leticia admitted, “Sweet lays out three tactics for dealing with the tensions that arise for critical educators between the institutional demands on hiring, promotion, and tenure, and one’s belief in the tenets of critical pedagogy. The first response to these tensions was to subordinate institutional demands to your own radical philosophy. The second response was to subordinate your radical philosophy to institutional demands, and the third response was to continue to struggle to achieve a balance between your radical philosophy and your institutions demands.” She paused for a moment and then continued, “I was feeling something missing from those alternatives. Maybe because I don’t see myself fitting into those three response options? Or maybe because the options sound so antiseptic?”

#### V. MERGING CRITICAL RACE AND FREIREAN PEDAGOGY

As I started my first cup of coffee, I began, “I’ve read the article, and I agree the alternatives seem to be missing something. Maybe it’s uncomfortable for us that Sweet seems to talk about critical pedagogy in the absence of the context of real students, struggling with racism, classism, sexism, and other forms of oppression everyday. There are some important frameworks that link everyday struggle with critical pedagogy in the classroom and we should draw on those frameworks. Still, I believe Sweet raises two important issues that critical educators struggle with on a continuing basis: (1) the intersection of the personal history that each of us brings to the teaching enterprise, and (2) the contextual obstacles and opportunities that lay in our paths.”

Puzzled, Leticia asked, “Professor, I’m not sure I follow you. What do you mean by personal history in a critical pedagogical context?” I thought for a moment and then continued, “Each of us brings to our research and teaching an accumulation of experiences that have had a profound impact on our work. For instance, I was an undergraduate during the 1960s and was influenced by and participated in the civil rights, anti-war, and farmworker movements. My beliefs and values for social justice were being applied right outside the classroom door, in the communities just off campus, and in the community that I grew up and lived in. We could see the contradictions and connections between what our professors were telling us and having us read, and what was happening in these

very active struggles. On the other hand, you were an undergraduate in the late 1980s and a graduate student in the early 1990s and probably didn't have that experience with an active, broad-based civil rights movement."

Leticia cut in, "You're probably right. Just as the overt racism of the 1960s has given way to more covert, insidious forms, activism to challenge racism has also changed forms. Most of my activism was on campus and related to student issues. When I left campus, it wasn't to engage in an organized 'civil rights' struggle per se, but to tutor high school students in East Los Angeles."

I waited until she paused and then responded, "Those are very important activities and are crucial to the continuing civil rights struggle. There has to be a place for people to participate in any way they can. Today, the struggles to maintain the skeletons of affirmative action, bilingual education, and immigrant rights are very important and ongoing."

Leticia thought for quite a while and then continued, "Professor, you bring up another issue: the struggle for social justice is a continuing one and it has a long history. I try to explain the struggles of the past with my students, and maybe I don't link those struggles enough with today's struggles." "Perhaps," I said, "your students would benefit from seeing themselves as part of this tradition of resistance. We have to see this as a long-term struggle. If we don't come to grips with that reality along with the further reality that civil rights gains are never completely won, then we can't deal with the continuous pattern of setbacks, short gains, setbacks, and short gains."

Leticia said, "That's a hard reality to come to grips with. I've been doing readings of legal scholars whose work outlines how civil rights gains are only allowed to the extent that they benefit Whites. They call it the 'interest-convergence theory.'<sup>37</sup> We should talk more about this. Actually, I've been working on an article that examines the linkages between a theoretical framework in the law—critical race theory—and its relation to education and the problem-posing pedagogy of Paulo Freire. I think I've been struggling in my writing because I have had a hard time coming to terms with some of these issues myself."

I replied, "That is going to be an important piece of work, Leticia. As you continue doing the research for it, look up Charles Lawrence.<sup>38</sup> He tells us that '[s]earching history to retrieve collective strengths is part of the work that must be done by law teachers engaged in liberating peda-

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37. See generally Derrick A. Bell, *Brown v. Board of Education and the Interest Convergence Dilemma*, in *CRITICAL RACE THEORY: THE KEY WRITINGS THAT FORMED THE MOVEMENT* 20 (Kimberlé Crenshaw et al. eds., 1995).

38. See, e.g., Lawrence, *supra* note 29.

gogy.’<sup>39</sup> We must continue to search for that history and bring it to our classrooms. Mari Matsuda argues that ‘[c]ritical commentators should look to the bottom and acknowledge the richness there.’<sup>40</sup> Leticia responded, “Sounds like she’s referring to individual, family, and community histories, stories, and struggles in Communities of Color.” “Yes and so much more,” I added.

Leticia continued, “So far in my article, I’ve outlined how I utilize Freire’s work, exposing the banking method of education, and how I try to use the problem-posing process in my own curriculum and pedagogy.<sup>41</sup> I walk with my students through this problem-posing method of naming the problem, finding the cause of the problem, developing an action-plan to remedy the problem, and finally reflecting on the whole process and renaming the problem to start the process over again.” “Sounds like you’re off to a solid start,” I said. “The problem-posing method has two interrelated goals: (1) to teach the student certain educational skills, and (2) to develop a critical consciousness in the student. Have you outlined with them the different levels of Freirean consciousness?” “Yes,” said Leticia, “and I have them try to relate it to their own experiences and use examples that come from their experiences to describe each level. I’ll explain that part in a minute.” “Good,” I replied, “those are necessary discussions to have with your students. As educators, we need to find out how people develop critical consciousness and our role in that development. For instance, can a person have an uneven consciousness development? Can there be growth in some areas and not in others? Indeed, one could be at the critical consciousness level as it relates to class, but be at the magical or naive level in his/her gender and/or race consciousness. In our pedagogy, we need to look at the development of a critical race, gender, and class-consciousness. In fact, as we develop what Freire called ‘generative codes,’ to facilitate a critical reading of the word and the world, we must make sure to identify those examples that depict the intersection of race, gender, and class oppression and engage our students in a dialogue at that location.”

