

APPENDIX F. Autoethnography Example by Jaime J. Romo

Experience and Context in the Making of a Chicano Activist
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This paper examines the experiences and context in the making of a Chicano activist. Utilizing autoethnographic methodology, I discuss my own identity development, as it was mediated by issues of social capital and mentoring, two significant elements related to Chicano educational activism. I discuss dimensions of race, class, self-esteem, and professional development as they relate to transformative educators and activism.¹

Key Words: mentoring; transformation process; autoethnography; identity development

Overview

Upon examining the literature on teachers and change, two alarming facts emerge. First, the overwhelming majority of teachers continue to be White or European American and tend to teach in the way that they learn (Romo, Bradfield, & Serrano, 2004). Secondly, we have classrooms with diminishing numbers of students who are European American. A crisis is looming: many teachers misunderstand, marginalize and mis-serve the growing minority-majority population by teaching and interacting with students as if students shared in the teachers' backgrounds. Concurrently, a virtual academic industry has developed related to European American teachers and students understanding their whiteness as it relates to teaching and learning (Delpit, 1995; Howard, 1999; Kohl, 1994; McIntosh, 1989; Scheurich, 1993; Scheurich & Young, 1997; Sleeter & McLaren, 1995). Despite a growing body of knowledge about teachers who practice educational social justice, much more needs to be understood about the lives of Chicano/Latino students and teachers (Fredrickson, 1995; Moll et al., 1993; Romo, Bradfield, & Serrano, 2004). Therefore, it is necessary to consider alternative educational social justice practitioners' voices in order to break the following patterns.

The dropout rates across the nation for Latinos, African Americans, and American Indians are particularly high (Kitchen, Velasquez & Myers, 2000) when compared to European American students. In the U.S., dropout rates for Latinos and American Indians hover between 40 and 50%, almost double that for African Americans and triple that for whites. In other words, out of one hundred White students that enter kindergarten, ninety-three earn a high school diploma, sixty-five attend at least one year of college, and thirty-four complete a B.A. degree. Of one hundred Black students that enter kindergarten, eighty-seven earn a high school diploma, fifty-one attend at least one year of college, and seventeen complete a B.A. degree. However, out of one hundred Latino students that enter kindergarten, sixty-three earn a high school diploma, thirty-two attend at least one year of college, and eleven complete a B.A. degree. Among Native Peoples, only fifty-eight percent complete high school and seven percent attend at least one year of college (Haycock, 1997; The Education Trust, 1998).

We know that the quality of teaching is the most important determinant of student success (Darling-Hammond, 1998; Elmore & Burney, 1997) that leads to student success or its antithesis, sharecropper education (Moses, 2001). However, students of color report that white, ethnically encapsulated teachers: did not know them nor did they care to; were biased against students' cultures; and were insensitive to issues they faced at home (Kitchen, Velasquez & Myers, 2000). Schools, in truth, often felt like prisons by students who faced cultural discontinuities and personal and institutional racism on a daily basis (e.g., Chávez Chávez, 1995, 1997; Delpit, 1995; Kitchen, Velasquez & Myers, 2000).

By looking at K-12 educational system as a whole, it is possible to conclude that, as a society, we are all complicit in the miserable learning conditions and outcomes related to Latino students (Darder, Torres, & Gutierrez, 1997; Howard, 1999; Kozol, 1994). For example, how is it that while the proportion of Latinos in the United States increases, the number of Latinos who complete graduate degrees, particularly doctorates decreases (Gonzalez et al., 1998)? I believe that by understanding Chicano educational activist educators, people who promote individual, interpersonal and institutional transformation towards equity and inclusion in a multicultural society, we can better serve the growing minority-majority student population. Therefore, this study hopes to provide insights into the questions: What factors influence the development of Chicano educational activists? How does Chicano activism in higher education relate to K-12 educational practices for all students?

The following autoethnographic study allows for a rich vein of anecdotal information about schools, identity development, mentoring and activism that traditional quantitative or ethnographic methodologies can miss (Bochner, 1997; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). In this study, I examine my experiences, as a representative of a nationally small group of Chicano professors/activists, to extend understandings of the dynamics related to the makings of a Chicano advocate (Reed-Danahay, 1997). The study offers readers a glimpse into the "totality" of the experiences involved in the making of a Chicano educational activist by utilizing racial identity development and social capital theory as well as current research on transformative teaching (Bourdieu, 1977; Romo, Bradfield, & Serrano, 2004; Romo & Roseman, 2004; Tatum, 1998).

Methodology

I chose an auto-ethnographic methodology as an approach to examine my own development as a Chicano activist because, as Tierney states, "auto-ethnography confronts dominant forms of representation and power in an attempt to reclaim, through self-reflective response, representational spaces that have marginalized those of us at the borders" (1998, p. 66). Autoethnography is a genre of writing and research that connects the personal to the cultural, placing the self within a social context (Reed-Danahay, 1997). These texts are usually written in the first person and feature dialogue, emotion, and self-consciousness as relational and institutional stories affected by history, social structure, and culture (Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

The context of autoethnography as a research method in this study is that those with power are frequently least aware of or least willing to acknowledge its existence as well as their role in maintaining inequitable social and cultural capital that leads to student marginalization (Delpit, 1995; Stanton-Salazar, 1997, 2001). In fact, Paulo Freire (1985) would say that, because of privilege, dominant culture members actually resist change toward equity. Therefore, it is highly appropriate that an autoethnographic approach is utilized to examine Chicano experiences in education, through a Chicano researcher's presentation of findings (Charmaz & Mitchell, 1997; Holt, 2003).

I originally generated this data approximately eighteen months ago for my undergraduate and graduate teacher education students. This was a way to help them know more about their instructor's emphasis on their becoming multi-culturally competent advocates for all

children. It was an autobiographical written narrative depicting my experiences as a student and educator that was based upon years of reflections on identity, voice, recovery and purpose. The essay also modeled part of a self-reflexive final project that dealt with a final educational philosophy project. I tried to produce an account of identity development and significant experiences related to my trajectory as an educational activist, particularly for marginalized students.

