

Pedagogies of Change: From Theory to Practice

by
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This paper describes the pedagogical approach used by an adult education program in El Paso, Texas that offers Spanish literacy and GED to Mexican immigrants. The paper briefly articulates the theory that has led the program to offer native language literacy and GED instruction rather than teaching literacy and GED in English. It also describes a critical pedagogy model influenced by theory based in writings by Maxine Greene, John Dewey, Paulo Freire, Ivan Illich and Henry Giroux, that has resulted in students earning GED certificates (high school equivalency certificate in the US) and the publication of five issues of a student journal of poetry and prose called *Memorias del Silencio*.

Introduction

This paper articulates reasons for offering native language literacy and GED instruction and describes a critical pedagogical approach used by the Community Education Program (CEP), an adult basic education program housed at El Paso Community College in El Paso, Texas. The approach, grounded in theory based in writings by Maxine Greene, John Dewey, Paulo Freire, Ivan Illich and Henry Giroux, provides creative writing instruction to immigrant students from Mexico so that they can document their experiences through poetry and prose while acquiring the ability necessary to earn a GED certificate (high-school equivalency certificate in the US).

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Background

CEP was established in 1986 to offer El Paso residents with limited academic achievement and limited economic resources the opportunity to improve their reading and writing skills. Over 98% of CEP participants are native Spanish speakers, immigrants from Mexico with an average 6th grade education in Spanish and an educational range between first and eleventh grade. Over 85% of participants are women.

Between 1986 and 2000, CEP offered English as a Second Language (ESL) classes with limited success. Because the majority of participants are native language (L1) Spanish speakers, in 2001 CEP began to offer Spanish literacy and Spanish GED classes. It also began a creative writing project and a critical pedagogy approach described below. Since 2001 CEP has helped 86 students to earn an elementary degree and 142 students to earn a secondary degree from Mexico. Moreover, 1,576 students have earned a GED certificate and 509 students have enrolled in college credit courses. In addition, five issues of a student journal of poetry and prose called *Memorias del Silencio* (Memories of Silence) have been published and are available in print or at: [HYPERLINK "http://memorias.border-senses.com/"](http://memorias.border-senses.com/) <http://memorias.border-senses.com/>.

Support for L1 Literacy

Using L1 and content familiar to the participants to develop academic skills is well supported in the literature. Hornberger & Skilton-Sylvester (1998) describe a model called the Continuum of Biliteracy, where language operates along several continua. These continua include language movement between oral and literate, native (L1) and second language (L2), bilingual and monolingual, oral and written, minority and majority, vernacular and literary, and contextualized and de-contextualized. In traditional educational settings, the literate, monolingual, written, majority, literary, decontextualized uses of language are privileged. But this can lead to limited development of L1 skills and difficulty developing L2. Usually L2 learners find themselves on the less privileged end of the continua and as they begin to acquire L2 their expertise is ignored.

In contrast, CEP attempts to privilege students' prior knowledge. CEP favors the literate and written ends of the continua because students are working towards a GED and they must write essays. However, they learn to read and write in Spanish, favoring the L1 side of the continuum, and they write about their own knowledge and experience, validating the minority and contextualized ends of these continua.

Additional support for L1 academic acquisition prior to L2 acquisition is offered by Cummins (1979). Cummins describes two types of skills, Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Proficiency Skills (CALPS). CALPS in a language can be acquired once a person masters

BICS in the same language, and CALPS in L1 will facilitate acquisition of CALPS in L2. However, it is virtually impossible to acquire CALPS in L2 only with BICS in L1. Since CEP facilitates CALPS in L1 (Spanish literacy and GED), students can later acquire CALPS in L2 (English).

More support for developing L1 literacy comes from Martinez-Roldan (2005) who argues that language, history and socio-cultural resources mediate learning. These resources can be tapped in L1 academic acquisition but often students are not allowed to rely on them in ESL programs (Macias & Kephart, 2009). Finally, Dworin (2006) suggests that the ability to access knowledge interconnected with cognitive abilities developed in L1 has positive intellectual consequences.

