SURVEYING AND LIVING CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS: FROM CRITICAL AWARENESS OF SELF TO OUR ACTION WITHIN SPACES OF LEARNING

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SURVEYING AND LIVING CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS: FROM CRITICAL AWARENESS OF SELF TO OUR ACTION WITHIN SPACES OF LEARNING

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DEDICATION

A mi Dios y mi Señor, el Sagrado Corazón de Jesús, y la Madre de todo Mexicano, Nuestra Virgencita de Guadalupe.

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My most humble and profound gratitude goes to my family, both past and present, both near and far. *A mi padre, que en paz descanse,* who tirelessly fought to provide our family a better life and instilled in each one of his children the courage to act regardless of obstacle. *A mi madre, siempre fiel,* who embraced all sacrifice so that each one of her children would be afforded the best formal education possible, as well as acknowledge, validate, and draw strength from *la educación* she provided that modeled that it was in the service of others that we are fed. *A mi hermanos* Alicia, Ramón, Susana, Juan, Rebeca, and Puri. You accompany me always, and especially during these last years, physically, emotionally, intellectually, and above all spiritually. Each of you, with your unique gifts and talents, make me strive to be a better educator, a better human being.

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ABSTRACT

SURVEYING AND LIVING CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS: FROM CRITICAL AWARENESS OF SELF TO OUR ACTION WITHIN SPACES OF LEARNING

by

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The primary focus of our qualitative study was to understand the phenomenon of the development of critical consciousness in educational and community leaders, and how critical consciousness manifests itself in action within hierarchically structured environments. Six educational and/or community leaders, including the researcher, served as units of analysis. In order to capture the lived experiences that fostered critical awareness of systems within education and community contexts that fail to maximize the gifts and potential of all its members, the leaders were invited to prepare an anthropological life map identifying salient events that created paradigm shifts in their theory and practice, ultimately promoting the leaders' motivation to interrogate the status quo and work toward sustainable change within learning settings. Moreover, leaders were invited to participate as both learners and research analysts, participating in an

engaged inquiry process alongside the researcher. Analysis of life maps informed the ethnographic interviews of leaders that described a greater scope of the pedagogical strategies that are born of the development and employment of critical consciousness. *Pláticas,* artifacts, and field notes were utilized to collect observables that would further inform the content provided and the implications gleaned from the anthropological life maps and ethnographic interviews. Implications of this study are presented within the contexts of: 1) teaching, leading, and learning; 2) the manifestation of critical awareness of self; and 3) future research.

CHAPTER I

ON CHILD'S PLAY, PERSONAL REVOLUTION, AND POSSIBILITY

I do not recall his name, but I can distinctly repeat the message he delivered in his sermon on a Sunday evening four years ago in Honduras. Clearing his voice, the priest approached the pulpit to address the community gathered before him. The ceiling fans circulating up above provided a gentle breeze that complimented the one that entered unassumingly through the windows on either side of the church. I sat, one of many, and listened as he spoke about the power for change inherent in the attainment and manifestation of humility, and the world's grave misunderstanding of both the concepts of humility and power. *–¡Prefiero morir de pie que vivir de rodillas!–*[1] he emphatically pronounced. More than a sermon, the priest's words were a call to rise up and challenge the powers that daily contributed to perpetuating the cycles of corruption, violence and poverty in communities throughout Honduras.

As I held that moment in time, cradled within a community that was at once familiar and strange, I lapsed into moments of reflection. I had only been in the country a few weeks as a participant in a student exchange and had already witnessed a student-led walkout from the local university protesting the rising cost of tuition, and a citywide roadblock protesting the rising cost of gasoline. Did such manifestations evidence what the priest was attempting to ignite in the community? Neither protest had manifested

[1] "I would rather die upon my feet than live upon my knees!" Quote from Emiliano Zapata (1879–1919), revolutionary leader during the Mexican Revolution.

lasting change, nor set the stage for willing heads, hands, and hearts to work together toward change. The frustrations and desperations of a suffering community seemed to have been ameliorated, or at minimum soothed, by having merely been made public. Within a day or two, students had returned to campus with no further discussion of the rising cost of tuition, no further negotiation, no sense of an authentic hope that change was even possible.

The priest's call to action continued to echo in my head as I made my way in between the pews, into the small chapel adjacent the church and exited into the day's evening. I did not sleep that night. And now, back home, amidst my own community, and more than three years into my doctoral studies, there have been many more nights that sleep has given way to countless questions and countless prayers for discernment. How do we arrive at the critical capacity to question our understanding of concepts such as "power" and "humility"? At what moment in time do we become aware that we have so fully assimilated into the systems in which we live and work that we are no longer responsive to injustices, however minute, that we suffer and that we ourselves impart? How do we awaken the critical consciousness (Freire, 1970) that has been slumbering as a result of ignorance, comfort or privilege, so that not only are we as community members, giving voice to inequities, but also rising up to prepare the tools and employ them for change? And, once awakened, how do we stoke that fire to prevent it from suffocating and returning to a state of slumber, buried and hidden underneath the weight of the embers and ashes, or employ them solely for the pursuit of individual promotion?

Borrowing from Freire (1970), among other theorists, we understand critical consciousness as a level of self-awareness that elucidates a person's lived realities,

highlighting how historical, cultural, and political factors influence systems and structures within self, institutions, and societies. It informs a person's ability to evaluate how these systems and structures either serve to promote the well being of all its members, or only a select few. Critical consciousness permits a person to recognize and acknowledge oppressive systems and mobilize in order to change these or envision and create new more equitable systems and structures (Freire, 2005; Giroux, 1997; Illich, 1973; Macedo, 2006). Of importance, I use the terms critical awareness, critical consciousness, and conscientization interchangeably throughout the text.

The Question Remains: So What?

Statement of the Problem

As learners, teachers, and leaders working within educational environments, whether PK-12, higher education, or community organizations, we often face working within systems that promote the standardization of instruction, assessment, and knowledge (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1996; Oakes, 1985; Valencia, 2002). This standardization is argued to be an attempt to address educational achievement gaps amongst students of color and promote more equitable school environments across the Nation. However, while individuals and groups with the social capital that most aligns with the values and beliefs of the dominant discourse and ideology will thrive and achieve across cognitive and social domains, those whose stories, languages, and experiences run parallel or counter, remain on the margins of institutions and society (Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Varenne & McDermott, 1998). Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) define social capital as "the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less

institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition (p. 119). Subsequently, many students and families are made to suffer the blame for not participating in spaces in which they have only been invited to participate at the expense of their identities (Bourdieu, 1991; Delpit, 2002; Erickson, 1987; Valencia, 2002; Valenzuela, 1999; Varenne & McDermott, 1998).

Students from diverse backgrounds daily contend with microaggressions (Delpit, 2002; hooks, 2003; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000) stemming from race, ethnicity, language, gender, and disability, among other forms of discrimination. The effects of these microaggressions are evidenced in a student's feelings of misplacement, educational institutions' substandard expectations of the student's capacities to learn and achieve, and the student's distortion of self-efficacy and self-worth (Solorzano, 2008; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Sue, Capodilupo, Nadal, & Torino, 2008). The best of intentions for the education of millions of children and youth result in the categorization of abilities interpreted by systems and within organizations that often dehumanize students, reducing some to commodities prepared to serve society as it exists, and others to reproduce and perpetuate social and economic inequalities (Oakes, 1985).

The perceived cognitive disability of students results in a fragmentation of learning, teaching, and leading that narrows our view of education and our understanding of knowledge creation. Subsequently, we may choose compliance over agency, prescriptive materials and measures over innovative and creative pedagogy (Fullan, 2003; Hargreaves & Fullan, 1996; Harris, 2002), and dynamic processes for change (Addams, 1910; Block, 2008; Horton, 1998; Trifonas, 2003; Wheatley, 2006). It lulls us into a state of passivity and perpetuates the stratification of a society that tracks students, and adults

alike, into predetermined roles (Durkheim, 2000; Henry, 2000). Students with low achievement on standardized assessments are mandated to remedial classes geared to prepare them to achieve the minimum standard at all costs. This is most often at the cost of enrollment in critical coursework needed to pursue a postsecondary education. Secondary students who are able to pass the standardized exam to qualify for graduation, however, often do not have enough credit hours or the qualifying credit hours to enroll in a two-year post secondary institution, much less a four-year university. These youth exit educational institutions feeling dejected, unprepared, and incapable of pursuing possibilities outside of employment that does not provide a livable income (Valencia, 2002).

Purpose and Scope of the Study

The capacity to think and act critically and creatively about who we are, who we think we are, who others say we are, and how we choose to engage, or not, in our communities, helps to shape our daily existence, and the health of the institutions and organizations that work in the service, sustenance, development, and transformation of our society (Anzaldúa, 1999; Freire, 2005; González, 2001; hooks, 1994). As a significantly abstract concept, critical consciousness can quite easily be dismissed as impossible, deigned with connotations of an unattainable utopia (Freire, 2005). However, as with the concepts of faith, hope, and love, the possibilities born of the manifestation of critical consciousness have the potential for extraordinary thoughts, ideas, insights, and actions. Subsequently, as a reflective practitioner and committed researcher seeking to understand and create sustainable change that promotes the welfare of whole learning

communities, it is a personal responsibility and deliberate moral choice to delve into the study of its development.

Through this study I seek to provide insight into the anatomy of critical consciousness as it relates to learning, teaching, and leading, and contribute to the growth of this movement of change within our communities. The presentation of findings is framed in a manner that is both theoretical and practical to the literature, my research partners[2], and the academy. My research partners included three PK-12 educational leaders, Grace[3], Samuel, and Christopher, and two community leaders, Marta and Joseph. A more comprehensive explanation of their invitation to contribute to our study is included in *Chapter II*. Of a dynamic and cohesive nature, the invitation to my research partners to learn and grow together throughout the inquiry process was extended throughout all phases, including the presentation of findings and future contributions to the literature, as well as the application of the constructed knowledge within educational settings, including PK-12, community organizations, and institutions of higher education.

This study was designed as a tool for the exploration of conscientization, including how my research partners and I manifest it in thought, word, and action within our learning spaces. I utilized auto-ethnographic and critical ethnographic methods to engage and provide insight into the contributions to spaces for learning, teaching, and leading of six educational and community activists and leaders, including me. Specifically, for this study, these learning spaces, by association to my respective

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[2] I deliberately utilize the term research partner(s), in lieu of participants, throughout the study and within the text. This continually promoted and grounded my research partners' and my engagement as both learners and researchers within the engaged inquiry process.

[3] Pseudonyms are utilized for all personal names and institution/organization names with the exception of the Community Learning Exchange, the Hawai'inuiākea School of Hawaiian Knowledge, the Highlander Center for Research and Development, La Unión del Pueblo Entero, the Kellogg Foundation, and the Kellogg Leadership for Community Change.

research partners, include three PK-12 campuses and two non-profit community organizations. The explorations into and manifestations within these learning spaces are derived from my research partners' and my stories, perspectives, and experiences, as well as from my field notes within these settings. Historical, political, cultural, and cognitive frames are employed to help make sense of the landscape of the development of our critical awareness and provide insight into the pedagogical strategies we employ to manifest personal and professional agency within hierarchically structured environments in order to transform these environments. Moreover, insight into pedagogical strategies created and propelled by critical consciousness, facilitate the analysis of how it informs our engagement within these spaces and the potential for institutional and organizational change and growth that are born of these.

Research Questions

1. How do we develop critical consciousness including the following frames: historical, political, cultural, and cognitive?
2. How does critical consciousness inform the engagement within pedagogical spaces for institutional and organizational change and growth?

Sub questions. a) What is the nature of the consciousness that influences and informs our actions in learning, teaching, and leading? b) What is the nature of the space in which these actions are manifested? c) What pedagogical strategies do we employ to manifest personal and professional agency within hierarchically structured environments in order to transform these?

Definition of Terms

The following definitions of key terms and concepts presented and/or embedded throughout the text are provided below to facilitate comprehension and engagement between the reader and the study.

- Agency – "Situated or embodied freedom" that fosters the potential for a person to critically reflect on their world(s), mobilize, and work to change unfavorable or dehumanizing conditions in order to improve his/her lived realities (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005, p. 890).
- Anthropological life history/map – A qualitative data collection method utilized to identify salient events or periods in a person's life and which requires the researcher to explore factors such as biological, cultural, social, and psychosocial (Mandelbaum, 1973; Wolcott, 2008).
- Critical ethnography – A research method utilized by critical researchers "[attempting] to move beyond the objectifying and imperialist gaze associated with the Western anthropological tradition (which fixes the image of the so-called informant from the colonizing perspective of the knowing subject)" (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005, p. 324). Through it, critical ethnographers seek to bring to light the influences and impact of power and control within and upon cultures or societies. Critical ethnography is not neutral, but rather contributes to "emancipatory knowledge and discourses of social justice" (Madison, 2005, p. 5).
- Diverse ways of knowing – Knowledge systems, including values, beliefs, and practices associated with peoples whose cultures and perspectives have traditionally remained on the margins of Euro-American educational systems and

structures. Diverse ways of knowing present worldviews and knowledge systems that provide insight into learning processes beyond what is traditionally practiced within PK-12 educational settings (Ah Nee-Benham, 1998; Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005; González, 1998).

- Ethnography – A foundational research method utilized extensively within the field of social sciences, anthropology in particular, to investigate a culture or society so as to describe in depth the nature of such. Ethnography takes into account the multifaceted nature of the cultural and living processes of human beings. Data collection methods often include oral histories, interviews, and participant observation, among others. Ethnography calls for the researcher to be immersed within the culture or society that is being investigated with greater emphasis and significance placed on qualitative interpretations of data (Denzin & Lincoln 1995; Patton, 2002; Wolcott, 2008).
- Narrative inquiry – A method of inquiry that seeks not "the construction of a universal set of educational objectives," but rather promotes thinking outside long held parameters (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 24). It focuses on stories that reveal human experiences not often acknowledged by society, but that hold the power to "mobilize others into action for progressive change" (Riessman, 2008, p. 9).
- Ontology – "Ontology is the study of being. It is concerned with 'what is', with the nature of existence, with the structure of reality as such" (Crotty, 1998, p. 10).
- Social constructivist theory – A theory emphasizing that knowledge is socially constructed and does not exist nor is created apart from the learner's social context

and processes. It is grounded in the understanding that we, as learners, construct new knowledge as we live and interact within and within our world(s). Learning is experiential and prior knowledge provides a foundation from which new knowledge can be constructed (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1997; Vygotsky, 1978).

- Euro-American ways of teaching – Pedagogy and practice that is grounded in Euro-American customs, traditions, values, and beliefs, and promotes assimilationist views on the inclusion of diverse cultures. Strict Euro-American teaching methods help reinforce and maintain educational systems and structures that acknowledge students whose ideology aligns with the status quo, while devaluing students who demonstrate diverse knowledge systems and methods of learning (Ah Nee-Benham, 1998).

Cultivando la Tierra y Echando Raiz[4]

The story at the opening of this chapter is only one of many along often-divergent paths that, upon continued discernment and critical dialogues, served as impetus and commitment to my study on the development of critical consciousness. Employing auto-ethnographic methods, this chapter captures profound insights into life paths I have traversed, specifically, the ways of knowing modeled and taught by *mis papás*, that informed my research and analysis of the connection between story and space, and historical, cultural, political, and cognitive understanding and sense-making. The discussion of the rationale for the study integrates my thoughts on the development and understanding of self, as this has greatly influenced my engagement in higher education

[4] See Appendix A: Glossary of Spanish Words/Phrases for translations and interpretations of all Spanish terminology.

and in particular my interest in critical consciousness within the landscape of its development, progression, cyclical nature, and as catalyst for growth and change.

The research is grounded in the ontological ways of knowing that I learned and lived as a child and adolescent within the micro contexts of home and school, and the development of a critical awareness that these experiences ignited in me. It incorporates the disruptions within and beyond these settings that provoked a need to escape and seek the rehabilitation of my heart, mind, and soul. Ultimately, this search unearthed the possibilities of accessing new perspectives to make sense of my place in the world and illuminated the potential of acknowledging my agency to act within the world. Through story and theory, I sketch the landscape of the development of my conscientization. I embed descriptions of significant landmarks along this continuum through recollections beginning at the age of five. These recollections give insight into the nature of my thoughts and actions within and upon my worlds in relation to the growth and development of a critical awareness. Subsequently, they set the stage for my exploration of the landscape of critical consciousness that I initiate at self and expand in later chapters to encompass my research partners and the educational settings in which we engage.

Child's Play

I was born in Irapuato, Guanajuato-México approximately five hundred miles south of the U.S.-México border. I immigrated to the United States with my family at the age of four (Figure 1.1). I was fortunate enough to experience discrimination at an early age. I was never confused about whether or not I was accepted. Indeed, it was my experiences of being hit, spat upon, mocked, ridiculed, and marginalized that would

eventually provoke me to tear away the crusted scab of ignorance that for many years provided a sickening comfort, not allowing me to see that I had accomplished what they[5] expected of me all along…mediocrity.[6] But most significantly, these experiences would foster an interconnectedness with the students and families whom I served as a bilingual educator. This interconnectedness eventually raised my awareness of the importance of one's life purpose.

Growing up, in moments of nostalgia over her separation from the land of her birth, *mi mamá* would exclaim, *–Nunca mejor está el árbol que en la tierra donde se cría*. I often pondered the significance of her exclamation, referencing the extent and nature of its poignancy depending on from whose experiential lens it was analyzed. Much the same as the conditional factor proposed in the idiom as to "what is best for the tree", *mi mamá* spent nearly forty years in México, the land in which she was born and raised. Surely she could package her experiences and daily contention with injustice and heartache, frame and nestle them within the meaning derived from one of her most esteemed sayings. But, what of my experience and that of my siblings? Mere saplings when circumstances required that we be unearthed prior to fully taking root and transplanted in unfamiliar soil, how did this saying frame the injustice and heartache we felt? Would we not have indeed been better off away from this land in which we were raised, but in which we were demeaned, spat upon, made to feel unworthy, and ignored?

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[5] "They" refers to some members of my K-12 school community, including teachers, administrators, and students who did not expect from my siblings and me any significant contributions to our educational settings, much less, to any postsecondary educational or professional settings.

[6] That I was "successful" enough to follow the prescribed guidelines and expectations that others held of me, without questioning the guidelines or expectations that I had for my own learning and potential, speaks to a level of mediocrity that informed my practice well into the first three years as a bilingual educator.

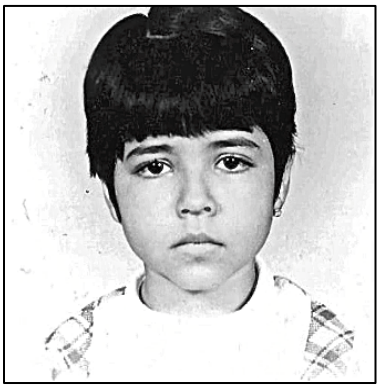


Figure 1.1. Author at age four.

Every morning, as the sun arose and the sounds and aromas from our kitchen made their way through doorways, down hallways, and into my first conscious breath of the day, I would lay in anticipation of the moment in which mi mamá would drag me up the stairs of my school and into my kindergarten classroom. By the age of five I had developed, however nascent, an awareness that there existed rules and parameters that favored some and subjected others to mistreatment. I was also aware that I was that other and that the rest of my classmates consisted of the some.

By the age of seven, I understood that if I played by the rules and within the parameters that were established, I could, at minimum, spare myself disciplinary action from superiors, if not ostracism from peers. I became aware that neither my home language, nor the lessons learned at home would be valued within the context of school. This understanding prompted me to censor my actions. Originating and fueled by fear, I did not have the understanding to label my self-censorship as unjust, nor good or bad. As I understood it at the age of seven, censorship was simply a way of being that was necessary for self-preservation. I was cognizant of the fact that I limited my contributions to those

that were most in accordance with the learning we were to accomplish. Neatly handwritten pages of letters, all within the boundaries established by the lines on a page. Rote recitation of sentences within books whose illustrations of children and families matched those of my classmates. I would not question the omission of other people and stories within our texts until well into my secondary education. Nevertheless, at the age of seven, I relished in pleasing my teachers and I evaluated my learning by their measures: impeccable handwriting, perfect scores on spelling tests, the memorization of sight words, the ability to sit quietly, and remain well-behaved at all times.

Reexamining the idiom that framed the experiences *mi mamá* lived after having emigrated to the United States, I acknowledge that I limited my understanding of her message to a mere literal interpretation of the idiom. All the while I had concluded that the soil in which we had been replanted lay dormant, affected, infected, barren, rock-laden, and lifeless; I allowed the sorrow to impinge on my learning, the recognition and appreciation that there exist various ways of knowing, and the agency to act with and through the sorrow to change the circumstances of my reality.

By the age of 12, I developed an awareness that rules and parameters were not necessarily created to promote order or justice, nor apply to all, but rather to oppress those with marked differences, to an existence mired with indifference, rejection, isolation, self-doubt, self-blame, and futile resistance. My last act of resistance within this setting came at the age of 17 and at the expense of my passion for the game of basketball. Despite the encouragement from my brother Juan to remain on the team, I could not move beyond the thoughts of self-doubt

that had accumulated over the course of my childhood and adolescent years. I would quit the team amidst my unexplained benching for games in which we faced our most competitive opponents. Months later, mi papá would discover that scouts from various universities in Texas had been in attendance during those games. My persistence in this environment confused my understanding of my role in the world. I further withdrew from life. I no longer acted upon life. I simply reacted to it.

It took many years for me to begin to analyze how I had engaged within the various contexts of my new environment, and how the suffering and chronic stress with which I lived impeded me from arriving sooner at a greater understanding of the subtle but revolutionary nature of the actions of *mis papás*. This analysis was fueled by new understandings that blossomed as I navigated my way through the experiences and knowledge acquired during my undergraduate studies. I was challenged to think in new ways about my artistic ability, and exposed to powerful works of art created by Mexican muralists that brought to light social and political inequities suffered by individuals and communities. My understanding of the causes of such inequities, however, would remain obscured as I focused most of my efforts on recuperating a sense of self that would help me rediscover my capacities to create and reconnect with life.

Personal Revolution

There are countless roads traveled, both literal and figurative, that have been affected, destroyed, rebuilt, flooded, and redirected by life experiences, personal choices, and people I have met along the way. I was fortunate; I was afforded the privilege, as

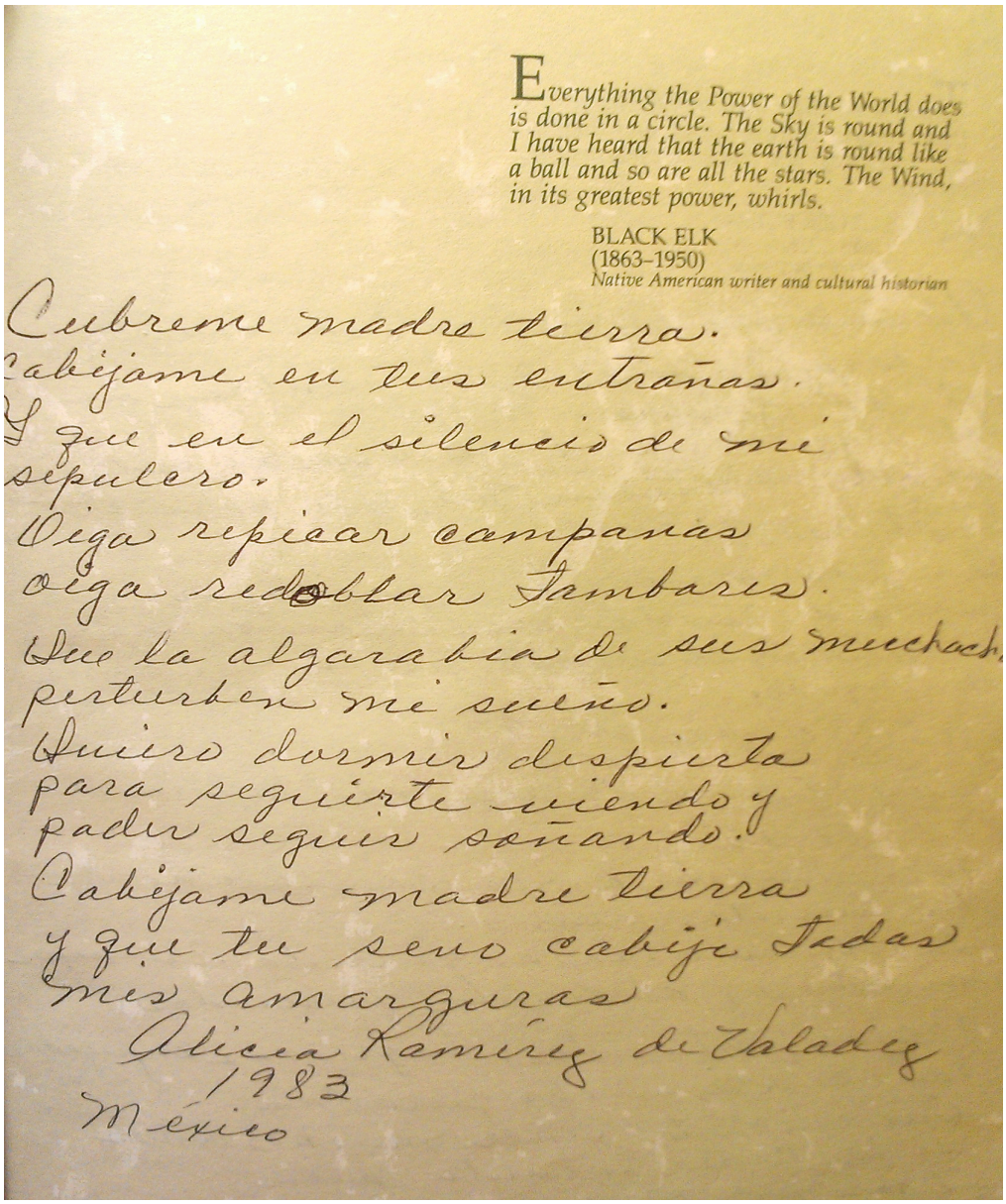
Castañeda (1973) describes, of learning how to learn in order to act on and change experiences and realities that suffocate and squelch the very life out of human beings.

> One day I found out that if I wanted to be a hunter worthy of self-respect I had to change my way of life. I used to whine and complain a great deal. I had good reason to feel shortchanged. I am an Indian and Indians are treated like dogs. There was nothing I could do to remedy that, so all I was left with was my sorrow. But then my good fortune spared me and someone taught me to hunt. And I realized that the way I lived was not worth living...so I changed it. (p. 80)

I have had such a difficult time making an effort to write, even just stream of consciousness. Somewhere in the recesses of my mind, I know that it is something that I want to do. But hesitating, I begin to ponder the so what or the what for and eventually succeed in creating such a burden of writing that I will set it aside. If I take a moment to reflect on my writing life from when I have memory, this hesitation to write has only existed in as much as it is something that may be made public. I have written of the profound pain and agony accumulated during childhood and adolescence, poems and stories briefly shared with the paper at hand, only to then be discarded and destroyed, the existence of the words and the memories relived for brief moments at a time, once again sheltered and stowed away within me.

> *Throughout my childhood and adolescence, I witnessed mi mamá squelch her voice and talents. She filled notebooks with poems (Figure 1.2) and writings and would, with subdued pride, read them to me on occasion. Though these were private writings of which she alluded that she had no intention of sharing publicly, by the age of 12 or 13, I recognized her need for someone to validate the power of*

her written word, the profundity of her thoughts and ideas, the dignity of her strength and resilience. Despite this recognition, I accompanied her as she took a backseat to mi papa (Figure 1.3). Living within the confines of aspects of a culture that demanded submission and silence from mi mamá, coupled with the impressive talent of mi papá for handcrafting boots, he would be the one to receive attention and accolades; we would accompany one another in our silence.



Everything the Power of the World does is done in a circle. The Sky is round and I have heard that the earth is round like a ball and so are all the stars. The Wind, in its greatest power, whirls.

BLACK ELK
(1863–1950)
Native American writer and cultural historian

Cubreme madre tierra.
Cabijame en tus entrañas.
Y que en el silencio de mi
sepulcro.
Oiga repicar campanas
oiga redoblar Tambores.
Que la algarabia de sus muchach
perturben mi sueño.
Quiero dormir dispierta
para seguirte viendo y
poder seguir soñando.
Cabijame madre tierra
y que tu seno cabije Todas
mis amarguras
Alicia Ramirez de Valadez
1983
México

Figure 1.2. *Cúbreme Madre Tierra* ©. Used with the permission of author.

Cover me oh Motherland; shelter me in your womb; that within the silence of my tomb, I may hear bells toll and drums beat; that the joyous sounds of your children may perturb my sleep; I wish to sleep awake so that I may continue looking upon you and continue dreaming; shelter me Motherland; may your bosom hide all of my sorrows.

Figure 1.3. *Papá* inspecting boot.

As a result, I was always waiting, anticipating something, not sure what, that would eventually and finally be the cause of my complete disappearance. I never quite disappeared, but rather became the tiniest of thorns that was only remembered on those intermittent occasions when in the stir of a thought or the sigh of my soul, I brought attention to myself.

But what happens when you begin to try to understand where you have been and who you are, and does any of it really matter if our struggle and discovery is limited to our understanding of our humanity within the confines of contexts in which the space for growth beyond a certain level of comfort is never sought? This paralysis speaks to a distorted image of self as incapable of imagining creative possibilities and changing lived

realities. At the same time, it provides insight into the indispensable nature of discernment, the understanding of self, and the extent to which various contexts and factors have contributed to its development or its distortion. It challenges what we think to be true about what we know regarding ourselves and our human potential and agency (Maturana & Varela, 1992; Ornstein, 1993).

