

Transforming

the IVORY TOWER

Challenging Racism,
Sexism, and Homophobia
in the Academy

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and *Mary Yu Danico*

University of Hawai'i Press
Honolulu

In association with UCLA
Asian American Studies Center
UCLA

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Printed in the United States of America

17 16 15 14 13 12 6 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Transforming the ivory tower : challenging racism, sexism,
and homophobia in the academy / edited by Brett C. Stockdill
and Mary Yu Danico.

p. cm. — (Intersections)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-8248-3526-2 (hardcover : alk. paper)

1. Discrimination in higher education—United States. 2. Racism
in higher education—United States. 3. Sexism in higher education—
United States. 4. Homophobia in higher education—United States.
I. Stockdill, Brett C. II. Danico, Mary Yu. III. Series: Intersections

(Honolulu, Hawaii)

LC212.42.T73 2012

378.1'982900973—dc23

2011036588

University of Hawai'i Press books are printed on
acid-free paper and meet the guidelines for permanence
and durability of the Council on Library Resources.

Designed by Janette Thompson (Jansom)

Printed by IBT Global, Inc.

CHAPTER FIVE

One Activist Intellectual's Experience in Surviving and Transforming the Academy

JOSE GUILLERMO ZAPATA CALDERON

My survival in higher education has its roots in the connections between my lived experience as the immigrant son of farm worker parents and the lessons learned in overcoming systemic obstacles as a community organizer and intellectual activist. Whenever the road in academia got rough and I had to face another hurdle, I always remembered the difficulties that my immigrant farm worker family had to face. In this way, the problems I encountered in academia appeared smaller and more manageable. My struggles with learning English and growing up in a poor immigrant farm worker family became the foundations of language, labor, and immigration issues that I passionately took up in my organizing, teaching, and research as an activist intellectual in academia.

* * *

I have survived the ivory tower by being proactive in both finding and creating spaces that bridge the gaps between the academic world and community-based projects for action and social change. This has included organizing not only in the community, but organizing on the campus to validate the significance of the carpentry that it takes to build

such spaces. In his article "College in the Community," sociologist John Wallace provides a glimpse of "what college education could be" if such spaces were created "with reality, with diverse disciplines, with a community of co-learners, with true self, and with purposes larger than the self" (2000: 762). For intellectual activists or organic public intellectuals who are tenacious in constructing such spaces in higher education, the obstacles are immense. It does mean creating a balance between the personal and political to advance ongoing educational and societal structural changes that recognize the significance of teaching and learning outside the traditional walls of academia.

The immensity of this endeavor has been recognized by the American Sociological Association (ASA). Through the efforts of 2004 president Michael Burawoy, a Task Force on Institutionalizing Public Sociologies (2005: 2) acknowledged that "despite the long-standing tradition of American public sociology going back to the nineteenth century, the work of public sociologists traditionally has not been recognized, rewarded, or encouraged in many of our sociology departments." A step in this direction is the task force's call to academia to recognize, validate, evaluate, and reward public sociology as both an applied and scholarly enterprise.

Public sociology has particular salience for historically excluded individuals from diverse racial, class, gender, and sexuality backgrounds, for whom the educational experience can be both an alienating and empowering experience. This chapter chronicles my journey in public sociology. It is a narrative about finding one's passion in one's lived experience as a foundation for overcoming obstacles in academia, connecting an engaged pedagogy to social activism, and advancing social change practices through learning, teaching, and research transformations.

Early Foundations of Academic Survival

As an immigrant who arrived in the United States at the age of seven, I did not know any English. I experienced the discrimination that many non-English-speaking students faced in the schools. My first six months in first grade were spent not understanding a word the teachers said. Everyone thought something was wrong with me. I learned how to

organize every hour of my day at school so that I could make it through the day without speaking to anyone. I ensured that my bathroom breaks were after classes. To avoid interaction with anyone, I always ran home at noon for lunch. However, there were times during the winter when I was forced to bring my sack lunch to school. This practice stopped when a group of students made fun of the bean tacos my mother had made for me. After this experience, when the winter snows kept me inside, I quietly slipped away and hid in another room while my classmates ate their lunches.

I learned English with the help of a teacher who realized that there was nothing wrong with my ability to speak. She realized that I was silent most of the time because I did not understand the language. This teacher, Mrs. Elder, began to stay with me after school. She began by pretending to want to learn Spanish. In the process, she learned some Spanish and I learned to speak English. A half-dozen other Mexican students who were part of my first grade class eventually dropped out. They were not provided the same opportunity since, structurally, bilingual education had not been established at the time. Later, when I was a student at the University of Colorado, I went back and carried out research on these students, many of whom were working in low-paying jobs as waiters, truck drivers, and farm laborers. When I wrote a paper on these students, I realized that many of them had never learned English.