“Well Professor, I’d like to bring us back to the question during the panel session. How do we, as critical educators, maintain a sense of integrity as we attempt to work for social change within the confines of the academy? I have this diagram that I’ve adapted from some work of my colleagues, and I want to include it in my article. What do you think? Can it help us address the question?”

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39. *Id.* at 2259.

40. Mari J. Matsuda, *Looking to the Bottom: Critical Legal Studies and Reparations*, 22 HARV. C.R.-C.L. L. REV. 323, 344 (1987).

41. See, e.g., PAULO FREIRE, *EDUCATION FOR CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS* (1973); FREIRE, *supra* note 2.

## VI. AN ALGEBRAIC APPROACH TO RESISTANCE?

“Now, I hope you know that math, especially algebra, was never my strong suit, but . . .” Leticia pulled a piece of paper from her bag, unfolded it, and placed it on the table. “Oh,” I said, “I recognize some of this.” “Yes,” said Leticia, “my colleagues have really taken the idea of resistance and pushed the envelope to look at resistance as not just a self-defeating, destructive cycle.<sup>42</sup> What I’m trying to do is understand these types of resistance within a Freirean approach to education.” “Can you talk me through the diagram?” I asked. Leticia flashed a smile and said, “Of course.”

“This figure replicates my colleagues’ chart,<sup>43</sup> with the only change being the labels along the y-axis. My colleagues label the y-axis at the bottom ‘no critique of the system’ and the top of the y-axis, ‘critique of the system.’ I utilize Freire to label the y-axis from bottom to top, magical, naïve, and critical consciousness, each indicating the extent of an individual’s critique of the system.”<sup>44</sup>

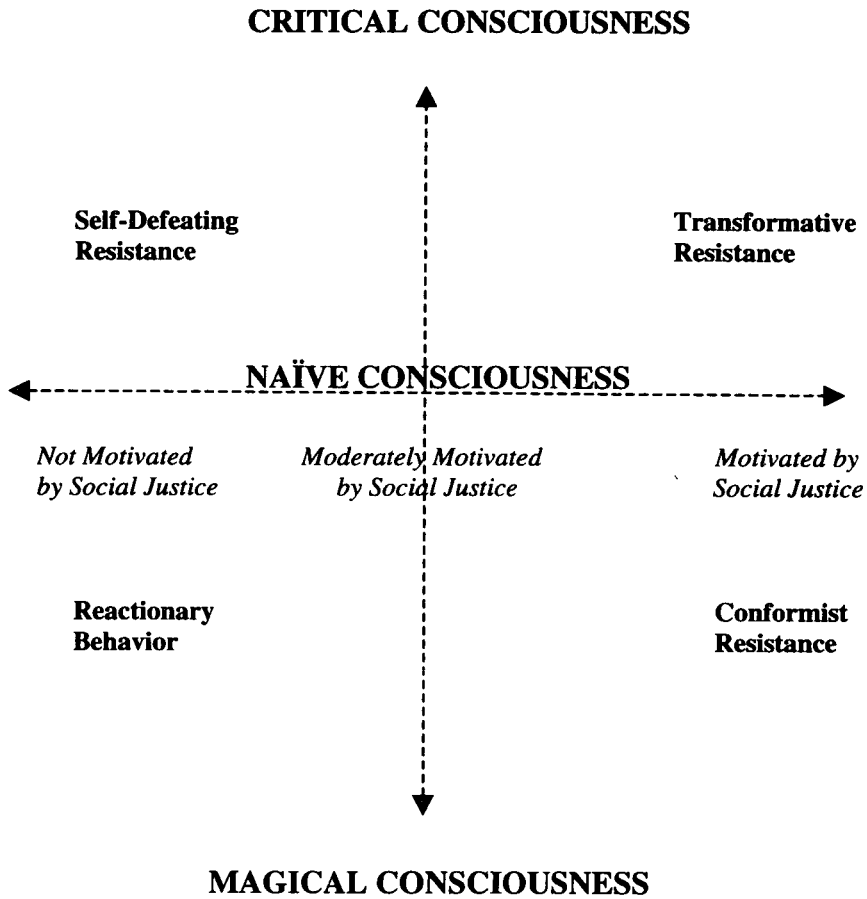
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42. See generally Dolores Delgado Bernal, *Chicana School Resistance and Grassroots Leadership: Providing an Alternative History of the 1968 East Los Angeles Blowouts* (1997) (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles) (on file with author); Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, *supra* note 33.

43. See generally Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, *supra* note 33.

44. See generally FREIRE, *supra* note 41.

**Letty's Figure in Progress**



"OK," I said, "now allow me to try and describe what I see. Like you said, the y-axis identifies Freire's three levels of consciousness.<sup>45</sup> The bottom of the y-axis is the magical stage, where students may blame inequality on luck, fate, or God. Whatever causes the inequality seems to be out of the student's control, so he/she may resign to not do anything about it. For example, a person at a magical stage of consciousness may explain, 'In the U.S., if Chicanas do not get a good education it is because, God only helps those who help themselves.'"

