Xicana/o Indigenous Epistemologies: Toward a Decolonizing and Liberatory Education for Xicana/o Youth

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“Son said, you have to go out and, and find different strong things that . . . that give you honor. To get rid of all the negative that people have to bring life back to each and every one of us.” This quote, made by a Native elder steeped in Indigenous knowledge, is a recommendation for the ways in which to respond to the negative effects of colonization and dehumanization of Indigenous youth, specifically the pervasiveness of internalized oppression, historical trauma, horizontal violence, domestic violence, patriarchy, homophobia, and drug and alcohol abuse that continues to adversely and disparately impact Indigenous and other colonized communities of color.

Relative to Xicana/o youth, within the greater context of the colonization of the Xicana/o community, public schools traditionally and currently do not provide safe and healthy spaces for their development; culturally responsive curricula and/or pedagogy; or programmatic offerings where youth can cultivate a sense of honor and dignity for themselves, their families, and/or their communities. This denial of Xicana/o youth of empowering, decolonizing, and liberatory methodologies in schools is copiously demonstrated in the literature on K–12 Chicana/o education as well as in our collective experiences in working with Chicana/o youth as educators and researchers within Tucson Unified School District’s (TUSD) Mexican American/Raza Studies Department (MARSD). What we know from the educational literature and through our collective educational research-based experiences is that public schools have traditionally and continue to serve as institutions where the culture, language, history, and identity is stripped from Xicana/o youth (Moreno and Garcia Berumen, 1999; Valencia 2011; Valenzuela 1999), where Xicana/o youth are criminalized, and where schools themselves serve as sites where inequality is reproduced.
Thus, based on these understandings of Xicanas/os and their relation to public schools and through the highlighting and critical analysis of Xicana/o Indigenous Epistemologies as living and fluid knowledge systems, I believe that when put into critical praxis these strategies can effectively counter the colonizing and dehumanizing structures, policies, processes, and practices in schools that have and continue to adversely impact Xicana/o youth. Xicana/o Indigenous Epistemologies served as the pedagogical and curricular framework from which TUSD’s MARSD operated, resulting in the positive and fluid development of identities and the unprecedented academic success in closing the pervasive achievement gap for and with Xicana/o youth in public schools. The Xicana/o Indigenous Epistemologies embraced and practiced as a form of living knowledge, in addition to the students and teachers of the MARSD, became the specific target of attack by the State of Arizona’s Department of Education, the Arizona State Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Arizona Attorney General, the Arizona State Legislature, and the Governing Board and Superintendent of TUSD for being “vehemently anti-Western,” “collectivist,” “anti-American,” “ritualized,” and a “cult,” and that it served as “a focal point of the Aztec consciousness element for the ‘Aztec movement’” taking place in MARSD (Horne, 2007; Landeros, 2011). These attacks on Xicana/o Indigenous Epistemologies eventually led to Arizona outlawing K–12 “Ethnic Studies” in the State of Arizona (Arizona State Legislature, 2010, specifically the MARSD, with TUSD complying with the state and eliminating this effective and liberatory education project on January 12, 2012, despite the fact that the MARSD in TUSD was a stipulation under the existing federal court desegregation order. These attacks on Xicana/o Indigenous Epistemologies and K–12 Chicana/o Studies from the state and local school district is testimony that the colonial project for Xicanas/os, and other Indigenous people and communities of color, is not a remnant of the past, but that colonization remains a very real dehumanizing and oppressive force.

This chapter is divided into five sections. The second section, “Xicana/o Indigenous Epistemologies,” offers an analysis and positional review of existing bodies of literature that address Mexicana/o–Xicana/o Indigenous forms of knowledges, which informed the former K–12 MARSD, and that provide epistemological and pedagogical possibilities for K–12 Chicana/o Studies de-colonizing and liberatory education projects. “Attributes of the Temachtiani: Nahua Principles of Education as Decolonizing Teacher Pedagogy for Xicana/o Youth,” the third section of this chapter, serves as a pedagogical framework for teachers to effectively engage Xicana/o and other marginalized youth in K–12 Chicana/o Studies and beyond, through the centering of Indigenous Epistemologies, and that specifically draw from humanizing and liberatory Nahua principles of education (León-Portilla 1980). The fourth
section, “Toward a Xicana/o Indigenous Epistemological Praxis: Tucson’s K–12 Mexican American/Raza Studies Department,” focuses on the foundational and liberatory pedagogical tool of the Nahui Ollin, which was implemented by the MARSD to develop strong cultural and fluid identities that guided students to the unprecedented closing of the academic achievement gap for and with Xicana/o youth (Cabrera, Marx, and Milem 2012; O’Leary, Romero, Cabrera, and Rascón 2012; Sleeter 2011). The theoretical, philosophical, and practical framing of MARSD’s operationalization of the Nahui Ollin functions as an empirically based decolonizing and liberatory educational model from which K–12 Chicana/o Studies and Ethnic Studies projects can be placed into a pedagogical praxis.

XICANA/O INDIGENOUS EPISTEMOLOGIES

Here I develop a positional review and analysis of existing bodies of literature that provide insight into Xicana/o Indigenous Epistemologies. I focus principally on works by Chicano scholar Marc Pizarro (1998), Mexican historian and anthropologist Guillermo Bonfil Batalla (1996), and Chicana educator and Nahua philosopher Martha Ramírez Oropeza (2002). Critical to note are that the epistemological frameworks by these scholars informed the work of Tucson’s former K–12 Mexican American/Raza Studies program—which has since been outlawed by the State of Arizona and eliminated by TUSD despite its unprecedented success in closing the pervasive and persistent academic achievement gap for Xicana/o youth. Equally important to examine are how these Xicana/o Indigenous Epistemologies provide possibilities for effectively engaging and empowering K–12 Xicana/o youth, as well as other traditionally marginalized youth of color, through a decolonizing, rehumanizing, and liberatory education.

Pizarro contends that schools act as social and economic reproduction sites where the hegemony of schooling shapes students into efficient workers and consumers, ultimately strengthening and benefiting multinational corporations within the neoliberal capitalist system. The consumerization of students in public schools has forced students to either buy into this model of education (e.g., rote memorization; standardization; and culturally, socially, and historically irrelevant pedagogy and curricula), despite its dehumanizing and despiritualizing nature, and become consumers of this knowledge as a means for eventual financial success, or to resist consuming this knowledge, risking school failure and becoming one among the masses of the uneducated, thus solidifying their position as an unmarketable lifetime low-wage earner.

Pizarro contends that this type of educational system perpetuates subordinate and dominant groups within contemporary society’s cultural, political, and economic power relationship dynamic, with Xicana/o and other youth of color too often forced into subordinate positions. Critical scholar and
educator Antonia Darder (1991) provides insight into the maintenance of these dominant and subordinate relations within public schools, examines the relation between culture and power and how it adversely impacts students of color, and offers a challenge to counter and disrupt them:

It is impossible to impact significantly the underachievement of bicultural students without addressing the issue of power in society and its role in the cultural subordination of people of color, in spite of proclaimed democratic ideals. It is this link between culture and power that must be challenged in any effort to develop a theory of critical bicultural education toward the emancipatory interests of bicultural students in the United States. (21)

Analogous to Darder’s challenge to the existing relationship between culture and power, where youth of color are forced into a position of subordination, Pizarro’s work is critical for it explores and provides possibilities on how educators working for and with Xicana/o youth can challenge dominant power and ideology with relation to culture by implementing a decolonizing and rehumanizing curriculum by using a Xicana/o Indigenous Epistemological framework. In this instance, a decolonizing and rehumanizing curriculum challenges a curriculum whose aim is to make efficient workers and consumers of students. Ramírez Oropeza (2002) sheds light on the fact that Xicana/o–Mexicana/os communities do not have the economic resources or access to media resources as do the “globalizers” (34) to counter globalization and mass consumerization; nonetheless, Ramírez Oropeza provides an alternative by offering Indigenous knowledge as an approach to effectively counter globalization, stating “we resort to our greatest natural resource: the wisdom of our ancestors and the vision of unity and harmony inspiring their descendants” (34). Citing surviving waves of repeated colonization—by Spain, the United States, and now the “globalizer”—Ramírez Oropeza contends Xicanas/os–Mexicanas/os have been able to maintain their tradiciones, identity, and dignity through the maintenance of Indigenous Epistemologies. In keeping with one of the original objectives of Chicana/o Studies, the development of a strong cultural identity for and with Xicana/o youth within a public education system that has operated to assimilate and “subtract the culture” (Valenzuela 1999) from them, K–12 Chicana/o Studies programs can benefit greatly by implementing Xicana/o Indigenous Epistemologies that operate to empower Xicana/o students through the development of strong ethnic, cultural, and academic identities.

