

Chapter 1

Introduction

by Gene Bourgeois

Over the past several years, many college campuses have faced turmoil and tumult around questions of fairness, inclusion, equity, and diversity. Texas State University was among them.

Recognizing the distress, Texas State sought to reinforce its message and unwavering commitment to listening, improving, and acting so that this past does not define our future. We recognize that the path to inclusive excellence will be as varied as the faculty, staff, and students who make up our vibrant institution. Indeed, members of the university community have already forged pathways through crucial conversations, new staff positions, artistic displays, dialogue sessions, demonstrations, process improvements, poetry, music, and other forms of expression.

As a trained historian, I appreciate the strength and power of the written word that can reveal the thoughts of the author and others about important issues. Reading that work can provide a means to better explore, understand, and interpret the environment that helped forge and produce those thoughts. Reading that work can challenge preconceived notions or correct misunderstandings. Reading that work can better yourself.

So, when Miriam Williams and Octavio Pimentel, both professors in the Department of English, approached my office about an edited book collection to pave a new path forward on diversity and inclusion, I quickly agreed to the project.

Soon after, Miriam and Octavio posed four questions and invited members of the Texas State community to contribute chapters that fit the theme of healing and reconciliation. They asked:

How does diversity and inclusion at Texas State benefit teaching, research, service, and day-to-day activities on campus?

How would an even more diverse and inclusive Texas State benefit our students, our colleagues, and the future of this emerging research university?

What opportunities do we miss when we fail to make active and purposeful steps toward making all members of our community feel accepted and included?

What milestones do you hope the university will reach with your contributions and participation?

What follows are the eleven selected essays.

Autumn Hayes explores the concept of nepantla, an ancient term used to describe the feeling of being in-between two cultures. She explores how real life and real time connections between people can result in transformation.

Reflecting on his personal and professional journey, Scott Bowman advances a humble wish – the creation of an inclusive university with value, trust, and advancement. He couples that wish with a commitment to serve as the university's special assistant to the provost for inclusion and diversity.

Charise Pimentel delves into critical literacy as a teaching approach that prepares teachers to become change agents in schools. She acknowledges the stress associated with challenging students' core beliefs and describes the delicate dance of building critical consciousness in some students while engaging the critical consciousness of others.

Octavio Pimentel lays bare the subtle ways that some Texans refuse to acknowledge the state's Mexican culture. He also explores how people of Latinx backgrounds openly embrace or seek to escape their heritage.

Evolving from over twelve years of friendship, Miguel A. Guajardo, Monica Valadez, Leticia Grimaldo, Genise Henry, and Karen Henderson share stories related to resistance and resiliency in their quests to become fuller human beings.

In their interview with Libby Allison, Aimee Roundtree and Miriam Williams explore the importance of recruiting and retaining diverse faculty and students in academic programs.

Amanda Scott describes the motivations of Generation Z in the context of cultivating a new activist paradigm that requires re-envisioning how we engage traditionally marginalized students.

Christine Norton and Toni Watt illuminate the challenges faced by college students who grew up in the foster care system. This conversation includes the perspectives of race, ethnicity, gender expression, sexual orientation, poverty, first-generation status, and experiential trauma.

Scott Kampschaefer discusses the importance of diversity to campus culture and the differentiation in consequence that exists between attitudes of acceptance and tolerance.

Exploring the shaping of American sociocultural and academic landscapes, Samuel Saldivar examines the visibility, inclusion, and experimentation of Tejanos and their impact on those landscapes.

Sara Ramirez describes her experiences as a first generation, Mexican-American woman pursuing higher education and offers advice that may lead to a greater embrace of individual differences as well as an understanding of distortions resulting from a fear of differences.

I invite you to explore this generous collection and join me in thanking Miriam and Octavio for conceiving and undertaking this project. Alongside the grace and hope within these pages, there are lessons to be learned, stories to be heard, and assumptions to be questioned. Most importantly, perhaps your own path for service and care will emerge and find a home in the spirit of inclusivity at Texas State.



Dr. Gene Bourgeois

Dr. Gene Bourgeois is Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs at Texas State University. As the university's chief academic officer, he is responsible for the administration and oversight of the quality of the university's academic instructional and research programs and other functions central to its academic mission. Prior to becoming the Provost, he served in a variety of administrative positions at Texas State, including: Associate Provost, Chair of the Department of History, Director of the Texas State Honors Program, Founding Director of the Texas State in England Study Abroad Program, and Founding Faculty Coordinator for the Texas State Residential Colleges. Dr. Bourgeois earned B.A. and M.A. degrees from Louisiana State University and the degree of Ph.D. in History from the University of Cambridge.

Chapter 2

The Yes-Ands

By Autumn Hayes

Also, nepantla. Then the typing stops, and she's left staring at the latest Facebook message from her friend B, the only other woman of color in her poetry program. B is the one who helped her learn when to deal with and when to ignore questions like, "Why is hair such a big deal in this poem?" and "Why does the speaker use different diction all of a sudden?" B is responding to a piece that our protagonist has written about the Disney film Black Panther, an article in which – ruminating on a recent trip to Ghana – she has said, *I am not from here [Ghana or America] . . . I'm from the ocean, from the in-between, and there is no "going back" someplace I've never been.*

Also, nepantla. She knows one of these words. The other is a mystery, an assemblage of consonants she's never seen stand quite so close together. It looks like a puzzle piece blinking in the middle of her computer screen. Fit me in, fit me in, fit me in, it blinks. And because she knows that this is an invitation – that B respects her intelligence enough to expect her to look up words she doesn't understand – she immediately retypes the word in her internet search bar: N-E-P-A-N-T-L-A.

The results line up for inspection. She clicks and scrolls, clicks and scrolls. And then it feels like a thousand stout-winged wading birds – little blue herons, cranes with their flat gray heads – take off into the sky of her brain.

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Say where you're from again.

She's become *Cali Girl* to her uncle, the one who always wanted to go to USC but blew his knees out. But is she? No one in her on-campus apartment building seems to think so. *Say, where're you from again?* they ask, suppressing their shit-eating grins. It's a game at this

point. *Just say where you're from, they beg.* They want to hear her say *Tehhhk-sus*, soft and long as if it has three or four syllables instead of two.

It's not a harsh game, but just a reminder: she sounds strange. Hella strange. Clearly Southern. Enough so that another black woman – a woman from New York by way of the Caribbean – asks her, “So, are you a Southern belle, or what?”

You not from around here, huh?

She has been in rural Mississippi for five years. The frozen peas, wheat bread, and ground turkey she drove twenty miles to buy are forming an island inside the puddle growing on the conveyor belt as the cashier slowly surveys her for the fortieth time this year, taking her time with the coupons. She's not from around here again, just as she wasn't last week or last month or last year or the year before that.

She smiles her most innocent smile and says No, both hoping and ashamed that she manages to mirror the cashier's surprise, pride, and contempt. She's not from around here. Does she have to be, to buy frozen peas, ground turkey, and brown bread?

The cashiers never stop asking, not even when she moves back “home.”

What she know about anything? Never been married, ain't got no kids ... Why don't you stop being so selfish and have some kids of your own?

She doesn't know which one she wants to change first: them or herself.

I wish this essay talked more about the black family [sic] ... I don't see what the big deal is; B is whiter than me ... I don't look at J or A or B as “Hispanic” writers; if I didn't know your last name, J, I'd think you were white. And you, too, A ...

She never finishes the article she submitted for workshop in that class. She never submits it to the magazine that requested it. She freezes up every time anyone even appears to ask her to write about her blackness. (She never gets asked to write about her femaleness or her Southern-ness or her working-class background or.) What can they want, and what would it mean for her to deliver? She's frozen up seventeen times while trying to write the article

you're reading right now.

She knows she isn't "the." She fears she isn't even "a," sometimes. Yet she knows she is, and she knows she is, somewhere deep down. So when she encounters the word "nepantla" – when she learns that it means crossroads, means both-at-the-same-time, means man and woman and death and life and serpent and bird – in short, when she finally reads some Anzaldúa that isn't "How to Tame a Wild Tongue" – she knows that she's finally found her tribe: the Alsos, the Toos, the (to borrow from Claudia Rankine) Yes-Ands.

Which, of course, means that this word offers her a new "me," a new "I," in addition to her "we."

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Nepantla. I still confuse the term with nopalito, the tough-yet-juicy, picked-smooth meat of the prickly pear plant, even though I know that nepantla is a Nahuatl or Aztec word for in-betweenness, for existing simultaneously in the middle of things and no-recognized-where at all, for inhabiting the liminal space between dualities. I suppose the confusion is productive, though, as there is a fruitful prickliness to both. Nepantla is the perfect word for (which is to say the perfect little cage in which to capture and safely examine before releasing into the wild) my existence as an African-American woman, a descendant of slaves minimized, exploited, or rejected in all the countries of my genesis. I know this not only from my travels – from hearing the touts in Ghana and Morocco slyly call me sister in that way only hungry strangers must – or from my experiences being darker-than-brown-paper-bag-skinned in the United States, but from my reading of Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*. In his book, which my internet searches led me to finally read in its entirety, a lesbian, farmworking Chicana from South Texas asks, "Which collectivity does the daughter of the dark-skinned mother listen to?" (78), and I – a heterosexual, dollar-store-working, black woman from East Texas – hear my life's concerns stated as eloquently as possible. In this book, Anzaldúa describes the state and statue of Coatlicue, headless Aztec goddess of "life-in-death and death-in-life" (47) who "represents . . . something more than mere duality or a synthesis of duality" (46), and I grasp something that neither American patriarchy nor (long-coopted) African matriarchy has offered me, the thing without which both have rung hollow: wholeness. I see a legitimated space – for who can enter a land with no name? who can love, touch a

person she can't summon intimately? – where I can be Western and Eastern, accommodating and aggressive, mothering and independent, at the same time and according to my own needs as well as the situation's demands. I see a space where I, now and tomorrow, can simply “be” instead of concerning myself with how to be “a” or “the.”

And I have two very different women – two Chicanas from different eras and different backgrounds – to thank for that.

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In his seminal 1989 essay, “Literacy, Discourse, and Linguistics: Introduction,” linguist James Paul Gee defines Discourses as “ways of being in the world” (6)—combinations of ways of speaking, seeing, moving, thinking, believing, and being—and argues that true literacy only occurs through learning secondary Discourses, or ways of speaking, thinking, and being that differ from, and thus allow critique of, those learned in childhood (9). I couldn't agree more, as my experience researching nepantlisim attests. Before gaining language for liminality as a complete noun – a person, place, thing, and idea all at once - I felt torn to pieces, like Echo of Greek mythology: rent by others' caprices, unable to speak, capable only of repeating or contradicting what someone had proclaimed before me. *We (African Americans) come from kings and queens. Let a man be a man. If you work hard enough, anything is possible.* But I felt impossible. What was I, if I did not fully believe or disbelieve the words coming out of my own mouth? Was I as invisible, as erased, as an echo? Couldn't all these truisms be both false and valid at the same time? Couldn't I refute them, concede them, and do something more, too? Wasn't it possible that the “side” I needed to take was shifting territory that started in, or at least close to, the middle?

Learning to understand nepantla and Coatlicue showed me that the answer to these questions is yes. There is a space of inclusiveness and a way of inhabiting it, and these have always existed. People have known of them – had names for them – since the Aztecs, if not earlier, and knowing this gives me a sense of peace, curiosity, and connectedness unparalleled in any other part of my life. While inhabiting these spaces is a process of continual discovery – some discoveries painful, as my newfound literacy exposes my own potential complicity in sexism within my church, colorism and resentment against those lighter than me, and species-centric ravaging of the planet – the simple ability to see the world around me more fully and clearly is exhilarating, life-affirming, and thoroughly worthwhile.

For, as Gee further theorizes, primary Discourses, or those learned in home communities during the formative years, “no matter whose they are, can never really be liberating” (10). It is not enough for me to know and be proud of my African heritage, of my enslaved ancestors’ determination to succeed and survive, if that knowledge doesn’t teach me how to thrive, not simply survive, without dominating others. It is not enough for me to critique the practices of those who’ve enslaved Africans of women, either, unless those critiques teach me how to avoid being an enslaver, too. Competing perspectives, new language, new concepts: these are all necessary not only for literacy, but for freedom to build something new and freeing. In the university setting, this “something new” may mean a new engineering and architecture for our buildings, less damaging to the earth and to our psyches, or a new architecture and engineering for interacting with other living beings, Anzaldúa’s new “way of life” in which we stand “on both shores at once” with “a tolerance for contradictions . . . for ambiguity” (78-9).

However, neither will be possible without diversity. Without human beings of all walks of life – all skin tones, sexualities, body types and abilities, beliefs, nationalities, ages, and classes – sharing language and the concepts that those words represent, it is all too likely that we, students and teachers, will remain torn and scattered, stranded on what we perceive as opposing shores, “shouting questions, challenging” each other (Anzaldúa 78) in the same old ways when we could also be answering and adding to our common life. Unless we come together in the flesh and teach each other our words, our ideas, our forms, our body language, our Discourses, we will continue to see our complete selves as impossible and each other as theoretical problems to be solved for zero – “immigration problems,” “Negro problems” – instead of parts of the same whole.

And this is something I learned from a white man, two Chicanas (one lesbian, one straight), a scholarly article, a book of essays and poetry, and a Facebook message. Imagine what my students can teach me and each other, in all their blind, bipolar, autistic, dysgraphic, Chinese, Puerto Rican, Nigerian, Venezuelan, Cajun, bisexual, middle-class, farm kid, tweeting, Snapchatting, Tolkien-reading, atheist, fundamentalist, Papiamento-speaking glory. Imagine what we may make with and of each other once we learn the words for our common ground.

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Nepantla. It is a word that, by its very existence, reminds me I am not alone and therefore have hope and resources to lean on. It is a word that gives me a theoretical (which is to say

non-nuclear) means to research, understand, and contribute to my world and our history, our present, our future through my poetry, prose, and teaching. It is a word and a way of approaching the world that I might never have encountered had not B – Bonnie Cisneros, the Chicana mother, poet, essayist, tailor, DJ, jewelry-maker, and friend who helped me survive graduate school – read my article and sent me on a journey that is still unfolding, still leading me to question and re-form my ways of seeing, speaking, believing, and being. In short, it is a word that has made me more literate than I had previously imagined I could be, and only diversity on campus – access to someone like Bonnie, thoroughly versed in her culture/Discourse enough to see the connections between her words and mine and to share them – could have led to it. Not a token text in a book chosen and assigned by distant editors or curriculum-makers, but a real-life person seeing real-life – and real-time – connections between her flesh and mine, her struggles and desires and mine, her world and mine. That is the kind of diversity that leads to literacy, to being able to read and speak to the world in a way that transforms and enlivens it. My hope is that this is what diversity on campus looks like, and continues to look like, at Texas State.

[View Works Cited](#)

About the Author



Autumn Hayes

Autumn Hayes is an educator, freelance writer, and poet; her poetry, articles, and short fiction have appeared in *The Washington Spectator*, *Storm Cellar*, *The Seattle Review*, *African American Review*, *Teachers & Writers Magazine*, and the micro-fiction anthology *140 and Counting*, among others. She is currently a Senior Lecturer in the Department of English and serves as one of the Assistant Directors of the Texas State University Writing Center.

Chapter 3

Intentional Inclusion — Thoughts on Galvanizing a Diverse and Inclusive University

By Scott Bowman

Introduction

Acquiring an understanding of the relevance, necessity and applicability of a life committed to diversity and inclusion has been (and continues to be) a lifelong journey. Along the way, lessons have been learned regarding the fundamental difference between the interrelated and often co-described “diversity and inclusion” (consider “diversity” as a noun and “inclusion” as a verb), the thoughtful and careful examination of what diversity and inclusion look like, and the work that is necessary to manifest the efforts of a diverse and inclusive space. Recently, I have been called to think about these principles more carefully and I would like to share some of those thoughts in this chapter.

In presenting these reflections and how I believe they have facilitated a more robust knowledge of diversity and inclusion, I will be utilizing an autoethnographic approach.

According to Ellis and Bochner, “autoethnography is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural” (739). In other words, it is a scholarly scrutiny of my personal relationship to the phenomenon – in this case, my relationship to diversity and inclusion.

In this chapter, I will describe several reflections that I believe have shaped my understanding of diversity and inclusion and how those reflections help me better understand what real, applicable diversity and inclusion can look like at Texas State University.