"Exactly," said Leticia. She continued, "in the middle of the y-axis is the naïve stage, where students may blame themselves, their culture, or their community for inequality. Because they're informed by a naïve consciousness, students may try to change themselves, assimilate to the White, middle class, mainstream culture, or distance themselves from their community in response to experiencing inequality. For instance, a person at a naïve stage of consciousness may say, 'In the U.S., if Chicanos do not do well in life, it is because culturally, they focus only on today rather than planning for tomorrow.'"

"I like this tag team thing," I replied. "So the top of the y-axis is the critical stage, where students look beyond fatalistic or cultural reasons for inequality to focus on structural, systemic explanations. A student with a critical level of consciousness looks toward changing the system and its structures as a response to inequality. For example, a person at a critical stage of consciousness may explain, 'In the U.S., if Chicanas and Chicanos don't go to college, it is because from kindergarten through high school they are being socialized for working class occupations that don't require a college degree.'"<sup>46</sup>

"OK, now we're cooking," said Leticia. "The x-axis is where I've been struggling the most, so I'll describe it and then we can get back to it later?" "OK," I said. She continued, "The x-axis addresses various levels of motivation toward social justice. I'm defining social justice as 'working toward the abolishment of racism, sexism, and poverty, and the empowerment of underrepresented minority groups.'<sup>47</sup> A person who is *not motivated* by social justice would be on the left side of the x-axis. Someone who is not motivated by social justice perpetuates the status quo and upholds systems of inequality because he/she believes the system works ('if it ain't broke, don't fix it'). Someone who is *moderately motivated* by social justice looks to reform the current system by reforming him/herself and his/her community. This person would be in the middle of the x-axis. Someone who is *motivated* by social justice looks

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45. See generally FREIRE, *supra* note 41.

46. See generally SAMUEL BOWLES & HERBERT GINTIS, *SCHOOLING IN CAPITALIST AMERICA: EDUCATIONAL REFORM AND THE CONTRADICTIONS OF ECONOMIC LIFE* (1976).

47. See generally Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, *supra* note 33.



to transform the system by changing the structures of the system, which disempower underrepresented minority groups. A person motivated toward social justice would be on the right side of the x-axis." I took out my automatic pencil and began to take notes on my coffee coaster.

Leticia went on, "The four quadrants of the figure depict various forms of oppositional behavior. My colleagues adapt and extend the work of Henry Giroux to write about various forms of oppositional behavior, yet they differentiate reactionary or defiant behavior from the three methods of student resistance, which they identify and describe as (a) self-defeating, (b) conformist, and (c) transformative. Each of these three forms of resistance are based on two intersecting dimensions: (a) critique of domination (consciousness), and (b) motivation by an interest in individual or societal transformation (motivation toward social justice)." "Now I see the reason for the x and y axes!" I exclaimed. "Yes Professor, pretty exciting work, huh!" I grinned, as I continued to listen to Leticia.

She explained, "The upper left-hand quadrant is *self-defeating resistance*, which infers that one holds a critique of the structured nature of inequality but is not motivated by social justice and thus responds to oppression in ways that perpetuate inequality for him/herself and others. For example, a Chicano who complains to his teacher about being misplaced in a remedial class may be conscious of the structures of inequality that benefits from him being miseducated. However, if this Chicano drops out of school in defiance of being treated poorly, not only does he reinforce the school's notion that he was not able to do well in a 'regular' class, but he also limits his own socioacademic opportunities. Even though this Chicano had a strong critique of the inequality perpetuated by society's institutions, he is now a high school drop out, which adds to negative statistics and ideas about Chicanas/os."

I interjected, "Even if he is a 'push out,' meaning the system pushes him out and he leaves, it's still the student who ends up with limited options and resources."

"Good point Professor," Leticia continued, "the lower right hand quadrant, *conformist resistance*, can be seen when one does not critique the systemic nature of inequality, and although moderately motivated to create change for society, looks to create changes within the system (conforming to the system) by changing individuals, communities, cultures, etc. For example, a Chicana who begins to speak only English at school and home, in order to succeed in education, changes herself and may not question the system that privileges English and downgrades Spanish. This Chicana may try to assimilate linguistically to the dominant culture, but her individual sacrifice leaves the structures of domination intact. As she tries to conform (fit in) to the system, she may even start to look

down on other Chicanas/os who speak Spanish as inferior, thereby strengthening the oppressive power of the system.”

Leticia continued, “The upper right-hand quadrant, *transformative resistance*, means one critiques the structures of domination and is motivated toward social justice. *Transformative resistance* to oppression necessitates liberatory changes to the system. For example, the Chicana/o students who organized against California’s anti-youth Proposition 21, held a strong critique of the structural nature of social inequality and were highly motivated to abolish racism, classism, and sexism and empower minority groups.<sup>48</sup> These Chicana/o high school students protested alongside other Youth of Color to transform the social dialogue about juvenile crime and to transform the hypocritical California system that structures injustice through multiple means—such as being number one in the U.S. on prison spending and number forty-one on education spending.”<sup>49</sup>

“Whew!” I sighed. “That’s a lot in one figure. But it makes sense. I think your examples are helpful; make sure you include them in your article.” “Thanks Professor, but how do I facilitate my students’ movement through the stages of consciousness, through levels of motivation toward social justice, and still get promoted to tenure? How do I maintain my ideal for social justice and still get tenure at my institution?” Leticia paused and looked at her watch, realizing it was 7:30 in the evening and then made the suggestion, “I think the panel moderator was right, this question looks like it’s going to take awhile, would you like to have dinner and continue this conversation?” “I’d like that,” I replied, “but I have to make a phone call first.”