> *At the age of 18, I summoned my last remaining thread of dignity and hope, and decided to pursue a degree in fine art. This juncture marked the commencement of the rehabilitation of my heart, soul, and mind. I began to spew the self-hate, anguish and anger onto my canvas, while capturing the beauty of life with my camera. I spent countless hours in the studio, dark room, art museums, and galleries. I began to ask of myself the same questions I asked as I contemplated the works of artists such as Frida Khalo, Diego Rivera, José David Alfaro Siqueiros, and José Clemente Orozco. What is my message? What is the source of my passion? Who needs to hear my message? How do I continue to paint life?*

Now as a graduate student and with new lenses through which I can critically analyze the landscape of the development of my critical consciousness, I acknowledge and hold in inestimable value the contributions made by *mis papás* throughout my childhood and adolescence. I recognize how they labored to cultivate and help reestablish the health of the new soil by infusing it with distinctive nutrients supplied and informed by the experiences and knowledge sets they held before arriving in the U.S., as well as those constructed after their arrival. These actions spoke to their awareness that the systems and structures that constituted our school, work, and church communities would not willingly make room for different ways of knowing. But more than an

awareness of the exclusive communities in which we battled daily, *mis papás* modeled resistance and agency (Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Trueba, 1999; Valenzuela, 1999) They never allowed us to not show up, whether at school, work, church, or the corner grocery store, simply because we were not welcomed. They held themselves to the same standard and modeled it daily. *Mis papás* understood that their battles would not be fought in vain, but rather be fought with the purpose of changing the trajectory of their children's lives. And in their estimation, these lives would change the world (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2002).

Possibility

In much the same fashion as *mis papás* accepted their vocation as tree shepherds in order to care for my siblings and me, *cultivando la tierra* in which we were replanted, I too strive to live the tenants of this vocation. I borrow the term tree shepherd from The Lord of the Rings trilogy. A tree-like race of beings in the movie The Two Towers, these beings nurtured and protected the trees in the forest from the dangers that surrounded them, especially saplings needing time to grow strong. I purposefully chose the term tree shepherd in lieu of arborist to describe *mis papás* within this context. Unlike a tree shepherd, who is at once, both tree and shepherd and shares in the lived realities of the saplings, the arborist is outsider, hypothesizing as to what is best for the tree without ever fully understanding it.

Echando raíz signifies to establish roots. When analyzed in relation to the ontological footprint impressed upon my siblings and me by *mis papás*, it was not indicative of an adaptation to the soil in which we were replanted, but rather a hybridization of existing as well as newly introduced assets and knowledge sets. In

retrospect, much of my knowledge remained restricted within awareness. My understanding limited me to a futile resistance that kept me silent and yearning not to be noticed. I did not know that systems and structures could be changed, nor how to go about changing systems, much less that human beings were behind the same systems and structures that excluded us. Indeed, the very power of developing a critical awareness and realizing that the climate, culture, and systems that keep us in specific places are social constructions, is important and a necessary state in order to change them.

I borrow from Freire (1970) who discusses the concept of conscientization, as a critical awareness of self, time, and space, and historical, cultural, political, and social factors that influence our ability to construct our lived realities. Where are the pockets of change existent within our educational institutions and organizational settings that promote and foster the importance of learning and teaching for critical consciousness? How are these pockets providing the space for us to challenge and cultivate our understanding of conscientization as it relates to the areas of learning, teaching, and leading?

The pocket of change inspired by *mis papás*, and the first in which I would be provided an opportunity to develop critical perspectives and subsequently plant seeds for the possibilities of change, was founded in examples of resistance modeled through action, as well as spoken hope. More often than not, this spoken hope was framed from what *mis papás* hoped would not transpire. *Mi papá* voiced concerns about the risks of his children assimilating to our new surroundings to the extent of negating la patria, including language and customs. In my auto-ethnography prepared during my first

semester of my doctoral program, I describe the level of consciousness as regarded my desire to remain faithful to the land of my birth.

> *At the age of 16, steeped in the battle between assimilation and resistance, I reduced my heritage to the differences pronounced in our physical traits. Mi papá had the most impressive of hands. They were dark, strong, calloused and I was envious of the veins that protruded from them, running from the base of his fingers well into his forearms. Mine were not as dark, let alone calloused, but I remember making the most out of every physical task that was asked of me so that mine too would reflect the strength of his. I worked outside after school and during the summer months, maintaining the grounds at our church. It was physical work and it kept me out in the sun a few hours each day. I wanted to be as dark as he was. I needed him to know that I did not want to turn white, that I would not turn white.*

Mi mamá raised concerns about the risks of her children validating and valuing formal schooling over generational knowledge and lessons learned at home. It would not be until well after my undergraduate studies, while serving children and families as a bilingual educator, that I began to internalize, acknowledge, and substantiate the concerns of *mi mamá*.

> *During my tenure as a bilingual educator in public education, I spoke and interacted daily with women who devalued the knowledge they possessed and with which they raised and nurtured their children and families. I listened to them describe their feelings of fear as they assessed that the day would soon come in which their children would outlearn them and no longer need of them. I recall my*

> *attempts to reassure them that that which they offered their children and families was invaluable. These conversations prompted me to reconsider and challenge what, up until then, I had defined as knowledge, learning, and teaching. Moreover, it exposed my role in stoking this fear within the hearts of my students' parents. This ruptured my understanding that knowledge was acquired through books, teaching was unidirectional, and learning could be achieved absent of context.*

Learning, teaching, and leading surely comprise a myriad of the multi-textured threads interlaced throughout our lives, yet analysis of these threads often remains mired either within theoretical perspectives held lifeless, scripted on pages, pressed and preserved within books, never to escape nor be embodied nor employed in the pursuit of the preservation and promotion of human dignity, or practiced daily but devoid of the discernment necessary to evaluate the growth, development, and social, emotional, mental and spiritual health of ourselves, our institutions and organizations, and our society.

The critical perspectives fostered within the pocket of change existent within my childhood home, have been strengthened and broadened through readings that have highlighted social networks created to employ community knowledge and assets in order to transform systems and institutions so that they respond to all members of a society. Addams (1998) and Horton (1998), in Twenty Years at Hull House and The Long Haul, respectively, provide insight into two such pockets of change. Community knowledge and its potential to address societal inequities was the catalyst that gave birth to the spaces created and organizations established and fostered within these settings. In

addition, professional experiences have also heightened my interest in the processes of organizational and institutional change ignited by a critical consciousness that takes into account multiple, as well as multilayered perspectives that extend from micro to macro settings. My engagement as participant and organizer with the Community Learning Exchange (CLE) is one such experience. This vibrant, national organization facilitates sustainable change within communities across the Nation by connecting local resources to the wisdom and stories of local people. These experiences have modeled the possibilities existent through the critical development of self, the development of a critical consciousness, and the power of diverse partnerships within educational and community settings. These experiences and the learning that they provoked in me are further discussed and interwoven throughout this text.

Point of Departure

I have arrived at a place where I no longer want to explore and write about the pain for the sole purposes of healing and understanding, or remain alone, framing my experiences to remain strictly within the parameters of my private self. My reasons for exploration and writing have become multifaceted and I more profoundly appreciate the power of research and the written word and set the expectation for me to contribute to the field of education within this realm, giving voice and taking ownership of spaces to share my public self, while constructing these spaces to invite others to do the same.

This transition and recent development within my conscientization has been informed and brought to fruition over the course of many years and by countless instances and experiences in which individuals, groups, and communities provided insight and resources, and challenged me to visualize and create beyond what I alone

could never have imagined. Readings, class discussions, conversations over coffee, and observations of the many worlds in which we are members have provided pedagogical spaces in which points of interest have been unpacked, expanded, problematized, and/or challenged by colleagues and peers, and within organizations that seek ways to disrupt systems and institutions and inspire creative possibilities that promote human dignity and subsequently social equity. This journey is an attempt to deconstruct these points of interest, these spaces with which my mind reels on a daily basis in order that I may breathe and taste the point of departure from unconsciousness to consciousness, from mindless absorption of knowledge or information/data to mindful learning (Langer, 1997) from the pursuit of personal completion to the embracing of human unfinishedness (Freire, 1998). What are the conditions within our institutions and organizations that propel our learning to maturate and continually move us to seek the unknown? These pedagogical spaces and conditions highlight and provide insight into

> ...the unfinishedness of our human condition. It is in this consciousness that the very possibility of learning, of being educated, resides…This permanent movement of searching creates a capacity for learning not only in order to adapt to the world but especially to intervene, to re-create, and to transform it. (Freire, 1998, p. 66)

I acknowledge and daily inhale the belief that it is in and through learning, teaching, and leading that the hope of identifying and developing a greater and more profound discovery and understanding of the pedagogical vehicles employed to create equitable and responsive institutions and organizations remains alive and constant.

Transitioning into the following chapters, we delve further into the nuances of this study and the significance of my research partners' contributions to the learning. In *Chapter II, Interconnecting the Wisdom of People and Place*, I discuss the methodology and include visual representations of the conceptual framework utilized to make sense of the findings. Of particular significance, I discuss the impact my role as participant and my partners' roles as researchers had on the relational power that was fostered among us. Moreover, I discuss how the quality of this relationship impacted the depth of the stories, and observables collected, as well as the quality of the analysis and descriptions of these stories and observables.

Chapters III and *IV*, scaffold the presentation of findings from the micro level of self in *Chapter III* to the macro levels of self within organization, and community in *Chapter IV*. *Chapter III, An Ontological Exploration of Self: What's Your Story?* is framed by the concept of social cartography as proposed by Paulston (1996) and the role that understanding the self (Maturana & Varela, 1992; Ornstein, 1993) has on the development of critical awareness. Paulston posits that through the use of visual metaphor and spatial relationships in social cartography, we can more openly engage in dialogue that is reflexive and welcome divergent thinking across various contexts. The visual nature of social mapping eases the tensions and the fragmentation often inherent within heterogeneous contexts. In this chapter, I present and discuss our social cartography, in the form of life maps, created by my research partners and me. Through these life maps, or anthropological life histories (Mandelbaum, 1973; Wolcott, 2008, p. 155), we plotted salient events/eras in our lives that fostered paradigm shifts in our level of consciousness (Freire, 1970). The life maps facilitated the analysis of the nature of the

development of critical consciousness within each of our own contexts. Subsequently, it opened the space to create a more authentic discourse of the manifestations of conscientization across the broader learning settings of my research partners and me.

In *Chapter IV, Sense Making, Problem Posing, and Knowledge Creation*, I share my research partners' contributions to the manifestations of critical consciousness at the level of organization/institution. These are presented through a virtual dialogue among my research partners and me. Critical selections from interview transcriptions are utilized to paint the picture of the nature of the learning spaces in which we serve and the pedagogical strategies we employ to manifest critical consciousness. The dialogue is filtered through and organized by our study's conceptual framework. This framework (Figure 2.3) is depicted on page 50. I include discussions at the end of each subsection of the virtual dialogue, embedding pertinent literature and referencing concepts presented by my research partners. These discussions shed light on the impact that bureaucracies and hierarchical systems and structures have on the development and manifestation of critical consciousness, as well as the potential impact of critical consciousness on the disruption of these same rigid structures, and the implications for the well being of the members of these organizations/institutions. Moreover, the summaries illustrate the potential of cross-pollination between and among learning organizations/institutions. The virtual dialogue represents an authentic engagement among educational and community leaders as we shared insights into our own work, as well as ideas and wisdom that might contribute to transformational change within our respective organizations/institutions.

In *Chapter V, Engaged Inquiry: Critical Consciousness as Process,* we revisit our conceptual framework and braid the significance of each previous chapter, including the

study's implications, within three subsections: 1) teaching, leading, and learning; 2) manifestation of critical awareness of self; and 3) future research. Implications are presented in a manner consistent with our profound appreciation for the application of theory in practice. As such, it provides a look at how we, as teachers, learners, and leaders, might initiate the process of the development of critical consciousness within our own learning organizations.

Questions for the Reader to Consider

- What is my understanding of critical consciousness?
- How might I use it to frame my own personal and professional experiences?

CHAPTER II

INTERCONNECTING THE WISDOM OF PEOPLE AND PLACE

My exploration of the landscape of critical consciousness was founded in the tenets of qualitative research, specifically, auto-ethnography, critical ethnography (Behar, 1996; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Madison, 2005), narrative inquiry (Chase, 1995; Guajardo & Guajardo, 2010; Hickey, 2007; Riessman, 2008), and social cartography (Paulston, 1996). These approaches allowed for the space to discover the stories and actions of my research partners, as well as the nuances within these actions that reflected critical consciousness, including those informing my own ontology and development. As an emerging critical ethnographer embedded within the study, I, including the various contexts, knowledge sets, and stories that influenced my awareness of self and my experiences within the study, remained present throughout (Behar, 1996; hooks, 2003, 1994; Wolcott, 2008). I continually sought to go deep and beyond Euro-American ways of teaching, learning, and leading, inviting contributions from individuals, groups, and communities that focus on local resources and diverse ways of knowing (Ah Nee-Benham, 1998; Ah Nee-Benham & Cooper, 2000; Amstutz, 1999; Anzaldúa, 1999; Schneider & Ingram, 2007; Villenas & Moreno, 2001). These resources included personal and community narratives, and systems of assessment and analysis that strive to create more equitable public institutions and social structures (Behar, 1996; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Guajardo & Guajardo, 2010, 2008; Trueba, 2004).

Innovations in Methodology

My research partners and I strove to remain active within the process of critical reflection both while we shared time together, as well as while we engaged and served within our respective learning institutions and organizations. We understood that our participation and contributions for our study were pedagogical in nature and their foundation fertile ground for the continued growth and development of each of us, both independently, as well as interdependently (Ayers, 2004; Freire, 1970; Shon, 1987). We purposefully utilized an engaged inquiry process as catalyst and vehicle for scaffolding our understanding of critical consciousness. Our engaged inquiry process facilitated the promotion and creation of a climate within the research process, that acknowledged the research partner as both participant and research analyst. As such, we limited our use of the pronoun I in referencing my contributions to our study, but rather, employed "we" and "our" to highlight the significance of understanding our research as an engaged learning process. In addition, the scaffolding of our research process included purposeful framing of questions for the reader as anticipatory sets to provoke personal and professional opportunities for discernment and sense making as regards critical consciousness.

Scaffolding the Research Process

My Research Partners

I invited Grace, Samuel, Christopher, Marta, and Joseph by utilizing purposeful sampling (Bogdon & Biklen, 2007; Patton, 1990). In particular, the invitation to my research partners was based on findings of the manifestations of the their application of a social constructivist theory within their educational and learning environments (Patton,

1990). These included their approach to school and community leadership, as well as their perspectives regarding the validation of existing knowledge, the creation of new knowledge, and the employment of these to challenge and begin to change inequitable systems and structures within their educational organizations. The following illustrates one such example drawn from my first interview with Christopher, research partner and PK-12 educational leader.

> My role this year, has been to learn about the community, to learn about the families, to get to know the kids, and to get to know the staff. I'm trying to acquire as much knowledge about this area, because even though it's in the same district, it's a different community than the school in which I was previously. There's a lot of building trust with people. Next year I'm going to continue to do that, but there will also be a lot more of setting goals and providing a certain vision for where we want to take our school. That's what I see my job being in the future, leading our school with the collective vision and mission that we've created as a campus and community and making sure that everything we do is based on that.

Christopher discusses the importance of building trust and a collective vision. His framing of the context in which he envisions leading is one that reflects the evolution of campus leader from authoritative to servant, from leading from within the system world to leading from within the lifeworld (Habermas, 1984; Sergiovanni, 1996, 2000). Within the current standards movement, it is not uncommon to adopt a "one size fits all" leader mentality focused on competence rather than caring (Sergiovanni, 2000). By understanding and acting with the conviction that school communities possess unique

assets and attributes that contribute to the contexts of campus and community, Christopher's discussion evidences a greater sensibility to leading beyond solely academic purposes.

I also considered the already existent relationship between my research partners and me. The degree to which I hold each in esteem as a critical friend, affirmed the necessity of their selection for our study on the development of critical consciousness. I trusted that the reciprocity connected to their participation would include holding me accountable to an accurate representation and a generative process. Moreover, I was confident that the degree of trust among my research partners and me would foster spaces in which we could express the vulnerability necessary for us to understand ourselves as both learner and teacher, or researcher and participant, as well as understand our role as critical friends to challenge our insights and perspectives when the need for such arose. Equally important to note, my research partners also manifested the role of key informant (Patton, 1987) within their respective settings. They provided insight into their spaces for learning that were beyond the scope of my collection efforts, but that nevertheless informed our exploration of the development and manifestation of critical consciousness.

As previously mentioned, three of my five research partners, Grace, Samuel, and Christopher are educational leaders currently serving within a high school, middle school, and elementary school campus, respectively. These three research partners and I completed the foundational course, Understanding Self, through the same educational leadership preparation program. In this course, students are positioned as the units of analysis. They are invited to critically reflect and identify, acknowledge, and address

assumptions, biases, prejudices, as well as strengths and deficiencies in their growth, development, and preparation as educators and educational leaders.

This course proved instrumental for my continual exploration of self as a necessary means to effectively understand the complex nature of educational systems, including the power structures that influence the distribution of resources to these spaces for learning. As a bilingual educator for nine years prior to enrolling in this course, my knowledge of these systems was nascent at best, at worst, it influenced actions that did little to promote critical thinking and meaningful learning for students, families, colleagues, and me. Knowing that Grace, Samuel, and Christopher had each engaged in the process of critical self-reflection, coupled with my knowledge of their leadership philosophy and service within educational communities, informed my decision to invite them as research partners. The service and critical pedagogy they manifest within their learning communities is more comprehensively discussed in the following chapters.

I also invited Marta a program director for El Centro Valle Bajo (CVB) in South Texas, as well as Joseph, director of the Center for Leadership Transformation (CLT) located in the Pacific Northwest region of the United States. Non-profit community organizations, both are vibrant learning spaces founded in the power of people and place. I met, and have since been in contact with Marta and Joseph through our involvement in the Community Learning Exchange (CLE). This institution works with youth, teachers, educational and community leaders, and university faculty within their local contexts. Through this institution, a network of over 40 communities across the Nation has initiated more deliberate dialogues and actions with respect to working for sustainable change and utilizing the power of collective leadership. Marta and Joseph provided another facet to

the study of the landscape of critical consciousness. Both are experienced educators, as well as community leaders. Their acceptance, widened the scope of the learning spaces influencing my research partners' perspectives and knowledge, as well as provided insight into the possibilities of the cross-pollination of wisdom and critical pedagogy across institutions with distinct organizational and power structures. Below, Joseph references one such process that sheds light on the possibilities of cross-pollination.

> I just started feeling that this is a place [higher education] that is supposed to inform people and create all these wonderful explorations of society and build better futures, but we can't even talk to each other on this campus. That just didn't feel right. When I started getting involved with community work, I realized that people were having real conversations out in communities. It was like, "Wow!" this is more higher education than higher education. And what's happened now through the Community Learning Exchange process is that I am with people who refuse to let higher education have inauthentic conversations, no matter how difficult it is. There is this connection between the institution and the community that I never experienced when I was an administrator, an educator in the institution. Now I experience it everyday. I feel like both of those pieces of me come together in a whole place now.

Exploration of Self and Making Sense of World

Marcus (1998) asserts that assuming the role of critical ethnographer "in one's own society leads to a kind of second-class professional citizenship for the results. [Moreover], ethnography that begins with the self is suspect as leading to a kind of digression from the proper subject of research–the Other. Self-reflection, in this mode, is

useful only to recognize bias and the effect of subjectivity so as to neutralize it" (p 15). This insight posed an opportunity to problematize and make sense of my role as critical ethnographer and participant observer within this study (Patton, 2002). After all, not only was my study situated within my own society, but I also did not utilize self-reflection as solely a means to neutralize bias. I claimed neither absolute subjectivity, nor absolute objectivity. "…One cannot conceive of objectivity without subjectivity. Neither can exist without the other, nor can they be dichotomized…Neither objectivism nor subjectivism, nor yet psychologism is propounded here, but rather subjectivity and objectivity in constant dialectical relationship" (Freire, 1970, p. 50).

From Familiar to Strange and Back Again

Subsequently, I framed my role as critical ethnographer within my study on the development of critical consciousness with the theoretical underpinnings of making the familiar strange/strange familiar (Spindler & Spindler, 2000) and liberation as mutual process (Freire, 1970). Spindler, as quoted from above resource, states,

> As Margaret Mead (I believe) once said (approximately), "if a fish were to become an anthropologist, the last thing it would discover would be water." I was an American fish in my own element. The last thing I would discover would be the intricacies of communication and reinforcement of cultural values and class position that were the key to the classroom and what was happening there. But eventually I began to see the teacher and the pupils as "natives," engaging in rituals, interaction, roleplaying, selective perception, cultural conflict, sociometric networks, defensive strategies, and so on. I began the cultural translation from familiar to strange and back to familiar. (p. 202)

Of great significance to my own continued development as ethnographer, my research partners, as mentioned above, included three central Texas PK-12 educational leaders within whose element I was quite familiar, as well as two community leaders in non-profit organizations, within whose element a greater degree of strange remained. Interactions and dialogues between the community leaders and me created the space for us to problematize the observables collected through my relationship with the educational leaders. The community leaders' expertise in divergent ways of creating and promoting spaces for learning within a broader and more autonomous context provided a unique lens through which we were better able to make the familiar strange within the PK-12 educational settings represented. This was also evidenced in my interactions and dialogues between the educational leaders and me. The educational leaders' expertise in manifesting critical consciousness within a more narrow and hierarchical context, created a critical lens through which I was able to make the strange familiar within the non-profit organizations' contexts. The following brief discussions help illustrate this position with more in depth analysis of my research partners' contributions presented in later chapters. Marta's description of how she engages high school students within the context of community provided insight on making strange the all too familiar power dynamic between teacher and student, often evidenced within PK-12 educational settings.

> At the very beginning when we start our interaction with students, we are very intentional about building relationships as a way to get to know one another, and to break down any power dynamics. This takes us to the next level. We spend significant amount of time getting to know each other in terms of who we are, where we come from, who our families are, and what the things that really matter

> to us are. We dig deep and explore our own personal stories and our family stories. Doing this gets the students to not only reflect on their stories, but also on the things that they value the most in life. They begin to see the things that are really important in life, as opposed to what the mainstream society has told them is important. That's when they begin to reach those levels of critical consciousness and begin questioning and saying, "OK, these are my truths." And often, the students find that those truths do not always align with what they're experiencing as high school students.

Marta's discussion raises questions on the potential of the teacher to be one of the greatest purveyors of opportunities for the development of critical consciousness with youth. Intentionally building relationships, as she proposes, diffuses cultural expectations that view the teacher as powerful and the student as powerless. By contrast, Samuel's account of students' understanding of education based on their experiences and their families' histories within PK-12 settings, raises questions as to if and how transformative change can be fostered within unwavering systemic structures.

> There's a significant social side to education. It's not a secret that the campus I serve is a high needs area, and so as far as transformative change, we're talking about needing a culture change. The truth is we have students that have a very negative opinion of what school is and what education can be for them. They've been in a cycle where it hasn't been fruitful for them, not for their parents, not for their grandparents. And so, for generations they have seen school as just a place that they've had to go to, but never really a place that they could get anything from. From this end, we've been making a push, or at least I have, to have

> students understand and change their point of view. It does happen. Sometimes I talk to students that have just a profoundly negative opinion of what education can do for them. Which, being from this community, I know it doesn't have to be like that. School can be a gateway to something else if you allow it to be and if you work within that school structure. There has to be a change in the culture of school. It has to be a place of learning. I try to be a change agent on the academic side in regards to what we're giving our students and the social side in changing their culture of what they think education should be. It's hard though because you fight a lot of factors, their own experiences and the personal histories, but you still got to make the push.

Samuel's expressed desire for transformative change problematizes our understanding of what a place of learning could look like within a PK-12 educational setting. These insights helped me make sense of the not so familiar learning spaces fostered within the non-profit organizations and their potential for the creation of learning spaces that better promote the change that Samuel references. How do we promote change within the current school structures?

Liberation as Mutual Process

I deliberately positioned self as present and not distant from my study within the framework of liberation as mutual process (Freire, 1970). Embedding my personal experiences within oppressive educational environments was not indicative of a need to find blame, but rather of a journey of sense making to discover and uncover possible opportunities for transformation, as well as to maintain a conscious realization of that oppression. Without this living realization, I myself would have questioned my own

resolve, commitment, and capacity to conduct this study. Absent of this realization, Freire (1970) asserts,

> …the oppressed do not see the "new man" as the person to be born from the resolution of this contradiction, as oppression gives way to liberation. For them, the new man or woman themselves become oppressors. Their vision of the new man or woman is individualistic; because of their identification with the oppressor, they have no consciousness of themselves as persons or members of an oppressed class. (p. 46)

As such, the learning process that I undertook and to which I invited my committee and research partners to join me, was a dynamic one, exploratory of both self and field. It was imperative that I remained critically aware of assumptions and biases. Subsequently, I purposefully maintained my participation within and amongst communities of reflective practitioners and expert analysts (Denzin & Lincoln, 1995; Schon, 1987) that provided critical review and evaluation of findings and conclusions throughout the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 1995). These communities included my committee, research partners, a select group of colleagues selected in collaboration with my dissertation chair and mentor, Dr. Miguel Guajardo, and my dissertation writing group, comprised of peers at various stages within their respective dissertation work (i.e., proposal, data collection, Institutional Review Board application, data analysis, dissertation and post-dissertation writing, etc.).

Multi-space Ethnography

Hannerz (2003) posits that multi-site ethnography yields the space to cut across boundaries and investigate a topic that is not unique to any one site, but rather is "translocal". The exploration of the shared formulations and qualities of the relationships,

connections, and knowledge sets within and between sites has the potential to build on the capacities of any one institution; knowledge sharing is viewed as an opportunity for knowledge creation. Moreover, Marcus (1998) posits,

> …the function of translation from one cultural idiom or language to another…is enhanced since it is no longer practiced in the primary, dualistic "them-us" frame of conventional ethnography but requires considerably more nuancing and shading as the practice of translation connects the several sites that the research explores along unexpected and even dissonant fractures of social location. (p. 84)

Building on these concepts we propose and focus our study on multi-space ethnography (Figure 2.1). These spaces, though at times representative of the multiple sites in which my research partners work, were never limited to these contexts. I had the opportunity to share learning space with Marta as we traveled to Hawai'i to participate in a week-long leadership summit at the Hawai'inuiākea School of Hawaiian Knowledge at the University of Hawai'i–Manoa, and shared learning space with Joseph at the Highlander Center for Research and Development in New Market, Tennessee, as well as during convenings of the Community Learning Exchange in Seattle, Washington and San Marcos, Texas. I shared learning space with Christopher at his campus amidst his framed photographs of family and historical landmarks in baseball history, with Grace at local coffeehouses, and with Samuel at his home on two acres of pristine Texas countryside. In these spaces we shared stories, wisdom, experiences within and absent of community, and insights into our own awareness of self and how these influenced and impacted our understanding and manifestation of critical consciousness.

Making sense of these multiple spaces promoted sense making across and between my research partners multiple sites. Exploring multiple spaces provided me opportunities for the application of critical ethnography that spanned the landscape of critical consciousness from micro perspectives within a single institution or organization to macro perspectives informing organizations that encompass both PK-16 and community and social networks at local, state, and national levels. These insights facilitated my understanding of the relational power of dialogues with my research partners and the critical nature of the space that needed to be prepared and fostered in order to participate in an authentic way (Block, 2008; Hughes, 2004; Wheatley, 2002). Moreover, the utilization of various spaces for ethnographic fieldwork was purposeful within the context of my investigation with respect to the role that critical consciousness plays in the creation of more responsive systems within institutional and organizational settings that impact and influence one another (Morgan, 1998; Nhat Hanh, 1975; Wheatley, 2006). "Indeed, the persuasiveness of the broader field that any such ethnography maps and constructs is in its capacity to make connections through translations and tracings among distinctive discourses from site to site" (Marcus, 1998, p. 84), or in this case from space to space. Figure 2.1 illustrates the relationship between my research partners and me, our contributions to the shared spaces, and the nature of the spaces that was critical in order to foster a learning environment in which we could be at once vulnerable enough to discuss potentially sensitive material, as well as critical enough to challenge one another's thinking and acting in a generative fashion.

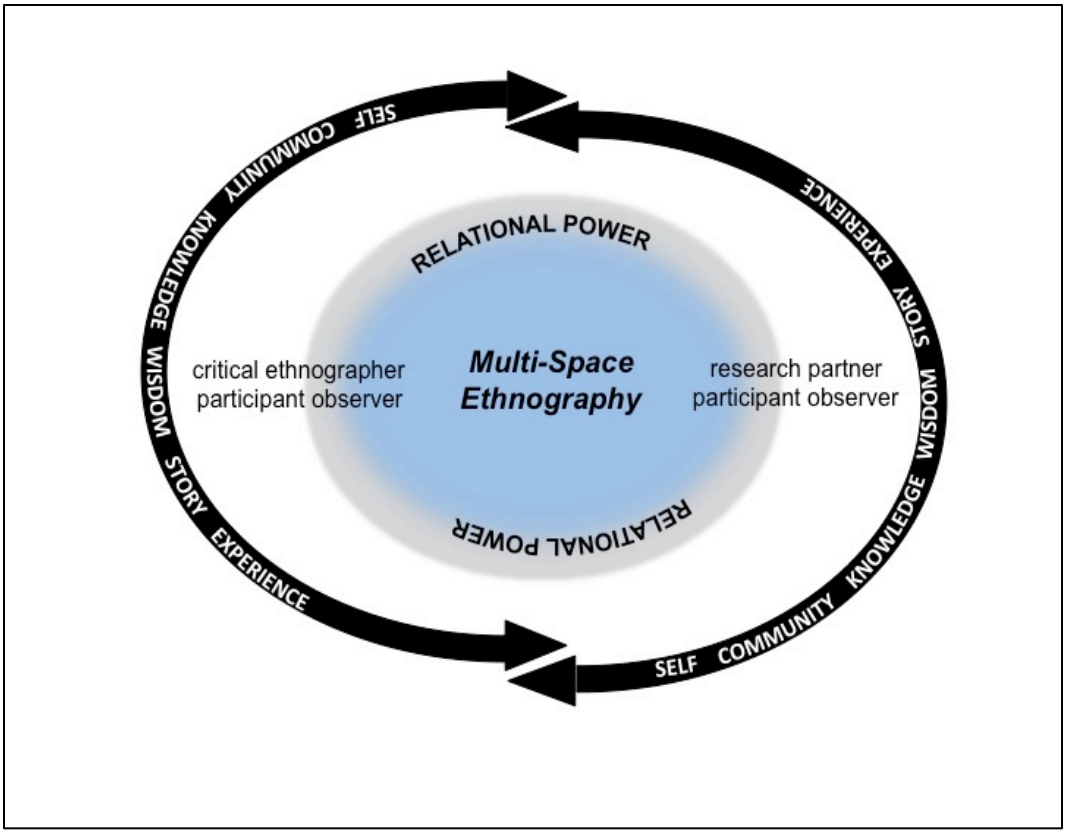


Figure 2.1. Multi-space ethnography.