Integral to this decolonizing and rehumanizing curriculum is the implementation of what Pizarro (1998) designates “Chicana/o Spiritualization through Indigenismo,” describing this process as:
Some segments of the Chicana/o student population, therefore, have increasingly realized over the past few years the need for spiritualization of the community. I am referring to the pursuit of greater spirituality: the creation of strong bonds within communities based on shared notions of the sanctity of life (and of greater forces behind this life) as part of the process of seeking empowerment for humanity and, in the case of Chicanas/os, revolutionary change for the oppressed. (61)

In his work with Xicana/o youth at both the high school and at the college/university levels, Pizarro has observed and taken critical note that this educational model has proven not only ineffective and disempowering, but that it has been a model of dehumanization wherein the lack, and in most cases the total absence, of cultural, social, and historical responsiveness is seen within the curriculum. Within this educational model, the absence of opportunities for Xicana/o students to physically connect and work for and with their community has led to the “despiritualization,” the discouragement, and in many instances, the killing of the spirit of learning itself. The lack of connectedness to community is disempowering for many Xicana/o students, who “have a distinct epistemological upbringing that calls this separation into question and actually demands a more revolutionary/humanistic approach to life itself” (Pizarro 1998, 61–62).

Consequently, this dehumanization and despiritualization of Xicana/o youth within educational institutions necessitates Chicana/o Spiritualization through Indigenismo as an approach to meet the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual needs of Xicana/o youth. Essential to an effective implementation is the requirement that teachers listen intently to la palabra (“the word”) of Xicana/o youth engaging in what Pizarro refers to as a “dialogical pedagogy” regarding their physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual needs—in essence, their whole person. Examination of qualitative analysis of the Chicana/o students that Pizarro had worked with over the years, has identified an emerging theme where students communicated their need for community connection, specifically a spiritual connection and development through Indigenismo—as a result of their exposure to Xicana/o community Indigenous practices—as a means to cope with and navigate the pervasiveness of materialism and dehumanization found within popular culture and within educational institutions, which in many cases are aimed specifically at and impact Xicana/o youth.

The implementation of Chicana/o Spiritualization through Indigenismo as pedagogical and epistemological instruments of decolonization, revolutionary possibility, and liberation for Xicana/o youth within schools is a radical shift from traditional Western educational models, because these freedom-seeking methodologies are viewed as far-reaching, extremist, and threatening to the
hegemony of the public education system that domesticates, perpetuates inequality, and in due course, operates to make consumers of all youth. Equally, these instruments and methodologies are considered radical and threatening because the notion of “spirituality,” specifically when used in education, is viewed as a violation of the Western rules of a supposed “objectivity.” Nevertheless, Western educational models have never been effective in engaging, empowering, or meeting the holistic needs of youth of color, much less serving as decolonizing or liberating methodologies. On the contrary, Western education models in the United States have effectively served as tools of deculturalization, colonization, dehumanization, and oppression for Black, Chicana/o, Native American, and Asian American youth.

While the recognition, implementation, and development of Chicana/o Spiritualization through Indigenismo as legitimate epistemological and methodological resources for Xicana/o youth is viewed as a breach of “objectivity,” I contend that the Western notion of objectivity within the social sciences and education disciplines is itself a biased conceptualization. Noted Chicano anthropologist Octavio I. Romano-V argues that “objectivity” is the West’s cherished philosophical tradition that is contingent upon the separation of the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual human aspects of being. “As generally defined in Western thought, the concept of objectivity is impossible without a corresponding belief in man’s ability to separate his mind not only from his body, but also from all of his ecological surroundings, whether or not these ecological surroundings are human or physical” (Romano 1970, 4–5).

Relative to this analysis of Western objectivity, it is critical to highlight Chicana cultural, feminist, and queer theorist Gloria Anzaldúa’s (1987) intellectual contributions to this subject, “In trying to become ‘objective,’ Western culture made ‘objects’ of things and people when it distanced itself from them, thereby losing ‘touch’ with them. This dichotomy is the root of all violence” (69). Anzaldúa provides much-needed perspective to the psychological violence that is placed upon Chicana/o youth in schools as a result of its maintenance of Western objectivity and its educational models that restrict addressing the holistic needs of their subjects, essentially translating to and perpetuating the dehumanization and objectification of Xicana/o youth.

Xicana/o youth have been dehumanized and despirtualized in particular ways—as evident in the consumerization and absence of cultural responsiveness within schools—thus, there is a critical need for the implementation of Xicana/o Indigenous Epistemologies as an approach that leads to rehumanization and decolonization through addressing the holistic needs of Xicana/o students. K–12 Chicana/o Studies has the opportunity to position itself to implement such an epistemic framework and therefore to transform the curriculum and pedagogy for the empowerment of Xicana/o youth, even in light of the fact that these knowledges, according to the academy, are not seen as legitimate by
educational institutions. “Since Chicana/o studies was founded in opposition to traditional conceptions of schooling and knowledge, it already exists in a contestatory realm” (Pizarro 1998, 69). The historical and contemporary realities of Xicana/o youth in schools—wherein marginalization, dehumanization, despiritualization, and school failure have been normalized and where traditional Eurocentric models have consistently failed Xicana/o students—should serve as testimony for Chicana/o Studies to maintain its oppositional stance in relation to traditional Western forms of knowledge. Eurocentric knowledge, which has in great part worked toward maintaining the subjugation, oppression, and colonization of the Xicana/o community should also serve as a consciousness-raising catalyst for the community’s demand for our K–12 public schools to implement comprehensive Chicana/o Studies using approaches that embrace Indigenous Epistemologies. These epistemologies work toward a holistic and liberatory education for Xicana/o youth in order for them to become the facilitators in improving the economic, political, health, and social conditions of the Xicana/o community. In stressing the critical importance of education as liberation through Indigenous Epistemologies, Pizarro (1998) articulates the necessity of Xicana/o youth’s spiritual development, asserting “re-spiritualization may be the most revolutionary force at our disposal as we, both within and outside Chicana/o studies, seek to transform the spiritually dead, consumerized schoolhouse” (74).

There exists a multitude of Indigenous knowledge that can be used to effectively counter the dehumanization and colonization of Xicana/o youth; further examination of specific decolonizing and humanizing practices illuminates ways in which a K–12 Chicana/o Studies pedagogy and curriculum can integrate this Indigenous knowledge. In México Profundo: Reclaiming a Civilization, Bonfil Batalla (1996) provides a decolonial analysis on the reclamation of the Indigenous Mexican civilization within the context of consecutive waves of colonization of Mexico and the resultant “de-Indianization” of its people, which is described as “a historical process through which populations that originally possessed a particular and distinctive identity, based upon their own culture, are forced to renounce that identity, with all the consequent changes in their social organization and culture. De-Indianization is not the result of biological mixture, but that of the ethnocide that ultimately blocks the historical continuity of a people as a culturally differentiated group” (43). For Xicana/o youth in K–12 schools, de-Indianization is a process that they are constantly subjected to, as evidenced by the denial of teaching of their Indigenous heritage, knowledge systems, and culture in schools (a space where Xicanas/os are also forced, through assimilationist processes, to renounce their identity). Nonetheless, the reclamation of Mexican indigeneity found in Bonfil Batalla’s work has had a transformative influence on the works of scholars in the field of Chicana/o Studies, specifically through
the privileging of Mexican Indigenous knowledge systems. As a result of this influence, the field of Chicana/o Studies is currently experiencing more of an inclusion of Indigenous Epistemologies, and many would argue a paradigm shift, from which to view, study, and research the Xicana/o experience.

The imposition of the Spanish culture and religion forced on the native Mexican people was the colonial model upon which cultural and spiritual genocide took place. The native Mexicans resisted this cultural and spiritual genocide in part by appropriating the imposing images, beliefs, and symbols of the colonizers, through a transformation of the discourses, imagery, and symbolism in order to meet their own needs as well as for the survival and preservation of their Indigenous traditions.

