

CHAPTER TWELVE



Critical Ethnography and Community Change

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Context

I remember several years ago sitting in the doctor's office. My wife and I had taken our children for a routine check-up. Javier was about to turn four and Emiliano was seven. As the nurse, a Mexican American, checked all their vitals signs and measured their head, height, and weight, I remember asking myself, "Is this what anthropologists used to do to measure the intelligence of people?" This raised my anxiety a little as I thought their answers would reflect on me as a parent and teacher. But curiously and quietly, I observed. As the process moved along, the nurse asked Emiliano to jump across a tablet as the doctor checked Javier's ears, nose, and throat. Along with the measurements, the nurse asked the boys some questions. The question that caught my attention was the following: "What do you do when you are cold?" Emiliano, who was the first to get the inquiry, appropriately replied by making a shivering and shaking motion. The nurse agreeably and predictably gave him a positive reinforcement, "You are so smart." Then Javier followed doing everything the nurse asked of him. Then the question came: "What do you do when you are cold?" Javier quickly replied, "I get a *colchita*" (I get a little blanket). The nurse reacted with a surprised look; with a blank face, she pondered for several seconds, and after noticing that we had noticed her blankness and surprise, she broke into a big smile. Immediately, she and Javier rejoined us. Upon her return, I asked her, "What reaction would Javier have gotten had

the nurse not been bilingual?" She was puzzled by the question and said, "I do not know. I had not thought of that." But indeed, she unconsciously knew what not to say. Javier did not get the same "You're so smart" response.

Emiliano knows the same language as Javier, and he could have responded to the question in the same manner, but he is much more socialized to the expectations of the popular culture. He understands that in this office you speak English, and the mixing of languages would confuse people. But Javier, being younger, more innocent and naïve, did not make that connection; his response came from "home." Indeed, Javier's response is much less "packaged" and much closer to the heart than Emiliano's. In my eyes, it is much more organic. Unfortunately the nurse, who unknowingly granted the label of smartness to my children, was in a position of power and felt at ease ascribing intelligence, a position many of us as ethnographers frequently find ourselves in.

I share this story because it begins to ground this chapter and place a context to an issue that is by design a topic that is well packaged and usually discussed in university campuses and/or professional conferences. Critical ethnography is an issue that is privileged by well-trained and very polished graduate students and academicians. But as the story above illustrates, the authors of this chapter are committed to taking us out of this safe terrain. And as my little boy did, we will share with you a reality that will disrupt the status quo, and will paint a picture of young people and old people alike practicing the art of ethnography. Indeed, it is this practice of critical ethnography that has allowed us to live life on the margins as we learn, teach, and practice the art of knowing, the science of asking, and the reality of being. But because we are less trained, and much less socialized to the traditional practices and disciplines, we mix epistemologies as we do language, we blend techniques, we confuse traditional researchers, we create new realities, and thus, we create new knowledge. By including those who have not had a voice in the past, we begin to privilege new information that is grounded on a different ontological reality, just as Javier did. Thus, in mixing these realities, techniques, and epistemologies, we use not only the written word as a vehicle for expression, but we use audio, video, music, and performance art as means for sharing the story and painting the picture of our community. To be sure, we are all at different points in our careers and we are at different places academically and intellectually. This chapter is grounded where we and other intellectuals of color find ourselves. We are intent and excited about looking at critical ethnography and its role in community change.

Clearly, the literature on critical ethnography positions itself as the voice and vehicle for challenging the power structures and working to equalize power dynamics. This does not mean that the research and its integrity are compromised, but it does challenge the illusion of objectivity.

In the spirit of critical ethnography and community change, the rest of this chapter will be developed in two ways. The first message is that the method of delivery will be critical in nature and will work to disrupt the isolation and inaccessibility of traditional academia. The second is that this document will use research as praxis (Freire 1993; Lather 1991). We attempt to connect critical ethnography with the impact it has had on community change. The structure of the document will be grounded in practice, yet informed by theory and reflective in nature. The emphasis on community change will be delivered in three different aspects. First, we emphasize the value of giving people "voice." Second, we shift from the micro to the macro in an attempt to give the reader some of the thinking and strategies that are used on a daily basis. Then we present the impact that critical ethnography can have on researchers and communities who have been traditionally marginalized. Last, we close by posing some challenges for the future. But first, we begin with a description of some theoretical points.

Theoretical Issues

Qualitative research and critical ethnography in particular creates an opportunity for academicians and common people alike to put forth the stories of people, cultures, and communities. The role tradition of ethnography has been rooted and practiced by anthropologists, but quickly adopted and practiced by other disciplines such as education, business, and other professional schools. But in spite of these cross-discipline practices, the common practice of the ethnographer telling the story is constant. And it is on this front that we want to deviate from the traditional critical ethnographers. Indeed, as Foley so aptly quotes Behar as writing, "anthropology that does not break the heart is not worth doing." Clearly, this forces the practice of critical ethnography to a deeper level. This level is traditionally interpreted as reflexivity. A practice that Marcuse writes about and anthropologists like Foley, Trueba, and Behar have perfected. We propose that there is a different interpretation to Behar's quote, which to us espouses an even more effective method for implementing a strategy and process that creates an anthropology that breaks the heart. Indeed, the context is one where Behar pushes the issue on making our selves vulnerable as Rosaldo (1989) did in his book *Cul-*

ture and Truth and as Behar does in *The Vulnerable Observer*. But it is here where we want to deviate and propose that Behar used her statement as a metaphor. To us this is a metaphor for breaking the mold. In our minds this mold is the traditional way of seeing life, people, and culture. In short, it is a different way of doing ethnography. The old has been constructed and maintained by white males. We propose that a new way of doing critical ethnography can and should be part of the discourse. In short, we propose that when the observed becomes part of the process of observing, the reality and story of people, cultures, and communities will be told in a very different way, with different vigor, indeed, with a different voice. This in turn surfaces and creates a different power dynamic.