As a result of continuous reading and rereading, long after writing the initial narrative, I identified units and then categories from the data. Four key categories emerged from the data: The bittersweet context of school; Chicano identity development; Mentoring; and stages of growth as an activist.

Findings

This examination began with the following questions: What factors influence the development of Chicano educational activists? How does Chicano activism in higher education relate to K-12 educational practices for all students? The data offered several insights to these questions, as well as some links for teacher educators and K-12 educators to consider in their work.

The Bittersweet Context of School: Hope and Wounding

Across the nation, a growing number of children are born into poverty. They enter kindergarten with hopes and dreams of opportunity, progress, and dreams fulfilled. Unfortunately, by the time most leave school, many of their hopes have withered—dried up like raisins in the sun. The social class of poor students consists of “black, Hispanic, and Asian class fractions, together with the white aged, the unemployed and underemployed, large section of women, the handicapped, and other marginalized economic groups” (McLaren, 1994, p. 180). In the United States, this underclass continues to increase as access to the privileges held by the middle and upper class diminish. And, despite the “myth of meritocracy” that maintains that a solid work ethic is all one needs to pull her/himself up “by her/his bootstraps,” the U.S. middle class is diminishing, the upper class remains relatively static and the underclass is growing. About 25% of U.S. children live in poverty and that percentage continues to increase (Romo, Bradfield, & Serrano, 2004).

Schools in rural or urban poverty-stricken neighborhoods have a particularly significant opportunity to make or break underclass children. If such schools are not proactive in mitigating the negative impacts poverty can have on children who grow up poor, they can negatively impact children's lives (e.g., Books, 1994; McDermott & Rothenberg, 1999, 2000; Payne, 1998). For example, schools with large populations of poor children often have policies and practices that reinforce compliance, obedience and passive intake of knowledge (Anyon, 1980a, 1980b; Anyon & Wilson, 1997). These become the background for the overall context of school as a set of bittersweet experiences for many Chicanos, emerging educational activists, and the following two reflections.

It was a sunny, September Friday in 1965. My first grade class at Divine Savior Elementary School in Cypress Park, in northeast Los Angeles, was gearing up for our weekly spelling competition. Our orderly room with the pretty bulletin boards, chairs in precise rows, and friendly mice and frogs in their cages on the bookshelf against the wall had become a second home to me. My first home wasn't like the neat, controlled environment, where I got consistent feedback, attention, praise, and sometimes hot dog, cupcake and chocolate milk on a Friday.

Within a few months, I had become the champion speller in my class. The Friday spelling contest was my stage, and I nervously sat, fully immersed in spelling colors and numbers, awaiting my turn to reestablish my spelling championship status, whatever it cost. Jeannie Prudell was a good speller and we were in a championship spell-off in my classroom. Jeannie Prudell was the first White girl I had ever met. On the first day of school, we were lined up: Ortega, Prudell, and Romo. The heavy, blonde, blue-eyed White girl, turned around and for no apparent reason declared, “I can spell stop: S-T-O-P. I can spell yellow: Y-E-L-L-O-W.” My mother, unlike lots of my classmates' moms, had already taught me to read well, but still I thought that Jeannie Prudell must have been a genius because she knew so much that she couldn't hold it in.

Sister called me to the board to spell the next word, but I also had to go to the bathroom. The contest won out and I marched to the board to spell orange: O-R-N-G-E, as I quietly peed on myself, leaving a small puddle for the next student to discover and declare, “Ooh, sister, somebody peed!” It wasn't such a big deal in itself, but for me, who wanted so early to be so perfect, it was a symbolic act: I was a spelling, peeing paradox, sitting in a pool of shame. At age six, the primacy of academic performance meant more to me than meeting my own basic

physical needs. I loved school and achievement more than myself, so I wouldn't give up my spot in the contest, my moment to shine, or admit that I had a need. What a foreshadowing of my years of teaching, wherein I held my pee like a pro, like all good teachers do, for the sake of the craft.

The first quote illustrates the socio-cultural gaps that often exist between classrooms and students' home environments. Despite early academic accomplishment, I exhibited a kind of adulation that many students of color pay to dominant culture members. The second quote highlights the compliance that I had internalized, partly related to Mexican culture 'respeto,' and partly related to the explicit authority that religion and religious figures made explicit in school.

A context of school as bittersweet frames the overall experiences of Chicanos and other students of color in schools. For me, this continues to be an accurate description of my experiences as a teacher, a K-12 administrator and university professor. However, I now have the benefit of a more developed and integrated identity, understanding of educational and societal dynamics, and mentoring that I discuss in the following sections.

Identity Development

Frameworks of racial/ethnic identity development generally work from a lower to higher level, whether they relate to dominant culture members (Hardiman, 1982; Helms, 1990; Howard, 1999), ethnic people of color (Atkinson, Morten, & Sue, 1989; Cross, 1991; Kim, 1981; Solis, 1981) or biracial or bicultural individuals (Poston, 1990; Stonequist, 1961[1937]). Similar to other developmental models, growth varies based on context and experiences. In the case of racial/ethnic identity development, sociopolitical and contextual factors create conditions which could prevent internalizing a normalized identity and, at times, arrest normal progression. In the following examples, we see how racial identity development intersects with class and psychological or self-esteem conflicts, before yielding an integrative stage of identity.

Identity development: racial dimensions Prior to meeting Jeannie, I was unsure about what White people were like. My prior experience was only through TV and TV made me very conscious of what the 'good life' meant, and how my family didn't have it or look like those who did. School was my way of entering into a slice of this good life that, while not my own, was where I was liked and accepted by some White teachers and some White kids.

