

Lo Último: Consejos— Un Diálogo Respetoso Entre Colegas

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The mind rather than thriving on solitude is clearly dependent upon the reflection, renewal and trust inherent in sustained human relationships.

(John-Steiner, 2000, p. 7)

Los testimonios, or life stories, shared in this volume reveal that academia represents a labyrinth of challenges for aspiring and emerging Latina scholars. A story we know all too well. As Latina *veterana* scholars, who have traveled this arduous journey, we recognize that our collective efforts have etched a pathway in what often seems an impenetrable and unfriendly terrain. The intent of this final article is to offer words of inspiration for those who will follow. We share our story, our *consejos*, our advice, and our *sabiduría*, our wisdom, in hope of a better tomorrow.

It does not often happen that three scholars approach a creative alliance in search of a common goal without hidden agendas and tripping all over each other's self-importance. However, this is exactly what happened to

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the three of us when we began working together. Independently, each of us had developed strengths in distinctive areas of expertise and each had achieved wide recognition for her efforts. Although our work centered on different geographical areas of the Southwest—Clark and Flores in Texas and Vásquez in Southern California—it was driven by a mutual *compromiso a la comunidad* (commitment to the community) embodied in a desire to make a difference in the educational success of Spanish-English bilingual children from Mexican-origin backgrounds. It did not take us long to recognize that the vectors of our research agendas converged seamlessly into one unified objective: tackling the under-representation of Latinas/os at the higher rungs of power—i.e., the corporate boardroom, higher education, and the political arena. It was with this one objective in mind that we, coming from different directions, focused on best practices to remedy the underrepresentation of Latinas/os in leadership positions.

Our subsequent collaboration, theorizing, and imagining a new educational practice formed what John-Steiner (2000) refers to as a creative activity in the social construction of knowledge. Rather than leading to “shared voices and visions,” as she suggests, our collaboration led to a re-articulation of a mutual voice and vision we each shared as Latinas growing up in a “cultural and historical milieu” (John-Steiner, p. 5) that has historically disregarded minority epistemologies and contributions to the development of the “American” nation-state. *Confianza* (trust) and *Respeto* (respect) come from the collective arms of our community culture and the familism of our traditional homes. We brought these two community values to our collaboration and as John-Steiner argues—our minds were set free to envision *un futuro mejor*, a better future where everyone has equal access to higher education, where Latinas exercise positions of power and where, through better schooling for Latina and Latino students, change happens. Our commitment is to improve our communities’ social capital through better schooling for Latina/o students.

The notion of *un diálogo de saberes* (knowledge exchange through dialogue), a meeting of minds, best represents the collaboration that took hold among the three of us as we worked on the various chapters of our co-edited volume, *La Clase Mágica: Generating Transworld Pedagogy* (Flores, Vásquez, & Clark, 2013/2014). This collaborative endeavor nourished our spirit and our belief in *la hermandad* (sisterhood) that REAL has provided the authors in this special issue. Thriving on “the reflection, renewal and trust” of our mutual histories, visions, and our individual personalities, *logramos a hacer una mente unica* (we formed one mind in our thinking) as each one of us took turns reading what we had written separately. In the process, we completed each other’s sentences, suggested umpteen words until we found just the right one that completed our thought, and we played with established concepts until they were our own. At the pinnacle of creation, we found one voice, one vision and ultimately who we were in relation to each other, our work, and the society at large. It was fulfilling, exhilarating, and a new experience for each of us—very much in the same way that it was for the authors of this issue, who found validation, voice, and refuge in REAL as a space for critical and genuine collaboration.

Such heights of creativity and accomplishment, however, do not come easily, especially in academia. The unstated practice of privileging individual production over collaborative work is one of those well-understood agendas that make up the hidden curriculum. Confronting this hidden curriculum in a situation that is “very male, very White, very old and very conservative,” is treacherous and time consuming (Margolis & Romero, 1998, p. 1). It engenders competition, hierarchical measures of evaluation, and general mistrust among colleagues. Reading between the lines in terms of what is valued by academia, young scholars hold back from talking about their work openly. They are afraid to share half-baked ideas for fear they may be stolen. They refrain from engaging in co-authored projects because they will not count sufficiently towards tenure. While it is true that these things happen, that collaboration is often more pain than pleasure, the cost of not participating in collaborative development of innovative ideas circumvents the possibility of achieving a high level of creativity. This is what REAL has provided young scholars—an opportunity to develop critical engagement and dialogue about life in academia and the “mixed messages” they often encounter.

We do not propose that all work should be done in collaboration. We do suggest however, that when one does collaborate, one should approach it from a position of confidence in what one knows. We also advise, *que no se pongan la corona muy alta*, or let its picos hurt others in the eye or the heart when one bends down to write. The idea that “I” am better and must compete with others impedes fruitful collaboration, engagement, and ultimately progress. We need to know how to build on each other’s creative ideas and push them to their most optimal potential. Our mind is nurtured through supportive relations (John-Steiner, 2000). It thrives in the positive dynamics of academia as we set our goals in improving the educational and economic outcomes of Latina/o students so they too can continue to energize our community.