CEP's Critical Pedagogical Approach

Maxine Greene (2007) argues that schools are capitalist media promoting passive reception of decontextualized content instead of active engagement with subject matter. She reflects on Arendt's (1964) book *Eichmann in Jerusalem: a Report on the Banality of Evil* to illustrate the risk of this. Arendt describes how Eichmann scheduled trains to transport millions of Jews into concentration camps and the gas chamber. Because Eichmann disassociated himself from humanity, focusing entirely on the bureaucratic act of processing paperwork, he felt no responsibility for the death of millions. Apathy and passive consumption of rules turned a mediocre bureaucrat into a mass murderer. By turning reality into bureaucratic abstractions, people become apathetic, disassociating themselves from others. While Eichmann's example appears extreme, government officials often sign bills approving invasions of countries, reducing or eliminating health care for millions, cutting school lunch programs and welfare benefits, eliminating access to housing for millions, or destroying linguistic and cultural practices of others. The abstracted act of signing detaches bureaucrats from any responsibility towards the victims of their actions.

For Greene (2007), education should challenge apathy and passive reception of decontextualized content through the process of creating ourselves, and art is a tool to do this. Art allows us to see ourselves better than the imagery provided by textbooks. Engaging art takes students out of the familiar, doesn't take them for granted, and forces them into action. Art is unpredictable and resists predictable and measurable outcomes geared to technological and economic competency. Rather than encouraging students to be passive recipients of information, she believes that they should actively engage it to conceptualize new ideas. Engaging art critically teaches students to do so. The role of the teacher is not to tell students what is important but rather to let them decide what is important. CEP has embraced art in the form of creative writing so students can begin to create themselves.

John Dewey has also influenced CEP's pedagogy. Deweyan pedagogy is highly critical of prescribed textbooks and tests that decontextualize reality from instructional content. Dewey (1966) believes that there is an artificial dichotomy between academic life inside and practical life outside of the classroom. Dewey wants to bridge this gap and integrate practical life with academic life. For Dewey, academic tasks should be used to explore and solve real life problems.

Dewey finds geography and history to be highly significant subjects to be covered in a curriculum, but Dewey is not referring to traditional history and geography. A Deweyan pedagogy calls for students to become historians and geographers themselves. And, as geographers and historians, students have a whole world to explore in their immediate surroundings. As historians and geographers, students have free reign of their intentionality to explore their own contexts by interviewing family members, mapping their neighborhoods, creating flow charts and genealogical trees, identifying the linguistic, social and cultural characteristics of their family members, antecessors, neighbors, friends and peers, and identifying and describing the geographical settings where family members, antecessors, neighbors, friends and peers live. The role of the Deweyan teacher is to facilitate tools for the students to engage in their explorations. As students become historians and geographers, they have the opportunity to read and learn about other people's geographies and histories. Rather than prescriptively directing and limiting a student's attention to certain "normalizing" experiences, Deweyan pedagogy frees the individual's attention to constitute the world within a social context.

Imagine, for example, that students in a classroom in El Paso are asked to explore their histories and geographies. Residents of a poor Mexican neighborhood may describe themselves as immigrants who came to work in the fields in El Paso and Southern New Mexico. Their geographical context with its characteristics provides the socio-historical context that they inhabit and that they can begin to explore.

The poem below, written in Spanish by Veronica Macias (2005), a CEP Spanish GED student, was published in the first issue of *Memorias del Silencio*. Through the poem readers can understand both the historical and geographical context of the student even when the instructor never makes references to the teaching geography or history. Rather, the student constructs the historical and geographical space out of personal experience. Following is the translated version.

To my Beloved Farmworker

To my beloved husband Refugio and to my sons Omar and Daniel

In the fields you worked your hands,
hand by hand with the chile,
with the land to harvest,
with your hat a little torn,
and in the handkerchief your sweat.

At dawn
your shadow begins to work.
In your face the fatigue,
but strong, green farmworker you are.

Your youth
was left in the fields of Deming
starting the tractor,
harvesting the chile,
preparing the land,
waiting for the onion.

With strong arms you gathered the baskets,
smell of wet soil in your clothes.

The harvested land became your brother,
that is how you achieved your American dream.

Translated by: Minerva Laveaga Duarte

Below is the original Spanish version.

A mi amado Campesino

A mi amado esposo Refugio y a mis hijos Omar y Daniel

En los campos tus manos trabajaste
dándole mano al chile,
a la tierra para labrar
con tu sombrero un poco roto
y tu pañuelo con sudor.