Diversity Discovered

I was raised in Phoenix, Arizona. Normally, the words “Phoenix, Arizona” and “diverse” are not referred to in the same sentence; however, the city is actually quite diverse. While the level of diversity does not compare to cities like Los Angeles or New York City, there are very

few cities in America where you can see White, Black, Hispanic, Native American and Asian populations and communities on any given day. There is an active and engaging LGBTQIA community in the city and there are numerous elderly populations that retire to the greater Phoenix area. In addition, there are numerous active military and military veterans in the city and, as is the case with most major metropolitan cities, there is unmistakable economic diversity. From my earliest recollections through college and into the workforce, I grew up with friends and acquaintances that fit all of the aforementioned demographic characteristics.

Much like Texas State University, the *structure* of my geographic space was diverse (the noun). Yet, I also recognize that much of the “diversity” that the city held was not “inclusive.”

Social issues that arose during my time in Phoenix were often isolated to the group that was protesting the issue, with minimal (yet important) support from “outside groups.” Over the years, I recall politicians, professors, students, activists, and other citizens that would ardently speak on the importance and value of establishing “diversity” in workplaces, in universities, and in communities. I was one of those people, speaking from a variety of the aforementioned roles; yet I was speaking about the “noun of diversity” without the “verb of inclusion.” It was not until I returned to school for my graduate studies that I began to understand the importance of “inclusiveness.”

Inclusion Realized

When I decided to return to Arizona State University, I decided that I was open to the area of study that I was going to pursue. As a result, I (literally) flipped through the university’s catalogue and read the course descriptions for each department. When I arrived at the “School of Justice Studies” course, I found courses titled Economic Justice, Race, Class and Gender, and Gender and Feminist Inequality – to name a few. Upon acceptance and enrollment, I had a tremendously diverse faculty and a diverse cohort, which was an ideal setting for a student who was committed to the ideologies of diversity. However, it was not until I began my coursework that I realized that simply existing in a diverse space was not enough to produce an inclusive experience. In the midst of course discussions of race, gender, sexual orientation, age, etc., and justice, the accompanying narrative of the faculty and students was a clear indication of the gap between “diversity” and “inclusion.” There were countless times where I found myself reflecting “I never knew that” or “why weren’t more people actively outraged about this.” I realized that, while I was in full support of the “diversity noun,” I was severely lacking in the practice of inclusiveness.

Through several years of graduate school, I learned the importance and relevance of inclusiveness in the praxis of diversity. I began to recognize the similarities and differences among diverse groups, the importance of supportive action (both verbal and physical) to ensure inclusive decision-making, and simply learning to “listen” to the experiences of others, rather than simply believing that diversity in a social setting should look and feel the way that I believed it should. Actions as simple as marching with others in their calls for true inclusiveness and speaking directly to those that believed in diversity without practicing inclusiveness became regular practices. This paradigmatic shift produced better, stronger, and more authentic relationships with the people that I shared diverse space with and formed a shared, collective vision of the interrelatedness of shared issues. Despite the fact that I was/am a heterosexual, African-American, able-bodied, cisgender male, I realized that female, racial/ethnic, LGBTQIA issues were also my issues in an inclusive space.

Inclusiveness Tested

Upon arriving at Texas State University, my efforts were closely aligned with the education that I had received at Arizona State University. In many ways, college (at any level) exists in a bubble. Students hold the privilege (if they exercise it) to engage the ideology of diversity and inclusiveness in coursework, in their living situations, and in their clubs and organizations; however, it is often sheltered. Ironically, many students (regardless of the university) arrive at college with minimal exposure to diverse groups and go through their college years without a meaningful exposure to diverse faculty, students, and clubs and organizations. Ultimately, it does a fundamental disservice to students’ preparation for post-college employment, as they will often be forced to interact with diverse populations in unique and important settings.

Moreover, they can leave a university without understanding the interrelatedness of their identities to the identities of others.

Since this was my first post-doc position, this is where my test of diversity and inclusiveness began. At various times during my tenure at Texas State, I have spoken, marched, and protested for a variety of issues in support of a variety of groups. I have developed courses and mentored students on how to become stewards of inclusiveness as they go into the workforce and into graduate studies. I have challenged students, staff, other faculty members, and administrators when their views of diversity were not aligned with the importance of inclusiveness. Other faculty members, staff, and administrators that I have met

at Texas State over the years have held similar views on the importance of diversity and inclusion. Yet, there is much work to be done – particularly with regards to inclusiveness.

As a university, the faculty, staff, students at Texas State University are privileged to be at one of the most diverse institutions in the United States. We serve a variety of racial/ethnic students, a robust LGBTQIA student population, significant numbers of disabled students, a disproportionately higher number of veteran students, an increasing number of international students, and many others (as well as their respective intersectionalities) (Crenshaw, 95).

There are numerous programs that are in place to support these students; however, many of these programs take place in isolation, with non-in-group students being largely unaware of these efforts. There are personal, academic, and professional issues that these students face that are largely unknown to the rest of the student body, which can happen in a diverse space, yet simply cannot happen in a truly inclusive setting. I believe that this is the fundamental test that all Texas State University students face within this diverse setting.

The Importance of Inclusivity

I believe my experiences and autoethnographic reflection have shaped my understanding of the phenomenon of “diversity and inclusion.” In contemporary society, it is a challenge to exist in spaces that are not diverse. Furthermore, I believe that most individuals share a commitment to diversity. It is the commitment to inclusiveness – particularly the purposeful action that is associated with inclusiveness – that is the challenge that remains. According to Sherbin and Rashid, “Without inclusion, however, the crucial connections that attract diverse talent, encourage their participation, foster innovation, and lead to business growth won’t happen” (2). In the remaining section, I will attempt to highlight three areas of inclusiveness that I believe are essential to move Texas State University forward as the university that stands at the forefront of producing smart, empathetic, active students that support a diverse ideology.

Inclusiveness as careful

Nobody is perfect at the work of inclusiveness. Those that work diligently at the efforts of inclusiveness often forget to examine who is (or is not) “at the table”, forget to account for the narratives and issues of others, and forget to actively support those in need. The establishment of an inclusive space happens neither quickly, nor effortlessly. At times, our

words and phrases are insensitive or exclusionary and our ideologies of diversity are perceived to be contradictory or harmful to our perceived self-interests. Moreover, attempting to transition a populous thinking towards inclusion is often met with resistance, anger, and/or indifference.

The efforts towards an inclusive university must be carefully and thoughtfully constructed. At Texas State University, we must begin to carefully examine *exactly* what diversity means to students of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds (including White students), LGBTQIA students, veterans, disabled students, etc. (and their intersectionalities) and what we can collectively do to manifest a more inclusive university. This is of paramount responsibility for the administrators, faculty, staff, and students that have committed to be a part of the diverse, Bobcat community. In order to take the first steps towards an inclusive university, we must understand that co-existing in a diverse space is simply not enough and that there must be careful conversations on how to ensure that everyone's voice matters. Much like my transition into my graduate program, we must listen and commit to an inclusive space.

Inclusiveness as work

Inclusiveness is work. It is a daily work that will constantly test your commitment and will not always reward your best efforts. It is a fluid that requires an immeasurable attention to details that most of us miss. You will have friends and family that will test your commitment to inclusion, based on outdated paradigms and useless rhetoric. On your best, most inclusive days, it remains tremendously uncomfortable. Much like my earliest participation in diversity without the comprehension of inclusion, diversity is an empty promise – a fabrication of intention – without the commitment to inclusiveness.

At Texas State University, we must put in collective work – regardless of the discomfort, struggle, and effort. As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. suggests, “The ultimate measure of a {man} is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.” In our respective roles at Texas State, we have the collective opportunity to stand tall in our moments of challenge and controversy, once we commit to inclusion in the same manner that we have committed to diversity. The establishment of an inclusive university will not take place overnight and will not be universally engaged; yet I would contend that it is the only way that we move forward, maximizing the potential for our students, faculty, staff and administrators to become careful, global stewards of inclusion.

Inclusiveness as possible

Finally, we often become jaded with efforts that seem insurmountable. Arguably, there is no more arduous work than that which changes a society, a paradigm, or an ideology. For example, not only did women's right to vote, marriage equality, and civil rights unmistakably not take place overnight, they also were seen as unfeasible prior to their various inceptions. Each social action had both in-group challenges to the existing paradigms and support from careful and hardworking allies that desire a more just and inclusive society. As a university, we have demonstrated a clear commitment to diversity – similarly, we must demonstrate an identical commitment to inclusion – something that Roberson refers to as “identity-conscious practices” (231).

Having been on the Texas State University campus for the past twelve years and witnessed our significant growth and expansion, it seems the appropriate time begin earnestly and carefully planning for the possibility of sharing a dynamically inclusive space. Examining effective and inclusive “identity-conscious practices” for faculty, staff, administrators, and students must be the start of making the possible achievable. Students that walk through the quad and recognize that the commitment to others is a commitment to the maximization of inclusivity and the betterment of their future interactions makes diversity and inclusion possible. Faculty that refresh their courses, lectures and assigned readings to incorporate stories and perspectives that are often ignored also take the first steps towards interactions that make diversity and inclusion possible. Staff and administrators that take the time to meet students (and faculty) where they are and establish a cooperative collaboration to solve problems and achieve solutions additionally make it possible for a diverse and inclusive space. My personal commitment to Texas State University's diverse and inclusive space is to serve a three-year appointment as the Special Assistant to the Provost for Diversity and Inclusion.

Ultimately, the simultaneous commitments to diversity and inclusion of Texas State University faculty, staff, students, and administration can make the possible achievable – the creation of an inclusive space with value, trust, and advancement. This is my humble wish for my university.

[View Works Cited](#)

About the Author



Scott Bowman

Dr. Scott Bowman is an Associate Professor in the School of Criminal Justice and the Special Assistant to the Provost for Inclusion and Diversity. He has published two-edited books, several book chapters, and in many peer-reviewed journals, including *Criminal Justice Policy Review*, *Journal of Qualitative Criminal Justice and Criminology*, and *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*. His research areas include juvenile justice, youth development, and race/ethnicity, class and the criminal justice system. In his commitment to Social Justice, he also works on numerous inclusion and diversity projects and programming on campus and in the community.

Chapter 4

I Stress Less and Sleep More at a Hispanic Serving Institution

By Charise Pimentel

During my 13 years of working at Texas State University, I have taught the same courses over and over again, and for my undergraduate multicultural education class in particular, I have taught it every single semester, and often two sections a semester. Despite my many years of experience as a college professor, I cannot say that class preparation or syllabus design is effortless or stress-free. For this class, I teach pre-service teachers about tough educational equity issues with a central focus on how U.S. schools perpetuate racist practices and outcomes. Needless to say, the stakes are high, as inevitably what I teach in this class will make its way into K-12 classrooms and impact the educational experiences and outcomes of youth for many years to come. Realizing the significance of this class, I continue to wrestle with, and yes lose sleep over, how to best deliver a race-centered curriculum that is both meaningful and that prepares teachers to become change agents in schools.

In this chapter, I 1) examine my ongoing struggle to teach multicultural content through a critical literacy perspective, 2) discuss how my stress level is alleviated as my courses become more diverse, and 3) provide un cuento from one semester in particular when I had the unique experience of teaching a course that contained primarily Hispanic, bilingual students.

Critical Literacy

Whether teacher educators realize it or not, they are preparing teachers to enter school systems that replicate the racial order of the larger society. To be clear, schools do not operate in isolation of the racist society in which they are embedded, and as such, schools are institutions that produce inequitable policies and practices that impact students' educational experiences and outcomes. Educational scholars have documented and theorized the racist nature of schools by focusing on the relentless racial achievement gap that U.S. schools have

produced since the inception of public schooling (Valencia 3; Howard 12). In a teacher education program, teachers must be made aware of the sociopolitical context of schools and further realize that their acts of teaching are never apolitical (Freire 42; Zinn 27). In my own attempt to center my preservice multicultural education class on the sociopolitical context of schooling, I develop curricular materials and pedagogical practices that draw from Paulo Freire's concept of critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy is a problem posing, democratic, and transformative approach to teaching in which teachers and students work together as they seek to understand and transform the various oppressive conditions that shape the opportunities, experiences, and social positioning of all members in our society.

A key component to Freire's critical pedagogy is his conceptualization of literacy. Unlike conventional ways of understanding literacy, in which people passively consume the various messages or "texts" they are exposed to, Freire's concept of critical literacy involves an active, analytical process in which people "read" texts in an effort to better understand how power, inequalities, and injustices are produced through the texts they are reading. As Freire puts it, critical literacy refers to one's ability to not only read the word, but the world. Ultimately, the goal of critical pedagogy and critical literacy is for students to take an active role in their education, so they can deconstruct and transform the asymmetrical power relations that define our schools as well as all other aspects of society.

A critical literacy approach to teaching is not a novelty by any means. Such pedagogical practices have been detailed in a variety of books, some of which include: Mary Cowey's *Black Ants and Buddhists: Thinking Critically and Teaching Differently in the Primary Grades*; Jeffrey Duncan-Andrade and Ernest Morrell's *The Art of Critical Pedagogy*; Candace Kuby's *Critical Literacy in the Early Childhood Classroom: Unpacking Histories, Unlearning Privilege*; Julio Cammarota and Augustine Romero's *Raza Studies: The Public Option for Educational Revolution*; Angela Valenzuela's *Growing Critically Conscious Teachers: Social Justice Curriculum for Educators of Latino/a Youth*; and Vivian Vasquez's *Critical Literacy Across the K-6 Curriculum*. Other scholars have built upon Freire's work as they advance various iterations of democratic and transformative pedagogies, including critical media literacy (Funk, Kellner, and Share 7), racial literacy, (Twine 130; DiAngelo 62), equity literacy (Gorski 221), and coalition pedagogy (Pimentel and Pimentel 115). I draw from all of these conceptualizations of critical literacy as I have my students critically examine how schools produce inequities and how teachers can work as transformative agents in schools.

The Struggle to Implement Critical Literacy

Teaching about social injustices such as racism, poverty, language discrimination, and immigration are not easy tasks by any means. Taught through a critical literacy perspective, this material often challenges students' core beliefs in equal opportunity, meritocracy, and the pursuit of happiness. As a result, many of my students do not readily accept my teachings, but rather pose a variety of challenges to the course materials and perspectives. Some students will outright deny that the injustices I focus on even exist. In extreme cases, I have had students state that my focus on these issues actually perpetuates and exaggerates the problem by bringing attention to what are otherwise minute problems. In these cases, students argue that the problems would essentially fix themselves if people, including myself, would just stop making such a big deal about them. One student, for example, stated that "I am sure there are some cases of racial discrimination, but as minorities increase their numbers in schools, these incidents will fade." Further, some students divert the class discussion to other topics or if they do focus on school inequities, they might blame the problems on students and their families, also known as deficit thinking (Valencia, 20). Other students deescalate the magnitude of these issues by making random, unrelated statements. For example, when I asked my students to write a brief statement on how they were feeling about the racism that was occurring on our own campus (e.g., racist flyers that were posted around campus), one student wrote, "How do I feel? I'm hungry!" and had nothing else to say about the flyers or to the clearly emotional responses other students were having to them.

From what I have gathered over the years is that students (often White, middle class, English monolingual students) who have not experienced injustices are often unaware of them and will sometimes go so far as to deny they exist. For many, if an injustice does not affect them in an adverse way, it does not become part of their consciousness, and if an injustice is brought to their attention, they may go to great lengths to explain it away. Consequently, I sometimes struggle all semester long to convince students that the injustices do exist and the sooner I can do this, the sooner we can start working on transformative practices that aim to address these injustices. As part of my course preparation process, I scour resources from multiple outlets, trying to find current and relatable material as well as develop innovative ways to make this material meaningful to the mostly white students who have had the privilege of never having to consider these issues. In the end, I pull together a collection of academic articles and books, films, news items, interviews, social media posts, blogs, and other various

webpages. My goal is to provide the material from multiple angles with the hope that I can create entryways for students to critically examine the sociopolitical context of our schools and society.

Pedagogically, I try a variety of strategies, including class activities that put students through simulated classroom experiences that decenter the English-only, Euro-centric perspective they have grown accustomed to. For example, I have students read multicultural materials and I deliver tests that focus on the multicultural knowledge they are often denied in their K-12 schooling. Additionally, I teach segments of my class in Spanish, at which time I deliver brief lectures in Spanish, administer quizzes in Spanish, and require students to communicate with their peers as well as write in Spanish. Based on my students' capabilities to function in a multicultural and bilingual classroom environment, I will segregate students, and in some cases, dumb down the curriculum for students who cannot keep up by giving them coloring sheets and crayons. Additionally, I will change their names to something that is easier to pronounce in Spanish. These are all things that take place in K-12 schools, and as my students undergo this process, they often come to realize what many K-12 youth experience and become eager to make schools more equitable, especially for language minority students.