Nuestras Raíces son Nuestros Tesoros. Our roots are our resources.

In the *Sexto Sol*, you will know what was hidden from us. The epoch of light will illuminate your being; it is your children who will travel the celestial skies.

(Guochi cited by Lara, 2000, Translated by Authors)

This Mayan prophecy reminds us of the importance of being open to change, to embrace new ways of thinking that inform a new ideology. It also reminds that our work will open greater opportunities for those who follow, so that they too can reach greater heights as scholars and leaders. What we do today will lead the way for future Latinas in academia.

As *sabias* and researchers, we must also appreciate the value of our past experiences in shaping us as Latina academics. This was made evident as we worked through our book project and recognized the source of our fluid consensus and mutual imagination. It was our common backgrounds, our cultural upbringing, and our commitment to the community that had impacted our academic lives and made our collaboration flourish. Below, we share a few bits of wisdom as consejos

for navigating an academic life. Following in the cultural ways of our *antepasados*/ancestors who commonly shared their wisdom in dichos timeless morsels of knowledge, we offer the following *consejos*.

As *sabias*, we believe in a common goal of creating a more responsive community of learners within the academy. We hold steadfast to our ideals of making a difference and transforming the academy through our research, teaching, and service. We are not satisfied with the status quo and constantly seek ways to support the next generation of scholars as is evident in the work of many other scholars. Theoretical propositions such as the use of cultural tools— for example, *consejos* (Delgado-Gaitán, 1994/2009) and *dichos* (Flores, Sheets, & Clark, 2011) as well as the exploration and identification of the funds of knowledge (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005), *pedagogies* of the home (Delgado Bernal, 2010), and the community's capital wealth (Yosso, 2005)— speak to the work being done in the academy and opens up other ways of thinking. More specifically, this work validates the use of our communities' cultural knowledge within academia and makes it a building block for the schooling experience, making learning an affirmative, culturally relevant, and equitable experience for Latino learners.

We must remember *lo que diran* (what will people say) and recognize that we are also role models for the community and other ethnic minority faculty and students, as well as those who may claim that they do not have a cultural or ethnic identity. As cultural *sabias*, we know that we must crisscross borders into different worlds that often do not have our shared values, in particular the world of academia. We must learn the hidden curriculum of academia and learn to exist as academics in a new world, while at the same time retaining our cultural identity and ability to navigate the interstices of multiple ways of knowing. We offer the following *dichos* (sayings) as *consejos* (advise) to enliven the spirits of young Latina scholars:

Celebra quién eres (Celebrate who you are)

As *sabias*, we coin this *dicho* to counter hegemonic discourse—one of the most vulnerable aspects of our schooling experience. Our sense of self runs through a gauntlet of attack as we move up the educational ladder as the school system tries to mold us into someone else, a pseudo archetype of academia, and not who we really are. One sees this evidence in the little ones who do not want to speak Spanish after a few months in school or later struggle to see the magnificence of being bicultural (Nieto, 2008; Valenzuela, 1999). As academics, we must reclaim our cultural identity and restore our self-respect through a critical understanding of the socio-cultural, historical, and political contexts that have mediated the development of our identities. In doing so we become role models to young children, students, and young scholars who struggle to “fit in.” When you “celebrar quien eres” and share this axiom with others, one begins to provide a space for possibility, inclusion, and acceptance.

We must pursue equity, as a conduit for social esteem, based on equal rights and the knowledge that ethnic identity leads to ethnic solidarity and power. Lastly,

we must use our own cultural and ethnic identity, taking pride and sharing our collective accomplishments as a group, as a medium for constructing empathy and promoting social justice in our classrooms and our work.

Cada cabeza es un mundo (Every mind is a world of its own)

When we reflect on this axiom, we recognize the wisdom imparted in this dicho. It captures our belief that each person has a unique contribution to make. It also suggests how our experiences shape our world perspective. As Latina academics, we must approach collaborative writing from an interdisciplinary lens, weaving in theory from Freire (1970) to Vygotsky (1978), a critical perspective that highlights a cultural principle—*que cada cabeza es un mundo*, respecting what others have to offer. Blending these different perspectives amplify our understanding and bring depth to an issue.

Saber es poder

Yes, knowledge is power, but knowledge is not owned. We cannot hoard it. When knowledge is owned by the few, it marginalizes others. In the struggle for social justice, we cannot only preach this; our actions must support our stance. We must share our knowledge with others. This is accomplished through the principle of dialogic discourse as a powerful tool for understanding (Freire, 1970; Vygotsky, 1978). For example, when we share ideas, we open our minds to new thoughts, new points of view, and expand our world. In this volume, we note how critical REAL is in disrupting young scholars' fears and the hesitancy towards collaborative work.

No te pongas la corona (Don't put on a crown)

We also advise that much can be accomplished when we leave our egos at the door. Yes, each of us has achieved in our own right; however, we still have much more to learn. We must honor that our achievements are based on the work of others who have toiled to construct the groundwork from where we stand today. To truly have an open dialogue as collaborators, *un dialogo de saberes*, we must be willing to reveal our inner selves, our thoughts, and ideals. We must also be willing to listen to others, and understand differing opinions or experiences.