Desde el alba se veía tu sombra
empezando a trabajar
en tus mejillas el cansancio,
pero vigoroso, verde campesino eres tú.

Tu juventud
se quedó en los campos de Deming
echando a andar el tractor,
pizcando el chile,
preparando la tierra,
esperando la cebolla.

Con tus brazos fuertes juntabas las canastas,
olor a tierra mojada en tu ropa.

Hiciste del campo tu hermano,
así lograste tu sueño americano.

Because Macias chooses poetry as her medium, history and geography are subtly incorporated into her piece. Since Macias is a GED student, she must acquire reading and writing skills as well as learn American history. Writing about her own experiences allows Macias to acquire writing skills informing the content of her writing with her own knowledge. When she learns American history, she may do this relating other people's experiences to her own. The fact that her experience has been considered valuable should give her confidence and the poem can be a source of inspiration for other students.

Another educator who has influenced CEP is Paulo Freire. Freire (1970) is critical of prescriptive education with texts selected a-priori. Pre-selecting information and telling students what to learn is what Freire refers to as the banking model of education. According to this model, students are considered empty vessels where knowledge is deposited. Banking education prevents students from learning what is important to them.

Freire sees reality as having a hidden base and a visible surface. Through the banking model students are only allowed to focus on the surface. The hidden base includes the historical and economic forces shaping the surface. Freire proposes a critical pedagogy that allows students to redirect attention to the base. The process that allows the students to see the base is conscientization. For Freire, society's masses have been rendered unconscious by banking education. Freire's critical pedagogy can help people emancipate themselves from uncritical and oppressive constitutions of experience which lead to exploitation. Critical pedagogy allows students to become conscious of their own oppression and leads to change (Freire, 1970; Freire & Macedo, 1987).

Freire (2000) describes the pedagogical process that leads to conscientization with poor adult learners in Brazil. In Freire's model, the teacher does not have a predetermined content of instruction. The teacher must first become familiar with the students' social and cultural context. Then the teacher asks students to bring to the class a picture of their neighborhood. The teacher asks the students to take a look at one picture. This is the extent to which the teacher directs the students to what must be learned. The teacher then asks the students to talk about what they think about when they see the picture. At that point, the students' consciousnesses are set free to explore the picture and reflect on their experiences, memories and feelings. The picture can direct the students' attention to specific objects in the picture, or open horizons for students to talk about past memories and experiences. The teacher's role is to write down words and themes that students explore in dialoguing about the picture. These words become the content for language instruction among the students. The teacher does not direct the attention of the students or restricts the students to specific objectives. Rather, the teacher uses a picture of a context familiar to the students to open up the field of potential horizons of attention.

Freire's pedagogy is political. When poor students explore their own context, they learn about their history, their culture and their social conditions as oppressed members of a society. By externalizing and objectifying their own context through pictures, the students can separate themselves out of their own realities. This allows them to acquire objective and scientific knowledge of their own context and objectively see what things need to change in the objectified reality (Freire, 2000). They may, for example, report that they see or associate the pictures to unpaved roads, garbage on the streets, abandoned cars, no hospitals, run down schools, malnourished children, lack of employment, lack of health services, etc. The students will then collectively decide on an issue that they need to improve.

The purpose of the instruction is to help the students acquire the language, math, academic tools and other skills to bring about the desired change. Instruction may focus on teaching students how to write letters to politicians, how to repair things, how to document their own histories and realities, how to speak in public, how to organize pickets, how to write press releases, or how to organize themselves to put pressure on the authorities to bring about desired changes. Once the students collectively decide on a project, they work with their teacher on implementing the project. Once the project is concluded, the students again step outside of their own context, take a picture of the new reality and start the process again. The role of the teacher is simply to facilitate the skills that will lead to the mastery of the knowledge that students wish to acquire. Rather than the students relying on the expert other to learn what is important, they are free to focus on things that are important to them. Moreover, the students are then able to force the attention of others towards their problems.