Equivalent to this imposition, the historical and contemporary structures, policies, and practices of public schools are continuous with this colonial model; Xicana/o (and other youth of color) often resist the processes of the colonial apparatus of schooling, much like their ancestors resisted colonization, as a means to preserve their dignity, albeit in a myriad of ways. The examination of how Xicana/o students resist these dehumanizing schooling processes are brought to light by Daniel Solórzano and Dolores Delgado Bernal (2002) in their article “Examining Transformational Resistance Through a Critical Race and Latcrit Theory Framework: Chicana and Chicano Students in an Urban Context,” where reactionary behavior, self-defeating resistance, conformist resistance, and transformational resistance are identified and analyzed. Solórzano and Delgado Bernal describe the forms of behavior and resistance as follows: reactionary behavior, while a form of oppositional behavior, is where students have neither a critique of the oppressive environment of their school nor a hunger for social justice and often exhibit behaviors of acting out; self-defeating resistance is where students may have a sense and assessment of oppression in their schools, but they do not have an interest in social justice and therefore exhibit negative behaviors (i.e., not doing school work or dropping out of school); conformist resistance is where students display oppositional behavior through working toward a form of social justice (i.e., better educational opportunities for themselves and their families through “hard work”), but are not critical of the oppressive structures and systems of their schools, often citing familial, community, and cultural deficiencies for the lack of educational equity; and last, transformational resistance, where students have a critique of the oppressive conditions of their schools and a yearning for social justice.

I maintain that transformational resistance is situated within the larger frame of Mexican Indigenous resistance. While both transformational resistance and Indigenous resistance critically examine oppressive social conditions and work toward the notion of social justice, Indigenous resistance, as a specific and legitimate Indigenous knowledge form that Xicanas/os–Mexicanas/os
have used for the last five hundred years, transcends the notion of transformational resistance in and of itself, in that it works to preserve the dignity and very humanity of an entire people. Moreover, transformational resistance operationalized within an education context through a Xicana/o Indigenous epistemological lens will serve not only to alter the oppressive structures, policies, and practices of schools, but it will also allow for the sustainability and revitalization of Indigenous Xicana/o youth identities, functioning as a reminder that the issue of identity is paramount to the overall struggle against the greater colonial project that Xicanas/os are subjected to.

Continuous with the notion of resistance as a form of Indigenous knowledge, Bonfil Batalla (1996) alludes to appropriation, stating, “Diverse Indian societies have taken the signs, symbols, and practices of the imposed religion and made them their own by reorganizing and reinterpreting them within the core of their own religious beliefs” (136). Along these same lines of reasoning, Broyles-González (2002) asserts that, “in the give and take of struggle, Mexicanas and Chicanas have learned to fashion faith and religion in our own image: the image of our gender, our ‘race’/ethnicity, our class affiliations, and the particulars of the local habitat and regional history” (118). Mexicanas and Xicanas have created faith and spirituality in their own image through the resistance to the colonial apparatus that imposed the Virgin Mary upon the native Mexican people. The Indigenous Mexican woman recreated or transformed the Virgin Mary in her own image by using the various pre-Columbian feminine principles manifested in the creative energies of Tonantzin, Coatlíque, and Coatláhuaca, all manifestations of la madre tierra or “mother earth,” as well as that of Coyolxauqui, which represents the moon. These pre-Columbian feminine principles and epistemological bodies demonstrate the importance of acknowledging the feminine energy as a requirement of life itself within Mesoamerican Indigenous cosmology and scientific understandings of the universe. Despite this colonial subjugation, this appropriation by the Indigenous Mexican woman has allowed for the successful protection and preservation of Indigenous culture and spiritual beliefs.

Broyles-González’s reference to the traditional appropriation that the Indigenous Mexican woman has made, through Xicana Indigenous ways of knowing, provides a pedagogical frame that situates young Xicanas as central subjects in making their own history, rather than having the Xicanas remain as passive objects whose history was determined and whose contemporary reality and future will be influenced by someone outside of themselves. There is power when implementing such Xicana/o Indigenous Epistemologies into K–12 curriculum and pedagogy, where Xicanas and Xicanos can engage these Indigenous Epistemologies to resist patriarchy and practice self-determination in a school system where Xicanas are viewed as less academically capable and are consistently acted upon through oppressive gendered, racialized, and class practices.
The sustainability of this resistance through Xicana/o Indigenous Epistemologies is illustrated in Ramírez Oropeza's highlighting of the ancient Mexica calendar system, Tonalmachiotl, more commonly known as the Aztec calendar, identifying it as an epistemological tool that facilitates processes of resistance, decolonization, and rehumanization for Xicana/o-Mexicana/o people. In the case of public schools where Xicana/o youth are forced to operate in a space where the colonizing and dehumanizing effects of institutional racism have stripped them of their identities, culture, languages, and history, the scientific, philosophical, and spiritual principles within the Tonalmachiotl provides for a viable pedagogical foundation that Ramírez Oropeza (2002) calls a “map for strategic action” from which students can enact resistance, decolonization, and rehumanization for themselves as well as their community.

Within the Aztec calendar, Ramírez Oropeza (2002) expressed that the “five Ages or Suns depict a distinct period in the development of the world itself, providing us with a model by which to encounter, evaluate, resist, adapt to and ultimately influence the forces of dehumanization that penetrate our communities” (33). The first Sun, the Jaguar Sun, physically represents the element of earth and has the philosophical and intellectual representation of the “smoking mirror”—Tezkatlipoka, or that which calls for critical introspection. In order to fully grasp the multidimensional conceptualizations within the Aztec calendar, a holistic engagement through using the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual ways of knowing is required. In providing greater understanding of this first Sun of the Tonalmachiotl, Ramírez Oropeza (2002) expands upon Tezkatlipoka, explaining:

From this we learn that in order to encounter the Other it is necessary to know our own heart: before we can meet the Other face-to-face, it is necessary that we grasp the continuity of our collective identity. By confronting the ancestral memory within the Smoking Mirror, we do not allow our identity to be defined by the Other. Remembering who we are in our totality, however, requires that we educate ourselves about the essential experience that makes us one. (35)

Engaging in Tezkatlipoka as epistemology and as a pedagogical tool allows for Xicana/o youth to critically examine themselves, their familias, and their communities, which constitute revolutionary acts, for to fully know oneself through self-analysis and within the colonial context of schooling that discourages Xicana/o youth from doing so is a liberatory process.

Further alluding to the importance of critical self-reflection as fundamental to Xicana/o Indigenous Epistemologies, Bonfil Batalla’s (1996) proposal to reflect on the distinction between the “México profundo” and the “imaginary Mexico” provides critical insight into the identity confusion of Xicana/o
youth. “I propose to reflect on the matter of civilization, in hopes that it will permit us to overcome the schizophrenia caused by the lack of understanding between the México profundo and the imaginary Mexico.” Through this critical reflection, the distinguishing between the “México profundo”—one that takes into consideration the effects of five centuries of colonization, unequal relations of power between Indigenous and “de-Indianized” Mexicans, and the acknowledgment of Indigenismo as one of the Mexican people’s most vital assets—and the “imaginary Mexico”—which is ahistorical in ignoring the effects of colonization, the unequal relations of power between Indigenous and “de-Indianized” Mexicans, and which views the Indian as uncivilized or simply as a dead relic of the past—allows for a collective reconciliation with the past and the struggle that leads toward the rehumanization of all peoples to be realized. Along these same lines of analysis, Xicana/o youth too often suffer from a cultural schizophrenia, wherein schools, the media, and society restricts and discourages Xicana/o youth from embracing their “Mexican-ness” and/or “Indian-ness” through racially repressive imagery, policies, and practices. As a result of these racially repressive practices, Xicana/o youth, and Xicanas/os in general, internalize these forms of oppression and buy into the belief that they are inferior because of their “Mexican-ness” and “Indian-ness,” consequently adopting this worldview based upon a self-hatred. Chicana/o Studies activist-scholar and historian Rodolfo Acuña (1996) writes of this internalized oppression, stating, “Mexicans themselves internalize the ‘Anything But Mexican’ mindset. An internalized racism, popularly called a ‘colonized mentality’ by Chicano Movement activists during the 1960s, splinters Latino and even Mexican unity. It is more than a cliché that many Mexicans and Latinos want to be white, or at least consider fairer skin to be better. . . . The acceptance and internalization of the dominant society’s racism by Mexicans and Latinos is irrational and produces a false consciousness” (8). Through Xicana/o Indigenous Epistemologies, such as the critical self-reflection as forwarded by Ramírez Oropeza and Bonfil Batalla, Xicana/o youth can develop to counter this internalized oppression and come to terms with, embrace, and assert their identities, which have been submerged through colonizing processes.

