



Chicano/a

Francisco Rios

In this article—a combination of personal narrative mixed with conceptual ponderings—I seek to explore the development of a continuum of identities, which range from Chicano/a to Xicana/o. The former is rooted in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, while the latter has its roots in the transnational, globalized, and neoliberal policies of the early years of the 21st Century.

I wish to highlight how these two identity movements came out of (and, in a reciprocal way, influenced) the particular social and political moments of their times but also how each has implications for identity, ideology and issues, and imagination toward the development of a critical consciousness. I also intend to extend the argument to how these identities, ideologies and issues, and imaginations serve as a frame for the kinds of praxis one can engage in when one is committed to social justice.

Because identity and positionality profoundly impact how one teaches for multicultural education (Bennett, 2001),

and because many Xicana/o educators see their identity and ideology both similar to but different from Chicano/a educators of an earlier generation, pedagogical pursuits for activism are equally likely to be different. In sum, this article intends to move from the politics of identity to the politics of critical thinking, from a distinctly Mexican American version of (“old school”) Chicanoism to a more contemporary (“la nueva onda”) Xicanismo.

I wish to acknowledge that most of these ideas are inspired by the lessons I have been taught by the many people who have influenced my ways of looking at the world as I seek to make sense of my own experiences. These include the *consejos de las mujeres* (my mother, my grandmothers, and my sisters, *angeles todas*). It's rooted in the *confianza* of my father and those, too many to mention, who've mentored me throughout my life. It's fostered by the *respeto* of my children, my students, and my colleagues/peers but also the *respeto* I have for them. It's inspired by the *buen ejemplos* I have for those teachers and community activists and scholars (most notably, for this essay, the work of Franquiz, Gomez-Peña, and Urrietta) whose work I admire from both close in and from a distance.

As mentioned, I intend to juxtapose the birth of the Chicano/a movement with the contemporary rise of a new Xicanismo. In doing so, I wish to highlight important differences and similarities of these two historical moments, looking all the while at what we learn about a critical pedagogy toward praxis. I acknowledge at the outset that some of the comments made herein are generalities about these two identities and socio-political moments. Thus, it is important to also recognize differences

as noteworthy counter examples. In fact, I see these two identities/ideologies and historical moments as falling upon lines of differential possibilities and variations (Sandoval, 2000).

Take, for example, the question of identity. There are many kinds of Chicano/a identities evident in these terms: American, Americano, Mexican American, Hispanic, Latino, *vato*, *cholo*, lowrider, gangsta, *gran vato*, etc. In fact, the Chicano/a “homies” series¹ (while needing to be troubled out) provide a broad perspective on all the ways one can “be” a Chicano/a. And these identities shift. As Guillermo Gómez-Peña (Mendieta & Gómez-Peña, 2001) relates, ethnic identification is both strategic and contextual.

For example, sometimes when I'm arguing the democratic imperative to schooling for social justice, I call on my “American” identity to create disequilibrium among those who have narrow-minded notions of what it means to be American. In my time on a Fulbright in Chile, I called upon my Americano identity to highlight my desire for alliances with all the Latin-American people that I was privileged to encounter. I'm Latino in the mid-west where intercultural collaborations with *Cubanos*, *Puertoriquenos*, and *Dominicanos* are essential for political empowerment. I'm Chicano when I want to highlight my political otherness. And each of these identities, indeed, are very complex.

To reiterate, my intention here is to offer some broad generalizations which are more conceptual than real but which have instructive value nonetheless. The many ways one can be Chicano/a-Xicana/o abound; we would do well to affirm these variations.

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Critical Activist Teaching Revisited

Xicanismo



I begin with each moment, the Chicano/a movement and then the *nuevo Xicanismo*, discuss (for each) their broader social, political, and economic context, and then identify central issues relative to identity, ideology, issues, and imagination, and finally detail the critical thinking during each period (see Figure 1). I intend to bring these two movements to life by sharing two narratives, two stories, which highlight much of the conceptual arguments that I'm advancing. In doing so, I hope to illuminate where the Mexican American community has come, where it's going, what "works," and what productive perspectives will carry us forward through the struggle for self-determination.

Chicano/a

The Chicano/a movement had its inception before the 1960s but its birth is often traced back to the Chicano Youth Conference held in Denver in 1969 (Acuña, 2003). The 1960s and 1970s was a time of outright and undeniable oppression: signs read, "Mexicans and dogs not welcomed" while discrimination in housing, employment, education, and voting was explicit and rampant. Chicanos/as and their organizations, rooted as they were within the nest of the local community, operated largely on the outside of, and in opposition to, institutional systems and the dominant society.