The following essay written in Spanish by Eva Hernandez (2006) was published in the second issue of *Memorias del Silencio*. The Spanish version is available at: [HYPERLINK “http://memorias.bordersenses.com/joomla/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=34:trabajadora-del-campo&catid=6:volume-2&Itemid=7&lang=es”](http://memorias.bordersenses.com/joomla/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=34:trabajadora-del-campo&catid=6:volume-2&Itemid=7&lang=es) http://memorias.bordersenses.com/joomla/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=34:trabajadora-del-campo&catid=6:volume-2&Itemid=7&lang=es.

Farmworker

I have been a farmworker since 1981. I would cross the bridge daily as an “American” since my sister is a citizen and she would lend me her papers because I have three kids and I needed to work. I would cross at midnight. Sometimes I would inject myself vitamin B to calm my nerves because they would spend 2 to 3 hours interrogating and investigating me. But, since I knew my sister’s personal information, they would believe that it was me. With time, I even became friends with one of the immigration officers. They called him Kojak because he would shave his head and he was very mean. But, since I crossed at the same time every day, he knew me. Then, I could cross without problems.

Once I crossed over, every day it was the same. At 12:00 AM, I had to help recruit workers. It didn’t matter if they were men or women, documented or undocumented. We had to fill two buses, each with 65 seats. In one bus, they would carry documented people only and the undocumented would travel in the other bus, because there was an immigration checkpoint before the ranch. If they were not checking we would all make it to Hatch to pick chile. The ranch manager there was very nice and he would let the people that would make it there stay. He would be happy and said that he had a small Ciudad Juarez. Workers would stay at the ranch for months eating grilled chiles with salt and tortillas. Sometimes immigration would come to the fields. We would hide in between the crops, but many would get caught. Sometimes we would get all bitten by mosquitoes and we would get deported to Mexico, but we would come back and would not give up. Then, the amnesty law passed in 1986 and many got our papers so we could

work without fear. Sometimes we would live under bridges but we would look for the river nearby so that we could bathe and cook. We were like butterflies. One day we would be in Hatch picking chile and the next day we would be in a different town planting onions. Once the agricultural season was over we would thank god. Sometimes, we couldn't even sit down.

Once we would finish planting, we would get into the crops even if they had just been fumigated. Because of that, many of us have cancer caused by the fertilizers. I got cancer in 1995. Doctors were able to stop it, but it came back in 2003. It was very hard, because I lost my hair and the desire to live. Even though they removed part of my body, the cancer is under control and I thank god because I am still alive. Many workers died because they didn't realize that they were sick until it was too late.

There is no health insurance for farmworkers or money to cover healthcare costs, because the earnings are small and uncertain. Those who pay us and those who make the laws don't think that because of us, the farmworkers, people can eat fruits and vegetables. It is all the labor of the farmworker.

I think that it is very nice to work in the fields, to smell the vegetables and see the dew on the leaves. It is nice to fill the lungs with fresh air.

Recently, I stopped working, because I am disabled, but I am hoping to get well so that I can go back to work.

Translated by Andres Muro

While the political aspect of Freire's pedagogy is not overt in CEP, it emerges from students' experiences. Grounding herself in her own context, Hernandez narrates the experiences of thousands of farmworkers who work and live in the US. Entering the country illegally and risking deportation, working odd hours in difficult conditions, working in crops with pesticides and getting cancer, and not having health insurance are all facts in farmworkers' lives. Hernandez reminds us that many farmworkers die, while others become handicapped in order to feed Americans.

By writing down her experiences Hernandez is able to externalize and objectify her reality. This can allow her and others to become conscious of the social, historical and political forces that shape the life of farmworkers. By teaching students to share their experiences through print, CEP facilitates the political task of the student to educate society about the plight of farmworkers. This gives the voiceless a voice. Not only does Hernandez ground herself in her experiences, but she invites others to learn about her not well documented history. Her story can be a source of motivation and inspiration for children and adults from a shared background.

A contemporary of Freire who proposes a radical pedagogy is Ivan Illich. Illich (1971) feels that educational systems de-educate rather than educate, so he proposes to de-school society. For Illich educational systems are corrupt instruments that reproduce existing disparities by manufacturing consent, teach-

ing students to embrace the status quo. For Illich, schools are systems to acquire entitlements rather than knowledge. Students are given domesticating tasks and once mastered through repetition, memorization and behavioral modification; they are given entitlements that promote them to a higher level with additional domesticating tasks. Degrees are entitlements reflecting the degree of domestication achieved, indicating a person's consent to embrace hegemonic values.