Throughout her explanation of each one of the five Ages or Suns of the Tonalmanchiotl, Ramírez Oropeza redefines and re-appropriates the commonly held notion of “the Other,” as popularized (although building upon the earlier work of social scientists) by postcolonialist and critical theorist Edward Said, who, within his formative work Orientalism, used the term to describe the West’s patronizing, objectifying, and fetishizing of the colonized subjects of the East, who were and continue to be viewed as “objects.”

Numerous critical theorists, postcolonial theorists, and Ethnic Studies scholars have borrowed from Said, adopting and applying the concept of “the

Other” within their own analyses to describe the colonizers’ and oppressors’ perspective on the subjects whom they colonize, oppress, and subjugate. By inverting this conceptualization of “the Other,” where it is common that Indigenous Mexicanas/os–Xicanas/os have been constructed as “the Other” through processes of colonization and dehumanization, Ramírez Oropeza practices self-determination through the engagement in Mexican Indigenous knowledges inherent in the Aztec calendar, first, by not allowing the Mexicanas/o–Xicanas/o people to be defined as “the Other,” essentially not allowing for their objectification; second, by placing the term “the Other” onto those who colonize and dehumanize; and third, by not allowing this newly designated “Other” (the colonizer and systems and structures of oppression) to influence or determine the actions and beliefs of Mexicanas/os–Xicanas/os. Bonfil Batalla (1996) exemplifies this paradigm shift toward the embracing of an Indigenous worldview and of not allowing to be identified as “the Other,” or allowing the newly constructed “Other”—the colonizer/oppressor—to determine the actions and beliefs for the Indigenous Mexican by asserting, “The question should be posed in these terms: we should see the West from Mexico, instead of continuing to see Mexico from the West” (166).

The implications of this re-articulation of the concept of “the Other” for K–12 Chicana/o Studies and Xicana/o youth, in particular through these Xicana/o Indigenous Epistemologies, as demonstrated in Ramírez Oropeza’s analysis of the Tonalxchiotl, are numerous and promising. It is critical to acknowledge that within K–12 public schools, Xicanas/os are viewed, discursively constructed, and acted upon as “the Other,” as evident in the “Otherizing” practices that are forced upon Xicanas/os. These practices include their disparate discipline rates, their disparate “push-out” rates, their criminalization, the increased amount of surveillance of them in schools, their placement as English learners in segregated spaces that receive inequitable educational opportunities, the low expectations placed upon them, their underrepresentation in advanced placement and/or honors classes, their low college-going rates, and their persistent, pervasive, and disproportionate low academic achievement relative to white students. In reference to these “Otherizing” negative experiences that Xicana/o youth are forced to face in public schools on a daily basis, urban educator and scholar Jeffrey Duncan-Andrade (2005) provides much-needed insight regarding Xicana/o youth designated as “the Other,” stressing “Urban youth [particularly Blacks and Chicanos] are always inscribed by stigmatizing images of gangs and the so-called inner city that produces this social pathology. . . . [T]hey are branded by the official discourse of the media, legal system, social welfare, and public policy institutions as dangerous ‘Others,’ the menace from the margins” (587–88). It is this marginalization, criminalization, demonization, and racialized gendered practices where “Otherizing” has been socially constructed to be used as a tool to oppress
Xicana/o youth in schools. Consequently, the engagement of Xicana/o youth, and their teachers as facilitators, in Xicana/o Indigenous Epistemologies can effectively resist this “Otherizing” practice. It is through the critical examination of self—Tezcatlipoka—that results in the development of a strong sense of love for self, family, culture, and community, as well as the embracing of a collective historical memory, that the processes of transforming schools to make them more responsive to the needs of the Xicana/o community can be realized.

**ATTRIBUTES OF THE TEMACHTIANI: NAHUA PRINCIPLES OF EDUCATION AS DECOLONIZING TEACHER PEDAGOGY FOR XICANA/O YOUTH**

Fundamental to the role of the teacher, what the Nahua peoples call temachtiani, is that they possess in ixtli in yollotl—“a face, a heart”—a concept that Chávez Leyva (2003) describes as “central to Meso-American education and philosophy; to develop a strong face and heart was to acquire intellect, morality, and a sense of community responsibility” (101). Distinguished from traditional and contemporary Western educational models, which are based on individualism and a supposed objectivity, in ixtli in yollotl encompasses a holistic approach to education, explicitly wherein the acquisition of intellect and dissemination of knowledge, the development of morality and ethics, and the embracing of the notion of obligation and responsibility to community are foundational. Native American historian, anthropologist, and political activist Jack D. Forbes (2008) espouses the importance of personal and ethical development for the purpose of community empowerment for Xicana/o and other Native youth, which parallels the Nahua concept of in ixtli in yollotl, by attesting: “Education of the kind we know in the modern world usually has little to do with ethics or with bringing forth the individual potential of the learner. On the contrary, it is largely technical in nature (whether in natural science, social science, or whatever) and seldom (in and of itself) serves to alter the class and ethnic ‘interests’ of the graduates” (12). Education in the Western world continues to preserve and maintain the position of the powerful, who within the context of the United States have largely been male, white, and heterosexual, hence the negation of the study of subjects and issues of ethics, class, and ethnic development within educational institutions, for to allow these analyses and developments to take place in public institutions, particularly for marginalized communities of color, would function as a threat to white male hegemony.

In Tlalocoyotl: Aspectos de la cultura nahua, Mexican anthropologist and historian Miguel León-Portilla, through extensive research and interpretation of numerous codices, identified five essential attributes of the teacher—teixcutiyan,
teixtlamachtiani, tetezcahuian, netlacaneco, and tlayolpachitivia—which were specifically called for and highly respected among the Nahuas. I assert the position that the concept of in íxtli in yöölǘt and its attendant five attributes of a temachtiani, adhering to the Nahua tradition as described by León-Portilla, are directly applicable and highly effective within the contemporary context for urban teachers working with Xicana/o youth. I base this assertion on the empowering and transformative experiences of youth who matriculated through Tucson’s K–12 Mexican American/Raza Studies program, whose pedagogical foundation was based in Xicana/o Indigenous Epistemologies, which in turn led to the development of strong yet fluid identities, as well as the closing of the pervasive and persistent academic achievement gap for Xicana/o youth.

The first Nahua attribute of the teacher, teixcuitián—“causing others to take a face”—can serve as an empowering, liberatory, responsive, “sustainable,” and “revitalizing” pedagogical tool that teachers can use to meet the academic, cultural, social, and emotional needs of Xicana/o youth. Consistently viewed and treated as faceless and nameless in public schools, which often results in apathy, a lack of engagement, and sometimes a nihilistic attitude and approach toward schooling, Xicana/o youth are placed on a trajectory to go through the motions of the K–12 pipeline, in a seemingly factorylike process in which close to one-half of Xicana/o youth are pushed out of school. It is rare when Xicana/o youth are acknowledged for their academic and human potential. The community cultural wealth that these youth possess, those cultural forms that Chicana critical race theorist and scholar Tara Yosso (2005) identifies as “aspirational, familial, social, navigational, resistant, and linguistic” are ignored and seldom used in schools to empower Xicana/o youth (77). Fundamentally, schools operate to keep Xicana/o youth relegated to the margins, viewing and acting upon them as pathology, as “the Other,” and essentially to be viewed as objects that somehow need to be fixed.

Traditionally, public schools have forcefully placed faces upon Xicana/o youth that can be described as foreign, deviant, criminal, lazy, linguistically deficient, culturally deficient, and intellectually inferior, which all have served to keep Xicanas/os in subordinate and powerless social, political, and economic positions. Within the K–12 educational pipeline, Xicanas/os (as well as other marginalized youth of color) either remain faceless and nameless, or have dehumanizing pathologies that are externally placed upon them to function as faces—which are in fact less than human—and ultimately serve as potential sources of cheap and exploitable labor. Urban education scholars and practitioners Jeffrey Duncan-Andrade and Ernest Morrell assert the notion of urban schools as sites of social reproduction, where inequality is reproduced, adversely and disproportionately impacting Black and Brown youth, thus perpetuating their anonymity. “On the one hand, urban schools are producing failure at alarming rates; at the same time, they are doing this
inside a system that essentially predetermines their failure. This is where the urban school reform rhetoric has missed the mark. It is presumed that urban schools are broken. Urban schools are not broken; they are doing exactly what they are designed to do” (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell 2008, 1).