As I stated at the beginning of this chapter, the teaching of this class requires much research, planning, innovation, reflection, and evaluation. While such a thorough teaching process should ideally result in the execution of a successful class, I am often left questioning the effectiveness of this class in reaching its diverse student population. As I have already discussed, I often struggle to convince the White European American, English monolingual students about the inequities that students of color and/or linguistic minority students experience in schools. Perhaps more concerning, however, is the possibility that I cater too much to whiteness in my class, thereby perpetuating the inequitable educational experiences I seek to overthrow. With this being said, I must consider to what degree my teaching practices may fall short of building upon the critical literacy perspectives of my students of color. This is a perplexing endeavor, considering that I work at a Hispanic Serving Institution and my ultimate goal is to prepare teachers who will advocate for Hispanic and other underserved students in U.S. schools. Needless to say, these are the dilemmas that keep me up at night.

Un Cuento from a Bilingual Class

While my teaching dilemmas are ongoing, as I teach 1-2 sections of multicultural education every semester, there was one semester in particular that I had the opportunity to teach a bilingual class to a cohort of pre-service teachers who were all bilingual in Spanish and English and with the exception of one student, were all Hispanic. I taught this class as part of a teaching block that took place at a local elementary school when one of my colleagues was on developmental leave. Much like the multicultural education class I describe above, this bilingual class also focused on the sociopolitical context of schools and we particularly focused on the politics of language in schools, examining such topics as: language discrimination, language loss, the racialization of language, the inconsistencies and short-term commitment of bilingual programs in schools, and the benefits and successes of bilingual education. However, unlike the struggles I experience in my multicultural classes, the Hispanic students in my bilingual class all had first-hand experiences with language discrimination and racism in schools and could all identify with the topics we covered in class. During our first week of class, for example, I had students write a language biography that they then presented to the larger class. This assignment resulted in an emotional class experience in which students shared their K-12 experiences, some of which included: being held back a year due to their home language, being placed in special education, being told not to speak Spanish, being ignored, ridiculed, sitting in classes not understanding the language of instruction, segregated from White, English-speaking students, and missed opportunities to participate in bilingual education altogether because their parents declined this option, recalling their own horror stories of being bilingual in U.S. schools. In essence, we had reached a point of critical literacy in the first week of class that it often takes me an entire semester to achieve in my general multicultural classes. From here, the students were able to focus their attention on how to position themselves as change agents in schools and were eager to challenge and transform the sociopolitical context of schooling.

Concluding Remarks

Based on my diverse teaching experiences at Texas State University, there are important implications for all instructors across campus. First, we must realize and build upon the full range of experiences and perspectives of our students. Our students come to Texas State University with diverse experiences, perspectives, and identities. As referenced in my class descriptions, I as well as others must ensure that we are building upon the advanced critical

literacy skills that many students of color have. Indeed, teaching multicultural content requires a delicate dance—maneuvers that aim to build the critical consciousness of some while engaging the critical consciousness of others. Also important is that professors should not do this work in isolation. We need to hire more faculty who work from a critical literacy perspective as well as provide ongoing professional development opportunities on these topics to faculty who are already here. Too often, faculty who are teaching from a critical perspective are doing so in isolation from what other professors are doing, and as a result, students do not get a consistent experience, or worse yet, they are learning uncritical perspectives that continue to normalize the Eurocentric, English-only perspective. My discussion in this chapter also speaks to the importance of maintaining a diverse student population on our campus, as diverse students come with a rich set of knowledge and this provides all students the opportunities to learn from others' experiences and perspectives, not just from that of their professors.

[View Works Cited](#)

About the Author



Charise Pimentel

Charise Pimentel is an Associate Professor in the Department of Curriculum & Instruction within the College of Education. Her areas of specialty include: Race and Education, Bilingual Education, Multicultural Education, and Critical Media Literacy. The courses she teaches include such titles as, Multicultural Teaching and Learning, The Politics of Language, Bilingual Education Principles and Practices, and Literacy Education for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Children.

Chapter 5

¡No escondan el nopal! Sus raíces son obvias! ("Don't Attempt to hide your Latinx Ethnicity! Your Ethnicity is Obvious")

By Octavio Pimentel

Muchas veces, I come across people in San Marcos, Texas and at Texas State University who do not like their ethnicity, color of their skin, native language, parent given name, among other cultural characteristics that make them who they are. Unfortunately, this ethnic shame stems from the anti-Latinx rhetoric and even more so from the Anti-Mexican rhetoric that persists in the United States. What is sad about this embarrassment of themselves is that it often produces, at best, a low level self-hatred of themselves, and in more severe cases, a keen hatred of themselves.

These varied amounts of self-hatred often occur in people who have Latinx cultural roots. Not surprising, it is often others who are not Latinx who produce the most anti-Latinx rhetoric. For example, it is common to hear people say things like; "This is America... people should speak English," "These illegals are coming over to take the jobs from Americans;" "These people should stop supporting Mexico. They live in America". In addition to those who are blunt about their racist beliefs, there are others who are equally racist, but express their viewpoints in a subtle way. A prime example of this was when the "FLOTUS," wore a jacket with the message "I Really Don't Care. Do U?" when she visited the child detention center in Texas. When she was questioned about her apparel choice, she responded by saying it was "just a jacket," as if she was oblivious to the rhetorical message she wrapped herself in. As a way to further grapple with these complicated issues, this essay addresses many other rhetorical racist practices that occur in Texas. This is followed up with an analysis of how people respond to this negative rhetoric. Lastly, I provide suggestions on how Texans can help minimize these racist rhetorical practices.

Let me be blunt. Racism is alive and well in the United States. It appears everywhere. What is most heartbreaking about this is that its existence is so widespread that it has become

normalized and thus unrecognizable. That is, racist rhetoric simply passes as everyday rhetorical practices that “Americans” participate in. For example, the 4th of July is a holiday that is celebrated in coordination with the signing of the Declaration of Independence of 1776, and is often viewed as a representation of freedom. Although this is true to some point, it is rarely recognized that the Declaration of Independence that was signed in 1776 was not applicable to all Americans, including African Americans and other people of color. Their freedom was not finalized until June 19, 1865.

To understand my positionality, it is vital to understand who I am. I am a 50-year-old Mexican male who was born in poverty in a racist environment! To some surprise, even today, as a full professor at Texas State University, I face racism on a daily basis. Unfortunately, there are plenty of people who do not like me because I am Mexican/Latinx. As a child my family migrated throughout the western United States, following the fruit harvest, but settled down in San Ysidro, California for a few years, while my father opened up a business in Mexico, which is why I call San Ysidro my hometown. One of the best things about San Ysidro was that everyone was bilingual, and thus most interactions were in both Spanish and English or a mixture of both languages. Since I was lucky enough to be raised in this linguistically rich area, I became bilingual at a young age, which gave me the confidence to embrace and love myself for the multiethnic individual I am, which is something I continue to profess (purposely or not) to date.

Now as a professor who deeply cares about people and the rhetoric they (re)produce, I spend many hours theorizing why many people embrace the racist rhetorical practices in the United States to a point where they hate themselves. When I arrived at Texas State University in 2005 I was excited. Not only was Texas State University a beautiful campus with great colleagues, but at that point, it was in the process of becoming a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), which was exciting because the central focus of my research has always been on “Hispanics” or Latinx, which is the term I prefer to use. Over my tenure at Texas State, I have had hundreds of beautiful (referring to the interior of a person and not the physicality of an individual) students, both female and male, with gorgeous names like: Xiomara, Xochitl, Sebastian, Marcos, and many others. To my surprise, almost every time I get a student with a name that is rooted in Spanish or in some cases in Nahuatl, the students most often prefer to be called by a more Anglo sounding name like: Jessica, Vicky, Erik, or Scott.

Una cosa que sí quiero dejar claro es que entiendo lo que implica tener un nombre mexicano,

o aun más, lo que significa tener un nombre de origen indígena. Yo entiendo que a algunas personas les podría causar un poco de vergüenza tener un nombre atípico, pero para mí es motivo de orgullo. Es muy importante que la gente se de cuenta que la cultura mexicana, el idioma, y las prácticas culturales de México y otros países son bellísimas.

They are simply gorgeous. With little doubt, being Mexican is something to be proud of and certainly nothing individuals should hide. And even when people do try to hide their ethnicities, they are almost always outed by the color of their skin, accent, and/or cultural practices.

The pressure of NOT BEING LATINX, or specifically Mexican is strong within the United States. Within the United States there is a constant pressure to assimilate into “American culture” which is narrowly defined as White European Culture (WEA). This can be seen in different ways of society, which is presented at an early age and continues on until adulthood. For instance, a prime example of this is the education system in the United States. For the most part, the education system in the United States is taught in English, and through a European American perspective. What is most thought provoking about this is that most people do not recognize this, and in fact claim that it is simply the way it is in the United States.

Although most people claim they are unmindful to these racist acts, the truth is in most cases they are not. I claim this because for the most part many people adopt an anti-ethnic perspective, while immersing themselves in an “American” life-style (most commonly defined within the cultural practices of White European Americans). An old student of mine (who I’ll call Dallas to preserve his anonymity) told me a story that supports my claim well. During one of our conversations Dallas told me that while his mother was pregnant with him his parents could not decide on a name. In his words, they wanted to give him a name that would simply fit into “American culture” and not be too “Mexican.” As it turned out, since he was born in Dallas, Texas, his parents named him Dallas.

Although Dallas’ parents’ actions can be classified as passive aggressive, there are other stories that are more straight forward. In one incident while recording attendance in my class, I read the name “Carlos.” Once I read the name, a student raised his hand and assertively asked me to call him Charlie. When I questioned him about this, he told me that “Carlos” was the name given to him by his Mexican parents, but since he lives in the United States he wanted to be called by his American name—Charlie!

There are many motives as to why people often do not like their Mexican names, but a common reason is that they are humiliated by its Spanish or *Nahuatl* origins. For some time now there has been a clear push for “English Only” in the United States. Although this push has been intensive over the last 30 years, the “English Only” propaganda is especially prominent right now (summer 2018). Of course, this is all ironic because as history shows, the United States is a collage of immigrants (with many different languages) that came to a new world that already had hundreds of indigenous languages. Influenced by this anti-Latinx rhetoric, some people are adopting an Anglosized name because they hope that by removing their name from Spanish origins, they will no longer be classified as Latinx, or more specifically, Mexican. Unfortunately for them, in most cases, these individuals have not realized the complexity of all this and how their skin color, accent, and cultural characteristics most often prevent them from being classified as “American.”

Luckily, although there are people who are not proud of their Latinx backgrounds, there are others who are proud of their Latinx culture like Dr. Sergio Martinez and Dr. Jesus Jimenez, both Texas State University professors. I originally met Dr. Martinez the first day of faculty orientation in 2005. Within minutes of small talk, we realized that we were both advocates of Latinx/Mexican issues and had very similar migrant backgrounds. About six months later, I met Dr. Jimenez at a local coffee shop where we too realized that we had many things in common. Similar to the goals of myself, and my wife Dr. Charise Pimentel, Dr. Martinez and Dr. Jimenez (and their partners) both made conscious choices to teach their children Spanish as their first language. In all of these cases, we provided all our children with names that were deeply rooted in either the Spanish or *Nahuatl* language. In my case, along with my wife, we named our son *Quetzin*, and our two daughters *Quetzalli* and *Maya Azteca*. In the case of Dr. Jimenez, along with his wife, they named their children: *Jesús* and *José Eduardo*. Similar, Dr. Martinez, and his wife named their three daughters: *Jazmín Xitlali*, *Cristal Quetzali*, and *Iris Yoltzín*. Also, and perhaps more importantly, in all these cases, the parents taught their children to be proud of their Mexican culture, and specifically of being bilingual.

In the case of all of these children, they have a strong Mexican identity network, and thus it is not surprising that these children are proudly aware of their ethnicity. It must also be noted that none of these children, including my own, are embarrassed or ashamed of the overlaying “American culture” that blankets them. It is also important to note that all of these children are proud of being fluent English speakers, and in most cases, use it as their primary language when they communicate with each other. Lastly, since most of them are teenagers, thus being

active in social media, their primary language choice is often English. In fact, on some occasions they participate in activities that can be classified as very European. For example, *Quetzin* backpacked through Europe with his high school AP Spanish class during the summer (2018).

The reproduction of anti-Spanish and thus insinuating anti-Latinx (specifically Mexican) can be seen in many ways in San Marcos, Texas. When I first arrived in 2005, I was surprised how the majority of people did not embrace the Spanish Language, and purposely miss-pronounced words that were obviously in Spanish. It was not one, two, or three words that were completely being mispronounced, but instead it was a continuous stream of words. Shockingly, now (2018), things have not changed much.

Perhaps the most agonizing one is the town's name "*San Marcos*." In most cases, people pronounce the name, "San Marcus," which makes NO SENSE. To pronounce it in such a way, the complete spelling must be changed and the emphasis on the word would have to be completely changed around. Another example of this is one of the central streets in *San Marcos* named "*Guadalupe*." This name is deeply embedded in Catholicism and "*la Virgen de Guadalupe*" or the Virgin of Guadalupe. That said, since there is a large Catholic population in San Marcos, it is pretty ironic once again that people pronounce *Guadalupe* as "Gua-Da-Loop".

Perhaps the funniest word that is often miss-pronounced is *Jalapenos*. The first time I heard this was when I visited a famous fast-food restaurant in San Marcos named Whataburger. I remember the cashier asking the customer if she wanted "Jaw-La-Pe-Nos" on her hamburger. Shocked, and laughing, I was waiting to hear the customer's response, which was just as bad. The customer never missed a beat and said no thank you. I really don't like "Jaw-La-Pe-Nos."

There are other instances as the ones I have previously described. The bottom line is that it is alarming that some Texans, which are obviously influenced by the national anti-Latinx rhetoric, are not willing to pronounce common words in Spanish that are part of their community. And to be honest, I think in some cases it is even more complicated than that. In some cases, I believe individuals are purposely sending a message to Mexicans that their culture is not welcome in Texas.

Texas is beautiful. But unfortunately, there are some people who simply are not willing to

Texas is beautiful. But unfortunately, there are some people who simply are not willing to embrace the “Mexican culture” that historically as well as currently defines the state. What is delicate about this is that although most people are not straightforwardly protesting Mexican culture, they nonetheless are doing so in subtle ways that become normalized. As a way to oppose these practices, I highly suggest that the entire state of Texas participate in a dual language Spanish/English education system that is carried throughout the K-16 education system. A dual language education requires that students’ schooling be provided in both English and Spanish. And more importantly, it is crucial to understand that these school programs are not only aimed at Spanish speakers, but are aimed at English monolingual speakers as well. The hopes are that by having students participate in dual language education programs many more people would become bilingual. Although I recognize that “dual language” programs are not the answer to fix the complexity of problems we face, it is a step in the right direction. I say this because it is well supported that language is often connected to culture; thus if a language is accepted, it is likely the acceptance of the culture will follow.

About the Author



Octavio Pimentel

Dr. Octavio Pimentel joined the Masters in Rhetoric and Composition Program in The Department of English at Texas State University in 2005. He has taught various undergraduate and graduate classes in the area of cultural rhetorics. Dr. Pimentel has authored or co-authored 3 books: *Racial Shorthand: Racial Discrimination Contested in Social Media*, *Historias de Éxito within Mexican Communities: Silenced Voices*, and *Communicating Race, Ethnicity, and Identity in Technical Communication*. He has also authored 20+ articles and presented at 30+ national and international conferences.

Chapter 6

Framing of Pláticas, Reflections and Cuentos

By Miguel A. Guajardo, Monica Valadez, Leticia Grimaldo, Genise Henry, and Karon Henderson

In this chapter we present *cuentos* birthed during ongoing *pláticas* we have sustained over twelve years. These *cuentos* are informed by the multiple spaces we have occupied with loved ones who have informed our identities and fueled a commitment to resistance. These spaces and relationships have also taught us the art of resiliency. Not a resiliency that is informed by the traditionally value of whiteness (i.e. grit and bootstrap mentality), but a resiliency that has taught us how to change, survive, and sustain our presence as we learn to change with the ever-shifting terrain we stand on. Mainly among these skills, we develop the ability to sustain both micro and macro-aggressions, which we face in traditional classrooms intended to be about higher learning. We faced these moments as students and faculty and from students and faculty. This awareness has been informed by a strong pedagogy of faith, hope, and relationship(s); at the core of these relationships is the understanding that we are interdependent and that our personal success is intricately connected to each other. The *cuentos* below are grounded with the concept of resistance and resiliency in the process of becoming fuller human beings.

