

ON PEDAGOGY

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Most academic fields evolve from mainstream disciplines; they gradually develop paradigms and methodologies that separate them from their mother disciplines. Slowly new disciplines are defined and recognized by the academic journals and academe. Sociology, anthropology, and the other social sciences are relatively young, having mutated from the field of history. Political science was institutionalized as a separate department in the 1850s, while sociology formed as a discipline in the 1890s. They developed as teaching fields. Chicano studies are different. The area came about because of student activism. They did not evolve from a single discipline, but as a multidisciplinary area of inquiry. Because of student pressure, it received departmental status overnight. Thus collectively the disparate disciplines bypassed the transition from teaching fields of study to research fields. Unfortunately, because of this rapid development, the area's teaching mission got lost, which is understandable. In academe teaching and its outcomes are low on the totem pole.

In higher education, content courses do not, as a rule, teach students to read and write. They shun the label remedial. But because of the inequality of the American educational system, aside from teaching content, Chicano studies were often used to develop student skills. Academe was challenged by this proposition. This supposedly was the job of the K-12 people. The notion of teaching students clashed with the culture of academe. This culture conflict was compounded by the fact that university professors are the worst teachers in the world. (They ain't Mr. Chips.) Research has always reigned as king of the mountain in academe. When I was suing the University of California, Santa Barbara, I remember reviewing promotion files for comparables. I ran across a file of a well-known environmental history professor who had been denied a step promotion by the environment and history departments' review committees on the grounds that he had three sexual harassment charges pending against him. A Committee of Renowned History Professors met and overrode the recommendations of the two review committees, finding that the professor was a prolific writer who had an outstanding publication record. Thus, he was a good "citizen." In academe, pedagogy is for the education people—content for the hard disciplines.

Early on, Chicano studies professors had to defend the legitimacy of the area. Because professors within the area of study were in disciplines that required a Ph.D., this became the norm for Chicano studies. They adhered to the canons of the discipline instead of Chicano studies. In contrast, a majority of education professors had Ed.D.'s that focused on educational

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practice and the application of theory and research. This was much more in line with the canons of Chicano studies. At California State University, Northridge (CSUN), where I teach, professors in the content fields are not permitted to teach pedagogy, and the education people are not permitted to teach content courses such as history.

As Chicano studies faculty members assimilated into academe, they forgot that Educational Opportunity Programs (EOPs)¹ came before Chicano studies. That the area was built out of struggle. Thus, they adopted many of academe's elitist attitudes. This was a radical departure from the original purpose of establishing Chicano studies, which was to teach Chicano students and to empower them. This is disappointing since, in the beginning, we were much more in synch with the educational objectives of programs such as bilingual education and the aspirations of students who knew that the system was collectively failing them. Somehow pedagogy got lost in the shuffle from Mexican American studies to Chicano studies. With the entrance of larger numbers of Chicano students into graduate schools, there was a subtle break with the Mexican American generation and the Chicano student demands of the late 1960s. In retrospect, theory seduced the new generation of scholars as they followed one fad after another in search of a personal identity. At the time, much of this turned me off because I had been exposed to scholasticism under the Jesuits and to courses such as epistemology and cosmology that were merely reconfigured to support dogma.

The developing area of Chicano studies broke from this teaching-first tradition, and as more Chicanos entered graduate school, they replaced high school teachers who had formed the backbone of many Chicano studies programs. The National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS) was established in 1976.² It evolved out of a caucus at the Southwestern Social Science Association held in San Antonio, Texas, led by Chicano faculty and students active in the American Sociological Association, American Anthropological Association, and the American Political Science Association. In its history statement, NACCS states:

Since its inception NACCS has encouraged research, which is critical and reaffirms the political actualization of Chicanas/os. NACCS rejects mainstream research, which promotes an integrationist perspective that emphasizes consensus, assimilation, and legitimization of societal institutions. NACCS promotes research

¹ Cf. Sharon S. Lee, *The De-Minoritization of Asian Americans*, 15 *ASIAN AM. L.J.* 129, 132-33 (2008) ("In the 1960s, [University of California] administrators became concerned with increasing enrollment rates of low-income and minority students. To that end, Educational Opportunity Programs ("EOPs"), consisting mainly of community outreach, junior high school recruitment, and tutoring for enrolled college students were initiated in 1964 and implemented on all [University of California] campuses by 1968. These efforts targeted disadvantaged students, especially racial minorities." (footnotes omitted)).