It is this different way of painting the picture of people that we want to develop further in this document. It is clear in our minds that if critical ethnography is to live up to the values and principle of traditionally marginalized people, resist oppression, and become a counterhegemonic tool, it must continue to develop a message that not only talks the talk, but also walks the walk. It is clear to us that critical ethnography is not just about giving people a voice, which in and of itself puts forth a traditional power dynamic; but it should be about giving people skills, allowing people to create their knowledge, and in the process sharing and co-creating the power. In short, critical ethnography can be pedagogical in theory and in practice.

But to do this we cannot follow the prevailing discursive regimes; indeed, it is up to those of us who come to academia from the margins to push the envelope not only on developing a new language (one that is accessible to people), but is also on developing and practicing a different method of critical ethnography. It is imperative for us to continue to struggle with what Villenas (1996) posits in *The Colonizer/Colonized Chicana Ethnographer* in order for us to reflect on the work we do and how we do it. This is critical as we attempt to live in the multiple worlds that Holland (1999) writes about, and it is at the core of Ladson-Billings and Tate's (1995) and other critical race theorists' argument that people and their characteristics are not property to be commodified.

So it is on these theoretical grounds that we propose a hybrid version of critical ethnography that is true to the principle/criteria for a good ethnography outlined by Spindler and Spindler (1987), yet propose a pedagogical strategy for including common people in the process of observing and painting their own picture. This frames a dynamic that needs to see the community participants as partners and not "informants," and the ethnography

must go beyond being the "Professional Stranger." We must respect relationships, and we must understand how they are built.

Below, we provide an example of how some of this work has been done on a daily basis. It is a process developed and implemented by organic intellectuals who range from fourteen to seventy years of age. It has been the beginning of a new ethnography that is described above and it has given birth to a new intellectual whose talents have been latent during this past century. Thus, as we paint the picture of a people and their community, we have given them a brush to paint with us as we simultaneously legitimize their knowledge that in turn creates power. Next we provide some snapshots of this reality.

A Case Study: *The Llano Grande Center*

The Llano Grande Center for Research & Development, a school- and community-based nonprofit organization, is located at Edcouch-Elsa High School (E-E H.S.) in Elsa, Texas, fifteen miles north of the Texas-Mexico border in the Rio Grande Valley. The Center was born out of numerous conversations that some of us from the rural communities of Edcouch and Elsa had during a period of several decades, spanning from the time when we were students at E-E H.S. until the time when some of us joined the faculty of the same high school in the early 1990s.

A number of sources have inspired the creation and development of the Llano Grande Center. We were inspired by the stories our elders told us, just as we were inspired by the immense talent and potential of our youth, which typically goes uncultivated by an increasingly standardized system of public education. Singular acts have also inspired us. Take, for example, an instance in 1992 when a Mexican American high school student posed the question, "Were Mexican people around in 1776 when Thomas Jefferson was crafting the Declaration of Independence?" and followed with the statement, "We're nowhere in the history books." That question, along with the wisdom of our elders, and our growing disaffection with public schooling, inspired us to seek alternative paths for schooling. The Llano Grande Center was born out of that energy.

Initially, the Center took shape as an ambitious oral history project supported by an Annenberg Foundation Rural Challenge grant. Through the oral history project, we promised to confront the traditional method by which history was taught in our schools, where 99 percent of the student body was of Mexican ancestry, but where every state adopted textbook E-E

H.S. used blatantly disregarded the experience of Mexican people in the making of Texas. Indeed, we were nowhere in the history books.

We addressed the issue by convening community people with teachers and students to develop a plan of action. The history of rural south Texas, we contended, was yet to be told. We began the oral history project out of Edcouch–Elsa and La Villa High Schools in the summer of 1997; three years and several hundred oral histories later, the project has been a source for the profound transformation of people, institutions, and even a community.

From Deficit Model to an Assets-Based Approach

The prevailing paradigm that influenced many of us growing up in the latter part of the twentieth century is distinctly rooted in a needs-based, or deficit-driven, model (Valencia 1997). Community development initiatives typically begin with the question, “What does this town need,” and civic leaders react to the identified needs. The teaching profession similarly is guided by the needs of children, although today’s needs are increasingly identified in the context of what a child needs to pass the state-mandated test. Growing up in a community where half the population participates in the migrant farm working stream, a place where annual unemployment rates hover around the 30 percent mark and where most of our parents did not attain a high level of formal schooling, our region was easy to describe as an area with high needs, a region with pronounced deficits. For decades the pitiful indicators of high poverty, high unemployment, and low levels of educational attainment have defined our south Texas communities. Not surprisingly, educational and other public policy makers characteristically respond to the needs.