Miguel

Llegué a Texas State in 2004 after teaching in South Texas at University of Texas-Pan American for two years and after attending the University of Texas-Austin as a student, employee, community activist, and a WK Kellogg Foundation's International Fellow. During this time, my community partners and I gave birth to the Llano Grande Center for Research and Development in South Texas, which became a beacon of academic work, creative pedagogical space, and a place where we grew healthy children and strong citizens by learning about our elders' stories and their contributions to changing the world around them. The idea of uniting the power of place and the wisdom of people was born here and then informed the work of a national network, Community Learning Exchange (Guajardo, Guajardo, Jason & Militello, 2016). The clear message in this work is that place matters, good

work is socially constructed, and relationships are critically important for successful change to take place. Thus, at the center of this work are the values of relationships that are built on trust, respect, dignity, shared-power, and being present.

During my job interview in San Marcos, I remember a question my Department Chair asked me: "Can you do in San Marcos what you have done in South Texas?" Being the political-animal, I am, my response was simple, a grin, a *phew* sound and "of course!" I had a number of critiques of his questions, but these were for other times... at the moment, I needed to be clear in my commitment, and I was. A second question that has informed my time at Texas State was during my interview by the hiring committee. One of the interviewers asked the question: "What do you want to accomplish while you are at Texas State?" my response was short and simple, "I want to change the world!" My soon to be colleagues were puzzled by my response, but then I shared a story about an incident that had just occurred at my children's elementary school. I gave an example of how a sequence of events at a parent-teacher(s) and school leaders' conference allowed me to display my principles, values, and commitment to pushing boundaries, building community, and acting for the public good, while changing the world for about eight people who participated. My colleagues' concerns about me being a Don Quixote type of character were tempered, but they still didn't quite understand what to make about my arrogant response. In my brand of dynamic-critical pedagogy, the act of changing the world begins with inviting people to imagine and live their dreams.

The *cuentos* that follow are written by myself, a faculty member in the Education and Community Leadership Program and School Improvement (SI) PhD program in the College of Education and four learning partners who all obtained a PhD from our program. Monica Valadez is a first-generation college graduate; she grew up in an immigrant family who raised their eight children in a predominantly Anglo Community in Central Texas. Leticia Grimaldo grew up in a Mexican neighborhood in a segregated West Texas Community. Leticia obtained a PhD from the SI program in 2010. Genise is a African American educator who came to Texas State as a student who formed her academic identity by studying in a Historically Black College in Central Texas, and Karon Henderson came to the program as a white woman whose teaching practices were about keeping things safe and the status quo was her mode of operation. All five of us shared a common space, place, and time within the School Improvement program and the stories below capture snapshots of how our worlds have changed during this process of engagement in a PhD program.

The stories in this chapter are captured by sharing, *pláticas*, *cuentos*, visuals and reflections of the work we have done together. Over the last twelve years, we have strived to belong in a Whitestream Institution (Urrieta, 2009) as we work to own the community we've nurtured at Texas State. Our work to naming and celebrating the relationships and knowledge we've created in our own learning community has given each one of us hope and the strong relationships to complete monumental work in our own personal and family journeys.

Monica

It was always more than a sense of solidarity that moved us to seek out and create spaces in which we could be disturbed enough to consider that maybe our stories had a place within higher education. And yet I would estimate that many of us were not searching for another diploma, certification, or title, but rather to understand why students and families continued to struggle so gravely within our public schools. Some of us came in with both unrecognized or downplayed strengths, but also a woundedness that we would not understand until much later, which could be harnessed as a source of hope and inspiration. I was very familiar with schooling and did schooling very well, but the spaces into which we were invited to engage and eventually ourselves create, challenged us to reconsider what we understood to be the purpose of education.

There was an earnestness and oftentimes a rawness to the vulnerability manifested with highly dialogical spaces. I remember one of the first circles I participated in while a graduate research assistant for Miguel. It was a national Community Learning Exchange hosted by the Laguna Department of Education in New Mexico. That was almost ten years ago, but to this day I reference it when I speak to the power of this method as I invite students, parents, staff, and community to discuss deep and significant issues. I joined that circle not through a willingness, but because of the trust I had for the person who invited me. And so it is with our community; trust begets vulnerability and through it a greater dive into spaces that express stories of wisdom, hope, sorrow, joy, and fear. The circle would eventually become a significant tool within the PhD classroom and subsequently our writing circle. Through it we promoted a collective spirit to the dissertation process. Though we each had a responsibility to our own research, we also believed that each other's work would influence students, families, and communities somewhere, and regardless of location, we were committed to them as well. We learned from one another and reclaimed a truer sense of accountability and assessment. We held our work to the highest standards because we grew to understand our mutual commitment to doing the public good.

While developing the conceptual framework for my dissertation, I experienced great frustration making sense of how it interconnected and if it would speak to what I was investigating. I clearly recall the moment Miguel, having knowledge of my artistic capacity, invited me to make sense of it through art. Line and color helped liberate me to put word to thought. I continue to express sensemaking through art and created the image below, which was influenced by our collaboration and continued dialogue in this process. It depicts the strength of the learner as we provide the rich, dynamic, and trusting spaces through which s/he is valued and invited to think creatively about hope, possibilities, and our commitment to a greater purpose.



Letti

As I sit and reflect on my journey, it is hard for me to believe the personal transformation that I have made throughout my educational journey. Born and raised in a small West Texas town, entrenched in racism and low expectations for students of color, I grew up always second guessing myself and never quite feeling good enough. The deficit thinking endured in my developmental years left an imprint on my identity that I have struggled to overcome. While I have had critical champions along the way that have fostered my educational growth, I always felt lonely in academia. As I first began to work on a Ph.D. in School Improvement, my charge was clear. I wanted to make a difference in the inequities that were taking place in our schools. The tension started when I could never quite see myself or my journey in the classes that I took, and there seemed to be a disconnect with what was being discussed and what was taking place in our schools. After my first semester, I set up an appointment to speak to the director of the program and he mentioned a new junior faculty had just been hired that he felt would be a good fit to serve as my mentor. This is when my world began to open and my own transformation unfolded. Dr. Miguel Guajardo started mentoring me and allowing me to take independent studies with him. As we began to talk about the works of other Latino scholars, I was filled with hope. I began to understand that the struggles that I had experienced were not mine alone. It was comforting; it was a pivotal moment in time for me and I was able to exhale.

As time passed, our morning coffee *platicas* (Guajardo, 2013) evolved and Dr. Guajardo invited Monica Valadez and Genise Henry to join. This space was one of trust, dignity and openness. We were able to put our vulnerabilities on the table and support each other throughout the process. We grew stronger as writers, as scholars, and as beings.

I sit here now empowered. It has been eight years since I completed my Phd., but these relationships continue. As a mother, as a researcher who works with teachers in schools and as an adjunct professor, I am constantly striving to model the dialogical process in order to foster growth, support and instill a belief that all things are possible. *Si se puede*.

Karon

When I reflect on my life in schools and as a citizen of this ever-changing world, I categorize my experiences into two life chapters; Old School Karon and New School Karon. Old School Karon was not only afraid to challenge the status quo but was also oblivious to possible

inequities that existed in education. New School Karon reflects critically and understands that every educative act in schools has social and political implications that may further marginalize students of color and those living below the poverty line. The transformation from Old School Karon to New School Karon may not have occurred had it not been for the opportunity to be a member of the 2008 Ph. D. in School Improvement Cohort.

In 2008, I was invited to participate as a member of the PhD in School Improvement Cohort at Texas State University. From the first day of the program, it was clear that the philosophy of this graduate program hinged on the idea of developing a diverse academic community. Our original membership included 22 students of various races, ethnicities, gender identities, and socio-economic backgrounds. Additionally, half of the group represented the School Improvement cohort and half of the group represented the Adult, Professional, and Community Education cohort providing a platform to examine issues throughout the educational pipeline from the cradle to the workforce. The first year in the program, the courses were co-taught by professors representing each group. My educational experience as a member of this group was enhanced as I gained insight and perspective through the diversity of experiences of my fellow cohort mates.

It was not until the second year in the program when we broke off into the School Improvement Cohort and the Adult, Professional, and Community Education Cohort that I began to feel a bit of disequilibrium. We were now an intimate group of eleven members and many of our classes began with Circle where we arranged our chairs in a circle and we would take turns facilitating the Circle in conversation, giving each Circle member an opportunity for their voice to be heard (Guajardo, Guajardo, Janson, & Militello, 2016). The prompts were generally open-ended and designed to stimulate deep reflection about a critical issue in education. I will never forget our first Circle. The prompt was, "What is your story?" I recall thinking that I didn't have a story but as I heard the others in my group tell their stories of school and ways that they felt marginalized by the systems, policies, and practices of schools, I realized that my story could possibly have been the one that perpetuated a system based on dominant race ideologies. I left class that night with my mind racing. How could I have better served my students and families of color? Why did I not challenge initiatives in schools that may have further marginalized students and families? The familiar was now strange (Spindler & Spindler, 1988) for me and the comfortable space I had occupied my whole life was disrupted that night as I listened to my cohort-mates open themselves up into the Gracious

Space (Hughes, 2008) of the Circle.

As time passed, our cohort developed a strong bond based on trust. Because we were in critical conversation about issues that at times were emotionally charged, we had to practice empathy and take care of one another. Through this culture and ethic of care (Noddings, 2016) we were able to tackle and grapple with social inequities in schools including issues of race, class, and gender. Additionally, we had time and space to grow ourselves as leaders by challenging old paradigms and to re-imagine schools that need the assets of the community to fully educate our youth. As a cohort, we were in collective pursuit of knowledge and growth.

I often wonder about the educator and human I might be today had I not had the opportunity to be a part of the diverse Ph.D. cohort. Would I challenge the status quo or would I remain in the Old School Karon chapter of my life forever? My experience as a member of the Ph.D. in School Improvement cohort allowed me to revise my life story. I was able to be in fellowship with others who listened to me as I identified my own white privilege and ways I had underserved my students and families. And they were there, listening and not judging. Facing and addressing my biases and assumptions was hard work but I was not alone in this journey. In this chapter of my life, New School Karon will not be afraid to question systems and processes that may work to further marginalize our culturally and linguistically diverse students, students of color, and students who live below the poverty line. Above all, I will listen and honor the stories of my students, parents, teachers, colleagues, and community members. It is through the stories that we will connect as humans because there is great strength when people feel seen, heard, and valued as an individual.

Genise

“As we work together to restore hope to the future, we need to include a new and strange ally – our willingness to be disturbed” (Wheatley 38).

Influenced by deeply thoughtful and determined African American women during my undergraduate program at a historically black college, I was primed and willing to challenge my prowess as a student when I matriculated into a graduate program because I had experienced what it was like to be disturbed. Attending a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) changed my thoughts about schooling and what it meant to be educated.

This education was beyond the low-expectations that I encountered during K-12 as one of few African American students. The HBCU experience empowered me and served as bridge of hope for what I could accomplish in my future, which eventually led me to obtain both a Master's degree and a PhD from Texas State University. However, the journey through each program was vastly different. The Master's program was primarily an individual journey that reminded me of the K-12 experience, covertly competing with classmates through superficial conversations and contrived collegiality.

Entering the doctoral program was a new landscape. It started with an invitation and a story. Leticia Grimaldo invited me to a gathering where professors and students were sharing their experiences and stories about being in a doctoral program at Texas State University. Due to my experiences in the Master's program at Texas State, I was skeptical. However, she introduced me to professors who spoke sincerely about their desire to help change the educational landscape for students of color. It seemed unreal to me that university professors would be having an open dialogue about diversity and inclusion and inviting others to the table for this conversation. After all, this was not my HBCU. I listened intently, but a part of me was focused on trying to figure out what the catch could be. I thought, surely there is something in it for these professors. I listened and waited, but there seemed to be no catch. There was just an invitation to learn more, share my own story, and hear the stories of others. I thought, had the "willingness to be disturbed" returned?

As time went by, I learned more about how the doctoral program intentionally aimed to be different. Leticia invited me to a writing group comprised of racially diverse scholars led by her dissertation chair, Miguel Guajardo. It was evident to me that Dr. Guajardo recognized that a program diversifying its enrollment needed a system of support for all students who wanted to grow beyond what traditional schooling offered. I credit the support from this group and the commitment of Dr. Guajardo for my completion of the doctoral program. Through the writing group, I met Monica Valadez, an encourager who conferred value in my desire to invite and embrace my spirituality as a part of the journey. She connected me with Karon Henderson, with whom I was able to witness personal reflection and stretching from a different point of view. We all became a support for one another, helping each other along the educational journey and forming a kinship. This group was a source of strength and endurance for me. It was like no other group that I had ever been a part of in an educational setting. This was a community of learners willing to be vulnerable with one another and willing to put in the work that was needed to grow. Being in connection with this group and others became the key that

I needed to allow myself to be open and willing to be constantly disturbed in order to grow as a fuller human being.

Experiencing resistance that is at once actively and painfully present within heart, body, mind, and spirit is a powerful space in which imagination and insight flourish. The greatest challenge is in the evolution of understanding as to how to foster spaces for the exploration of this resistance so that it provokes and prompts it to bear good fruit. This space invites us to manifest strength through vulnerability and the intimacy and symbiotic nature of the learning relationship. It calls us as teachers and leaders to be mindful of tendencies toward desiring only that which would reflect our way of knowing and being back to us as the measure of learning. As learners it calls us to spaces of divergent perspectives and purposeful invitation to and engagement with others. We experience our world in beautifully unique ways that are rarely explored within standardized systems. We have been influenced by the ontologies of home and family, childhood learning spaces, and ancestral ways of knowing, among so many others. Each context with deep experiences all too often relegated to spaces and things of memory and surely not content for higher education. But the exploration of the significance of ontology as theory is only as fruitful as it allows for the praxis of this exploration, beginning with self. Through praxis is where we discover, uncover, and recover our own uniqueness as learners along life's path. Here is where we release imagination and possibility to influence and impact our worlds, whether within personal, societal, or global spheres. Here is where institutions become learning organizations.

Future Cuentos, Platicas y Curiosidades

We propose these cuentos as starting points for a series of *platica* that will follow. Our next dive into this *platica* will be to explore our own agency and role within our resistance, resiliency within the process of becoming doctors of philosophy, citizens and fuller human beings with our changing institution and evolving work. We also invite the readers to explore the following question: What's your story?

[View References](#)

About the Authors



Miguel A. Guajardo

Miguel A. Guajardo is a Professor in the Education and Community Leadership Program and a member of the doctoral faculty in School Improvement at Texas State University. His research interests include issues of community building, community youth development, leadership development, race and ethnicity, university and community partnerships, and Latino youth and families. He was a Fellow with the Kellogg International Leadership Program and the Salzburg Seminar. A sample of this work is highlighted in the 2016 book he published with a team of colleagues: *Reframing Community Partnerships in Education: Uniting the Power of Place and Wisdom of People*.

Leticia Romero Grimaldo

Leticia Romero Grimaldo, Ph.D. currently serves as the co-principal investigator for the English Language Institute for Teaching and Learning (Project ELITE2) at The Meadows Center for Preventing Educational Risk at the University of Texas at Austin. The project, funded by the Office of Special Education Programs, is designed to develop, implement and evaluate tiered intervention models for students who are English Learners (ELs). She is also an adjunct professor for Texas State University–San Marcos, where she teaches in the Education and Community Leadership Program.

Karon Henderson

Karon Henderson is a language acquisition specialist and instructional coach in Round Rock, Texas. Previous to this position, she worked as a Bilingual/ESL Director, Coordinator, and ESL teacher. Additionally, Dr. Henderson also serves as an adjunct lecturer in the Educational Leadership Master's Program at Texas State University in San Marcos, Texas.

Genise Henry

Genise Henry, PhD, serves as the director of Academic Foundations for the Institute for Public School Initiatives (IPSI) at UT Austin. She has an extensive background in education spanning Pre-K–20 in urban and rural settings, offering expertise in instructional leadership and coaching, professional development, program evaluation, research, and supporting diverse student populations. She earned both a PhD in Education: School Improvement and master's degree in education from Texas State University and a bachelor's degree in English from Huston Tillotson University.