Consequently, the urgent need for teachers to counter the namelessness and facelessness that operate as barriers for Xicana/o youth can be realized through teachers acting as teixcuixtli, an engagement in what Chicana educator and Nahua practitioner Silvia T. Villanueva (2013) terms “Chicano-Indigenous Pedagogical Praxis.” In reaction to Xicana/o youths’ marginalization through public school discursive practices and policies of regulating them as foreign (i.e., through exclusionary language programs and racial academic tracking) and un-American (Orozco 2012, 48) and constantly told “to go back where they came from” (Rodriguez 2014, xx), all of which renders them nameless and faceless. Essential to Chicano-Indigenous pedagogical praxis is the recognition and embracing of the Xicana’s/Xicano’s connection to the land of this continent, that which reifies their existence and humanity as Indigenous. An example of this Chicano-Indigenous pedagogical praxis of teixcuixtli is observed and can be framed within the work of Xicana scholar and educator Margarita Berta-Ávila (2003), wherein she situates Xicanas/os as Indigenous people and analyzes dominant white society’s resistance to this premise.

Xicanas/Xicanos are indigenous to the land on which they live. The land is the connection to their identity and their understanding of life. This connection is a threat to the growth of capitalism in the United States, thus making it necessary to impose on Xicanas/Xicanos a dehumanizing cultural hegemony. When Xicanas/Xicanos enter the schooling system, they come with a sense of displacement. Xicanas/Xicanos are not sure how to view themselves or how to view their role in the world. (120)

As culturally responsive, sustaining, and revitalizing educators enacting teixcuixtli, working to counter the colonial apparatus of schooling that tells Xicana/o youth that they are foreigners, much clarity can be sought and realized through acts of critical analysis and implementing a sense of history that illustrates Xicanas/os as an Indigenous people, thus providing these youth with a face of belonging, rooted in the historical and contemporary Indigenous realities of this continent.

The “causing of the others to take a face” requires more than acts coming from the teacher; teachers act as facilitators in creating this new face for and with youth by developing voices within their students, thus a new face of Xicana/o youth organically (not externally imposed) emerges. Berta-Ávila (2003) speaks to this emergence, “Voice’ becomes the political action that
challenges the domination that wants to keep Xicanas/Xicanos nameless and voiceless. Voice becomes the means to rupture the silence to transform the reality” (119). It is through the development and assertion of voice, an honoring of five-hundred-plus years of Indigenous resistance to colonization, where Xicanas/os can move from “object” to “subject,” from “foreign” to “Indigenous,” and from “nameless and faceless” to become fully human and with a “face”—ixtlí.

Through “causing others to take a face” in the Nahua tradition, the teacher can empower Xicana/o youth by embracing their fluid identities (i.e., gender, urban, cultural, sexual, and spiritual) and their forms of cultural wealth by being responsive through the direct teaching of their histories, culture, and lived social realities. Additionally, and in direct opposition to the pervasive naming and assigning of faces to Xicana/o youth in pathological terms, teachers employing the attribute of teixcuútiani can empower and instill “a strong face,” in Xicana/o youth through the daily pedagogical practices of high expectations, building students’ sense of self, affirming their humanity within the totality of their fluid identities, and by being constant reminders to students through both actions and words that they are fully capable of achievement. While implementing this attribute of teixcuútiani may seem trivial or overly simplistic to those outside of the Xicana/o experience, within the context where the actions and discursive practices of racializing, dehumanizing, and marginalizing brown bodies and minds in schools takes place, this instilling of a “strong face” in Xicana/o youth is significant in that it is a determining factor, as are all matters of education, in the quality of life that these youth will eventually experience. In short, these often are matters of life and death for Xicana/o youth.

The second Nahua attribute of a teacher, Teixtlamachtiani, which signifies “one who gives knowledge to the faces of others” (León-Portilla 1991, 194) is a concept that teachers working with Xicana/o youth can operationalize as an empowering, liberatory, responsive, sustainable, and revitalizing pedagogical practice. This giving “of knowledge to the faces of others,” in the Indigenous Nahua sense and tradition, and particularly in an urban schooling context in which the majority of Xicana/o youth are currently situated, is diametrically opposed to the Western notion of “banking education,” which Brazilian critical pedagogue Paulo Freire (1970) warned about, stating, “The capability of banking education to minimize or annul the students’ creative power and to stimulate their credulity serves the interests of the oppressors, who care neither to have the world revealed nor to see it transformed” (54). Rather, for Xicana/o youth who have historically and are currently and disproportionately subjected to this pernicious “banking education” model that views Xicana/o youth as empty receptacles waiting to be filled with essential white Eurocentric knowledge, the concept of Teixtlamachtiani allows the teacher to be facilitator and
co-constructor of knowledge, establishing classroom conditions that are conducive and optimal to nurture the creativity of students. Through providing the -ixtli, meaning both face and eyes, within this banking education context that predetermines what knowledge systems are legitimate and fit within the existing Western epistemological frame, it allows for students the face and eyes to create an alternative lens, one different from the white Eurocentric lens, from which to begin to critically view the world and develop a critical consciousness, where new knowledges and traditionally subsumed knowledges (i.e., Mexican Indigenous knowledges) will begin to emerge.

Borrowing from scholars Teresa L. McCarty and Tiffany S. Lee, I identify the emergence of these new knowledges and once-subsumed Mexican Indigenous knowledges as a result of the teacher enacting Teixtlamachtiani, as a “Culturally Sustaining/Revitalizing Pedagogy” (CSRP) for these newfound faces and eyes within this conceptual framework that afford the Xicana/o to critically examine their own contemporary and sociohistorical contexts of schooling. “First, as an expression of Indigenous education sovereignty, CSRP attends directly to the asymmetrical power relations and the goal of transforming legacies of colonization. . . . Second, CSRP recognizes the need to reclaim and revitalize what has been disrupted and displaced by colonization” (McCarty & Lee 2014, 103). Through the establishing of an educational ecology where students can critically examine asymmetrical power relations, the Teixtlamachtiani provides “knowledge to the face of others,” which can operate as a platform for Xicanas/os to contest colonization. Moreover, with this new knowledge, the teacher in collaboration with Xicana/o students can begin to unpack, identify, revitalize, and engage in the Mexican Indigenous subsumed knowledges that have been concealed through processes of colonization.

Tetezcahuiani, the third Nahua attribute of a temachtian, connotes “one who places a mirror in front of others” and is a liberatory pedagogical tool that teachers can implement with Xicana/o youth, affording critical self-reflection. The teacher engagement with the concept of Tetezcahuiani, allowing and encouraging continuous self-reflection, is one way that Xicana/o students can come to an understanding of who they are in this world. This reflection, which is an integral process of developing critical consciousness, allows students to reconcile with and embrace their individual and collective past as well as create alternative and more humanizing possibilities for their future. Equally, the teacher as Tetezcahuiani engages students in personal, familial, and community reflections of historical memory, processes that in “white-stream” schools are either forbidden or severely limited in scope. Through these reflections students can develop self-discipline, self-respect, self-motivation, and self-determination. The placing of a mirror in front of youth encourages students to examine themselves through their own eyes and cultural perspective and not the eyes of dominant
white society, which Xicana/o youth are consistently forced to do. Pan-Africanist and activist-scholar, W. E. B. Du Bois (1965), providing illuminating insight into self-perception, spoke to the importance of Blacks examining themselves through self-reflection through their own lens: “this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of the world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (45). As a colonized Indigenous people who continue to suffer dehumanization, the process Du Bois alludes to is equally important for Xicanas/os to adopt. Thus, the critical component of Tetecahualtla is that students can gaze to the self and one’s personal and collective history and culture, rather than adopting the gaze of colonizer. This act of looking at one’s self in the mirror through one’s own lens is an act of self-determination that works toward personal, familial, and community liberation.