Politically, the focus was on the national economy and national security spurred by international tensions and the Cold War. The hot war, Vietnam, was in full action, as was the impact of an oil boycott and rise of inflation. The broader Civil Rights Movement had been going on for a little over a decade; importantly, the farm

workers' struggles and Cesar Chavez's non-violent activism were important to the rise of the Chicano/a movement.

But it was also a time where political movement, while slow, was at least leaning progressive (pushed as it was by the Civil Rights Movement and the protests in communities of color). Voting rights acts and affirmative action legislation were being passed and enacted, and court case victories around bilingual education and against discrimination in housing were changing the racist "business as usual" discrimination that marked the day.

There was an overture made toward an agenda of equity to counteract past discrimination and oppression. Equity means a recognition that people who were down needed a hand up: affirmative action in employment and education, bilingual education, and other civil rights initiatives came to life (not without challenges from the mainstream, to be sure).

This then sets the backdrop for both the birth of the Chicano/a movement but also the ways in which the Chicano/a movement was able to influence the context.

Identity

For Chicanos/as, there was a keen focus on the development of a distinctly political identity. Its focus, however, was limited: identity was centered in race and ethnicity with strong male overtones.² Importantly, women were playing a critical role within the *movimiento* but their role was marginalized (while contesting

this marginalization) in the pursuit of a broader Chicano identity.

Ideology & Issues

Chicano/a cultural nationalism was the ideology of the day. That is, there was explicit rhetoric around the desire to retake the southwestern part of the United States, pointing back to the historical land mass called *Atzlan*. Connected with this nationalism was the idea that Mexican Americans were neither Mexican nor American but were, instead, a unique sociocultural group/citizenry with a specific and unique history, culture, and language; hence, the term Chicano/a came to be affiliated with this unique social-cultural grouping as well as the political (nationalist) ideology that was being forged.

The Chicano/a community had many issues it had to confront. In education, these issues included the need for a more culturally and linguistically responsive approach to schooling (both Chicano/a Studies and bilingual education served as two specific programmatic demands). The desire for political self-determination was made manifest most by the advance of the *La Raza Unida* party (Garcia, 1990). There was activism centered around addressing the rights of farmworkers and asserting historical land rights (most notably in New Mexico). All of this was on top of the Vietnam War, with its significant numbers of Chicano/a soldiers who fought for this nation only to return to a homeland characterized by racial discrimination.

Imagination³

Critical thinking was marked by identifying and honoring as positive all things Chicano/a—historically, socially, and culturally—with little public critique by Chicanos/as of other Chicanos/as and things “Chicano/a.” It included critiquing the master narrative upon which much of the nation was built and offering a counter-narrative, a counter story, one where Chicanos/as were present, visible, and important. It was marked by a narrow understanding of Chicanism, best described as Chicano-centric.

Advocacy and action were set against “the system” and all it represented. This was possible because there were very few Chicanos/as who worked within the system. Therefore, much of the activity happened outside of the system, in its opposition. Protests as general acts of civil disobedience were met with physical violence (the great whitewashing of the civil Rights Movement is that it was not understood as a violent time: resistance was met with violence and people were being murdered and losing their lives) (Murray & Menkart, 2003). But these protests were critical for the political gains that were being made (as described earlier).

As I mentioned at the beginning of this article, I want to detail personal experiences, different moments within my own life, to breath life into how this actually looked for me. In this first moment, I was a young Chicanito growing up on Denver’s Westside in the late 1960s.

A Chicano Narrative

I went to a high school which had a student composition that was 80% Chicano/a (interestingly, today, it is nearly 95% Chicano/a—so much for the integration of schools with “all deliberate speed”). And there were very few Chicano teachers and no Chicano studies classes. We learned that the district used the student attendance rates of third period to determine school funding levels. We figured that if we weren’t in school at that moment, the school received less money. So we decided to “blow out” (that is, walk out of the school) at the beginning of third period until the school hired a teacher who could teach us Chicano studies.

As third period came around, we heard “blow out” in the halls. Almost all of 80% of the students walked out of school, marched down town, shouted “We want Chicano teachers now,” went to the park in front of the capital, listened to political speeches, went to another park to eat beans and tortillas (these were, after all, organized protests), and then went home.

All of a sudden, a new Chicano teacher appears.

So we have a new Chicano teacher but no Chicano/a studies classes being offered.

So, again, third period, “blow out” is being shouted in the halls. This time as I walked out of school, I see in front of us police cars, police dogs, and a line of policemen on bull horns telling us to stop. I walked slowly past them, joined the throngs of activists on the other side of

the line, marched downtown, shouted “We want Chicano studies now,” went to the capital to listen to political speeches, ate beans and tortillas, and went home.

The school’s funding drops. Soon, we have Chicano/a studies classes being offered.

What’s next?

The school had just repainted the lunchroom. On the back wall of the lunchroom, they put up a picture of a big hotdog and hamburger.