Monica Valadez

Monica Valadez is Community and Attendance Liaison for San Marcos CISD. She graduated from Texas State University in 2012 with a doctoral degree in School Improvement. As Community and Attendance Liaison, she explores ways to promote a shift in thinking around school non-attendance as only the surface-level symptom of critical factors that both push out and pull out students from school. Moreover, her work focuses on identifying and promoting leadership that is place based and that considers education as imperative for the development of a more just society.

Chapter 7

Diversity & Inclusion in Academic Program Development and Faculty Recruitment: An Interview with Professor Libby Allison

By Aimee Roundtree and Miriam F. Williams

As scholars in technical and scientific communication, we are interested in making the complex plain. In this emerging field, researchers and practitioners often call us “advocates for users” of technology and complex written information. It was peculiar then, that as late as 2005, in a field concerned with writing and designing for non-expert audiences, our textbooks, research articles, and conference papers included little to no discussion of the racial, ethnic, or language diversity of those readers/users in the U.S. who so desperately needed medical, technical, legal, and scientific information written and designed with them in mind. Fortunately, when we entered the field, technical communication research and pedagogy was finally making “the political turn” and beginning to explore the cultural, political, and historical contexts in which technical communication is created. But during this time, we were two of only a very few faculty of the African Diaspora in the nation teaching in graduate technical communication programs and presenting research at academic conferences in our field. This meant we were often the only black scholar at our field’s conferences and certainly the only black women in the room.

It is by no coincidence, though, that thirteen years later we both now call Texas State University our academic home. Yes, we are both Texans, who had both lived and worked as technical communicators in Houston and Austin before accepting positions here, but there were other important factors that attracted us to Texas State. We both have personal connections to the university—one is an alumna of the Master of Arts in Technical Communication (MATC) program and the other has familial connections--and the MATC program’s curriculum included the opportunity for us to prepare students for high-paying jobs in industry, but with a deep appreciation for ethics and intercultural competence. Admittedly, the legacy of Texas State University’s most famous alum—Lyndon Baines Johnson—was also

a draw. The prospect of teaching at the institution where LBJ honed some of the expertise and values that served as a touchstone for the “Great Society” and civil rights advancements was appealing, as was the opportunity to teach, serve and collaborate on research at a Hispanic Serving Institution.

Our colleague, Professor Libby Allison, the M.A. in Technical Communication’s inaugural program director (1999-2013) and faculty in the Department of English were instrumental in designing one of the most diverse graduate technical communication programs in the nation. In this chapter, we share the M.A. in Technical Communication’s story through a conversation with Dr. Allison. It is our hope that the following discussion will help others in the Texas State University community understand the importance of recruiting and maintaining diverse faculty and students in academic programs.

What are the benefits of a diverse faculty to students? Aimee Roundtree:

Libby Allison:

I have been on dozens of hiring committees since I moved to Texas in 1993 to teach at A&M-Corpus Christi and when I came to Texas State University in 1999. These were committee assignments with substantial participation responsibilities. Because the MA in Technical Communication (MATC) was just beginning when I stepped in as the first Director, I was able to hire faculty with an eye toward diversity.

Because of its historical background as a Normal School for educating teachers, primarily women in the state, admitted its first African-American student in 1963, and recognized in 2011 as one of a handful of Hispanic-serving Institutions in Texas, I knew the campus has a long history of inclusion. Shortly after I stepped down as Director, the MATC program had two African-American faculty women, one Chinese male faculty member, a younger white female, a younger white male, and an older white female (myself). For a small program, and with its technology ties, it is about as diverse as it gets.

I may be a big proponent of diversity because I am of the generation of women when many of our Mothers were homemakers and had not yet ventured out into the “working world”

themselves, so I personally have experienced being one, if not the only, woman in various educational and work situations. As a result, I have experienced some positive results of those circumstances but also the negative consequences of those circumstances that were unfavorable toward women.

That said, perhaps the most important reason I believe in diversity is because it is fundamental to the role of colleges and universities in our country and society. Our role is to introduce students to new and different ideas and experiences than they have ever heard of or had before. It is because of these learning differences and opportunities that the United States leads the world in many things including innovations across all fields. Having people with different backgrounds, cultures, races, genders, and disabilities offers students an opportunity to learn from and about people who have different ideas and may be different from them.

In a field with so few faculty of color, what strategies did you and your colleagues use to recruit faculty of color to Texas State? **Miriam Williams:**

Libby Allison: In efforts to recruit a diverse faculty, I found some strategies useful:

Even though it may seem standard fare to some, I think that ads from Universities with statements about the University having commitments to diversity hiring are important. Those ads missing such statements seem to say that diversity hiring is not even a consideration.

For instance, here at Texas State, our faculty and staff positions job ads include this statement:

Texas State University, to the extent not in conflict with federal or state law, prohibits discrimination or harassment on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, sex, religion, disability, veterans' status, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression.
(<https://jobs.hr.txstate.edu>)

Our campus also has a strong statement about the importance of a diverse faculty in its Policies and Procedures Statement for Faculty Hiring that says,

Texas State is committed to recruiting and retaining a diverse and distinguished faculty.

“Diversity” is broadly defined to include such factors as geographic backgrounds, ages, genders, educational backgrounds, employment experiences, language abilities, economic backgrounds, cultures, and special skills and talent.

<http://policies.txstate.edu/division-policies/academic-affairs>)

Also, our campus has “Guidelines for Recruiting and Hiring a Diverse Faculty, which is linked to its Policies and Procedures webpage, and the campus has a Center for Diversity and Gender Studies as well as a Multicultural Transformation and Research Institute that can offer ways to reach minorities.

In hiring let your colleagues know you want to diversify your program and ask them to spread the word.

If the program has alumni who have gone onto doctoral programs, tell them about programmatic diversity needs and wants, and ask them to spread the word about upcoming hiring.

Alert your own friends from your graduate school about the hiring being done in your program, and if they know of interested applicants, encourage them to apply.

In hiring, particularly at the Assistant Professor level, check not only the title of the applicant’s dissertation but also the content of it. Even if the dissertation title and/or topic is not focused on diversity, check the table of contents and the index for indications of diversity and/or cultural research.

Network in your professional organizations—let members of your own professional organizations know that you are hiring and that you are looking to diversify the faculty. In the fields of English and Technical Communication there are numerous professional organizations such as the Modern Language Association (MLA), National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), Society for Technical Communication (STC), Association of Teachers of Technical Communication (ATTW), and the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers (IEEE).

Likewise, there are organizations and associations in higher education that have job information for recruiting women and minorities. The Higher Education Recruitment Consortium lists numerous resources for recruiting and hiring African Americans, Asian Americans, Individuals with Disabilities, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender, Hispanic Americans, Native Americans, Veterans, and Women. A webpage for the Consortium is

https://www.hercjobs.org/career_advice/diversity_resources/.

The Chronicle of Higher Education, a longtime publication for academic job advertisements, has on its online job posting a Special Diversity Network where the ad will also appear in sites like Diversity and [Career.com](#), [Diversityjobs.com](#), and [Diversity.com \(Chronicle.com\)](#).

What are the benefits of a diverse technical communication workforce?

Aimee Roundtree:

I also think diversity is important because it prepares students for their careers. Some may find that statement odd, but it is ironic some people criticize the university for not preparing students for jobs, yet, also criticize the university for its diversity efforts in both faculty hires and student recruitment. The reality is that as the demographics of the country changes, so do the demographics of the workplace. For instance, within a few years Texas' Hispanic population will "become a plurality of the state's population" (Texastribune.org). In addition, the U.S. military, which has a long history and large institutions in Texas, is the largest employer of a diverse workforce in the world ([Militaryconnection.com](#)).

In the same vein, one of the key rhetorical principles of good writing and communicating that we teach our students is to "know your audience." If a student goes out into a working environment and has not experienced people who are different than he/she is and tries to communicate with a boss or coworkers or clients, there is going to be a lot of misinformation and miscommunication, which can be detrimental to the employee and maybe the company. In the field of technical communication where students often land jobs in technical companies having experience dealing with diverse populations is, in my opinion, even more critical because big technology companies like National Instruments and Dell computers deal with people and sale products all over the world. Understanding how to negotiate through and respect different people and cultures can be critical for an employee's success.

What factors did you consider in planning and implementing a program that privileges ethics and cultural competence?

Miriam Williams:

Libby Allison:

Without going into an analysis of whether the term cultural literacy is appropriate or not, I think of cultural literacy is the ability to negotiate among cultures--to not only understand and appreciate your background and culture but also to “take in” and respect other people’s cultures. In considering hiring faculty, I looked at the types of classes we needed in the program and considered who might be able to teach them well, paying attention to the CVs, dissertations, and research interests of potential hires who came from other backgrounds and cultures than mine. It is similar to another principle we teach about writing and communicating well, and that is “visual literacy”—the ability to see beyond what is presented to what is absent, missing, or unspoken in a document, media presentation, illustration, etc. In the same way, if a student is looking for a certain program, major, discipline, etc., it behooves him/her to pay attention to not only the topics presented for courses and so on but also the faculty members’ backgrounds, genders, ethnicities, disabilities, and so forth. Diversity adds to education and experience.

What future steps should we take—as a field and as a program here at Texas State University—to advance diversity and inclusion among faculty, students and professionals?

Aimee Roundtree:

Libby Allison:

Here are some approaches toward keeping a diverse faculty and student program:

- Emphasize the diverse faculty and students already in the program on the program’s website and on promotional materials for potential faculty and students.
- Send hiring information to individuals, alumni, and friends who work in diverse organizations, businesses, and agencies to help spread the word. Ask them to come to talk with your classes.
- Create teaching activities that engender inclusion and diversity.
- Describe and highlight diversity research done by faculty on the website.

In reflecting on the MATC program’s history, I know we had a diverse faculty and student

body. I realize now that over time students began to gravitate to faculty members not because of their race, ethnicity, sex, or age but because of their areas of expertise. To me that indicates a positive overall tendency. Students stop going to faculty whom they felt were like them because they were afraid or shy of the ones who were not like them and began to see beyond the faculty's race or gender, for instance, to what they could learn from the faculty member. That is the way graduate school should be. Having a diverse faculty from the beginning of their education offers students a cultural learning experience beyond reading and writing, which they will realize the value of later in their lives.

Libby Allison

Libby Allison grew up in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, a college town with people from all over the world and all walks of life. As a former journalist, she focused her academic career on how language usage, written, oral, and visual communication, can create cultures that exclude and marginalize people based on their socioeconomic class, race, ethnicity, gender, and disability. Regardless of the way language and communication is delivered, she says, the success of communication depends on writers and communicators understanding that audiences are diverse and are becoming increasingly diverse as the demographics of the country are rapidly changing.

Dr. Allison has a Bachelor's degree in Mass Communication and Sociology from the University of South Florida, (1974), a Master's degree in Journalism/Communications from the University of Florida (1983), and a Ph.D. in English, with a specialization in Rhetoric and Composition, from the University of South Florida (1993). She has taught technical writing for 30 years and has won numerous teaching awards.

About the Authors



Aimee Roundtree

Dr. Aimee Kendall Roundtree is Associate Dean of Research in the College of Liberal Arts. She is a Professor and Interim Director of the Master of Arts in Technical Communication program at Texas State University. She is an associate editor of IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication and an editorial board member of Technical Communication Quarterly and WAC Clearinghouse Publications. She has worked at the Texas Medical Center and Air Combat Command, Langley, Air Force Base.

Miriam F. Williams

Dr. Miriam F. Williams is a Professor of English who previously worked as a policy analyst, policy editor, and program administrator for the State of Texas. Her research on race, ethnicity, and public policy writing includes three books and articles in her field's most prominent journals. As Presidential Fellow (2011-2012), she co-authored Texas State's proposal for reclassification to an Emerging Research University. From 2013-2018 she served as Director of the M.A. in Technical Communication Program. In 2017, she was the first person of color elevated to Fellow of the Association of Teachers of Technical Writing.



Chapter 8

Cultivating Activist-Based Pedagogy in the Age of Generation Z

By Amanda Scott

Introduction

With the presidential election of 2016 and other momentous cultural events, it seems that the public forum has ushered in a new era of advocacy. From Black Lives Matter to Me Too to Never Again, grassroots movements have become part of our debates and day-to-day conversations. At universities and colleges, in particular, students of the emerging Generation Z demographic, those succeeding Millennials, are expressing their desire to transform these conversations into action, many in response to personal experiences with bias and discrimination. In a recent report, Alex Vandermaas-Peeler et al. found that “One in four (25%) young people report having been targeted or treated unfairly themselves in the last 12 months because of their race or ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation or gender identity, immigration status, or religious beliefs” (“Diversity, Division, Discrimination...”). This apparent escalation in prejudice and discrimination mirrors levels of increased activism among this demographic. As Corey Seemiller and Meghan Grace note in *Generation Z Goes to College*, more than 20 percent of Generation Z students they surveyed indicated that they have participated in a boycott, rally, or protest to demonstrate for a cause they care about, a figure more than double the percent of Millennials surveyed (104). Given students’ appetite for meaningful engagement in civic discourse and change, one must ask: How can administrators and faculty promote immersive, active learning, across disciplines, humanities and STEM-based? More to the point, how can we motivate this demographic to be change-agents on behalf of their institutions and, more broadly, their communities? Considering students’ frequent use of social and digital media and their budding interest in advocacy, instructors should strive to integrate these patterns into their pedagogical approaches, namely through multimodal and participatory learning.

Beyond its ability to encourage thoughtful engagement with current events, socially transformative pedagogy paves the way for more empathetic and equitable learning experiences—ones that reflect the growing diversity of our campuses and communities. Accordingly, a 2015 Pew report found that multiracial Americans are “growing at a rate three times as fast as the population as a whole” (5). Similarly, those “identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) increased to 4.5% in 2017, up from 4.1% in 2016 and 3.5% in 2012,” (Newport, “In U.S., Estimate of LGBT Population...”). Given this multicultural, non-binary trajectory, we must re-envision how we engage traditionally marginalized students in spaces of learning. We must diversify our pedagogical approaches so that they parallel students’ varied learning styles, cultural traditions, and preferred modes of expression. To that end, this chapter presents several frameworks—generation theory, new media theory, and social justice pedagogy—and activities to better understand the relationship between rhetoric and praxis so that we may cultivate a new activist paradigm.

Literature Review

Generation Z & Learning

To cultivate more socially-focused pedagogy, we must understand what makes the Generation Z demographic unique from its predecessors. Unlike Generation Z, Millennials “were raised during the boom times and relative peace of the 1990s, only to see their sunny world dashed by the Sept. 11 attacks and two economic crashes, in 2000 and 2008,” and many see Generation Z’s seemingly pragmatic nature as a reaction to the unrest their Millennial counterparts experienced (Williams, “Move Over, Millennials...”). Conversely, “Born from 1995 through 2010, Generation Z has been profoundly shaped by the advancement of technology, issues of violence, a volatile economy, and social justice movements” (Seemiller and Grace 22). As a result, Generation Z students are more likely to be engaged with the most pressing cultural, political, and economic issues of our time through digital media. With rapid technological advancements and the rise of social media in the last decade, it is clear that Generation Z engages in public discourse differently, a critical feature of their learning preferences as well.

Unlike Millennials, Generation Z is more individualistic and practical in its approach to education and professional prospects. Vandermaas-Peeler et al. found that “six in ten young

people say jobs and unemployment (60%), terrorism (60%), and the cost of higher education (57%) are critical issues to them” (“Diversity, Division, Discrimination...”). As a result, Generation Z students crave opportunities to apply the skills they learn in thoughtful, real-world scenarios. Seemiller and Grace confirm this yearning, citing that “community engagement opportunities that make a lasting impact on an underlying societal problem appeal more to Generation Z students than do short-term volunteer experiences that address the symptoms of that problem” (23). Essentially, this preservation of autonomy reflects a more egalitarian approach to education—what Paulo Freire calls ‘problem-posing education,’ a system wherein “the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers” (80). In this configuration, instructors and students apply an epistemological lens through which to critique and cultivate dialogue around course topics, effectively disrupting traditional power dynamics between teacher and student. Such an arrangement mirrors similar pedagogical approaches including social justice pedagogy, participation action research, and Inside-Out, frameworks which stress community engagement, collaboration, and creative expression.