² National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies, History of NACCS, http://www.naccs.org/naccs/History_EN.asp (last visited Feb. 25, 2009). The organization was originally called the National Caucus of Chicano Social Scientists, and has undergone several name changes since.

that directly confronts structures of inequality based on class, race and gender privileges in U.S. society.³

I may have missed it, but I could not find the word “pedagogy” on the NACCS website, and over the years that I have attended NACCS conventions, there have been few workshops on how to teach Chicano studies to students.

This is not to say that every member of NACCS is unconcerned with pedagogy and that there are not good teachers among us—especially at the community colleges. But what I am arguing is that we changed as we became part of the academy and our value systems were corrupted. I remember visiting the University of Texas at Austin on a lecture tour arranged by José Angel Gutiérrez who was raising money for his *voluntarios* program. When I arrived, I was put off by the lack of bonding between graduate students and Crystal City, which for us was one of the most important historical events of the decade.⁴ I was even more put off when a student leader told me that the school’s Center for Mexican American Studies would become the Harvard of the West—an intellectual *foco*.⁵ Its emphasis was developing graduate students—the vanguard. My response was: that was not how student power was built. Undergraduates are more numerous, more needy, and more militant.

Elitism was not limited to Austin. In California, I remember a conference at Stanford University where I said that Chicano studies should stop worrying about scholarship and concentrate on getting students through college—even if it meant passing out degrees. One scholar did not speak to me for half a dozen years because of my hyperbole. Many of the scholars—distinguished from educators—tuned me out. The point I was trying to make is that education is generational—that the children of the graduates, even if you want to call them ill-prepared students, would come back much better prepared than their parents because they would have the knowledge that their parents attended college. Even today, I get the children of former students who dropped out after a semester asking me if I remembered their parents. It meant something to say my parents went to college.

But the academy seduces you. Makes you feel better than a community college teacher, than a high school teacher. If you are at a research institution, you are better if you are at a tier-one university than a tier-two or tier-three. Like Ernesto Galarza used to say, one of the worst traits of the human species is their persistent need to peck down to feel better than. (Everyone needs a Mississippi.) This is especially true in academe where the hard sciences are better than the social sciences, the social sciences better than humanities, and so on. I remember Mario Barrera telling me that historians

³ *Id.*

⁴ See generally JOSÉ ANGEL GUTIÉRREZ, *THE MAKING OF A CHICANO MILITANT: LESSONS FROM CRISTAL* (1998); ARMANDO NAVARRO, *THE CRISTAL EXPERIMENT: A CHICANO STRUGGLE FOR COMMUNITY CONTROL* (1998).

⁵ I found this presumptuous; a *foco* is a revolutionary cell.

were like the proletariat, that they extracted knowledge, whereas political scientists were like the bourgeoisie who crafted the raw materials.⁶

A new generation of scholars saw Chicano studies as content fields which dealt with subject matter, not pedagogy. This trend accelerated with time. The lamentable thing was that, although the 1970s scholars dismissed pedagogy, they also sacrificed content by concentrating on theory—obsessed with making Chicano studies more academic, more scientific. These early scholars were social scientists who looked at other fields as soft.

The professionalization of Chicano studies scholars has changed the area of study. Fewer young scholars have public school teaching experience. Their own education has placed more emphasis on research, theory, and the philosophy of Chicano studies, and less on how to teach Chicano students. As mentioned, in the academy, pedagogy is the purview of the education people; the hard disciplines deal with the content fields. Hence, aside from the occasional genuflection to Paulo Freire,⁷ little attention was and is paid to Chicano studies as a pedagogical tool.