Blow out!

We got up, walked past policemen, marched downtown, shouted “We want taco now” (that little Taco Bell Chihuahua had nothing on us!), went to the capital, listened to political speeches, ate beans and tortillas, and went home.

Within days, a big taco appears alongside the hotdog and hamburger and they even gave us another wall to produce a student-designed mural in keeping with the mural wall art movement that was sweeping across the Southwest.

Against this was the backdrop of alternative, community-based projects and activities aimed at creating a more vibrant community. This included educational programming. My first two “education” jobs as teaching assistants were instructive of what was happening in the community relative to schooling. The first was at the West Side Youth Center which enacted an alternative middle-school program for early adolescent youth who had been kicked out of the Denver Public Schools. This was, to be sure, a very challenging experience, but we went at the work with a great sense of purpose, hope, and commitment.

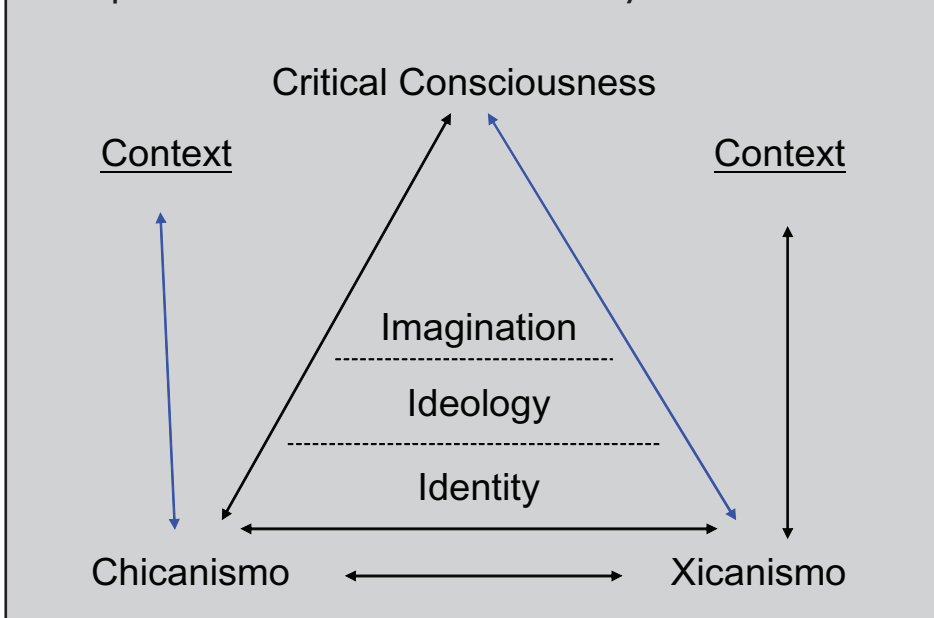
The second was *La Academia del Barrio*. It was a K-6 summer education program where Chicano/a history was taught, math was taught using the Mayan counting system, and where Chicano/a art and Chicano/a folklore dancing were part of this alternative school’s attempt as seeking a more cultural-connectedness. All the teachers and their aides were Chicano/a. It was Chicano-riffic!

From these, I learned how schools were both sites of assimilation and oppression but also possible sites of affirmation and liberation.

Xicana/o

The context for the new Xicanismo is situated in a historical moment of the dawn of the 21st Century. The political economy is marked by globalization and the push for the virtual unrestraint of ideas, products, and cultures (with conditions, of course, such that North Americans can go anywhere

Figure 1
A Conceptual Model of Chicana/o and Xicano/a Identity



but those wishing to come to North America will soon have to scale a massive—real and symbolic—border fence). This globalization is happening in the context of unequal relations of power so that we have to extend our language (and thereby our thinking) to acknowledge that there are those in the privileged position of globalizers and those who are being globalized.

Free market neoliberalism (what Edelsky [2006] calls “capitalism with the gloves off”) is running rampant with its assumption that all that results of unrestrained capitalism is good, despite its role in producing greater economic inequality. Private enterprise and corporatist responses are sought to cure the social challenges of the day. This is evident in privatizing and corporatizing schools and their related services (curriculum, pedagogies, programs, etc.) (Sleeter, 2007).

It's also a moment absent a broader,

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sustained social movement of significance in the U.S. (stronger elsewhere in the world where people are especially challenging globalization). Rather, it is a time where the climate is marked by intimidation and fear with the wearing away of constitutional rights making critique and protest all the more difficult.