## VII. TOWARD A LATCRIT THEORY OF EDUCATION

I returned to the table and Leticia was browsing through the dinner menu, and talking in Spanish to a man bussing tables. I picked up my menu and began to peruse the salad selections, finally settling on one with chicken, wontons, and sesame sauce. I nodded “hello” to the man as he left and Leticia said, “He was an engineer and his wife was a professor in Mexico. He was joking with me about how his kids are like ones in the Tigres del Norte song, *Jaula De Oro*. Have you heard it?” “No,” I replied, “I don’t think so.” Leticia continued, “It talks about an undocumented worker whose children were born in the U.S. and the pain he feels because he wants to go back to Mexico but his children have become so Americanized they want to deny that they’re Mexican. And the song is all in Spanish, except one part where the father asks his son in

48. See Gov. Davis: *Meet with Us!*, at [http://www.schoolsnotjails.com/html/news/nw\\_reports.php3](http://www.schoolsnotjails.com/html/news/nw_reports.php3) (April 2, 2001) (quicktime video clip).

49. *Id.*

Spanish if he'd like to go back to Mexico, and the son answers in English, 'Whatcha talkin' about Dad? I don't want to go back to Mexico. No way, Dad.'<sup>50</sup> Leticia chuckled, "It's sad but funny to hear the song, because the kid sounds like Opie from that one show . . ." Leticia trailed off as she looked for something to eat. The waitress took my order and Leticia ordered a turkey club sandwich. "Gotta have a sense of humor," I noted. "Yes," replied Leticia, "you've always reminded me of that. For Chicanas/os, Latinas/os I believe that sense of humor has been key to our survival."

"For oppressed peoples, I think humor has been a form of survival and also a form of resistance," I added.

While we waited for our food, I brought us back to our discussion. "I think I'm starting to see how this figure can help you answer the question you referred to. Have you read the work of André Gorz?" "No," Leticia said, "do you think he'd be helpful?" "I think so, but I'm not sure how," I responded, "let me think out loud and we'll see. Gorz wrote STRATEGIES FOR LABOR<sup>51</sup> in 1967, wherein he outlines three types of reforms: reformist, non-reformist, and revolutionary.<sup>52</sup> Basically, he says reformist reforms are those which maintain the status quo, and do not challenge the system of inequality."<sup>53</sup> Leticia interjected, "So a reformist reform might work to reform a school bureaucracy, only to make the bureaucracy marginalize Chicanas/os more efficiently?"

"You could say that," I replied. "according to Gorz, non-reformist reforms move to change the system, but keep the system intact."<sup>54</sup> The difference here is that the non-reformist reform works to change the system into something more equitable, but it works within the system to make this happen." Again, Leticia commented, "So the system itself doesn't get challenged?" "Right," I said. "and finally, revolutionary reforms work toward a radical transformation of the present system and the creation of an entirely different, more equitable system."<sup>55</sup>

50. LOS TIGRES DEL NORTE, *Jaula De Noro*, on LOS TIGRES DEL NORTE 16 SUPER EXITOS (Profono, Inc. 1988).

51. ANDRÉ GORZ, STRATEGY FOR LABOR: A RADICAL PROPOSAL (Martin A. Nicolaus & Victoria Ortiz trans., 1967).

52. See generally *id.*

53. A reformist reform "subordinates its objectives to the criteria of rationality and practicability of a given system and policy. Reformism rejects those objectives and demands--however deep the need for them--which are incompatible with the preservation of the system." *Id.* at 7.

54. A non-reformist reform "does not base its validity and its right to exist on capitalist needs, criteria, and rationales. A non-reformist reform is determined not in terms of what can be, but what should be." *Id.* at 7-8.

55. A revolutionary reform makes an "advance toward a radical transformation of society." *Id.* at 6.

“Wow,” remarked Leticia, “I think I see where this might fit in.” “Maybe,” I said, “The reformist reform would be somewhere in the area of being not-so-motivated toward social justice because it’s more conformist resistance.” “Yes,” Leticia nodded her head and replied, “and maybe non-reformist reform would be somewhere in the area of motivated toward social justice, but it’s in-between conformist and transformative resistance, whereas revolutionary reform sounds like it’d be in the highly motivated toward social justice and transformative resistance area.” I agreed and said, “But do you see what I see?” Leticia asked, “Do we as critical educators ever really engage in transformative resistance? Are our reform efforts ever non-reformist or revolutionary?” “That’s exactly what I’m seeing,” I said. “I think at best, we engage in non-reformist reforms with an eye toward revolutionary reforms. But more than likely, many of us may be making more reformist and conformist efforts from within our academic positions.”

Leticia added, “I think that’s where we hear the frustration in the question: How do we keep our integrity as critical educators working toward social justice from within the academy? In the end, as we try to teach a critical pedagogy, we ourselves are not feeling like we’ve been true to the struggle because the structures of inequality remain intact.”

“Maybe we need to go back and listen to the spoken word of Gil Scott-Heron who eloquently reminded us that ‘The Revolution Will Not Be Televised.’<sup>56</sup> As critical educators, we can’t become like ‘Chuy,’ the armchair revolutionary, who sits and waits for a revolution in the satire of the stalled Chicano Movement by Chicano-Latino theater group Culture Clash.<sup>57</sup> Maybe we should go back and read some of the goals of the Chicano Movement like *El Plan de Santa Barbara*?” I said.