Diplomacia: el arte de permitirle a alguien que te haga caso (Diplomacy: The art of asking someone to pay attention to you)

Often junior faculty are told not to be contentious and that it is best to be silent when controversial issues are discussed. We agree that we should listen and accept that not everyone will approach a discussion from the same lens. However, when others approach issues from a deficit perspective, rather than allowing the dialogue to continue or to simply rant in anger, assist them in reconstructing their ideology by providing a counter story to their narrative. To assist others in their transformation, we, as cultural brokers, can provide academic readings, cultural experiences, and testimonials, such as those offered in this volume.

Mejor andar sola que mal acompañada
(Better to be alone than be in bad company)

We all know that our world is changing and that we are becoming increasingly diverse; this is not news to us; we are living it. However, for those who perceive themselves in power, these changes are a threat to their very being and status quo. As faculty, we may find ourselves in a setting that is less than optimal. While it may be easier to retreat and disappear, and/or forgo our convictions, we should not forget our core beliefs. Instead, we must reach beyond our department, college, and/or university to find an affinity group that will nourish our weary souls, validate our work, and strengthen our resolve. One must take strength and say “no” to collaborations or situations that may be harmful or damaging; choose your collaborators wisely!

Camarón que se duerme se lo lleva la corriente—
We must remain vigilant in the face of a continued onslaught

There is always more that needs to be done in developing our work and in achieving our goals. We must not become complacent. As we move up the academic ladder, it is important to support others through their journey. *¡La lucha sigue!*

Our Work Is Political, We Are Change Agents

Awareness of our situation must come before inner change, which in turn come before change in society. Nothing happens in the “real” world unless it first happens in the images in our heads.

— Gloria E. Anzaldúa, p. 109

We, as academics, must understand that as our socio-cultural worlds are shifting, that we are part of that repositioning, and that we should be the ones to find the strategies with which to change our worlds. We must strengthen our inner core as we strive to be productive in both our worlds, that of academia and of our communities. As academics, we must follow in the footsteps of Anzaldúa’s *mestiza* and “create a new consciousness” (p. 305).

As we formulate this new *mestiza* academic consciousness, we have to take into account all those external factors such as space, history, gender, politics, and culture that have formed us. “These socio-cultural contexts differ for all of us based on where we grew up, when we grew up, and how we grew up” (Clark, in progress). Our research has not only “...demonstrated the complexity of the changing boundaries of ethnic groups and individuals but also the challenges of cultural identity as affected by diverse settings and was cogent for new findings and theories” (Clark, in progress). Likewise, Delgado Bernal (2008) speaks to the value of using our intuitive epistemologies as our research lens to explore and understand the lives of Chicano students. As new *mestiza* academics we have analyzed the past and present, considering future trajectories if the status quo is not disrupted. Major contributions to the discussion of gender and identity within the educational, sociopolitical, and

historical context should now be embodied in our works and our writings. We must not forget that power and positionality are inextricably linked to the forming of identity, ours, our students, and that of the people in our communities. To change one's subjectivity requires an examination of our social, cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and economic positioning in society. We must go into the real world beyond borders and listen to people's histories and examine those experiences that were once not seen as valid in our fields. As new mestiza academics and as agents of change, we must continue to *Derrumbando Fronteras* (Clark, 1999) by breaking the boundaries to create *un mundo sabio y justo* (a knowledgeable and just world).

This is a new way of thinking, an in-depth look, not just looking within but extending our work beyond into our larger communities, not only its innovation but also the radical perspective of the *mestiza* epistemology that combines academia and the social political context of our communities. Though it is not easy to challenge the culture of academia, we must go beyond the existing research literature, to infuse our epistemological and theoretical frameworks with this new way of thinking beyond traditional perspectives (e.g., Delgado Bernal, 2009; Flores, Vásquez, & Clark, 2013/2014). To underscore, understanding and drawing strength from one's past and one's cultural history, beliefs, and values should be central to our approach to teaching, research, and service. So we, the new *mestiza* academics, have to continuously challenge and transform how research is conducted and perceived, not only in the ivory tower, but also in our communities.

In conclusion, we have laid out key concepts that are emblematic to the concerns raised by the authors of this special issue. The *consejos* we have offered is our *compromiso* (commitment) to continue our tradition of respecting the *sabias/os* of our communities and to develop and maintain their legacy as we share with those who are to follow us. Mentoring, our *hermandad*, remains a principal component in our continuing relationship as researchers and scholars, and as we work with other faculty. We must never forget that we form the bedrock of our work through the gifts and resources of the people in our communities. For it is only through working with our communities that the fabric of our society can improve. We urge you to understand that the application of these tenets in the broader context of our field can lead toward a more aware and just society. *¡Adelante!* In Benito Juárez's words, *el respeto al derecho ajeno es la paz*; this maxim serves as a call for political action that should be our mantra as the new *mestiza* academics transforming the academy.

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