Politically, we have witnessed a very powerful conservatism and policies which are as regressive as this nation has seen in some time. This conservatism is frequently in opposition to public opinion. Consider, for example, that while the vast majority of Americans believe that a “path to citizenship” should be part of a comprehensive immigration reform package, the Congress in 2006 only passed the building of 700 miles of fence along the US-Mexican border.⁴

The equity agenda of the 1980s has been replaced by an equality agenda—treating everyone the same—evident in anti-affirmative action propositions which have been passed by the electorate in California and Michigan. But equality among equals just reproduces the existing inequality; recall Oliver Wendell Holmes' adage: “there is no greater inequality than the equal treatment of unequals.”

More specially, with respect to diversity, oppression, and the “isms” (racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, etc.) have taken on a more chameleon character which is present

nonetheless (Zamudio & Rios, 2007). Bonilla-Silva (2003) describes this as “racism lite.” It has gone underground and lives in White people's more private worlds (Myers & Williamson, 2002).

Identity

Xicana/o,⁵ as described by Urrieta (2004), marks important differences from Chicano/a identity. The new Xicanismo works to recognize the multidimensional and intersecting nature of identities. Gender, class, and sexual orientation are recognized as salient differences that must be understood, addressed, and affirmed within the Xicana/o community. But the new Xicanismo demands that their intersecting elements are equally important (race/ethnicity AND gender, class and sexual orientation). The new Xicanismo also indicates the growth of a transnational dimension of what it means to be Xicana/o.

While the Chicano/a movement was fixed on Mexican Americans, the new Xicanismo is elastic enough so that many can be considered Xicana/o, including newcomers from Mexico as well as those with roots centered in Central and South America. It also indicates that the new Xicanismo wishes to recognize its connections and concerns for indigenous movements everywhere.

Finally, the perspective that many within the new Xicanismo bring is holistic and organic. That is, there is a greater tendency to see things as being interconnected (the political with the cultural, the social with the economic, as but two examples).

In an interesting change from the Chicano/a period, Xicanas/os find themselves both outside and inside “the system” including their organizations. Consider, for example, that on many college campuses the student group MEChA (*Movimiento Estudiantil Chicanos de Atzlan*) is considered a “Recognized Student Organizations.” There are presidents of universities, faculty, staff, program directors, principals, teachers, and school staff who are Xicana/o within educational institutions (as but one example of institutional incorporation).

Ideology and Issues

A much broader vision of social justice and human rights best captures the new Xicanismo. It is marked by a framework where multiculturalism, alliance and coalition building, and unity and justice are guiding principles. The issues this new group face rest largely around language and immigration, which have become proxies for race.

We know they're proxies with the following questions: when most people think of “immigrants” what ethnic/racial group comes to mind? And, when most people think of bilingual education, do they imagine the eight million students who speak Chinese who attend schools in the U.S. or do they think of Latinos?

Imagination

We have come to a point where we can finally honor the social, cultural, and linguistic history of communities of color, seeing these as assets (funds of knowledge; see for example Yosso, 2005) especially as we have come to see how these community values help Xicanas/os to persist. For Xicanas/os, these have been identified by Franquiz and Salazar (2004) as the *consejos*, *confianza*, *respeto* and *buen ejemplo* which provide guidance and nurturance in circles of familial and communal mentors.

But there is also a willingness to critique our positions: to raise questions of the role of class and homophobia and to question *machismo's* often-negative impact on the treatment of women. And, indeed, we learn that the mere presence of a Latina/o in a position of power does not indicate that the person has developed a cultural enlightenment or a political advocacy that serves the community well.

For many Xicanas/os, advocacy and action, nonetheless, does take place. It is more complicated and difficult, however, since it must happen both within and outside the system. Thus, Xicanas/os have the difficult task of “negotiating” their dual roles as insider and outsider of the system as they move to transform their microworlds towards greater justice. The result is various degrees of commitment to this transformation. But the possibility of “resistance” to hegemony is always there.

As mentioned earlier, I wanted to describe personal events to bring to life these two historical moments in the Mexican American community. The first was in the 1970s on Denver's West Side. This second centers around the May 1st (2006) protests in support of immigration rights. Now, I find myself in Laramie, Wyoming.

A Xicano Narrative

Earlier in the semester, the MEChA student organization (yes, officially recognized) had planned a community rally. It was attended by about 70 students/faculty/staff and a few community activists. We walked downtown on the sidewalk, chanted some slogans back from the *movimiento*, and chanted some new slogans as well. We stood on the central corner of the downtown of Laramie on a Saturday and waved posters and flags. At one point, we stood for 15 minutes in complete silence in respect to those who have lost their lives crossing the border. It was an eerie silence. We then marched back to the University where there were speakers, music, and pizza.

Some of the high school students, led by my son, approached a group of Chicano professors and community activists and asked to allow them to organize the march on May 1, a day when protests nationally were to take place. They asked that the day be marked by “active teaching.”

