Abstract

The purpose of this study was to suggest post-colonialist programmatic considerations for the implementation of service-learning programs that empower LatinX students. The researcher interviewed LatinX student participants in a Northwest community college

Service-learning program to discover any shared themes between social justice *testimonios* and the service-learning experiences. A model was adapted for the development of critical consciousness through social justice service projects that promote LatinX student empowerment.

Applications of Latin American Consciousness-Raising Strategies for Community College Service-Learning Programs

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We became like a family, and our mentees became like our children. We're taking care of them; we're guiding them. We're looking for the best for them.
—Ale, community college student, leader, mentor

In the past decade, researchers have documented increasing numbers of LatinX -identified students entering institutions of higher education (Aud et al., 2010; Brown & Patten, 2011, 2012; Fry, 2011; Fry & Center, 2010; Fry & Taylor, 2013; Hernandez, Slate, & Joyner, 2015; Nuñez, Sparks, & Hernández, 2011; Prescott, 2013), and, concurrently, practitioners have called for innovation in higher educational programs and curricula to meet the need to serve these students (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Bedolla, 2012; Contreras, 2009; Contreras & Contreras, 2015; Crisp & Nora, 2010; Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Nora & Crisp, 2012; Nuñez, 2009; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009). Following evidence of a need for change in higher education to better support LatinX students, some U.S. educational scholars, including those focusing specifically on community colleges and Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI's), have been calling for innovation and testing of programs and of educational practices that promote student and community success, defined on the students' own terms (Andreotti, 2011; Bedolla, 2012; Bernal et al., 2009; Chen, 2012; Contreras & Contreras, 2015; Crisp & Nora, 2010; Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009; Yosso et al., 2009).

Andreotti's (2011) comprehensive theoretical explication of post-colonialist educational frameworks detailed forms of post-colonialist theory in order to demonstrate their validity and argue for their implementation in educational practice. Andreotti defined post-colonialism in education as a perspectival lens that

> informs and structures an analysis of knowledge production and power relations that attempts to identify ethnocentric, paternalistic, depoliticized, ahistorical, and hegemonic tendencies (or assumptions of cultural supremacy) and their implications in the discursive production of self and Other in institutionalized discourses. Central to this framework and analyses are colonial violences and their implications, as well as the acknowledgment and strategic appropriations of "enabling violations" of colonialism as strategies of resistance and transformation. (p. 58)

The present study takes as a key guiding post-colonialist theoretical framework the concept of "Mestiza consciousness" and the "path to *conocimiento*," or stages in the process toward achieving Mestiza consciousness introduced by Anzaldúa (1999). Anzaldúa's theory built upon the works of other post-colonialist educational scholars, such as Paolo Freire (2005), who had described the process for acquisition of critical consciousness as *conscientização*, or "conscientization." Anzaldúa (1999) described the path to *conocimiento* or "path to knowing" as a process through which individuals and their communities can develop a critical awareness that allows them to understand sociocultural structures that lead to oppression and marginalization, to question the assumptions that lead to oppression, and to conceptualize identity and community differently, as transcendent of dualistic formulations. As Anzaldúa (1999) explained:

> By creating a new mythos—that is, a change in the way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves, and the ways we behave—*la mestiza* creates a new consciousness. The work of *mestiza* consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality that keeps her a prisoner and to show in the flesh and through the images in her work how duality is transcended. (p. 80).

On the path to *conocimiento* as Anzaldúa (1999) conceptualized it, individuals could begin to heal fragmented identities by engaging in: (a) reflection on critical issues including identity, (b) deconstruction of oppressive cultures and sociopolitical structures, (c) restoring more empowering mythologies of identity and authority to marginalized cultures, (d) coming to an awareness of collective and plural identity that heals fragmentation within individuals and communities through transcendence and solidarity (called *nepantla*), and (d) organizing communities using empowering strategies for bridge-building and overcoming oppression.

In the present study, we have pursued this inquiry, our primary research question was:

> In what ways, if any, have themes identified in Latin American indigenous-led social justice projects contributed to the development and success of a service-learning program for LatinX students at a large Northwest community college?

In order to investigate this question, we interviewed LatinX participants in a community college social justice service-learning program regarding their experiences of the program and the pertinence of values and educational practices adapted from the concept of Mestiza consciousness and Latin American social justice movements to their learning.

