

Mestizo Center



The Educational Opportunity Gap in Washington

Lynn Becerra, Cultural Studies Doctoral Student

Shawn Wilson (2008) describes the elements of an Indigenous Research Paradigm as:

The ontology and epistemology are based upon a process of relationships that form mutual reality. The axiology and methodology are based upon maintaining accountability to these relationships... An Indigenous research paradigm is relational and maintains relational accountability (Wilson, 2008, p. 70).

When Dr. Brian McNeill asked me to provide a summary of my work, from what has become more than a "traditional research project" but an endeavor which has fostered many meaningful and enriching relationships and experiences. Needless to say, I felt a bit overwhelmed. I understand now that this feeling was rooted in the prospect of articulating what has become a transformative experience for me personally, as a doctoral student, and also as a teaching instructor within the College of Education's Teacher Preparation Elementary Program for the past three years! I am tremendously grateful for the confidence and support of Dr. McNeill and the generous financial contributions provided by the Center for Mestizo & Indigenous Research and Engagement (the Center) of Washington State University, Pullman's College of Education.

The work I have been a part of for the past three years has been rooted in my positionality. In other words, my-self-in-relation to others, taking into account socio-cultural, historical, economic conditions and specificity which have shaped my understanding and thus "perspective" and interaction with the world and others. I am a third-generation-raised but second-generation-born daughter raised in a home where my mother's highest level of "formal" education was 7th grade; working-class origins; overshadowed by an environment drenched by domestic and substance abuses. I am able-bodied, heterosexual, cisgender, mono-lingual, woman of Mexican-American descent who identifies as Xicana.

My positionality and identity "recognizes the relations between past and present oppression... never [forgetting] the material conditions and subordinate position of Chicanas/os, Mexicans, and Central American immigrants in the U.S." (Elenes, 1997, p. 365). For some, including myself, this deliberate and political move to identify as a Xicana is to denote a political consciousness: A consciousness that is highly aware of the Mexican/Indian/Black/ European/Mestiza/o ancestry of the colonizer and colonized history we have inherited and the multiple subjectivities within and beyond the U.S. borders; intentional opposition to a singular history/experience within our schools and society; solidarity among and with other marginalized communities throughout the world; rooted in working class origins.

My work and teaching experiences have been informed by my positionality and lived experiences as a Xicana and shaped my research. In particular, I have sought to understand how might educational state and national policies (particularly discussions of opportunity gaps in K-12 schools and a teacher preparation program) foster a largely privileged class of students in our process of always-becoming (Esquibel, 2006) culturally responsive educators? Influenced by this overarching question, my approach to teaching and learning is strongly rooted in an anti-racist, Xicana feminist/decolonial methodological and epistemological approach to understanding. Like my students, I cannot, nor should I, separate my diverse cultures, histories and identities from my teaching and learning, and my doctoral research. Like me, my students' diverse cultures, histories and identities inform their teaching and learning, and their future professions as Elementary Education teachers.

In the words of Dr. Manulani Meyer, "We do not leave our communities when we go to school, our communities come with us" (Maui Community College, Lau'ulu TV). As a Xicana teacher educator in my own process of always becoming culturally responsive, I too must center my own socio-cultural, historical, economic conditions and specificity. This call is an imperative one, as illustrated by the literature of culturally responsive pedagogy, Chicana Feminisms and Indigenous scholarly work, as it is the root of the transformative nature of schooling that culturally responsive pedagogy calls us to work toward.

Back to my initial task, "to provide a summary of my work" that was funded by the Center for Mestizo & Indigenous Research and Engagement (the Center) of Washington State University, Pullman's College of Education; I must begin three years ago:

Spring 2012. A four-person, women of color*, graduate, student research group initiated and led by Drs. Armando Laguardia and Brain McNeill of Washington State University would meet to examine how the 2008 report, Understanding Opportunities to Learn for Latino Students in Washington by Drs. Contreras and Stritikus were implemented and addressed by Washington State's "Achievement Gap Oversight & Accountability Committee" (AGOAC), later renamed the "Educational Opportunity Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee" (EOGOAC).