While the Llano Grande Center is acutely conscious of the needs of our youth, our schools, and our community, the needs approach is not what defines the core of our philosophy. To the contrary, the Center has deliberately departed from the traditional deficit-driven model to education and community development by creating an aggressive assets-based approach (Kretzmann and McKnight 1996). The conventional approach suggests that because the majority of people in our community do not speak, read, or write English, they are deficient. On the other hand, our students and staff believe that we have extraordinary assets in our community because many of our residents are very proficient in Spanish. Because we have used this approach,

we are in the process of developing various microenterprises, including the Llano Grande Spanish Language Immersion Institute; we recently received a \$50,000 grant from the Kellogg Foundation to launch such an enterprise. The community-based research work of the Center has revealed abundant assets within our towns; our researchers, in fact, utilize research data to engage the community in development initiatives (Lather 1991).¹ The Center’s purpose for conducting youth development programming, community-based research, and a school reform initiative is primarily focused on creating positive social, cultural, and institutional change (Lather 1991; Trueba 1999). Youth, teachers, and a wide range of community members who participate in the Center’s ongoing research work drive much of what is created; they are the ones who emerge as the experts of our schools, our community, and our history—as we continue to grow together as researchers, educators, and agents of change (Scheurich and Imber 1997).² In short, we utilize a wide variety of assets, including our young researchers, our wise elders, and the distinct assets-based approach to development.

Impact of the Assets-Based Model on Youth and Raising Expectations

The pitiful indicators would suggest that our students would be dropping out of school, working in the fields, and standing on the welfare lines. But ask our sixty students—all Mexican American, all poor (meaning working class)—who have gained acceptance into Ivy League universities since 1993,³ when we began to dream and imagine that a kid like Delia Pérez, whose father worked in the fields and whose mother was a housewife, could go to a place like Yale University. Or a kid like Blanca Rojas, who didn’t have indoor running water until she was in high school, who attended Brown University.⁴ Or Mónica Marroquín, who lives in an isolated *colonia*, who attended Harvard and then medical school. Or Carlos García, who grew up in federal housing in Edcouch and whose mother earns \$4,000 per year cleaning houses, who is paying \$33,000 per year to attend Yale. We imagined that José Luis DeLeon, a lifelong farmworker, could leave his family working in the fields of Wisconsin, hop on an airplane at O’Hare Airport in Chicago en route to Cambridge, Massachusetts, where he would enroll in MIT in August of 1993. He did, and he graduated from the Sloan School of Management in 1997.

After Yale, Delia returned to Edcouch–Elsa to teach and has since

enrolled at the LBJ School of Public Affairs.⁵ Blanca graduated from Brown and returned to teach, just as Ernesto Ayala also graduated from Brown and returned to develop a community-based research program with the Llano Grande Center. Karina Cardoza graduated from Columbia and will soon be joining our community development efforts, just as Modesto Hernandez who graduated from Brown has returned to help develop our Geographic Information System research project. José Salívar, who graduates from Stanford next year, will return as well . . . and the list goes on.⁶

A Sampling of Stories and Voices

José Isabel Gutiérrez

When we embarked on our oral history project, one of the first people we interviewed was ninety-seven-year-old José Isabel Gutiérrez, known by many in the community as don Chavelo. Don Chavelo came to Texas from Guajuato as a young man, landing in Edcouch before the town was sold in land tracts in 1926. "Yo soy uno de los fundadores de Edcouch" ("I am one of the founders of Edcouch"), don Chavelo proclaimed to the interview team as he stiffened his small body for emphasis. "How can that be, don Isabel?" one interviewer retorted. Don Chavelo's comment puzzled the interview team, particularly because during the previous forty-five minutes of conversation, he had described himself as a lifelong laborer, and even as one of the thousands of Mexican men and women who cleared the thick south Texas brush to make way for the establishment of towns such as Edcouch. Very deliberately, but with terrific resolve, don Chavelo posed a question to the inquiring interviewer: "Have you ever drunk Edcouch water?" "Yes, I have," said the young interviewer. "Well," said don Chavelo, "you can thank me for that, because in the late 1920s I was one of the men who dug up the ditches to install the water pipes. You drink water because of the work that people like me did. I am a founder of Edcouch" (*Llano Grande Journal* 1997–1998). With that, and with dozens of other stories, don Chavelo established himself as an invaluable character in the creation and development of the community. As he did so, he also challenged young people to question their own paradigms. Who really are the founders, builders, and heroes of our communities?