“Good points,” said Leticia, “or maybe even the Black Panther Party’s Ten Point Program. Those struggles surely speak to the same concerns we continue to deal with in our communities and within our educational system. And speaking of the strengths of those historical struggles, I’ve been trying to utilize Latina/o Critical Race Theory—LatCrit theory to extend the critical race discussions to Chicanas/os in education—and an important part is the interdisciplinary, historical aspect which we need to bring to our research.”

“I’ve had this conversation with other academics, but I’m wondering about your thoughts. What’s the difference between LatCrit or critical race theory and Ethnic Studies frameworks?” I asked.

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56. GIL SCOTT-HERON, *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*, on *THE REVOLUTION WILL NOT BE TELEVISED* (Flying Dutchman Productions 1974).

57. See RICHARD MONTOYA ET AL., *CULTURE CLASH: LIFE, DEATH AND REVOLUTIONARY COMEDY* (1998).

Leticia flipped through her notebook, stopped at a page, and said, "I was at the last LatCrit conference in Colorado, LatCrit V, and I adapted this working definition from their LatCrit Primer.<sup>58</sup> I tailored it for my work in education. Leticia began to read, "A LatCrit theory in education is a framework that can be used to theorize and examine the ways in which race and racism explicitly and implicitly impact on the educational structures, processes, and discourses that effect People of Color generally and Latinas/os specifically. Important to this critical framework is a challenge to the dominant ideology, which supports deficit notions about Students of Color, while assuming 'neutrality' and 'objectivity.' Utilizing the experiences of Latinas/os, a LatCrit theory in education also theorizes and examines the place where racism intersects with other forms of subordination such as sexism, classism, nativism, monolingualism, and heterosexism. LatCrit theory in education is conceived as a social justice project that attempts to link theory with practice, scholarship with teaching, and the academy with the community. LatCrit acknowledges that educational institutions operate in contradictory ways, with their potential to oppress and marginalize co-existing with their potential to emancipate and empower. LatCrit theory in education is transdisciplinary and draws on many other schools of progressive scholarship." Leticia looked up and continued, "I think what makes it different is that it combines various frameworks together, such as Ethnic Studies, internal colonialism, Marxism, feminism and other critical theoretical models in a very unique way."

"I'm impressed with your working definition and I agree, critical race and LatCrit utilize the strengths of various critical frameworks and have the benefit of hindsight in addressing some of the weaknesses, blind spots, or underdeveloped areas of other frameworks. So critical race and LatCrit theory are not new in and of themselves, but instead are syntheses of many critical frameworks. As critical race educators, we recognize the need to incorporate the knowledge of those who have come before us and to learn from the struggles that we engage in today. And I think that the LatCrits have pushed the envelope of the ways in which we talk about race and racism, so that we focus on the intersectionality of subordination," I said.

"Yes," replied Leticia, "and I think that critical race theory as a 'synthesis,' as you put it, demonstrates that the dynamic nature of oppressions requires dynamic responses. I also appreciate the ways in which critical race and LatCrit scholars are clear about analyzing race as a social construct."

"Definitely," I agreed, "they do not approach race without challenging its very problematic ideological basis. And they are unapologetic in

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58. LatCrit Primer, from the LatCrit IV Planning Committee to all Participants in the LatCrit IV symposium (Apr. 29, 1999) (on file with author).

their focus on racism. I think this is important because they recognize that even the language we utilize to identify ourselves is grounded in archaic notions of biological determinism and anthropological 'othering.' Yet, they are not naïve in their critique of how notions of 'race' play themselves out in very real ways, through racism. We need to understand how we are racialized, how race has been socially constructed, and how that leads us to discussions of racism and racism's intersections with other forms of oppression."

"Exactly," Leticia nodded her head in agreement, "your comments remind me of bell hooks' *TEACHING TO TRANSGRESS*,<sup>59</sup> where she quotes from an Adrienne Rich poem, "[t]his is the oppressor's language yet I need it to talk to you."<sup>60</sup> We need to talk about the concept of race so that we can critique and challenge racism. Like we talked about earlier, racism changes forms, and our ways of thinking about and responding to racism and its many subtle and overt tendencies, also is an ongoing process. I see LatCrit as a natural outgrowth of critical race theory, but I do not see them as mutually exclusive. I think LatCrit scholarship is evidence of the ongoing process of finding a framework that addresses racism and its accompanying oppressions. LatCrit draws on the strengths outlined in critical race theory, and emphasizes the intersectionality of experience with oppression, and the need to extend conversations about 'race' and racism beyond the Black/White binary. And I think that Freire pushes me to also look at the intersectionality of resistance."

"Yes," I replied, "I also think our goals as LatCrits are similar to Freire's goals. Freire's problem-posing approach is used to develop and move toward a critical consciousness as a means by which to create societal change. Likewise, critical race and LatCrit theorists are working toward the end of racial oppression as part of the broader goal of ending all forms of oppression such as those based on gender, class, and sexual orientation. Both Freirean pedagogy and critical race theory challenge the traditional claims of the educational and legal systems to neutrality, objectivity, and color-blindness. They see these concepts as a camouflage for the self-interest, power, and privilege of dominant groups in U.S. society."

Leticia followed, "As I mentioned in my working definition earlier, LatCrit and Freire would also acknowledge that educational institutions operate in contradictory ways with their potential to oppress and marginalize co-existing with their potential to emancipate and empower."