Methods for Collecting Observables

Ethnographic Interviews

I conducted two interviews with each of my five research partners. These were formulated to gain greater insight into their understanding and development of critical consciousness and how this informs and provides direction into how change is manifested within educational and learning organizations (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2002; Guajardo, Guajardo, & Casaperalta, 2008; Schon, 1987). I focused on two interview strategies as outlined by Wolcott (2008), the life history interview "[focusing] on the life of a particular individual" and the semi-structured interview (p. 55). The first set of interviews were utilized to document my research partners' anthropological life histories (Mandelbaum, 1973) and help facilitate the creation of their life maps illustrating salient

events or periods, and personal theoretical perspectives (Paulston, 1996) that marked stages in their development of critical consciousness.

Anthropological Life Maps

Immediately after collecting life history interviews, my research partners and I each created an anthropological life map. Though I provided samples of previously constructed life maps, we each decided what our own would look like. What was required was that we each captured events that we considered critical in our own development of critical awareness. I embedded personal and professional experiences and made sense of them through new and developing theoretical perspectives highlighted during my graduate and postgraduate coursework. Moreover, I utilized artwork painted during these pivotal moments, to help illustrate the experiences for the reader. For example, Figure 2.2 and the accompanying critical reflection illustrates a selection of my anthropological life map, presented in its entirety in *Chapter III*.

Figure 2.2. *Fronteras*© painted and owned by Mónica M. Valadez

I was inspired to paint Fronteras during the first semester of my second year as a fourth grade teacher. I had been a first grade teacher for a number of years, and although it was difficult to part with this age group, I quickly grew to appreciate the more profound conversations I had with the fourth grade students. They shared experiences that made me question my purpose as an educator and begin to reflect on personal events that had long been ignored, but that nevertheless impacted my pedagogy and praxis. I had a student recount the arduous walk he and his family traversed from the border to Central Texas. Another student had recently joined her family in the United States after having been separated from them while crossing the Río Grande the year before. One had witnessed his father shot and killed, and another had lost his father who suffered a heart attack while laboring in the fields as a migrant worker. And the students' oral histories continued.

The subject of the painting is a Mexican immigrant sitting on the border between México and the United States. He hangs his head in frustration caught between two worlds. Unsure of whether or not to divide loyalties, with clenched fists he sits and waits. Resigning himself, he is unable to transform his reality. Still, there exists within the strength of a giant who slumbers in anticipation of his confrontation with his environment. Dewey (1944) writes, "Knowledge as an act is bringing some of our dispositions to consciousness with a view to straightening out a perplexity, by conceiving the connection between ourselves and the world in which we live" (p. 344). The experiences and injustices faced by the students and their correlation to situations that had transpired in my life, began to raise my level of consciousness as it related to what I, as an educator, was doing to prepare students. Of whom was I of service? Why? And to what end?

Pláticas

Pláticas were a key method of collecting observables (González, 1998; Guajardo & Guajardo, 2010, 2008). Critical foundations of the method of *plática* that framed these interactions are 1) the space it allows for the sharing of our critical stories within various contexts, whether historical, cultural, political, or cognitive; 2) the vulnerability that is established in its very essence, allowing for the sharing of self and action within micro and macro settings without judgment; and 3) the knowledge that is acknowledged, shared, and valued which goes beyond Euro-American ways of knowing, including idioms, sayings, and teachings collected and cultivated from our ancestors to the youth of our communities (González & Padilla, 2008; Guajardo & Guajardo, 2010). Though my research partners and I made the greatest efforts in arranging face-to-face *pláticas*, some were conducted via the use of video/phone conferencing. Nevertheless, save for the

physical presence of my research partners and me, the qualities of the critical foundations of this method were not compromised.

Artifacts

Merriam (2009) defines artifacts as physical objects found within the study setting, and states, "Anthropologists typically refer to these objects as artifacts, which include the tools, implements, utensils, and instruments of everyday living" (p. 146). My research partners and I each collected personal and professional artifacts that served to inform the creation of our life maps, as well as contribute to our process of engaged inquiry. These contributions facilitated more in depth and authentic ethnographic interviews and *pláticas*. Artifacts collected included photographs depicting family members, events, and history, as well as photographs of social and professional experiences and events. In addition, creative works, in the forms of paintings, illustrations, family and community stories, and poetry were also collected. Many of these are analyzed and embedded within this textual representation of our study.

Observations and Field Notes

I conducted observations and collected field notes through and within multiple spaces. All spaces and experiences were shared with at least one of my research partners. Observations and field notes were collected for auto-ethnographic, as well as ethnographic purposes. These spaces and experiences included: 1) the PK-12 campuses in which Grace, Samuel, and Christopher serve as educational leaders; 2) a week-long leadership summit at the Hawai'inuiākea School of Hawaiian Knowledge at the University of Hawai'i–Manoa; 3) two Community Learning Exchange convenings, one in Seattle, Washington and the other in San Marcos, Texas; 4) a three-day leadership

summit at the Highlander Research and Education Center in New Market, Tennessee; and 5) local coffeehouses and one of my research partner's home. Field notes were kept during all facets dedicated to the collection of observables and facilitated efforts to capture that which neither the audio nor the video equipment was able to. Bogdon and Biklen (2007) assert, "Fieldnotes can provide any study with a personal log that helps the researcher to keep track of the development of the project, to visualize how the research plan has been affected by the data collected, and to remain aware of how he or she has been influenced by the data" (p. 119). Moreover, both descriptive and reflective field notes were kept in order to provide evidence of the tangible aspects of my observations, as well as provide insight into my own processes as I conducted the analysis and synthesis of the observables collected (Bogdon & Biklen, 2007, p. 120).

Ethical Considerations

No photographs, video, or audio recordings were collected of learning spaces within the PK-12 campuses to safeguard the privacy of students, families, faculty, and staff. My research partners gave consent to video and audio recordings of semi-structured interviews and life history interviews (Appendix B). For future consideration, any visual/audio products that may be created from the footage collected will be made available to my research partners and will be used strictly for educational purposes. Research partners may choose not to have their audio and/or video recordings viewed/heard within public spaces for educational purposes. Audio and video recordings of research partners wishing for these not to be viewed/heard publicly will be returned to them.

Pseudonyms were utilized in the textual representation of any identifiable information referencing my research partners and the organizations/institutions in which they serve. Research partners were kept abreast of the analysis and synthesis of all findings and invited to provide critical feedback on its "accuracy, completeness, fairness, and perceived validity" (Patton, 2002, p. 560). In addition to the "member checks" provided by research partners (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 216), I worked closely with my dissertation chair and dissertation committee in order to remain critically aware of the analysis and synthesis of the findings, as well as the quality of their representation within each phase of the process (i.e., field notes, transcriptions, recordings, chapter drafts, critical reflections, to mention a few).

Framework for Analysis of Observables

Analysis of observables was informed by approaches taken by qualitative researchers, theorists, and community change agents that contributed to my own growth and development. These included, but were not limited to *mis papás*, Gloria Anzaldúa, Sofía Villenas, Donaldo Macedo, Myles Horton, Ernesto Guevara, Paulo Freire, Jane Addams, and Henry Giroux. In addition, analysis was done in partnership and dialogue with my research partners (Behar, 1996; Block, 2008; Freire, 1970; Horton, 1998; Wheatley, 2006), and through our conceptual framework as illustrated in Figure 2.3.[7]

Moreover, a community of learners consisting of professors, colleagues, student peers, family, and friends provided the impetus for continued analysis through discussion and critical reflection of the process. Historical, cultural, political, and cognitive contexts provided perspectives and lenses through which findings were both analyzed and richly

[7] Character portrayed in framework is borrowed from the unnamed protagonist in Dr. Suess' book, *Oh, the Places You'll Go!*.

described in depth (Patton, 2002). The quality of and commitment to the description of findings, especially as they pertained to the stories and experiences of my research partners, were very much embedded within the learning spaces that contributed to our exploration (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2010). The expressed lived realities and actions taken in the transformation of these learning spaces required the description to promote interpretation of findings in order to connect from micro to macro settings, and ultimately "[connect] individual cases to larger public issues and to the programs that serve as the linkage between individual troubles and public concerns" (Patton, 2002, p. 503).

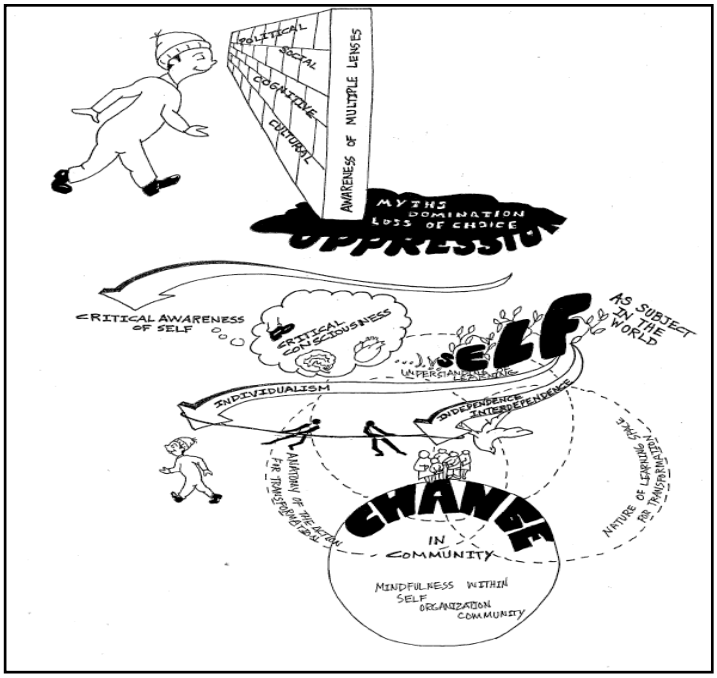


Figure 2.3. Conceptualization of critical consciousness.

Findings serve to address gaps in the literature regarding how we develop and continually foster a critical awareness of self so as to remain active within the landscape of critical consciousness. Moreover, they provide insight into the nature of critical consciousness within spaces of learning, as well as into the pedagogical strategies employed across boundaries and settings that procure the manifestation of changes in our

educational and community organizations that promote the spirit and well being of the whole of society.

Questions for the Reader to Consider

- Where do I position myself within the landscape of critical consciousness?
- How does my awareness of self influence or impact my world(s)?
- How have I/do I make sense of salient experiences that impacted/impact my growth and development?

CHAPTER III

AN ONTOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF SELF: WHAT'S MY STORY?

> Perhaps the greatest tragedy of modern man is his by the force of [myths created by powerful social forces] and his manipulation by organized advertising, ideological or otherwise. Gradually, without even realizing the loss, he relinquishes his capacity for choice; he is expelled from the orbit of decisions. Ordinary men do not perceive the tasks of the time; the latter are interpreted by an "elite" and presented in the form of recipes, of prescriptions. And when men try to save themselves by following the prescriptions, they drown in leveling anonymity, without hope and without faith, domesticated and adjusted. (Freire, 2005, p. 6)

To understand the interdependence and interconnectedness of our universe and all of us who reside within, prepares the whole of our being to respond to the well-being of all (Nhat Hanh, 1975; Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, & Flowers, 2004). As learners, teachers, and leaders it provokes us to change the way we think and often shatters our strongly held beliefs and values. It provides a catalyst for learning how to learn and act upon the need to create and develop systems that are dynamic and responsive to all members of a society. We begin to question our pedagogical practices. The story of who we are as teachers and learners has the potential to highlight the dynamics of our profession and interweave the ecological factors that influence our learning environments (Garner &

Kelly, 2008; Guajardo, Guajardo, & Casaperalta, 2008; hooks, 1994; Trueba, 1999; Villenas, 2001; Villenas & Moreno, 2001).

To gain a greater perspective on our own development of critical awareness and share the stories of who we are, my research partners and I constructed the following anthropological life maps, illustrating our journey of conscientization. More than an exercise, their creation became a process of discernment, a process that we have each come to acknowledge and understand as a vital lifeline that impacts our learning, teaching, and leading. It promotes an opportunity through which we are able to continually assess our actions. Was the lesson meaningful for students beyond knowledge sharing? Did I welcome my colleague's insights about my contributions to our work together, even though they may not have been what I wanted to hear? Do those whom I work with and serve know through my actions that I hold in highest esteem their dignity and spirit?

The anthropological life maps evidence the various and multiple factors that contributed to our overall development, issues of racial discrimination, belonging, confusion, and sense making, among others. They were created within a few months of the first interviews with my research partners, and the information and insights gleaned from these informed the learning spaces we shared throughout the remainder of our time together. The anthropological life maps highlighted observables that begin to answer the study's guiding question: How do we develop critical consciousness including the following frames: historical, political, cultural, and cognitive? Each anthropological life map is presented independently of the others and has largely been left unaltered by my attentions, save for the utilization of pseudonyms and filtering of certain family

photographs to respect privacy. Critical narratives and reflections presented by my research partners remain in their own voice. Each represents the strength and commitment of my research partners to do the complex work of analyzing and synthesizing their story, couched within a medium of their choosing. I provide an introductory paragraph for each anthropological life map and conclude with a summary that will set the stage for the following chapter.

Anthropological Life Map: Joseph

We begin with Joseph, director of the Center for Leadership Transformation. Joseph created a historical, cultural, and political narrative of salient experiences that raised questions about his own privilege and the public systems that he grew to understand were inequitable and unresponsive to many communities' rights. From a young age, the opportunities afforded Joseph through his family's service to community, eventually proved to be catalysts for his continued commitment to critical self-reflection, and his role in promoting social equity within and among communities. The following critical narrative begins and ends over the course of one afternoon in which Joseph accompanies his aging mother in story. Through it, he relives vivid and impactful stories and experiences that span his lifetime, and in the process, interweaves his own critical analysis of self.

Critical Narrative

June 20, 2011 – Aging mother. Are we our memories? My 83-year-old mother sits in a wheelchair in a nursing home. With a broken leg she is largely immobile and with advancing dementia it is never certain what memories she can access. On days she is clear, she will remember who I am. And she may realize enough about her current

circumstances to be depressed. I rub her neck and shoulders, stiff from sitting in one position so long, and I tell her stories to stimulate her mind. She delights in the stories. They are my stories, from my view, and it is not clear whether she remembers she is part of each story or whether she is hearing them for the first time. It does not matter to her because she enjoys hearing the stories. She tells me, "You have had an interesting life."

I was born on March 14, 1953 in a small town of about 16,000. I entered the world in the midst of the baby boom, born to a World War II veteran and his wife. After serving in the marines, my dad went to college on the GI Bill, the first in his family to go to college. There he met my mom and, as many young people filled with hope whom had delayed life plans during the war, they got married and had a family. My mom had my older sister during her sophomore year. She dropped out of school to be a full time mom and wife and didn't return to college until she was in her 50's. I was number three of five children. In this one simple, unremarkable description, are so many of the seeds that shaped my life. So many factors were not of my choosing. My role was to determine how they would shape me and what meaning they would have in my life. Where do I come from?

My parents. My dad grew up on a farm in rural Minnesota. He was the fifth of six children. His family was quite poor. Born in 1924, his family survived the great depression because they grew their own food. I heard stories of destitute families showing up at my grandparents' door and they were never turned away. They were always given a meal and sent off with potatoes and other food. With limited education, my grandpa did mostly manual labor jobs – farming and digging trenches to drain excess water to create more plantable land. To help support the family, my dad was sent as a

boy to live with neighbors each summer as a farmhand. His housing was in the barn. As rural electrification was just starting, he had no light in the barn. I used to wonder what it would be like to be so young and away from home, alone, living in a barn. He learned to work hard and grew up with a strong sense of responsibility to provide for his family.

My mom grew up in tiny towns in North Dakota. Her parents were educators, a low wage job in those days. My grandpa's first job out of college was as a high school teacher. He was also the principal, music director, and janitor. Grandma taught home economics and office skills. She was the more serious of the two, having been raised by foster parents when her mom died; grandma was eight when her mom died, and her dad couldn't care for the five kids. Both of my grandparents were well educated with grandma achieving Phi Beta Kappa. Their house was filled with musical instruments, books, and games. Mom was the oldest of four children. She grew up with lots of interesting people around. She loved meeting people from different backgrounds. Valuing education, my grandparents sent my mom off to college in Minnesota.

Living community with mom. The flood of men returning from war seemed to have a similar desire as my parents – get a job, buy a house, get married, and have kids. In this era, one important responsibility of men was to provide for their families – to be the primary breadwinner. It was a source of pride for my dad that mom did not have to work outside the home. This, however, was not what mom really wanted. She had so many interests and would have loved to have a career outside the home. Her way of navigating this dilemma was to volunteer for different organizations. And since she was the primary caregiver to my siblings and me, we got to go along with mom as she engaged in activities in the community. In addition to roles that went along with being a

parent such as room mother at school, girl scout leader, and cub scout leader, she also did clothing drives, meals on wheels, prepared food for wedding receptions at church, arranged for all the foreign exchange students in town, served as president of the league of woman voters, led bible study, etc.

While a child, these were all just regular activities with mom. I didn't think about them very deeply. Now, as I see these events through the eyes of an adult, I see the deeper impact they have had on who I have become. While delivering meals, we saw many homes of people living in poverty. Some were shut-ins who were disabled. Most of the homes were quite run down. We might see a new TV at one home or a snowmobile sitting in the front yard. There was never any question of how a poor family could indulge in such extravagant purchases. Mom did not judge them, only delighted when they were cared for and happy.

Mom invited Jolene, one of our community members, to church on Sundays with us every few weeks. Jolene had the largest hymnal I had ever seen. When she opened it, there were no words, at least not that I could tell. Jolene was blind; she lived at the school for the Blind. Jolene would read the braille hymnal with her fingers and sing the same songs we did. I could not imagine what it would be like to be blind all the time. Jolene seemed to be relaxed about it. My mom was always bringing someone home especially when they lived away from their families.

I remember going to the regional center, the institution that housed people who were retarded, the term used in my childhood. Mom volunteered there frequently. Many of the residents had profound disabilities. Some had gnarled and disfigured bodies and were unable to walk. They frightened me because the life they had seemed too horrible

for me to acknowledge. I wanted to run away, but mom would walk up to them talking kindly and reach out to hold their hand or stroke their face. The residents would smile because they could feel the love of human connection. My mom could always reach that place of need in others and connect to the love that made their faces light up.

What makes one town different from another? I didn't have much to compare to, so as a boy I didn't think about this. I knew I felt safe riding my bike with friends to explore the woods and ravines and the tunnels under bridges, building forts in the farmer's field, climbing trees to get apples from the neighbors' yard, and playing baseball at the field down the street. There was something different about my neighborhood. We had many institutions to serve people that families felt they couldn't adequately care for. There was a school for the Deaf, the Blind, a military high school for boys, one for girls and a military grade school for boys. The military schools seemed to be places where rich people placed their kids or where families with disruptive sons dumped them so they would be straightened out by the military discipline. How could families send their children away so young? There was the regional center for those with mental impairments and a boarding school for emotionally disturbed boys. I didn't think much about this because their campuses were places for me to play.

Over the years, I have learned a lot about social policy by looking at these institutions. For instance, there is a split in the Deaf community between those who use sign language which provides access to others in the Deaf community and those who lip read and use their voices because it provides access to the hearing and "normal" world. Next to the larger deaf school that used sign language was a smaller school that taught lip reading. They were separate communities. Only recently did I learn that the country's

first deaf architect was from town. He had been banned by law from practicing architecture because he was deaf. He had to appeal to President Teddy Roosevelt to be able to get his license to practice – something the rest of the community took for granted.

With the regional center, when I was very young, the approach seemed to be to warehouse people away from society. Sometimes a person with regular mental abilities would be found to be living on campus because they were mute or had an inability to communicate. When I was finishing high school, the deinstitutionalization movement swept the country and these residents were given more opportunities to live in group homes, work in basic jobs, and interact in the greater community. Those who were once "abnormal" were now seen as normal parts of our community. The consciousness of the whole community shifted.

The paper route. When I was approximately 11, I had a paper route with 60 customers in my neighborhood. Because we had to place the newspaper on the front porch or near the front door and we also had to collect payment each month, I got to see the inside of these homes. This gave me a glimpse into the many ways people lived and the events that shaped their lives. One man who worked on the railroad, fell off a train, severed his arm and they reattached it. His left arm was several inches shorter than his right arm. The Harris boys were tough, mean, and out of control. Their father was an alcoholic. Mr. Butler suffered from depression. He had dug a co-worker out of the ground after a cave-in while digging the foundation for a new building. He was too late; the co-worked was blue from lack of oxygen and died. Mrs. Laeger became deaf in her childhood. She read lips and spoke with a southern accent. Mr. Bachert had a mentally ill daughter who lived with him; she would occasionally wander the town, but mostly she

would stay in the house. The Rabbes were deaf but had a hearing daughter. One family had foster children who never stayed long and always seemed too strange to be able to play the games we liked to play. Some families yelled at each other, some couldn't pay the 60 cents due for home delivery of the newspaper. Mrs. Hackley's legs were too short to reach the pedals so her husband installed wood blocks so she could drive a car. Mr. Hackley had been a sailor and had a tattoo of a pin-up girl on his arm. Certain homes smelled bad because they were closed up as people seldom came out of their house. Others were neat and immaculate. Some women seemed lonely and wanted to talk to anyone who would listen. Families had lots of different circumstances! I learned to be dependable in delivering the daily paper, handling money, and dealing with different personalities. There was no room to judge others as everyone seemed to have their own issues.

Our town. Our town was a combination of white collar and blue collar. In addition to all the institutions run by educated, white-collar professionals; we had a strong factory sector, the woolen mills, turkey plant, tilt-a-whirl factory, plastics factory, manufacturing plant, and canning factory. My dad ran the canning factory for a wealthy owner who lived in Minneapolis. The jobs in the fields and the factory were hard jobs. When the crops were ready, they needed to be harvested and processed quickly or they would deteriorate in quality. There were never enough local folks available or willing to do these jobs, so every summer a large group of men would come to town for the summer. When I was a boy, 400 black men from the Bahamas came to live in the barracks of the labor camp at the factory. They had housing, a recreation room, and a dining hall, all located across the street from the factory.

Because my grandpa had only a limited pension, my dad hired him to be the cook for the workers. He lived in the labor camp each summer and I would spend lots of time with him. Some of the workers would make friends with me. They probably missed their own children. I remember one man named Nathan who asked me to bring some paper, glue and sticks. He made me a kite I flew around the camp. It was magic to make something useful out of scraps. I liked being at the camp as there was always something to learn or someone interesting to talk to.

While playing at neighbors' homes, I would sometimes hear the adults talking about the migrant workers. "Lock your doors 'cause the crime rates are going up, keep your daughters away from the men, or they'll all apply for welfare." I would hear the "N-word". This always seemed strange to me, because I knew the men at the camp. They worked hard and were nice to my grandpa and me. My neighbors had no interaction with the workers, but they did have lots of opinions.

Whiteness had little meaning when I was a boy as everyone in town was white. More powerful was whether you were Catholic or Protestant; German, Polish, Czechoslovakian, Irish, Norwegian, or Swedish, blue collar or white collar. These differences created real barriers in friendships, dating, and social relationships. The only people of color came to town once a year as migrant laborers at the canning factory. In the late 1960's, the canning factory stopped bringing Bahamian men and started bringing Mexican American workers to fill the jobs. This had something to do with immigration, as the Bahamas are part of a British commonwealth. One big difference in this shift was the recruitment of migrant families. There were still single men who came to the camp but now the factory purchased several houses for families. One of the family men was

the boss of the entire camp. When I was old enough to work at the factory, my first job was to paint the houses to get them ready for the families. When I was in college I was responsible for the camp – the housing, maintenance, food, recreation, etc. I also was in charge of the summer personnel records. Most of the workers came from Texas, some listing their towns from Mexico.

Moving away. During this same time, my dad expanded his role at the canning factory to start an import business to distribute non-food items to grocery stores as they were opening up to becoming more than places to buy food. He imported some of the first Hibachis from Japan. He started making lots of money and growing the business. I headed off to college and he paid my first two years of tuition. Then catastrophe hit – a boatload of product was stolen from the San Francisco port. His partner had not insured the cargo. My dad was sued, lost all his money and went instantly from being upper middle class to being poor. This experience rippled through our family.

Mom, who had always wanted a career, went to a college for adult learners, finished her degree and was hired as the volunteer coordinator at the regional center. Her income helped support the family as dad tried to get back on his feet. He managed to find a series of consulting jobs and entrepreneurial projects that brought in enough money until he was old enough to retire.

I was confronted with the reality of paying for my college. Fortunately, I found jobs in local factories and was able to make it through my last two years. I learned to mistrust the power of money to bring security. The money could go, but the relationships last. I also learned another lesson: When my dad had more money and was working on business deals, he was both more dominant and distant. After he lost his money and had

a lower key career, he evolved into a wonderful, loving grandpa that my kids wanted to be with. Money can distort relationships.

My first major career decision was to choose between two jobs in higher education. I had just finished my master's degree at a local university. I had the choice of moving to a small community in Washington and working at a community college or moving and working at a university in Los Angeles. The college in Washington paid more than double the job in Los Angeles. Los Angeles was a big, scary, and expensive place. I decided to go to Los Angeles. I was just about to get married and had no idea how we would afford to live. It offered the most unknowns and yet seemed to offer the most possibilities. So I started work and one month later, flew back to Wisconsin and got married.

The university in Los Angeles had 30,000 students, many of whom were international students and U.S. students of color. The office staff was African American, Mexican American, Asian American, Jewish, gay, with more women than men. We worked hard and played hard. I attended staff weddings in East Los Angeles, funerals in the black churches of South Central, and Christmas parties in the gay community of West Hollywood. There was so much to learn about how we all lived and could work together at the university.

One of the programs we ran was a nursery school for children of international students and staff. One of staff members, Lidia, was a single African American mom. She was upset one day and I asked her what was going on. She told me her four and a half year old daughter came home the previous night from the nursery school and said, "Mommie, I don't want to be black anymore." How could a four year old know so much

about prejudice and discrimination? How could international students, here for only a short time, embody the racism prevalent in American society?

There were lots of questions about race and class. The director of the Office for Black Student Services was a woman with a hard edge. In meetings she was tenacious and frequently confrontational. I was not sure how to work with her. At a retreat, we discovered we both liked tennis and started playing regularly. We had great conversations. She was personable, easy to talk to, and shared many of her family stories. Yet, when we were back at work, she seemed cold and harsh. This was confusing to me. I had to learn about what it means to be a white professional and how this is different from the experiences of an educated, black woman professional. She experienced the daily slights and carried the experiences of all the black students at the university. For instance, she had worked to create an exchange program between our university and Howard University. The first day our first student from Howard was at our university, as he was walking along the perimeter of campus coming from his apartment to attend classes, a police officer confronted him. He questioned the officer, and was then thrown to the ground, handcuffed, and hauled to South Central precinct. He fit the description of a crime suspect, 22 year old, black man, 6'1'', and 185 lbs. The fact that he was an honor student from a prestigious black college didn't fit the officer's profile.

Sense making. Near the fairgrounds in my childhood hometown, is a small museum for the history of the county. I was interested in learning more about my hometown; in searching through the artifacts, I came across a book titled, From Swords to Plow Shares. It described the Prisoner of War (POW) camps set up in the upper Midwest during World War II. I was surprised to learn that captured, low-level Germans

were often sent to the U.S. to keep them away from the possibility of re-entering the war. One of these camps was at the canning factory. The prisoners were hired out to farmers and factories to perform the jobs their sons had done before the war. I remembered our junior high school janitor spoke with a German accent and had a limp. It turns out he was a POW and stayed in town after the war.

This camp raised questions for me. How is it we sent our young men to Europe to fight, brought the enemy's young men to live in our communities and work in our backyards, all the while we were interning our Japanese citizens in concentration camps in the west? It is clear our government and dominant culture trusted German soldiers more than our Japanese citizens. I also thought about the symbolism of having a migrant labor camp in the same facilities used to house Prisoners of War. I don't know if the migrant labor camp preceded the war, but it did make me think of the status of migrant laborers who are "locked in" with limited options, mostly involving manual labor and low wages.

In 2002, the Center for Leadership Transformation, along with an institution from the Northeastern U.S., was selected by the Kellogg Foundation to coordinate their new national leadership program. I wrote our proposal and became program lead. This work brought me into low-income communities and communities of color throughout the U.S. My partner was an African American man. Much of the reason this program worked was because he and I got along well and imprinted a spirit and approach to the work that was highly relational and non-judgmental. Whatever work each of us had to do in our lives to make sense of our racial identity and role in the world, we had already done. This

opened us up to the possibilities of combining our gifts in a partnership more powerful than either of us working individually.

We worked with different communities that in their grant proposals to the Kellogg Foundation said they really didn't want to work with outside consultants and particularly white consultants. There was a great deal of suspicion of the national team, that they would use their power to impose on the local sites. What was my role as a white person co-coordinating this program? Some settings were intimidating for me to enter as the white guy and some for my partner as the only black man in the town. We showed up with questions that got communities talking. Who needs to work together to advance this community? How does change happen in your community? What is the work you most want to do? Each question drew the gifts and creativity of communities into the work. Each answer helped us loosen up and open up to new relationships.

As I reflected on my role, I came to realize that we need to work across ethnic and racial boundaries to create a whole society. I had a role to be a healthy, white male who partnered with others in a positive way. I could bear witness to the genius of people in diverse communities and help their wisdom connect with others across the country. My role was to not be a stereotype of the oppressor. I couldn't do this in a manipulative way. I had to be myself and treat everyone I met with love and respect. This was the same love I saw my parents have in community. And I had to be okay with people who were not ready to let me in, to get too close, because I represented all that had caused them pain. They got to choose whether to be in relationship – not me.

As we built a national network, new relationships opened up that changed me. I met S. P. at a gathering of KLCC [Kellogg Leadership for Community Change]

Communities. S. P. escaped the killing fields of the Pol Pot regime in Cambodia and worked through the difficult violence of street life in Boston. He emerged as a healer who could bring peacemaking to others. He was leading a four-day peace-making circle with 40 people from KLCC Communities. He created such a powerful and sacred circle, that we were able to talk about our deepest pain, healing, and whether we could find the strength to forgive. S. P. and I connected on a deep level and went on to share other work. He has come to the Pacific Northwest several times to stay with my family and to do healing work in the community. We still talk about doing more healing work together.