Most of the kids were Latinos, first or second-generation Mexicanos, but the few White kids stood out to me as parts of the world I saw on TV. Rick Jones, a blonde, crew cut sporting White boy gave me another pleasant experience with White people. A week before my fateful Friday spell-off, some classmates were spinning tops at recess. We'd throw our tops and then pick them up and let them continue spinning in our hands. Danny Olivas crouched down to pick up his top and right as the metal top tip was at the point of contact of the web between his two fingers, I threw my top. I didn't mean to throw it near him, but it happened to hit his top, which pinched his hand. He jumped up and charged me. Out of nowhere, Rick Jones jumped in between us, pushed Danny and said, "Hey, leave my friend alone." I watched in surprise that this White boy would call me his friend and stand up for me. While Rick may not have any thought of race at that point, I did. It was a subtle consciousness that came up every once in a while, mostly when I saw TV.

At the same time, every time a school person said my name, I got a consistent message that I was unusual or foreign. In its apparent innocence, it was a pattern of not being seen as I am. My mom named my five siblings and me so that we'd keep our names in English and Spanish: Leticia, Conrad (named after our father, Conrado), Jaime, Marina, Rene and Teresa. I think she must have known how important was the idea of keeping our names, which represented our identities and our connectedness to our past. She assimilated in lots of ways, yet she maintained a connection to her language, relatives in Mexico, and community; still, her inclusion as Vangie or Lina seemed like a mainstream way to see her as White, as "Latina-lite." Her name was Maria Evangelina.

/Jay-me/is what I get when most people see my name spelled J-a-i-m-e. I guess that there's a Jamie and Jaime spelling that some people claim as/Jay-me/. As a child or as an adult, when a non-Latino has wanted to be friendly, he's said, "Hi-me, that's my name—Jim." Even as a child, I knew that my name is Jaime, not hi-me and not Jim. Santiago is James, Santiaguito might be Jim. Being re-named by others represents years of absorbing people's misinterpretations or impositions. For years, I smiled, I was nice and I didn't want to offend. I put up with and excused others, even though it felt bad, because I believed that it was flattering to be given the attention. But my name represents the core of who I am. And who I am represents something that others needed to change in order to relate to me.

The previous quotes reflect the assimilationist context that people of color often experience in schools and in society. Valenzuela (1999)

argues that schools, in fact, have a subtractive nature by minimizing students' language and culture. Therefore, a sign of post-assimilation racial identity development for people of color is to reclaim names or other ethnic markers in order to both reject the assimilation and claim their own identity (Atkinson, Morten, & Sue, 1989; Cross, 1991; Kim, 1981; Solis, 1981). The expression for "What's your name?" in Spanish is "Como te llamas?" ("What do you call yourself?"). What we call ourselves says a lot about how connected we are to our roots, ethnicity, and language of origin. It often takes a conscious effort to keep those connections through names in an assimilationist society. When my first son was born, my father and sister chided me for not naming Jesus something more 'mainstream,' like Michael Francis. This speaks to the discomfort so many Latinos feel about being ethnic in a society that despises Latinos, as well as the desire and fantasy that so many carry to be mainstream.

Identity Development: Class Dimensions Public schools generally have at least three tracks of classes and over-place poor students (of color) in academic tracks beneath their actual ability level (e.g., tracking) due to preconceived notions of performance. Consequently, social class becomes a powerful filter that practically defines who succeeds and who does not. Students' self-esteem is often permanently affected as perceptions of their academic abilities and future possibilities dry up over time (Romo, Bradfield, & Serrano, 2004). Many Chicanos experience the bitterness of not fitting in to school environments. Since I experienced some academic and athletic success in school, I persisted. However, many others turn inward (Tatum, 1998) and subsequently find themselves disconnected from the educational gatekeepers and resources that can help Chicanos resist assimilation or identity loss and find school success (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, 2001). In the following section, I examine how attending a private, elementary school, college prep high school, and university influenced my identity development.

For me, school was where I was safe, where I felt valued, included, liked, and successful. But no place is completely safe and sometimes the violence from the neighborhood carried over to the church property and a normally safe parish fiesta exploded. The crowded schoolyard was lined with food and game booths and families swarmed the property; "I'm your Puppet" blared for the twentieth time that day from the jukebox in the corner near the snow cone booth. A few feet away from me, someone from another neighborhood must have bumped someone from a Cypress Park clique and within seconds, a group surrounded the unlucky intruder and kicked and

beat him to the ground. Nonetheless, I generally felt safe at school and it was there that I got picked to go on the Art Linkletter Show in 1966. Art was a gentle, friendly man who knew Sister Monroe, the principal of my grammar school. He, no doubt, asked her to supply gullible, obedient children who would sincerely answer questions, even if we had no idea what the questions or answers meant. All I knew was that I felt special because I got picked. My three classmates and I got to the studios and played in the waiting room for the taping to begin. The waiting room was carpeted and had cool toys that I didn't have, like "A Barrel of Monkeys." While I played, some television people primed us with questions in a friendly, conversational way. "What do you like about school?" I told them about some cool frogs we had in the classroom. "What do you want to be when you grow up?" I didn't know. I don't think anyone had asked me that before first grade. So when I got under the hot studio lights and Art Linkletter asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up, all I could think of was how cool it was to have those frogs in the classroom and how I could make that happen for other kids. The stagehands may have mentioned veterinarian back stage, but all that came out of my mouth was, "I want to be a tadpole keeper." Everyone laughed. Backstage, another question was, "If you were president of the United States, what would you do?" I didn't know what presidents did, but the stagehands asked, "Would you run for second term? . . . Would you run for third term?" Sure. I figured that if they asked, there must be such a thing, and that if two is good, three is better. I was the supposed smart kid in the class and I had fallen for the backstage set up. So when Art asked, "If you were president of the United States, what would you do?" I was ready. "I'd run for third term." Everyone in the audience laughed again, and I had no idea what I had said. Our pay for being goobers on national television was a limousine ride to the famous Beverly Hills restaurant, The Brown Derby, to feast on a huge ice cream sundae or banana split, either of which were heaven on earth for me.