Leticia continued, "Both frameworks recognize that the experiential knowledge of People of Color is critical to understanding and analyzing the fields of education and law. Actually, both traditions argue that the

59. HOOKS, *supra* note 3.

60. *Id.* at 167 (quoting Adrienne Rich).

experiences of People of Color should be examined for their ability to contribute to the establishment of a society where people participate and contribute as equals in a culturally democratic social environment.”

“Freirean pedagogy and critical race theory are about strengths, and strengths are what we should be looking for within Students and Communities of Color,” I responded.

#### VIII. WHAT DOES A CRITICAL RACE/LATCRIT FREIREAN PEDAGOGY LOOK LIKE IN MY CLASSROOM?

“So, as LatCrit educators, how are we participating in non-reformist reforms?” Leticia asked. I thought a moment, and replied, “Looking at your working definition, we are challenging the dominant ideology and are working toward social justice, but what that looks like in real life depends on the type of institution we work in. Doing critical pedagogy will be very different at a community college where you teach 10 classes a year with no research and publishing responsibilities, compared to a four-year comprehensive teaching institution where you teach 6 or 7 classes a year, but have additional research and publication pressures. Still different will be a research institution where you teach 3 or 4 courses a year, but have the primary responsibility to conduct research, publish, and bring in grant monies. Each system is a unique balancing act of time and resources and doing critical pedagogy takes place within that context.”

I continued, “Leticia, it’s been 21 years since Daniel Solórzano wrote that article documenting his use of Freirean pedagogy with Chicana/o students in a community college classroom.”<sup>61</sup> Leticia replied, “Did you know that Sweet mentions Solórzano’s article as one of only 13 published articles in 23 years in the journal *TEACHING SOCIOLOGY* that practiced radical pedagogy?”<sup>62</sup> I replied, “Yes, I recall reading that. I also remember Solórzano’s article because I was in a similar situation, trying to utilize Freire as a young community college instructor. Since those years in the California Community College system, I have taught in California’s other two higher education systems; the California State University and the University of California. Throughout the years, I have continued to use different forms of critical pedagogy in the classroom with varying degrees of success.”

The waitress brought our food, and Leticia responded, “That’s true, you’ve taught in all three systems. How is it done?” As Leticia began to eat, I replied, “Well, each one provided a different challenge. But, the common denominator gets back to my personal belief and commitment

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61. See generally Daniel G. Solórzano, *Teaching and Social Change: Reflections on a Freirean Approach in a College Classroom*, 17 *TEACHING SOC.* 218 (1989).

62. Sweet, *supra* note 36.

to critical pedagogy. I believe that my students bring their own set of strengths to the classroom and that I can share something with them that might reinforce those strengths and have an impact on their lives and the lives of others.”

I paused for a moment, took a few bites of my salad, and then continued, “No matter the system I’m working in, my pedagogy is driven by my desire to effect change and struggle toward social justice. I begin all my courses by telling students who I am and what I stand for. I believe students have the right to know who we are and what we teach. Then, they can make decisions about whether they want to remain in my course. If they don’t like what they hear, or who they’re hearing it from, they can take another professor. It’s really their call.”

As we continued eating, I commented that, “Certain classes lend themselves to an easier transition to critical pedagogy. Ethnic and gender studies, race, ethnic, and gender relations, or social problems courses can accommodate critical pedagogy a little easier than research design or research methods. But even those classes can be adapted for use with critical pedagogy. There’s an important article by critical race scholar Charles Lawrence, titled *The Word and the River: Pedagogy as Scholarship and Struggle*,<sup>63</sup> where he describes the dilemmas we face as critical educators and how we struggle between the poles of ‘throwing up our hands in despair or adopting an attitude of self-righteous radical chic.’<sup>64</sup> He responded to this dilemma by pedagogically including a community simulation exercise in law and public policy into his classes. His students must go outside the academy in order to contact and utilize the resources of seven very different interest groups in Black communities. This pedagogical exercise ultimately leads to short and long term strategies for social change, as well as political and legal reform in the Black community.<sup>65</sup> I believe this model can be adapted for your classroom.”

After Leticia scribbled down the Lawrence citation, she looked up, smiled, and again went back to Sweet’s article. “Sweet used four criteria to define critical pedagogy. He concluded that radical teachers ‘do not test or grade in the traditional fashion . . . surrender considerable power to students . . . abandon lectures in favor of dialogue [and] couple learning with activism.’<sup>66</sup> How could you possibly incorporate each of those criteria in every class that you teach, in every quarter or semester?”

After the waitress cleared away our dinner and refilled our coffees, I continued, “You have to decide for yourself how you define critical pedagogy. You then have to decide how you can incorporate the working

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63. Lawrence, *supra* note 29.

64. *Id.* at 2245.

65. *See id.* at 2243-48.

66. Sweet, *supra* note 36, at 101.



definition into your scholarship and teaching. Once you make those decisions and, as you know, they are not easy decisions, and they are not set in stone, you can begin the process of developing a critical pedagogy that works for you. It has to work for you because you are the one who will struggle with various classroom challenges that arise for all educators. But you will have the added challenge of teaching from a critical perspective, being a woman, and being Chicana." I knew what was going to come next as Leticia said, "Professor, one of my biggest problems is students who somehow think that I have no right to be in front of that class, to be teaching them. I get challenged in areas where my White colleagues don't. It has been a painful process."