Student Perspectives

In this issue we focus on our students who we have been happy to provide funds to support their educational pursuits, and the important outcomes related to this support. These students also include Maria Morales, Paula Abustan, Greg Urquhart, Matthew Hale, and Renee Holt to present at and attend professional meetings.

We would come to understand these recommendations as but one set of recommendations produced by communities within Washington State Tribal Nations-Governor's Office of Indian Affairs and Washington State's ethnic commissions representing African-American, Hispanic American (Latino), Asian American, and Pacific Islander American populations. In total, these reports, comprised of multiple members' contributions within their respective communities would be known as the "2008 achievement gap studies."

In 2009, the AGOAC (later renamed EOGOAC) synthesized the five 2008 achievement gap studies' specific community recommendations into ten priority areas (2009). The ten priority areas were:

- 1) Supporting and facilitating parent, family, and community involvement and outreach.
- 2) Identifying data elements and systems needed to monitor progress in closing the gap.
- 3) Enhancing the cultural competence of current and future educators and the cultural relevance of curriculum and instruction.
- 4) Expanding pathways and strategies to prepare and recruit diverse teachers and administrators.
- 5) Recommending current programs and resources that should be redirected to narrow the gap.
- 6) Making closing the achievement gap part of the school and school improvement process.
- 7) Exploring innovative school models that have shown success in closing the achievement gap.
- 8) Health and wellbeing.
- 9) Post-secondary education and job training.
- 10) Early learning – Seamless birth to 20 support continuum.

In 2009, these recommendations were directed to the following state entities:

- Quality Education Council (QEC)
- State Legislature
- Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI)
- Professional Educator Standards Board (PESB)
- State Board of Education (SBE)

Specifically, as it pertained to Drs. Contreras and Stritikus' ten policy recommendations, we would find that all ten were included in the AGOAC's synthesis of the five "2008 achievement gap studies" into ten priority areas (2009). In addition to the ten specific recommendations from Understanding Opportunities to Learn for Latino Students in Washington report, the following four areas (VI, VII, VIII, IX) were contributed by non-Latino specific communities:

- Making closing the achievement gap part of the school and school improvement process (VI)
- Exploring innovative school models that have shown success in closing the achievement gap (VII)
- Health and wellbeing (VIII)
- Post-secondary education and job training

"What we have in common is our difference. It first begins with this, and it is the leaping-off point to the beauty of specificity that will bring us to a common knowing" (Meyer, 2008, p. 220).

Fall 2012. As a second year teaching instructor within the College of Education's Elementary Education Program, I would initiate the continuation of this project but more specifically, my overarching research goals would aim to understand the process of this work: Specifically, prioritizing the needs of ethnically diverse communities within K-12, as it pertains to closing the opportunity gaps in our schools, as articulated by ethnically diverse communities' diverse and specific priorities, concerns and recommendations. None of this work would have been possible without the genuine support and sincere belief in this project from Dr. McNeill and the Center for Mestizo & Indigenous Research and Engagement (the Center) of Washington State University, Pullman's College of Education.

Through the Center's financial support, I was enabled to:

Commute approximately 300 miles for three months to physically attend the "Educational Opportunity Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee" (EOGOAC) meetings on the Westside of Washington State (October, November and December of 2012)

Observe and shadow EOGOAC Staff and management of EOGOAC operations for 32 hours within Washington State's Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) in Olympia, Washington.

Direct Outcomes

The direct effect from the Center for Mestizo & Indigenous Research and Engagement's financial support extends beyond Fall 2012! The effects of this funding would influence systemic and programmatic changes within our College of Education then and today. To note a few, our College of Education has:

Established professional relationships with members of the EOGOAC who hold multiple national, state, regional, and local leadership positions that directly influence Washington State K-12 public education.

Clarification: The EOGOAC takes a multidisciplinary approach, reviewing social, emotional and health supports, and seeing input and advice from other state and local agencies and organizations with expertise in health, social services, and other issues that disproportionately affect student achievement and student success.