Through this work, I also met Ellen, an African American woman who partnered with the CLT [Center for Leadership Transformation] to do national KLCC work. She brought special expertise in youth and adult partnerships. We were planning a national gathering with 200 community members from KLCC sites. We decided to have the gathering at Stone Mountain, Georgia. This is the location where the Ku Klux Klan was founded. One of the leaders from the Kellogg Foundation, called me and asked if we knew what we were doing by bringing communities of color to a place of great pain. I said we did. Ellen is a person of great spiritual faith and we had developed strong trust for each other. Together we wrote a ceremony to have at Stone Mountain. I did the set-up, and Ellen delivered a heartfelt talk of why we were there. "I come here because I can. I am living the life my ancestors only dreamed of." For an hour and a half, participants named the injustices taking place in their communities. After each story, 200 people chanted in unison, "We bear witness and bring our spirit of healing." This ceremony was in the midst of three days of dialogue on "meeting in the village square to bring justice to our communities." I was honored to stand with Ellen and see the faces of our friends

from across the Country, while in the shadow of the granite wall carved with figures of Southern heroes who espoused slavery. On that day, we reclaimed a piece of the earth from hate to love, from intolerance to justice.

In 2009, on a Community Learning Exchange visit to Migizi, I was interviewing Eva and Greg to include their story in the storybook we were writing on collective leadership. They told me of a program they started that takes teachers and Native American youth to visit the sacred sites of the Dakota people, the original inhabitants of the land on which Minneapolis rests. One of the sites was an island below Fort Snelling, where 3,000 Dakota men, women, and children were placed in a concentration camp after their defeat in the Dakota – U.S. War of 1862. Thirty-eight Dakota warriors where shackled and carted to Mankato where they were hanged in the largest mass execution in U.S. history. The women and children had been made to walk 150 miles from the Mankato area to Fort Snelling, where they were kept in horrendous conditions through a harsh winter. Many died and the survivors were expelled to Nebraska, leaving no Dakota on their ancestral lands.

In 2004, the Dakota began holding walks to retrace the journey and remember their ancestors who had suffered so much. After talking to Eva and Greg, I spent the afternoon in quiet reflection at the site of the memorial. It was painful. The world whizzed by 100 feet above as I was standing under the arches of the freeway bridge pass overhead. I marvel at the invisibility of this site tucked in the woods below.

As a boy, I had heard bits and pieces of story about the hanging of Native Americans in Mankato. My grandpa had grown up nearby. I never heard the full story until 2009. Now I am reading a book written from the Dakota voice that tells the story.

One quote strikes me, "Decolonization needs the oppressed to remember and those who benefit from oppression to remember." I have inhabited the lands taken from the Dakota. I have been part of the collective amnesia of white people in the state. I am broken hearted. Can the pieces of this world be put back together again?

Recently, I read the story of white anthropologists gathering Native American artifacts at sites in New Mexico. They came upon pottery shards that when reassembled, showed intricate patterns that had been lost to the Pueblo Nations. The reclaiming of these traditional patterns was a gift to the Indian Nations. One Native American elder commented, "Their grandfathers worked to break us apart and their grandsons are working to put us together again." I know it is not something that white people can do – heal those who have been oppressed or reassemble broken lives into whole communities. I have a piece of the work to bring wholeness to communities. But it is a shared journey with those who have been oppressed. We share power; we share voice. We learn together. We work on social policy. We can have loving relationships across differences and are powerful together. We can heal.

Coming full circle. I am blessed to have been born where I was, to the parents I had, and grow up to do the work that I do. I have come full circle to be a part of healing a fragmented world and creating a new story. I grew up with migrant workers and now get to work with communities from where they came. I heard stories of Native Americans and now get to be part of their emerging story. And all the seeds of my youth have grown into a consciousness that guides me in the new world we are creating together. I draw on the generosity of grandparents, the love of mom for all people, dad's sense of responsibility to make life better; seeing differences were a normal part of life,

seeing that inequities and mistreatment can be changed; understanding that social policy can open or close doors; and knowing that while cultural norms are strong, they can be changed.

I have four siblings who grew up with the same parents in the same house and had some of the same experiences. Yet our lives have unfolded in such different ways and our journey of consciousness is so different. How did the meaning that I drew from these shared experiences lead to such different perceptions of the world?

June 20, 2011 – Saying goodbye to mom. I whisper in her ear, "I love you. God loves you. I pray for you every day that you will find peace, be free of pain, and know we love you." She smiles a peaceful smile and coos a soft, joyful, contented sound. For a moment, I know she remembers – what it is to love and be loved.

Anthropological Life Map: Grace

I looked forward to my coffeehouse *pláticas* with Grace. She often initiated these with the expectation that she would "pick my brain" about any new insights I might have discovered along my own life's journey that would open up new ways for her to approach challenges she faces in her educational work setting. Our *pláticas* gave birth to a mutual process of sharing and creating knowledge that promoted our learning and action within our respective organizations, as well as our growth and development as human beings. Grace illustrates her desire to make sense of life experiences and continue to nourish her critical awareness of self through her anthropological life map (Figure 3.1). Her timeline highlights firsts for African Americans in the small West Central Texas community in which she was born and raised. These milestones[8] highlight her family's resistance and challenge in the face of oppressive conditions, as well as their contribution to push the

[8] The black text boxes with white font, within Grace's life map, highlight these milestones.

thinking of a whole community to points of discomfort and potential growth. Grace lived the trauma of discrimination from a very young age and prefaces its implications for her development of critical awareness in her mention of the demolition of her ancestor's slave name at the beginning of her life map. Indeed, she strongly asserts that, "my story neither begins, nor ends with me." Acknowledging and harnessing the spirit and power of her ancestors to maximize learning opportunities, her life map conveys its contribution to her gaining the capacity to negotiate learning spaces, raise questions and act despite oppositional forces.

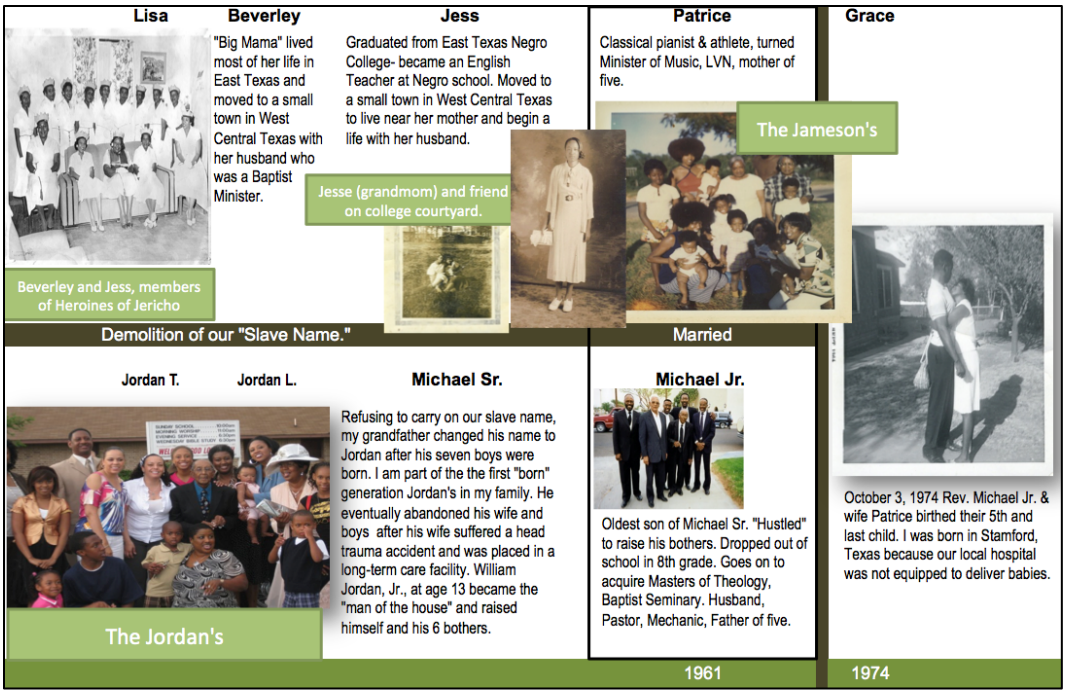
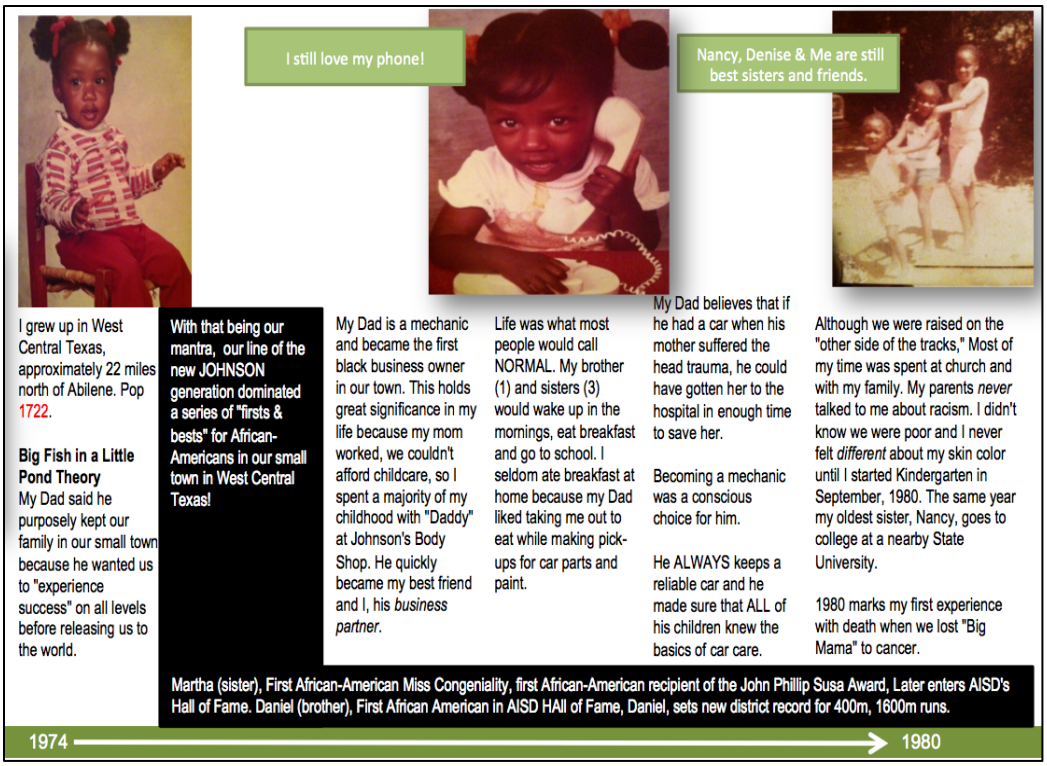


Figure 3.1. Anthropological life map created by Grace ©.



My Daddy, Michael Johnson, Jr.

Mrs. Little's First Grade Class

My Dad drove my sister to the local State University the night before I started Kinder. I remember, staying up late that night and crying because I didn't think he would make it back in time. My sister, Denise gave me the sisterly comfort I needed and when I awoke, my "Knight in Shining Armour" was there holding my brand new "book satchel" that he bought me while he was dropping off my sister.

The first day of Kindergarten was fantastic! I liked my teacher, Ms. Kay. My Dad picked me up from school and I spent the rest of the evening at "the shop."

We would keep this same routine for the next three years...

Denise (sister), first African-American Cheerleader in AISD

THE PLAYGROUND

The days following my first day school was when I was exposed to an unhidden truth.

THE PLAYGROUND
K-5th, my sister, about 7 others and I were the only African-American students enrolled at our elementary.

The Playground became my battlefield. The only problem is, I'd never had to fight, so I didn't know how to fight.

TORMENT

Why do you wear your hair like that?

Are you black all over?

You look like you have spiders in your hair!

TAG: You're it! Everybody, ruuuuuuuun from the black girl!

...and my personal favorite: You're a black banana!

THE PLAYGROUND

December, 1980 - Daddy explains that we will have a tight Christmas because Martha is in college. He also talked about plans to buy a car.

I later learned that my dad would build our savings account before buying a car because everytime we made a big purchase, bussiness at the shop would drop tremendously for about 6-8 months. *The "Little Pond" doesn't mind sharing it's bait as long as the fish don't get too big.*

Kinder remained a very difficult place to exist and I HATED school. My peace came from knowing that my day would end at "the shop" with my dad.

Daddy becomes the first African-American to sit on the town's School Board of Trustees.

Summer, 1981 - Daddy takes the family with him to a School Board retreat. We spent the week with members of our community from the Dawes Addition, aka, the better side of the tracks.

I met the high school principal's daughter who was only five days younger than me. We played together all week and I don't recall her making a comment about the color of my skin, or the texture of my hair.

Spoke with teacher. Little response. No change in student behavior.

1981

1981

My sister Nancy, Tuffy and I...Nancy was always taking in stray animals and nourishing them to health.

Summer, 1981 -

One week of Vacation Bible School (VBS), Greater Zion Baptist Church

One week of VBS, First Baptist Church

One week of Southern Baptist Association

One week of Southern Baptist Congress

One week of revival

Fall, 1981 - 1st Grade
I'm invited to my first birthday party in the Dawes Addition by Mary Ellen, the high school principal's daughter.

1st Grade teacher separates all students in learning groups:

Blue - Advanced
Red - Potentially Advanced
Green - Bubble Kid
Yellow - Prime Time Drop-out Candidate

When my mom found out well into the school year that I was placed in the Yellow Group, I don't know what was said and I remember her coming to the school in her scrubs. Taking me to the principal's office along with my teacher,

I was asked to sit in the waiting area.

My mom checked me out of school early that day and drove to "the shop" in tears.

Spring, 1982-

I'm placed in BLUE GROUP!

Introduced to Hanley Relays, an all day track & field event for elementary students. My first shot at competitive sports and I brought home 3 blue ribbons. School all of a sudden became "ok."

Daniel, wins State Championship in 800m & 2nd in State in 400m. Graduates from AHS.

Summer, 1982 -
- Girl Scout Application DENIED! (ouch) All of my friends were accepted.
- Started playing softball.

- Daddy buys a new car

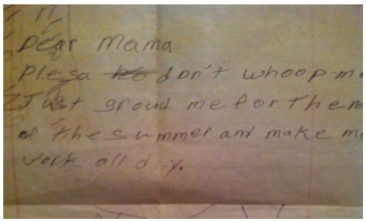
- One week of Vacation Bible School (VBS), Greater Zion Baptist Church
- One week of VBS, First Baptist Church
- One week of Southern Baptist Association
- One week of Southern Baptist Congress
- One week of revival

Fall, 1982-
Daniel attends local State University on a full Track & Field scholarship

2nd Grade and my birthday party invites have tripled. Even the kid who called me a "black banana" has become my friend. I'm starting to like my friends and my teachers are still very mean. I don't say much to mom and dad because I don't want to upset them. It makes mom cry!

1982

Me,
Mrs. Benfield's 3rd Grade Class



ALWAYS NEGOTIATING...
This is a letter i wrote my mom when she found out that I smoked my dad's souvenir cigar from Six Flags. It was a plea for her NOT to give me a spaking. My mom always did spank harder than my dad!

Spring/Summer, 1983 -
- Starting to show interest and ability in sports. Momma and Daddy attended every event that they possibly could, even if it was only for a few minutes.

- Softball All-Star Team

- One week of Vacation Bible School (VBS), Greater Zion Baptist Church
- One week of VBS, First Baptist Church
- One week of Southern Baptist Association
- One week of Southern Baptist Congress
- One week of revival

Fall, 1983
4th Grade

I am introduced to Mr. Lawrence Evans my 4th grade teacher. He is duly noted as the first teacher to EVER show me any respect and belief in my ability to learn. I read my first chapter book in the fourth grade, thanks to Mr. Evans, and began my journey to becoming an English teacher.

Spring/Summer, 1984 -
- Dominate Hanley Relays
- Softball Team
- Denise, recipient of John Phillip Susa Award

- One week of Vacation Bible School (VBS), Greater Zion Baptist Church
- One week of VBS, First Baptist Church
- One week of Southern Baptist Association
- One week of Southern Baptist Congress
- One week of revival

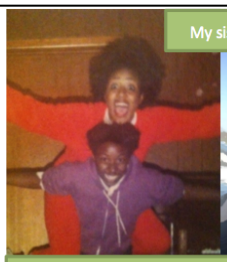
Denise, voted first African-American Student Body President at high school.

Fall, 1984

5th Grade
Home room with Mrs. Charles my English Teacher.

Began to drift away from my elementary school friends from the Dawes Addition and connect with friends from the Hispanic community. My skin color became more prevalent to me. I started walking home after school with other peers from my neighborhood instead of riding to "the shop" with my dad.

1983 1984



My sister/mentor, Denise.

That was then. This is now.

Mary Ellen and I hanging out at the State Track Meet.

Basketball becomes my savior!

Spring/Summer, 1985 -
- Dominate Hanley Relays

- Softball Team

- Denise, graduates with honors

- One week of Vacation Bible School (VBS), Greater Zion Baptist Church
- One week of VBS, First Baptist Church
- One week of Southern Baptist Association
- One week of Southern Baptist Congress
- One week of revival

Fall, 1985 -6th Grade

Denise enrolls at local State University.

At this point, I only like the social aspect of school. I began to cultivate an internal anger for white people as my experiences with children and adults at this point have not been significantly positive. I bathed myself in Yo MTV Raps, hip hop radio (out of Dallas) and anyone of color whose path I crossed. I felt like I was missing a HUGE piece of my own culture/self. In essence, I was a big black fish in a little white pond and I desperately wanted to discover what it meant to just BE a black fish.

Spring/Summer, 1986 -
- Dominate Hanley Relays

- Softball

- One week of Vacation Bible School (VBS), Greater Zion Baptist Church
- One week of Southern Baptist Association
- One week of Southern Baptist Congress
- One week of revival

Nancy (sister), first African-American on HS Flag Team

BASKETBALL

Fall, 1986
7th Grade - I am now finally old enough to compete in UIL sports. There are two people in my life at this point who automatically staged me at the top of the class. My English teacher, Mrs. Hanley (yes, the principal's wife) and my basketball coach, Coach Mendez.

My Dad became engulfed in his pastoralship in town as he now pastors the third largest predominantly African American churches in the Big Country. He also started working on his Masters in Theology.

I became incredibly interested in boys and there were only 2 African American boys in town in my age group. I didn't know it was ok to date outside of my race.

1985 1986

My Junior High Crew!!!

There's Mary Ellen Again!

8th Grade Basketball

Johnna, Grace, Jane, Mary Ellen
8th Grade Banquet

Close friend, Christine killed in a car accident. We were the same age. She taught me to play the drums. Had to miss her funeral because of a family vacation. Deep sorrow. Deep regret.

Spring/Summer, 1987 -
Still maintaining a close relationship with my dad, we often went on "Ice Cream Dates." This year in particular, I remember him asking what I wanted to do after college (as college was the only post-secondary option that my parents supported for us). Without hesitation, I told him I wanted to be a teacher and a coach as I'd experienced success and a great deal of enjoyment in softball, track and basketball by this time. So, "what do you want to teach", he asked? I don't know. "Can I just coach?" My dad told me that I should look into either, science, math, english or social studies.

Fall, 1987
8th Grade- By this time, I'm still in love with sports. I joined the "Pep Squad" so that I could participate at football games. I have 3 siblings in college, and one who this year becomes the 2nd African-American cheerleader at HS.

I continued to dominate in basketball, becoming our starting post player and team captain. I started to stray away from the "trouble makers" as most of them were not involved in sports. I started dating my first boyfriend, who was a basketball star as well!

Voted 8th grade Class President.
Voted Football Sweetheart

Introduced, on a professional level, to Mrs. Hanley (yes, superintendent's wife).

Spring, 1988
My Dad's business is not doing well and he files for bankruptcy. Our phone gets cut off at home and at his shop. His truck is repossessed. I remember riding by the bank with my mom seeing my dad's truck in the impound lot and feeling a huge sense of embarrassment. I knew this was a painful time for her because she worked so hard to keep our family afloat. She was adamant that all of her children attend and finish college. My dad leased out the office space in one of his shop (annex) to a single mother of two from our church. She was a very attractive woman and in town, it didn't take long for rumors to birth. So, in addition to the bankruptcy, my mom was having to filter rumors of my dad having an affair.

I remember her on several occasions saying her favorite Shakespearean quote: This too shall pass.

It was then that she I learned the value of a dollar and my mom and I began having money and "man" talks. This was my introduction to momma as I'd spent most of my childhood at the shop with my Dad. I learned so much about character and hard work from my mom. She taught me that who you are and what you can do is more important than what you have.

1987

1988

Daddy becomes the first African-American town's ISD School Board of Trustees President.

1989, my sister adopts my nephew, James. He gravitated to me almost instantly. Now at 21 years old, he still says, I'm his favorite Auntie

High School,
Cross Country Dist Champs

Fall, 1988
Earning my reputation with district-wide as a star athlete. This is also the year that I engage in my first experiences with "spiritual warfare." I remember the constant moral struggles of taking place during my 8th grade year.

My first boyfriend. He was only one of two African American boys in school who were close to my age (keeping in mind that I didn' t think I had a choice among other ethnicities).

My parents disapproved because he was of a lower social economic level. He too was a star athlete. He was an upper median student. He had a great personality and at least in the beginning was very kind and respectful. I couldn't understand my parents angle. It seemed pompous and *wrong*.

Many of my friends begin to experiment with cigarettes and alcohol. Another struggle. My dad is now publicly being accused of cheating on my mom. Is he? I still don't know...

Spring/Summer, 1989

Begin to develop a deeper relationship with my cousin, Roosevelt from Abilene.

Freshmen (girl) Initiation. My behavior scores huge points with the upper classmen and get an "automatic" fit-in stamp of approval.

Summer Band Camp with high school students.
...and of course the usual 5 weeks of summer in church.

Nancy (sister), 2nd African-American on HS Cheerleader

Fall, 1989

I earn my high school letter jacket within the first six weeks of my 9th grade year by advancing to Regional competition in Cross Country.

I was the only 9th grader to advance to Varsity Basketball that year.

I was in band and I hated it.

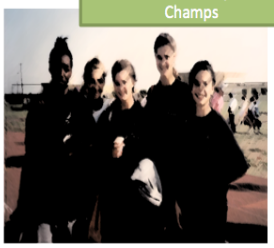
Voted Class President.

My sister and I become a dynamic duo and earn the reputation of "untouchable" when the principal tells a new coach that she couldn't park in the spot behind the gym because the Johnson's have occupied that space for the last 10+ years. She hated us...and we new she'd get over it. That's what tradition births in *Small Town, Texas*.

1989

My Cousin, Ronald Johnson

High School,
400X4 Meter Relay District Champs



Spring/Summer, 1990
Now, drug, alcohol and sexual pressures persists. I continue to battle with "fitting in," my moral and personal standards and my calling to be an "athlete."

Dad continues to have less of a presence at home and mom is going through menopause. We constantly fight. Things at home are not well. My sister and best friend is basking in her senior year.

April, 1990 I give my life to Christ at a revival at First Baptist Church, Anson.

Nancy graduates.

Fall, 1990
Sophomore Year
Nancy starts college at the Junior College and becomes a cheerleader.

My cousin, Ronald becomes my new best friend. I spend every "extra" minute of my life with him.

I get my first car.

Voted Sophomore Class President.

Varsity Cross Country. Varsity Basketball. Band...and I still hate it, even more now because my sister is not there with me.

Spring/Summer, 1991

ONLY CHILD LEFT AT HOME!

MY COUSIN IS MY BEST FRIEND!

Youth Group President at my church.

Regional Track Qualifier

Varsity Basketball

Made Cheerleader...

Started my first job at Dairy Queen

Fall, 1991

Junior Year
Cheerleader. I found this to be a high maintenance commitment with high maintenance peers and decided that I would work hard at it this year, AND NOT tryout again.

Texas Toe Touch Champion!

Started dating Roy Simms. HS Running Back. Rushed 1,000 yds this season. My parents HATE him because of his family's dark history.

Varsity Basketball Team Captain
Cross Country Regional Qualifier
Class President

1990 1991

High School,
Class of 1993

Life-long friend since 4yrs old. Mary Ellen Hanley!

Sister, and BFF, Sabrina from Sweetwater.

Spring/Summer, 1992

Roy becomes abusive after I try to break up with him. I was afraid to tell my parents because...they "warned me."

Home Alone: After he breaks into our home while I'm on the phone and takes the phone away from me, he uses it to strike me on the head. At this point I call the police and I have to tell my parents about the abusive months building up to this point.

Roy is arrested. Suspending opportunities to go to most Texas colleges.

My Dad takes me to the shooting range and teaches me how to shoot a 357 Magnum, 32 caliber and a shot gun.

Regional Qualifier in Track.
Run for Student Body President - lose election

Fall, 1992

Senior Year
I spend most of my time in near home.

I refuse to date ANYBODY!

Varsity Basketball Team Captain
Cross Country Regional Qualifier
Class President

Spring/Summer, 1993

Graduation!
Gravitated to hanging with my friends in close to home. By this time I'd developed an appreciation for hanging with African-American peers. Ready to graduate. No tears, just ready to leave hometown behind.

Dairy Queen - I wanted to insure that EVERY weekend was spent away from hometown.

My mom made me go to prom.
Student Body Vice President
Regional Qualifier in 3 events (Track)

Class of 1993, Graduation!!!!

1992 1993

Mary Ellen gets married in 1997.

Jimmy and Denisha met, August, 1994.
Married August 2, 2001

Fall, 1993 -1996
Freshman Year: Weatherford College
Ex-boyfriend, Roy Simms' girlfriend breaks up with him. With a sawed off shot gun, he kills her, her new boyfriend and himself in front of her two small children.

I read into this event as a direct connection to the conversation that I had with my Dad in the 7th grade when it hit me that I was called to work with teenagers. This young lady was in the same scenario that I was in with the same young man, and God saw fit to spare MY life. From this point on, I begin to take life more seriously and embrace my purpose.

1994- I meet future husband

W. College
Varsity Basketball
President of Black Awareness Student Organization
Phi Theta Kappa Leadership
Student Ambassador (President's Council)
Student Government Association
P.E. Club
Resident Assistant

1996-1999

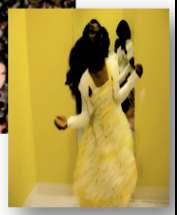
BA
Zeta Phi Beta, Sorority

English Tutoring
ESL Tutoring, HS Library
Student Mentoring, Willie Mae Mitchell Center

My focus is on graduation. I quit basketball and had to work to put myself through school.

State University, BA, English
August, 1999

K. J.
April 10, 2003



February, 2000

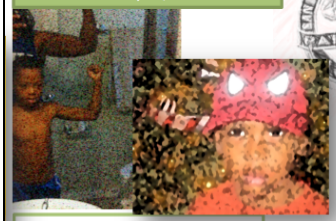
First teaching position:
6th and 8th Grade English at Middle School, Central Texas

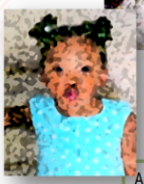
August, 2001
After dating for 7 years, I marry & began teaching English at Freshman Campus-Central, Texas.

April, 2003
Gave birth to my first child, K. J. Having K. in my life changes how I see life and how I see my students. I begin to adopt a Karmic mantra of seeing students as I see my own. Passion for working with teens change. Disgust with administration and what I see surrounding my colleagues and how they interact with students arises.

1996 2000

M. Z.
January 19, 2005





C. J.
October 30, 2008

USC

January, 2005

I give birth to our second child, M. K.

My husband goes back to finish his B.S. in Biology and with two small children, I find a greater need to teach where I live.

August, 2005
I begin teaching 9th grade English at local High School. By the end of the year, having observed the cultural dymics of three different schools, I make the decision that as soon as my son turns 1, I'm going back to school to get my Masters in Education Leadership.

August, 2006

I am accepted and begin the M.Ed. program at local university.

September, 2007
Life begins to move at an exponential pace. I am hired on at local High School as an Assistant Principal

August, 2008

Graduate from local university. M.Ed. in Educational Leadership

October, 2008
After a tubal ligation in 2005, and being accepted into the Ph.D. program at local univeristy, I deliver my third child, C. J.

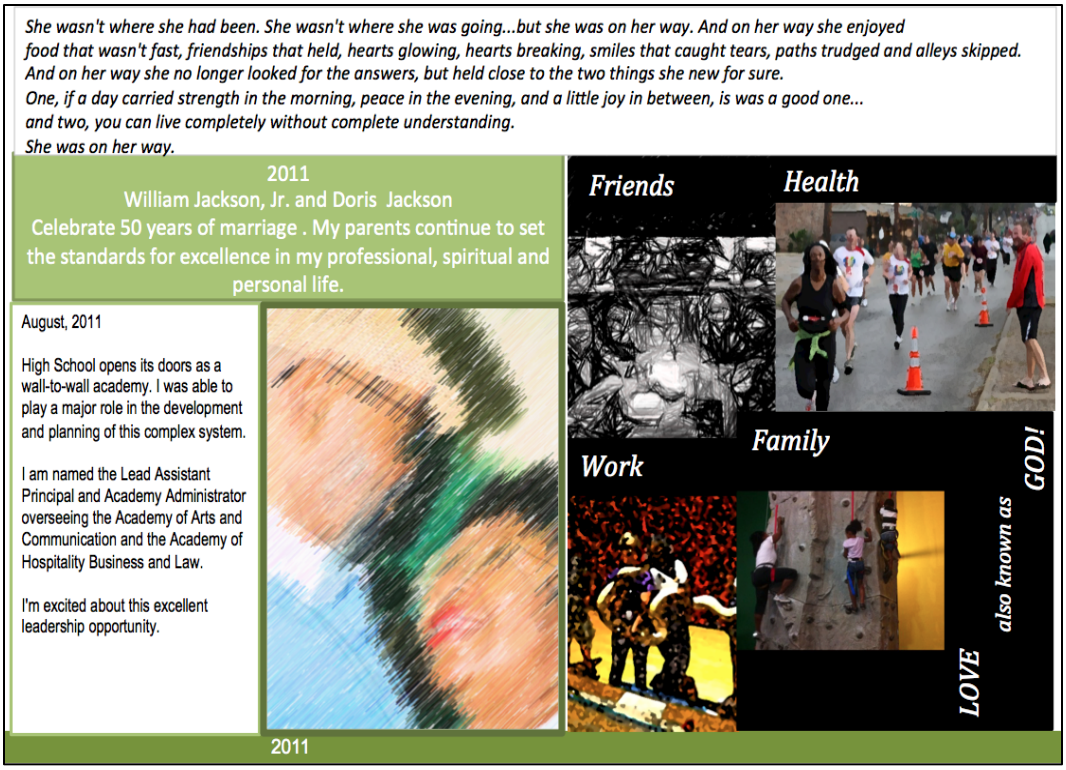
I had to decline my acceptance to Ph.D. program and focus my energy on my family and professional development.