“One who has a humanizing love for the people,” Netlacameco, constitutes the fourth Nahua attribute of a temachtiani. In a school system and in a society that consistently dehumanizes Xicana/o youth, teachers have the responsibility and obligation to constantly humanize their students. In order to engage in processes of humanization for and with Xicana/o youth, teachers must first facilitate the necessary methods with students to assist them in identifying those structures, policies, and practices that dehumanize them and their community. This process of identifying dehumanization can take place through what Freire called “problematization” wherein through a shared dialectic process students can begin to “pose” their social realities. In facilitating Xicana/o youth through these problematization processes, as illustrated in the educational literature on this subject, common themes of dehumanization consistently emerge, including poverty, racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, police and law enforcement harassment/brutality at schools and in the community, lack of equal educational opportunities, lack of respect with school officials, and a lack of trust with school officials.

Chicana scholars and educators María E. Fráñquiz and María del Carmen Salazar (2004) offer one framework for a humanizing pedagogy as an effective means to counter the widespread dehumanization of Xicana/o youth in schools through the research-based identification of four key elements that specifically include “respeto (respect), confianza (mutual trust), consejos (verbal teachings), and buen ejemplos (exemplary models). Findings suggest that teachers who practice a humanizing pedagogy are instrumental in fostering healthy educational orientations among Chicana/o adolescents, which in turn results in their academic resiliency against all odds” (36). Exercising the attributes of Netlacameco, the teacher can consistently work toward humanizing Xicana/o youth.

“Pero lo más importante es respeto” (but what is most important is respect). For students, respect encompasses a code. It is a personal and collective code that
demands resistance and stamina when the dignity of Chicanos/Mexicanos is threatened. *Respeto*, a key element within this humanizing pedagogical framework, can be realized through the teacher acting as *Netlacaneco*, respecting students in their totality, which includes, but is not limited to, their linguistic, cultural, sexual, spoken, and creative beings. Once this *respeto* is established, with the teacher initiating this process, students will reciprocate to educators and peers. This is the juncture where the work toward the humanizing and “transformation of school structures, educator role definitions and student identities” based on the notion of *respeto* can take place.

The building of mutual trust between teacher and students, *confianza*, within a school system that forces a pathology upon Xicana/o youth, requires the teacher to open up their *yolotl* (hearts) to students. Fránquiz and del Carmen Salazar (2004) describe this humanizing practice of *confianza*, of opening their hearts to students. “They reported that *confianza* develops when interactions in the classroom made them feel comfortable, valued, trustworthy and where time was taken from academic tasks to build trust and caring for each other” (49–50). While this opening up of the teacher may present a certain risk or vulnerability for the teacher, once this trust is established through the demonstration of teacher entrusting in students, the actual work of humanization through the development of mutual trust can move forward.

*Consejos* (verbal teachings) are steeped in Mexican Indigenous knowledge, known as the *Huehuehtlahotlli*, “literally the ‘old word’ of the ancient Americas” (Chávez Leyva 2003, 100). León-Portilla believes that through these teachings, *consejos*, or *Huehuehtlahotlli*, discipline and self-knowledge can be attained. Teachers can implement *consejos* with and for Xicana/o youth, demonstrating the humanizing love of the *Netlacaneco*. As described through a Nahua mother’s *consejo* to her daughter in a Nahua codex, León-Portilla (1991) illuminates the importance of *consejos* as a teaching tool for the ancient Mexican people, translating, “Hijita mía, tortolita, niñita, pon y guarda este discurso en el interior de tu corazón. No se te olvida, que sea tu tea, tu luz, todo el tiempo que vivas aquí sobre la tierra (47).”

Additionally, Fránquiz and del Carmen Salazar emphasize the powerful influence that *consejos* have as a humanizing pedagogical approach for Xicana/o youth, reinforcing the centrality that these forms of teaching are situated within Mexican Indigenous ways of knowing. They assert, that “in the model for Chicano/Mexican students’ academic success, *consejos* are considered a special genre of verbal teaching that typically sounds like a spontaneous homily and is delivered with the intent to influence behaviors and attitudes” (2004, 49). Teachers working toward developing the attribute of *Netlacaneco* have the unique opportunity to access the Mexican Indigenous knowledge of *Huehuehtlahotlli* or *consejos*, an action that affirms the indigeneity of these youth. Simultaneously, in accessing and putting into practice *Huehuehtlahotlli*
or consejos, teachers actively facilitate the acquisition of self-discipline and self-knowledge for their students, all of which signify a humanizing pedagogy for and with Xicana/o youth.

The fourth humanizing pedagogical approach that Fránquiz and del Carmen Salazar identified is conceptually linked to the attribute of Netlaca\neco is “buen ejemplo.” Researchers found that students attributed their academic resiliency or success in high school to “the presence of a more expert caring person in their life, someone who acted as a buen ejemplo (relentless role model)” (2004, 50). Enacting the attribute of Netlaca\neco requires teachers of Xicana/o youth to consistently work toward being a relentless role model. Whether teachers realize it or not, Xicana/o youth are keen observers of their teachers; Xicana/o youth are either positively impacted or negatively impacted by their teachers, depending upon the teacher’s daily actions, discursive practices, and effort put forth in authentically engaging and working toward humanizing and empowering their students.

One approach that teachers can use to serve as buen ejemplo for their students is to see the sacredness within themselves and how it is directly reflected in others; if they do not, the teacher is unable to come to the full recognition of themselves as a whole human being and is therefore unable to reach their full human potential. If the teachers do not see the sacredness in themselves, they cannot see the sacredness in their students; consequently they cannot be present to serve as buen ejemplo. To see the sacredness in others as a direct reflection of the sacredness of one’s self was practiced daily in Tucson’s K–12 Mexican American Studies program with the daily recitation in many classes of the poem In Læk’Ech (“tú eres mi otro yo” or “you are my other me”) (Valdez 1992, 10)—a collective oration based in Mayan philosophy written by Chicano playwright Luis Valdez, and further developed by Tucson temachtiani, Curtis Acosta. In Læk’Ech is a poem that serves as a reminder to all in the classroom that when one does harm to another they are doing harm to themselves, and when one practices acts of kindness and good for others, they are practicing acts of kindness and good for themselves. Accordingly, the teacher’s embodiment of In Læk’Ech serves as buen ejemplo and Netlaca\neco, a relentless role model who has a humanizing love for their students.

The fifth and final attribute of a temachtiani, in accordance with the Nahua, is Tlayolpachitivia, which signifies “one in relation with things, whom makes the heart strong” (León-Portilla 1991, 195). An indicator of a temachtiani as “one in relation with things” is a teacher who has a critical consciousness about the world, including a critical awareness of their physical, ecological, and social surroundings. From this position, the teacher can foster the development in making the student’s “heart strong.” According to the
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Nahua, the heart represents the consciousness of the human being, thus, in making the heart strong, the *temachtiani* is in fact developing and strengthening consciousness in students.

I draw from the work of scholar-activist Curtis Acosta, whose work was based upon Xicana/o Indigenous Epistemologies, to illustrate *Tlayolpachitívia*, the “strengthening of the heart,” or strengthening and development of the consciousness, among students in a high school Chicana/o literature class. It is critical to emphasize that this development of a critical consciousness through the examination of Chicano literature was centered on the students’ sociohistorical experiences: “Students continue to develop critical consciousness through analyzing literature representative of their heritage and history. Students come to see that school no longer exists outside of their experiences, and an academic identity emerges” (Acosta 2007, 46). This heightened consciousness developed for and within students not only afforded them a critical understanding of their world, but it also raised the consciousness of the students to view themselves as academic beings, fully capable of engaging and succeeding in a school system that has traditionally dehumanized and marginalized them. Consequently, the strengthening of the heart, the development of a critical consciousness, and the embodiment of *Tlayolpachitívia* was clearly evident in Acosta’s Chicano literature classes; moreover, these engagements and processes can serve as a transformative model for K–12 Chicana/o Studies teachers to empower their students through decolonizing Xicana/o Indigenous Epistemologies.