Critical Consciousness and Identity Awareness for LatinX Students

According to Tinto's (1987) model of student integration and retention, integration into college life is key in preventing student attrition. As Yosso et al. (2009) pointed out, though, this model was originally developed with White students in mind. For LatinX and other non-White students, a critical process must often take place to develop ethnic awareness and understanding of identity as a political construct before authentic or meaningful integration can take place. In their case study, these researchers pointed out the applications of post-colonialist theory and Critical Race Theory to LatinX education and demonstrated the benefits of critical consciousness, identity awareness, and social support networks for LatinX students. Chiara (2014) also highlighted the importance of cultural empowerment and the affirmation of autonomy and identity through inclusion of marginalized knowledge systems to LatinX students, and Molix and Bettencourt (2010), in their study, found that LatinX students' experience of their ethnic identity played more of a role in their "well-being and psychological empowerment" than it did for White students (p. 478). Similarly, Schmidt et al (2014) used Cultural-Relational theory to identify correlations between ethnic identity and community relationships and self-perceived well-being of college students of color.

RCT is a strengths-based model that focuses on the influence of relational (personal, social) and cultural (contextual, societal) elements on the development and maintenance of health and dysfunction for all people, especially marginalized individuals. (p. 475)

Schmidt's study found that students who reported a high connection to ethnic identity and also strong community relationships had higher perceived well-being than those who did not:

In particular, the quality of peer relationships was extremely important to perceived well-being. A strong ethnic identity helps individuals recognize positive virtues about their own ethnic group, which may help minimize the harmful effects of racist beliefs on people of color…Ethnic identity is comprised primarily of two main components: a sense of attachment or belonging to one's ethnic group, and the sense of identifying and engaging with ethnic practices. (p. 477)

While 21.4% of 229 students included in Schmidt's study were LatinX and the study's results were not differentiated into ethnic groups, the study did show significant correlation between ethnic identity and well-being for the group on the whole.

Familial and Mentorship Relationships

Another study confirming the importance of psycho-social factors on LatinX student success was undertaken by Syed, Azmitia, and Cooper (2011). In this study, the authors sought to understand complex factors of academic success for under-represented minority (URM) students that relate to ethnic identity based on a cross-disciplinary range of research. The study found that three factors are particularly important to URM students' ethnic identity-related academic success: prevalent stereotypes about their ethnic group; broad support from peers, family, and educational leaders; and eligibility and ability to attend college. Alvarez (2012) has also explored and affirmed the importance of family networks and involvement to LatinX immigrants' literacy acquisition. Additionally, Rodríguez and Oseguera (2015) introduced seven key elements for LatinX student success grounded in transformation of institutional culture: strong, authentic relationships, excellence, dialoging, learning from marginalized students, hearing student voices, recognition, and seeing students as intellectuals while also stressing the importance of faculty-as-mentor relationships.

Overall, these studies affirmed findings of LatinX educational scholars that a familial-type culture supported by mentorship, advising, and authentic social connection along with critical education that facilitates deepened awareness of ethnic identity have strong and positive influences on LatinX students' psycho-social well-being and academic success. These factors were associated with LatinX student empowerment, and programs that supported their development were particularly effective tools for improving LatinX students' collegiate experiences and also increasing participants' likelihood of persisting at college.

Critical Service-learning as a Means for Social Justice and Cultural Empowerment

Service-learning scholars and practitioners have also recognized the potential for critical, post-colonialist service-learning programs to transform contexts for learning and to empower LatinX students (Argenal & Jacquez, 2015; Garcia, 2007; Hipolito-Delgado & Zion, 2015; Jones, Robbins, & LePeau, 2011; Martin & Pirbhai-Illich, 2015; McNally, 2004; Ross, 2012; Winans-Solis, 2014). A recent history of critical service-learning scholarship has particularly emphasized the alignment of social justice projects with authentic, motivating, and critically-conscious service-learning curricula (Argenal & Jacquez, 2015; Butin, 2010; Cipolle, 2010; Dewey, 2004; Farahmandpour & Shodjaee-Zrudlo, 2015; Garcia, 2007; Giles & Eyler, 1994; Harbour & Ebie, 2011; Hipolito-Delgado & Zion, 2015; Jenkins, 2012; Martin & Pirbhai-Illich, 2015; McNally,

2004; Mitchell, 2008, 2014; O'Grady, 2000; Rosenberger, 2000; Ross, 2012; Schulz, 2007; Wade, 2001; Winans-Solis, 2014). In addition, case studies have also demonstrated effects of critical service-learning programs for marginalized ethnic minority students and for LatinX students in particular (Bernal et al., 2009; d'Arlach et al., 2009; Garcia, 2007; Gregory et al., 2006; Hipolito-Delgado & Zion, 2015; Ling Yeh, 2014; Winans-Solis, 2014).

