

Aprendizaje Colectivo en Tiempos de la Pandemia: Employing Testimonio Pedagogies at a Teacher Preparation Program

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Coronavirus pandemic has imposed critical challenges upon educators across levels and spaces. Novice college professors who recently transitioned from being graduate students to faculty members in 2020 faced and continue to face uncharted terrains in terms of connecting and engaging with students online. This work portrays the autoethnography of a Mexicana scholar in her journey as a newcomer junior faculty member at a Liberal Arts University in New England during contentious COVID-19 times. In this piece, the author draws from the Chicana/Latina plethora of conocimiento [knowledge] to document how testimonio pedagogies allowed her to facilitate and co-create critical online learning/unlearning experiences with graduate students and pre-service teachers in a special education program.

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

The institution in which this case takes place is a private Liberal Arts university located in New England founded in the 1900's with the purpose of preparing teachers to work at the kindergarten level. Historically, the school's mission has stated to prioritize the connectedness between theory and practice through education and the arts. Said university states in its mission statement a commitment to diversity, social justice, and culturally responsive practices across its programs. Currently, the demographics of the school, including students and faculty, are predominantly white. The courses in which testimonio pedagogy is described in this chapter are at the graduate level and offered in the Special Education program of this university.

SETTING THE STAGE

Within the field of education, scholars are increasingly taking up testimonio as a pedagogical, methodological, and activist approach to social justice that transgresses traditional paradigms in academia. Unlike the more common training of researchers to produce unbiased knowledge, testimonio challenges objectivity by situating the individual in communion with a collective experience marked by marginalization, oppression, or resistance. (Delgado Bernal, Burciaga & Flores Carmona, 2012, p. 363)

Chicana/Latina qualitative research methodologies and Critical Race Feminist lenses are foundational in this chapter. Childers-McKee and Hytten (2015) describe Critical Race Feminism as “a framework with which educators and teacher educators might begin to reconceptualize the meanings of change in school settings to deflect the deficit-based ideology found in many contemporary iterations of reform and to reflect a commitment to social justice” (p. 394). Such a framework challenges traditional Eurocentric ways of knowing, which claim objectivity as the distancing from the researcher or writer from their work (Flores Carmona & Luciano, 2014). Specifically, testimonio pedagogy and Critical Race Feminist frameworks push scholars, writers, and researchers to situate themselves in the context they explore and draw from lived experience and critical self-reflection (Aleman & Delgado Bernal 2016; Wing, 2003). While discussing how testimonio pedagogies took up space in online learning environments as a first-year faculty member at a Historically White Institution (HWI), the author draws from self-reflection, lived experience and Chicana/Latina epistemologies across this chapter.

It is important to note that this work is not a testimonio; instead, this autoethnographic piece sheds light on concrete examples regarding the applicability of testimonio pedagogies in digital learning environments with pre-service teachers in a special education program. Throughout this chapter, the author employs the plural term pedagogies to highlight the multidirectional process of learning/unlearning that occurs in the classroom when centering testimonio as a source of knowledge. That is, the course participants and the instructor collectively create a classroom dynamic where self-reflection, democracy, and lived experiences frame the classroom discussions and, therefore, the participants’ collective learning process.

As an approach to fostering horizontal relationships and sustaining a democratic online learning environment, the author describes the process of establishing community guidelines collaboratively (Sleeter & Flores Carmona, 2017). Further, this work illustrates how testimonio pedagogies facilitate and center discussions around context, positionality, and identity at the core of a special education online course.

Aprendizaje colectivo translates directly to collective learning. Therefore, *aprendizaje colectivo* aims to challenge the dominant discourses, policies, and practices in academia that often favor individualism over collectivity, solidarity, and community (Burciaga & Tavares, 2006; Smith, 2012; Torrez, 2015). This work depicts approaches to centering counternarratives, specifically in the field of education and (dis)abilities, as instrumental sources of knowledge when employing testimonio pedagogies. Likewise, the author describes some of the dynamics of using this pedagogical approach to facilitate dialog and collective learning opportunities. Some examples are collaboratively challenging the dominant narratives while exploring how they inhabit our mindset and inform our lenses, behaviors, and decision-making processes as educators. That is, how course participants collectively identify connections between their lived experiences, counternarratives, and systemic oppression.

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