**TOWARD A XICANA/O INDIGENOUS EPistemological Praxis: Tucson’s K–12 Mexican American/Raza Studies Department**

The distinguishing element of TUSD MARSD from other K–12 public education programs is that its liberatory and decolonizing pedagogical foundation is based upon Xicana/o Indigenous Epistemologies. Specifically, the privileging and operationalization of the Mexican Indigenous epistemology of the Nahui Ollin—the central space representing “four movements” within the Aztec calendar along with its physical, spatial, scientific, and philosophical meanings—which serve as the main curricular and pedagogical framework of MARSD. Within the Nahui Ollin are the four principles of *Tezcatlipoca*, *Quetzalcoatl*, *Huitzilopochtli*, and *Xipe Totec*. In this section, an analysis of these four principles will demonstrate how this framework found in the Nahui Ollin informed the innovative and liberatory MARSD, contributing to the development of strong cultural identities and the closing of the pervasive achievement gap for Xicana/o youth, which in effect created a Xicana/o Indigenous epistemological praxis.
Tezcatlipoca

Tupac Enrique Acosta, Xicano nation elder, community/Indigenous/human rights activist, and practitioner of the Nahua tradition, describes Tezcatlipoca as “a reflection, a moment of reconciliation of the past with possibilities of the future—not a vision of light but an awareness of the shadow that is the smoke of light’s passing. It is the ‘Smoking Mirror’ into which the individual, the family, the clan, the barrio, the tribe and the nation must gaze into to acquire the sense of history that calls for liberation” (Acosta 2006). The process of gazing into the “Smoking Mirror”—Tezcatlipoca—as alluded to earlier in Ramírez Oropeza’s analysis, is a process to regain the historical memory at the individual and community collective levels, which leads to individual and community liberation. This critical reflection of self not only affords Xicana/o youth to reconcile and embrace their personal, familial, and community histories, but it acts as the very foundation upon which Xicanas/os can be creators of their own futures.

In my sixteen years of being privileged to serve Xicana/o youth employing the Indigenous epistemology of Tezcatlipoca, along with my colleagues in the former MARSD, we witnessed hundreds of students who experienced this decolonizing and liberatory process, whereby they expressed that coming to know themselves through this Indigenous knowledge allowed them to embrace their identities and fostered their academic success. Equally important, many students communicated that this process of coming to know and love themselves through Tezcatlipoca had in fact saved their lives.

My development as a Chicana within these last couple of years has really been life changing for me. Before I enrolled in these classes, I really didn’t have a strong identity. I mean . . . I knew that I was Mexican, but, it was always talked about in a negative way at school. Teachers were always trippin’ on how I wore my makeup, how I talked, how I sometimes spoke Spanish, and how I dressed. One crazy teacher who got frustrated with us Brown girls in the class told us that “Latina girls were gonna get pregnant anyways” or something stupid like that. That’s really sad because a lot of us Chicanas are told that so much that we begin to believe it. We believe that we are not beautiful, that we are not smart . . . that we will not go to college. Now, because of practicing Tezcatlipoca in our Chicano Studies classes and with my family and my community, I am a proud Xicana. I know that we have a beautiful and strong history. I always speak up when I hear teachers or students hating on Chicanos and I now know why inequalities at school happen. (Arce 2010, 17)
This young Xicana who matriculated through the MARSD demonstrated an understanding of the concept of Tezcaltipoca as evidenced through the individual as well as collectivist orientation when she said she was a “proud Xicana” and emphasizing that she has “a beautiful and strong history.” Equally, this student’s knowledge of self and community through Tezcaltipoca was used as a platform from which to engage in discursive practices of resistance to the dehumanization of Xicanas/os, which worked toward creating more humanizing, in the words of Tupac Enrique Acosta, “possibilities of the future.”

Quetzalcoatl

“From the memory of our identity, the knowledge of our collective history we draw the perspective that draws us to the contemporary reality. From this orientation we achieve stability, a direction found in time-tested precepts that allows our awareness and knowledge of the surrounding environment to develop. This awareness and knowledge merge to form the ‘consciencia’ of a mature human being” (Acosta 2007). Tupac Acosta’s analysis of Quetzalcoatl provided the MARSD the understanding that the merging of our critical self-reflections and the regaining of our collective memory with the obtaining of an awareness of knowledge (both a historical and contemporary understanding of our lived realities, which are consistently subsumed in public schools) would develop a consciencia within our students. Analogous to the Freirean principle of “conscientization,” students engaging in the Xicana/o Indigenous epistemology of Quetzalcoatl are critically analyzing the social realities that are steeped in their collective historical memory, identifying barriers that impede their progress in becoming fully human, and from this state of critical consciousness, they have the possibility to envision, or in the words of Chicana scholar Emma Pérez, to imagine liberatory possibilities of the future through a “decolonial imaginary” (1999) to take action to transform their reality.

Former MARSD temachtiani, Curtis Acosta (2006), describes Quetzalcoatl, the second principle within the Nahui Ollin as “precious and beautiful knowledge. Learning about our history follows self-reflection. Gaining perspective on events and experiences that our ancestors endured allows us to become more fully realized human beings” (37). Through learning the history of their ancestors, all that they endured, and the resiliency and strength to not only survive, but in fact thrive within colonial conditions, Xicana/o youth engaging in the Indigenous epistemological practice of Quetzalcoatl affords them the opportunity to see themselves as individuals within the larger Xicana/o-Mexicana/o community, as active subjects and creators of history, countering the master U.S. historical narrative that is taught throughout
K–12 public schools and that has identified Mexicans in the United States and beyond as mere objects of history without agency. Consequently, this understanding encourages and affords Xicana/o youth to view themselves as creators of history, using their ancestors as a model, from which to practice full agency to act as subjects in obtaining and creating precious and beautiful knowledge.

Romero, Arce, and Cammarota (2009) designate this creating and gaining of precious and beautiful knowledge, Quetzalcoatl, as a result of a “barrio pedagogy” that was implemented by the former MAS teachers where classroom conditions were established by the teachers in order that students could develop the intellectual capacity, both organic and institutional, that is centered on the development of intellect and wisdom and that is rooted in community knowledge as well as the certain knowledges that are needed for students to successfully navigate and negotiate the educational institution.

It is also crucial that we define these critical intellectual engagements as taking place both in the barrio and in the school. Moreover, the third space that is created in our classrooms is a convergence of the barrio and the institution. This third space challenges the status quo and the stereotypes that exist within our educational institutions. This is a newly created pedagogical space that is driven by the need to challenge the epistemological and ontological understandings of our students. (Romero, Arce & Cammarota 2009, 226–227)

The acknowledgment that students, their familias, and their community are both bearers and creators of knowledge is central to the Xicana/o epistemological principle of Quetzalcoatl. While the knowledge systems, culture, and lived experiences of Chicanas/os have been marginalized and stripped from them in public schools, the former MARSD classes embraced this precious knowledge and identified it as a pedagogical tool for the purpose of developing the consciencia or critical consciousness that is necessary for the liberation and self-determination of the Xicana/o community.

**Huitzilopochtli**

“La voluntad. Will. The warrior spirit born with the first breath taken by each newborn infant in the realization that this human life we are blessed with is a struggle requiring physical effort for survival. The exertion of this life-sustaining effort evolves into a discipline, a means of maximizing the energy resources available at the human command which in order to have their full effect must be synchronized with the natural cycles” (Acosta 2006, 7). Tupac Acosta's perspective of Huitzilopochtli provided critical insight that
informed the MARSD to understand that self, familial, and community reflections, as well as the obtaining of knowledge and developing of a consciencia, or critical consciousness, was necessary in facilitating processes of decolonization and liberation with and for Xicana/o youth; nonetheless, these processes of reflection (Tezcatlipoca) and obtaining and constructing knowledge (Quetzalcoatl) were inadequate unless they were acted upon through direct individual, familial, and community action.

Huitzilopochtli—the will to act—literally translates as “hummingbird to the left.” This is in reference to the heart being on the left side of the body and the hummingbird’s tenacity of work rate to fly and the strength of its will. It is also symbolic of the sun rising in the wintertime. This concept has meaning for the will of a person or people to be positive, progressive, and creative. Huitzilopochtli, as praxis, presents students with the will and courage to enact their positive, progressive, and creative capacities to create change for themselves as well as for their community. In this sense, the social realities that students find themselves situated in can be directly acted upon to improve their overall conditions. The engagement of Huitzilopochtli, the will to act, demonstrates the agency held by Xicana/o youth to critically reflect upon their past and present lives (Tezcatlipoca), while strengthening their resiliency through the obtaining and constructing of knowledge as well as the development of the necessary academic skills, social capital, and confidence (Quetzalcoatl), and to take action as historical beings in constructing their futures (Huitzilopochtli). This process, what Romero, Arce, and Cammarota refer to as the “tri-dimensionalization” (2009, 223), constitutes a decolonizing and humanizing methodology where the practice of self-determination by Xicana/o students signifies their engagement in a Xicana/o Indigenous epistemological praxis.