The Center published don Chavelo's story in the *Llano Grande Journal*, and we have archived and digitized it (*Llano Grande Journal* 1997–1998). His story will live forever. But while don Chavelo lived—he died during the spring of 2000—his story validated the great value of his life. During the last

five years of his life, don Chavelo attended the Blue Bonnet Adult Day Care Center, where daily he drank coffee, played cards, and exchanged stories with several dozen other local elders. We received a telephone call at the Llano Grande Center one morning from don Chavelo. We were surprised to get such a call. As we had gotten to know don Chavelo, we understood that he did not own a phone, nor was he known to speak on the phone with any regularity. It must have been important, we thought. And it was. Don Chavelo called to request thirty copies of the *Llano Grande Journal*, because his friends at the Blue Bonnet were interested in seeing him "en el libro." Immediately, we dispatched a team of researchers to the Blue Bonnet, whereupon we proceeded to hand out copies of the *Journal* to a couple of dozen eager elders. After a few minutes of observation, the director of the Blue Bonnet approached one of our young researchers and confided, "Do you know that at least half of those people who are reading the journal are actually illiterate?" Indeed, the power of the oral history, don Chavelo's story, and the publication began the process of transforming many of us. We began to redefine literacy, education, stories, and numerous other concepts deeply imbedded within our minds and in our souls.

Santos Layton

When high school students interviewed seventy-six-year-old Santos Layton, they quickly learned what master storytelling is about. La señora Layton told the joyful story of when she raised her children in Elsa during the greater part of each year and in the fields in west Texas as the family followed the crops every summer. Uplifting anecdotes characterize narrative, until she told the story of Pablito. Early one morning in the mid-1950s Pablito was out delivering newspapers on his bicycle as part of his daily routine when a car fatally hit him. The entire Mexican side of Elsa mourned the death of the youngster, and a traumatized señora Layton was devastated. Shortly after the death, and against the wishes of la señora Layton, el señor Layton bought an accordion and a guitar for the four remaining children. The event would forever change the Layton family, just as it would change the cultural complexion of the entire community. Today, Los Hermanos Layton stand as an important institution in the music industry of south Texas. They have been featured at the Smithsonian Institution and have played an integral role in the formation of Tejano music in the Rio Grande Valley (*Llano Grande Journal* 1998).

The Layton oral history has been presented in the classrooms at Edcouch–Elsa High School and in numerous other classrooms across the country. La

señora Layton's interview is part of a collection of stories from rural America that is used in some 600 rural schools across the nation. At E-E H.S., her story resonates particularly well. When several freshman students debated the merits of a literary selection last year in a freshman English class, a fifteen-year-old female student emphatically pounded her fist on her desk and declared, "No, that's not what my grandmother meant in that paragraph!" The student? La señora Layton's granddaughter. At E-E H.S., Santos Layton has become an important part of the literary canon.

Olga Solis

Through our work this past year, as well as with the changes we have seen, we have learned invaluable lessons. We have learned how using the wisdom of people from our community and the relationships we have built can be adopted for creative development. Indeed, the oral history process has guided us as we continue to create the direction for community development. Take, for example, the development implications of the oral history we conducted with Olga Solis.

In a recent oral history, a team of a teacher and students conducted an oral history with eighty-four-year-old Elsa resident Olga Solis. As usual, it was an inspiring and enlightening house visit. Doña Olga Solis, the interviewee, taught us about life in the community years ago. As she shared her experiences and wisdom, we once again observed the intellectual, spiritual, and historical values embodied in our elders.

But Doña Olga went way beyond these aspects. As she shared the stories of her children, she especially focused on her daughter Mary. In 1942, when Mary was six years old, Doña Olga took little Mary to the Edcouch Elementary School, whereupon superintendent White, who stood on the front door steps of the all-Anglo elementary school, met mother and daughter.

"Mrs. Solis," the superintendent said. "I'm sorry, Mary cannot come to this school. There is another school for her on the other side of the tracks."

Mrs. Solis responded, "Mr. White, I've trained Mary from day one so that she could come to this school. She knows English, she knows how to read, and she is ready to go to school."

But superintendent White reiterated that school policy called for segregation. Mrs. Solis conceded, for the moment. That very day, however, Mrs. Solis drafted a letter to Franklin Delano Roosevelt, urging the president to intervene on the side of justice.

Two months later, the White House delivered a directive to do what was right. The school district responded by instituting a literacy test for Mexican

children. Mary took the test, passed it, and integrated Edcouch Elementary School. Mary graduated from Edcouch-Elsa in 1954, left Elsa in 1955, and has seldom been heard from again in our community. But her story intrigued us, and we decided to seek her out.⁷

Through Doña Olga, we made contact with Mary and quickly found that she was owner and president of a survey research operation in a large city. We also learned she was on the board of directors of major corporations and foundations. She flew down to Elsa one weekend to visit with a team of students and teachers for an oral history. After an hour's worth of conversation/interview, we asked Mary about her business. She described to us the survey research work she conducts and offered to mentor us in learning the research techniques and methods she used. We have since formed a strong relationship with her, and she has played an integral role in helping launch the Llano Grande Center's community-based research work.

Through this research work, we have transformed curricula. Researchers have become transformed because of the power of people's stories, and we have begun to create the infrastructure for a new economy—an economy based on the spirit, will, and the stories of our people.