While Illich would embrace pedagogies proposed by Freire and Dewey, he wants to create alternative educational settings where participants share different ways of knowing and learn from each other. Illich believes in the sharing and embracing various ways of knowing as well as creating opportunities for exploration and validation of these forms of knowledge within appropriate contexts.

CEP does not believe in de-schooling society but agrees with Illich that schools use entitlements to privilege certain ways of knowing. While CEP prepares students to earn a GED certificate, an entitlement that privileges one form of knowledge, it also believes in validating students' other ways of knowing. The following essay written in Spanish by Cresencia Atayde is published in the second issue of *Memorias del Silencio* (2006). The original Spanish version is available at: [HYPERLINK "http://memorias.bordersenses.com/joomla/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=18%3Adesde-el-sur&catid=6%3Avolume-2&Itemid=7&lang=es"](http://memorias.bordersenses.com/joomla/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=18%3Adesde-el-sur&catid=6%3Avolume-2&Itemid=7&lang=es) http://memorias.bordersenses.com/joomla/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=18%3Adesde-el-sur&catid=6%3Avolume-2&Itemid=7&lang=es.

From the South

It is a sad adobe hut surrounded by dry rockroses, stones cracked by the heavy wind. Dusty whirlwinds pass close to the soil along the road. Some gleam from the sun's rays can be seen in between the prickly weeds. Far away, a big mountain can be seen with its top filled with snow shining at dusk. Too far. The nearby rocks reflect the misery of the battered houses, abandoned by time. Dry wood doors, bent and broken.

An old couple lives in one of those houses. They wait for the day when their children will come back. Their only company is a white cow, chickens, one pair of pigs, and the dog. They wake up in the morning, and through an old window they reach to see the road to check if someone is coming. Sometimes their compadre arrives in his mule cart. He comes to bring them some supplies and water. When they finish eating, they throw remaining pieces of tortilla out the window to the dog and the chicken. Sometimes the dog moves his tail, and they turn their sights to the road.

Sometimes someone passes by, but never who they expect. One day their children decided to cross the river "to improve, to be able to bring them better things and a better life."

With a tired eyesight, her black dress, her scruffy apron, and her dusty shoes, the old woman turns to the sky and says a prayer for her children.

Translated by: Minerva Laveaga Duarte

Atayde, a woman over 50, did not complete elementary school as a child. She entered CEP a few years ago and had difficulty reading and writing. By hegemonic standards she was not even entitled to an elementary certification. However, by CEP standards, she is entitled to become a published author. Authorship in a book is an entitlement to which many aspire. Atayde's writing skills, her aesthetic sense and her intimate knowledge of the lives of immigrants entitled her to become a published author.

In fact, through this collection, CEP is conferring privileged status to ways of knowing of Mexican immigrants. And those with the given epistemic privilege are entitled and celebrated even if dominant society has not done this in the past.

In the cover of the second issue of *Memorias del Silencio* (below) as well as before every piece in this issue, photos of the authors are included.

When this issue was published, CEP organized a reading and the authors brought their children to the reading. Children of poor immigrants often don't look up to their parents because the parents don't have the social status privileged by dominant society. The academic progress of CEP students as well as the entitlement of authorship has served to privilege their marginalized knowledge and to give children confidence that their ways of knowing are valuable.

A contemporary pedagogist who, like Illich, believes in creating spaces for exploring and validating various forms of knowledge is Henry Giroux. Giroux considers himself a disciple of Freire and believes in using established educational settings to implement and practice radical pedagogies.

Giroux believes that schools are a medium to manufacture consent and to reproduce dominant cultural practices. For Giroux (1988), public schools are designed to help students to master predetermined and decontextualized basic skills. According to Giroux, the curriculum is designed for the students to acquire productive knowledge leading to the reproduction of goods and services. Giroux distinguishes productive knowledge from directive knowledge, the latter being concerned with the relationships between means and ends. Directive knowledge is a philosophical mode of inquiry allowing students to question the purpose of learning and examine how productive knowledge is being used to reproduce hegemonic practices.