An email announcement went out on a university diversity list serve informing people of the event: We have become, after all, as Guillermo Gomez-Peña describes it, this nation’s first web-backs (Mendieta & Gómez-Peña, 2001). Over this very public email, we get a response from a student.

She writes:

The people who this event is going to support are not immigrants... they are ILLEGAL ALIENS! Do the research, and please do not be ignorant to the issues at hand when trying to force political issues at others! Immigration is wonderful, but as a country, Americans cannot support illegal alien rights... it defiles the principles our country was founded on, decreases the job market, and has hundreds of other effects.

Most vividly seen right now is the misinterpretation of affirmative action. For example: In school districts across the country, the American Flag has been taken down, and replaced with the Mexican Flag. The only statements that were made were that Americans need to be sensitive to other cultures.

We are Americans, let us remember that as we discern the impact this legislation will have on us all.

—Student

I write back to the student, again on this public email:

Hi:

I hope that you will attend the session...it’s a teach in and, indeed, there is much that I hope you will be open to learning. We intend the teach-in to raise the multiple points of view around this

complicated issue, including those whose perspectives you share, but to recognize that it is but one point of view. The belief is that understanding the multiple perspectives on this issue is the foundation for critical thinking, a bedrock of the purposes of education and the establishment of a robust democracy. I’ll see you there!

PS: Let us agree, at minimum, that humans cannot be illegal (they can act in ways that are illegal) and that no person is an alien (they are brothers and sisters in the human race). I invite you to visit with me to discuss this and other issues if you wish.

Atentamente.

—Francisco Rios, Ph.D.

The student is quick to reply:

Mr. Rios,

Please do not try to twist words... while I agree with you that “illegal aliens” when broken down is not a way to generalize humans as a whole, that is what we have to work with right now. These people are acting in a way that is illegal and as such, are aliens to this nation (These are facts, Mr. Rios).

I am very much a patriot of America, and do not look at the grey area to issues... they are either right or wrong. This issue is right to discuss, but wrong to advocate. The facts are the “immigrants” referred to in this meeting are not immigrants... Immigrants are not illegal, and deserve our support and help, the people you choose to offer solidarity to are illegal, and we are not in solidarity with them anymore than saying we all belong to the human race. I don’t really know how to say it more simply... That is all the further that critical thinking needs to go... is it right or wrong?

Regards,

—Student

I responded in a way I thought would end the conversation:

Hello:

The invitation for you to attend the teach in is a genuine one Alison, as is the invitation to come to my office to discuss this more. But if you do attend (either), please do so with a good heart and an open mind. Without both, it will not be much of a “teach” in and rather fall into a political diatribe... that will get us (as citizens and as a nation) no where. Trust that you can talk with me, a person who considers himself more “AMERICAN” than most everyone else (my family was on U.S. soil before it was the U.S.; my father fought in Vietnam; I’ve raised to the ranks of full professor in U.S. schools). But please recognize that well-meaning Americans can disagree on these critical issues.

At end, my patriotic duty is to question, to learn, to teach, to speak out, and to work in honor of the principles of equality and social justice upon which this nation was

founded. Perhaps, some day, you will see this as your patriotic duty as well.

—Dr. Francisco Rios

I signed it Dr. Rios purposely. But the student, using all the privileges of superiority that are granted to her via her Whiteness to “name,” responded:

Mr. Rios,

Thank you for your concern. I am having as much of an open mind to this issue as possible, but again, I find it to really be quite straightforward. I’ve been to rallies such as this before, and have found there’s no “teach” involved, nor is a conservative view represented at all. In respect to past experience, I’m not willing to sit through another session where people choose to express views just to feel important, regardless of the effects/implications/facts.

I also recognize that people may have contrary views, that’s one of the beauties of this country =). I would like to be able to hold mine without being attacked and constantly bombarded by others trying to change my mind in disrespectful and unnecessary means (such as the original e-mail and countless others sent by list serves to attempt to desensitize people to the facts).

I do appreciate your concern, and your willingness to discuss the situation. Unfortunately, there’s nothing to discuss. I’ve already done the research, and this entire situation is just headed down the same path as the abortion debate... (i.e., let’s change pro-abortion to pro-choice so people don’t feel so badly about what’s actually going on)... I realize that is another issue entirely, and I’m sure we’ll probably disagree on that one as well.

Again, thanks for your openness, I hope your rally is more productive and representative of all citizens than past rallies.

—Student

I have to admit that there was much in this exchange of emails to lament. Evident is a mixing of issues (immigration with abortion and patriotism, in this exchange) which speak to the tangled web of ideologies (Weiner, 2000) that often inform racist thinking. Evident is the ability, the privilege, to ignore and minimize any status achieved by a person of color within the academy by a student. Evident is her self-perceived right to call forth one’s axiological position and to name it as “truth.”