My research revealed the price I had had to pay for “making” it through the school system.¹ The school promoted assimilation, calling me the “good Spanish boy.” Those who dropped out were called “Mexican.” In my school, being called “Mexican” was a fighting word. The teachers had created a culture where being “Spanish” was acceptable and “Mexican” was not.

Unbeknownst to the teachers, I kept my Mexican culture, including the Spanish language, because of the persistence of my parents. They continued to emphasize that I was Mexican, that I should be proud of it, and that I should know my language. Knowledge of the Spanish language became a means of survival for me economically and academically. When I was in junior high school, I contributed to my family's finances by working as an interpreter in a local clothing store. In tenth grade, when everyone was required to take another language, I shined

in Spanish classes and got straight A's. For the first time in my life, the Euro-American students were coming and asking me for help. My Spanish also helped me survive graduate school. When I was at the last steps of finishing my PhD, one of the requirements at UCLA was that one had to take a sociology exam in another language. The test required one to read excerpts from various sociology journals and answer multiple-choice questions based on the content. Many of these articles were difficult to understand in English, let alone in another language. I was able to whisk through the exam because of my Spanish.

Early Connections between the Academy and Social Change

Encouraged by a high school counselor to succeed in sports, I attended Northeastern Junior College in Sterling, Colorado, on a track scholarship. By my second year, I got involved in student government and decided to focus on my studies. I worked alongside other students in questioning why a meatpacking plant across from the library created such a bad odor that permeated the whole city. Some of us began to research the plant and found that the company had been cited for polluting a stream near the plant site. We took our research and turned it into action by organizing a demonstration that resulted in the closing of the plant until it dealt with its pollution problems. The significance of this first organizing experience is that I began to learn about the potential for turning research data into action for social change. Motivated by this discovery, I applied and was accepted to the University of Colorado (CU) as a major in communications.

At the University of Colorado, I survived by continuing to connect the classroom to social issues and by continuing my involvement in student government. I took various sociology and political science courses that introduced me to the debates that were going on about the war in Vietnam. In one sociology course, I challenged a professor who said that he had two positions on the war: one was his personal position and the other was his “institutional” position. My questioning led to a panel debate on the meaning of the word “integrity” in the class. Little by little, my convictions deepened my commitment to the antiwar movement. Subsequently, as vice president of the student government,

I joined the antiwar movement on campus and helped organize a rally of ten thousand students in support of a national student strike against the war in 1970. Instead of completely shutting down the university, we turned this action into a learning moment during the last two weeks of the spring quarter. By working collectively with dozens of students and faculty, I learned about the power of popular education and how it could be implemented in opening a new university that connected classes in the various disciplines with study and debate on the educational system and how it was affected by an unjust war. Subsequently, we had media students writing columns and letters to the newspaper, engineering students building peace domes, and art students creating murals and posters on the effects of the war. One of our efforts included placing various billboards throughout the city depicting a young dead soldier on the ground with an inscription reading “Dear Mom and Dad Your Silence is Killing Me in Viet Nam.”

During my involvement in the antiwar movement, between 1968 and 1971, I also became active in the struggles to get more students of color on campus. I joined the United Mexican American Students in asking for funds to develop summer programs to prepare Chicano/a students to go to college. We occupied a building on campus when Board of Regents representative Joe Coors took a position that minority students were less qualified than other students to attend the university and that no funds should be used for their recruitment. The first summer programs were developed after we were able to show that there were dozens of qualified Chicano/a students who could be admitted to the university but who lacked the necessary resources to survive. Out of those summer programs, I met students who eventually went on to become social workers, teachers, lawyers, doctors, community organizers, and political leaders.

While organizing on campus, I met various students who were involved with a farm worker support group on the campus. In addition to getting the student senate to allocate funds for the group, I joined them in traveling to Center, Colorado, and joining striking lettuce workers on the picket line. It also led me to make connections between the farm worker movement and the antiwar movement. For one of my classes at CU, I wrote a paper called “Rhetoric of the Chicano Movement.”

In looking at the persuasion strategies of leaders in the Chicano/a movement, I was most impressed with the strategies of Cesar Chavez. In carrying out the research, I was shocked to find that the Defense Department, under the Nixon administration, was buying tons of grapes when the farm workers were on strike (Del Castillo and Garcia 1995: 92). This really affected me since I had witnessed the burial of various friends who had died in the war. On the one hand, the labor of the farm workers was being used to increase the profits and power of large agribusiness corporations (Barger and Reza 1994: 22–25). On the other, the sons of these farm workers were being drafted in disproportionate numbers, representing 20 percent of those who died on the front lines (Gonzalez 1999: 211–213).