I paused and then asked, "Have you read any of the critical race and LatCrit literature that deals with this issue?" Leticia responded, "What works did you have in mind?" I replied, "There's Linda Greene, Derrick Bell, and Reginald Robinson's experiences as Black law professors.<sup>67</sup> Kevin Johnson talks about being a Mexican American law professor in his book.<sup>68</sup> There is also an important article by Gloria Ladson-Billings that focuses on a Black woman professor's experience teaching White students about multiculturalism and race.<sup>69</sup> These five pieces can help put your experience into a broader perspective. They describe the classroom experience you mentioned in much detail. You will see that many of us have and continue to experience these forms of racism in and out of our classrooms. I think our White sister and brother educators deal with some of these classroom problems, but when you add the dimensions of race, ethnicity, gender, language, accent, immigration status, and sexuality to the mix, it gets a bit more complex and I think that is where our experiences divert from theirs."

Leticia responded, "I know that I bring so much to the classroom. I bring the multiple consciousness of being a woman, a Chicana, and from working-class parents. After so many years of thinking these were a burden for me, I have come to view these characteristics as strengths that give me insight into multiple worlds.<sup>70</sup> I have to move and adjust to these worlds on a daily or even hourly basis. But this multiple consciousness

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67. See generally Linda S. Greene, *Tokens, Role Models, and Pedagogical Politics: Lamentations of an African American Female Law Professor*, 6 BERKELEY WOMEN'S L.J. 81 (1990-91); Charles R. Lawrence III, *Doing "The James Brown" at Harvard: Professor Derrick Bell as Liberationist Teacher*, 8 HARV. BLACKLETTER L.J. 263 (1991); Reginald Leamon Robinson, *Teaching from the Margins: Race as a Pedagogical Sub-text a Critical Essay*, 19 W. NEW ENG. L. REV. 151 (1997).

68. See generally KEVIN R. JOHNSON, *HOW DID YOU GET TO BE MEXICAN?: A WHITE/BROWN MAN'S SEARCH FOR IDENTITY* (1999).

69. See generally Gloria Ladson-Billings, *Silences as Weapons: Challenges of a Black Professor Teaching White Students*, 35 THEORY INTO PRACTICE 79 (1996).

70. See generally PATRICIA HILL COLLINS, *FIGHTING WORDS: BLACK WOMEN AND THE SEARCH FOR JUSTICE* (1998); Patricia Hill Collins, *Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought*, 33 SOC. PROBS. S14 (1986).

isn't valued in the academy. I only get the validation when I meet with other Scholars of Color and feminist scholars at our annual meetings and of course from my family."

As we finished our dinner and began looking at the dessert menu, Leticia threw a few more insightful questions at me, "Is there a tipping point? Is there a number or percentage of minority students in the class, a tipping point, when they begin to have a positive or negative impact on the interactions within a class? I have found that I don't get the same degree and types of challenges to my being 'the professor' when there are greater numbers of Students of Color in the class." I had heard about the tipping point principle of Blacks in public housing projects and law faculties from the works of Derrick Bell,<sup>71</sup> and I replied, "I think there is, but I've never been able to quantify it. Sometimes, when I teach a class that is predominantly White, I can see that they really need interaction with Students of Color. It is one thing to hear about racial and ethnic issues from me and another when it comes from their peers. This interaction among students is a very delicate enterprise and gets even more delicate when issues of race, gender, class, and sexuality are thrown into the mix. But the interaction makes the discussion of theory, method, design, and practice so much more complex and so much more exciting. When I have a good mix of Students of Color and White students in class, our discussions are much more lively, challenging, and complex and we come up with much better action plans for our problems. They truly do learn from each other in some immediate and long-range ways. You plant seeds of critical analysis, and you nurture them, and then they leave. You try to keep up with them, and every now and then, one returns and reminds you of what you and others said or did—for better or worse."

Leticia looked at me and replied, "You've just given an argument for the value of diversity in the classroom. That it benefits both White students and Students of Color." I paused, thinking of my older sister Jesse.<sup>72</sup> I shared this story with Leticia: "My older sister, Jesse, had a way of explaining things that cut right to the core of the argument. When I was still in diapers, Jesse was identified as a bright kid but didn't receive the resources she was entitled to. She should have been in the GATE (Gifted and Talented Education) program, but my parents couldn't drive her to the gifted school, wait for an hour and a half while she took a spe-

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71. See generally Derrick A. Bell, Jr., *Application of the "Tipping Point" Principle to Law Faculty Hiring Policies*, 10 NOVA L.J. 319 (1986).

72. Jesse is a composite character whose name is inspired by the Jesse B. Simple character from Langston Hughes' work. Hughes first introduced this character in the CHICAGO DEFENDER newspaper in 1943. See generally LANGSTON HUGHES, *THE RETURN OF SIMPLE* (Akiba Sullivan Harper ed., 1994). Derrick Bell re-introduced him as Jesse B. Semple. See generally BELL, *FACES AT THE BOTTOM OF THE WELL*, *supra* note 29.