**Xipe Totec**

The ultimate objective of engaging in the Nahui Ollin as Xicana/o Indigenous Epistemologies is transformation. This movement of transformation, as represented through Xipe Totec, is consistent with the natural lifecycles, further demonstrating that the Nahui Ollin as a liberatory pedagogical tool is not a static model, rather it is one that is fluid, adaptable, and transformative. “Xipe Totec—transformation. Identified as our source of strength that allows us to transform and renew. We can achieve this transformation only when we have learned to have trust in ourselves” (Acosta 2007, 38).

Xipe Totec encapsulates the three principles of Tezcatlipoca, Quetzalcoatl, and Huitzilopochtli, for the accumulation of the processes within all three of these principles results in transformation. For Xicana/o youth engaged in the Nahui Ollin, once they come to a reconciliation of their personal, familial, and
CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

As a decolonizing and liberatory education project, the MARSD teachers’ work was to decolonize and liberate the classroom. This was done through challenging the coloniality of power present within the existing policies, processes, and practices of schools. The main tool that was used in this decolonial project was the centering, privileging, and full implementation of Xicana/o Indigenous Epistemologies. Transformative Chicana/o Studies high school educator and scholar, Cati de los Rios (2013), contends that MARSD was able to do this through the processes of “Equitable curricular innovation [that] includes a reconceptualization of subject matter and the active recovery, (re)imagination, and (re)investment in indigenous paradigms” (60). What distinguished the MARSD as a decolonial education project, and more important, how it can serve as an exemplary for existing and future K–12 Chicana/o Studies–Ethnic Studies programs, was that these liberatory educational processes took place within the context of over five hundred years of colonization, bringing us to the contemporary situation where many Xicana/o, Mexicana/o, and other Indigenous-origin people have internalized this oppression and have developed a postcolonial identity, manifesting itself through internalized oppression in which Xicanas/os view their own culture as inferior to the dominant white culture. In short, these decolonizing, liberatory, humanizing, and empowering educational processes, executed through Xicana/o Indigenous Epistemologies, took place in the “belly of the beast,” in public schools where traditionally and presently these institutions serve as the main sites of colonization, dehumanization, and “deculturalization” of Xicana/o youth (Spring 1994).

It is critical to acknowledge that like most (if not all) decolonial projects, they are met with a powerful resistance. This was the case with the MARSD, where this resistance manifested itself in the State of Arizona’s outlawing and
the TUSD’s capitulating to the racist law by the elimination of this decolonial project; for it was the “destiny” of the white power structure that could not permit brown bodies, minds, and spirits to “manifest” themselves through self-determination, self-love, self-directed academic achievement, and particularly the self-identification of Xicana/o youth as Indigenous. Immediately following the elimination of MARSD, Roberto “Cintli” Rodríguez (2012) exemplified what lengths the white power structure of schools took to keep Xicana/o Indigenous Epistemologies from Xicana/o children in Tucson:

Teachers and students were confounded, not sure of what could be taught or discussed in their classrooms. Among the situations that arose, one with MAS teacher Norma Gonzalez is informative. While Gonzalez was teaching the meaning of the Aztec Calendar to her students, the principal instructed her to take down the image. The principal cited the TUSD vote, explaining that teaching the calendar was prohibited because it symbolized Mexican culture. (127)

In this instance, it was the decolonial imagery within the Aztec calendar that represented a threat to the white hegemony of schools, symbolizing “Mexican culture” and knowledge as forbidden, directly sending the message to Xicana/o youth that their culture, heritage, and very “Mexican-ness” is illegitimate, illegal, and not worthy of study, thus, re-establishing the continuation of the historical and psychological trauma that has historically been placed upon Xicana/o youth.

If only for a moment, for fourteen consecutive years (1998–2012), the MARSD was able to facilitate decolonizing processes with and for students in removing themselves from what urban education scholars Django Paris and H. Sami Alim (2014) reference as “the White Gaze or colonizers gaze” though using our own Xicana/o methodologies, lenses, and worldviews, which in this case came in the form of Xicana/o Indigenous Epistemologies. Moreover and equally important, along the lines of what Tintiangco-Cubales et al. (2014) term “community responsiveness” as a foundational tenet of Ethnic Studies. These epistemologies spilled out into the community and the reciprocation of community cultural practices in the form of Xicana/o Indigenous Epistemologies consistently replenished our classrooms. It is critical to note that Xicana/o Indigenous Epistemologies are not static, rather, they evolve and are adaptable to the current dynamic, lived realities, and the fluid culture and identities of Xicana/o youth, thus, they are “sustainable.”

For future analyses of transforming where Xicana/o and other marginalized youth in urban schools are situated, teachers and researchers of K–12 Chicana/o Studies–Ethnic Studies and beyond can draw upon the conceptual framework of Xicana/o Indigenous Epistemologies as offered herein to engage
in and facilitate the processes of decolonization, liberation, and humanization for and with these youth. Additionally, critical questions for further consideration of decolonizing and liberatory methodologies should be addressed, such as, What are the educational strategies and structures that can engage students in healthy constructions of Xicana/o and other marginalized youth of color's possible selves? How can educational structures, policies, practices, and mindsets better support Xicana/o and other marginalized youth of color in the reconstructing of their cultural and academic identities in the social and academic spaces provided in the K–12 pipeline? What are the resources that Xicana/o youth can draw upon in the communities from which they come (as well as in their schools) that are based in Xicana/o Indigenous Epistemologies to construct healthy cultural and academic identities across the years of K–12? How do teachers, with support from and accountability to students and community, implement Xicana/o Indigenous Epistemologies into their daily practices within and outside of K–12 Chicana/o Studies programs, while maintaining the integrity of these knowledge systems amid the attacks from schools, political bodies, the white power structure, and from supposed allies (both white and Brown) that are certain to come down on these programs, epistemologies, and practices? While this list of questions is not exhaustive, it serves as a starting point from which teachers and K–12 Chicana/o Studies–Ethnic Studies programs can engage, dialogue, and imagine the revolutionary, decolonizing, and liberatory possibilities. One thing is certain, the forces of colonization and dehumanization are persistent and pervasive; we simply need to look no further than where Xicana/o youth are situated in public schools today, and more specifically, we can look to the tragedy of what transpired with Tucson’s MARSD for substantiation.

NOTES


2. I choose to spell “Xicana/o” with an “X” rather than a “Ch” (“Chicano”) because it privileges and is an affirmation of the Indigenous heritage of Mexican (and other Latin American) origin people. I also chose the “a/o” rather than an “o” (“Chicano”) because it signifies the inherent equality between female and male, deconstructing inequalities found within gender dynamics, as well as drawing upon Mesoamerican epistemologies where the duality and balance of the feminine and masculine are essential to the worldview of Mesoamerica, being in sync with the natural lifecycles (see these positions in Berta-Ávila’s “The Process of Conscientization” and in Chávez Leyva’s “In Ixtli In Yollotl”). Also, “Xicana/o” much like “Chicana” stresses a politicized person who works toward fighting all forms of oppression (i.e., racism, sexism, classism, homophobia) and the struggle for social justice for all people.
3. Xicana/o Indigenous Epistemologies is the study of Mexican Indigenous knowledge, those knowledges subsumed through colonization, those knowledges that are being revitalized (i.e., Danza Azteca, Nahualt language, Mexico cosmology, Temezcalli—“sweat lodge,” and Xinachtli—“agricultural practices”); and those that are present and have survived and evolved despite colonization, but that are not openly recognized as being Indigenous (i.e., familial practices, linguistic practices, cultural practices, and spiritual practices) among Mexicana/o-Xicana/o people.

4. According to León-Portilla, the Nahua people are the majority group of Indigenous people of Mexico and central America, existing before and after the Spanish colonization of Mexico. Their language of Uto-Aztecan is called Nahualt. According to León-Portilla, evidence suggests that the Nahua peoples origins reside in the present-day southwestern United States, thus the Xicana/o peoples connection to the land.

REFERENCES