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Announcements/ Updates

The Journal of Mestizo and Indigenous Voices is now online. See our first issue at <http://education.wsu.edu/rearchcenters/mestizo>.

We will be hosting a reading by Dr. Elisa Facio in January/February. Stay tuned to for the time and date. Dr. Facio is the Director of Chicano Education Program at Eastern Washington University. She will be reading from her own recently published *Fleshing the Spirit* (2014). The University of Arizona Press.

Fall 2013. Supported the creation of a “Diversity in Schools and Society Speaker Series” comprised of members of the EOGOAC, a statutory committee of the Washington state legislature that makes policy recommendations for closing opportunity gaps in Washington state public K-12 schools. The Speaker Series was open to everyone within the WSU College of Education and WSU Campus at large. Series Sponsors of the series included: College of Education; Office of Student Affairs and Enrollment; Office of Equity and Diversity; Office for Access, Equity and Achievement; Culture and Heritage Houses; Plateau Center for Native American Programs; Office of Multicultural Student Services, Elementary, Teacher diversity, block III pre-service teachers (Course: T&L 330) had the opportunity to meet and hear diverse perspectives pertaining to the on-going, critical conversations within our Washington State K-12 schools as it pertains to culturally responsive pedagogy, equity and diversity, and the



Indirect Outcomes

Lastly, there were also indirect effects of the Center’s financial support from Fall 2012, such as (these items would not have been possible without the initial support of the Center for Mestizo & Indigenous Research and Engagement): Washington State University’ College of Education is now a “presence” on the EOGOAC membership’s agenda. This presence is not limited to merely physical attendance at the EOGOAC meetings but has also hosted its second on September 15, 2015) “Community Forum” event in which the EOGOAC invites community input and concerns pertaining to their recommendations.

Fall 2014. Spearheaded by myself, Drs. T. Francene Watson and Brenda Barrio, we kicked-off the inaugural College of Education “Teach In” event for our Elementary, Teacher Preparation, Block III pre-service teachers (Course: T&L 330). This workshop invited members of the EOGOAC to provide a space for our pre-service teachers to receive authentic, community-based feedback on equity and culturally responsive teaching lesson plans before returning to their student teaching placements throughout the state.

Future Considerations

“Make your work useful by meaning and truth... Knowledge that does not heal, bring together, challenge, surprise, encourage, or expand awareness is not part of the consciousness this world needs now” (Meyer, 2008, pg. 221).

Lastly, the funding graciously provided by Dr. McNeill and the Center for Mestizo & Indigenous Research and Engagement and the work I was empowered to learn from has left a lasting impression on my professional goals and aspirations as a Xicana teacher educator, doctoral student and professional. Specifically, at this point in my academic career, I seek to support educational endeavors which begin with diverse communities’ perspectives and contributions. I still seek to understand their influence within teacher preparation programs but ultimately, I hope to de-center the current educational and schooling practices which further marginalize underrepresented communities’ contributions within K-12 education.

Student Travel Activities

Bianca Barrios, Counseling Psychology Doctoral Student

Thanks to support of the Center for Mestizo and Indigenous Research and Engagement, I was able to attend the National Latina/o Psychological Association’s 6th bi-annual conference. The theme of this year’s conference was Dreamers, Immigration, and Social Justice: Advancing a Global Latina/o Psychology Agenda and it was held in Albuquerque, New Mexico. This is my third year attending the conference, and just like in the previous years, I left the conference feeling empowered, rejuvenated, and motivated. Being surrounded by mi raza and research about mi gente was exactly what I needed to continue down this difficult path towards my doctorate degree. During Friday morning breakfast I was able to reconnect with a number of fellow Chicana colleagues who also graduated from the University of California, Irvine (UCI) and are now at universities across the nation pursuing their graduate degrees. We discussed what we have accomplished so far and encouraged each other to keep pushing to reach our goals. During breakfast, I also had the honor of listening to Dr. Isaac Prilleltensky’s keynote entitled Wellness and Fairness for All. Bienestar y Justicia para Todos. After the keynote address it was the first breakout session. Dr. McNeill was the chair of the first symposium, Curanderismo en la Comunidad, I attended. In the symposium I learned more about the use of curanderismo in the community and curanderismo as evidenced based practice in the clinical setting. We were introduced to two curanderas and they briefly demonstrated how a limpia is done. After the symposium I connected with my mentor, Dr. Jeanett Castellanos and joined her at an NLPA board meeting as she discussed her platform in running for NLPA president.