Feeling that I could do something about these injustices, I decided to go and learn firsthand about Cesar Chavez’s union. With only \$57 in my pocket, I caught a Greyhound bus that took me to Delano, California, where I observed the organizing strategies of Cesar Chavez and the violence being waged by the growers against the farm workers. I also heard a speech by Cesar Chavez that changed my life. In challenging the young students volunteering with the union, Cesar proposed that “we have only one life to live” and that “the highest level of using your life is in service to others.” It was after this experience that I made the decision to return to northern Colorado and to use my education to organize against systemic injustices that had kept farm worker and immigrant communities at the lowest levels of the economic ladder. The sacrifices of farm worker organizers, including Cesar Chavez, who received only five dollars a week for their organizing efforts, inspired me in this direction.

Connecting Popular Education to Community Organizing

Galvanized by my experience with the farm workers, I returned to Ault, Colorado, where I had grown up, and began my organizing efforts. I first developed a community center out of a garage in my parents’ backyard. Remembering the difficulties I had faced in not knowing English at an early age, I used the methods of Paulo Freire in teaching young Mexican children to speak English.² These educational strategies would later become a part of my teaching methods in the college classroom. I

also used the research skills that I had obtained from my undergraduate education to discover that eight out of ten Mexican children who started in the first grade in Ault eventually dropped out of school. After learning this information, the students and their parents collectively used this research to appear before the school board to demand that bilingual education be instituted in the school district. The response of one school board member was that if we wanted bilingual education, we could “return to Mexico.” This response led to a seventy-mile protest march from Ault to the state capital in Denver. Our efforts, coupled with organized student walkouts, led to an ongoing social movement in the region that resulted in the establishment of bilingual education programs and the hiring of bilingual teachers and administrators in many Weld County schools.

As a result of these organizing efforts in the next few years, I was asked to teach a class called “The Community” at Aims Junior College. The class was my first major experience in having students connect the classroom to community service and social change issues. Hearing about the successes of the class, the Sociology Department chair at the University of Northern Colorado asked me to teach a similar class there. Before long, without a master’s degree, I was teaching as much as a full-time professor (on part-time pay). The experience of teaching sociology classes strengthened my affinity for the field of sociology. Simultaneously, it allowed me to experiment with various forms of using critical pedagogy and research by having students conduct research on migrant housing through the Colorado Migrant Council and volunteer at a community center that we developed in the north side of Greeley, Colorado. I did not know it then, but these organizing efforts laid the foundation I needed to complete my PhD and be a teacher and researcher at the college level. Like other activists of this time period, I began my teaching at the university without a PhD (Ichioka 2006: 281).

For the next twelve years, I survived on little income, but I was sustained by the spirit and passion of the farm worker, immigrant, student, and poor communities that I collaborated with. Working with various national organizations, such as the Workers Viewpoint, I was motivated to look beyond issues of race to working-class issues that affected

low-income people from all racial/ethnic backgrounds. The unity of multiracial leaders who turned away from luxury to devote their lives to building a more just and equal society energized me.

Challenges to Economic and Activist Survival

In 1984, after marrying and having children, I faced the reality of looking for a long-term career that would allow me to meet my responsibilities to my family as well as allow me to continue my commitment to community organizing and social change. After coming across an announcement for a graduate fellowship at UCLA, I filled out an application and obtained recommendation letters from my former undergraduate professors. In June of 1984, I was accepted to UCLA. Although saddened at the prospect of leaving our friends and their families, my wife, Rose, and I agreed that that we could no longer survive on part-time jobs in the Greeley area and that we had to plan for the long term.

After saying good-bye to friends, we drove to Los Angeles in a U-Haul truck with our two young boys in the front and our belongings packed in the back. Rose obtained employment as an administrative assistant with the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund, and I obtained a part-time job as a counselor with the Optimist Boy’s Home in Highland Park. This highly demanding job involved implementing counseling projects to advance teamwork and leadership skills among one hundred young men who were primarily referrals from the County Department of Probation. My life consisted of managing the freeway from our apartment in El Sereno to classes at UCLA, working at the Boy’s Home, studying at the library, and juggling home and day-care chores with Rose.

Unhappy with this new life, I longed to return to my life of community organizing in rural Colorado. At UCLA, I became part of a graduate student cohort group that focused on comparative and historical sociology. While enthralled by the readings, I was frustrated by the lack of connections between the classroom and community-based issues. I had envisioned UCLA’s sociology graduate school program as one that was engaged with the urban problems faced by the mosaic of diverse communities in

Los Angeles, but my classes focused primarily on historical comparisons and theory that lacked grounding in participatory transformative social change. My involvement in various study groups and my teaching experience in Colorado had provided me with some understanding of the theories of power and conflict, particularly Marxism. I used this understanding to critique the arguments in the assigned readings. Rather than simply analyzing the authors' data, my arguments centered on whether the theories would be useful as agents of social change. The discussions in the class appeared to be polemical—so I made them polemical.