According to Giroux (1988), the curriculum is divided between questions raised and questions ignored. Questions raised focus on providing answers to specific problems. Questions ignored have to do with determining the why certain problems are chosen in the first place, who decided on them, and who benefits

from students learning answers to the chosen problems. Students should have a voice in the deciding the content to be mastered.

Giroux (1996) also argues that schools should be arenas of contestation where conflicting experiences are explored in context and where students are asked to engage in “border-crossing.” This is where students are asked to cross over to the context of different students and experience the world from new perspectives. The purpose is to allow students to experience the culture of those excluded by hegemonic practices.

In broadening students’ horizons, challenging productive knowledge, and promoting directive knowledge, Giroux places a great deal of responsibility on teachers. Giroux (1988) refers to teachers as organic intellectuals, a concept borrowed from Gramsci, explaining that organic intellectuals are found in all strata of society and serve to reproduce existing norms and practices. One set of organic intellectuals are the teachers who reproduce the status quo. Giroux argues that organic intellectuals can also work to challenge the status quo. To this end, teachers bear a great responsibility and can become transformative intellectuals. So, teachers face a dialectical dilemma. They can choose between reproducing the status quo, or they can create spaces to contest it.

CEP teachers are considered transformative intellectuals who help students engage in border-crossing. Teachers must prepare students with the hegemonic knowledge necessary to succeed in the GED. At the same time intellectual teachers recognize that students are endowed with their own valuable knowledge. Students are engaged in a dialectic between the knowledge that they must acquire and the one that they possess. In a subtractive pedagogical environment they would be required to neglect their own knowledge. In an additive, empowering and consciousness rising environment they are invited to negotiate multiple forms of knowledge and arrive at their own conclusions.

The following essay originally written in Spanish by Lorena Fernández (2007) was published in the third issue of *Memorias del Silencio*.

The challenge of leaving my hometown

Dedicated to my entire family

My grandmother, my aunt, my brother and I left Madrid, in the state of Durango in 1988 on our way by bus to Torreón, Coahuila. From there we would catch a train to Ciudad Juárez. My parents were already there, having left earlier to look for work and to later send for us. They had four children and sent for us two at a time. We were forced to leave the place where we had lived due to the fact that the harvest of cotton, corn and beans was not what it once was. As a result, the entire town lacked money and work.

When the moment came to leave I felt happy because I would get to see Juárez for the first time, and most importantly, I would get to see my parents. It had been a month since I had seen them. The train left at six in the afternoon. Everyone tried to make themselves comfortable, since it would be a long night together.

As morning dawned, all the passengers looked out the windows and began to comment: “We’re almost there!”; “It won’t be long, now!” When I heard that we were pulling in to Juárez I got up from where I was seated to look outside. All that I saw was a mountain and shabby-looking houses made of cardboard, paper and wood. Upon seeing this, I thought to myself that the city was something totally different from what I had imagined. A look at these houses made it seem as though there was much poverty. What I did not know was that they belonged to people who had recently arrived from other parts looking for a better way of life for their families.

When we arrived at the train station, it was seven o’clock in the morning. It was bustling with noises of trains, cars and buses. The smell of smog made my stomach turn, especially since I had not eaten yet. Everything looked so dirty. From the train station, we caught a bus that took us to the neighborhood where my aunt lived.

Along the way, I saw several houses made of wood and cardboard, and only a few that were constructed of sturdy building materials. It seemed impossible to me that people could live that way. Where I came from there were no houses like that. Our house was made of adobe, with a traditional roof made of reeds and beams. When we arrived at my aunt’s house I was very happy to see my parents waiting for us with hugs and love, as always.

After a while, the local neighborhood organization gave out plots of land to people who didn’t have their own and were living with relatives. My parents received a plot close to where my aunt lived. There, we made a room of wood and lined it with black paper outside. We had a bed made of sticks of wood, and instead of a mattress, we slept on foam cushions and a few blankets. When night fell, we would take out a foam cushion and place it on the floor for my parents to sleep on. My brothers and I would sleep on the bed. Two of us would sleep one way, and the other two would sleep the other. That way we were nice and toasty.