2009-2010

The work with the United Communities of San Antonio begins with High School students. Through this extension we began training students to become leaders and XYZ club was established. This is the school's first GTBL support group.

Administration begins to look at campus dress code and electronic policy in a way that takes into account the cultural differences of students.

2005 2006 2008 2009



Anthropological Life Map: Samuel

Instead of specific pivotal events, Samuel depicts time periods that together span the years of his life. His illustration (Figure 3.2) provides insight into a mathematical literacy through which he gained entrance into learning spaces that Chicanos are rarely invited to occupy, nor largely expected to aspire to. The discussion that accompanies his illustration is brief, but poignant. Samuel speaks to the power of relationships to push his thinking outside of comfort zones that would otherwise perpetuate the belief that what we know and how we make sense of our life is true regardless of experience. In doing so, he joins Joseph and Grace in validating educational opportunities as not only constituting formal education, but also critical conversations within family that at times challenge often held perceptions that their can only be one correct answer. Moreover, Samuel's life

map gives indication that acquired knowledge and experiences, though we may attempt to speak to them separately, are interconnected and can neither be distinct from one another, nor from the critical understanding of self. The following critical reflection is provided in Samuel's own words.

Critical Reflection

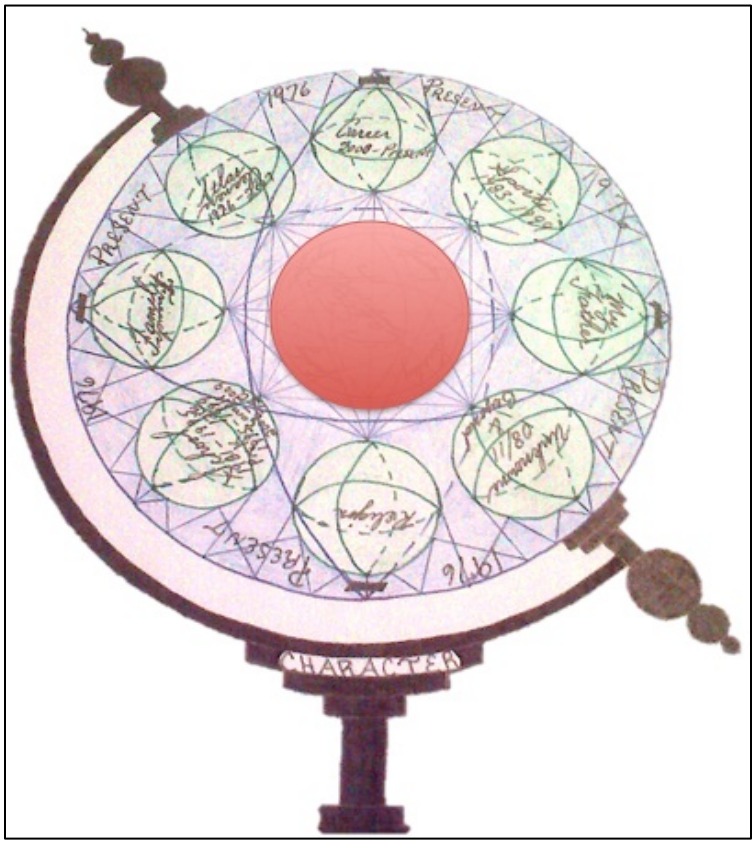


Figure 3.2. Anthropological life map created by Samuel ©.

As I thought about how I was going to lay out my life map I kept trying to pinpoint critical events in my life that have shaped who I am today. However, this task proved to be much harder than I first anticipated. The more I thought about it the more I realized that if I was going to map out a timeline of my own history then I would use a globe. The events in my life resemble eras or time periods and their effects do not stand

alone. Each part of the globe combines to function as one system. This system is "My Education."

The globe is composed of ten globes with lines that illustrate the bonds that exist between them and tie each globe to one another. We are all bound by a finite amount of time as we journey through our lifetime. This finite amount of time represents the biggest globe, which is blue. From birth to death represents and exact amount of time in which I have to grow and learn. Within the blue globe there are two different types of globes – eight green and one red–each color represents significant parts of who I am. Each green globe represents a distinct era of time in my life. Some of the globes have time periods with a start and end time in them. For example, the globe titled Sports spans the time period from 1983 to 1999. The green globes not defined by a time period are represented by the time period indicated within the blue globe. The globe titled Father is an example of this. Each green globe represents an era that has impacted who I am today. These include: family/friends; East Side Cleaners; career; sports; father; religion, school, and unknowns. Below, I briefly discussed the significance each had on my own growth and development.

The essence of who I am as a person can be traced back to my family and the circle of friends that I keep. The relationships that I have with each of them impacts how I think. They do not dictate what my thoughts will be, but they definitely challenge my opinions in a healthy way.

My years growing up in a mom and pop shop, East Side Cleaners, showed me that you have to make sacrifices in order to achieve success, hard work pays off, and knowing your limitations are all factors that help determine your final outcome.

As regards my career, it has given me the opportunity to learn one of my greatest lessons, gaining true appreciation for people. As a public servant I have profoundly come to understand the value of changing people's lives and the impact that one look, one word, and/or one relationship can have on a person or a group of people. My ever-present challenge is to continue to learn and to appropriately negotiate the power that comes with working with people.

As an athlete I was taught discipline, humility, and what it means to be competitive. The race for excellence was never a question when I competed. I always had a deep passion to be the best. Training and practice always required a push to dig from within myself to overcome my opponent, but more importantly myself. I learned to not defeat myself.

While I do have a globe to represent family and friends, my father has played such a major role in my life that he gets one all to himself. At one time I wanted to be him, but through his guidance he made me understand that I needed to be my own man. My father was always giving lessons. Whether it was using a hammer correctly or keeping my head up in defeat. There are not enough words that can do this man justice. You would have to witness it and live side by side with him to truly understand.

Religion is a part of my life that has always kept a balance for me and given me the strength to always look for the good in all people.

I have many thoughts when it comes to schooling, but I will keep it short. The manner in which material is presented and the "what" that is taught really shaped my thinking. I can say that every time I have felt I have known something, I take on or start

a new program that reframes what I believe and what I thought I knew. This has been a constant in my life from grade school to graduate school.

While I think I know where I am headed I also know that I have to prepare for both the good and the bad. My own life's history has taught me that life can be good and it can be cruel. With that in mind, I try to do the best that I can to prepare for the unknowns that I know will be coming my way. Paradox, I know. How can I prepare if I do not know what it is that I am preparing for? The question fills my free time…

Finally, a brief mention of the red globe. It is the focal point of all other globes that cross and intersect one another. It represents me and the effects that all these factors have on my own awareness of who and what I am. The map allows for the presentation of micro and macro events, their impact on one another, and ultimately on me. I have had life changing events in my life that at one time I thought shaped who I was as a person. But further analysis of self has revealed to me that my ability to deal with situations has been developed by a series of related events that share characteristics, and not necessarily the individual events in isolation.

Anthropological Life Map: Mónica

My anthropological life map is framed by theory and personal artwork that was created during moments of critical awakening covering a period of almost four years. Many years of lived experience prior to this time frame influenced my sense making though. The depth to which I attempt to make sense of my experiences was aided by the powerful dialogues with family, friends, and colleagues that never ceased to ask the right questions, most requiring no immediate answer, but rather critical self-reflection.

Freire (2005) posited that if we adapt and lose the critical capacity to make choices than we are no longer integrated, relying solely on that which is prescribed. I feared becoming apathetic in regards to my vocation and to the realities of many of the students and families with whom I worked, realities that often evidenced great suffering. A great unrest began to surface with my inability to foster a space for them to make meaning of their lives; a yet greater unrest surfaced as I acknowledged that I had not stopped long enough to make meaning of my own life. I discovered that as long as I feared turning the mirror on me and fully embracing the battle to make meaning of my own life experiences and purpose, I would not be the teacher and mentor that I longed to be, nor that the students and school community deserved. For, as Huebner (1999) asserts,

> Any part of the self that remains hidden or suppressed because of threat, shame, or possible ridicule cannot be incorporated into a person's story line, for it distorts other aspects of the narrative. The teacher, like host or hostess, helps the student be comfortable, totally present and able to open to others. In an environment that invites and supports presence and openness, the noise of prevailing powers is reduced, and the teacher can hear more clearly and respond more directly to a young person's call. The stories of both can be more fully told. (p. 30)

Summer 2005: *Pan de Cada Día*

During the summer of 2005, on a much-needed retreat, I accompanied a good friend to visit childhood friends of her family. Both families had labored as migrant workers and had traveled over several years between fields of harvest in Texas and Washington. My friend's family had eventually taken root in Texas, her family friends, in Washington. They welcomed us with open arms, and told us their home was ours. A

small and weathered mobile home surrounded by the family's strawberry fields was quite humble, but nonetheless welcoming and comfortable. The older couple, approximating 65 years old, apologized for not being able to spend more time in our company. They worked from before sunrise, to well after sunset. Early mornings filled with the aroma of fried eggs would stir us from our sleep just before the first rays of sun penetrated through the bedroom curtains. Within a short time, the couple was off to labor in the boss's fields and return in time for dinner and with just enough daylight to work their own strawberry fields.

Situated in Linden, Washington, near the border between the U.S. and Canada, my friend and I relished the drives along the countryside and its chilled air. But, a certain degree of remorse accompanied me. I was painfully aware of the privilege that my life experiences afforded me. How often had I looked upon crop fields and only relished in their beauty, never even stopping long enough to think of the hands that labored those fields, nor considered the human injustices buried in those fields? As I strove to remain critically aware and reposition my experiences and those of my fellow humans so as to view them through a lens grounded in spirituality, I began to experience that which Kesson (2002) describes as a decentering of the self. This included a critical review and questioning of spirituality and religion.

Figure 3.3. *Pan de cada día* © painted and owned by Mónica M. Valadez.

Pan de cada día (Figure 3.3) was painted in response to my critique. I grew up reciting, and continue to do so to this day, the Lord's Prayer. *Pan de cada día* depicts two migrant farmworkers as they await their daily labors to ensue. For me, it spoke to a sense of the earth's beauty as well as the toil that is accompanied in working the earth. Moreover, it problematized my view that God provided all of us with an equitable share of daily bread, that we had to be gracious and humble enough to be grateful for our share, and that we were at God's mercy as to whether it was a bountiful portion or not. Freire (2005) spoke of a fatalistic hope that renders our actions within this world as mere reactions to our surroundings and positions us as predestined beings without the agency to construct our lived realities, washing our hands of any injustice with the naïve and often self-serving belief that the oppressed are in God's hands. He posited,

> …the absence of hope is not the "normal" way to be human. It is a distortion. I am not…first of all a being without hope who may or may not later be converted to hope. On the contrary, I am first a being of hope who, for any number of reasons, may thereafter lose hope. For this reason, as human beings, one of our

> struggles should be to diminish the objective reasons for that hopelessness that immobilizes us. (pp. 69-70)

Diminishing these reasons became a noble struggle, but nonetheless an intense one, I could no longer accept reasons that provided countless excuses as to why I could not act against oppressive systems. Finding spaces in which I could relish in ignorance and futile hope, and ask that suffering communities be patient as they awaited for God to deliver them from harm, created feelings of shame. I recalled the strength of prayer that *mi mamá* embodied, and the expectations to change his reality that *mi papá* knew God had of him. Theirs was not a futile hope. Theirs was faith in action.

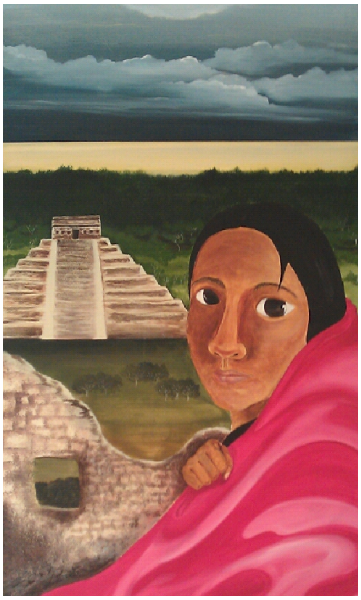


Figure 3.4. *Herencia* © painted and owned by Mónica M. Valadez.

Fall 2005: *Herencia*

Herencia (Figure 3.4) was painted shortly after completing *Pan de cada día*. It depicts a young woman seeking validation outside of herself. Caught between a world that does not acknowledge her heritage as valuable, and a world in which she is so far

removed from her ancestral home, that she herself questions whether she has any right to claim it. It was a purposeful attempt at documenting my journey on a newly realized plain of consciousness regarding education and my pedagogy. I had experienced a paradigm shift that called for me to divulge years of questions, turmoil, unrest, trauma, and marginalization and make sense of them. Wang (2005) asserts,

> A responsible pedagogy must confront the breakdowns of meanings of loss in order to find breakthroughs to new paths that lead to other possible worlds. Making sense of suffering necessarily involves a mutually expansive relationship between memory and mobility. (p. 139)

I uncovered a cultural, spiritual, and intellectual knowledge that if harnessed could be utilized to create and inform new systems as well as challenge the unjust systems that have historically been and continue to be oppressive. The neighborhood tapestry that surrounded our elementary school was interwoven with parents and grandparents, aunts and uncles, siblings and cousins creating a familial structure abounding in a wealth of life experiences and understandings. Invitations to baptisms and confirmations, attendance at celebrations of *La Vírgen de Guadalupe*, and the common utterance of *–En el nombre sea de Dios* [In the name of the Father], spoke to a spiritual and cultural knowledge that helped pave my path into discovery and action.

Spring 2006: *Metamórfosis*

As I continued to peel away at the scab of ignorance and problematize the dissonance between who I was in theory and who I was in practice, I realized that I limited myself to the parameters dictated by a system that reproduced that which always was – a favorable and nurturing environment for a select few. During my last year as a

fourth grade bilingual teacher, anger became my fuel. But very little came from the anger that originated from having been recipient, witness, and bearer of injustice. Subsequently, with more questions than answers, I resigned from my position as a fourth grade educator to pursue graduate school full-time. I painted *Metamórfosis* (Figure 3.5) in response to my decision. It was not an easy one, but it proved to be a critical one in the effort to keep futile hope from becoming the norm. Freire (1998) asserted,

> It is difficult because it demands constant vigilance over ourselves so as to avoid being simplistic, facile, and incoherent. It is difficult because we are not always sufficiently balanced to prevent legitimate anger from degenerating into the kind of rage that breeds false and erroneous thinking. (p. 51)

Figure 3.5. *Metamórfosis* © painted and owned by Mónica M. Valadez.

Fall 2006: *Encuentro al Amanecer*

Encuentro al amanecer (Figure 3.6) was painted at the end of my first semester in graduate school. It depicts the awakening of the slumbering giant introduced in the first work of art, and portrays the possibilities born of a symbiotic and reciprocal existence between distinct worlds as symbolized by the American Bald Eagle and the Mexican

Golden Eagle. The female, central to the work, speaks to the power of Latina women and a rediscovery of their voice long devalued by *machista* influences. Replanted in rested earth, the tree springs forth healthy shoots and its branches extend beyond obstacles to receive new knowledge.

Figure 3.6. *Encuentro al amanecer* © painted and owned by Mónica M. Valadez.

Theory without self-exploration would have proven futile in the development of a consciousness originating from my responsibility to my fellow human beings. Lack of critical self-awareness ultimately paralyzed my intellectual, moral, and spiritual capacities, and in turn the ability to foster it in students and families. Critical self-reflection challenged me to raise my level of consciousness about that which influenced my personal and professional actions and reactions. Larrañaga (1999) writes,

> Friends and family can accompany me only so far into the abyss that is self. For at the core of my being, where I am myself and distinct from all others, there, or I assume all responsibility or I lose myself, because at that depth there arrives no exterior help. (p. 22)

The realization of this existential dilemma was empowering. There is no more sincere manner in which to understand others than by first understanding the self. It fostered the conscientization of which Freire (1970) spoke that develops our ability to critically analyze situations and acknowledge our right and obligation to address injustices.

Fall 2008: *Ventanas*

I completed my graduate studies in the summer of 2008 and accepted the invitation to purse a doctoral degree beginning in the fall of the same year. There remained critical facets of self that required meaning making. The ontology of my childhood home became the unit of my analysis. I had come full circle. That from which I most wanted to distance myself as a child and adolescent, would be the same to which I would have to return. The struggle of critical self-understanding would begin at home (Waite, Nelson, & Guajardo, 2007).

Ventanas (Figure 3.7) was painted at the end of my first semester of my doctoral studies. As the weeping willow depicted in my drawing, I had not come through unscathed. The leaves that at once guarded and protected me, also isolated and silenced me in turn. I discovered that there were many more roots to unearth before new leaves could bud, no longer for the purposes of hiding and isolating myself, but rather as testimony to the possibilities that exist. Moreover, I was moved to identify and validate the educational philosophies that were deeply rooted in the lessons I learned within the four walls of my home and in my interactions with all that was held within. They were lessons that ultimately informed the way I approached the students and families, that like me, represented the other. They were lessons that opened my eyes to the injustices rooted in race, ethnic and gender differences, among others. They were lessons that

insisted I value a person's story or risk devaluing my own. They were lessons that taught me that there is no one philosophy that will provide all answers or include all. They were the lessons that proved to be the catalyst for the rediscovery of my spirituality, the strength born of prayer, and the spirit of hope that instills in us the desire to co-construct a purpose-filled life and meaningful relationships to self, others, and world.

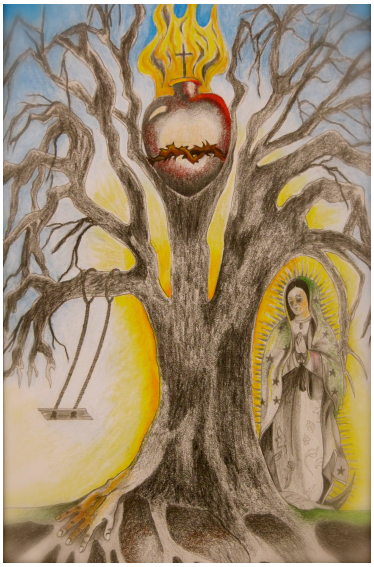


Figure 3.7. *Ventanas* © painted and owned by Mónica M. Valadez.

Anthropological Life Map: Christopher

Christopher bookends his life map with family, and highlights salient events that he would make sense of later in life about the power of the human spirit to struggle through the most difficult and traumatic experiences. He points to pivotal moments of awakening in which he became aware of the influential power of gangs, sports, education, and the unconditional love and commitment of family. Christopher introduces his life map (Figure 3.8) with two stories that illustrate a conceptual framing of the images he selected to depict. These concepts ground his life map in his understanding of the power

of story, commitment to family, and serving a greater purpose. The following critical reflection is provided in Christopher's own words.

Critical Reflection

There are experiences that are not reflected in my life map that continue to impact who I am as an educational leader, experiences that I often recall in my commitment to my family and my school community. There are many instances that reflect my parents' contributions to the degree to which I value family. One in particular involved a lesson learned from my mom. There was an incident in elementary school where my cousin who I grew up with, same age, same grade level, was being teased and picked on. We were in second or third grade at the time, and a group of fifth graders had him circled and were pushing him around. As soon as I saw that, I'm gone, pumping my arms and running away as fast as I could. I ran to my mom, and told her what was happening and she says, "Nuh uh! You go over there and you help your cousin. If you get beat up, you get beat up, but you don't leave him like that." She stayed her ground. I returned to where my cousin was, and we got beat up together. The mentality that you don't back down was always there. The good in that was not letting down my family, not running away from something that, in my mom's mind, was the right thing to do.

Knowing the power that is held in such stories is critical in my position. I remember the first time I had Dr. Guajardo for class. He said something that has stuck with me to this day, "So, what's your story?" That, "So, what's your story," is something I've stolen from him to open that door with teachers. "What's your story? Where do you come from?" I have found that knowing someone's story, as things come up, I have something to connect it to, "Aren't you from here? What's that like?" And then we can

relate it back to our campus and the decision that needs to be made. Recently, knowing about his story, I asked one of our teachers, "You come from a town near the border, right? That's your community from home. What are some things that you know work well? How do you help people feel welcomed?" And then "boom!" he started talking and ideas were coming that helped move the conversation forward with something we were struggling with.

It all goes back to the understanding of self. I don't see how a teacher, or a principal, or anyone that is working with children cannot think about the importance of understanding self. If you don't know what you believe in, if you aren't passionate about what you are doing, then why are you here? There are certain things that every teacher should feel strongly enough about to say, "I'm not going to bend on this. This is just not right." You have to stand for something. I think my life map is representative of some of the things that I just won't bend on and the events that contributed to that awareness.

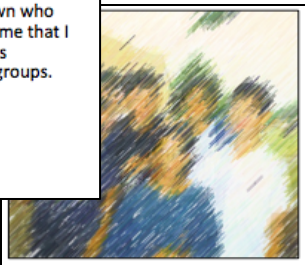
Figure 3.8. Anthropological life map created by Christopher ©.

I grew up in West Central Texas. We lived just two blocks from my elementary school and a few blocks from my middle and high school. This physical proximity created a strong affiliation with being from the "North side" and attending "North side" schools.

Although our family was a strong unit, local gangs influenced how we saw the world. We knew that gangs were "bad" but we also thought that they were cool.

I did pretty well in school and was liked by all of my teachers . At the same time, I associated with kids who were in gangs and who were involved in illegal activities.

While in middle school I flirted with trouble but also began to meet new kids from other parts of town who were bused in. This is the time that I started to notice differences between social and ethnic groups.



My friends in middle school were the kids from my neighborhood. I had the same group of friends from elementary through middle school. Once I got into high school my friends started to change and I became more involved in sports and less involved with gangs.

High school was going perfectly, I was a star basketball and baseball player and I thought that I would get a scholarship to play sports in college.

Sports continued to play a positive role in my life. Sports kept me out of trouble and gave me something to be passionate about.

My life was changed forever very quickly the summer prior to my senior year in high school. These events during this short period of time strongly influence the person that I am and want to be. During this difficult time so many people showed great compassion and humanity toward my family. So many people helped our family and instilled a core belief for me that people can make a difference in others peoples lives in a positive way.

First, my sister and three of her friends were murdered. This single event has had many implications on the direction of my life and how I live and work.

Next, while playing in a baseball showcase for college and professional scouts I suffered a career ending injury to my leg. I broke my leg and tore all three major knee ligaments.

The last major event that happened during this time was that our house burned down. At the time I felt hopeless but because of my family and other people I became stronger.

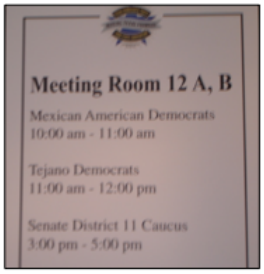
Other than my father, my coach helped shape my drive and dedication more than anyone else. The four years that I spent with him solidified a work ethic that drives me today. "The harder you work, the luckier you seem to get".

After high school I bounced around a couple of colleges trying to figure out the "ways" of college. I received a small privately donated scholarship after high school but was unsure what to do next. I am certain though that because I received that small scholarship it helped me to start my pathway with college.

I graduated from a university in Central Texas and on the day of graduation, drove to a job fair and landed my first teaching job in a local middle school.

While in college I met and married my wife who is undoubtedly my biggest supporter and motivator.

Education is my calling and passion.



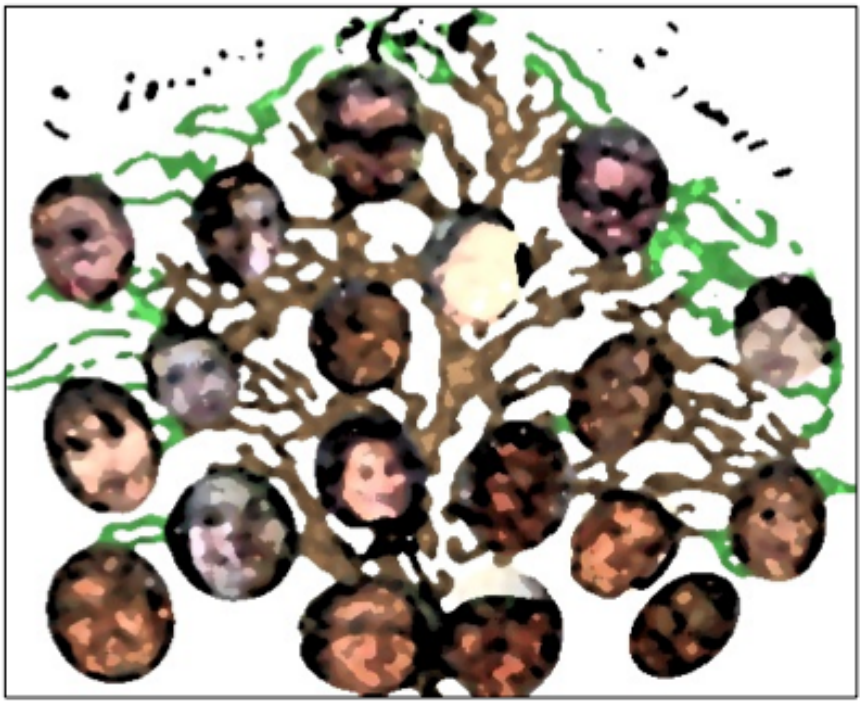
I believe that being involved in the political process is vital to the improvement of our communities. I was proud to represent my local county at the state convention during the last Presidential election.

My wife and I had our first child. My nephew began living with us when he was in 8th grade and is now a part of our family. I hope to inspire and raise two strong men who will be positive influences on our world.

Being mentally tough is an idea that was instilled in me by my coach and is something that I continuously push for professionally and personally.

I received my Master of Education degree and was promoted to Instructional Administrator at my middle school campus. I was charged with leading the campus instructional and curricular programs.

In March of 2011 I was promoted to principal at a local elementary campus. Here I will work with the community to build a world class school for our kids.



Our family tree continuous to grow each year and I hope to follow my father's lead and lead our family to new heights!

Anthropological Life Map: Marta

Marta presented her anthropological life map (Figure 3.9) in both narrative text and visual representation. She experiences a powerful awakening born of the incongruencies between how she envisioned attending a U.S. school would be like, and the deception she faced within a school community in which she daily contended with rejection. Her message conveys the strength of story and community to change lived realities within systems in which those who claim all the power to make decisions, attempt to convince the community that the system will simply not allow deviation from the norm. The following critical narrative is provided in Marta's own words.

Critical Narrative

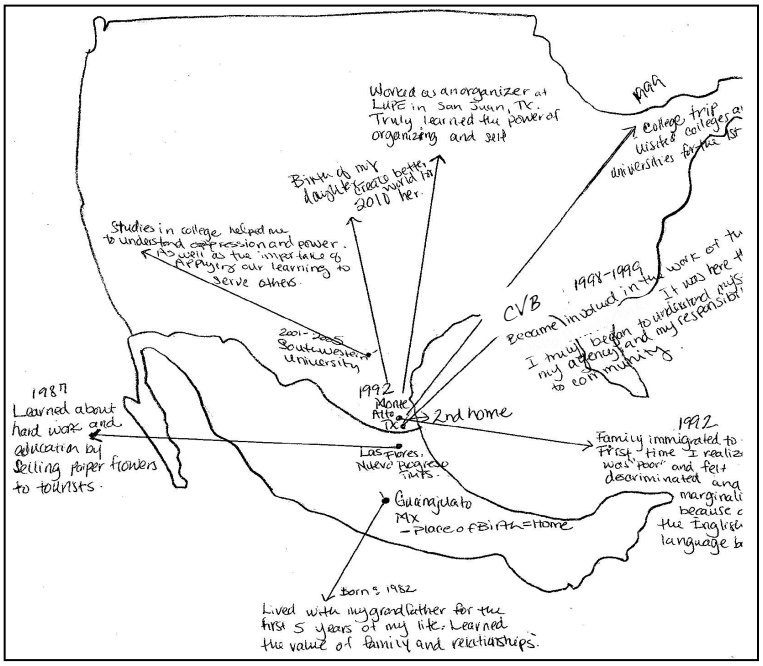


Figure 3.9. Anthropological life map created by Marta ©.

I was born in Yuriria, Guanajuato, a small rural town almost in the heart of Mexico. I lived there for the first five years of my life until finances forced my mother to demand that my father take the entire family al norte with him (to the north, the U.S.).

My mother's hope was that my father would take her and her three children (at the time – I have five siblings now) to live in the United States where everyone knew there was a "better life." As a five-year-old child, the most important thing to me as part of this move was the loss of time with my grandfather, or I should say – my father. Since I was born my dad had traveled to the United States for work and returned only once or twice a year. Therefore, I learned to see my grandfather as my dad. During the time we spent together he taught me about persistence, hard work, but mostly about the importance of love and relationships. Of course, I did not know that then. It has been over the years that I have realized the many lessons he taught me each day as he allowed me to sit by his bedside and run through the times tables with him until I finally learned them. Even when I cried out of frustration, he was willing to go through the same exercise the next day. I remember that he had great patience with me and was always willing to help me out with homework. The time I spent with him was invaluable; after our move, I only saw him two more times before he passed away in 1997.

In 1987, my family left Guanajuato and settled in Nuevo Progreso, Tamaulipas, a community along the U.S.–Mexico border. Our move did not solve my family's financial problems. Instead, they were augmented. During the second year after our arrival, things became especially difficult. My older sister and I began to sell paper flowers in order to help my mother make ends meet. I went to school for half a day and the second part of the day I spent working. At the age of seven, I felt a bit embarrassed, especially when I was seen by some of my classmates. Later, I understood that it was nothing to be ashamed of. It was just what I needed to do to help my mother make ends meet. Again, this stressful situation was the catalyst for our second move. This time, my family

immigrated to the United States. I was ten years old and naïve enough to be only excited instead of afraid or nervous. The excitement lasted only until I went to school and realized that instruction would be in English not Spanish. Soon, children started making fun of me, and the excitement about living and going to school in the U.S. quickly faded away. I became withdrawn and felt somehow like I didn't belong. I wasn't good enough, my clothes weren't nice enough, I did not speak English… Had it not been for my mother's words about hard work and the value of education, –*Tienes que estudiar para que seas alguien en la vida, y para que salgas adelante* [You have to study so that you can be somebody in life, and to move ahead], I am not sure what my future engagement in school and society would have been like. Magically, her words were stronger than all the forces at school that only continued to make me feel marginalized. Quiet and withdrawn, I studied and practiced English as much as possible until I finally learned it.