At the time, I didn't fully understand why the professors and some students would roll their eyes when I spoke. In the ensuing months, I learned that the task was to find "holes" in the authors' arguments regardless of what significance their arguments had to our lived experienced and practices in social justice organizing. It is this connection between intellectual activity and "the experience of human beings in a specific community at a certain moment in history . . . a social interaction involving both thought and feeling" that is often missing in the academic classroom (Shor 1992: 22). By the second semester, when I had begun to figure out what the professors wanted, I was already making plans to complete my master's degree and quit the PhD program to work in a union.

In the Optimist Boy's Home, I also faced the frustration of having to do "therapy sessions" with dozens of Latino and African American teenagers without any room to empower them or to create structural changes in the institution. Tired of the bureaucracy, I went to the campus employment office and found an internship with the city manager's office in the city of Monterey Park.

Connecting Research with Community Organizing

This internship led to my involvement in the city and fostered my survival in the PhD program. In the mid-1980s, Monterey Park was going through a dramatic demographic transformation that reflected the larger changes taking place in California. Monterey Park's population had gone from 85 percent Euro-American, 3 percent Asian and 12 percent

Latino/a in 1960 to 56 percent Asian American, 31.3 percent Latino/a, and 11.7 percent Euro-American in 1990. When I started working in the city manager's office, Monterey Park had just received a national designation as an "All-America City" for its innovative volunteer programs that reached out to new Chinese immigrants. At the same time, an organized backlash against the unbridled growth policies of the city council had begun. As part of blaming the "growth" problems on the new Chinese immigrants, an all-White city council passed an "English only" ordinance making English the official language of the city, calling for the local police to cooperate with the Immigration and Naturalization Service, and giving nonsupport to any city that advocated sanctuary for immigrants. As an intern in the city manager's office, I was assigned to carry out research on the passage of a similar ordinance in the city of Fillmore. I was almost fired by the city manager when I used the research to criticize the city council, at one of their open meetings, for passing such a racist measure. By the time my internship was coming to an end, I was already involved as a community organizer, resident, and cochair of a coalition to defeat the English-only initiative.

In 1988 and 1990, I complemented my organizing activities in the community by working as a researcher with Professor John Horton of the UCLA Department of Sociology and a seven-member local research team in a study of the politics of conflict and cooperation in Monterey Park.³ My research, as part of the study of demographic transformations taking place in Los Angeles County, where racial minorities and new immigrants are becoming the majority, focused on the changing ethnic and class alliances between Latinos/as, old residents, and new Asian Pacific immigrants.

The Monterey Park research project brought together what I had been looking for in the academic world: a concrete connection between sociological theories and the lived experiences of diverse communities in an urban setting. The project also created a space for my passion as a former immigrant, an activist, and a researcher working for social change. The experience strengthened my commitment to finish my dissertation and provided a glimpse of how I could connect the academic world with community-based participatory research, teaching, and learning.

Rather than perpetuating the traditional idea that researchers should not participate in the organizations they study, the project allowed for my involvement as an organizer and researcher in the community. My data was gathered from field notes written from my lived experience as a resident in the community and from my participation in numerous community-based organizations.⁴ I remained conscious throughout the process of representing the meanings and actions of the participants without discounting my own perspectives as a participant. After my thesis proposal was reviewed and accepted, I learned that the time between the proposal and the actual writing of the dissertation is crucial in finishing the PhD. I applied some of the recommendations from David Sternberg's (1981) *How to Complete and Survive a Doctoral Dissertation* for my own academic survival, including prioritizing my commitments to ensure a focus on the task at hand, ensuring a balance between my academic and family responsibilities, putting aside at least three hours a day to writing, organizing a personal file system, developing a support network, and finding employment with a flexible environment. My support network included employment as a graduate research assistant with the Chicano Studies Research Center and involvement with other Latino/a graduate students through the Raza Grad Student Organization. We organized the latter group to bring students together to share, socialize, mentor, and to survive the academy. We developed our own newsletter and at one point organized a demonstration to advocate for our rights as graduate students. To this day, I have close ties with many of these friends who are now colleagues in various colleges throughout the country.

In addition to these networks of support, there were various professors, such as John Horton, David Lopez, David Hayes-Bautista, and Edna Bonacich, who took the time to mentor me and other Latino/a students. They encouraged me to utilize my ability to tell stories as a vehicle for ethnographic research.⁵ Another professor, Richard Berk, saved me from drowning in a required two-quarter statistics course by creatively integrating storytelling in his assignments. Rather than writing endless formulas from the textbooks on the board and moving ahead before we could explain our confusion, this professor connected

statistical theories and formulas to data that involved compelling issues in our lives. Analyzing historical data on the death penalty taught us the meaning of "longitudinal concepts." I remember the excitement I felt when he complimented my analysis of statistical data on the economic conditions of farm workers in the United States.⁶

I survived the dissertation process, graduated from UCLA in 1991, and landed a position in sociology and Chicano Studies at Pitzer College in Claremont, California.⁷ I had planned with my family to return to Colorado, but there were no jobs available there in my field at the time. Nevertheless, I was drawn to Pitzer by its ethos of advancing intercultural and interdisciplinary understanding in the context of social responsibility. It was the type of place that fit with my passion of connecting the academic world with social change.