A Theory in Practice

The work we have engaged in is pedagogical and relational at the core, and because we have consciously begun with the relational, we have put youth, parents, teachers, and community members at the forefront of our efforts. We are committed to deviating from the traditional mode of programming dictating practice; on the contrary, people will dictate programming. Additionally, we have developed programs with the assets of people in mind. Consistent with the writings in *Latino Cultural Citizenship* (Flores and Benmayor 1997), we have developed a proactive and assets-based model (Kretzmann and McKnight 1996). Our communities are full of assets, yet traditional practices and funding organizations (foundations, government programs, and bureaucracies) force us to continue to label people as poor, deficient, and helpless. This many times puts service deliverers, schools, and institutions of higher education in the role of the "grand savior" and expert. But Macedo has found a more appropriate label, considering the self-serving and negative practices of many of these institutions. He boldly refers to them as "poverty pimps" (1994). This has created multiple victimizations of our communities: first by the historical racists' social structures; second, by a paternalistic top-down school system that excludes many of our citizens from participation in

the process and reaping its benefits; and third, by institutions who receive resources to "save or fix" our community, yet little is done.

These are bold words, but we must be conscious of the history and traditional practices that have gotten us here if we are to prevent this cycle from continuing. We can easily say that since most of us involved in this effort are local and sensitive to these practices, this will prevent the replication of these structures. But history has shown us otherwise. This same behavior is obvious during the last twenty-five years while local Chicanos have been in leadership roles. Some of us would make the argument that it has taken us thirty years to see the benefit of people ruling themselves. Essentially it has taken a generation to begin decolonizing our community. During the last twenty to thirty years our ancestors' only knowledge of leadership was that of the white dominant power structures. It has taken some of us leaving the area to see the damages as we begin to train ourselves and create alternative yet native theories of thought and practice. It is this transition that we see before our eyes that raises the importance of documenting our reality.

Our theory is a hybrid. One that takes from critic pedagogical writings of Freire (1993), Trueba (1999), and Giroux (1996), while also building on Moll et al.'s (1992) funds of knowledge, Reyes (1999) High Performing Hispanic learning communities, and the loving caring schools Scheurich (1998) writes about. Additionally, as we build on our knowledge and assets, we have worked to enhance our theories by adapting and adopting Pittman's (1996) community youth development model. Our youth are not only our future leaders; they are also our present shining stars. They are the reason why 5,000 people congregate at the Friday night football games, and it is in their educational interest that our public funds and institutions provide employment for many of our community's residents during a time when private-sector industry has abandoned us. Additionally, if there is any expert in what youth need, it is youths themselves. Thus, it is by developing a mutually beneficial partnership that we can collectively begin to tend to our past pain, present needs, and future concerns while working on building our local assets. Young people must understand the past and be active participants and partners as we deal with local community issues (Giroux 1996) if we are to prepare healthy citizens of all ages.

So, as we engage our youth, we develop our own epistemology based on family (Hidalgo 1998), and as we begin to better understand the past, we build our resistance against many of the dominant forces. Simultaneously, we become more resilient (Trueba 1999). And as we become stronger, we begin to dream and develop a pedagogy of hope (Freire 1993; Trueba 1999).

that our community and institutions desperately need if we are to resist and survive the effects of the racist epistemologies (Scheurich and Young 1997) that the dominant research practices use as they research us and not research with us. It is this emancipatory tactic that we are committed to developing with our community partners. As Habermas (1972) writes, as we research, we are committed to developing the instrumental knowledge, relational knowledge, and the critical knowledge. Thus, as we research, we have built our own capacity to deal with the issues like education, economic, and spirituality of our community. Certainly these three components overlap, but I have delineated them because they are the most pressing issues I have identified that presently need our attention. A number of other stories need to be told and are being chronicled, but consistent with the need for our research to be grounded in practice and responsive to our community needs and assets, it is critical that this story be captured. Because once documented, it will further expand the discourse; and to an extent, we agree with Wolcott (1994) when he raises the point that it is much more important to be provocative than right.

Some Strategies of the Process

McClelland's (1985) theory of needs puts forth the ideas that people have three major needs if their lives are to be meaningful. He writes that we all have the need for achievement, affiliation, and power. This theory of needs helps us outline the responsiveness that we are committed to delivering to the youth, families, and professionals in our community. These needs are thus articulated, implemented, and practiced in a variety of ways. The youth and adults are part of the learning community, and every opportunity is a teachable moment. The Center's director, employees, and students decide the management, resources allocation, and daily operations. The outreach and resources development duties are shared between all of the above, with those who have more contacts and access to resources making more of the public presentation. The structure and mode of operation is very horizontal and based in a democratic value. The daily work is intense; adults who are outnumbered by youth are always in a teaching and learning mode. The strategies used to weave the theory of needs with practice are the following: 1) every child needs a safe place, 2) every child needs a positive relationship with an adult, 3) every child needs to learn skills, 4) every child needs a safe place to apply these skills, and 5) we must celebrate our victories.

Developing a Safe Place

In developing this safe structure it is critical that we go beyond looking at safety as only a physical issue. This safe place must be a place that nurtures and stimulates the thought process of children, youth, and adults. It is a place where young people feel safe to take intellectual risks, and it is a place where youth feel safe enough to share their dreams, hopes, and expectations. It is also a place where we develop and practice a high quality standard, and a culturally relevant process that rids itself of the symbolic violence that many of our children of color experience too frequently.