My immigrant status marked my schooling experience. I was always afraid to speak for fear that I would mispronounce words or say incoherent statements. This followed me into high school where I studied arduously but rarely spoke. Every time I did, my heart would raise and beat as fast as a drum and I could feel myself turning red until the moment passed. Little did I know that I would turn into a public speaker in just a matter of one year. Toward the second part of my freshman year in high school, I learned about the Centro Valle Bajo. I was asked to have a written piece featured in the Valle Bajo journal. What? Feature my story, something so personal? I was nervous, hesitant and afraid, but I said yes. I was scared about the kind of response I would get from my peers since the story was about my experience as an immigrant and my longing for the place I once knew as home. To my surprise, there was a lot of positive feedback

from students and teachers. They could relate to the story and the feelings of loss either on a personal level or through the experiences of a family member given the rooted history of immigration among families in our communities. This was my first experience with the work of this organization. It was so empowering to be able to be public about my story instead of running and hiding from it–like I had always done. It was then that I started to listen closely to my mother's voice within me about being proud of who I was, about the idea that it didn't matter how poor I was, that I was the same as everyone else and that people are valuable for who they are and the values they hold, not for how much money they have. As I write this, I feel embarrassed that I once felt ashamed of my family and me because we were poor and did not speak English. Why didn't I always listen to my mother's voice and not to the outside forces?

At the CVB I learned to claim my story and my identity and to use it as an asset not a deficit. This consciousness gave me even greater impetus to aim high and pursue the education that my mother had always dreamed of for her children–after all, that is why she left her own family and moved to a foreign country that still remains alien to her. In 1999, encouraged by the CVB's staff members, I participated in a college visitation trip to Ivy League schools such as Yale and Columbia. This trip completely changed my mentality about what type of education I could pursue. After this, there were no limits, despite the fact that I was an undocumented student. This experience and its impact on my outlook on education truly taught me the importance of the exposure to new experiences.

Indeed, college proved to be exactly that. A new world revealed, on so many levels, by simple exposure. By being with and interacting with people from multiple

backgrounds in terms of race, class, and gender I experienced tremendous growth both mentally and emotionally. I remember learning about race, class, power, and oppression; things became clearer. Many things I had experienced until then began to make sense. I was able to look at education then with a critical eye, not just as an ultimate goal to reach for, like I had always thought about it. I reminded myself constantly of the dangers of being caught in academia and getting "lost." This awakening reminded me of the need to use my talents and skills to serve others and not allow myself to be sucked into corporate/mainstream America. These thoughts, coupled with the connection and love for my community that was fostered through the CVB's work, motivated me to return home upon graduation from a university in Central Texas in 2005.

Three months after returning home I found employment as an organizer at La Union del Pueblo Entero (LUPE) in San Juan, TX. I quickly embarked on a profound journey working with and helping to organize extremely marginalized communities in the *colonias* of Hidalgo County. I worked with families who were eager to learn how they could improve the quality of life for their families and their communities. We organized together to fight for installment of public lighting in *colonias*, placing street signs to help ambulances reach homes in cases of emergency, petitioned the county for construction of public parks in *colonias* so that children had healthy spaces to play in rather than on the streets, and many other things. I was always inspired by the commitment that people made to this work. People showed up to weekly meetings after long days of work and took time off work when they needed to meet with an elected official to petition for change. My work with these communities helped to reinforce my passion for social justice. Some of the things we fought for were absurd. County dollars are allocated for

specific services in the *colonias*, but if people don't demand these, elected officials will conveniently forget to extend basic services. I saw first-hand the abuse of power, and even though I had grown up in a very humble family-the poverty I saw in the *colonias* was greater than I remembered. I remember thinking, why do college and church groups go abroad to help "needy" communities? We have much work to do in our own backyard.

In 2008 I transitioned to work as a program director at the CVB. It was the perfect job! What a better way to spend my time than to work with youth from my community and to serve as a mentor and role model for youth in the community that raised me. Since then, I have been working with high school students not only to apply to college and get into college but most importantly to have them learn about themselves, their families, and, their communities as a way for them to understand who they are, where they come from, and where they are going.

In the middle of this journey, I was blessed with the joy of becoming a mother. I now have a daughter who is 18 months old and who we have named Itzel. Her birth has been transformative for me in so many ways. As it relates to my work, Itzel reminds me everyday of why I do the work that I do. When I feel challenged and question whether or not I should be in this field, she reminds me of the need to create a better world, a better place for her to grow up in!

Summary

The anthropological life maps represent my research partners' and my journey of salient experiences lived within various contexts: family, school, church, work, and community; they speak to self as the unit of analysis through which we made/make sense of these critical moments. Underlying each life map, there is a rumbling consciousness

that we daily listen to and act upon, an ever-present consciousness that provokes a motivational force that informs a deliberate choice to discern our relationships to self, others, and world.

Four significant threads that are evident throughout each of the life maps include: 1) access to educational settings with an understanding of the potential inherent within these settings to promote critical awareness, independence, and interdependence; 2) opportunities to experience diverse settings, languages, cultures, ideas, and ways of knowing that challenge what we think we know and expand our capacity to create; 3) outlets that are generative and give voice to suffering, injustice, and trauma, as well as to hope, possibility, and action; and 4) making sense of our home ontology and family history and how it influences and impacts theory and practice. There are several ways in which these threads can be further unpacked and made sense of as they apply to our findings and their implications for our work. Of significance to their analysis, is the work of McClelland (1961). In his text, The Achieving Society, McClelland identifies and describes three types of motivational need. These are: achievement motivation, authority/power motivation, and affiliation motivation. The achievement-motivated person seeks achievement, attainment of realistic but challenging goals, and advancement in the job. There is a strong need for feedback as to achievement and progress, and a need for a sense of accomplishment. The authority-motivated person produces a need to be influential, effective and to make an impact. There is a strong need to lead and for their ideas to prevail. There is also motivation and need towards increasing personal status and prestige. Finally, the affiliation-motivated person has a need for friendly relationships and is motivated towards interaction with other people. The affiliation

driver produces motivation and need to be liked and held in popular regard. These people are team players. These needs are found to varying degrees in all workers and managers, and this mix of motivational needs characterizes a person's or manager's style and behavior, both in terms of being motivated, and in the management and motivation others.

These threads, along with the threads presented in the following chapter, as well our study's research questions will be further explored in *Chapter V*, our final chapter, to present conclusions, implications, and recommendations for theory and practice within institutions and organizations committed to learning, teaching, and leading for sustainable change.

Questions for the Reader to Consider

- What do I understand about the nature of the learning space within my institution or organization?
- How do I make sense of my personal and professional agency within hierarchically structured institutions and organizations?
- How do I manifest critical consciousness within the spaces in which I live and serve?

CHAPTER IV

SENSE MAKING, PROBLEM POSING, AND KNOWLEDGE CREATION

Our qualitative study explores the development of critical consciousness and its manifestation within spaces for learning, teaching, and leading. Our goal was to embark on a journey that would initiate at the exploration of self for each of my research partners and me and explore tenets originating from self that contributed to a heightened sense of critical awareness. My selected research partners were three PK-12 educational leaders, and two non-profit organization community leaders, each with strong ties to the development of youth, teachers, and educational leaders. Each was selected because of their demonstrated commitment to critical self-reflection, in addition to their work within educational settings that is indicative of their application of a social constructivist theory.

In the previous chapter, the tenets born of a profound understanding of self, not only influenced how each of us made sense of our realities, but on a wider scope, how these tenets influenced how we acted within and upon our realities. This understanding and sense making never gave indication of having arrived at critical consciousness, much less at absolute answers to any of the issues and challenges faced. Rather, it cultivated the soils in which each of us was rooted within the various communities in which we were/are members. Multiple factors, such as time, ruptured relationships, and stagnant or uncaring environments, among others, impacted our continued membership in some of these communities. Nevertheless, as is evidenced in our preceding anthropological life

maps and the following dialogue, we were each afforded insights, opportunities for discernment, and relationships that helped us embrace these experiences, and make sense of them and grow, rather than be debilitated by them. It was not a matter of forgetting, but of reclaiming.

In this chapter, research findings are presented through a dialogical approach. I borrow from Freire (1970) who asserted,

> Human existence cannot be silent, nor can it be nourished by false words, but only by true words, with which men and women transform the world. To exist, humanly, is to name the world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namers as a problem and requires of them a new meaning. Human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection. (p. 88)

As such, and guided by our study's conceptual framework, including the concepts of critical awareness of self, critical consciousness and its impact on how we think, feel, and act within micro contexts, and mindfulness and how it factors in on community change, we created a textual representation of a virtual dialogue circle among my research partners. This dialogue circle evidences that which had previously been named by my research partners and me as community, learning, teaching, leading, and relationship, among others, and the fantastic opportunity to rename them in light of our contributions to the learning, and as impetus to work for transformative change.

Each selection, comprising a key ingredient in the virtual dialogue, was identified from my research partners' individual interview transcriptions. All transcriptions were mined for salient elements that most exemplified these concepts, and then organized

according to concept. Transcription selections were largely left unaltered, save for transitional phrases that promoted the feel of an authentic dialogue, as well as some attentions to grammar usage to maximize comprehension.

Dialogue Circle

Figure 4.1. Sample setting for virtual dialogue circle.

Figure 4.1 depicts the layout of the space we occupied at the Highlander Center for Research and Development in New Market, Tennessee in the fall of 2011 and serves as a visual representation for the reader of the setting in which my research partners' dialogue circle took place. On this particular occasion, I was invited, as part of the work of the Community Learning Exchange, to contribute to the conversation on changing today's narrative on education. The convening brought together divergent ideologies, experiences, and perspectives from youth, educational leaders, teachers, higher education faculty, community organizers, and journalists. The layout invited the utilization of dialogue circles that facilitated engagement and generated learning. Moreover, it fostered a space that conveyed the message that openness, collaboration, critical questioning, and

story would be honored, embraced, and cared for as means to uncovering blindspots, acknowledging assumptions, growing ideas, and promoting our work independently and interdependently (Bohm, 2004; Hughes, 2004). In much the same fashion as our morning gatherings at Highlander, my research partners convened on an early Saturday morning to contribute to each others growth and development, as well as their own.

Virtual Dialogue

Opening

MONICA: Good morning everyone and thank you all for so generously offering of your time, wisdom, and story to contribute to our dialogue this morning. If we all want to take a seat, we borrowed a few rocking chairs so we can sit comfortably in each other's company. First of all, thank you all for agreeing to share your interview transcriptions and anthropological life maps with one another. I think the stories of personal and professional experiences that all of you participated helped give each of us a more profound understanding of the other. Not only that, but I also believe that the insights gleaned from our stories will help us engage in a more generative dialogue this morning.

As some of you may have noticed, I have with me a postcard. We'll use it as our talking piece this morning. It serves as a reminder that we are here to share as much as we are here to listen to one another. So, as we are each compelled to offer our thoughts and ideas, we'll pass the card to one another. The person that holds the postcard has the floor and is invited to share openly without fear or anticipation that he or she will be interrupted. Now, I just want to share one more thing before we begin that I think is important in order to open up the space in a good way. As I may have mentioned to some

of you during your individual interviews, my work with the Community Learning Exchange strengthened my understanding of the potential for knowledge creation as a result of dialogue circles. In my first experiences with the organization, I was intrigued by the attention to the significance placed on the talking piece. It wasn't as simple as one might consider a bookmark to hold the space of the text for a reader. It was an artifact that in its symbolism, held the space for the story, wisdom, and experiences of a community member to share within his or her community. It spoke to an indigenous knowledge rooted in the interconnectedness of people, place, and nature, so often unacknowledged or dismissed as unimportant. Yet it is precisely in the acknowledgement and validation of this interconnectedness that the potential for transformative change resides (Deloria Jr., 1973; Mankiller & Wallis, 1993). To this end, this postcard depicts a fresco painted by Mexican muralist José Clemente Orozco. And though it's of personal significance, I do believe it connects well to our learning together. Its significance is twofold. One, the work of José Clemente Orozco, which so powerfully illustrates social and political injustice and unrest, propelled my thoughts to a more profound awareness of systems and structures during my undergraduate career. And two, this particular work, depicts Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, Mexican priest and leader of Mexico's war for independence. Known as the Father of Mexico's Independence, he lived his life challenging oppressive power structures. I thought it was an appropriate contribution.

So, this is how we'll proceed. I will pose a question or two to spur the dialogue and will, on occasion, take opportunities to connect story and experiences to some of the

literature that I have accessed over the course of our exploration on the development of critical consciousness. Let's start by quickly introducing ourselves.

GRACE: My name is Grace and I'm a high school assistant principal. I've been in educational leadership for about five years, and in education for roughly 12 years.

MARTA: I'm Marta. I live in south Texas in a small town by the name of Monte Alto, I am part of a non-profit organization that works with high school students, primarily, and community members, increasing the college-going culture and the number of students going in to higher education, and working to improve the community in whatever way that may be.

JOSEPH: May name is Joseph. I live in Seattle. I run an organization called The Center for Leadership Transformation, it's a non-profit focused on leadership and community building. And, I've been doing a lot of national leadership work. That's how I met Marta and Mónica. First through the Kellogg Foundation and later through the Community Learning Exchange, as Mónica mentioned earlier, where we bring communities together to learn from each other what works for creating just and inclusive communities in each of their areas.

SAMUEL: Good morning everyone. My name is Samuel. I'm a middle school assistant principal.

CHRISTOPHER: And I'm Christopher. I'm a first year principal of an elementary school.

MONICA: Thanks to all of you again. To begin our dialogue today, if you will just take a moment to reflect on your life map and provide us something that may not have been evident or presented, that contributed to your development of awareness of self,

and then describe if and how that may have propelled you into the work that you do now within educational settings.

Critical Awareness of Self

CHRISTOPHER: I know that I've always been aware of my desire to work with people and teach. I saw that modeled by my father who has been doing that in our community for almost forty years. Seeing his work in community was a catalyst for me to want to do the same. A lot of people look up to my dad; a lot of people have respect for him. He didn't go to high school; he didn't go to college, but I have seen all the positive things that he has done and I wanted to do something like that. I remember my dad talking to my friends and me about how people were going to treat us as we treated them. He would tell us that when you're nice to people, when you're respectful to people, when you care for people and they know you care for them, they're going to treat you well. That's always been instilled in me.

MARTA: My upbringing was also critical Christopher. But for me, it was my mom. I always remember her talking to me about how it was really important for me to get an education. I feel that if I hadn't had formal schooling, I wouldn't be where I am professionally today. By the same token, I did also grow up to value, very much so, the education that my mom gave me. This education was separate, I would say, from the school setting. This education taught me values and the important things that I should give value to in life. That has had a huge influence on me because it really shaped me to be the kind of educator and the kind of community-minded leader that I am today, thinking about the well being of others and not just mine. Growing up, I remember wanting to be a professional, but not just so that I could make money and do well for

myself, but I always thought about how that would impact my family and siblings. And also what it could mean for others in my community, taking into account that I come from a community that is typically described as a disadvantaged community where vulnerable children of families live. Many people saw a lot of talent in me, and I was lucky enough that people voiced that to me; I always felt like I had an obligation and a commitment to give back to my community.

SAMUEL: I agree. My family was very important in my own development as well. I know that when I left to attend higher education, it was with a certain awareness of the strength of community, especially my family community. We were a pretty large family and all lived within the same community. That awareness became more profound as I got older and began to realize that all these things had an impact on me. It took many years for me to develop the kind of awareness that motivates you to always be putting things together and going back to certain things and making sense of them. For me, part of it was facilitated by me being an educator, another part from reflecting on my own family setting, thinking about the places they are at now, and making sense about why their journey was different than mine. I now understand that the nature and structure of the educational opportunities that were there for me, was a large part of it. I was exposed to programs and people that they didn't have the opportunity to be exposed to.

GRACE: Samuel, I'm struck by your emphasis on developing a practice of critical reflection to help you make sense of things. For me, critical reflection is so important, not only professionally, but personally as well. In recent years, I've found that for milestones such as birthdays, I don't want gifts or parties, I just want to meditate and think about where I'm going, where I am, and where I've been. Watching my daughters

grow up, I see bits and pieces of me; looking at myself as a parent, I see bits and pieces of my mom, and then looking at my youngest, who is three years old now, I see my great grandmother, tons of personality that I remember from my great grandmother! That's the place where I am now. I continuously reflect and assess or reflect and adjust my own spiritual being. I've found that when I become more aware of who I am as a person and how I think and function, it helps me better deal with, and actually, be more empathetic and compassionate in my daily way of being. I think that's the biggest part for me, and something that guides my work. I try to be in tune with what that lifeline and legacy mean.

JOSEPH: I've always tended to that development as well and agree with Samuel about the awareness becoming more profound as we get older. A few years ago, I was doing some reflection about our work at the Center, and I had been reading a Catholic theologian, Nouwen I believe. He was talking about inner space in the sense of a group, this notion that the space within us and the space between us is essentially the same space. So, I've reflected on that the last few years. I absolutely believe that this is true. I think a lot about, what is the inner space and all the things that are going on that aren't expressed, but that show up nonetheless. If we're feeling brokenness inside, it will manifest itself in the way we engage in the world. And, the brokenness might have come from the brokenness exterior and is always flowing back and forth. I think that when we acknowledge that it's the same space, and we hold it that way, then we tend to it differently. We realize that it matters, because whatever is out there impacts us. And whatever is in us comes out and impacts others. It's really caused me to think on inner reflection and helping people heal and make sense of whatever is going on, whether we

feel dissonance, or whole, to make sure that it can come up in a good way, not a forced way. That's been a gift to me, to believe that the space within us and the space between us is the same space. I think that's a part of my consciousness.

Discussion. MONICA: If you'll allow me build on that concept Joseph, and then I'll include a few other critical components that were mentioned in the last few minutes before we move on to our next questions. The concept that, the space between us and the space inside us is the same space, makes me question the importance of doing the complex work of understanding and acknowledging our biases and assumptions. Bohm (2004) posits that it is very possible to suspend our assumptions when in dialogue, and that without the capacity or willing to do so, there cannot be true dialogue, the generative process sours, as our assumptions occupy the spaces of learning and impede our own growth and development.

And your point resonates Joseph as I consider the practice of critical reflection that Samuel and Grace discussed earlier in the conversation. There's an intriguing quote by Mezirow (1990) on this degree of reflection. He asserted that, "we learn differently when we are learning to perform than when we are learning to understand what is being communicated to us" (p. 1). Samuel, you illustrate this beautifully when you described your desire to make sense of how your family community impacted your sense of self. The process of understanding self was guided by your search for meaning. And Grace, you widened the scope by promoting the family community to encompass past generations and how they live on and continue to impact our way of being, not only its impact, but also our responsibility to those legacies and lifelines within the work that we do now (Ah Nee-Benham, 2010, 1998).

Finally, I highlight the concept of *educación* that Christopher and Marta mentioned in their contributions on the knowledge that their father and mother, respectively, inculcated in them. Marta, you discussed the importance that your formal schooling played in your learning, but also quite deliberately made the distinction between formal schooling and the education your mother provided you. And Christopher, you mentioned the absence of formal schooling in your father's experience, but much the same as Marta, your emphasis was on the education he provided you regardless of his formal schooling preparation. This is key, because it problematizes who we define to be educators and also what we define as education. The values, wisdom, advice, and stories often rooted in familial structures are critical components of knowledge creation and sense making (Elenes, González, Delgado Bernal, & Villenas, 2001; Stanton Salazar, 2001; Villenas, 1996). These are all very significant contributions. Thank you.

Continuing the dialogue, we now focus on critical awareness and its manifestations within how we think, feel, and/or act as educational and community leaders. How would you describe any contributions you may feel critical awareness plays within these three contexts?

Critical Consciousness

How we think. SAMUEL: I think this will connect with the question, especially in terms of how I think, and it builds on Grace's last comment. You mention reflecting on your spiritual being. For me, my sense of responsibility to a greater good started with formal religion, and as my understanding got better, it evolved into a connectedness to humanity, and not just pigeonholing myself to think in one way. There's a need to be more humane. Maybe some of the challenges that formal religion raised as far as my

own personal life, and the imbalances that were there, helped me shift into this concept of doing the greater good. This definitely goes back to community for me. It goes back to society and trying to move everyone to a place where they're happy and excited about life.

GRACE: Thanks Samuel. I know the power it has had in my work, especially in building relationships. I can't say that biases can ever be completely erased, but when I have a deeper relationship with someone, the biases mean less. In The Four Agreements by Miguel Ruiz, one of his agreements is not to take anything personally, and to understand that when people act, it may have nothing to do with you in particular. When we acknowledge this and we understand it, it changes how we respond. I've shared it with teachers. You know, when you're in conflict with a student, whether looking for a hall pass or and ID, or it's a Monday, you have a tenth of a second to completely change your relationship with that student for the rest of your life. Students are going to do what they do because they have their own stuff going on. We have to decide about our response. If students don't know that we see them as who they are, and love and embrace whatever that may be, then they don't care that we say we care. They don't care what we know. If they feel they don't exist for us, then there's no reason to engage.

MARTA: That's so true! Unfortunately, students are often taught to think that they don't have a voice or that their voice doesn't matter. A lot of times, as educators and as adults, we don't give students enough credit for what they know and what they see and how they understand it. But, sociopolitical factors are on students' radar all the time. Students see it on a daily basis. While I think a lot of the times they don't have a full understanding of how politics and those kinds of factors are at play, I often hear students

talking about how school boards and city boards, as they see it, are not making the right decisions. They talk about how it impacts their school negatively. For example, our school has recently been placed under AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress) probation, because not enough students met the testing standards for the state exam. Our school was assigned a State auditor who watches pretty much every step and move that the school makes in order to improve the scores. The auditor is also working with the school board, because in past history, there have been "political favors" in terms of school positions, hiring school personnel. It's also been shown, in the past, that the school board managed the budget very poorly. All of this information has come out over the last couple of years and students are aware of it. They understand that these are politics at play that impact them very directly. So, for me as an educator, it's critical that I acknowledge and validate that students understand and that they know what's happening.

SAMUEL: Well, you know that was one of the questions I think we were all asked at one point or another, whether it's possible to develop critical awareness in youth. Basically, that's what I hear you describing Marta, a certain level of awareness from students.

MARTA: Absolutely.

SAMUEL: While I do think youth are capable of reaching a certain level of critical awareness, I also believe that there are developmental patterns that influence it. There would have to be some studying involved, but it is very possible at a younger age, at elementary, junior high. I think that a young mind can be exposed to this. Case in point, when I was working as a classroom math teacher and making students aware of the different structures and systems that affect them, intuitively, students wanted to know

why they had to negotiate the systems in a different way. In order for them to want to take on that challenge, they needed to know why. If not, they would have been doing so aimlessly and without reason. We had many conversations about these realities. But, working with different levels of students, it seems that their thought process, their exposure, the amount that they were willing to engage in, and the amount that they were willing to do, changed as they got older, or as they matured.

JOSEPH: It's interesting, because as we talk about critical consciousness, we haven't really defined it. In a lot of ways, I'm defining it as having a sense of self and relationship to other, and how the world works to the benefit or detriment of others. I think I'm more aware of a critical consciousness when it's not there as opposed to when it is there. I love to see it in others when they have encountered someone in an interaction who initially was a stereotype to them and then they see the person in them. All of a sudden, everything that they knew has to be rethought, because they can't simply dismiss or describe somebody as this one narrow thing. I love that moment of positive encounter where people are able to counter their own thinking.

How we feel. GRACE: I feel the same way. You can sense when it's not part of the conversation, and surely when there are stereotypes present that interfere with the learning. I've been in meetings, and one in particular recently where part of me wanted to say, "Do you not see me? Do you not hear my voice?" And another part of me wanted to say, "Maybe you hear my voice and you ignore it because of the skin color that it's attached to." And sometimes I just want to give up, because I remember a time when I was working with students as a classroom teacher. This was never an issue. I could just teach English, and we could talk about this writer or that writer and it was never an issue.

I remember coming back to my office after that meeting; I began packing up my stuff. This has been a consistent struggle but on that day, I just wanted to go home. Then, I looked at the picture of my mom and I thought, "She would blow up if she knew I was in here trying to go home because I met some resistance!" She would be saying, "I don't care. If I am right and I believe in my heart that I'm right, then I'll stand up before God and everybody and fight like nobody's business!" This manifests itself, more so in my work, my ability to stand, never forgetting my purpose here, and realizing that my purpose here is going to cause me to have to fight some, and that there are students out there that need me to fight for them, who don't even know I'm fighting for them. They need it. There families need it. They deserve it. That's one of the ways my past becomes real to me.

CHRISTOPHER: I would never stop fighting, not for students, not for families, but to be honest, I feel like with all the factors contributing to education, we just need to clean the slate and begin rebuilding from the ground up. There are so many barriers in the system that hinder any big, progressive changes, even just changing what our school buildings look like! I keep thinking that it would make much more sense if we just had the physical space make sense. Our campus is old and it doesn't make any sense for students and for creating optimal learning environments. We also need to take a look at how decisions are made. Right now, decisions are made up top and everyone else below has to figure out, "How do I work around this decision to not only do what I think is best, but also not get fired at the same time?" There's always this constant push and pull of what's worth taking a risk and fighting for and what's going to be too much. I'll give you an example. Right now, there is no real bilingual education program or any guidance

on what that might look like, what the philosophy is. Yet, because of the present, political climate, there's not a lot of room to ask questions and provide resources. Sure you want to change things, but is simply throwing an idea out, going to get you a pink slip?[9] There needs to be greater freedom for local schools to make decisions.

SAMUEL: You mention all the factors that contribute to education. As it stands, I would say that there are so many factors that I could sit here and list them for days and I still wouldn't list them all! I think for many of us in this room, one of the greatest political factors we face is a district's benchmark testing; the results from those can make or break you. They can allow you to do some things and then they can hinder you from doing others. If the results are not favorable, then guess what, people that are in positions of authority come in and start dictating how certain things will be done. But in the midst of all that you still need to be able to find ways to negotiate around the bureaucracy and help people. Because there are a lot of people that rely on schools to help build capacity, but it isn't just about the books, though it may seem like that when looking in from the outside.

CHRISTOPHER: Not to dismiss the current remarks, but Samuel, I was thinking about your earlier comments on the developing critical awareness in youth. That piece of their willingness to engage is key. And both of us know, as campus leaders, we can either have a positive or negative influence on students in terms of how they feel about school and how they feel about life in general, there outlook on whether people care about them or not. That's was one of the reasons I was interested in coming from a middle school campus to an elementary campus. In middle school, I saw how students were coming from elementary school with certain beliefs or thoughts already engrained

[9] Pink slip is utilized as a metaphor indicating the termination of a position or employment.

in them. Some students hate school by the time they are in sixth grade and that's not good.

GRACE: I feel like just in the first few minutes of this dialogue, we have already hit on so many factors that influence our own critical awareness. Sometimes I feel very alone in this position, in education all together, and certainly in administration. Even when I go to conferences, in a room of 150, there are maybe one or two African American women. That is why it was so important that I include those firsts for my family in my life map. Those firsts never came without opposition, and they never came without going above and beyond what was expected. They still don't. As I detailed in my life map, my dad was a mechanic and he always kept really good running cars around the house. Part of it was because of a tragic event in which his mom fell on a rock, severely hitting her head. She began hemorrhaging, but they didn't have a car to get her to the hospital. And when they finally got her to the hospital, the only thing the doctor could say was, "Well, if you had gotten her here 30 minutes ago, she would be OK." So, we always kept good running cars around the house. I also distinctly remember that my dad would always save up before he bought a car, but not to buy the car. He would save up, because as the only African American business owner in town, his business would go down for a few months every time he drove up in a new car. He prompted us almost to be afraid of being in a leadership role, or at minimum to be prepared to receive the backlash.

JOSEPH: Fear is a powerful sentiment Grace. And to be honest, I would say that for me a lot of my life has been around dealing with fear. I live with this fear that something will happen. The agency will close. I won't be able to do this work. We'll

run out of money. There was a point in my life when my dad who was doing pretty well, lost everything in a year and threw us all for a tailspin, changing the whole trajectory of our life. So, I think I've always lived with that uncertainty and feeling that you can be poor one day, you can have money one day, and then you can be poor again. That unsettles me. It's below the surface and people don't see it, but I've really dealt with that my whole adult life. I would say it's only the last couple of years that I'm learning to hold that in a better balance. Our board chair is a really nice and amazing man. He was reading this book and one of the questions was, "What would we do if we were not afraid?" I've been thinking a lot lately about how I would live my life if I were not afraid. What could we do if we were not afraid? Fear holds people back and all our good stuff can be bottled up.

How we act. CHRISTOPHER: A lot of times it comes down to acting despite being afraid or unsure of the next steps. I don't know if any of you recall, but in my life map I include three almost debilitating traumas that I suffered during my senior year in high school with my sister and her friends being murdered, having an injury that ended some of the things that I wanted to do in college with sports, and then our house burning down. But, many positive things came from that. The recent, local fires that destroyed so many homes reminded me of this. Despite the tragedy, you heard a lot of people talking about the positive things. People demonstrated how much they really do care and want to help people in need. Those three events were probably the most impactful in reaching an understanding that I wanted to serve other people. Even though at 17 I was involved in things that I know I shouldn't have been, soon after, I reached a point where I

was able to acknowledge and say, "This is who I say I want to be and I have to start living that."

JOSEPH: You know Christopher, I recall reading in one of your interview transcriptions how your community of support, your coach in particular, really helped you through those terrible tragedies. That really hit home for me because of my work now in community. My sense of the power of community deepened when I began consulting with the Center. Before I knew it, they'd asked me to come in and work full-time. I'd come in just to help them be more effective, and ended up being transformed by their work and ultimately becoming the executive director. We're always doing work in community, but I've got deep into it, particularly in the last 12 years. If you think of being a university administrator or a faculty member or an educator, and then doing this out in the community, so often those worlds are very separate. I found a way to blend them, but it wasn't an intentional thing. I didn't set out saying, "I want to be engaged in community change and run national work around leadership." In a way, I would say whenever I was restless and looking for something else, I followed my restlessness to find a place where I felt I could really be myself and be fully engaged with others. So, it's been more of a journey of discovery to find my relationship to both education and community and I've just done it in a different way with a foot on both sides of the street.