We had few possessions, a table made of wood, upon which we set a gas stove, and a few dishes. Every day, while my mother made us something to eat, she battled with the stove so that it didn’t spew out smoke; it was that old. We hung a line from one corner of our room to the other; there we hung our clothes to dry. Also, we had a plastic bin in which we stored our blankets. The door to our room was made of wood and was very old. It was full of holes. Sometimes, when the wind blew, it would fall over and my parents would have to put it back up.

Having lived there for a while, my parents came to know our neighbors. They worked in the U.S. picking chiles and onions. Although they were legal residents, they also struggled, since the house that they lived in with the other farm workers was overcrowded. Seeing that my parents were in need of money, they invited them to work with them in the fields. My parents would have to cross over illegally, but my neighbors would be waiting for them on the other side to take them to Hatch in New Mexico.

I stayed home in charge of my three brothers. At the time, I was fourteen and worked as an operator in a factory. I used my sixteen year old cousin's ID to get the job. When my parents left I had to begin to work overtime five days a week. The workday started at seven in the morning and ended at four thirty in the afternoon. However, when I worked overtime I stayed until seven in the evening. When I got home from work I was exhausted. Still, I gathered enough energy to prepare supper, which also served as dinner. By that time, my brothers were starving and ate heartily. Before I left for work in the morning, I would make them breakfast before they went to school. When they got out of school, they would stop by my aunt's to pick up my older brother. He was disabled and my aunt took care of him when no one was home.

A few weeks after my parents left, the people they went with returned to Juárez to tell us how they were doing and to find out how we were getting along. When they stopped by, I was working and so they talked to my aunt. They also left a little bit of money with her which we never received. All I knew was that they arrived OK and that they would return after awhile.

And that's exactly what happened because a short while later they were picked up by the Border Patrol and deported. They told us they had worked picking chile where they marveled at the vast, expansive fields of crops. At first, they suffered because they didn't know what to do. But they watched the others and learned in order to improve day by day. They told us that while they were working, they would think of us and because they missed us so much, they would start to cry. However, they knew they had to work to save money in order to not return home empty-handed. They were sunburned and their hands were blistered.

With what my parents had earned, they began to buy cement to build a sturdier room. They also bought a gas stove and a refrigerator. When we told them what happened to us while they were gone, they decided to never leave us again and they looked for work in Juárez.

After a few years, I married and left my parent's house. I've never lost contact with the fields. My husband has been a farm worker for many years picking chiles and onions. This work provides daily sustenance for us and our children.

Translated by: Gabriel Camacho

The story portrays the economic realities of thousands of Mexicans who move north in search of work every year and eventually enter the US. This is the social and historical reality of late 20th and early 21st century working class Mexicans. The story offers an alternative version to some members of the media who portray immigrants as criminals.

GED students learn that the US was colonized by settlers that arrived in New England in the 1600s, and celebrated their first thanksgiving with Native Americans. While this is an important part of history, there are other histories from immigrants from the south who have contributed to the economic, social and cultural fabric of the US. Through this story, we can see how GED students border-cross,

learning about an important part of US history while contributing another important part of history not often told. In this way, they are not merely passive consumers of information but active contributors to it. At the same time, GED teachers, as intellectuals rather than managers and technocrats, teach the students while learning from the students. Teachers know and instruct reading and writing as well as US history as told in GED textbooks. At the same time, intellectual teachers are willing to learn about history from their students. Since every student has a different history, students are invited to share their own histories and border-cross with each other. In CEP classes, the vast majority of the students are Mexican immigrants, so some border-crossing happens among students as well as between the students and the textbook. However, in other communities with more diversity of immigrants there is greater potential for border-crossing.

Conclusion

Ultimately, while CEP attempts to promote a measure of social change, it recognizes that its contribution is limited. However, it offers evidence of the possibility of implementing alternative pedagogies that are not merely reproductive. This paper demonstrates how alternative pedagogies help students engage their own knowledge and positions in a capitalist society in order to understand their own conditions. Through creative writing, students are forced into action and the process of creating themselves. Students choose what is important, actively engage information, and conceptualize new ideas. While the students engage themselves in nontraditional didactic activities, they still earn necessary entitlements, such as GED certificates, and transition to college. In addition to the potential for teaching, the pedagogical approaches described above have tremendous potential to produce new knowledge for other students and the rest of society.

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