School was my oasis and sometimes my mirage. When I was in the eighth grade, I still wet the bed and was still terrorized by the violence in my home. When I heard about a private high school that had boarders, I knew that I had to get a scholarship to attend and get away from my house and the insanity I lived in. I'd often go to bed dreaming of living in the boarding house, without cockroaches, crashing furniture or piercing screams in the middle of the night that would transform me into Mighty Mouse, my favorite after school cartoon character, to save someone or into the invisible man so I could hide and be safe. I wanted out of my house and school was going to be my boarding ticket. I knew

(or maybe was so desperate and unaware of any other alternatives) that doing well in school would help me—somehow, in some way, someday. With good grades, I thought, I could be a lawyer and defend kids, like the kids I grew up with who didn't seem special to anyone and who got into trouble. That dream propelled me through many all-nighters at a young age wherein I'd finish every assignment, no matter how tired I was. In high school, I obeyed school authorities and rules, I never challenged or spoke back to teachers, and I was a decent high school soccer player. High school was a place where I could channel my anger in constructive, socially acceptable ways. Besides getting good grades, I got a mysterious pleasure at beating rich White boys in the classroom. That was my consolation when, every day, my efforts to fit in, to look like, sound like, and act like my wealthier White peers dissolved like a mirage when I got home.

At school, I'd overhear their stories about their dates over the weekend, driving their convertible to the racetrack or to some expensive concert and I'd feel jealous. At the same time, they gave me my model for what dates are supposed to be like. As a senior, I met a young woman from a girls' school at a dance and later, we went out on my first date. I wanted to go out and live like my schoolmates. I borrowed a car from my molester priest, and I wore the leisure suit and polyester shirt he had bought for me when he took me to Hawaii, like I was a prince for a day. I really liked the young woman, but I never called her again. I felt terrible that we lived in polar opposite socio-economic worlds and that I couldn't afford to date her. Besides, I only had one leisure suit. Again, my illusion of school as the great equalizer that would override my miserable home life left me. So when the mirage faded, it was a bonus that I outperformed lots of rich, White boys in the classroom and on the field.

When it came time to apply to colleges, I filled out my own financial aid forms. Mom left the financial matters to my father and he left them to me. While I could figure out paperwork, I was under-prepared for managing my life in such a fast paced, high-powered environment as Stanford offered. As successful as I was in a college preparatory high school, my leap into Stanford life was disorienting and fostered nagging questions that lead to insecurity. This insecurity was a kind of not being at ease (dis-ease) with the core of being who I was. As a result, I floundered through my undergraduate education.

Of the many class issues to develop, I will highlight three that emerge from the data: cultural capital, violence and symbolic violence, and a migratory identity development. Cultural capital refers to what middle and upper class families pass on to their children,

which substitutes for or supplements economic capital as a way of maintaining class status and privilege (Bourdieu, 1977). Gonzalez et al. (2003) discusses how low-income and underrepresented students do not sufficiently possess the knowledge of what college is, the diversity of institutions, the admissions process, graduation rates of different types of institutions, or utility of various degrees. This theme of limited cultural capital expected in mainstream institutions and the experience of being under prepared for social or academic rites of passage relates to my own memories.

While some parents can pass on middle-class cultural capital, others pass it on with violence or the symbolic violence of exclusion, marginalization and classism (Nieto, 2000). The U.S. Census Bureau notes that approximately 37% of children in the United States today live in poverty. Popular wisdom suggests that many more families live one check away from homelessness, like I did. Children enter kindergarten with hopes and dreams of opportunity, progress, and dreams fulfilled. Unfortunately, by the time most leave school, many of poor children's hopes have withered—dried up like raisins in the sun. In the quotes, it is clear that I persevered through a violent home, a violent neighborhood and the symbolic violence of not having enough and not feeling as if I were enough in middle and upper class academic environments.

The last theme from these class memories is that of a migratory identity. Given the poverty of local public schools, my parents sacrificed and sent me and my siblings to private schools. For me and many students to participate in prestigious and rigorous educational programs, we have to leave the neighborhood and often separate from our friends and support group. Later in this discussion, I raise the image of being a professional migrant worker as an empowering identity descriptor. However, in these formative years, I felt more isolated and pressured to disconnect from my roots, or connect in an intellectual way, knowing that I represented others who sacrificed for me to have more opportunities than they had.

Identity Development: Self Esteem Conflicts Positioning theory notes that as we take up a position assigned to us by others, we begin to see the world from the vantage point of that position. In the following memories, I took up the 'good student' role, even when it did not seem to produce the benefits of academic success or even led me to the shameful contrasts of hopes and experience.

"Ooh, sister, somebody peed!" . . . I was pretty embarrassed, but the teacher and my mom were very gentle with me. I'm sure that the teacher had seen this many times in her career, so it wasn't a big deal

for her. My mom, on the other hand, probably thought that this was a continuation of my bed wetting at home most nights. She knew that I was so damned scared of my dad's drinking and violence that I slept in a stinky bed and kept a stinky secret with her for many years. But my mom didn't know about my other grammar school secrets that I carried: the fact that I was molested by the parish priest and his friend; the fact that I was ashamed of my poverty and home for so many years; the fact that at some point I transferred the shame of what wasn't perfect about what happened to me to who I was.

This is an example of what qualitative research can uncover that quantitative research cannot (Bochner, 1997; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). The pain and shame I felt as a child from my home life was compounded by the devastation of molestation by a religious authority figure. For various reasons, many Chicanos feel ambivalent about school and authority figures. Some feel the symbolic violence of rejection or manipulation by teachers or other authority figures (Nieto, 2000). The juxtaposition of these home and school experiences illustrates how Chicanos and other students of color contend with or resist a lifetime of symbolic violence and/or ambivalence about school.

These memories also elicit a tone of desperation and failure. As a student and professional, the hard work and sacrifice I invested in school seemed to draw the proverbial check marked 'insufficient funds' when it came time to enjoy the benefits of academic achievement. While these memories may seem devastating, they are also the foundation of activism that I will discuss in later sections of this article.