GRACE: I'd like to build on that Joseph, that feeling of restlessness. Though, I don't know that it was necessarily restlessness for me. Never in my life did I want to be principal of any school. I wanted none of that. For me, I think it became more of a sense of obligation. Once I began teaching, I began witnessing the ways in which some principals interacted with students and with teachers. I also began to understand what

school was like for students. It's a lot of stress! Students would come to my room and just pour out all of their concerns. They would often confide how everything was so boring and things didn't seem fair. Oftentimes, principals would take the side of the teachers, but not because the teachers were right in how they were handling issues with students, but simply because they were teachers. So, I thought, "Well, that's not cool." Around the same time, the principal began promoting the idea of me pursuing school administration. He began volunteering me for district-wide committees. Gradually, I became more involved and he continued to insist, though I was still sure that I did not want to pursue the principalship. I wasn't ready. Then one day, in a conversation with a friend, I said, "You know what, I think this is just where life is taking me. I think this is my new calling." And so, I never did coach like I wanted to. And a lot of times I will sit back and think, "Wow, I should just be coaching right now. I don't want to do this." And at the same time, I feel like this is a calling that has been put in my life, and I enjoy what I do.

CHRISTOPHER: The same thing happened to me Grace. It was a decision that was really prompted by what I was witnessing. I think if you had talked to me six years ago, I would have told you that I would be a teacher forever. That was my goal. I never thought I would go into educational leadership. And although things went pretty well in my first year of teaching, there were some things that jumped out at me that I didn't agree with. I began asking why we did things a certain way, and why we treated certain students certain ways. I loved my school, but I didn't feel comfortable with some things. I began graduate school in my second year as a teacher. Soon, my principal asked me if I was interested in going into administration, and becoming an instructional administrator.

The position offered an opportunity to make decisions on the curriculum, the instruction, and the hiring of staff. I wanted to continue teaching, but in the back of my mind, I kept hearing, "You can make changes that you're interested in making." So, I went ahead and I accepted the opportunity. That's where it started for me.

SAMUEL: Much the same as for Christopher and Grace, for me there was a calling to be an educator. I had that calling at a younger age. In some ways, I've always had this need to help those who I knew struggled in an academic setting. Initially, when I would reflect on my role as an educator, it was more from an academic perspective. As I got better at the craft of teaching, then there was more of, "What else can I do to try to help those that I'm working with, do better?" And, as I got older and started understanding the impact that education can have on self, society, community, etc., then what I envisioned about what I wanted to do and what I was willing to do in education, drastically changed. It took years to develop that deep awareness. It was a process, and it took just even reflecting within my own family setting to realize that there are some things that go on, even within these organizations, that we think are "good" but that really aren't that good for all. It became a place to pursue some justice for those that aren't always able to access different opportunities.

CHRISTOPHER: I don't mean to go off on a tangent here, but that's precisely why hiring is critical when you're trying to make those changes and pursue justice, as Samuel puts it. I hired five people this summer and that was my thinking. I get one shot at this! I looked at their belief systems, tried to get deep into that, and at the same time, looked at content knowledge and knowledge of instruction and how students learn, how they relate to students, how they feel about working with parents, how they feel about

working with other people collaboratively. If I can be at a school for a number of years and build a staff that is reflective of what we think is best for students and that works together in building that knowledge and live it, that would be a great change.

JOSEPH: Well, if it was a tangent, it was an important one, and I want to build on that Christopher, because I think that hiring people that have that openness is really critical. I think for all of you in very responsible leadership positions, the culture you create can allow for people to continue opening up or it can shut it down. I'll give you an example. My wife teaches second grade. She's had several principals and some of the principals have come in and the conversations are very stoic in terms of her own teaching and how she works with students. It's a very formulaic kind of evaluation conversation. But, currently, she has a principal who is just good at talking as a human being. Don't get me wrong, he has the educational concepts, but the human being part is also part of that and not separate and in the background. The way that you set up a culture that makes it OK for people to talk about what's in their head, even the parts that are undeveloped and kind of fuzzy, really makes a huge difference! So, I think hiring well and then creating that culture is critical, and it sounds like each of you is really highly skilled at that.

SAMUEL: And, I think, part of that culture needs to be creating an understanding that we need to help students both academically and socially. Until certain structures change, students have to find a way to negotiate themselves through the current systems to be successful. The reality is that there are social patterns that need to be displayed for you to exist in that world, because if they're not there, people are not going to want to deal with you. As a classroom teacher, my students and I focused on how to find

resources and how to access those resources. It became more about helping a student find and make their way through life, when before it had just been about helping them find and make their way through the course. There was a significant shift.

MARTA: I just want to jump in here right quick, and correct me if I'm assuming too much, but listening to the conversation, it seems that for each of us, it's about practicing what we say. I know that for me, a lot comes down to whether or not you practice what you say. I feel like I've done my work and I've lived my life in a way that is right with my own personal values. I think that by doing that, I've influenced a lot of people in my community. That may sound very arrogant, but I don't mean it to sound like that in any way. I really believe that when I've lived the way I've lived and I've worked the way I've worked, with passion and with true concern and with genuineness, people have followed. I would say that through the leadership I've exhibited, both within my own family and then within my circle of friends, and then in my job, people have seen the passion, concern, and genuineness. For example, and connecting to what Samuel was just describing about helping students navigate certain systems, when I used to work at a community organization organizing right out of college, though it wasn't part of my work assignment, I mentored many students one-on-one, especially those that were undocumented about pursuing higher education. Looking back now, a lot of them are going to college or have graduated from college. I would like to think that it's motivated others to think of the kinds of possibilities that exist for communities.

Discussion. MONICA: I must apologize, I should have mentioned it at the beginning, but I'm sure you all have concluded by observing me. I've been quickly jotting down insights as I listen to your experiences and reflections on each other's

contributions. It helps me remember key points so that I can more readily share with you. First of all, there was a subtle, but distinguishable shift from critical awareness at the micro level of self, to one that encompasses critical awareness at organizational and community levels. Three common threads that were evidenced for me included, and I'll discuss them at greater length in just a moment. But the first was an understanding of the enduring self as proposed by Spindler and Spindler (2000); the second one was the concept of relationship building, and I'll connect this to Block's (2008) Community: The Structure of Belonging; and the third thread included service to humanity and doing the public good.

This last thread, brought to mind González's and Padilla's (2008) *Doing the Public Good* and a recent article I read by Efron (2005) titled, Light in the Midst of Darkness. I reflect on, as Efron frames, the spiritual yearning of Janusz Korczak, to make meaning of the human's spirit desire to pursue a purposeful existence regardless of the profound despair and suffering that may be present. Just to provide some context, Korczak, a pediatrician in ghetto Warsaw during WWII, decided to focus his devotion and service to the education of poor and orphaned children. He did so with the conviction that education, and not medicine, would be the greatest force for the amelioration and eradication of the emotional and social problems faced by the children in the orphanages. Korczak's life journey epitomized a great understanding of the impermanence of life, to the point of renouncing his life to accompany the children in death rather than accept an offer of freedom. Efron describes a deliberate moral choice on the part of Korczak that was far from the easy thing to do, but that nevertheless was the right thing to do. All of you described the very real tension between your personal

life and your commitment in responding to the daily challenges faced by students, families, and communities alike (González & Padilla, 2008).

Now, as I'm trying to make sense of the first two threads, I'm sensing a need to speak to them in unison, and also to add that within these two threads, there exists the necessary component of knowing how to navigate highly politicized climates. Spindler and Spindler (2000) discussed the enduring self as being grounded in a person's early experiences and cultural heritage. They went on to problematize how that self can become endangered within mainstream systems in which students have to continually adapt or perish. Building on this, Block (2008) asserts that in order for communities to move beyond blame to possibility, it is imperative that we change the nature of the conversations we're having and through these build trusting relationships to move the work forward. Marta, what you discussed in terms of students understanding the climate of school policy, coupled with Samuel's discussion on helping students navigate systems that are not built to respond to their needs, is evidence of a need to one, understand how to identify and care for the enduring self, two, build the capacity of students, teachers, and community members alike, to negotiate systems and structures without sacrificing that self, and three, change the nature of the conversations we're having so that we can build trusting relationships and reach that understanding. A brief mention before continuing, Grace, your inclusion of first African American milestones reached by family members as your were growing up, and the strength of spirit that this provokes in you to this day exemplifies this importance. Thank you all, again, very powerful insights.

Now, we're going to widen the scope even more and begin to unpack some of the concepts that we've touched upon this morning and potentially introduce new ones. This

continuation is framed by our understanding of critical consciousness within three contexts: the nature of the learning spaces in which you each work, your understanding of what learning is, and what the actions, informed by a critical consciousness, look like. I've taken the liberty of writing these out on chart paper, so that you can reference if needed.

Mindfulness: Change In Community

Nature of learning space. SAMUEL: I know I've mentioned this before, but creating a learning space where students know they are cared for beyond academics is critical. Teachers can greatly influence that space. Teachers that are good for students care about them. They go above and beyond what is asked of them, and do it in such a way that is respectful and that helps the students understand that this person really cares about them. Often, students will go to these teachers with life struggles, situations where they just need someone to listen to them, tell them it's going to be OK. Even as adults, we go through trials where we fall down. Most of us have the skill set to get back up and keep moving forward, but a lot of times, we simply learn through experiences; we learn the hard way. Whereas, there are people out there that can help a student overcome that without it having to take so long that it either delays the recovery, or stifles it all together, eventually affecting their academic progress. Losing classroom time, academic time, is detrimental. We live in a society now where you need an education if you want to be able to do certain things with your life and not feel a prisoner to your knowledge or lack of knowledge. The people that I know are good for students can move them along and create that space.

JOSEPH: Samuel, I understand that our work settings each have their own challenges, and yours I imagine has greater pressures in terms of time and mandates, but creating that space is very important. In my experiences, what I like to do is to create a space where we open up to reflection together and dialogue together, where there's enough room for all of our stories and all of our viewpoints. I'm always encouraging people to show up, and I need to understand the processes that draw people out. It's usually creating some initial safety and sense of shared purpose, but then asking questions that invite people into dialogue with each other. But, doing it in a way that doesn't just have their expertise and their opinions come pouring out, because that tends to stifle the opportunity of getting to know each other in a great way. So, I always have this image about how do we open people up. What is it that we need individually? What is it that we need together? How do you set it up? How do you invite them to show up and get out of these stuck personas, these circular kinds of things we get into?

MARTA: I know there are many factors that influence PK-12 campuses, that we don't necessarily see in the organizations in which we work Joseph. But, in my experience of working both at the CVB and also teaching within the local high school, creating those spaces is important and I think it's very possible to foster them. I know that in the course we teach at the high school, we use dialogue circles to help challenge power dynamics and reach a greater awareness of self. In circle, we really encourage trust, openness, and questioning. Having everybody feel comfortable enough to ask or to share, and also feel like they can be their vulnerable selves, begins to inform and produce a different kind of knowledge that's not produced in traditional classrooms that often don't allow for conversation. The circle allows us not only to hear what somebody says,

but also to think about it from different perspectives. The circle really allows for people to say, "Oh, OK, I hadn't thought about that in that way." Or, "Is that how things really are? They're not this way?" For example, when we talk about the community with students and discuss what the community means to them, how they see it, and what their relationship is with the community, a lot of the times, the very first comments are, "Well, our community is really small," "Our community is poor," and "Our community is awful." That's what people have heard for the most part. But then you have students that have been grounded in different values say, "Well, don't you think that it's really good that we live in a place where our families all know each other, where we live close to cousins, and where we have a family support system? Isn't that a positive thing?" Then students begin to step back a little bit and say, "Well, you know, I hadn't thought about it that way, but it is." Those critical points of consciousness become, "Whose truth is it? Who's defining what my community is? Who is defining how I feel about it? Where have I gained those understandings from?" So, we begin to discuss the idea that, "Who says our community is poor?" Our community may be economically poor, but the relationships that exist in the community, the caring character is very alive. One of the biggest things that students talk about is when someone in the community is really sick or has a big need, there are huge barbeque plate sales showing the kind of commitment that people have. That's something that students see everyday, but they don't have the time to stop and think about it and understand what it really means. The dialogue circles help facilitate that understanding.

JOSEPH: Experiences in circle can be quite transformational Marta. If the group will bear with me, I'd like to give you an example. I was at the Kellogg Foundation for

their 75th anniversary and one of their divisions was having a big gathering and using dialogue circles. There was a man from the Yukon who had taught peace-making circles and restorative justice to one of the agencies that we were working with in Boston. And it just so happened that he and I were supposed to be in the same circle together. But, there was some confusion as to whether he was supposed to facilitate the circle or I was supposed to facilitate the circle. Only five days before that, we found out that my wife had cancer and so I was just really distracted and not feeling like I wanted to hold that space. So, this man said he would hold the space. It was mostly youth, high school and college students, a few adults sprinkled in. We started around the circle, and he opened it in a very interesting way. He said, "Does anyone have an opening they would like to share just to warm us up?" And this young man from Cleveland who had been in theatre said, "Well, when we do theatre production, what we do is we always pass a candle. And we just share all the things that are on our minds and then when we've gone around we blow out the candle and we watch the smoke go up, and we say that all of our worries go up so that we can be here together in this place." So, we started doing that. Some of the young people were saying, "Well, I just broke up with my girlfriend," or "I got a B instead of an A in class," or "I don't get along so well with mom and dad." My turn was soon approaching, but I was so used to, in these things, not being the center of attention, of being the facilitator. I'll ask the question, but I won't really answer it. So, I got this talking piece and I couldn't speak for like 45 seconds! It felt to me like a very long time. I was just holding and looking at the talking piece, and I kept repeating to myself, "OK, are you going to show up?" I just started talking and it was very emotional because all the stuff started pouring out as I was thinking of my wife at that moment. And it was

interesting, because as I was holding the talking piece huddled over it with my head lowered and eyes closed, and feeling this embrace, all of a sudden there were two women on either side of me actually embracing me. It was one of the first times that I had really shown up fully in the group. It was a very transformational moment. As an administrator you wouldn't do that. You couldn't. You're not supposed to do that. But now I'm in a place where it's not what you're supposed to do. It's what you're called to do.

Understanding learning. CHRISTOPHER: You know Joseph, when you mentioned that as a facilitator you ask the question, but don't answer it, and then experiencing the transformational moment of having fully shown up, I think goes back to what Marta was mentioning earlier about practicing what we say. Good learning, at least for me, is modeling for staff and teachers that it's OK to try new things. Even though it may not work out the way you wanted it to or the way you planned it out in your head, that you learn from these experiences, is important. I show people that I don't know everything and that we're going to work together to find solutions to issues that we face in our school. I may have an opinion, but being a part of that with teachers and showing them that we're learning together is something that is important to me. The same thing for students, I'm modeling for them all the time. They should see me in the library checking out books; they should see me in the classrooms working with them on their products and assignments. I expect the teachers to create very positive and engaging learning environments for our students. If that's not happening, then we're going to have to work together to build those lessons or that classroom climate.

GRACE: Having those expectations and then working together is important, and maybe now I'm going off on a tangent, but we hire all of these teachers and expect them

to know how to do their job, but then we bring outside consultants or an administrator in to tell them how to do their job and tell them how to think through their job. So, one of the things that we've been asking ourselves lately is, "How do we get teachers to think about how they think?" Not only to think about how they think about their practice, but also to provide the space and time for them to start those conversations on their own. And how do you do that without creating a venting session? One of the challenges that our school faces is our awareness of everything that comes into play in education now. There's this piece where we want our students and we want our teachers to develop greater levels of critical awareness, and then there's the elephant in the room, the testing, the questions of "who's going to college and who's not going to college." Is it OK if a student decides not to pursue postsecondary education? I think the greatest challenge is finding time to slow down our everyday activities and relieve ourselves of some of the pressures that are put on us by the State, District, etc. and move students. How do you find time to move teachers and students and administrators into this place of critical awareness?

JOSEPH: I think that's just a powerful way to phrase it. We have this world pressing on us that crowds out all of the opportunities to think about how we think and how we practice, and pushing it to the side. And this notion of creating space is so important. And I don't really have any magic answers other than really trying to find little creative openings. We have something we've started saying at the Center: It only takes a small opening to create the space for profound transformation. So, what are those small openings? That's part of why we created the Community Learning Exchange. It's to provide a space for people who are just so busy that they often can't create that space

for themselves. But, how do we do that in educational settings and push back against some of this incredible fault of testing on developing human beings? We have to begin to see how some of our realities are distorted, because the stories that are presented to us about our sociopolitical life together have become so distorted that it's very hard to follow it. I'd rather read the New York Times than the Wall Street Journal for instance. That gives me some awareness of how people are playing out policies together and how it will all work together. But, for me it's even more so at the experiential level. It's when I have a chance to be in gatherings where there are people with lots of different life perspectives, where we set up this respectful space, where people feel safe enough to tell their real stories that I feel fortunate to get inside what people really experience in community. And all the things you're never taught in school and all the real life that happens just starts weaving together and you see how systems work and don't work. You see how societies work and don't work, but it's really through the stories of people. And what's so different from the political realm; they're not rants. There could be anger; there could be pain. But, they're whole stories. They come from a very different place. It's not people trying to manage a message. It's people really telling their stories and talking. It constructs a whole different view of how things work.

MARTA: And capturing those stories and connecting them to learning is just so necessary to shed light on those distortions. Storytelling is another key component of our work with students. It was born out of the work that we did originally with CVB and researching the history in the community and seeing the kind of power that it had, not only in raising community pride, but also in getting students to think differently about their own history and about themselves. Thinking, "Well, you know, Mexicans were

more than laboring hands." Mexicans were people who made extremely valuable contributions to the making of these communities, to the making of South Texas, and beyond. Specifically, I remember one story where an elder talked about clearing the land, and a second one talked about laying down the pipework for the water system in his community. He said, –*Yo ayudé a fundar este pueblo* [I help found this town]. When students heard that, it really painted a different picture for them about the kind of role their parents and grandparents played, versus the traditional history that they had learned that whites were the ones in power and had the most influence, and whites were really the ones who built up the town, and we, the Mexican community let it go down the wrong pipe after they left. When they heard that, then they understood that the work that their parents and grandparents had done in helping to establish the community was just as important as the roles, if not more so, that some of the white landowners played in the community.

Anatomy of action. CHRISTOPHER: And going back to the discussion about age and developing critical awareness, we don't have to wait until middle school and high school. I'm at an elementary school and we're doing some things with students recently to raise their level of awareness of their capacities to make change. We're doing a peer mediation program. We trained 30 students to be peer mediators; students report their own issues, and they take care of it. We have some teachers though that feel like students aren't mature enough to understand what they're doing. My argument to them is that if we're not, as a campus, building core values at this age, then when is the right time? Do we wait until high school or middle school when they've experienced different things such as being bullied and have built this concept where they see the world as being

negative? High school is too late. Middle school is too late. We can be doing these things in elementary school and have students understand that they can talk about things and they can address who they want to be, what's right, what's wrong, and how they want to treat other people. We have some students that are already experiencing an impact from these efforts, even at the elementary school level.

MARTA: I think that the way that youth can develop a critical consciousness is by being in conversation and interaction with people who can challenge them to be critical thinkers. And, that sounds like those opportunities are being provided through this mediation program Christopher. Because I think institutions and society overall, teach young people that education is about going to school and about getting a good grade at the end of the day. Often, what that looks like is a student who sits in the classroom and who doesn't "disrupt" the classroom, but they do all the reading and they answer the questions, and they do the assignments. But, are they in conversation with somebody about what that assignment meant? Are they in conversation about the text that they just read about? Are they making connections to their own experiences, and are they questioning the things that they're seeing presented to them? One of the things that we emphasize a lot in our work with students is that they have a good understanding about themselves, their family and the community that they come from, so that they have a better sense of the direction in which they're going, or wanting to go. I think one of the biggest things that emerged from all our interview transcriptions is about how age plays into critical awareness. Thinking back when I was in high school, I think it's really hard to have a full awareness of yourself, but the whole idea of whether critical awareness can be reached, I think that we can begin to develop it at a very young age. We see that in the

stories we presented in our interviews. So, I feel like if we preach that and if that's one of the methodologies that we use in teaching our students and in working with students in the community, then it's really important that we explain that, and that we live it. I mentioned it before about being genuine, being honest, and modeling those values as a way to show a way of being that students can look towards, especially during a time when they're really looking at finding themselves and putting things into place and into priority about what matters to them the most. I think that having a space where they can really be themselves is important. So, when we talk about the relation to self and how that's practiced in our work, we try to be as genuine as possible. We tell them about our life histories, our struggles, and our successes. That makes us much more real to them. We're no longer the adults in the room, but rather people wanting to do work with them in a real way.

Having said this, being able to assess that growth is also important. I think for us, what we're looking for is a change in attitude, and if there hasn't been a change in attitude, then at least a deeper understanding of themselves, the community, and the idea of agency and voice. You know, it's the same old cliché that all non-profits bear, "It's the personal transformation that really matters." And, how do you measure that? And, even within a student, how do you measure growth, other than having them tell you, "This is how I felt at the beginning," and "This is how I feel now." But I think we see it even without doing a formal evaluation. We see it in their confidence. We see it in their ability to articulate ideas. We see it in their ability to think critically and in their willingness to engage in the community. And, a lot of the times, a shift in pride in who they are and being from that community.

GRACE: Our work this year has been with the adults on campus. Many of our academy meetings this year have been about how we give praise to students and the power of our words. We invited teachers to go out and praise students, and it seems silly, because they're professionals and we know our teachers are encouraging people, but we wanted to deliberately raise our consciousness, our awareness of what we're saying. I referenced my running life to try and make that connection. You know, I said, "I've been running all my life." Eventually, I realized that there's a certain way that I plant my feet that affects the quality of my run. If I become aware and conscious of how my feet hit the pavement, I can knock a minute off of my mile every time. I run and walk everyday, but just being aware helps me do it better." So, we asked teachers to go out and say words of encouragement to a student, and then email it to the office staff. Then we put all the comments in one place so that we could see our words. We saw, "Oh my gosh, we're recognizing girls, not boys. We're recognizing white girls, not Hispanic boys," which indicates a lot when we look at numbers. We have one academy that has 23 girls and the rest are boys, that's four hundred and something boys. And none of them were recognized. So, to bring that to a conscious level first, is where we are right now, elevating that awareness. We're not saying the teachers are wrong; we're not saying they're right. We just want them to see what they're saying, or not saying, to students.

SAMUEL: A lot comes down to how we prepare educators to understand and value building positive relationships with students. It can't be so impersonal that it's the same thing from one year to the next. If that's the case, then we're going to continue to get the same results. We need to start preparing our educators in such a way that they're developing our students so that they can be effective in their own lives, whatever that

may be, whether it's an employee, a parent, or a community member, whatever that student's calling may be. Our educators need to have that kind of preparation; they need to have that craft; they need to know how to negotiate that. When I talk about fostering change, I'm talking about changing the people that are changing other people, the intangibles, not the curriculum. We can change curriculum, but having someone understand what it means to reach a child in such a way that the child leaves the classroom ready to move forward and not leave the classroom regressing or having a sour taste for what education can offer them, that is true change. It's not something that can be forced though; it should be something that people want to do because they truly want to help.

MARTA: Both of you make an excellent point. It's not enough to be working with students, we need to be working with adults as well. A big component for us and that we've really honed in on this year, is being more deliberate about reaching out to the leaders and the adults on campus, and not just the youth, because if it's just a small group of people doing that work and we don't do it systemically, and across the school, then I think we're doing a disservice to ourselves and to the students as a whole. We've always done teacher training and have worked with the school to share some of our learning practices and learning exercises to use with the students, but, this year we've been a lot more deliberate about reaching out more to the adults on campus and inviting them.

JOSEPH: Touching upon something Samuel just mentioned, when I think about it externally, really trying to bring about that true change with others, I think of creating safety and building an opportunity for developing relationships, exposing people to different folks who think differently, getting them to share stories in those safe

environments where there's a relationship forming and then to really get them to analyze what from their stories they can use in their work, much the same as we're doing this morning. That's kind of the rhythm of change that I've been using and that keeps developing with this process.

GRACE: That makes me think of something I believe Michael Fullan discussed about the change process and how if you have something that's good, you'll bank some quick wins and you'll see improvement immediately. And then as you continue to do it, it's kind of like an exercise regimen, you'll hit a slump, and that's usually when people jump ship. That's when you have a new initiative each year or two in a school. If you continue to do what you're doing and engage in the change, and embrace the discomfort, then it becomes a true practice, and as you continue to practice, that's when you start to see the big wins, not just the quick wins. I'm in a place right now where things are a little uncomfortable at times, and it becomes uncomfortable because of the pushback that you get from others. So, there's that principal that you mentioned Joseph that your wife worked for, who had the educational piece, but not the personal piece. I think for principals, it's easier to function in that area because it's black and white. Here's a policy; here's what we do; what's next? It's harder to function in that place of personal relationships. That's were it becomes difficult. It would be really easy to step back and revert to what's comfortable. But, I believe that the greatest benefit is not in what's comfortable. It's in what's uncomfortable right now and will become comfortable later. I know that that's what's going to yield the greatest benefit, both for self and for the school. Because, when you're in a classroom and you have 150 students running through your classroom everyday, you often think about what's easy. So, just pushing through

and encouraging an entire organization to push through the discomfort until what is new to us becomes everyday practice and second nature, that's exciting!

JOSEPH: Given the time, I know our dialogue is coming to a close, but I was just thinking about how all of us are connected to education in some way, and what are the different opportunities that we have had presented here. How do you work with teachers if you're an assistant principal? How do you work with parents to give them a chance to deal with their own journeys? It seems to me that one of the starting points that came through all of our reflections is that all of us contributing to this dialogue seem to have had a lot of opportunities to deal with our own reflection and come to a powerful positive step forward with who we are and how we show up. So, if you're an assistant principal, or principal, or teacher and you show up in a very authentic way, do you start creating an opening for others to at least be curious about that and then can you actually find or build in ways that you can do that with parents and teachers and just take them a step forward?

Discussion. MONICA: Taking a step forward seems like such a simple task, but given the complexity of our educational and learning spaces, we know this to be far from an easy endeavor. Yet, based on your discussion, it's that small step that is imperative if we want to nurture transformational change within our work settings. I have a great sense that our dialogue this morning unearthed numerous insights and possibilities for us to continue growing our work. And, as I was thinking of a way to present back to you a succinct, but comprehensive analysis of our final thoughts, I thought it best to couch your contributions within the three contexts that guided this portion of the dialogue: the nature of the learning spaces, our understanding of learning, and the anatomy of our actions within these spaces. As regards the nature of the learning spaces, I connected insights on

the importance of creating a gracious space (Hughes, 2004), as Joseph discussed, in which all of our stories and viewpoints are acknowledged and validated. And all of you speak to an understanding of dialogue (Freire, 1970; Wheatley, 2002) as a critical component of not only creating that space, but also fostering the sense of belonging that Block (2008) asserts, "requires the courage to set aside our usual notions of action and measuring success by the numbers touched" (p. 119). Moreover, an emphasis on authentic caring (Noddings, 1984; Valenzuela, 1999) was evident as Samuel discussed at length the significant impact teachers, that care for students beyond academics, can have on whether students persist through school despite the numerous challenges they may face.

Building from these components, as regards our understanding of learning, I was able to tease out the concepts of story as pedagogy (Bruchac, 1997; Guajardo, Guajardo, & Casaperalta, 2008; Horton, 1998) and reflective practice (Merriam, Cafarella, & Baumgartner, 2007; Schon, 1987). Grace, your questions on how to get teachers to not only think about how they think, but also on how they think about their practice provokes a much needed discussion in terms of educator preparation. Christopher describes this in his own practice as he models for students and teachers the importance of taking risks, conscientiously reflecting on outcomes, and growing from both the things that have worked well and the things that may have gone awry. The concept of story as pedagogy also highlights key insights into our understanding of learning. In effect, by capturing untold stories, Marta and many of the students she works with, countered (Delgado, 1989; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001) the traditional narrative long held to the detriment of their community. These stories were the catalyst that changed the trajectory of her

community, present, past, and future. Joseph's point supports this view, as he purported that it has been through the stories of people that he has come to understand how realities are often distorted as they're sifted through our mainstream media. Finally, a brief mention of three ways in which you all discussed what the actions impacting transformational change look like. These included fostering youth and adult partnerships in which the relationship is dialogical and teacher authority is not punitive (Freire, 1998; Giroux, 2005), authentic assessment that incorporates real life applications of learning processes (Darling-Hammond, Ancess, & Falk, 1995; Gay, 2010), and embracing change despite discomfort (Fullan, 2011; Wheatley, 2006).

Summary

In summary, critical consciousness within spaces for learning is understood, based on our study's results, as a continual and generative process that provides a catalyst for the critical reflection of our work as educational and community leaders. The process of critical reflection, very much in tune with that of discernment, requires the capacity and sensibility to seek out opportunities that unearth assumptions and biases that impede an authentic deliberation of our actions within our spaces for learning. Absent of an authentic deliberation, change at the micro level of self, is fleeting and gives way to the reinfestation of myths that stagnate transformational change within more macro contexts. This process has assisted my research partners in remaining attentive to the multiple factors that negatively impact their learning spaces, namely, hierarchical systems, deficit ideologies, and inauthentic assessment of learning, as well as to contributions that they understand positively impact these spaces, namely, personal and community story, dialogical learning, and trusting relationships.

There is also an understanding that transformative change requires the work of communities and not individuals. Subsequently, educational institutions and organizations need to be equipped with the capital necessary to promote an understanding of self among its members in order to raise levels of critical consciousness, maximizing the possibilities of transformation. In addition, the tension between individualism and independence is problematized, with independence couched within the concept of interconnectedness and personal responsibility to preserving and promoting human dignity, and individualism that is framed by self-promotion and actualization apart from community.

Based on conclusions derived from the information provided by my research partners, our final chapter presents implications that the development and nurturance of critical consciousness has for transformative change within learning institutions and organizations. Moreover, it details a hybridized view of educational settings and learning opportunities that promote cross pollination of ideas, pedagogical strategies, wisdom, and story between PK-16 institutions and community organizations to strengthen our understanding of good learning and the possibilities of educating for social change.