For six years, I had driven twenty-five miles west from Monterey Park to UCLA. Now, I drove thirty miles east from Monterey Park to Pitzer in Claremont. The distance added to the difficulties of finding a balance between my teaching and committee work on campus and my family and organizing activities in the community. The only way I could do all this and still find time to conduct research was to continue to develop creative ways of connecting the classroom with the community and to write about it.

Connecting Teaching and Research to School Transformations

When a series of fights erupted between Latino and Chinese American students at a high school that my son attended, I joined with other parents in organizing a coalition, the Multi-Cultural Community Association, to resolve these conflicts. After numerous meetings between the leaders in the Latino/a and Asian Pacific communities, we successfully pressured school administrators to establish an official advisory group to the school board, the Alhambra School District Human Relations Advisory Committee.

In this committee, I worked in the dual roles of researcher and committee chair. As a researcher, I worked alongside the community representatives to counter the views of some administrators who blamed the

conflicts on the “hormones” of the students. The survey showed that 86 percent of the students at Mark Keppel High School and a majority of the students at all three high schools in the district perceived racial tensions as a big problem.

At the same time, at Pitzer I collaborated with sociology professor Betty Farrell in developing a conflict-resolution service learning class. In addition to encouraging students to conduct research on a multicultural curriculum and ethnic conflict-resolution programs, this class provided students with a unique opportunity to help the Alhambra School District assess the effectiveness of its policies for dealing with racial and ethnic conflict (Calderon and Farrell 1996). The foundation of the program was the training the students received in ethnographic research and the literature related to ethnic conflict resolution. The students’ research included the gathering of census data and information from the district’s schools (e.g., ethnic makeup, dropout and expulsions rates, etc.) and interviews with students, teachers, and administrators that identified issues confronting ethnic/racial groups in the district.

Ultimately, the Alhambra School District’s Human Relations Advisory Committee utilized the collaborative research of the coalition and Pitzer students to develop a policy on hate-motivated behavior and to implement a racial/ethnic sensitivity program for all teachers. As part of this policy, the school district institutionalized conflict-resolution classes as part of the curriculum and gave students the option of mediation as an alternative to expulsion (Calderon 1995).

Connecting Service Learning to the Farm Worker and Day Laborer Experience

In reflecting on my lived experience as a farm worker and the impact that Cesar Chavez had on my life, I sought to develop a class that would have the same influence that the farm worker social movement had on my life. Out of this passion and with the help of various farm worker contacts, I developed another service learning class called Rural and Urban Ethnic Movements. In this class, now in its seventeenth year, students learn about community-based organizing theories and how they apply to the civil rights, farm worker, immigrant,

and contemporary social movements (Barger and Reza 1994; Broyles-Gonzales 1994; Bulosan 1984; Buss 1993; Del Castillo and Garcia 1995; Edid 1994; Ferris and Sandoval 1997; Ganz 2009; Rose 1990; Ross 1989; Scharlin and Villanueva 2006; Shaw 2008; Weber 1994; Wells 1996; Zavella 1987).

During the spring break, the class visits the historical sites of the United Farm Workers Union in La Paz (Keene, California) and Delano. The students learn from farm worker leaders about the history of the movement, particularly the strategies that the union has used to survive. In return, the students implement service projects based on the union’s needs. In the first alternative spring break in 1994, alongside Filipino American leader Pete Velasco, the students planted one hundred roses at the gravesite of Cesar Chavez. In the following year they helped to clean up after a flood hit the community. Seven years ago the students carried rocks from a nearby creek to help build the foundation for a Cesar Chavez Memorial. That experience involved students from Vina Danks Middle School, located in the nearby city of Ontario, and day laborers from the Pomona Day Labor Center. This collaboration resulted in the painting of two murals, one at Vina Danks and one at the day labor center, led by community-based artist Paul Botello. More recently, the students traveled to Delano and began framing the pictures of sixty Filipino farm workers who, because of antimiscegenation laws in California, never married and passed away in an elderly farm worker village, Agbayani Village (Calderon and Cadena 2007).