Note: most scholars are enthralled with Freire's theory rather than the application of his pedagogy. This is lamentable. The other day I ran across an interview with a sixteen-year-old Fremont High School⁸ student, Mariela Martinez. She described the impact that Freire had on her: "What I remember most about [Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*] was his theories of how oppressed people have to realize that they are oppressed first before they can liberate themselves. . . . I had never thought of things that way or that I was oppressed."⁹ Mariela read Freire in the circumstance of a South Central Los Angeles leadership program. She related the theory to her activism:

Black and Brown people are always told that they are stupid so you grow up believing that you weren't meant to be anything. We believe we are born this way and that it is just our destiny. Then I realized that our schools and other systems are instruments that make us think this way.¹⁰

Why pedagogy fell through the cracks is understandable; in Mariela's words, "our schools and other systems are instruments that make us think this way."

⁶ It is very easy to feel like you are one of the select. I went to Loyola High School, a Jesuit college prep school, where students felt that they were L.A.'s select. This attitude carried over into higher education where you felt that many of your colleagues could not have made it with the Jesuits.

⁷ See, e.g., PAULO FREIRE, *PEDAGOGY OF THE OPPRESSED* (Myra Bergman Ramos trans., 30th anniversary ed., Continuum Int'l Publ'g Group Inc. 2003) (1970).

⁸ John C. Fremont High School is in South Central Los Angeles, California.

⁹ *Mariela Martinez: Breaking the Cycle of Oppression SCYEA Leadership Inspires Change*, THE MOVEMENT (Cmty. Coal. for Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment, L.A., Cal.), Fall 2007, at 6.

¹⁰ *Id.*

The truth be told, only a few of the early Chicano Ph.D.'s were themselves activists. They were the students with the best grades. In contrast, my generation, for the most part, was trained in pedagogy. Like most Ph.D.-types, the new generation had very little training in the science of teaching. This is especially true of California, where the greatest number of Chicano studies programs were formed. In Texas, a division broke out between those with community experience and those nurtured by the universities. I would argue that the experiences of the post-1972 Chicano Ph.D.'s set the priorities for what would become the area of Chicano studies and had much more influence than people such as myself.

Mindful of the importance of pedagogy, in the first years, I preferred hiring former high school teachers who could teach skills using identity for motivation.¹¹ Content specialization would take place in the upper division—once the students had acquired writing and analytical skills. Many students at the state universities enter college with combined SAT scores of 800. That is why we fought for a stake in the teaching of remedial classes. This arrangement worked well until the terminal degree became the union card and the new hires were not teachers—it was as if teaching was beneath them. For example, we hired no fewer than a half dozen instructors to teach English grammar. However, once they got tenure, they pressured the department to assign them literature or film classes.¹² The why eclipsed the how.

During the first years, most of us taught lower division classes that gave us the opportunity to teach outside our disciplines. For example, I taught Chicano Culture, Mexican Literature in Translation, English Writing, Education and Social Institutions, Field Work in the Barrio, and a variety of other first- and second-year-level courses. Today we run six to seven sections per semester of Chicano history—so I teach two Chicano history classes and haven't taught outside my discipline in a dozen years. Before I retired, I taught four Chicano history classes per semester. Once upon a time, Chicano scholars outside Chicano studies departments never left their respective disciplines. However, today, even those in Chicano studies departments are teaching the discipline and not the child—to use Fentonian language. I would add that many minority scholars have dismissed the pragmatism of John Dewey, who I feel everyone should read.

As a consequence, students and professors on campus have become less political. Professionalism has produced the illusion of objectivity and promoted a false consciousness. I recall Ivan Illich, who in the early 1970s called for the annihilation of the schools and wrote:

Many students, especially those who are poor, intuitively know what the schools do for them. They school them to confuse process and substance. Once these become blurred, a new logic is

¹¹ My generation of teachers genuflected to John Dewey and his philosophy of teaching the whole child.

