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Maricela DeMirjyn

Doctoral Student, Gervitz Graduate School of Education, University of California, Santa Barbara

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The Pedagogical Color of Chicana Voice

Abstract

The session covers a discussion of the educational process of higher education for Chicanas and other women of color as a trajectory of disillusionment. Aspects of this disillusionment stem from formal educational systems, such as the university and are perpetuated by classroom cultures, curriculum and pedagogical approaches.

Maricela DeMirjyn

Doctoral Student, Gervitz Graduate School of Education, University of California, Santa Barbara

In relation to Chicanas, we are often looked down upon in academic circles, whether it be as undergraduates, graduate students or faculty. I include faculty as well because as women of color, they face the same discriminations at perhaps even a more subtle level within the hierarchical patriarchy of the University. A Chicana at any academic level may be solicited for the mere color of her skin, only to be later cast aside by the same solicitors. As poet/activist Ana Castillo states, "we are seen primarily as the daughters and lovers of mongrel bandidos" and institutional racism "insists that our labor backgrounds indicate mental deficiency, physical inferiority, or at the very least a cultural tendency toward lack of ambition" (p. 211).

Chicana activism has occurred within the framework of the University by both students and staff in attempts to counteract the waves of discrimination. From press conferences to hunger strikes, Chicanas have fought for their voices to be heard on the injustices of the University. Their battle cries shout for the recruitment and retention of Chicanas/os to campuses across the country, for the development of Chicana/o Studies programs, including those at the graduate level and for the void in empirical research on Chicanas/Latinas. These cries for recognition may be viewed by some as a continuation of racism in the form of ethnocentrism. However, "ethnicity is not the same as race...ethnocentrism is not the same as racism" and "one can be ethnocentric without being racist" (Lugones, p. 48). The Chicana cries are cries of centrality to one's cultura, one's gente, one's lenguaje, one's comunidad y son contruidas sobre lagrimas de sangre.

Speaking from the heart, I too have cried tears of blood along the trajectory of my education experiences as a woman, as a woman of color, as a Spanish-speaker, as a non-Native speaker of Spanish, as a theorist, as a scientist, as an educator, as an artists, as an activist. . . The list is not to validate my words as words of wisdom, but rather to state that what appears on the outside is superficial to our worlds of knowing, to Chicana worlds of knowing. In our hunger for knowledge, we as Chicanas evoke our ways of knowing, or tools, that we have at our disposal. This may be defined as a form of Chicana Consciousness, an attempt to use our degrees and our capacities as Chicana women to create a circle in academia where we are not marginalized.

Unfortunately, more often than not, our tools fall short of academic approval, our circle broken and we are forced to look to other means of sustenance outside las paredes de

hiedra of the University. A study by the National Center for Education Statistics in 1992 reported that 31.1 percent of all Latinas between the ages of sixteen and twenty-four are pushed out of school. Another study conducted in 1996 by the President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Latina Americans stated that Latinas have the highest high school push out rate at 28 percent in comparison to blacks at 14 percent and whites at 8 percent.

Additionally, a report on public schooling by the President's Advisory Commission in 1996 indicated that Latinas are less likely to be enrolled in college preparatory classes or to be enrolled in gifted programs and are more likely to be placed in remedial programs or incorrectly assessed as mentally retarded or learning disabled. A concluding statistic to end this discouraging display was published in the 1996 "Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac." In the academic year of 1993 to 1994 only 2.6 percent of conferred doctorates were Latinas.

We may now be introduced to the metaphorical image of the pipeline to higher education based on past research that indicates how more Chicana/o students enroll in institutions of higher learning than earn degrees.

Presenter

Maricela DeMirjyn is a doctoral student in the Gevirtz Graduate School of Education at the University of California-Santa Barbara with an Emphasis in Cultural Perspectives. As a bicultural, first-generation, Mexican American woman, Maricela has focused her professional career and research on Latinas of Mexican decent. She holds a B.S. degree in Biopsychology from the University of CaliforniaSanta Barbara and completed her M.A. degree in Women's Studies at San Diego State University. Maricela's experience as a domestic violence counselor led towards her thesis, "Arte y Terapia: Treatment for Domestic Violence," and she now serves as a treatment counselor for Latino youths through the Council for Alcoholism and Drug Abuse in Santa Barbara, Calif. Her dissertation work entails the recruitment and retention of Chicana/Latinas within the university system, as well as the pedagogical use of narratives in higher education.