This email exchange raised lots of questions for me about my sense of place: How is it that a Chicano barrio boy from Denver’s Westside (*y puro rasquachi*), who saw the fine line between juvenile delinquency and a college education, was acting the role of *profe* in an academic research university in rural Wyoming—and which could be completely discounted by students?

How was it that I sailed through the

tenure and promotion process with very little critique (was I not doing enough to raise people's ire)? How did I go from my lower, working class roots to a middle, collar class position with all the concomitant family aspirations (sending children to Europe upon graduation, college as expectation, white collar expectations for my children)? How was it that I, an advocate for bilingual education, was now project investigator of the state's ESL program? What have I become comfortable with? What am I forgetting? Am I doing enough?

Wondering about this *locura*, and wondering how many people would actually attend, I dutifully moved ahead working with the two Chicana professors and I who were assigned the teach-in portion of the event. Organized by the youth, we were met at noon by a small group of community activists. We still had no idea how many youth would actually show up.

Over 200 high school students walked out. Standing there, in front of the school, it was a beautiful sight to see these students streaming out. This time, we walked down the middle of the street, to the middle of the campus where we were joined by another 150 community members, university students/faculty, and where we held the teach-in. This time, there were fewer speeches but instead we engaged in role-play activities and shared a series of readings.

At various moments, high school youth, community members, and university folks spontaneously spoke. We felt that we had created space for a collective imagination both troubling out assumptions about immigration but also imagining more human, humane, and socially just responses to the issue.

Toward a Critical Thinking Orientation

I hope that evident in these stories is the importance of *confianza* in our youth and in the possibilities of imagination. Evident is the outright resistance to equity and the political ideology of the conservative class (Fredrick Douglas was right: power concedes nothing). Evident is both the need to question and critique our very own life positions. Evident is the multiple shifting identities that our work demands and negotiating these through our work within the system while being *respetoso y un buen ejemplo*.

Heretofore, I have shared concepts—Chicanismo with new Xicanismo, critical thinking with identity, ideology and imagination—but I wish to acknowledge that there are mutually influencing dimensions (refer again to Figure 1; note the arrows in the figure). For example, the

context of the 1960s and 1970s gave rise of the Chicano/a movement, influenced as it was by the Civil Rights Movement and the Farmworkers' organization already underway. But the Chicano/a movement was instrumental in forging some of the gains in bilingual education, integration in schooling and housing, and a more open job market thereby influencing the very social-political context which gave rise to the movement.

As another example, consider the degree to which one moves toward critical consciousness which is dependent upon the identity, ideology and imagination of possibilities one takes. But equally important, critical consciousness calls one to question continually one's identity, ideology and worlds of imagination. As but one more example, the old school Chicano/a movement has influenced *la nueva onda* Xicanismo; and new Xicanas/os are influencing old school Chicanos.

While heretofore I've identified the differences between these two historical moments and identities, I also want to acknowledge their similarities. Both of these moments (Chicano/a and Xicana/o) rely on the following:

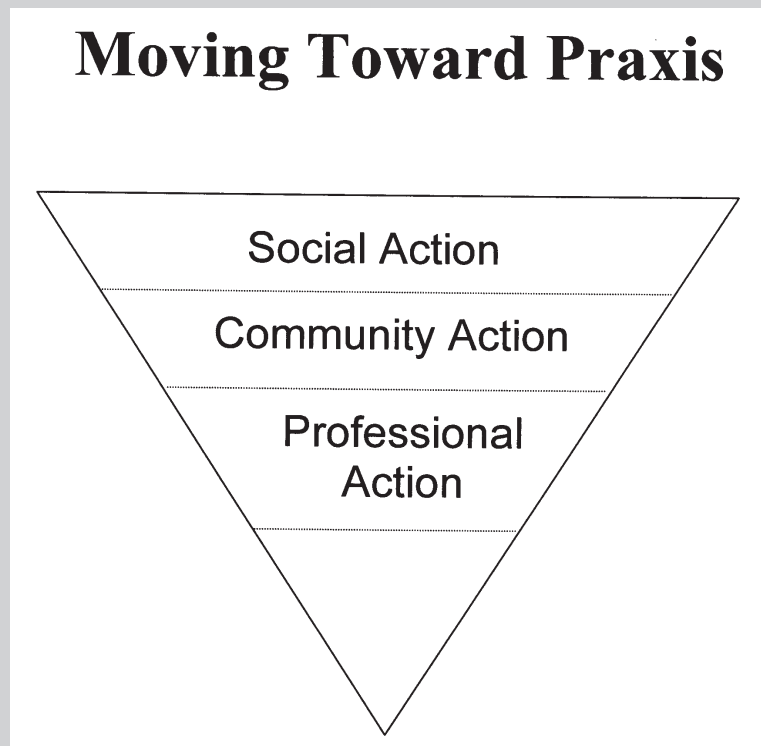
- ◆ Identity is a central construct;

- ◆ Critical consciousness is essential for each;
- ◆ There's an awareness of the role of unequal relations of power;
- ◆ They result from various forms of oppression;
- ◆ Social justice lays at the heart of imaginations; and,
- ◆ They rely on individuals and small groups working in local settings to make positive change.