When I began the service learning project with the farm workers, another opportunity for a service learning site came forward when the city of Pomona passed a resolution in 1996 that anyone caught on a corner asking for jobs could be fined \$1,000 and spend six months in jail. The ordinance was clearly aimed at the community’s growing day laborer population. I was teaching a class, *Restructuring Communities*, when immigrant rights activist and Pitzer student Fabian Nunez organized a coalition of students, day laborers, and community supporters to pack city hall. When the city council argued that it could not fund a center for undocumented workers, the students gathered research showing that many of the day laborers were also permanent residents. In 1998, these efforts led to the establishment of a nonprofit day labor center, \$50,000

in funding from the Pomona city council, and an advisory board that included Pitzer students and faculty. Fabian Nunez, the nonprofit's first board chair, eventually ran for the California state assembly and became one of the most influential Latinos when he was elected as the speaker in Sacramento.⁸

Since the center opened in 1998, students from my classes have joined in collaborative programs with the day laborers in developing employment training programs, health referral networks, immigration rights counseling, and biweekly organizational meetings. In addition to holding language and computer classes every morning, the students have been instrumental in ensuring worker representation on the organization's board. Rather than allowing city officials or consultant "experts" to control the decision-making process, we have organized biweekly meetings to build the collective voice of the workers in running the center. As a result, two day laborers were employed as coordinators and the son of another day laborer is serving as an office administrator. In further advancing the historical partnership between Pitzer College and the day laborers, one of my former students, Suzanne Foster, was hired as the center's director.

In response to the city council's decision to minimally fund the day labor center in the future, we have utilized surveys, questionnaires, and focus groups to establish the amount of resources that the workers have and how they can be maximized.⁹ Our collaborative research with the workers has resulted in the writing of various grant proposals to area foundations. One grant helped pay for a day laborer organizer and allowed us to develop a health referral program for the day laborers and their families. Another grant assisted in expanding language, computer, and job-training programs.

Surviving Promotion through Creating Transformative Spaces

I survived the joint appointment pressures and both my tenure and full professor reviews by relying on the support of collective action and by ensuring structural change in my lived environment. Flowing from the vivid examples presented to us by various union organizers in the region, I worked alongside my family, day laborers, students, faculty, and

community friends to develop democratic "spaces" that exemplified the type of society we would like to live in. In our home, Rose and I created a culture where we all shared in carrying out the household chores. In the day labor center, the day laborers and students went beyond "charity" services to collaborating in organizing pilgrimage marches in support of driver's licenses for immigrants, pickets of employers who refused to pay, and community "fiestas" to build broad coalitions of support for immigrant rights.

One lesson I have learned in creating a democratic classroom and having students think critically about the social issues around them is that the students' growing conscience and engagement often lead to collective action. This was the case when some students at Pitzer, motivated by their experiences of working in service learning projects with unions, day laborers, and farm workers, joined the college's cafeteria workers in their efforts to obtain higher wages and better health benefits. As early as 1991, when I began as a professor at Pitzer, a collaboration developed between the cafeteria workers and various faculty and student leaders to address worker grievances. One student, Juan de Lara, who later became Pitzer's first Rhodes Scholar, met with cafeteria supervisors when the workers faced problems. This practice continued throughout the years until students and workers agreed that the grievances could be handled more efficiently through a union. After vocal demonstrations by the workers and students, the workers joined the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees (HERE) union.

The beauty of having a critical pedagogy turn into practical examples of social change can be exhilarating. On the other hand, it can affect the evaluation process when one comes up for tenure or promotion.

As a junior faculty member, I had to figure out how to publish enough work to ensure tenure. I did this by writing throughout the process of the service learning projects I designed. As a result, I published a number of articles based on my organizing work in Monterey Park, the Alhambra School District, the United Farm Workers Union, and the Pomona Day Labor Center (Calderon 2004b). I also joined a dialogue in the Pitzer Faculty Executive Committee to change the faculty handbook so that it was more inclusive of the teaching, research, and service activities of a public intellectual.¹⁰ Today's faculty handbook includes

sections recognizing the contributions in this realm as part of the contract renewal, promotion, and evaluation process:

effectiveness inside and outside the classroom, sponsorship of internships and other non-traditional means of teaching and learning, the supervising of student participation in research projects, evidence of applied research and/or action research, service to the wider community, and acting as an intellectual resource for colleagues, students, and the community (Pitzer College Faculty Personnel Policies and Procedures 2009, Section V-A).