Identity Development: Integration Examinations into the lives of educational activists (Romo, Bradfield, & Serrano, 2004; Romo & Roseman, 2004) have uncovered that activists: have questioned their own mindsets, have experienced cultural dissonance, have experienced the pain caused by both the actions of misinformed others, and have begun to face their own demons grounded in their privilege and/or biases. All, however, continue to struggle in the everyday as advocates for their students. The following narratives represent a kind of personal and professional integration that comes through practice.

I identify with brown men who wait for work on supermarket corners—men who will break their backs for a day's wage and say thank you. It takes guts to stand on street corners waiting for someone to come and offer you a job, meanwhile hoping that the INS won't pick you up to send you away from here, away from where there's work that can take care of your family. It takes courage and tenacity to sleep in hills or wherever is affordable and then to clean up to be presentable to ask for work out in public. It takes faith and endurance

and resistance and persistence to show up every day and sacrifice food, comfort, and family, to live and work alone among strangers.

Brown men and women wait for work in strawberry fields and in educational fields—men and women who will break their backs for a day's wage and say thank you. It takes deep faith that somehow God will take care of us and our loved ones as we do the best we can do, without contacts, without understanding the hidden culture of the system, and without support. It takes great heart to stand amid disdain and hatred and not lash back when people blame us for taking their jobs away, for not being qualified to be where we are, for making them feel uncomfortable and be dependent on someone else's prerogative to select.

I'm a migrant worker with more education, more possessions, more visions of changing the systems that perpetuate dark people waiting on corners for work. Because of my journey of poverty and temporary assignments, I am an advocate for social justice through teacher education. Because I know what it is like to be marginalized, isolated, and rejected [as a professional], I organize Latino faculty and staff to help themselves and empower others to find a place at the educational table and institutionalize equity and diversity.

Part of my empathy for kids in elementary or middle school in particular comes from the secret hell I lived that taught me how much energy it takes to keep secrets. I empathize with kids who put on a happy face when angry or terrified because they don't know how to handle the monsters that are real (Edelman, 1992).

Scholars report that Latinos/as and American Indians remain the most underrepresented major ethnic groups at institutions of higher learning—especially at selective, four-year liberal-arts colleges and research universities—as students, tenured professors, and academic administrators. In addition, key decision makers in the selection process for presidents and provosts expected higher standards of qualifications and experience for Latino men and women than for members of other ethnic and racial groups (Haro, 1995). It is with my experiences in mind that I work to redeem my own life experiences and transform the conditions that perpetuate experiences of inequity, marginalization and violence for others.

My personal and professional integration process has paralleled my ethnic/racial identity development process. Overall, I have come from rejecting my home experience and culture in order to assimilate and be accepted into the mainstream, to embracing my heritage with a vengeance (rejecting anything that represented dominant culture), to negotiating the knowledge, dispositions, and skills from both worlds.

When I recall the image of migrant worker, therefore, it is with a personal identification with migrant Latino families, even though I now hold a middle class professional cultural capital. It is with this perspective that I can better understand my mentoring experiences as well as my work as an activist, which I discuss in the following sections.

Mentoring

In a study of 14 Latino educational administrators, one theme was clear: the need for mentors and mentoring of Chicano students to develop future educational activists in both teaching and administration (Romo, 1998). My activism, particularly as a Chicano, has been shaped through both negative and positive mentoring experiences, although the predominant experience of professional mentoring has been a lack of mentoring. The following sections illustrate how this mentoring looked, sounded, and felt in my educational experiences.

Negative Mentors

The experiences of . . . longing began my search for a mentor, a successful authority who could validate me with my experience and my perspective, as well as my [Spanish] name. I can't overstate how significant the lack of mentoring I experienced was in my formative years. Until I had my own sense of being an author and authority of my own experience, I constantly questioned myself: "Am I somehow bringing something that's true, or real, or that makes sense to others?" And the making sense meant looking for someone to validate me. The making sense meant looking for someone who was successful and 'authoritative,' yet enough like me that I could trust her/his judgment and benefit from her/his authoritative voice when it spoke to my merit, my place, my authenticity.

As an undergrad in a predominantly white institution, I never knew my assigned advisor and after trying a series of majors, I found a Latino professor in the history department who agreed to be my advisor. At the beginning of my last quarter, I met with him. "Any suggestions on what I should do next?" I asked, unsure of myself and aware that I had pieced together a history degree. "Well, I wouldn't suggest that you be a historian." I'm sure I was reaching for nurturing or empathy from a fellow Latino, who represented an idealized

intellectual father figure to me. My blind faith and dreams propelled me for years in my search for a mentor, someone who had been where I wanted to go, someone who even looked like me. I was profoundly embarrassed, more so than in my peeing, spelling debacle. More than in front of a national television audience who laughed at me because I didn't understand the questions. I filed away my numb self-esteem, got drunk and determined that I would redeem myself someday. I wasn't surprised, when I received my diploma from Stanford, that the reader called out another version of my name, "Jaime Who-deh (Jude) Romo."

Positive Mentors

In high school, two teachers pushed me to achieve and I responded to them because I sensed that they valued me and my name. Perhaps it helped that they called everyone by last name, so for the first time, teachers pronounced my name correctly. Fr. Eugene Colosimo was a feisty Sicilian Jesuit who refused to accept minimal effort or results from me in his Algebra and Trigonometry courses. Mr. Pat Rowell was a gentle White English teacher who told the class about his Latina wife's experiences of poverty in her formative years. By acknowledging that he appreciated struggle, I worked especially hard in his class. Despite their and others' support, I was without a mentor.