Movement toward praxis begins with personal action associated with doing the critical work around identity and ideology and imagining one's actions in pursuit of social justice (see Figure 2). This movement then moves to the professional, communal, and social. But education is at the heart of positive change. Thus we move, as seen from the Figure 2, from the narrowest form of action, but the one upon which all others rest. As can be surmised, each level is broader since it has a broader impact. These two dimensions of critical thinking and action, which Freire called praxis, come together.

My own pedagogical work has focused on classroom-based practices where we bring the personal level of action together

Figure 2
Movement toward Praxis



with the imagination level of critical consciousness in pursuit of praxis (see Figure 3). These come together for me in social perspective taking and role-playing activities. To reiterate, the pursuit of productive pedagogies, in my thinking, revolves around the initial work of clarifying identities, broadening ideologies, and engaging imagination and that this IS praxis.

For me, the greatest possibilities lie in pursuing a range of productive pedagogies aimed at personal imagination toward fostering critical and more holistic thinking, honoring students' cultural capital and developing social network skills, troubling and affirming identities, and teaching advocacy and negotiation skills.

**Concluding Thoughts:
Perspectivas Criticas y Consejos**

As suggested, identities are a central factor in the teaching-learning process. But these identities are dynamic and shifting. It's essential that we can create counter-spaces, contexts in our classrooms, schools and communities, for the reframing of these identities.

So what do I hope we can learn from this essay? To begin, we must acknowledge that a shared ethnic heritage between teachers and student does not imply that one is able to make meaningful academic

and social connections. Rather, it is the development of a critical cultural consciousness which is paramount in bringing the much needed assets to the teaching-learning enterprise (Darder, 1993).

For teachers, these assets include an ability to understand the social-cultural realities of their students, high expectations, an advocacy for the students' primary language(s) and home culture, the implementation of a culturally responsive pedagogy, and forging robust relationships with parents and the local community. In addition, Galindo (1996) discusses how Xicana/o educators can develop a "bridging identity."

But we also know that Latino (and any other) educators don't have the kinds of knowledge and skills to be effective teachers of Latino students by virtue of their skin color (Berta-Ávila, 2004). Thus, these assets (connected to the broader goal of fostering a critical cultural and professional identity) have to be developed and/or nurtured within both a teacher education program and nurtured within the context of meaningful professional development and among a cadre of critical friends and allies.

This is, as one might imagine, a most difficult challenge. It's difficult given the general nature of most teacher education programs which have a hard enough chal-

lenge to address diversity issues generally. It's difficult given the largely conservative nature of most schools which are reluctant to hire teachers of color (let alone teachers of color with a critical thinking orientation, one which positions the educator, at times, against the system) (Quiocho & Rios, 2000). It's difficult given the general reluctance of schools to discuss issues of race and racism (Foster, 1993). It's difficult given that Latino educators are at varying levels of identity development and critical consciousness (as described above).

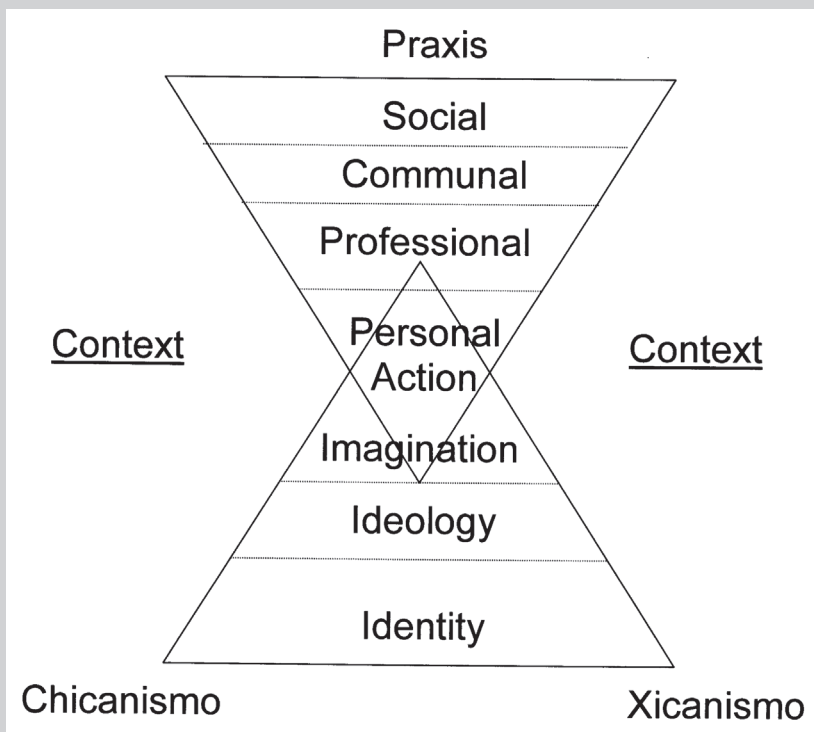
In sum, schools would need to be willing to hire educators who would be critical of the broader society as well as the school (as a system) itself as well as to advocate for meaningful change on behalf of historically marginalized students (including Latinos).