During their Critical Civic Inquiry (CVI) project, Hipolito-Delgado and Zion (2015) specifically tested psychological empowerment of LatinX students through service by learning by engaging high school students in conversations intended to increase critical awareness, promote engagement, and empower marginalized identities. Their study found that that the students did indeed experience psychological empowerment as a result of their participation in critical inquiry and civic engagement compared to a control group. In a similar project, Winans-Soliz (2014) explored the potential of service-learning to support the development of critical consciousness for marginalized high school students. Results of the case study indicated that students' own experiences and knowledge were validated during the service-learning program, and, at the same time, students were able to envision themselves with new perspectives and frameworks and, as such, the programs offered them transformational opportunities. The study's authors concluded that six key thematic areas characterized the students' experiences of "empowerment and self-authorship." They included: "(1) Developing an Awareness of Oppressive Structures, (2) Resistance, (3) Forming Community, (4) The Empowering Practices of Service, (5) Expanding Identity, and (6) The Dangers of Sinking," (p. 611). The present study confirms these results and offers the benefit of analysis of a program that took place in a community college setting.

Methods

A qualitative method was selected for the collection and interpretation of data, and Anzaldúa's (1999) theory of Mestiza consciousness was used to shape the approach to research design, qualitative interviews, and analysis in this study. By interviewing students and faculty involved with a critical social justice service-learning program that s specifically focused on LatinX student empowerment, we were allowed to check the alignment of the participants' experiences and the program dynamics both with characteristics of Latin American social justice projects. We were also able to identify themes present that may not have been included in our original model. By incorporating the views and feedback from program participants into the research process, we were enabled to collaborate with them on the creation of a list of key programmatic elements for LatinX student social justice service-learning projects.

Participants

Necessary criteria for selection included: community college student status, long-term (at least one year-long session) participation in a service-learning program with a focus on social justice and critical education, self-identification as LatinX, and involvement in the same program as other participants. Because this study focused on developing in-depth understanding of program values and dynamics, one program (rather than multiple programs) was chosen as the unit of analysis. Three students (two females, one male) as well as one faculty member were chosen in order to best represent the demographic diversity of project participants. In addition, the program chosen was particularly demonstrative of elements of empowering programs designed for LatinX students, as its mentorship format allowed for authentic meaningful relationships between students, parents, community members, faculty, and staff. In the yearlong mentorship and service program, LatinX community college students received free college credit over three terms while learning critical awareness and leadership skills. Students

then organized and lead a series of Saturday courses for LatinX high school and their parents, for which the high school students also received free college credit.

Data Collection

Participants were interviewed individually to allow for the researchers to focus on each person's experiences more deeply than would be possible in a focus group format. Students were asked 11 questions, including:

What was your reason for becoming involved with the project/group?
What is the goal of the project?
How have you or your community benefitted from the project/group?

(A full list of questions is included in Appendix A.) The project leader was asked a total of 14 questions, with additional points such as:

Have you engaged with educational practices intended to increase awareness of identity issues? What were they?
How has the group demonstrated solidarity with the community, if it has?

These questions were developed based on both the steps of Anzladúa's path to *conocimiento* (1999) as well as themes emergent from the *testimonios* of Latin American social justice project leaders as recorded in Author (2019). A constellation of the previously-identified Latin American social justice movement elements and associated thematic areas is depicted in figure 1.

Figure 1. Process of Mestiza Consciousness emergent from Latin American social justice movement narratives. This chart shows the recursive flow of critical awareness centered around a collective motivation to learn.

Data Analysis
Thematically-grouped elements of critical consciousness development in social movements were also used to frame the data analysis process. To check for saliency of the themes, an analytical chart was created and interview data were organized based their pertinence to those themes. In some cases, themes were exceptionally descriptive of topics and information emergent from the interviews, and, in other cases, the themes were less salient. In this way, the data served to verify applications of post-colonialist theory and of values and practices emergent from Latin American social justice movements for future development of LatinX service-learning programs and curricula.

Trustworthiness
Triangulation of the case-study testimonies, described in the earlier study (Author, 2019) with the interviews of service-learning leaders and participants, has been used to verify the trustworthiness of the researcher's analyses. Maintaining a pretense of scientific objectivity was not of primary concern, given the subjective and interpretive nature of qualitative and post-colonialist epistemology (Merriam, 2009). Rather, an awareness of perspectival bias has been included as a primary element of analyses.