The changes in the faculty handbook, together with the development of a core of faculty who supported service learning initiatives, ultimately helped me to obtain tenure and full professor status. Although numerous professors supported me in this process, there were struggles along the way. My ongoing support of the cafeteria workers' unionizing efforts resulted in a letter from the administration questioning my involvement as an employee of the college. When I argued for an increase in the number of underrepresented faculty at one faculty meeting, I was stunned to hear a professor who considered himself progressive argue that affirmative action "discriminated against White males." When some students questioned why various art murals had been painted over, I stood with the students in their efforts to ensure that designated spaces were made available on college walls and columns for student-created art pieces. Mindful that the negativity in these conflicts was stirred by a small number of individuals, the collaborative governance structure at Pitzer responded by developing an art committee that included the voice of the students and changed the faculty handbook in support of specified affirmative action goals.¹¹

In 2004, after overcoming the "full professor" promotion hurdles, I jumped at the opportunity to apply for a newly created revolving chair position, the Michi and Walter Weglyn Endowed Chair in Multicultural Studies, at Cal Poly Pomona University. I was drawn to the position by the rich diversity among students on the campus, the requisite that one had to only teach one class per quarter, and the reality that I would

have more time and resources for my service learning and participatory research work in the community.¹²

Moving to Higher Levels in Applying Participatory Service, Teaching, and Research

This two-year position expanded my history of connecting academic teaching and research with community organizing and social change initiatives. Michi and Walter Weglyn, for whom the endowed chair position was named, were examples of individuals who used their lives to carry out research and to use that research in service to the community and to advance social change policies. They were examples not only in the academic sense (with Michi Weglyn producing a book *Years of Infamy: The Untold Story of America's Concentration Camps* [1976]), but also in the participatory action sense. Hence, Michi Weglyn's book and efforts helped advance a movement that eventually led to reparations for more than eighty thousand interned Japanese Americans and exposed the kidnappings of thousands of Japanese Latin Americans who were forcibly held as prisoners of war during World War II.

Since I was the inaugural chair for the position, I had the opportunity to develop a plan and implement it in the context of the Weglyns' visionary commitment to turning learning, teaching, and research into civic engagement. Although I had been implementing aspects of critical pedagogy, multiculturalism, service learning, and participatory research in my academic work, the endowed chair position gave me the time and space to deepen my understanding of these concepts and their integration.¹³ Working alongside Professor Gilbert Cadena, professors from the Ethnic and Women's Studies Department, and the Center for Community Service, we developed a faculty learning circle that met every other Friday.¹⁴ The faculty learning circle was a foundation for deepening my study of the project-based approach as described by Randy Stoecker in *Research Methods for Community Change* (2005). It was also a catalyst for working with a diverse group of faculty and students at Cal Poly in developing various interdisciplinary projects at the Pomona Day Labor Center and organizing a campus-wide conference on service learning and participatory research.¹⁵

In connecting the reading materials in the classroom to the history of local communities, I also had the opportunity to experiment with service learning and participatory research projects that included the contributions of groups that our educational system has had a tendency to marginalize or exclude. As a Civic Scholar with Campus Compact, a national organization of colleges devoted to civic engagement, I had the opportunity to participate in a dialogue with other national scholars on how to make the classroom more a part of the civic realm and to encourage students' skepticism of traditional historical documents.

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In this chapter, I have chosen to tell selected stories from my lived experience that include the lessons learned in surviving the educational system by making learning, teaching, research, and organizing part of a lifelong commitment to advancing social change and social justice. To survive, I have found my passion from reflecting on the "individual issues" that affected my family and working with others in linking these issues to what other oppressed groups have faced historically, placing these issues in a larger context, and implementing strategies for change through nontraditional forms of campus and community engagement.¹⁶

Along the way, I have had various mentors and teachers who helped me in overcoming academic obstacles: from the support of my family and Raza Graduate Students to various professors in graduate school who helped me make the positive connections between my activism and participatory research.

From graduate school to the present, I have steadily deepened my understanding and implementation of these connections. Through my involvement in the Monterey Park project, I was introduced to the use of ethnographic methodology. As a professor at Pitzer College, I learned to collaborate with other students and professors in applying both service learning and participatory research techniques in implementing solutions to racial conflicts in the schools. Through my work with the United Farm Workers Union and the Pomona Day Labor Center, I learned the importance of making a long-term commitment to a particular site and how service learning and participatory research could move beyond charity to social change and leadership empowerment

initiatives. As an endowed chair at Cal Poly Pomona, I had the opportunity and time to work with a diverse group of students and professors in applying aspects of the project-based approach.

As my story has shown, there are spaces in the academy for those who connect their teaching, learning, and research with their passion for social justice. The creation of such democratic spaces takes the organized collective support of family, mentors, colleagues, and community activists who are supporters and participants in transforming the educational system to transform society. The application of a transformative pedagogy, rooted in a passion for overcoming systemic and historical injustices, can determine whether historically excluded individuals and groups can survive the traditional walls of the academy and can play a role in advancing long-term structural changes in the larger society.