CHAPTER V

ENGAGED INQUIRY: CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS AS PROCESS

Our qualitative study explored the development of critical consciousness within ontological, axiological, and epistemological contexts. Two main questions guided our inquiry process: How do we develop critical consciousness including the following frames: historical, political, cultural, and cognitive? How does critical consciousness inform the engagement within pedagogical spaces for institutional and organizational change and growth? In addition, three sub questions were utilized to further tease out potential insights into our study on critical consciousness. These included: What is the nature of the consciousness and/or mindfulness that influences and informs our actions in learning, teaching, and leading? What is the nature of the space in which these actions are manifested? What pedagogical strategies do we employ to manifest personal and professional agency within hierarchically structured environments in order to transform these?

This inquiry process has been in and of itself, personally transformational. All along, I remained in continual dialogue with friends and colleagues that challenged me to remain true to myself, not only in the manner in which I invited my research partners, but also the ways in which we collected our observables and presented our findings. For me it was a profound struggle remaining vigilant and not returning to the learning process of neatly handwritten pages and the rote recitation of sentences, in this case, a traditionally

researched and written dissertation. As such, my research partners and I were at once researchers and participants within our inquiry. Our employment of auto-ethnography, critical ethnography (Behar, 1996; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Madison, 2005), narrative inquiry (Chase, 1995; Guajardo & Guajardo, 2010; Hickey, 2007; Riessman, 2008), and social cartography (Paulston, 1996) as research methods grounded our work in story. So, as I wondered how I would construct our final chapter and present implications and final thoughts, I was encouraged by members of my learning community to continue to trust the power of story to illustrate our study's significance.

In doing so, I return to *Chapter I, Child's Play, Personal Revolution, and Possibility*, couching implications for 1) learning, teaching, and leading; 2) the manifestation of critical awareness of self; and 3) future research within these subsets, and braiding in the elements that provoked our concluding thoughts. These elements include: experiencing, acknowledging, and validating diverse ways of knowing (Ah Nee-Benham & Cooper, 2000; Anzaldúa, 1999; Barhnardt & Kawagley, 2005), interrogating the status quo, equitable access to resources (Delpit, 2002; Durkeim, 2000; Gaventa, 1980; Giroux, 1997), going beyond the technical, making sense of historical trauma (Simon & Eppert, 1997), living critical consciousness as process, engaged inquiry, negotiating power, and creating space for authentic dialogue (Bohm, 2004; Freire 1970; Hughes, 2004).

Each subsection depicts a section of our conceptual framework that most parallels with the implications presented. Distinct from the conceptual framework proposed as we initiated our study, our current framework encompasses analysis and findings that were reached during various stages of our inquiry process namely, the distinction between

independence and interdependence and its impact on living critical consciousness as process, and the role of the understanding of self within the nexus created by an understanding of learning, our actions for transformational change, the nature of our learning spaces, and our awareness of micro and macro levels of community change.

Finally, I preface each subsection with a personal account that creates an authentic space in which to discuss the implications. As we begin our journey through the presentation of implications, it is important to keep in mind that their strength is embodied within a harmonious union. They are introduced separately for the purposes of explication, but not to give indication that we can pick and choose those that most suit our endeavors in the pursuit of critical consciousness for transformational change, nor to give indication of it being a linear process.

Child's Play

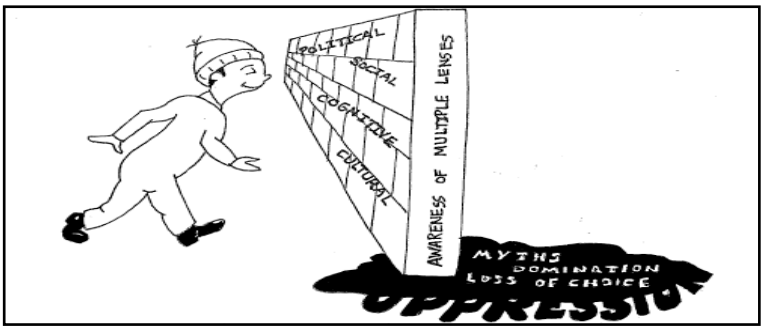


Figure 5.1. Critical awareness of self.

Implications for Learning, Teaching, and Leading

Growing up, we did not have many luxuries, and I can distinctly remember a number of arguments between mis papás concerning financial difficulties. Still, we were blessed with all of our necessities, and within this context I developed a heightened awareness and sensibility of understanding need from want, giving from what I had and not from what I had left over, and recognizing the power

inherent in giving freely of personal resources. Birthday gifts for siblings often included personal items, carefully hidden beneath gift-wrapping paper, that they either had shown an interest in, or that we had concluded was a resource they were in need of. Among my siblings and me, items did not necessarily belong to us. For periods at a time, we may have been the one most in need of the item, but within the four walls of our home, we understood, that resources were for the benefit of all.

These ontological ways of knowing were quite distinct from those my siblings and I were proposed throughout our PK-12 schooling (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; González, 2001). We understood that we at times made sense of our worlds differently than many others in our community, and while at home, these were valued as resource, they were often met with disdain or indifference within the larger community. I think back on my experiences as a bilingual educator working with families and students, acknowledging that at that place in time, I was only initiating a more profound awareness of all the lenses through which we make sense of our self in relation to others and world. Yet, without the necessary opportunities to problematize who we are, what we do, and why we do the things we do in the manner in which we do them, we often remain mired in the myths, as depicted in Figure 5.1, that convince us that we are doing the best we can given the circumstances (Freire, 2005; Guajardo, Guajardo, & Casaperalta, 2010; Maturana & Varela, 1992).

What might have been the possibilities for the growth and development of my family and me, that of our community of teachers, leaders, and community members, or me as a nascent bilingual educator entering the field of education, and the families and

students with whom I shared space, had we been versed in these elements of critical awareness of self? And yet, much of the preparation of students, educators, and educational leaders is based on, as my research partners asserted, the teaching of academics to youth. The following implications, as relating to the concepts of teaching, learning, and leading, is the first subset as informed by these assertions and the moral choice of all my research partners in responding to the development of a critical consciousness at the level of understanding self and with specific attention paid to these within the contexts of teaching, learning, and leading.

Experiencing diverse ways of knowing. First, experiencing diverse ways of knowing was significant in preparing the groundwork for a lifelong pursuit of social equity for the educational and community leaders in our study. All my research partners attribute an engagement within diverse settings as impetus for their commitment to creating equitable learning and social environments in which the stories of all members of a community are welcomed and validated. From Marta experiencing a community that promoted her story and that of her surrounding community as asset and not deficit, to Samuel's postsecondary experience that promoted his making sense of the value of the educational opportunities he had the privilege of living, and questioning why his siblings had not been afforded the same. From Joseph's work with communities seeped in historical trauma that provoked him to turn the mirror on himself, to the presence of Christopher's father who daily modeled teacher in community and community as teacher, to the childhood friendship that fostered a space of belonging for Grace, a space that was nonexistent within her larger community. Experiencing and living diverse settings and ways of knowing play a key role in raising an understanding of self and the potential that

we as educators, and educational and community leaders have to harness the diversity in voices, knowledge, and wisdom within our learning environments to promote this same understanding in others.

Interrogating the status quo. Second, challenging systems and structures that are not responsive to all members of a community, alerted my research partners to critical awareness of self and the process of discernment as they questioned the degree to which their actions either promoted or challenged the status quo. Though often constrained within hierarchical power structures, Samuel, Grace, and Christopher speak to a profound understanding of the inequities within many educational settings and to their contributions in bringing these to the forefront of their conversations with educators (Ayers, 2004; Fullan, 2011). Moreover, all of my research partners validated the need to build the capacity of interrogating the status quo at various levels, in particular at the levels of both youth and adults. For instance, Marta concluded that a myopic focus on solely raising the critical consciousness of the student body within the educational institution in which she serves, was a "disservice to [themselves] and to the students as a whole." And Samuel passionately discussed the importance of teaching students how to navigate systems that have largely been unresponsive to their needs, first as a means to survival, and then as a means to change these same structures (Giroux, 1997; Guajardo, Guajardo, & Casaperalta, 2010; Guajardo & Guajardo, 2002; Macedo, 2006; Oakes, 1985). Imagine the possibilities to student and teacher learning if embedded within a standard curriculum, was the study of social structures and their impact on who gets what, when, and how.

Equitable access to resources. Third, my research partners' exploration of equitable access to resources heightened their understanding of self as leader. In their analysis, and as a result of their continued experience within learning communities that challenged their understanding of resource, their views of resource have widened to encompass not only financial capital, but also cultural, social, and political capital (Block, 2008; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). These new understandings, helped each of my research partners make sense of the degree to which these were accessible to them during salient experiences or time periods in their lives. Moreover, my research partners were able to make sense of what constitutes resource, a community's history, a person's story, a family's native language, and a student's ability to navigate systems in which the power dynamics do not favor youth, among others. As educational and community leaders, they are more adept at identifying resources and maximizing these for the betterment of their organizations and institutions.

Personal Revolution

Figure 5.2. Critical consciousness and self as subject in the world.

Implications for the Manifestation of Critical Awareness of Self

As a bilingual educator, I often prayed that the students would do well on assessments, that my attempts to effectively cover all objectives had been responsive to their learning. Concerns regarding the achievement, or lack of achievement based on standardized assessments gave way to reprimands that were often swift and merciless. Unknowingly, I had permitted my spiritual

connection and responsibility to the students and families to be diminished to the superficiality of how we chose to measure the learning and capacity of students. How had I acquiesced my understanding of learning and the impact that this had on the human and spiritual dignity of the students (Gaventa, 1980)?

"Material systems of understanding simply do not satisfy many human beings when it comes to discerning and affirming those beliefs, values, and meanings that provide the principal template for human life and purpose" (Shapiro, 2005). The educational system in which I served was housed within largely materialistic and positivistic paradigms. Meaning was derived from how well the lessons were taught and these evaluated by how well the students scored on numerous paper and pencil exams. There did not seem to be any question as to what our understanding of or purpose for learning was beyond that of academic achievement. Subsequently, a critical awareness of the students' resistance to the curriculum took root. The exhaustive and mind numbing efforts at arriving at the right answer and raising scores on standardized tests had promoted a technical and mechanistic understanding of learning. Making meaning of lived experiences and how these influenced how both educator and student perceived their life purpose did not seem to warrant consideration (Milligan, 2005). Were young students not supposed to be concerned with such discernment? Was it simply a state of being privileged to adults, and only a few at that? These questions, though I have the foresight to pose them now, did not occur until well after I began to problematize the unrest that was brewing within and paint life experiences to help me make sense of the suffering (Wang, 2005).

> *My artwork became an impetus that would assist me in unearthing and healing historical traumas that clouded my capacity to be human and to embrace the reflective practice of living a critically conscious life. Subsequently, I gained a more significant understanding of the imperative nature and responsibility of responding to students, families, and communities not only on an intellectual level, but also on moral and spiritual levels (Purpel & McLaurin Jr, 2004).*

It is not enough to be well versed in a conceptual or theoretical understanding of critical awareness of self. Figure 5.2 depicts the second portion of our conceptual map and illustrates the process that leads from reaching a critical level of awareness of self to a space in which this awareness becomes manifest in how we feel, what we think, and what we do as educational and community leaders. As Freire (2005) posited, it is the process of understanding ourselves as subjects in our world, rather than objects. The realization of our potential to change lived realities, is heavily grounded within the degree to which we understand this phenomenon. How do we understand critical awareness of self? Do we acknowledge it beyond what we access in print? How do we assess its influence in our lives? And more importantly, how do the students, teachers, colleagues, families, and communities we serve assess its influence in us? Our inquiry process took my research partners and me to these spaces of self and peer critique. As Marta asserted,

> I really believe that when I've lived the way I've lived and I've worked the way I've worked, with passion and with true concern and with genuineness, people have followed. I would say that through the leadership I've exhibited, both within my own family and then within my circle of friends, and then in my job, people have seen the passion, concern, and genuineness.

Though Freire asserted man's existence as subject in world to be the natural state of man, we have all experienced lived realities within organizations and institutions in which the assessment of our service was bound more to compliance of rules and regulations, than obligation to ourselves and our fellow human beings. As such, based on our findings, we teased out the following implications, including going beyond the technical, making sense of historical trauma, and living critical consciousness as process, as pertinent to not only the development of a critical awareness of self, but more importantly, to its manifestation within our communities.

Going beyond the technical. First, by recognizing their commitment to reaching beyond the technical aspects of their service to their educational communities, my research partners were better prepared to evaluate whether or not they were manifesting critical awareness of self in thought, feeling, and action (Fetterman, Kaftarian, & Wandersman, 1996; Freire, 1998; Merriam & Baumgartner, 2007; Mezirow, 1990). Grace illustrates this evaluation of her own responsibility and that of her partner campus leaders as they face the very real pressures of preparing students for standardized exams,

> There's this piece where we want our students and we want our teachers to develop greater levels of critical awareness, and then there's the elephant in the room, the testing, the questions of "who's going to college and who's not going to college." I think the greatest challenge is finding time to slow down our everyday activities and relieve ourselves of some of the pressures that are put on us by the State, District, etc. and move students. How do you find time to move teachers and students and administrators into this place of critical awareness?

This ever-present critical reflection, helped my research partners self evaluate and lessen the consequences of being overly distracted by the technical, to the detriment of the health of their learning organizations and institutions.

Making sense of historical trauma. Second, experiencing opportunities to make sense of historical trauma, whether their own or others, contributed to my research partners' healing process and capacity to more profoundly manifest critical consciousness and build trusting relationships with students, families, colleagues, and communities. Though this process was one of validation and not blame, it did provoke moments of turmoil and anguish for my research partners. None of my research partners claimed that personally lived traumas have been forgotten, indeed the indications were that these same painful experiences, rooted them in the work they do in community, as well as the obligation they have to their own families, often having experienced generations of trauma, in doing the public good (Simon & Eppert, 1997).

Living critical consciousness as process. Third, my research partners acknowledged that living critical consciousness a process, is necessary in order to avoid complacency in their service to humanity. Through the inquiry process, it was revealed that some research partners, because of various levels of exposure, had a greater sense of the terminology associated with the concept of critical consciousness, which speaks greatly to the importance of this implication. It wasn't a matter of whether my research partners had or not the topic specific language, but rather the capacity to reflect on their contributions to the inquiry process, acknowledge and validate the contributions of others, and act from the knowledge created in symbiosis. This process is indicative that critical consciousness is never fully attainable. We live, work, and learn in community.

Possibility

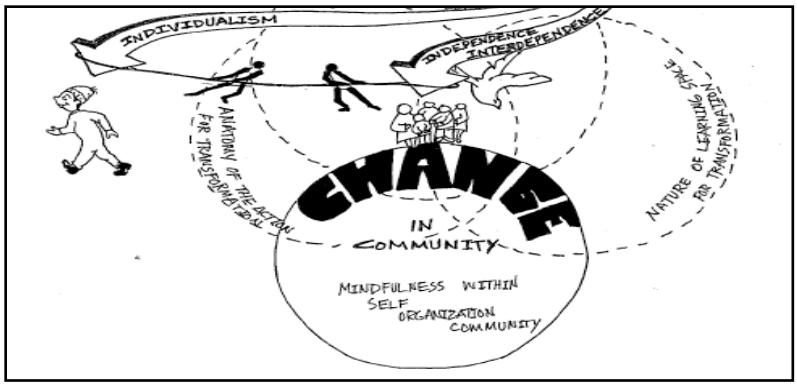


Figure 5.3. Change in community.

Implications for Future Research

What happens when our understanding of education is no longer confined within the walls of any one institution, organization, or context? How do we blur the invisible barriers and borders we have constructed that impede the disruption of our set(s) of knowledge and carve out spaces where change, ambiguity, mindfulness, consciousness, and spirituality influence and inform the settings of progressive, creative, and responsible service toward one another?

I have been privileged enough to access learning spaces within higher education that provided me the encouragement, guidance, nurturance, and constructive feedback necessary to traverse the journey of understanding self and meaning making. I have been privileged enough to be gifted with mentorship that is grounded in the belief that "education for increased knolwedge and understanding should be grounded in a deeper commitment to pursue a larger good than studying for its own sake" (Purpel, 2002, p. 95). And, I have been afforded the understanding that institutions of higher education, in their current state, do not have the capacity to accept anyone and everyone with the desire to

access such learning spaces. As such, my spiritual, moral, and deliberate choice (Shapiro, 2005) is, and will remain, to co-construct organizations and systems in which such opportunities are not at the ready because of privilege, but because of human right (Freire, 1970).

A few weeks before concluding our final chapter, I sent a text message to each of my research partners with hopes that they each were well, and expressing my profound gratitude for their contributions to my own growth and development throughout our inquiry process. Grace's response illustrates the reasons why we conclude our study with implications for future research, in particular the research process, and embed experiences that I lived during this time that further contributed to who I am as teacher, learner, leader, and more importantly as researcher and participant in our study.

> All is well. Know that your work has offered a sense of renewal and repurposing for me as well. I'll have to share with you my plans to restructure advisory to start the critical conversations within our student body. I'll want to pick your brain when you're ready. Good thoughts to you and your work. Good energy to your defense!

My research partners and I were not born critically conscious human beings. As my personal account details, I have been afforded opportunities that created the space in which I developed a level of consciousness that desires to work in the service of humanity, and that causes sufficient unrest so as not to become complacent amidst human suffering. My research partners were afforded the same. The possibilities inherent in creating, as well as inviting others to engage in processes that promote living critical consciousness are astounding. As such, the following implications are presented and

framed by the spaces that I either helped create or to which I was invited to participate during the timeframe in which we were conducting our study, spaces that are representative of such possibilities for research in education and community (Figure 5.3).

Engaged inquiry. First, engaged inquiry became increasingly important as we strove to continually foster and nurture a relationship of trust between my research partners and me. This was greatly informed by my membership in a Ph.D. writing group (Figure 5.4). As I initiated our study and began processing the whole of the experience, critical conversations with friends and colleagues who were also grappling with many of the same questions about the strength of our methodology and the potential impact of our research, sparked the initiation of a research-writing group. We set aside the often hidden notion within academia, of the lone researcher…the power of one to create sustainable change. Each of our ontologies had prepared us to respond to research in much the same way as we had each grown and developed to respond within our educational settings, not as one, but as community. Though we understood our responsibilities to our own research as independent of the group, we also understood our responsibility to our community of learners as interdependent within the group. Figure 5.3 illustrates the distinction of the very real tension between individualism and independence. Given to practices born of individualism, we risk returning back to a state of slumber without connection to a community that challenges you to think beyond self-interest.

My own methodology called for me to be as much a participant, as an observer, to be as vulnerable to my research partners, as I was inviting them to be with me (Behar, 1996). As such, it had to be about more than how I would collect information and make sense of it; indeed, it was critical that I engaged my research partners in helping me make

sense of it. It had to be about how I lived and practiced my methodology daily; it had to be about how we held each other accountable to do good work and to share good work. Joseph expressed it so profoundly, as he described embracing his own vulnerability and emerging from facilitator and distance, to fully present, opening up and sharing a very personal account during a dialogue circle, "As an administrator you wouldn't do that. You couldn't. You're not supposed to do that. But now I'm in a place where it's not what you're supposed to do. It's what you're called to do." I found this space within our research-writing group. I became more conscious of the importance of engaged inquiry and to its significant contributions to the impact of this and future research.

Figure 5.4. November 2011 writing group retreat.

Negotiating power. Second, experiencing the practice of negotiating power contributed to my capacity as teacher, learner, leader, and researcher, to recognize and challenge practices born of hierarchical and punitive systems in which those holding positions of power have first and final say in decision-making. Shor (1996) posits,

> Students and teachers can only learn how to negotiate by negotiating, on-the-job, in-process. We don't come to class with the discourse habits suitable for

reconstituting power relations. We have to invest that discourse as we invent the process and, by doing so, reconstruct our social selves. (p. 20)

One experience I was afforded, during the timeframe in which we were collecting observables for our study, that fueled my understanding of negotiating power whether between teacher and learner, or researcher and research partner, was my participation in a leadership summit at the Hawai'nuiākea School of Hawaiian Knowledge–University of Hawai'i Manoa. Over the course of seven days, I witnessed the art of negotiating power among members of various organizations, most, with member representation that spanned two or three generations of leaders. Figure 5.5 depicts one of the many opportunities members of an organic farm had in practicing the art of power negotiation. Though a filter has been used to protect identities, it may be evident that the group is comprised of youth and adult. This was the same for many of the organizations. No voice, no knowledge, no talent, no wisdom was left untapped. This greatly informed my understanding of my responsibility to strengthen this as critical component in my role as researcher.

Figure 5.5. Leadership team from organic farm.

Creating space for authentic dialogue. Third, creating a gracious space (Hughes, 2004) in which my research partners and I could share and create knowledge proved indispensable in accessing, problematizing, and making sense of personal and historical traumas, as well as establishing an inquiry process that was generative in nature. Research partners were provided copies of all transcriptions, giving them an opportunity to understand each others educational settings, as well as share practices across spaces.

My sensibility toward the importance of space to authentic dialogue was strengthened by my participation in the Community Learning Exchange. After participation in several exchanges over the course of three years, my last experience was uniquely inspiring; I had the privilege of joining the local planning committee as we prepared to welcome 65 members from communities across the U.S. to collaborate and learn from each others stories of power and wisdom for social change. My previous experiences and practice within the organization in creating the space for authentic dialogue, were instrumental as I contributed to reciprocate as hosting community. Figure 5.6 depicts a dialogue among one of the youth-led organizations in attendance as they planned the presentation of how they would be moving their work forward in community. I lived in the service of our guest communities and through this and similar experiences, I grew to embrace authentic dialogue as a necessary component of our research process.

Figure 5.6. Group dialogue at Community Learning Exchange–San Marcos, TX.

Final Thoughts

The research on the development of critical consciousness in the nurturance of educational and community leaders is limited. As our implications indicate, there are limitless possibilities for the creation of opportunities that promote such a profound awareness of our potential to change oppressive realities within educational settings. But our study has only scratched the surface of such possibilities. We purposefully invited both educational and community leaders in order to plant the seed of the very real need to cross between and among generative spaces, and deconstruct deterring boundaries within and between our institutions and organizations. The multiple spaces that we occupied during our inquiry process were nestled within many of the implications presented, authentic dialogue, negotiation of power, making sense of historical trauma; all contributed to my research partners' and my own growth and development as more critically conscious leaders. We strove to remain in the mindful practice of our methodology. This greatly impacted the findings we were able to unearth, as well as the implications we were able to present. Subsequently, further research might explore the cross-pollination of ideas between education and community institutions and organizations, the creation of more experiential learning environments for students,

educators, leaders, community members, and researchers. The creation of curricula across settings that promotes and scaffolds the difficult process of acknowledging and making sense of historical trauma, understanding the power inherent in dialogue, validating and challenging power dynamics and in turn the status quo, and practicing the strength of discerning who we are and how we contribute to social inequities so that we might have the possibility to experience transformational change at the levels of self, institution, community, and society.

Appendix A

Glossary of Spanish Words/Phrases

Cultivando la tierra – My use of the phrase cultivating the soil, originated from a blossoming of my understanding of the ontology of my childhood home. The image that I seek to sketch within the mind of the reader is that of *mis padres'* preparation of the soil in which we were raised in order to build our resistance to the obstacles and challenges we encountered after arriving in the United States.

Echando raíz – My use of the phrase taking root, compliments *mis padres'* nurturance and tilling of the soil. Through it, and informed by the theoretical underpinnings of my proposed study, I acknowledge the importance of taking root, not for the purpose of remaining fixed in one location, but rather for its role in the infusion of nutrients and subsequently life.

Educación –

Encuentro al amanecer – Encounter at dawn.

Fronteras – Borders.

Herencia – Inheritance or legacy.

Machista – Male chauvinist.

Mamá – Mother.

Metamórfosis – Metamorphosis.

Nunca mejor está el árbol que en la tierra donde se cría – A tree is never better off than in the land in which it was raised. I provide a more in depth analysis of the

significance of this phrase within the text of my proposed study.

Pan de cada día – Daily bread.

Papá – Father.

Papás – Parents.

Patria – Native country.

Plática – My use of the Spanish term for dialogue, as understood within my cultural upbringing, is important towards the creation of spaces of conversation that are more aligned with the expectations inherent in the term *plática.* It is indicative of a profound and multi-resourced approach to conversation, in which participants utilize words, gestures, idioms, metaphors, past histories, and stories, among others, to bathe the setting of the *plática* with various influences and immerse its participants (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2000).

Ventanas – Windows.

Appendix B

Consent Form for Research Partnership
Texas State University–San Marcos

Title of Research Study
Surveying and Living Critical Consciousness: From Critical Awareness of Self to Our Action within Spaces of Learning

Supervisor	Researcher
Miguel Guajardo, Ph.D. CLAS 314 Academic Services Building South #318 601 University Drive San Marcos, TX 78666 Office: (512) 245-6579 Fax: (512) 245-9923	Mónica M. Valadez Ph.D. Candidate, COE 1350 Arbor Knot Drive Kyle, TX 78640 Office: (512) 245-8163 Cell: (512) 736-4438

Purpose of the study
To collect the life histories and maps of five educational/community leaders who work within PK-12 and/or community organizations and networks in order to gain a greater understanding of the development and manifestation of critical consciousness within hierarchically structured learning environments. The study will focus on how critical consciousness informs pedagogical spaces for institutional and organizational change and growth.

Expectations
Contribute to an engaged inquiry process consisting of two ethnographic interviews lasting approximately one hour each. The first interview will consist of questions referencing your personal background, educational journey, understanding of critical awareness within your learning environments, pedagogical practices you promote toward institutional and organizational change and growth, and a presentation of the nature of the spaces in which you work and serve, including historical, political, and cultural factors. The second interview will consist of questions developed from the analysis of the transcription of the first interview. It will serve to gather more in depth information or clarification of observables provided.

Create a visual representation or life map, including salient events/eras and theoretical perspectives that informed or influenced your critical awareness.

Contribute to an authentic dialogue circle in which all research partners will present thoughts, ideas, challenges, critical reflections, salient events, and feelings, among other possibilities, that pertain to the development and manifestation of critical consciousness.

Contribute to a *pláticas* within multiple spaces in order to further extend our engagement within learning environments and unpack our understanding of our critical awareness and the pedagogical strategies we employ toward institutional and organizational change. There is a target minimum of three *pláticas* lasting between 30-45 minutes each. However, given its organic nature, flexibility will be considered regarding scheduling and group structure. A *plática* may consist of all partners contributing within the same time and space, or one or two partners contributing to the learning over a cup of coffee.

Possible Benefits

Benefits for the research partners in the study: Research partners will benefit from engaging in this study by gaining a greater understanding of their personal and professional agency within spaces of learning. Research partners will discover how and if critical consciousness informs and influences the pedagogical strategies they utilize within hierarchically structured environments and understand the nature of their historical, cultural, and political agency within these settings. Research partners will have an opportunity to identify, acknowledge, and develop leadership competencies and capacities and employ the learning within their personal and professional settings. Benefits for the field of education: Results from this study may provide insights into the development and nature of critical consciousness and its impact towards educational and organizational change and growth. Moreover, it may provide insight into pedagogical strategies informed by critical consciousness that are employed within spaces of learning in order to challenge the status quo and create more equitable educational systems. Findings and results will contribute to the existing literature and address the gap that exists in the exploration of the nature of critical consciousness within multiple spaces and across varying educational contexts, including self, institution, community, and society.

Possible Discomforts and Risks

Engagement in this study does not pose any physical or mental risk. However, due to the nature of the ethnographic interviews, research partners may experience discomfort while presenting recollections regarding their life history. In addition, research partners may feel uneasy in revealing critical issues regarding the educational settings in which the work. To this end, research partners will be provided the opportunity to verify any information they may provide for accuracy and fairness.

If you choose to take part in this study, will it cost you anything?

No, there is no cost to partners.

Will you receive compensation for your contributions in this study?

No, there is no monetary reward in participating in this study.

What if you do not want to contribute?
Engagement is entirely voluntary. You are free to refuse partnership in the study and your refusal will not influence current or future relationships with Texas State University.

How can you withdraw from the project?
You are free to withdraw your consent in this project at any time without penalty by contacting Researcher, Mónica M. Valadez at mv1123@txstate.edu or (512) 736-4438, or Supervisor, Miguel Guajardo, Ph.D. at maguajardo@txstate.edu or (512) 245-6579

How will the information collected through the study be protected?
All interviews and *pláticas* will be audio and/or video recorded. In addition, field notes will be recorded during all interviews and *pláticas*. Research partners may request that audio/video equipment be turned off at any point during recording and retain the right not to answer any question. Information collected through interviews, life maps, authentic dialogue circle, and *pláticas* are intended for research and academic presentations and publication purposes only. Video and audio recordings will be safeguarded on an external drive kept locked in the Researcher's office. Any visual/audio products that may be created from the footage collected will be made available to research partners and will be used strictly for educational purposes. Research partners may choose not to have their audio and video recordings viewed/heard within public spaces for educational purposes, as well as decide not to be audio or video recorded at any time regardless of having given prior consent. Pseudonyms will be utilized in the textual representation of any identifiable information referencing research partners and the educational settings in which they serve.

Research partners may request and be provided a summary of the findings upon completion of the study. Please contact Mónica M. Valadez at (512) 736-4438 or mv1123@txstate.edu to request a copy.

Questions
If you have any questions about the research or research participant rights, please contact:

Dr. Jon Lasser, IRB Chair
Phone: (512) 245-3413
lasser@txstate.edu

Ms. Becky Northcut, Compliance Specialist
Phone: (512) 245-2102
bnorthcut@txstate.edu

Signatures

As the researcher in this study, I have explained the purpose, the procedures, the benefits, and the risks involved in contributing to this research study.

_____ _____
Mónica M. Valadez Date
Researcher

You have been informed about the purpose, the procedures, the benefits, and the risks involved in contributing to this research study. You have received a copy of this form. You have had the opportunity to ask questions before signing this form and you understand that you can ask additional questions at any time. You also know that you can withdraw your consent and stop contributions in this project at any time. Finally, you voluntarily agree to contribute to this study. By signing this form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights.

_____ _____
Printed name of research partner Date

_____ _____
Signature of research partner Date

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