New Media & Social Justice Pedagogy

Generation Z’s collective ethos around social issues has been shaped by the continued evolution of new media. From laptops to tablets to smartwatches and smartphones, these devices occupy the epicenter of modern communication. Indeed, Pew recently found that 77% of Americans own a smartphone, with those aged 18-29 reporting this figure at 94% (Pew Research Center, “Mobile Fact Sheet”). As we adapt to a digitally-dependent culture, we must consider, as Jacquelyn Kibbey suggests, how “visual literacy, media literacy, and technology literacy all converge to potentially influence citizens about social justice issues” (56). Based on their specific rhetorical characteristics, print, audio, and audio-visual mediums change the context and meaning of a particular narrative, event, or social movement. As individuals find their lives and news increasingly documented and distributed through video and similar channels, it is no surprise, then, that this medium offers students an avenue through which to explore fundamental rhetorical concepts vital to advocacy work—purpose, audience, context—and more critically analyze public discourse.

Indeed, in “Multimodal Composition and Social Justice: Videos as a Tool of Advocacy in Social Work Pedagogy,” Tetloff et al. claim that “by choosing what to include and how to frame the

information they encounter, students are able to illustrate how all information, especially the kind propagated by mainstream U.S. media, is rooted in perspectives that are ideologically biased” (25). Social justice education scholars Ruksana Osman and David J. Hornsby echo this sentiment, championing “focus group discussions, talking and listening, argument and speculation, research seminars, community projects, re-enactments, collages, dialogue, narrative, life histories and other forms of self-expression such as music and dance” as performative and participatory methods for critical meaning-making (5). As traditional mediums embrace hybridity and fragmentation, we must consider their distinctive qualities, so that we may design curricula with these factors in mind.

Aside from any technological implications, activist-oriented pedagogy has the potential to more thoughtfully engage traditionally disadvantaged learners. This means, as Freire claims, working to cultivate pedagogical experiences “with, not for, the oppressed” as we collectively support them “in [their] incessant struggle to regain their humanity” (48). As Henry Giroux reminds us, “Schools are political sites involved in the construction and control of discourse, meaning, and subjectivities” (46). He argues that to develop fair educational structures, we must acknowledge the contradictory nature of learning environments, spaces which often develop and deliver objective-based curricula to student populations with disparate experiences and privileges. Ultimately, Giroux claims that “By presenting schools as institutions designed to benefit all students, the dominant culture, its knowledge and social practices, misrepresent the nature or effects of social and cultural processes weighted against the interest of students from subordinate cultures” (66). Thus, it is in instructors’ best interests to cultivate not only a pedagogy that is generationally relevant, but one that is inclusive and just.

Activist-Based Pedagogy in the Classroom

This section provides sample activities for creating dialogical spaces that embolden activist-thinking. Many of these assignments are best suited for seminar-based courses in the humanities, which often design coursework with critical frameworks in mind, but can also be adapted to suit the needs of STEM courses, especially as topics pertain to reflection on course outcomes and/or discussing traditionally marginalized groups or ideas within these disciplines. New media offers a unique lens through which to challenge traditional binaries of form and content through fragmentation and intertextuality and to achieve such outcomes, we

must:

1. Embrace audio-visual learning.
2. Provide multimodal project opportunities that fuse passions with professional development.
3. Create opportunities for student work to be shared and synthesized.

Activity #1: Personal Advocacy Video

This project encourages students to choose a cause they are passionate about to explore in a short video. This cause should be something students are truly interested in. Some general issues students could consider include causes related to politics, economics, race and ethnicity, gender and sexuality, particular cultural groups or traditions, a policy, and others. Encourage students to respond to and incorporate the following questions and elements:

- Introduce the cause and why people should care about it.
 - What are the central issues?
 - Who are the various stakeholders related to the issue?
- Present some possible solutions.
 - Include interviews with relevant stakeholders.
 - Include pertinent facts and evidence for various claims.
 - Include a variety of shots and images to portray key points.

Activity #2: Creative Reflection Project

As a reflective exercise, ask students to capture how they have progressed throughout the course using a creative method. To accomplish this, students might write a short story, play, poem, or news editorial; create a video, blog, website, or social media page; or compose a set of illustrations or zine. Have students share their works, taking care to create dialogue around what they've created, not only in terms of content, but the chosen medium as well.

Activity #3: Reflective Timeline

This exercise offers a longitudinal means for understanding the logistical nature of social

issues and movements, their key stakeholders and decision makers, and how these issues manifest rhetorically through social media and other digital channels. Within a month, semester, or year, for instance, instructors and their students might work together to track the evolution of a single or few pertinent issues critical to public discourse. Instructors are encouraged to create a blog for artifacts—articles, memes, social media threads, videos—students might post to allow interaction and response between peers as they examine the rhetorical implications of each example.

Activity #4: Class Podcast

Instructors might also choose to collaborate with their students to create collective podcast projects based on various social justice topics, similar to NPR's Code Switch series. Ideally, instructors would work with their students to create episode topics and divide students into groups for focusing on these topics. Deconstructing a particular issue through a series of episodes, in particular, would allow students the chance to understand the many, often complex, facets of socially relevant issues.

Conclusion

As these examples demonstrate, creating opportunities for students to explore their personal histories, identities, and viewpoints can be a productive exercise in cultural stewardship. In particular, activities like these can help frame particular academic disciplines within their respective historical social paradigms, contexts that have historically benefited some students over others. In an era when partisanship appears to dominate compromise and understanding, creating communal spaces for civil debate is essential, especially in the classroom. According to Osman and Hornsby, "Whatever the pedagogic stance selected, sharing and reciprocity and mutual constitution are the underpinnings [of equitable learning experiences] rather than domination and authority" (5). We must learn to adapt our pedagogical methods so that Generation Z may become change agents and true citizens of the world. Only then will we be able to work toward institutional equity—in the classroom, home, and most importantly, the public sphere.

[View Works Cited](#)

About the Author



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Amanda E. Scott is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of English at Texas State University where she also serves as an Assistant Executive Editor for Porter House Review and manages the Lindsey Literary Series Digital Archive. Her research explores relationships between documentation design, representations of racial identity, and social inequities, and has appeared in *Technical Communication Quarterly*.

Chapter 9

From Foster Care to College Student: Addressing the Need for Equity, Access and Inclusion in Higher Education

By Christine Lynn Norton & Toni Watt

Human diversity in social and educational systems has often been undervalued and threatened by problems with equity, access and inclusion. In particular, there is a growing body of literature criticizing higher education as an elite institution, with significant class and cultural biases towards middle and upper class white students (Lehmann 90). In fact, institutions of higher education have been accused of being “businesses that are more concerned with their own financial well-being than with educating students or serving communities” (Freeland 1). In order to combat this negative perception, we have broadened our view of equity, access and inclusion in higher education; yet, there are still college students whose intersectionality of race, ethnicity, gender/gender expression, sexual orientation, poverty, first-generation college student status and complex trauma go largely ignored. These students are young adults with lived experience in the foster care system. According to the Children’s Bureau, over 687,000 children spent time in U.S. foster care in 2016. Nationally, about 27,000 of those children “age out” or leave foster care at the age of 18, if they have not been adopted or placed in alternative care (Patel et al 4). In Texas alone, over 1000 college-aged youth age out of foster care every year, often with little support or structure and at high risk for negative outcomes (Patel et al 8).

Foster youth in the education system are a distinct subgroup of students who are at high risk for poor academic performance and failure, particularly in higher education. Complex trauma, placement and educational instability, and mental health challenges have led to negative educational outcomes for youth in foster care (Leigh et al 4). Likewise, the historic bias and elitism of higher education have led even the most talented youth, who are not white and middle-to-upper class, feel that they are not college material—that they don't fit in (Lehmann

99). This self-doubt is nowhere more present than with foster youth (Watt et al 1412). This feeling of not fitting in manifests itself in high school drop-out rates, as well as low college enrollment. Nationally, only 50% of foster youth graduate high school (NFYI 3), and only 10% will enroll in college (Cohn et al 1). The college retention and graduation rates of foster youth are even worse, with research showing only 2-3% of foster youth attain a bachelor's degree (NFYI 2). Unfortunately, the outcomes for foster youth who do not succeed academically are not promising.

THE FOSTER CARE TO PRISON PIPELINE: RISK AND RESILIENCE

The foster care to prison pipeline is a very real phenomenon, and we are fast losing qualified and capable young people to homelessness and incarceration. According to the Juvenile Law Center (JLC), former foster youth face a disproportionate risk of being incarcerated. This is due to physical and sexual abuse, harsh discipline practices in foster homes and schools, academic failure, homelessness and mental illness (Krinsky 324). The problem is so severe that one quarter of foster care alumni will become involved with the criminal justice system within two years of leaving care (JLC 1). Furthermore, the foster care-to-prison pipeline disproportionately affects youth of color, LGBTQ-identified youth, and youth with mental illnesses.

Yet despite these risk factors, 70-84% of all foster youth report wanting to attend college, and more foster youth persist in attaining a GED than the general population (NWGFCE 2). These facts reveal a drive and motivation to pursue higher education that is often overlooked in the research. Though it is important to know what the barriers to success are, it is also important to move away from "deficit-focused inquiry" and recognize resilience and other strengths that former foster care students possess (Fox 4). Youth with lived experience in the foster care system can be highly persistent in the face of overwhelming obstacles, especially when given opportunities to succeed. They also care deeply about giving back to society or "paying it forward," in order to help others. These resilient qualities align perfectly with Duckworth and Quinn's definition of grit as "passion and persistence for long-term goals" (166). According to the latest education research, grit, accompanied with a growth mindset, helps students persist in the face of adversity, a highly desirable quality for success in higher education and in life (Hochanadel et al 48).

TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY'S RESPONSE: WHY SHOULD HIGHER EDUCATION CARE?

The mission of Texas State University includes embracing a diversity of people and ideas, guided by the values of service and leadership for the public good. Providing support to students with lived experience in the foster care system certainly aligns with this mission; however, the idea of campus support programs for former foster youth in higher education is still relatively new. Currently, only about 23 U.S. states provide some kind of tuition and fee waiver (Hernandez 2); however, not all of these states offer campus support programs along with financial assistance. Texas offers tuition and fee waiver programs at public colleges and universities for students that the Texas Legislature has identified as “warranting special consideration related to paying for higher education costs” (THECB 1). This includes youth who either aged out of or were adopted out of foster care. Though the tuition and fee waiver is a huge incentive for students to attend college, financial support alone is not enough to ensure the academic success of former foster youth in higher education. In fact, in a 2011 study conducted by Day et al, “former foster youth were significantly more likely to drop out of college before the end of their first year than their first-generation peers that had not been in foster care” (Courtney et al 33).

For this reason, in 2010, a campus-wide support initiative emerged to increase the recruitment, retention and graduation rates of former foster youth who enroll at Texas State University (TXST). The FACES (Foster Care Alumni Creating Educational Success) program was created, and has become a nationally recognized, research-based campus support program for foster youth. Texas State University was one of the first universities in Texas to address the needs of this population, and currently serves approximately 120 students who qualify for the tuition and fee waiver. FACES is housed in Office of Retention, Management and Planning, with support from collaborative partnerships with the School of Social Work, the Sociology Department, the Foster Care Advisory Council and other key campus and community stakeholders. We have learned that these interdisciplinary partnerships are critical for effectively serving these students because they are not easily folded in to the standard retention model due to their history of complex trauma.

Who are FACES students?

Students at Texas State who are involved in the FACES program all have lived experience in the foster care system. About 40% of these students aged out of care, and about 60% were adopted out of care. 60% of FACES students identify as female, and 40% identify as male. This also mirrors the foster care research showing that females coming out of foster care are more likely to enroll and find success in higher education (Courtney et al 36). 28% of all FACES students are transfer students, and 43% are first generation college students. 76% of FACES students did not have a parent who completed a Bachelor's degree. The racial and ethnic makeup of FACES students shows that 32% of FACES students identify as White, non-Hispanic, 25% African American, 11% Hispanic, 30% Biracial and 4% identify as "other." A common characteristic for all FACES students is that they have experienced trauma. This mirrors the literature about students with lived experience in foster care. According to the Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study Executive Summary, former foster children are almost twice as likely to suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as U.S. war veterans (Pecora 2).

What Services Does FACES Provide?

In order to increase recruitment, retention and graduation rates, FACES provides support to its diverse student membership through a trauma-informed, strengths-based approach that focuses on safety, inclusivity and engagement. The program provides faculty/staff mentors for former foster youth, advocacy and one-on-one support, a book lending library, a student organization, academic coaching and peer mentoring, social and community service events, and a variety of other retention activities and trainings to promote social connectedness, peer support and life skills.

THE REWARDS OF RESPONDING: FACES OUTCOMES

Supporting former foster youth is in line with the diversity and inclusion goals of Texas State University's strategic plan, and contributes to the larger public good. When foster youth are supported by strong practices, policies and educational opportunities, it is possible to counteract the negative effects of abuse, neglect, separation, and lack of permanency experienced by youth in foster care. As Green stated: "There is no greater work more urgent,

more exhausting, and more spiritually rewarding than helping to create opportunities to engage, inspire and ignite foster care alumni. Many of whom have had a lifetime legacy of being impoverished, ignored, as well as unwanted. Together...[we] can create a new reality of hope and global opportunities of economic and social mobility” (6).

The FACES campus support initiative is a model of successful community building and retention for a diverse and vulnerable group of students. Though this group of students comprises less than 3% of the entire college student population at Texas State University, they represent a group of students for whom education can be a life-changing protective factor. In fact, when foster care alumni have the dual support of the tuition and fee waiver, combined with the assistance of a campus support program, they can be highly successful in higher education. According to an earlier study of FACES outcomes, despite their demographic vulnerabilities and lower levels of academic performance, the retention and graduation rates of former foster youth were almost equivalent of those of typical Texas State students (Watt et al 1415). Recent retention data of foster care alumni from the freshman to sophomore year continues to improve, as well. In the fall semester of 2016 (academic year 2017), 55% of the previous year's freshmen foster care alumni re-enrolled as sophomores, marking progress over the previous year's 52% retention rate and the 42% retention rate recorded in the fall semester of 2014. Texas State's foster care alumni students continue to move closer to the university's overall freshman retention rate of 76%. Likewise, Texas State FACES students' graduation rate is 49%, just slightly lower than the overall Texas State graduation rate of 56%. However, by contrast, foster care alumni at four-year universities nationally only achieve a 26% graduation rate (Day et al 2).

Not only are academic outcomes changing for former foster youth at Texas State, but the FACES campus support program has also been instrumental in helping former foster youth redefine their identities from deficits to strengths (Watt et al 1411). The FACES program helped support the autonomy of former foster care students and identify and utilize the assets already present in their lives, in particular in the area of peer support. In a 2013 evaluation study of the FACES program, one student stated: “What really blew my mind was that I could come in with a group of people just like me, who had similar experiences, and that we could come together and talk in a non-threatening way and explore our pasts, and have a therapy about it, and have fun with it, and laugh about it. That's different. I've done it with other people

but to do it with other people who have lived what I have lived, that is very powerful. And to do it from the other side of the fence, to say yeah, we went through all of that but look where we are now? Now let's laugh about that. That's something that's been able to let me reach back into the past and let some of those things go so that I can propel myself even further on my personal path" (Watt et al 1414).

THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES THAT LIE AHEAD

Though much has been done to create a network of support for Texas State students with lived experience in the foster care system, the fact remains that resources in higher education are scarce, and unfunded mandates like the tuition and fee waiver programs create pressure on public colleges and universities to increase revenue. Because of this pressure, negative perceptions can arise about those receiving these waivers. It should be noted, however, that the exemptions provided by the state for tuition and fees for former foster youth comprise less than 2% of all exemptions (THECB 6). Though generating revenue should certainly not be ignored, the Chronicle of Higher Education reminds us that "we also must be true to our roots in educating young people, seeking the truth, helping communities, and preserving the most important values of our culture" (Freeland 9). This includes breaking cycles of poverty, abuse and neglect and creating opportunities for students with a history of complex trauma to build resilience through education.