¹² There are exceptions: Mary Pardo, one of our best-known faculty, voluntarily teaches at least one remedial writing class per semester.

assumed: the more treatment there is, the better are the results; or, escalation leads to success. The pupil is thereby 'schooled' to confuse teaching with learning, grade advancement with education, a diploma with competence, and fluency with the ability to say something new. His imagination is 'schooled' to accept service in place of value. Medical treatment is mistaken for health care, social work for the improvement of community life, police protection for safety, military poise for national security, the rat race for productive work.¹³

Unlike Mariela Martinez, most Chicano students are not pissed off. (You have to be pissed off to bring about radical change or a paradigm shift.) Students fail to bond with each other and blame themselves and others for their failures. (They do not want to be called victims.) Few Chicano professors have experienced the *desprecios* or racism that their fathers and mothers endured. Hence they have a hard time identifying with the narrative of their disciplines. Their courses lack what Fenton used to call inquiry; they assume that students accept their narratives.¹⁴

Mindful of the importance of pedagogy, I have changed *Occupied America* from a monograph to a textbook format.¹⁵ This difference is important because textbooks establish the paradigms for the disciplines within the area of study. The high school text, *Land of the Free*,¹⁶ was important because it challenged the established texts by including civil rights, minorities, and in some cases women. It sought not only to change the narrative but a discussion of that narrative. In revising *Occupied America*, I cut about 100 pages of narrative and included pedagogical tools such as timelines, links to maps, and other materials. In subsequent editions, I plan to concentrate even more on pedagogy while expanding the narrative.

The change in the focus of the book has come about by several circumstances. First is that we are on the third and fourth wave of Chicano studies scholars. Chicano students are different. And frankly, I don't think that these last two waves see or feel the urgency of racism or identity in the same way that the first two waves did. Learning about the past requires skills.¹⁷

I have come to the conclusion that many Chicano studies scholars do not share my priorities. I have basically remained a teacher and do not take pride in being a professor. For the past three years, I have been experi-

¹³ IVAN ILLICH, *DESCHOOLING SOCIETY* 9 (Pelican Books 1976) (1971). For the negative impact of professionalization, see *Deschooling Society* and IVAN ILLICH, *TOOLS FOR CONVIVIALITY* (1973) attacking the phenomenon of professionalization of education. In 1961, Illich founded the Centro Intercultural de Documentación (CIDOC, or Intercultural Documentation Center) at Cuernavaca, in Mexico. It attracted leftist intellectuals globally.

¹⁴ See Charles M. Flail, Jr. et al., *Inquiry into Inquiry: An Examination of the Fenton 11th Grade U.S. History Materials*, 6 *HIST. TCHR.* 169 (1973).

¹⁵ See RODOLFO F. ACUÑA, *OCCUPIED AMERICA: A HISTORY OF CHICANOS* (6th ed. 2007).

¹⁶ See JOHN W. CAUGHEY ET AL., *LAND OF THE FREE: A HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES* (1966).

¹⁷ For discussion of paradigm shifts see THOMAS S. KUHN, *THE STRUCTURE OF SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTIONS* (3d ed. 1996).

menting with an online class that has forced me to re-conceptualize Chicano history and communicate with students in different ways. Classroom professing has always been easy. I know the narrative and can go into a class and entertain. I have never used notes, and if I want, can keep them laughing. Online classes take on other dimensions. CSUN has a large deaf-student population, so everything has to be written. So I have had to return to the basics and plan out the course, comprised of units and activities. I have dusted off Fenton and returned to inquiry.¹⁸

In this context, *Occupied America* is a tool. For example, Chicano studies do not have the luxury of being an extension of grade school history as U.S. history does, exposing students to a reductive process. We have to cram in the study of a people into one class, generally at the university level. We teach students who are dimly aware of their past and future. The tragedy is that some students will become elementary and secondary school teachers, where they will repeat myths in U.S. History. For better or worse, we cannot escape our responsibility to teach students who can think for themselves and advocate for change. We can prepare students to teach the subject, but will they be prepared to teach the child?

¹⁸ In 2003, I published a book that focuses on inquiry. See RODOLFO F. ACUÑA, U.S. LATINO ISSUES (2003).