Limitations
As Merriam (2009) has pointed out, qualitative methods do not yield generalizable results comparative to those expected of quantitative methods. Because the operational measure of external validity normally applied to quantitative methods—generalizability— applies only loosely to this study's results, practical considerations regarding values and learning community organization produced by this study should not be used as abstract guidelines for any service-learning project outside of its context. Rather, this study provides extensive knowledge about indigenous learning practices in Latin America that have been proven applicable at one community college in the U.S. Thus, this study will deepen scholarly and practical understanding of the applications of Mestiza consciousness (Anzaldúa, 1999) in concrete circumstances and offer considerations for the application of theoretical principles to future projects.

Findings

The social justice service-learning program examined here took place on a large urban Northwestern community college campus with enrollment numbers greater than 28,000 and 7% LatinX-identified students. All of the participants interviewed identified themselves as LatinX, and all had participated in the program in the 2014-2015 academic year. The students were given pseudonyms of Ale, Dainela, and Manny; and the instructor was given the pseudonym of Marisol.

Emergent Themes and Programmatic Elements

The results of this study demonstrated the centrality of critical education and reflection as a driving element in the community college LatinX social justice service program (shown in Figure 2). The following sections reflect themes and sub-themes adapted from Latin American *testimonios*, Mestiza consciousness theory (Anzaldúa, 1999), and service-learning research as they fit the participants' responses:

- Critical social consciousness (focusing on critical awareness of identity, culture, and society, re-affirming LatinX cultural value, and learning as personal and collective empowerment);
- Transcendent communal awareness of identity (focusing on transcendent collective identity perception, solidarity and bridge-building, and on-going engagement in local and global justice efforts); and
- Social Justice service practices and values (focusing on participation and leadership roles, strategic practices for resistance and empowerment, collective values)

Critical educational methods focused specifically on identity, culture, society, and empowerment were key from the beginning, and they guided the structure of the program, including motivational and organization elements. As such, participants' assessments of their own critical awareness had primary significance in this analysis. In addition, the culminating element of the process of Meztiza consciousness (Anzaldúa, 1999), transcendent awareness of identity, wherein critical awareness is raised to a transcendent perception of the self and the "other," was also identified as a defining element success in the program. Finally, social justice practices and values were applied by program designers to guide the structure of the process in ways unique to the community college learning environment and tied to a direct relationship with critical educational methods. The following sections present a record of the responses organized into these three principal themes and their supporting sub-themes, listed above.
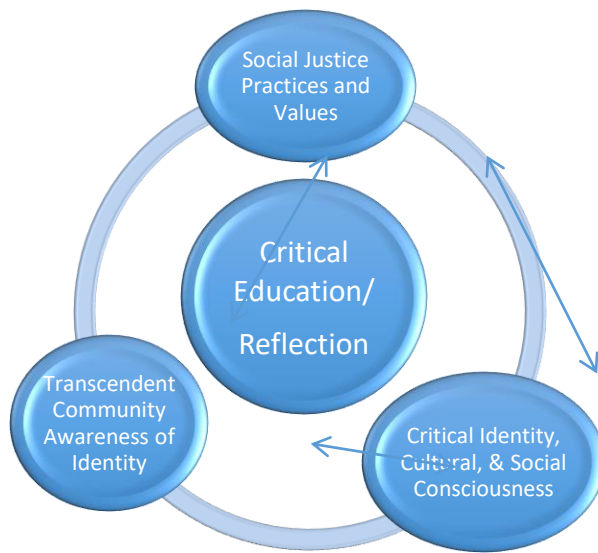

Figure 2. Process of Mestiza Consciousness emergent from LatinX community college critical social justice service-learning program data. This chart shows the recursive flow of critical awareness and social justice action centered around critical education.

Critical Social Consciousness

College student participants reported having received information about diversity, intersectionality, and LatinX community issues in their program courses. They also received an orientation to social problems and cultural studies. Ale, one of the student leaders, reported she had learned that, because cultures may repeat the same stories over and over again, it can be important to look at them from varying perspectives and to do research to become informed about issues, even those happening within her own culture. Manny, another student leader, stated that the critical education element of the program was intended to give LatinX students a sense of what LatinX identity means as well as inspiration and motivation to attend school as an important life opportunity.

Marisol, who serves as the staff program coordinator and is a former mentor in the program, stated that, as a part of the critical element of the program, "Community speakers come to talk about topics related to the issues that we face as a community" such as gangs, immigration, incarceration, rape, pregnancy, childcare, and cultural identity. She said that, through the program, students learn to find their voices and identities. "A lot of them identify as Chicanos, a lot of them identify as Mexican Americans, or just Mexicans," she explained, "It's very hard for them to come together as a group when they don't know who they are. So that's the first step, for them to feel comfortable knowing who they are." The next step in the curriculum is to learn about leadership concepts and then to implement these concepts in the programs that student leaders design for high school students.