Thus I advance three recommendations which might begin to address this challenge. The first is the advance of a research agenda which details the assets that Chicano/a and Xicana/o educators, those with a critical political consciousness, bring to the profession. By being able to detail these "tangible and concrete" assets to school-based professionals, they will be able to see that the resultant advocacy orientation will support meaningful academic school reform in ways that will assist in the success of both Latino and non-Latino students alike. It will help school-based professionals to identify the kinds of professional development that will nurture the identity, consciousness, and cultural assets these educators bring. And it will allow them to create meaningful structures within schools (teacher evaluation systems, for example) that identify and reward those who bring these assets to bear in their professional practices. I assert that one prototype for this kind of research is being done by Berta-Ávila (2004).

The second recommendation is the incorporation, in preservice and inservice professional development, of critical cultural thinking (see, for example the framework developed by Zamudio, Rios, & Jaime, 2008) as perhaps the most critical skill that teachers can develop. These critical thinking frameworks need to be holistic in orientation. It might include the following:

- ◆ *Organic experiences* are teachers' lived experiences which, when questioned, provides them with insight into positionality and inequality in society where knowledge is constructed rather than given in the form of a dominant ideology;
- ◆ *Relational analysis* describes teach-

**Figure 3
Identity as Praxis**



ers' abilities to make meaningful connections between their lives and the lives of others (as members of social groups) as well as to structures of oppression;

◆ *Historical analysis* entails teachers' ability to see how the past is a context for the present and how the residuals of past oppression are evident in contemporary life; and,

◆ *Power relations* asks teachers to recognize that power is embedded in all social relationships and that they can be agents better prepared to critique and act against racist and sexist ideologies that serve to subordinate oppressed groups, including Latinos.

The third recommendation is the importance of teaching advocacy and negotiation skills as a critical teaching skill for teachers of color. At the forefront of this is the recognition that resistance is not inherently transformative and can, indeed, be regressive in its overall impact (Solórzano & Delgado-Bernal, 2001). Thus, sharing with teachers the various ways in which an advocacy orientation can be meaningfully carried out, in addressing instances of institutional racism, and in negotiating the needs of the school district to assure high academic success with the development of their students' own cultural, critical consciousness would all be part of this professional development. This would tie back to the role of *old school* teacher/activists who can serve as mentors and role models, sharing what they have learned in terms of successfully negotiating the system while simultaneously advancing the needs of the community as they continually develop their own critical consciousness.

The immigration rights protests in 2006 did much to revitalize the Latino community on the broadest level. In these protests, *old school* Chicanos/as came together with *la nueva onda* Xicanas/os to teach, to organize, and to march on behalf of an important group of humans whose blood, sweat and toil provide much to the nation and to the Latino communities. In so doing, they were able to learn together, to work together, and to stand side by side in pursuit of advancing the Latino community and the pursuit of social justice.

Let us hope that this serves as a catalyst for the continual personal and professional growth of all those Latinos, Chicanos/as and Xicanas/os alike, for whom a critical, cultural consciousness can be made manifest in praxis.

Notes

¹ Homies are Chicanos with "...separate and distinct personalities and characteristics" which make up a single, composite entity. Made manifest in little figurines (more than 100 in all), they are an attempt to portray a variety of Chicano characters with the intent which "allows for laughter and good times as an anecdote for reality" (Gonzalez, 2007).

² Note the purposeful placement of the "o" in front of the "a" in "Chicano/a" to indicate the primacy of the male figure within the narrative of the *movimiento* during this time period.

³ Imagination is used here to capture positionalality, critical thinking and praxis (hence, imagining possibilities) of the specific time.

⁴ Note that while in the 2006 elections the Republicans lost control of the Congress, immigration was a wedge issue and many Democrats who won had to demonstrate that they too were in favor of stringent immigration restrictions.

⁵ Note the placement of the "a" in front of the "o" in Xicana/o to acknowledge the powerful role women have played in all aspects of the Xicana/o experience.

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