However, what higher education often fails to recognize is the strength in struggle. While some former foster care students (similar to many minority, first generation, LGBTQ students) may not have the same pedigree of traditional college students, they have encountered struggles that have helped them build character, resilience, tenacity and empathy. In short, they have a lot to offer Texas State University, but too often we view student "potential" through such a narrow lens that we don't recognize it. We may have to adopt pedagogical approaches that are more inclusive (e.g. being trauma informed). We may have to support strengths-based programs like FACES, and in doing so, recognize that we are not lowering academic standards, but rather, broadening our view of potential. When we broaden our view of potential and how we can help students achieve it, we take advantage of a richer and wider pool of talent. The purpose of higher education, particularly, public institutions, is not solely to

generate revenue (e.g. tuition). The purpose is to educate students, in part, to meet the educational and workforce needs of the state by providing a supply of talented workers and citizens. When we help foster youth discover their strengths, believe in themselves, and prepare them to contribute to their communities, we all succeed.

PARTING THOUGHTS

There is an African proverb that goes something like this: “Smooth seas do not good sailors make.” We cling to this adage as a meaningful mantra for our FACES students because we want to help them understand that they are uniquely qualified to handle the challenges of college, to be social and entrepreneurial problem-solvers, healers, community builders, and leaders on this campus. After all, they have already been through so much, and the stressors of college pale in comparison to many of their earlier challenges. However, the everyday stressors of college life are often a trigger for students with lived experience in the foster care system. The experience of failing a test or being disrespected by a professor may cause any student difficulty, but for someone with a history of complex trauma, these things can snowball and may even cause the student to drop out without ever reaching out for help. As former foster youth shared in Morten’s qualitative study, “the emotional aspect of anxiety, depression, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), panic attacks, etc., is the REAL struggle in attending college, NOT the school work itself”; “To this day I am still struggling with the past and the emotional repercussions of foster care” (75).

Though as academics most of us are not therapists, we all have a moral and ethical obligation to speak with compassion, avoid assumptions, and become informed about the negative impact of trauma on students’ academic performance. We can be strengths-based and broaden our view of student potential in order to fulfill the true mission of higher education, which is “to serve society and advance a public purpose” (Freeland 6). In this way, we will learn from our most marginalized students that diversity and inclusion are critical to the mission of Texas State University, not a detraction from it.

[View Works Cited](#)

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Christine Norton, PhD, LCSW, is an Associate Professor of Social Work at Texas State University. She received her PhD in Social Work from Loyola University Chicago. She has a MA in Social Service Administration from the University of Chicago and a MS in Experiential Education from Minnesota State University-Mankato. Dr. Norton is the Foster Care Liaison Officer to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and helped found FACES (Foster Care Alumni Creating Educational Success).

Toni Watt

Toni Watt is a Professor of Sociology at Texas State University. Dr. Watt received her PhD in Sociology with an emphasis in Demography from the University of Texas at Austin. She teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in research methodology, drugs and society, and mental health. Her research is both academic and applied and focuses on improving outcomes for children and youth who have experienced trauma and/or the foster care system.



Chapter 10

Diversity is Essential to a Thriving Collegiate Culture

By Scott Kampschaefer

Have you ever wondered what the Texas State campus would be like without a diverse student or faculty body? It would be pretty bland and unstimulating on a host of different levels. It would reek of sterility and uniformity that stifles the human spirit. It would deprive us of necessary experiences that help shape everyone into the well-rounded human beings we need to be to function in the world as it is.

I was lucky enough to attend school here as a graduate student and be inculcated into a mindset of diversity and inclusion by virtue of my major field of study, social work. My cohort of students was not particularly diverse when I entered, but by the time I graduated in 2009 I had been exposed to a plethora of ideas by my professors and fellow students that has made a lasting impact on my life today. During my second year, my original cohort had been combined with a large body of advanced standing social work majors from the Bachelor of Social Work program that helped to expand the amount of ideas and viewpoints I was exposed to.

Moving forward, I hope to see an ever-more diverse student and faculty body that includes the voices that are necessary to counter an increasingly threatening drumbeat of clannishness and isolationist philosophy. If there's anything that the first images from the moon in the late 1960's should have taught us, it was that we are all one human race and organism that need to figure out how to live together and support each other on this walk through life.

Not only do we need to embrace people of different geographic cultures at Texas State, but we also need to ever more deeply embrace the veteran culture, those in sexual minorities, and other variations on the theme of culture that we are now becoming more and more aware of. Accepting those diverse cultures and staying at the forefront of embracing more facets of diversity can be here like it is in the known universe in general: something that is expanding and growing to be ever-more inclusive than we already are.

In the following pages I will try to emphasize some key features of what I hope will become the main way of operating as members of a diverse community at Texas State, as well as to give some examples and guidelines for making a reality of these ideas.

One of the ideas that was bantered about a lot when I was a public school teacher in the Houston area back in the 1990's, and still tends to predominate today, is the idea of 'tolerance.' The focus is on tolerating people of different cultures, as opposed to embracing them. I sat through an all-day training while working at a school district in Houston after one of the administrators had made a racially insensitive comment where the facilitator continually emphasized viewing members of other cultural groups as a 'Child(ren) of God.' I liked this, and despite having some feelings of resistance to attending this training considering we staff members were doing this because of one administrator's comments, I have kept this mindset to this day.

I have often thought that focusing on an attitude of "acceptance" of people in other cultures was better than focusing on "tolerance." Tolerance suggests that I don't like people of other cultures and need to find a way to "put up with" them. Acceptance, on the other hand, suggests that I need to try and embrace the ideas and practices of other cultures instead of just 'putting up with' them. I may or may not like all of them, but the idea is to not close other cultural groups out of my life. This goes along with having an attitude of inclusiveness, as opposed to the clannishness that is so prevalent today.

When I accept someone of another culture, I view their rituals and practices as equally valid and important as my own. Again, I may or may not like them, but if I have an accepting attitude I don't put up walls to keep them out of my world or consciousness. Going back to that image of the earth from the moon back in the 1960's, I have to admit that we are all travelers on this one spaceship hurtling through space, and unless I can accept someone else from another culture, I haven't recognized that we are all homo sapiens with the same genetic background (which is another key point) and can be traced back to the same descendants who lived so many centuries ago.

So if I am accepting of a student from a different culture at Texas State, instead of just putting up with what they may be saying or doing, I focus on trying not to avoid them out of my own

discomfort. Instead I try to get an idea of where they're coming from and don't discount their cultural rituals and practices as 'less than' my own, but remind myself that their ways of doing things are just as important and valid as mine. Whether they're Americans or not, I can have a consciousness of equality instead of just 'putting up with' another.

As I mentioned earlier, we have about 99% genetic similarity not only with people of other cultures, we have DNA which is that similar to what we would also call 'sub-human' species of living organisms as well ('People Are Not As Alike as Scientists Once Thought'). I'm not mentioning this as part of some underlying approach to interacting with people of different cultures, but it does help to put in place the idea that underlying all the obvious differences in expression and appearance of someone from a different culture, there is much more that makes us similar than different. When I can remind myself of that, I can have a much different attitude towards people of different cultures.

There are few other areas of differences that get as much focus as sexuality. I'm not only talking about someone from a different gender, but as much or more someone who has different sexual orientation, values, and practices as myself. When you consider that some of these individuals may also be from different ethnic cultures, then that makes the aforementioned differences that much more accentuated and potentially conflictual. If these individual's values and practices are in conflict with my own, then I have to work to "suspend my judgment" about these folks (Braun-Harvey, 2014).

One of the exercises I recently did with a practice class I teach was to have the students write down the judgments they have of others (and themselves in some cases), and to literally hang them from a clothesline suspended at the back of class. The exercise was to visually represent the idea that if I have a judgment about somebody else, I need to "suspend it" and not allow it to color my interactions with them. We all have judgments, but we can choose to either put them on others or to just keep them in a state of suspension where they don't have to harm others. This also helps us have a better ability to temper our innate biases and be more able to identify them as just that—biases. If we can do that, the person we are listening to will be more able to trust us and not fear that we will shun them for their differences. The students seemed to really appreciate this exercise, and from the feedback I got, I discovered that the judgments weren't just about others. They were also about the individuals who had them. This illustrates how, if I have a judgment about someone else, it is also about me on a

very deep level. Modern psychology has illustrated that the defense mechanism of projection (McLeod) is fundamentally about oneself instead of others. It relates to intense emotions of fear and emotional pain that often gets expressed as hatred.

If I am able to have a calm and reasoned conversation with someone who differs from me without reacting to those differences, to some extent I have managed to suspend the judgments I have about the person and succeeded in not denigrating or demeaning them. By the way, the conversations that happen face to face are least likely to result in misunderstanding or animosity as a result. I'll get back to this point later.

I remember one classmate of mine who may or may not have been from a different culture (her last name was not of a particular culture). One day she revealed to me that she moonlighted as a burlesque dancer. I knew little about this, but after looking up some information on the internet (this was a subculture I knew little about) I learned that the clubs she frequented were also populated by people who were into swinging as well, which is a term for having sex with each other's spouses. I quickly formed some judgments and conclusions about her affiliations, but this didn't keep me from being friendly and cordial to her. It helped that we already had some significant positive rapport built up for about a year of attending classes together before she disclosed this to me. I mentioned this because she was identifying herself as being of a diverse background in other ways more obvious than this (she had one or more major health diagnoses as well). I had other classmates that were from diverse backgrounds as well, and was able to have much the same rapport and good will towards them. I think this was at least in part due to similar values that contributed to having a similar major, and being in the same academic cohort. All these experiences helped me have more acceptance of the diversity of others, but they also helped me be more accepting of myself as someone who wasn't exactly 'white bread' Anglo.

To get back to my earlier point about the value of face-to-face interactions, the reason I consider these to be more apt to result in positive interactions owes to the fact that if I'm engaging face to face with someone, I am less likely to say something to offend them because they are right in front of me. I can have a better chance of being able to develop genuine empathy for them because I notice they are human beings, just like me. I am also more likely to try and understand where they are coming from, in a manner of speaking. I may want to learn more about them to be able to understand them, which relates to developing more

cultural competence on my part. These are a few of the key capacities of someone in the counseling or social work professions, like myself.

Texting or exchanging messages on social media is at least one step removed from the live person, and it's easier to slip into treating them as something less than a real person with real feelings. This is one of the primary drawback of the electronic age: the removal of face to face interactions in much communication we have with each other. Interacting with a screen isn't the same as interacting with a real person, and the further removed I get from this experience the more I am likely to slip into treating others in less than compassionate manners. The more I slip into my own 'echo chamber,' the more I only reinforce the ideas I already have.

The great thing about being on a university campus with people of diverse backgrounds is that I at least have the opportunity to interact with many different individuals face to face and learn more about them and myself at the same time. I can do this in a way that doesn't undercut our shared humanity or dignity. That humanity and dignity is always there, but if I don't recognize it I'm slipping into some dangerous territory as far as potentially tearing at the fabric of society that deems each person to be of equal value to every other person. This recognition of human dignity is in our Declaration of Independence. It's what makes us unique as a nation among other nations. If we lose that value, then we lose a big part of what makes us who we are. If we lose a sense of who we are as a country, then we are truly lost indeed.

In conclusion, I'll say that our hope lies in befriending those who have some significant differences from ourselves. On this campus we have ample opportunity to do that. At some point it becomes time to look up from our portable electronic devices and see the others around us as the key to a better life. They don't have to be our boyfriend or girlfriend, our spouse or our best friend. They just have to be themselves and be willing to give us the same grace that we give them, not trying to appear better or worse, just as real and authentic as they can muster. This will allow us to be truly educated and enlightened and to leave this campus with more than a diploma and a fancy robe on. It will help us have a better grasp of the real world and everyone in it... and that's a real education.

[View References](#)

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Scott Kampschaefer, LCSW has served as a part-time faculty member at Texas State from 2017 to 2018, and is a clinical social worker in Austin, Texas. He has an extensive background in working with depression, anxiety, and bipolar disorder at a clinic for older adults with these disorders in Austin. He currently works with adults and adolescents in private practice.

Chapter 11

Pushing Boundaries of Tejanx: Visibility, Inclusion, and Experimentation

By Samuel Saldivar III

On October 17th, 2017 [Google.com](https://www.google.com) dedicated their search engine doodle to the late Tejana legend Selena Quintanilla who was dubbed the “Queen of Tejano.” Google Doodles Global Marketing Lead, Perla Campos, identifies the late singer as a “beacon of inspiration and hope for the Latinx, immigrant, and bicultural communities around the globe.” Aside from championing Latinx issues, Selena’s experimentation with “traditional” Tejanx sounds invited listeners to consider an alternative way of understanding and engaging ideas of what Tejanx music could be. Quintanilla’s song “Techo Cumbia,” for example, relied on traditional Tejanx beats and the rhythms *and* Techno style synthesizers, musical beat breaks, and turn table style stops and restarts. And while the work of Selena y Los Dinos, among countless other groups, will continue to bring attention to Tejanx communities and its’ culture, this chapter explores the varied ways Tejanxs move beyond music and influence so many other areas of the American landscape. Indeed, as one of the fastest growing population groups in the United States, Latinx and Chicanx communities are shaping the broader American sociocultural and academic landscapes. Chicanx and Latinx populations have become key topics of political and social analysis as white European American discourse struggles to understand the complex, dynamic makeup of this diverse population of the Americas and their relation to the broader U.S. Conversations surrounding immigration, deportation practices, separated asylums seekers whose children are placed in cages and tent cities, ethnic studies programs, and access to higher education dominate news headlines, social media outlets, and politics. Everyone this side of the Rio Bravo seems to have an opinion about Latinx groups in the United States; an opinion that has been shaped by a consistent, perpetual narrative of Chicanxs and Latinxs within the United States.

Unfortunately, many of these narratives attempt to erase the struggles that Chicanx/Latinx

populations have confronted, contested, and resisted in the U.S. What such conversations highlight, for us, however, is that while White European America struggles to maintain its presence in the U.S., “we Latinos/as, with our massive and ever-growing presence in the United States, are creating a new world, a new culture” (Aldama xii) that is reshaping concepts of Latinidad. Artists, creators, authors and storytellers like Selena and film director Robert Rodriguez, among many others, are transforming the U.S. American landscape and they are doing this through popular cultural mediums that we engage with every day. These changes, and challenges, include attempts at acknowledging often omitted inclusions of Tejanx identities that nevertheless play an integral role in understanding where Tejanx populations come from and how they shape their regional landscape. This exploration invites us to consider how the continued evolution of the term pushes us to ask, “what or who is Tejanx, and how have Tejanx’s influenced the broader American landscape”? This chapter discusses the geographic and socio-political histories of Tejanxs by examining indigenous and Afro-Tejanx cultural influences, while also pushing on the boundaries of the term in social, cultural, and literary spaces in the 21st century. By examining the breadth of the Tejanx reach in the U.S., this chapter invites readers to reimagine our expectations of Tejanx populations whose cultural influences have moved well beyond the border that carries its namesake.

While the term Tejanx is frequently paired with Texas-Mexican as interchangeable identifiers of particular population groups residing within the state, we must acknowledge that Tejanx is itself a product of Indigenous Caddo and Spanish linguistic *mestizaje*. The Caddo, who were also known as the Hasinai, are considered “the most advanced, numerous, and productive of the hundreds of indigenous nations who occupied the region” (Palomo 4) that would be known as East Texas. As interactions between the Caddo and Spanish increased due to trading so did their communication. In fact, the Spanish name *Tejas* (and later, Texas) comes from the Caddo word *teysha* meaning ‘friend, hello’. This usurpation of Indigenous language by Spanish conquistadors in East Texas is reminiscent of various Nahuatl worlds appropriated by Spanish conquistadors in the late 15th century and included in their own lexicon. Because of these linguistic appropriations, *Tejas* is not often associated with its indigenous origins, and the term is frequently identified as a product of Spanish-Mexican history via the Spanish-Mexican War (1810-1821), or the Mexican-American War (1846-1848) depending on the scholar. The latter produced the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo whereby Mexicans residing in

Texas, or Texas Mexicans, became American citizens due to a shifting border.

The result of these frequent historical omissions has led to a definition that firmly establishes Tejas/Texas with Mexican and Spanish histories and populations. For example, Arnold De Leon, in *Mexican American in Texas: A Brief History*, claims, “the [t]erm “Tejano” refers to those of *Mexican origin*, regardless of nativity, who resided, or reside, within those modern boundaries of Texas from the early eighteenth century to the present” (emphasis mine, 3). Moreover, in his book *Tejano Diaspora: Mexican Americans and Ethnic Politics in Texas and Wisconsin*, Marc Simon Rodriguez, maps out the varied and expansive reach Tejanxs have had in the greater U.S., but likewise makes similar assertions when he defines Tejanx Diaspora as the “permanent dispersion of several hundred thousand *Mexican Americans* from Texas across the rest of the United States” (emphasis mine, 3). While I agree with De Leon’s idea of acknowledging the presentness of Tejanx identity, and Rodriguez’s identification of the varied, far-reaching geographic presence Tejanxs have had in the U.S., they nevertheless limit the historical reach and populations that teyssha originally included.