Re-affirming Latino cultural value. One of the key elements of the critical education of program participants identified by interviewees was the validation of LatinX cultural perspectives. One of the strongest values recognized by participants as common to LatinX cultures and as important for supporting the empowerment of LatinX students was a familial culture. This familial culture was identified by all of the interviewees independently. For example, as Ale noted, "Family is something that's really important for us as a Hispanic culture. I think it's really important to have that family connection." Another student leader, Daniela, mentioned the importance of close relationships to the well-being of both mentees and their families: "My mentee was really quiet; she wouldn't really talk," but, she commented, when she and her mentor "started having one-on-one talks…she [the mentee] started getting more open, and her mom as well." Daniela attributed this openness to the need of the mentee and her mother to feel safe with the mentor. The familial sense of relationship allowed the community to develop in solidarity and authentic caring.

Learning as personal and collective empowerment. Because college students often need critical education to become aware of social oppression and potential for collective empowerment, this element was folded into the program. According to Ale, LatinX culture can be very "hardworking,"

> But we are too scared to asked questions sometimes or too scared to take risks. And that's something I was aware of, but I never really thought it was like a huge problem or that teens were facing this problem. So seeing that situation happening to the mentees we had the first day and seeing them change at the end taught me that if we help other students and if we encourage them to grow and to focus in college, then they're going to get a huge impact in their life.

Ale also wanted to point out that leadership skills can be extremely important to the lives of LatinX mentors and mentees, and the ability to create strong relationships with mentees and the families that were empowering for both her and for them added meaning to the role of "mentor". Because she cared authentically for the well-being of her mentee, she hoped to be able to continue to support her in the future, even after the program has ended.

Daniela's response also reflected knowledge about larger LatinX community empowerment issues and the importance of caring and solidarity to address them. Because a majority of students who do not graduate are Hispanic, she said, the mentors are trying to help them be more motivated, more social, and more engaged with the community by making sure they know there are people who care about them and what they do. Once again, this sentiment echoed the importance of familial-type bonds in the mentorship relationship. Daniela also recognized that she could help the mentees because she had had similar experiences to them: "There's so many people like me who need somebody to be them a little push, a little motivation." Both Manny and Marisol also identified helping others like themselves to gain the benefit of their experiences as main reasons why they became involved in the program. Marisol said that, because she appreciated the program so much as a mentor, she wanted to serve students as a coordinator in order to help students just as the previous coordinator had helped her and to apply the critical leadership skills that she learned as a student in the program.

Transcendent Communal Awareness of Identity
Throughout the leadership/mentorship program, a growing sense of collective identity, solidarity, and global consciousness of social justice issues, developments in critical awareness that correspond with the *nepantla* and bridge-building and stages of Mestiza consciousness, developed for interviewees. Collective identity and the ability to build bridges between themselves and others were developed upon a foundation of critical education and resulted from realizations during service and reflection on service. Solidarity on a broad-community scale was also demonstrated in participants' resolutions to continue their work in future leadership endeavors and the current social justice projects initiated and run by past student participants.

Transcendent collective identity perception. A prevalent theme among participants' responses was a conviction that, regardless of their heritage in different Latin American countries, they had shared interests as LatinX college students and members of LatinX communities and the program had brought them together to function as a caring family that could be strong in unity and solidarity. Manny explained how issues that touch the LatinX community at large touch his life deeply because his family members are also a part of that community:

My community has benefitted because it's not just any school that I'm talking to students about; it's also my own sister. And then my sister goes off from there— it's kind of like a domino effect…We're all strong, we're all together. <She'll say,>

"If he can do it, I can do it too." We can show each other that we can be strong together. We are like a family, we are connected. We all have future goals, we all want to become something, we all want to get there.

Ale also expressed the feeling that her community college has become her community:

It is united, and they put our cultures as a priority to help us to help others. I learned that I can make an impact and help others. We became like a family, and our mentees became like our children. We're taking care of them, we're guiding them; we're looking for the best for them.

For all of the interviewees, there was a strong sense of mutual well-being among LatinX student mentors and mentees. Even as students began to see that they share many concerns and challenges as LatinX students, they were also exposed for the first time to the realization that, although they are all of Mexican descent, the LatinX student community is far from homogenous. According to Daniela,

It's kind of hard. You start seeing how everybody has a different background. …You start seeing different problems that students go through as well. Some don't have enough money or some do…. You learn that when it comes to race, we aren't all Mexicans. There are Bolivians, and for me, I saw there are so many different types of race here—not just white, black, or Mexican.