cial class, and drive her back to her neighborhood school. They both had to work. Jesse is one of the smartest people I've ever known. Her street smarts, eclectic knowledge base, common sense, and critical analysis skills weren't recognized or seen as strengths. Jesse ended up graduating from high school and going to cosmetology college to become a hair stylist. She's earned a well-deserved reputation for telling her clients 'what's really going on.' Many years back, I remember Jesse told me 'what's really going on' with the affirmative action struggle. She shared with me her ideas: 'There's diversity and then there's *diversity*. Racial diversity means racial groups are merely present on the campus. On the other hand, real *diversity*, or I guess you could call it pluralism, would mean the different racial groups are not only present on the college campus, but are considered equals. This means they affirm each others' *dignidad humana* (human dignity) and are ready to benefit from each others' experience. And also it means they acknowledge each others' contributions to society in general and to the common welfare of students and faculty on the campus. Other than that, they're just taking you for a long walk off a short pier, thinking you have diversity when what's really going on is that you have a handful of people with darker skin color allowed to just sit near White people, learn about the great achievements of White people, and be reminded that they are not as 'qualified' as White people.' Leticia, I've always wondered, if given the opportunities I had, what kind of scholar Jesse would have been. In many ways, my work is an acknowledgment of her influence on me. And truth be told, she influences a lot of people from that stylist chair. As you can see, my ideas come from many different sources." I made a mental note to get my hair cut next week.

Leticia's looked at me and said, "You're right Professor, racial diversity benefits both People of Color and Whites, yet we need to push beyond the idea of diversity. In the college context, racial diversity is simply the presence of underrepresented students and faculty in colleges. On the other hand, we need to consider Jesse's words, that we must go beyond diversity, toward racial pluralism. That means we must include these underrepresented groups in the college and also integrate their culture and experiences into the mission, curriculum, and pedagogy of the college. The problem is that most educators know this, but the courts, in deciding affirmative action cases, want to see it in quantifiable form and don't react favorably to stories that challenge the majoritarian mindset—the belief that decisions on admissions should be based on a 'colorblind' or 'meritocratic' basis.<sup>73</sup> If the stories we told reinforced those notions, we would probably see more stories. But counterstories challenge majoritarian beliefs, and it is to the benefit of those vested in the system to

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73. See *supra* note 27.

ignore or silence the voices and stories 'at the bottom.'" I shot back, "Then we must tell the stories, the counterstories."

Leticia continued with a nuts and bolts question, "What other ways can I begin this process of incorporating critical pedagogy into my courses?" I responded, "You can begin by teaching an independent study or specialized course and work it into that format. You can also incorporate it into an existing course as an optional case study or an individual or group project. You can always incorporate it into the totality of a course and make it become the centerpiece. You have to experiment first and see what works best for you." Leticia jumped in again, "Time also seems to be a problem. If you are having students get involved in action projects, you probably have to work longer than one quarter or semester." I responded, "Ideally, it would nice to work with a group of students for at least three quarters, two semesters, or one academic year. That is ideal but improbable."

Leticia looked at her watch and said, "It's already 9:30; I have to make final preparations for my symposium tomorrow. But if you don't mind, I have a last comment to make." I shook my head no, and Leticia continued, "Professor, I am in a constant struggle my first year. I realize that I'm the first Chicana teacher that many of my students have ever taken. I am seen as a role model by some and an interloper by others, but regardless, I feel this pressure to be there for them." I thought about this important comment and replied, "Leticia, you're going to make mistakes and hopefully you can learn from them. I wish we veteran teachers would honestly tell the new teachers about all the mistakes we made along the way. Knowing that you are not alone can make a lot of difference at anytime, but is probably more critical in these first years of teaching and research." Leticia eyed her watch again, stood up, and said, "We probably should save this topic for our next discussion. It gives us a place to begin the next time we meet. As always, I have a list of readings and a lot to think about. I have to go now, maybe I'll see you at the symposium tomorrow? It always helps to see a smiling face or a head nodding in encouragement. I know I should be used to this, but I still get nervous—kinda like the nerves I get the first day of each semester with new classes."

"Hey," I reminded her, "I still get nervous. I think it's the passion for the work, the excitement of sharing your dreams of social justice and facilitating others' goals to effect social change. After all these years, I think the nervousness is a good thing. I think that when I'm no longer nervous, I need to get out of the business."

"Thanks Professor. Lucky for me you still get nervous because that means you're still around to guide and encourage. I'll buy dinner at the NACCS (National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies) Conference in the Spring. But hopefully I'll see you soon."

I sat there for a minute and reflected on my own first year of teaching. I'm glad that an unanswered question in a panel brought Leticia and I together to discuss these issues related to critical pedagogy. I rarely get that opportunity. I too had struggled and I continue to struggle with many of the same issues that Leticia shared. I remember Paulo Freire came into my life at a time when I needed some guidance. His book, *PEDAGOGY OF THE OPPRESSED*,<sup>74</sup> and old mimeograph sheets from his Harvard University seminars came in just the nick of time for a struggling high school teacher. With other young teachers, I read, discussed, analyzed, critiqued, reflected, and utilized this very important work. While difficult to read, it's beauty for me was in its simplicity. It made things so clear for me. To this day, Freire's problem-posing method has a parsimony, pragmatism,<sup>75</sup> and poetry that makes for good teaching.<sup>76</sup> Leticia is going to do fine. She has the heart, determination, and vision to be a good social justice educator. She would make Paulo Freire proud.<sup>77</sup>

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74. FREIRE, *supra* note 2.

75. Charles Lawrence argues that "[p]ragmatism helps the scholar avoid elitism by forcing her always to judge the efficacy of theory by its usefulness in righting the everyday wrongs committed against those who are most oppressed." Lawrence, *supra* note 29, at 2260.

76. See generally PAULO FREIRE, *CULTURAL ACTION FOR FREEDOM* (Harvard Educational Review 2000) (1970); *EDUCATION FOR A CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS*, *supra* note 41.

77. Paulo Freire died in 1997 but his work lives on.