Creating Positive Relationships

We firmly believe that youth must have a safe and positive relationship with an adult in their life. The adult can be a parent, relative, friend, teacher, or administrator. However, in case the youth we work with do not have any of the above, we see it as our responsibility to develop these relationships with youth when they are with us. These relationships will look like a mentorship relationship at the surface, but I would propose that these relationships are at another level. Mentorships many times imply a unilateral relationship where knowledge is given from the adult to the youth, but the process we practice is reciprocal. The youth and adults are simultaneously both the teachers and the learners. This relationship is pedagogical and democratic in nature. Further, from the exchange between the learners and the teachers, new knowledge is created (Giroux 1992). This new knowledge must be acknowledged, shared, and utilized to expand the learning process for the community.

Learning of Skills

It is critical that all youth leave school with the needed skills to live a productive life. But it is just as important to value, respect, and build on the skills that youth bring with them to school. This is congruent with critical pedagogy thinkers, and essentially presents a neo-Vygotskian perspective to his concept of the zone of proximal development (1978). Consistent with this practice, Giroux (1996) writes that the skills youth learn must be relevant to their daily lives. Also, Levy and Murnane (1996) in their book *Teaching the New Basic Skills* argue that if the information youth are learning does not equate to a future livable wage, we must question the information they are being taught. In short, the education youth obtain must be relevant, stimulating, and applicable.

Creating Opportunities to Apply Skills

We see the extracurricular activities as one of the vehicles where youth apply the skills they learn; however, these avenues become problematic when only

a small number of young people can participate in these events. An alternative opportunity we have developed for youth to apply the skills they have learned in school is to expand the school environment beyond the traditional four walls. Essentially, the community becomes the classroom. These venues might include performing service-learning projects, working in internships, training of other youth, doing history research, making public presentations, writing grants, participating in conferences, hosting and planning conferences, participating in teacher trainings, and the list can continue. But the participation in these activities alone is not the answer; the participation must be accompanied with a strong reflexive and evaluation process with adults and peers. This practice then presents education in very familiar and practical context for the learners and teachers.

Celebrating Our Victories

Acknowledging and celebrating our accomplishments is critical to us. The spirit of people must be energized and their hard work must be acknowledged. The constant celebrations allow for people to associate, celebrate our accomplishments, and reenergize the power we have collectively created; we also acknowledge the importance of breaking bread together.

Developing a Framework

These very basic strategies and values mentioned above in turn connect the three defining initiatives of the Llano Grande Center: 1) Policy and Education Reform, 2) Education, Training, and Leadership Development, and 3) Research and Development and Publications. These three foci in a very aggressive way inform our sustainable community and economic development initiatives. Through this initiative we then begin to define what the role of schools and education is in creating a sustainable and healthy community. Additionally, the rest of this chapter articulates the work we have done to impact the education, economy, and the spirituality of our community. To be clear, I define spirituality, in a broad sense, as that which relates to the nature of relationships with people, the environment, and ones past and future.

Our work with Llano Grande is a neo-Vygotskian (Moll 1990) approach to youth development and education. We are committed to working with youths', teachers', and families' local environments and ecology to develop an alternative way of creating new knowledge, or as appropriate in this case, surfacing latent knowledge. Education must be relevant to youth's reality if

it is to be effective and significant. So, in response to the local needs and to building on our local assets, we have developed a place-based curriculum. A process that has included local research, rewriting curriculum, and recruitment of teachers who have been willing to engage in this process. The principles and values of our Pedagogy of Place curriculum guide are the following: environment, history, economy, spirituality, and politics. Additionally, our students have become researchers and are collecting and telling their relatives' stories as they go home and interview their *pardes*, *abuelos*, *tíos*, and *tías*. So needless to say, a new local history is surfacing and now it is Don Chavelo who claims it was he and not Ed Couch who found the *pueblo* of Edcouch. Also, it is not uncommon to see fierce debate in the classroom as fifteen- and sixteen-year-old students debate about what their grandparents meant by the language they used in their published oral history.

This stimulating environment is created and replicated as we use multiple strategies to document our local histories. Oral histories are always videotaped and audio recorded, pictures are scanned, and these histories are transcribed and published in our locally founded *Llano Grande Journal*. As Giroux writes (1996), students should be researchers, and their findings should be documented in "free presses." The *Llano Grande Journal* is our version of a free press. We will not stand for others to decide and judge if our stories are fit for publications; we will publish our own history.

Additionally, we use research as praxis (Lather 1991; Freire 1993) as our research is used for educational purposes and consistent with participatory action researchers it is also used to democratize information, thus making it an emancipatory strategy, for we consider information a form of obtaining power.

The educational practices we have embraced are diverse and our local community has become our classroom. Thus, our teachers are the local *veteranos* who were in the battlefields of Europe during World War II, and those who returned to share their stories from the Vietnam conflict. The primary sources they provide for student learning are invaluable. Their data has helped the students construct their own Vietnam Memorial as we honor the local *Raza* who didn't make it back. Also, the English curriculum has been augmented and strengthened by a writer in residence program we have sustained during the last two years. Local writer David Rice (1996) helps students develop their stories so they can be published in our journal or the local newspaper. David and our media expert Lauriano Aguirre are now helping students produce their own films.