The realization that there is diversity among LatinX students has not created division among program participants. On the contrary, understanding each other's struggles and seeing the diversity of cultural differences has seemed to have given them a deeper perspective from which to appreciate their capacity to know and help each other. According to Marisol, "The secret and the magic of the program is that they feel like a family and the Multicultural Center serves as a house for them. Just yesterday they had a baby show here for one of the past mentors. It is like a family, and we have to support each other."

Solidarity and bridge-building. Just as participants in the LatinX student service-learning program came together in familial bonds to support each other, they have recognized the need to reach out to other students to create connections based on understanding and mutual aid. Daniela stated it thus: "We put borders between ourselves because of our different beliefs, but we're all humans…Borders turned around can be bridges that can help us come together." She went on to explain the rewards of connecting in meaningful ways with others, "It feels good affecting somebody's life and getting a positive response from them. It feels amazing to affect somebody's life and touch them

in a way." As a result, she says that her confidence in her communication, leadership, and ability to help others has grown. And she has also been impacted positively by the new connections she has created:

> You never know who you are impacting, who you are touching, or who you'll run into, you'll meet…being engaged with people around us, with our neighbors and friends and families, because it's just a beautiful thing to learn more about them, to experience something new.

In addition to mentees and their parents, Mentors were also able to learn from community leaders who made presentations in their courses and shared their experiences with volunteers who participated in leadership activities occasionally.

On-going engagement in local and global justice efforts. All of the interviewees said that they had gained confidence in their ability to be engaged in positive ways in their community and that they hope to continue to serve LatinX students in a variety of capacities in the future. Daniela, in particular, has begun to attend LatinX leadership conferences that have enables her to become more involved with national issues:

> I had never traveled, and I travelled to Chicago and San Francisco with <Marisol>. Marisol also keeps track of student engagement after students have completed the program, and she has noticed the impact that that past participants have had on the college community as a whole.

According to Marisol, mentors often go on to take on other leadership roles with a continuing sense of critical awareness. They take this awareness into other college programs and out into the community, and they seek to make social change. As she explained:

> Once they learn the materials, then they become advocates in the community...We have the <program> as a first step and then they can transition to be an equity ambassador.... What I see a lot from the students is they need to know who they are and why they're here and why are they being treated differently—why are there less opportunities for them than for other students and those are questions that come up from students...Mentors learning about the issues that our community goes through, and they choose whether they want to be advocates or not…for the most part, ten out of twelve or fifteen go on to serve the community on other ways...<The program> is like that starting point for a lot of our students.... One student went on to start a Chicana women's advocacy nonprofit in the community, and others have started student groups.

Social Justice Service Practices and Values

Within the mentorship program, leadership roles and relationships between LatinX college students, high school students, faculty, and parents are constructed according to frameworks for critical education and leadership covered in the instructional portion of the program. The transfer of leadership roles and responsibilities from program directors and faculty to college students and then to parents and high school students to create a "domino effect" is a defining characteristic of the program's structure. All of the elements in the program are intended to serve a dual purpose of empowering LatinX college students to persist at college and to empower LatinX high school students and their parents to both identify college as viable choice and navigate the educational system successfully. Throughout these processes, collective values shared by LatinX participants and critical social justice values served both to motivate students and to guide the program's evolving frameworks in support of post-colonialist meaning-making and empowerment.

Participation and leadership roles. According to Marisol, the premise of the program is straightforward: the program's aims to support high school students' needs by creating a transition between high school and college, and the mentors gain leadership skills and awareness through their support of the high school students. High school students receive two free college credits as a part of their participation, and college student mentors receive 10 college credits over the course of one academic year while they learn to become leaders and advocates of their Latino communities. During the course of the program, all participants have the opportunity to build relationships and to support each other's learning, identity awareness, and confidence.

Ale appreciated the opportunity she had to become a caring leader by taking on the perspectives of her mentees and their families. She said that taking on the responsibility of presentation planning and speaking in front of large groups for the first time was a "huge" challenge, but "it also brought out the leader in us. We thought, 'If I were in their shoes, how would I learn this?'" Daniela emphasized the impact of taking on the role of the teacher had for her. As teachers with a mutual interest in the success of the program, she noted, the mentors learned to collaborate, to share ideas and offer feedback as a group. When unexpected changes were necessary, the mentors worked together ensure that the high school students had meaningful experiences regardless. This gave the mentors confidence. Everyone was involved in the process based on what he or she could provide. She also mentioned the closeness this collaboration and solidarity brought to the mentor group. Mentors exchanged phone numbers and were present in each other's lives to give support and often to lend a helping hand when needed. Once again, this dynamic suggests a familial-type culture. Manny's testimony also included the assertion that participation was pervasive and there was a collaborative and caring leadership culture that allowed the group to discuss their own views until consensus could be reached: "Everybody's open to others' opinions, and we always come to an agreement. Nobody's left behind. Everybody shares their piece."