I entered Stanford in the fall of 1977 with two Chicano high school friends. They each had a plan and did well. [One] was a wealthy Chicano, whose father was a General Practitioner and who owned a large ranch in Mexico. He knew what it took to get into medical school from day one. He knew the language, culture, system and schedule. He worked hard and went from Stanford to USC medical school. [The second] was interested in being a lawyer and he also had a plan and worked hard. During our senior year, [my second friend] and I met on campus and he announced that he had just gotten his LSAT scores. "Great. How'd you do?" I asked. "Pretty good." He replied before adding, "For a Mexican." We both laughed at our insecurity and struggle to succeed. He went on to UCLA law school.

Finally, after six years as a teacher and twenty-three years as a student, I found a Chicano mentor. It was during my final assistant principal interview with Superintendent of Sweetwater Union High School District, Julian Marta. He surprised me when he asked, "What are you going to say to the teacher who says, 'The reason you got this job is because you are Latino and the superintendent is Latino?'" We

engaged in a role-play discussing my qualifications. He then said to me, "Are you willing to work longer hours than everybody else, work harder and do a better job than anyone else? If you are, then the job is yours." I was surprised, not by his questions, but by his openness regarding his Latino experience in the context of White privilege. He knew that for people of color to be respected and effective, we have to do more than anyone. He was an honest mentor and I appreciated his validation of my professional worth. He was a Stanford graduate, too. He also knew that I knew that school is very different for lots of poor kids, especially students of color. His presence and example empowered me to advocate for kids who succumb to the intolerance, the racism, the hatred, misunderstandings, physical dangers in schools and society, and win-lose power struggles with intolerant teachers or inept parents, where the kids almost always lose.

These memories describe an uneven, incoherent set of experiences with Latino and Euro-American mentors. It cannot be assumed that Chicanos will be empathetic or effective mentors, nor that Euro-Americans will be oppressors. What is evident in these quotes is the significance of mentors, particularly Chicano mentors (Romo, 1998), even if they are peers. It is also clear in these memories how I, at various levels of experience, yearned for mentoring, especially when I was the first or second in a particular professional role traditionally held by Euro-Americans.

The interview was a significant event, which helped me to reinvent myself while in relationship to Dr. Marta, a Chicano mentor. I received a different self-image from this elder professional Latino, one that I had not received before. This encounter reflected the power of positive mentoring for me. I looked up to him for his ground breaking form of mentoring. Unfortunately, his direct and confrontational approach about changing the status quo also led to his short term as superintendent. As I reflect on what I have learned from mentors' examples and my ongoing studies (Romo, Bradfield, & Serrano, 2004; Romo & Roseman, 2004), I see activism in three domains: Knowledge, Dispositions (Attitudes, Values, Beliefs) and Skills. These three domains are discussed in the following section.

Knowledge Growth As an Activist: Insights Into Societal Dynamics

Activists appear to embody particular knowledge base, dispositions, and skills related to promoting equity, inclusion and social change

(Romo & Roseman, 2004). The following data represents insights into the theory and practices of racism, classism, and discrimination in general.

For years, I couldn't figure out why some classmates just didn't do as well academically as I did, and I generally thought that it was because I was smarter and that I worked harder than they did. I worked hard to be a perfect student for many years because I held the fantasy that if I were good enough, my dad would stop drinking and our lives would be better. We grew up thinking that we somehow said something or did something that would launch my dad into a rage and drinking spree. Now I know that I wasn't the reason for my dad's outbursts and that it wasn't just my effort that helped me do well in grammar school.

My mother was an avid reader. My father only had a second grade education and often read the newspaper for general information, but my mother read constantly. She never went to college, but she told us that she was an art major in high school, conveying that she had an educational expertise and was proud of what she had done in school and that school was great. From her, my brothers and sisters and I got what lots of middle class kids got, unlike what a lot of poor kids experienced. We had a literature fiend, who used sophisticated vocabulary and developed her social and academic capital farther than her financial capital would ever grow to pass onto her kids. We got her middle class English skills and the benefits of having her at school helping in the office or on field trips. Teachers liked her and us and made us feel valuable and welcome. For lots of poor, Latino kids, school was unwelcoming, disconnected from home language and literacy, and a place of culture shock where finding a gang support system brought more support, acceptance, success and identification than any classroom. I was like the Bre'er Rabbit character in the Uncle Remus story, one of the many stories my mom read to me. School was my briar patch, where I could live well even though lots of my neighborhood kids didn't survive there. Not Sergio Padilla, who got mad at somebody for making fun of his English and went home at lunchtime and brought a butter knife to school to scare his taunter. Not Michael Hubbard (the Mexican kid with the Irish name), who got killed in a drive by. Not Frank Ortega, who struggled in all subjects and faded away long before he stopped coming to school. What might have been their fate if someone had seen their potential and had picked them for something special?

The men who wait and whose souls bleed on corners dream of work and a better life, too. They live in fear of being picked up by

the INS, so when sheriff cars drive by, the workers flinch with worry. What will the police do to them, the eternal suspects? I have a taste of that wondering when I get followed by police when I drive my new car, and I wonder if I really did something wrong or is it that my brown face is a magnet for their attention? I wonder because I generally have to show my identification with my local checks, even in local stores I've given patronage to for years—unless I happen to be chatting with a White friend, who the clerk knows. Then, my friend's White face must override my brown face, which somehow makes my check unsafe.

I used to wonder if I was making up this pervasive context of White privilege and hostility towards brown faces. I used to believe those self-proclaimed liberals who said that I was taking things too personally, and that I just needed to lighten up. I now know and my research and extensive conversations with scholars and critical educators from across the nation tell me that the context of White privilege and hostility towards brown people beyond the southern California, laid back culture of nice that is distinctive because of our regional economic ties with Mexico. I see that U.S. residents need and hate migrant workers. The need and hate showed itself in the attack in Rancho Penasquitos in the summer of 2000. Several high school White males from a wealthy, 'good' neighborhood hunted and beat elderly brown workers, asleep in their camp in the hills, dreaming of work and a better life. Latino superintendents in my dissertation expressed this conflicted disdain clearly, "'Cause there's people in this community, there's people here at this office who want me to fail. And I know that. I mean, you know that going in: that people want you to fail. Just a matter of life. I mean, they may say to your face, 'Hey, you're doing a great job.' But it makes them ill when they see a Latino running the show." "And I don't care what people tell you, you have some segments of the county here that may talk a good game about minorities, and what they do for 'children of color' but deep in their heart, they're hoping that they'll go away."