So the educational experience we have introduced is holistic, diverse, and

grounded in reality. Our community education strategy has been developmental at the core as youth share their research and the knowledge they created with the local school board and city officials to impact public policy. Our youth are learning and applying their skills as they become learners, teachers, and active participants in the development of their local community. Youth have embraced their birthright as citizens in their community and their country. They have become change agents as they engage in challenging the traditional practices and outdated public policies. Also, as we expand the definition of education and redefine the size and possibilities of a greater classroom, we have invited many of our community partners to be part of the education of their children and themselves. One strategy we have adopted and modified is the concept of community learning teams (Senge 1990). Recently we secured resources for the creation of ten community teams with each team having at least ten members. Every team consisted of both youth and adults, and after participating in six training sessions, they became eligible for \$15,000 per team to implement a community project of their choice. This has produced a local youth run radio station, a publishing center, several community centers for neighboring communities, and a comprehensive database. We have consciously invited the community to be partners in the their children's learning, for as Secretary of Education Richard Riley says, "If the school is the center of the community, then learning is at the center of the community" (1999).

Community Economics

Since the late 1960s our country's public policy has embraced the human capital theory (Ghez and Becker 1975; Marshall and Tucker 1992), which in brief says that the more you invest in the educational development of people, the higher the economic return. Additionally, the traditional market-driven economy is based on three major assumptions: 1) people make rational choices, and they categorize and order these choices, 2) these decisions are transitive, and 3) the consumer always wants more than less of the goods. These policies and assumptions of the traditional market economy are very problematic because most of the assumptions and applications do not consider race, education, or other discriminatory practices, and they are developed from values that are incongruent with those of our community (Clark 1995). Thus, this scenario puts forward a political economy that, based on its values and assumptions, eliminates many of our communities that differ on these values. For even the most liberal of policies, affirmative action is

intended to benefit individuals as opposed to strengthening communities. In short, it is consistent with the Euro-American individualistic value system instead of valuing the collective. Additionally, in a market economy, the only currency is money and we have begun to define our currency in multiple forms, which includes money. Some of our other currencies are funds of knowledge (Moll 1992), strong values and commitment to the collective/community, the community assets of young people, and the philanthropic spirit (Campoamor, Diaz, & Ramos 1999) of giving resources, time, ideas, and energy for supporting our neighbors and youth during times of need. In short, we have decided that in our work there are multiple bottom lines. Certainly, we understand the need for creating jobs and becoming active in our rapidly changing economy, but our values must be established if we are to develop a viable and sustainable alternative to the existing amoral market economy that has gotten us to this point of poverty and disenfranchisement. The only invisible hand we are familiar with is the one that has marginalized us and excluded us from the process. In this context, Wheatley (1992) aptly quotes Einstein: "No problem can be solved from the same consciousness that created it." I propose that it is time for a new consciousness that is based on our community's common sense to surface if the strategies for educating our future generations are to be congruent with the values, beliefs, and cultural practices of our community.

We believe that a healthy local economy can only be created and nurtured if developed along with our education and based on our local assets, but we must be aware of the traditional discriminatory practices and other pitfalls that have stagnated us in the past. It is then when we can begin to establish our political will and our economic power and begin to establish a "healthier" political economy that benefits the many in our community not only the few. As we work to develop the political economy, we have accepted the responsibility of creating the conditions that nurture the investment of resources into the area that will help us create new jobs. It is not just about creating new jobs, but it's about creating new jobs that are congruent with the "new economy," based on knowledge and skills not the traditional jobs that nurtured the old economy, and based on manual backbreaking labor. In creating new jobs we are committed to starting the conversation at the livable wage level—not minimum wages. We believe that as one nurtures these values and develops new jobs, our youth will want to come back home. During the last three years, we have secured over 2.5 million dollars and have created new employment for people who would have found employment elsewhere. We are committed to developing the supply of labor and the demand.

Further, as we continue to establish credible outcomes and significant impacts in this community, we begin to role model a different process of education and community and economic development.

This new process is pedagogical in nature and based on our local assets and common sense. This democratic framework has begun to demonstrate positive alternative modes of operation and viable opportunities that will navigate us toward a sustainable community development model. This model will move away from focusing on a single bottom line to a multiple bottom line where we respect the economy, environment, ecology, and human needs of our community.

Spirituality

As we develop a new knowledge base by both retelling our local stories that had been excluded from our educational system and augmenting them with the lessons and knowledge we bring back from our national and international travels and university experiences, we are creating a new spirit. This spirit is grounded in our local values and a language and theory that is global in nature. We are committed to developing a spirit that is respectful of who we are as a people. This spirit acknowledges, respects, and celebrates our *viegitos* for the strong cultural grounding and the identity they have endowed us with; as important, we are committed to developing a politic that rids itself of the patron democracy that has controlled our reality during this century. This politic we have nurtured and practiced and are laboring to evangelize is based on our community values of trust, respect, honesty, and security. For when we develop these basic and essential elements then we create the safe environments and conditions that allow us to dialogue about issues of race, gender, politics, economy, ecology, and values that must take place if we are to continue developing a new spirit of participation.