Strategic practices for resistance and empowerment. The most prevalent empowering practices that interviewees mentioned were (a) exercising leadership to help guide other LatinX students through the educational system and give them confidence, (b) providing the positive cycle of leadership that perpetuated more leadership, and (c) supporting each other to overcome fears of speaking up and being heard with American culture. Mentors saw their impacts on mentees' lives and were encouraged by the ability to affect change. Many mentees and their parents started the program without knowledge of the American educational system, and classes were offered in Spanish for parents, as well, to help them become better equipped to help their children.

Marisol described the cycle of leadership set in motion by the program: the students learn about leadership and then they implement it. They teach their mentees what they are learning in the mentor class: college, leadership, identity, and social justice issues, depending on what they are learning, and "It's a domino effect of teaching." Ale stated that she always had in mind that she was teaching her mentees so that they would they be able to go on and teach someone else.

Throughout their experiences, the mentors saw both themselves and their mentees gaining confidence and speaking out more often. "I was always that quiet shy girl in the corner." Daniela reflected, "I would listen and watch. That was me. It's really helped be to communicate a lot. I'm still shy sometimes, <but>…it's taken that fear away from me." Ale said that she especially appreciated "listening to <her mentee's> personal and academic problems," because she wanted her not to be afraid to ask questions, and listening was a step toward a trusting relationship. "Being able to speak and not be scared" was also one of the skills she had gained, she said, "I learned that people are listening to you because they need help." And Marisol explained the importance of trusting bonds that allow participants to examine their own identities and to gain the confidence to keep going with their education: "It's all about building relationship, knowing who they are, knowing their names, knowing their struggles, and that's what keeps them here."

Collective values. Some of the collective values that were recognized by all of the interviewees included a culture of consensus and collaboration while recognizing diversity, a safe environment to cultivate trusting bonds, and a familial culture of caring for each other and for mentees, their families, and the community. Marisol mentioned her intention to make sure the program provides a safe space where students can feel like they are truly at home. "There's something…that you can't read, that you can't see. I think the key to this program is being personal to each student," she said. And Daniela said that she felt "safe and protected…"We're a big family." Ale also agreed that familial caring between mentors, for mentees, and for the community was a key element of the program for her:

> It's like a family connection. We're connecting with the MC <multicultural center>, and we help out with the MC—it's another excuse to see each other…I gained

more confidence as a person, I really like to help others, and it fortified my value of helping my community.

Discussion

The LatinX student leaders touched upon all of the stages of Anzaldúa's (1999) theory of Mestiza consciousness, and critical education and reflection were the cornerstones of their consciousness development. Additionally, one of the most important conditions leading to the success of the community college LatinX social justice service-learning project was the familial culture it supported. Student leaders were able to create meaningful bonds with faculty/staff, peers, mentees, and the community, and these relationships contributed to the safe and rewarding environment in which they were able to increase their confidence as leaders and as positive forces within their communities.

Critical education permeated the program, giving participants frameworks within which to develop personal and political awareness. Within their critical educational courses, they were guided through processes of critical self-awareness and reflection that allowed them to recognize injustice. A familial culture supported student participants' abilities to perceive issues commonly experienced by LatinX communities and also to recognize the importance of collective empowerment.

Student participants also began to understand identity and culture in post-colonialist modes that allowed them to transcend marginalizing conceptions of themselves and their communities. As a result of critical education, service experiences, and increasingly strong familial-type bonds to their peers and their mentees, they were empowered to construct bridges of collective awareness and mutual support that motivated their learning and broadened their perspectives, and ultimately, they voiced their commitment to community leadership and to LatinX community issues in the future.

Finally, social justice practices and values such as consensus leadership practices, compassionate service to the community, and strong interpersonal bonds were defining characteristics of the project as described by all four interviewees. The combination of these elements created a meaningful and inspiring context for social justice work to take place and for the process of Mestiza consciousness to unfold, and their conditions also support studies that suggest that awareness of identity and strong community empowers marginalized students by creating psychosocial support networks.