By this I mean that while Mexican American, Mexican, and Spanish populations all have a historically present association with the term, it must also be noted that the Caddo also played a crucial role in linguistically and historically establishing the foundations of Texas. Consider the Caddo woman known as Angelia (her baptized Spanish name) who is credited as one of the “first known indigenous women to whom Tejanas (and Tejanxs) are bound historically and culturally” (Acosta & Winegarten 2). This historical union and the word Teysha, which frames this chapter’s analysis, identifies a geographic location and people group that invite us to reconsider a few, yet significant, concepts regarding how we discuss Tejanx identity and culture in the 21st century. Moving forward, as this chapter explores the varied ways Tejanx is used as a social, economic, and cultural identifier in relation to Mexican and Spanish influence, we also include the indigenous presence that the term derives from as a way of honoring the complex history and current use of the term.

Like the often-omitted indigenous Caddo histories, the role Africans had in the shaping of Tejanx Texas is also consistently left out of discussions when examining the relationship with a Tejanx identity. Scholars like Douglas W. Richmond, in his article “Africa’s Initial Encounter with Texas: The Significance of Afro-Tejanxs in Colonial Tejas, 1528-1821,” reminds us that

too often, “the topic of African slavery and the role of Afro-Tejanxs in Texas during the period of Spanish colonial rule has been totally neglected” (200). Although many Africans were brought to the new world by conquistadores Richmond points out that “mulattos and African-indigenous mixtures were the real founders of San Antonio, settling there before the fabled Canary Islands” (213). Yet, like the Caddos, the significance, presence, and role of Afro-Tejanxs are often subsumed by similarly used Mexican and/or Spanish identifiers, even though they maintained a significant role in the shaping of the Tejas region. Thus, as this chapter explores the boundaries of Tejanx as an identifying term in Tejas, it does so with the acknowledgement that when we describe forms of Tejanx mestizaje that make up Tejanx identity formations, it includes indigenous and Afro-Latino relationships that have likewise impacted our understanding of the term.

These associations with African and Indigenous populations within the borders of what would become Texas identify an evolving idea of what it means to study or acknowledge a Tejanx identity. In fact, as a newly arrived faculty member whose work focuses on various forms of Chicane/Latine narrative at Texas State University. I was delighted to learn that I would be working at an HSI, also known as a Hispanic serving institution. Texas State has a budding Latino Studies Program, and a lot of difficult and significant work (such as this collection of research and analysis) is being done to bring Latinx struggles from the margins of academic and social locations to the center. However, I must acknowledge that while these strides stand in direct contrast to the continued erasure of Chicane/Latine/Indigenous and Afro-Indigenous histories and struggles (among so many others), our students enter my classroom almost oblivious to said histories or struggles. My students, Tejanxs or otherwise, are quite familiar with grand dominant Texas narrative of the Alamo and the insurgents famed battle against Mexican forces. Yet, the Indigenous and Afro-Latine connections, the histories and connections to indigenous coastal groups or Indigenous groups from what is now Mexico and Central and South America continues to struggle for any kind of social or academic “air” time outside of University spaces.

One social space that appears to consistently work for an indigenous acknowledgment in film is Tejanx director Robert Rodriguez who not only include predominantly Latinx/Chicane casts, but also includes various forms of indigenous iconography in his films as well. Indeed, while

Rodriguez's films like the *Mariachi* trilogy situate their narratives in the country of Mexico, his films *From Dusk 'Till Dawn* and *Planet Terror* not only include Latinx/Chicanx cast members, but also place a key emphasis on indigenous iconography and placement to progress their narratives. In *From Dusk Till Dawn*, for example, much of the second half of the film takes place inside a Mexican indigenous pyramid. Likewise, towards the end of *Planet Terror* Rodriguez utilizes a coastal indigenous pyramid south of the American border as the location where humanity will repopulate the world. And while I have written elsewhere about how the use of iconography shapes our perceptions of culture and how we relate to it, I wish here to discuss the correlation between films like these and the often-omitted relationship to an indigenous past. For a Tejanx director like Robert Rodriguez to make a film about any land south of the border is to visually and artistically include its indigenous history.

While these moves might appear subtle to the casual viewer, it nevertheless speaks to the moves Rodriguez is making to make known a significant facet of Tejanx identity formation that, as this essay has noted, is not often included when students are taught about the diversity of Texas. Even now, as school districts across the state of Texas work include Chicano/Latino content into their curriculum, the hope is that such curriculums will include these areas of consistent omission. Students who might be familiar with legends like Selena or current films by directors like Robert Rodriguez have already begun engaging evolving facets of Tejanx identity formation without having to confront it. And if intellectuals in primary, secondary, and post-secondary spaces are willing to reconsider the limits and parameters of what it means to be Tejanx in Teysha, they'll take a page out of Selena's books and experiment with their own ideas and parameters concerning the origins of Tejanxs and share them with their students.

[View Works Cited](#)

About the Author



Samuel Saldívar

Samuel Saldívar is an Assistant Professor of English at Texas State University, and he examines examine how Latinx character are constructed in narrative fiction, film, television, and comic mediums. He also explores how these ethno-racial constructions are engaged in broader U.S. America.

Chapter 12

A Call for Anti-Discrimination: Embracing Difference through Respect, Responsibility, and Reciprocity

By Sara Ramirez

“Column Starts a Culture War.” “Racist Propaganda Is Tearing This Texas University Apart.”

“Texas State University and the War on Whiteness.”

Paradoxically, these headlines drew me in. I am a Chicana—a Mexican American woman who is politically cognizant of a history of Euro-American systemic oppression of poor and non-white people. Spanish was my first language. I grew up in a working-class home. Because these aspects of my identity are reflected in the majority-minority composition of the student body at Texas State, I accepted a tenure-track position, beginning in fall 2018, as an Assistant Professor of English at the University. I want to guide students who—like me—are the first in their families to attend college, have felt inadequate in spaces of higher learning, and will only in hindsight understand how they should have navigated their educational careers. So, when I read *Inside Higher Ed*, *Vice News*, and *The Root* news articles that illuminated the blatant racism on the University campus during the 2017-2018 academic year, part of me reconsidered whether Texas State would indeed be a good fit for my professional goals. Would students use the classroom to remind me, a non-white professor, that “America is a white nation” as white supremacists declared to them in October 2017 by hanging a banner with those words? The possibility is unnerving.

Still, these incidents and headlines are the very reason universities need to draw in faculty and staff who have lived-experience with and political awareness of a U.S. history of intolerance of difference. As a first-year undergraduate student far away from my Texas home, I had no idea I would need such adults when I first arrived on a university campus crowded with students who looked like they had just walked out of an Abercrombie and Fitch catalogue. Nor did I realize I would need their wisdom when my roommates mocked the diversity video required for all first-years. “Do *you* feel like an ‘outsider’ because you’re

Mexican?" they taunted and then laughed when I responded, "Kind of." These were the same roommates who deemed me "ghetto" for speaking "improper" English and for listening to hip-hop in our room. These experiences made me cautious to participate in class discussions with such peers; I feared I would say something wrong because I was starting to feel something was wrong with me. Throughout the course of my undergraduate career, I wished for professors who looked like me, had last names that ended with z, and could give name to our shared experiences. However, at the time, I could not put into words why I desired such professors in my life. In hindsight, I realize I needed someone sensitive to my difference as a first-generation, non-white, and underprivileged student. I needed someone with seeming authority to tell me America is not a white nation.

Students of color such as my eighteen-year-old self are not the only ones who have need for faculty of color in the university, as university leaders can also depend on our experiential knowledge to resolve issues around diversity. Note I am not suggesting faculty of color should bear complete responsibility for discussions about diversity on campus. Rather, the university should follow our lead in these efforts.) These issues include the institutional use of the word "diversity" itself. Literary scholar Jodi Melamed argues "diversity" has become a trope of multicultural liberalism, arguing cultural diversity is invited into the university only to maintain neoliberal ideology that portrays "the equality of the free market as the most fundamental expression of equality" (139). The maintenance of neoliberalism (founded on oppression) will not set free people whom anti-discrimination initiatives are intended to help, for freedom depends upon the dismantling of all systems of oppression. Trained in Comparative Ethnic Studies and Gender Studies, I prefer the words "anti-racist," "anti-sexist," and "anti-oppressive" to describe the practices universities must actively employ to contribute to the creation of a more just society. Such terms honor the Civil Rights movements that precipitated anti-discrimination laws. These terms remind us we must encourage anti-discriminatory practices in the university as ways to actualize a society free from divisions based on race, class, sex, gender, religion, ability, and other social constructs that keep us apart.

Tellingly, we avoid talking about race so much that we circumvent terms such as "*anti-racism*" by using words such as "diversity" in its place. Discussing race and racism reminds us of not only systemic and everyday racism but also the differences between us. Black American lesbian thinker and poet Audre Lorde points out, "[I]t is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences, and to examine the

distortions which result from our misnaming them and their effects upon human behavior and expectation" ("Age" 115). Diversity and inclusion initiatives in the university should indeed encourage the embrace of our differences as well as the examination of distortions that result from fearing our differences. Recognizing the effects of these distortions will lead us to understand how and why "the major systems of oppression are interlocking," as the Combahee River Collective observed in 1977 (234). Yet comprehension is not sufficient. We must affirmatively act to correct these distortions.

Before we can act, however, we must learn to listen to and understand one another. Just as first-generation students and students of color at Texas State are venturing into new thinking spaces, administrators, faculty, and staff may likewise feel lost venturing into new discussions about race, sex, and class. For students such as my eighteen-year-old self and other members of the University, I offer a series of *dichos*, or maxims, which have been helpful for me as a person of color who, at times, has felt out of place when far from my geographical and ideological homes. I encourage us to take action guided by the philosophy that our lives and experiences are interconnected.

"La/El que nace para maceta del corredor no sale"

This *dicho* encourages us to leave our comfort zones. It literally means "She/He who is born for the plant pot will not get out of the corridor." Dear student, you are the plant, and, like any healthy plant, you are going to grow toward the light. Will you stay in the *maceta* (the plant pot) or grow over the edge of what was meant to contain you? Since you have already left one *maceta*, your physical home, I encourage you to keep growing and leave *el corredor*. You were not born for *la maceta*; you were born to be a Bobcat. Allow your social consciousness to grow in your humanities courses at Texas State. Opt for classes that are perhaps outside of your—or anyone's—traditional academic comfort zone such as Latina/o Studies or Women's Studies. Let yourself fall in love with the material you read, watch, and experience in these courses. If you are unable to take such classes due to your schedule, check out the campus bookstore. Which books are Latina/o Studies or Women's Studies professors teaching? Pick up a used copy, and you'll be surprised to find out Latina/o Studies and Women's Studies are not what you once thought. (Believe me. I've been there.) Share your new knowledge with your friends and family, who might still be hanging out in their *macetas*.

Dear colleague, you and I were not born for the *maceta* either. With respect to discussions

about diversity, many of us are much like the students to whom we cater: lost. Though most of us have been educated in schools of higher learning, we have, unfortunately, not been taught how to employ non-violent communication, for instance. We have not learned how to step outside of the ego with which we so adamantly identify. We have not learned the skills of compassion for others' egos either. Yet we have a responsibility to these students, each other, as well as ourselves to pursue conversations that make us uneasy. We owe it to ourselves to crawl out of our respective plant pots and, when we do accomplish this task, to be compassionate toward others who still see their own *macetas* as their one and only home.

"No se puede tapar el sol con un dedo"

This maxim translates as "The sun cannot be blocked with one finger." If you try to block sunlight from your eyes using only one average-sized finger, you will likely fail at the attempt. You will soon realize you need to use five or even ten joined fingers to protect your eyes. This *dicho* underscores the need for thoughtful and collective solutions for big issues.

Students, you will encounter some difficulties as you navigate your undergraduate career. You may find, for example, especially after you've left your *maceta*, that the pre-health route is not really for you. Like me, as a first-generation student and a student of color, you may have declared pre-health because being a doctor is one of the few careers you've seen and heard glamorized. You might also realize that medicine is a career envisioned for you by your family because becoming a doctor/lawyer/engineer is the ultimate marker of success in our society. However, after you've taken a Chicana/o Narratives course, you may now want to major in English and minor in Latina/o Studies. (This is what happened to me.) How do you talk to your parents about your change of heart? Such a discussion will require thoughtful planning as your parents loom large like *el sol* in your imagination. Remember, like a single *dedo*, you alone may not be able to resolve how to keep them from obstructing your vision. This issue will take more fingers (people) joined together and working cohesively to discover a thoughtful solution. In this case, consider speaking with an academic advisor, a licensed counselor at the Counseling Center, or a professor who has had similar experiences as you have. These are all services free to you. You might also consult with other college friends who have had this "change of major" discussion with their families. While your parents may not change their minds about what they want for you, you will at least have these other people in your corner.

Colleagues, as we venture into discussions of race, sex, and class differences to create a

better social climate for students, let us remember that no individual or even a single group will be able to transform Texas State into the welcoming environment we want for faculty and staff of color, students of color, and first-generation students. The emotional and psychological effects of even subtle and unintentional acts of discrimination and making people feel unworthy of inclusion are indeed big problems that must be tackled collectively—like joined fingers protecting our vision from the threatening sun—if we are to effect positive change on campus.

“El respeto al derecho ajeno es la paz”

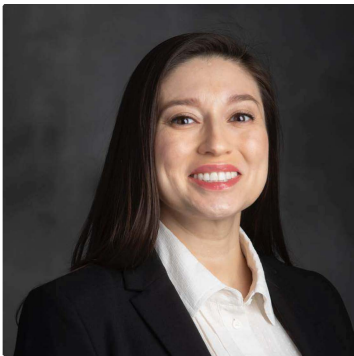
Although this is not a *dicho* per se, now, more than ever, we must remember nineteenth-century Mexican President Benito Juárez’s timeless words: “Respect for the rights of others is peace.” This statement gained meaning for me through my father. Each time another child would pick on me or if he found out I was picking on someone—most often my little sister—my father would remind me, “*Como dijo Benito Juárez, el respeto al derecho ajeno es la paz.*” I had a responsibility to maintain peace by respecting others rights. As a little girl, I once asked my father, “¿*Qué es la paz?* [What is peace?]” He responded, “*Ésto* [This],” his index finger pointing and tracing a long arch over our neighborhood street, parched trees, grass, and potted flowers, swaying in the hot summer wind; children riding bikes and skateboards and jumping through a water stream shooting out of a single sprinkler; and back to me. I began to associate peace with this feeling—the feeling of my own stillness and calm as the world moved without disturbing me. Yet I wouldn’t learn the meaning of *el derechos ajenos*, or the rights of others, and the ways in which some civil rights are infringed upon until much later.

Students and colleagues, in these harsh sociopolitical times, we must recall the lessons of kindness and respect from our childhoods. We must also remember the lessons of struggles for civil rights we learned as adults, for these efforts are not over. While I emphasize respect, I do not advocate a politics of respectability through which we police behaviors deemed “disrespectful” by dominant social standards that only serve to keep poor whites and people of color in their place. Instead, I am calling for all members of the Texas State community to respect one another’s rights to teach, learn, and navigate the campus without fear of physical or psychological harm in the name of *la paz*.

May these words be useful to the University community as a whole. These *dichos* are these timeless words of advice, which may incite us to reflect upon not only respect but also responsibility and reciprocity. All members of the University have a responsibility—the ability to respond, if you will—to the call to grow out of our individual *macetás*. We each have a responsibility to shape an anti-racist, anti-sexist, and overall anti-discriminatory space for higher learning. We are also responsible for engaging in reciprocity by giving back to the communities (or the other *dedos*, to align with the second *dicho*) that have collectively contributed to our growth. My hope is that attention to the nuances of respect, responsibility, and reciprocity may lead us to become aware of the interconnectedness of our experiences.

[View Works Cited](#)

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Sara A. Ramírez, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English. Her research agenda engages Chicana and decolonial feminist literature, visual art, and theory alongside trauma studies. Her first book is tentatively titled “Lo/Cura: Subjects of Trauma in Chicana Cultural Productions.” She is also executive editor for Third Woman Press and co-editor for recent editions of *El Mundo Zurdo*, selected works from the meetings for the Society for the Study of Gloria Anzaldúa.