The spirit of our community will continue to be developed as we include the young and the old in our conversations. These discussions will then continue to inform the development of our community including our education and economy. These discussions have also rekindled the spirit of hope in our community that used to only be obvious during pep rallies and Friday night football games. Our spiritual practices and commitment to our youth have increased the participation of youth that have been traditionally disengaged. Thus, our commitment to our spirituality goes beyond the traditional religious practices. It is relational at the core. Ideas, dreams, and experiences fuel it. The diverse thoughts and experiences our partners bring with them

make our community stronger. It is this diversity and spirituality that has helped us develop and begin to manifest a new leadership. This leadership is grounded in community and interdependence, inclusive, participatory, and transformational. This practice and value along with our strategies of development have nurtured and created the conditions that have surfaced in new organic public intellectuals (Simon 1991) who embody, live, and evangelize this spirituality that is a hybrid of the local and the global. Thus, Delia Perez, Raul Valdez, Ernesto Ayala, Blanca Rojas, Jose Saldívar, and many colleagues who are teenagers or in their early twenties are our new local heroes, role models, spokespersons, and change agents.

Impact of This Practice

There have been some significant impacts in the local community from our work. Some of the most celebrated accomplishments have been the thirty-six students from our community we have helped get into Ivy League schools. This has taken place in the span of the six years since we began this work. Certainly many other students have attended local and state universities, but it is these thirty-six students who come from one of the poorest areas in the country, and the second poorest school district in the state, who have helped put our work in the public eye. This impact has gained us credibility. Six years ago when we shared some of our ideas with local leaders and teachers they laughed, but now people believe they can make a difference in their community. We have nurtured a new hope; but the best, however, is yet to come, as is reflected by how many of our talented youth are returning to south Texas to participate in community development.

Future Challenges

Certainly we have many challenges before us, but our evangelizing has created disciples, and thus there are many more of us carrying the metaphoric cross. One of the challenges we see is our ability to train more teachers who are willing to try different strategies for educating our youth. The greatest challenges are not the youth, but our adults who have been institutionalized and some that are tired of the work they do. Because of this we must continue to tap our assets and help them shine. We have many assets in our community, and we must create the vehicles and space for them to share their stories of success and challenges. For as we begin tell our stories, we begin to document our community change, and community change begins with people

sharing their stories, with people sharing their vulnerabilities publicly. But we have learned much from our short experience and we are aware we will continue to face many of the same challenges we have faced historically, including the racism and patron democracy that has prevented our communities from healing. However, we are a little older and a little wiser as we include more of our community in the process. This inclusion will continue to convey the stories of our elders and the spirit and innocence of our youth. Thus, as we collectively struggle with very painful issues, we will then begin to heal cognitively, economically, and spiritually. Further the inclusion of young people in this process will also help us prepare for our future, and we know that our future is now!

An additional challenge from the field of research is to see if the existing structures and practice will allow those of us to form the margins in. This is of interest because as researchers at the Llano Grande Center define critical ethnography consistent with other practitioners, the ontological reality we bring as ethnic minority and organic intellectuals thus delineates a practice defined by its ecology. Indeed, knowing, understanding, deconstructing, building, and learning how to use and how to share power are concepts that are at the core of our work. We hope we have laid out a clear picture on how we live this idea while also painting the picture of our community.

Notes

1. For a published discussion on the Llano Grande Seminar Series see "State Farm Partners with Llano Grande Center to Grow with Prosperity," *South Texas Star*, 6, 10 (October 2000):13-14.
2. Unlike the Johnsonville reform experience that Scheurich and Imber 1997 discuss, the work of the Llano Grande Center is radically different. The process of local elites playing traditional local elite roles has been kept in check, at least in the case of the Llano Grande Center's development and influence. That reality can be explained, to a large degree, because those who lead the work of the Center were raised with or around school board members and other influential administrators and have long-lasting relationships with them. The leaders of the Center and those who evangelize the philosophy, spirit, and mission of the Center are primarily youths, teachers, and the elderly.
3. Ample published information tells at least part of this story: "Small Town, Big Dreams," *South Texas Star*, 6, 10 (October 2000); "Battling Modest Dreams: Valley Students Go to Ivy League, then Return to Make a Difference," *Austin American Statesman* cover story, October 8, 2000; "Why Frank Guajardo Went Home: A Texas Ex Makes a Real Difference in a Poor South Texas Community," *Texas Alcalde*, January/February 2000; "Mentorship at Its Best" from *the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented*

Newsletter, Spring 1999; *Standing Up for Community and School: Rural People Tell Their Stories*; "Francisco Guajardo and the Llano Grande Center," published by the Rural School and Community Trust, by Bradwell Scott, Spring 1999; Francisco Guajardo, essay published in *Public School Standards: Discussing the Case for Community Control*, a symposium hosted by the Annenberg Foundation's Rural Challenge, Burlington, Vermont, January 1999.

4. David Ruben, "Great Expectations," *Brown Alumni Magazine*, August 1999.
5. "Something in Return: Valley Natives Who Left for College Return Home to Pursue Their Careers," *The Monitor*, December 6, 1998, cover story.
6. "South Texas Teacher Inspires Students to Walls of Ivy," Associated Press article, October 1997.
7. Llano Grande Center Oral History Collection, Edcouch, Texas.

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