Implications for Future Practice

In demonstrating how critical social justice principles and practices can be put into motion in a U.S. program, the study has provided an example of one way that post-colonialist practices reflecting values from Latin American social justice movements and LatinX communities may support the empowerment of LatinX service-learning program participants. By extending these elements into other contexts and learning situations, educators may find further innovative applications for Latin American social justice practices in U.S. colleges. In addition, creating projects that are similarly-aligned with

LatinX community values for social justice organizing and collective empowerment may allow critical service-learning program practitioners to make further gains toward realizing goals of post-colonialist multicultural education and social justice education. One of the purposes of the present study was triangulation of results from an analysis of Latin American social justice movement narratives. The educational values and practices for achieving critical consciousness and political empowerment emergent from these narratives have proven applicable to LatinX community college social justice service projects based on community college program participants' feedback. In addition to confirming of the efficacy of specific values and practices, the experience of participants in the current study has also provided program developers with an example of the way that they may manifest differently specifically within the process of a college social justice projects. The model in Figure 2 reflects the implementation of the post-colonialist theory in education and suggests how Latin American values, critical educational practices, and transcendent identity consciousness may constellate to create effective conditions for empowering service projects. After implementing such programs, educators may see positive changes in the engagement, empowerment, and success rates of LatinX student populations. Further, we may also see institutional and community growth that reflects critical awareness, incorporation of multicultural value systems, and the empowerment of marginalized perspectives.

Conclusions and Implications for Future Research

The results of the present study have confirmed the importance of critical consciousness education as well as integration of Latin American values systems into the frameworks of social justice service-learning programs focused on the empowerment of LatinX student and their communities. The study has also demonstrated the relevance of values and practices from Latin American social justice movements within LatinX service-learning projects in a U.S. community college. The study's employment of Mestiza consciousness as a post-colonialist analytical framework has also provided an example of one way that post-colonialist theory can be used to understand, analyze, and describe organizational dynamics, identity politics, and critical consciousness development processes during critical educational social justice projects.

Research that explores post-colonialist frameworks for program design and analysis are necessary to continually pave the way for innovations in post-colonialist education. Program developers may consider using themes from this study in order to create social justice service-learning programs for these populations. Additionally, Figure 2 and/or the thematic results of this study may be used in future case studies of existing service programs to develop a survey tool or interview questions, as well as in the assessment of data to determine the alignment of the program with results presented here. As a cross-case study, the survey instrument or assessment tool may also be used to examine service-learning programs throughout a state, a region, or the US nationally to determine either the extent of alignment with dynamics presented here and/or identify possible adaptions. By expanding understanding of the potential for post-colonialist social justice service-learning frameworks, researchers can create viable possibilities for increasing critical awareness that mutually empower students and their communities.

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Rachael Cate is currently an instructor of communication and a program developer in the College of Engineering at Oregon State University. Her research focus is promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education program development, cultures of STEM education, experiential education, social justice service-learning program development, and decolonizing cultures of higher education. This present study was conducted during her time as a doctoral student at Oregon State University.

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Darlene Russ-Eft was the principal investigator of the present study and doctoral advisor for Rachael Cate. Her research centers on the study of learning in organizational settings, investigating the role of program evaluation in affecting change in individuals, groups and organizations, and issues related to ethical decision-making in program evaluation and organizations. She is a professor in the College of Education at Oregon State University.

Appendix A: Interview Questions

- Student Questions:
    1. What was your reason for becoming involved with the project/group?
    2. What is the goal of the project?
    3. How are group participants assigned project roles?
    4. How did participants teach each other or others?
    5. How are participants (students, teachers, or community members) learning as a result of the project/group?
    6. How have you or your community benefitted from the project/group?
    7. Have you learned about social problems during the project?
        a. What have you learned about your community and your culture?
        b. What else did you learn during the project?
    8. What is the connection, if any, between group members?
    9. What is the relationship between group members and the community?
    10. How has your perspective of service to the community changed as a result of participating in the group/project?
    11. What do you think the project/group has accomplished?

- Faculty member questions:
    1. What was your reason for becoming involved with the project/group?
    2. What is the goal of the project?
    3. How are group participants assigned project roles?
    4. How did participants teach each other or others?
    5. How are participants (students, teachers, or community members) learning as a result of the project/group?
    6. How have you or your community benefitted from the project/group?
    7. Have you learned about social problems during the project?
        a. What have you learned about your community and your culture?
        b. What else did you learn during the project?
    8. Have you engaged with educational practices intended to increase awareness of social issues? What were they?
    9. Have you engaged with educational practices intended to increase awareness of identity issues? What were they?
    10. How has the group demonstrated solidarity with the community, if it has?
    11. What is the connection, if any, between group members?
    12. What is the relationship between group members and the community?
    13. How has your or students' perspectives of service to the community changed as a result of participating in the group/project?
    14. What do you think the project/group has accomplished?