Notes

- 1 For a more developed account of this life experience tied to Chicano history see Calderon 2004a.
- 2 I used Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2000) in implementing a style of teaching that asked students to express the words that best reflected the day-to-day experiences in their lives. I would write their words on square sheets made from cardboard boxes. On one side, their word was written in English and on the other in Spanish. Eventually, each student owned a box that included dozens of their "own" words. As the students shared each other's words, they began to develop a dialogue in English.
- 3 One result of this collective project was a book, *The Politics of Diversity* (Horton 1995), and a PBS film, *America Becoming*. Additionally, two other books connected to this project included Leland Saito's *Race and Politics: Asian Americans, Latinos, and Whites in a Los Angeles Suburb* (1998) and Mary Pardo's *Mexican American Women Activists: Identity and Resistance in Two Los Angeles Communities* (1998).
- 4 At the time, our research team used the ethnographic methodology as prescribed by John and Lyn Lofland in *Analyzing Social Settings: A Guide to Qualitative Observations and Analysis* (1984). At the same time, Linda Shaw trained our team using materials from a book that she would later coauthor with Robert Emerson and Rachel Fretz, *Writing Ethnographic Field Notes*.

- 5 I have always been good at telling stories. I grew up hearing stories about the history of Mexico through the lived experiences described by my mother. I resonated with author Gloria Anzaldúa's stories, in *Borderlands* (1987), about how her grandmother and father used *cuentos*, much like the indigenous people, to connect the "artistic" with "everyday life."
- 6 This moment of survival reminded me of another teacher in high school who saw that I was having problems understanding the sine, the cosine (cosecant), and tangent in a geometry class. Rather than ridiculing me in the class, he took me outside with another student and showed me how to measure between buildings. To this day, I have not forgotten those terms and their meanings. In later years, it also taught me the significance of "doing" sociology.
- 7 The thesis, "Mexican Americans in a Multi-Ethnic Community," was completed in the spring of 1991.
- 8 The early history of the center is documented in an article, "Organizing Immigrant Workers: Action Research Strategies in the Pomona Day Labor Center," published in the book *Latino Los Angeles* (2006) and written with the collaboration of two former Pitzer College students, Suzanne Foster and Silvia Rodriguez.
- 9 A dozen students have written their senior theses on the topic of the informal economy, while others have made presentations at the National Association of Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS), the American Sociological Association, the American Association of Higher Education, and the Pitzer College Undergraduate Research Conference.
- 10 Sociology professor Michael Burawoy, when he was president of the American Sociological Association, helped to bring to the forefront the need to appreciate a public sociology "that seeks to bring sociology to publics beyond the academy, promoting dialogues about issues that affect the fate of society" (2004: 104). In August 2004, the Task Force on Institutionalizing Public Sociologies (2005: 2) was developed by the American Sociological Association to develop proposals "for the recognition and validation of public sociology, incentive and rewards for doing public sociology, and evaluating public sociology."
- 11 Pitzer College adopted an affirmative action policy with the goal "of increasing, during the period 2001–2015, the overall size of the faculty and the proportion of women and persons from underrepresented minorities on the continuing Pitzer faculty from the 1994 31 percent of women faculty members to 50 percent or more, and from 1994 19 percent of faculty members from underrepresented minorities to 50 percent or more" (Pitzer College Faculty Personnel Policies and Procedures 2001). These goals were met and new goals are being formulated for adoption in the academic year 2010–2011.
- 12 The endowed chair position allowed me to experiment with carrying out community-based teaching, research, and organizing without the tremendous workload exacted by being in a joint appointment. Most of the faculty of color at the Claremont Colleges, up until 2010 when the policy was changed, were hired in joint appointments that divided their teaching load with three-fifths in a primary discipline and two-fifths in a five-college department (Black Studies, Chicano Studies, Gender and Feminist Studies, or Asian American Studies). Ultimately, the many responsibilities of serving on many committees and having advisees from all five campuses cut into the amount of time that professors could devote to community-based research and service learning. The professors who do carry out these types of pedagogy in the community usually do it out of a deep commitment to the benefits of applied learning. At the same time, they do it with an understanding that this work is not valued as much as traditional academic activities and that it often has to be done above and beyond all the other typical responsibilities of a faculty member.
- 13 Over the years, I had invested many hours in studying the literature on these methodologies advancing from traditional ethnography to critical pedagogy, action research, participatory research, community-based research, and project-based research. The result has been an ongoing learning process of implementation and collaboration with others in what Randy Stoecker's project-based approach describes as a cycle of diagnosis, prescription, implementation, and evaluation.
- 14 The faculty learning circle held discussions on such books as *Empowering Education* (Shor 1992) and *Community-Based Research in Higher Education* (Strand et al. 2003).
- 15 Our version of implementing the project-based approach is described in Calderon and Cadena 2007.
- 16 C. Wright Mills, in the *Sociological Imagination*, wrote that many personal troubles cannot be solved merely as such, but must be understood in terms of public issues—and in terms of the problems of history making. Within that range the life of the individual and the making of societies occur, and within that range the sociological imagination has its chance to make a difference in the quality of human life in our time (Mills 1959: 226).