In the past, I'd feel like a migrant worker when I stepped out of my set role as a teacher who worked primarily with brown and Asian kids. I once heard the second hand comment, after I had interviewed for an administrative position, that I looked good on paper. That was a code that meant my resume read White, status quo: Stanford B.A., UCLA masters, enrolled at USD in a doctoral program. But my face and soul read migrant.

I knew that coded rejection and it ate at my self-confidence, at my psyche. To protect myself going into interviews, I'd read up

on educational research, review interview questions, and listen to spiritual, inspirational tapes. The talks seemed to soothe my ego in advance for the inevitable time that I'd get overly friendly smiles and then hear that someone else with more experience had gotten the job. I was a good candidate; it's just that someone else had more experience. And how the hell was I supposed to get more experience without the job?

For many years, being a migrant professional worker meant going from district to district (I wasn't an insider in my own district). It felt like begging, "Can I work here? Can I do anything here? Can I break my back for you for a day's wage?" I hated that feeling of always looking for a place to call home, a place where I was an insider. Now, I understand the paradox—traveling to find a place as an insider. After five years as a K-12 administrator, I was tired of not seeing my family, of small town educational politics, and of not finishing my doctorate. In my fatigue, I let go of my tentative insider position and I grabbed at the first university job I was offered, thankful to break my back for a day's wage, grateful for a place to work again.

Literacy is an example of the invisible cultural capital that helps students to be successful in school. Without examining how socioeconomic status, cultural congruity with schools, social positioning, and other invisible factors that help students feel unskilled or unwanted, meritocracy argues that people are unsuccessful in schools primarily because they don't work hard enough. On the other hand, Freire's (1985) critical pedagogy emphasizes dialogue, praxis (action informed by social justice values), naming the world (e.g., oppression), and a connection with participants' lived experiences. He argued that few human encounters are exempt from oppression because, by virtue of race, class, gender, and ethnicity, people tend to be victims and/or perpetrators of oppression. Freire promoted "problem posing," which integrated theory and practice as a means to clarify the causes and consequences of human suffering. He also advocated this method as a means of developing an ethical and utopian pedagogy for social change.

Critical pedagogy begins with an understanding that knowledge is political and not neutral, and therefore is contextual. Likewise, privilege and authority are political and not neutral. It took years for me to understand that besides my hard work, my mother interjected middle class skills into our home, which gave me access to mainstream curriculum and teaching practices. By understanding white privilege, I can recognize and address its implementation in professional arenas without only taking the experiences as personal insults or attacks. Because I understand identity development processes, I can be more

instructive and effective in mentoring others in their own professional and personal development processes.

Disposition Growth As an Activist: Victim to Survivor

Educational activists struggle in the everyday to advocate for ALL students in their ongoing efforts to provide more equitable access to meaningful challenging educational opportunities. In doing so, they become aware of their own identities, strengths, and biases and spend a lifetime reconstructing their own framework of teaching and learning toward these aims (Romo, Bradfield, & Serrano, 2004). The following quotes illustrate how discriminatory experiences, once understood in a societal context, can lead to changes in attitudes, values and beliefs that support proactive, resilient, and effective advocacy for others.

By that time, I began to see myself as a professional and as others saw me as less-than professional, I began to speak up. I saw the dynamic of being seen as 'other' happen in many ways, and once in a blue moon as an act of kindness. When I was an assistant principal in another district, I bought and lost a book of stamps at my local post office. As I retraced my steps a couple of times, searching the premises, a post office patron met me at the door, pointed to the lettering above the doorway and loudly enunciated, "POST OFFICE." I actually laughed and thanked him, instead of challenging him or leaving in a fury. I knew that this was probably a more polite, albeit patronizing, version of the old barrio question, "Where are you from?" That simple misunderstanding articulated a White privilege corollary, toxic politeness, at work: "You're not from here. You poor thing. You must be a migrant worker who doesn't understand where you are."

But I guess that it's better to be seen as less than and offered help than to be seen as a worker instead of a customer at gas stations, grocery stores or open markets, regardless of what I wear or how I'm interacting with others. "Could you go in the back and get some more milk?" I've been asked when I shopped with my daughter, who sat in the shopping cart. "Could you get the gas?" I've been ordered when I was wearing my dress slacks, shirt, shoes and tie and pumping my own gas. "How much are these flowers?" or "Oh, your English is very good" have come from customers as I stop with my children in front of a flower stand at our local farmers' market. After a while, I grew some roots, support and voice. I grew some integrity that told me that I didn't need others from a district office or committee to validate my skills or potential to contribute to an organization. When I discovered

that I knew what I knew and that it was valuable and special, I began to speak up and speak out. I began to write books when I began to figure out my life and when I began to read the world itself. It was then that being a migrant professional took on a different life or meaning. I began to go beyond my traditional instinct to wait respectfully and humbly for those in authority to tap me for work or to honor my skills and potential. I had lived in mainstream U.S.A. and had been socialized in educational settings for thirty years, so I believed that hard work and talent alone brought recognition, promotion, and success. Even when I tired of waiting for recognition, it was a major, conscious, counter-intuitive step to go against my cultural trust in humildad or self-deprecation, and to promote myself as a diversity expert, a teacher of teachers and an educational trainer of trainers.

Even though lots of White people positioned me as less-than on a daily basis, I committed to my educational preparation. My master's and doctoral degrees were rites of passage for me. My love of learning brought me back to being a student, but my understanding of where I have come from helped me endure the schedule of teaching or working as an administrator full-time and taking classes at night. I studied for Sergio Padilla, Michael Hubbard and Frank Ortega, for my neighborhood, and for brown kids who didn't survive the educational briar patch. I became driven to change the educational system and society through teacher education. My journey has led me to teach teachers at the university level and at professional conferences.