Friday afternoon consisted of attending a poster session and two other symposiums. After the poster session, I attended a symposium geared towards students and early career professionals, Latina/o Leadership in Action, by some of my idols in the field, Dr. Patricia Arredondo, Dr. Melba Vasquez, Dr. Marie Miville, and Dr. Azara Santiago Rivera. It was such an honor to be in a room with such powerful Latina leaders; I was star struck. They discussed their journey and encouraged us to continue pursuing our dreams of being Latina/o leaders and highlighted our role of also empowering others.

Friday night, I joined about 10-15 other conference attendees and participated in a Temazcal led by the curanderas that I had met earlier in the day. It is our job while participating in the Temazcal to challenge ourselves and search for spiritual cleanliness, while the sweat rids us of our toxins. Upon finishing the Temazcal, I felt refreshed, revitalized, and clean.

Saturday was also a day full of empowerment through workshops and poster sessions. Attending NLPA was everything and more than I expected it to be. Attending a conference with 500 other Latina/os was so comforting and inspiring. Being in the presence of so many powerful Latina/o leaders and seeing my friends succeed and be awarded was empowering, encouraging, and reminded me that I am not alone in this process. Attending NLPA reignited my fire and reminded me of my purpose why I wanted to pursue my Ph.D. I am thankful that the Center for Mestizo and Indigenous Research and Engagement supported this reenergizing trip.



Laura Preciado, Counseling Psychology Doctoral Student

Having the opportunity to attend the bi-annual National Latina/o Psychological Association (NLPA) Conference in Albuquerque, NM was sincerely one of the most inspirational experiences in my academic career. I was completely humbled by the generosity offered to me by the Center for Mestizo & Indigenous Research and Engagement. With their support I was able to discover how I, as a first-generation Latina, fit and belong within the field of psychology. It was exhilarating to sit in a room filled with the presence of so many professional Latina/os psychologists from around the nation. A topic was brought up at the conference about wanting to “touch” people that we admire, just to make sure that they were “real.” The idea of wanting to “confirm” that someone is “real” completely resonated with my thoughts as I looked forward to meeting famous Latina/o psychologists. In Dr. Brian McNeill’s, Historical and Philosophical Foundations of Counseling Psychology course I had learned about the important contributions that Latina/o psychologists have made in our field. I understood they existed but it was not until the NLPA conference that I was able to fully appreciate how significant it was for me personally to have such leadership from Latina/o psychologists.

Dr. McNeill introduced me to Latina/o psychologists, and colleagues of his, including Dr. Melba Vasquez, Dr. Patricia Arredondo, Dr. Jose Cervantes, Dr. Evie Garcia, and Dr. Jeanett Castellanos. Accordingly, I also had the honor of introducing Dr. McNeill to students who were interested in his research and knew about his work. It was a great feeling to see how respectable and well-known our faculty are across the nation. I would like to sincerely thank Dr. Lali McCubbin and Dr. Brian McNeill for their unwavering support toward our travel activities and numerous other professional endeavors we pursue as graduate students.



The Journal of Mestizo and Indigenous Voices

The Journal of Mestizo and Indigenous Voices serves as the on-line publication outlet of the Center for Mestizo and Indigenous Research and Engagement, which focuses on the generation, transmission, and application of knowledge to serve the needs of Latino/Mestizo and Native/Indigenous communities in the Pacific Northwest.

Call for Papers!

Anyone may submit an original article to be considered for publication in the Journal of Mestizo and Indigenous Voices provided he or she owns the copyright to the work being submitted or is authorized by the copyright owner or owners to submit the article.

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