But now I go against my cultural programming to the police and other groups saying, "I want to work here. I bring valuable expertise that you need to survive in your career. I'm not going away, so let's work together." I put myself in lots of settings knowing that I'll feel the need-hate tension, as an educated, credentialed migrant worker.

Now, I know that if I get followed or stopped [by police], I am not the problem. When I am the usual suspect, an error lies in those who don't even know that they misread me. On the other hand, when I don't get information I need to function smoothly in a new organization, the mistake reflects the problems others have accepting or treating someone they're afraid of with respect. These cultural clashes affect me, but they represent how lots of people don't want to see a brown face take his or her place at the table of legitimacy, decency or authority, as if it would somehow take those privileges away from themselves.

My identity as a migrant worker is redeemed. And my identity, regardless of the setting, is wrapped up in the identities of dark people, especially those who have been used, hurt, marginalized,

and minimized. Paulo Freire spoke to my soul when I read that the voices of the marginalized are essential to truly understand and live democracy.

These examples illustrate some of the dispositions (belief in self, valuing self worth) that lead to constructive action. These dispositions grew through risk-taking, doubting, and questioning, and they created and facilitated the conditions for me to find my own voice and participate in transforming my world.

Skill Growth As an Activist: Social Justice/Advocacy Action

Effective activists understand that knowledge itself is political and not neutral, and that schools are a central arena of struggle, resistance, and transformation for both the teacher and the students. They express an appreciation of the forms of tension that open new possibilities of interaction between human beings, and a spirit of challenging the social forces that perpetuate the status quo (Romo, Bradfield, & Serrano, 2004).

When I speak in schools, it's not because I think it's cute or that I think that volunteering is a generally nice idea. It's not even because I know research that highlights the benefits of volunteers, especially those that have expertise that teachers may not have, and shows how volunteers bring role models to students and open up curriculum, etc. I go because now I'm a doctor, an education doctor. I don't wait for the educational disease to grow and manifest itself in later stages; I already see the crisis. We're in an educational emergency and the current practice of letting students go through schools on their own and hopefully end up successful is an abysmal failure.

I go to schools and prescribe developing the strength and forgiveness, not amnesia, to work with those who continue to treat Latinos or others with a need-hate disdain. I also go out to vaccinate: to help people have a sense of warning, a sense of how schools systems in passive and unconscious ways can hurt people, can maim people's identities, can inflict a kind of disease, in a way that the blankets given to Native Americans carried diseases, that then decimate those recipients. This is partly why I teach teachers and why I'm involved with schools. Another reason is that when I look at those at-risk kids, I see myself. I know that through my work, I am redeeming more than schools in general. I am redeeming my own soul. When I see kids who "don't get a second chance . . . who will grab the hand of anybody kind enough to offer it," I see myself. In those moments, I'm the student

tadpole keeper, keeper of dreams, keeper of memories of shame and desperate hope in a future mediated by spelling, peeing paradoxes, keeper of a vision of what these student tadpoles can be.

This narrative operationalizes the various themes that the data has identified: addressing cultural capital inequities in schools, mentoring for students of color, presenting positive examples of Chicano leadership to promote a healthy racial identity development, and promoting the positive nature of schools for poor children. I have endeavored to weave accounts of where I have stood as an explanation of where I currently stand as a Chicano activist.² My personal and professional growth has not been bounded and stable, but rather bounded by ideals and experiences that surround a dynamic learning process.

Conclusion

This study set out to provide insights into the questions: What factors influence the development of Chicano educational activists? How does Chicano activism in higher education relate to K-12 educational practices for all students? The data suggests that K-12 and university educators should understand themselves and their own identities as members of a team or learning community, as well as the dynamics of isms. They should understand the bittersweet complexities that frame the overall experiences of Chicanos and other students of color in schools. Educators should comprehend the impact of the assimilationist contexts that people of color often experience in schools and in society. To be effective mentors, educators must take into account the discomfort so many Latinos feel about being ethnic in a society that despises Latinos, as well as the desire and fantasy that so many carry to be mainstream. In short, educators must understand the roles they play in many Chicanos' ambivalence about school and authority figures.

It cannot be assumed that Chicanos will be empathetic or effective mentors, nor that Euro-Americans will be oppressors. Advocates for inclusion and equity must examine their own attitudes, values, and beliefs as they relate to helping students develop belief in and valuing of self that lead to constructive action. Activist educators must develop the dispositions that promote student risk-taking, questioning, finding their own voices, and participating in transforming their world. Undergirding educator dispositions is the commitment to all students having a place at the table of academic success.

Educators, therefore, should be able to use an understanding of individual and group motivations and behaviors to create a learning environment that encourages positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and self-motivation. Educators should be able to bridge the cultural capital expected in mainstream institutions and the experiences of being under-prepared for social or academic rites of passage that many students bring. Educators should be able to facilitate students' negotiating the knowledge, dispositions, and skills from both mainstream and home cultures.

Furthermore, this study suggests that teacher educators and K-12 teachers have many opportunities to promote the inclusion and success of Chicano and other underrepresented students. One immediate systemic reform strategy that emerges from this study is K-12 teachers and teacher educators hear from those who are oppressed by educational systems and advocate for them. Finally, school leaders must act directly to recruit, retain, and mentor Latino and other 'minority' leaders (or those dominant culture members who are biculturally competent) to change educational settings towards equity, inclusion, and respect.

Notes

1. Names in this article have been changed, except for my own.
2. One way that I manifest activism in higher education has been through establishing formal mentor networks. My effort to create the Chicano/Latino Faculty Staff Association in my university (<http://www.sandiego.edu/clfsa>) and being a spokesperson for the San Diego S.N.A.P. (<http://www.snapnetwork.org/>) are examples of this activism.

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(Note: Typos from the original print are corrected for this publication.)