When Stepping to College is Stepping to Consciousness

Critical Pedagogy, Transformational Resistance, and Community Building with Urban Latin@ and African American Youth

Nicole D. Hidalgo
University of California, Santa Cruz

Jeffrey M. R. Duncan-Andrade
San Francisco State University

It helps us think in another way. Like before I just wanted to go to college and, I don’t know, just get on with my life, but thanks to this program I now understand why it’s important for me to go back to my community, or at least a place that’s similar to my community... Because, I could come back and help others, and those others could go and then come back, and that’s how we start rising.

(Lisette, third-year student in the Step to College program)

Introduction

In this chapter, we attempt to unite the conceptual frameworks of critical pedagogy (Darder, 1991; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Freire, 1970/2002) and transformational resistance (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001) to explore the ways teaching beliefs, practices, and curriculum can encourage transformational resistance among urban youth. The first section of the chapter discusses the educational theory that guided the pedagogical practices discussed in the second section.

The second portion of this chapter provides an on-the-ground look at how classroom curriculum and pedagogy can encourage young people to challenge, disrupt, and transform social inequities in their school and community by using the tools of literacy, research, and media production. It examines the process of cultivating transformational resistance within an educational intervention called Step to College (STC).

The STC program was designed by the current Dean of the College of Education at San Francisco State University as a response to the disturbingly low levels of academic engagement, achievement, graduation, and college eligibility among poor and working-class youth of color. The STC program partners a university professor with a local high school, allowing students to cross-enroll in a high school class and a university seminar class each semester. By taking these classes from a professor, students are exposed to the rigor and culture of university courses. Ultimately, the program aims to prepare underrepresented youth for college success and foster in them a sense of critical civic responsibility to create positive social change. The STC program currently operates in one East Oakland (California) public high school and one San Francisco public high school. Specifically, the second section discusses a 10th-grade urban sociology class in the East Oakland STC program.
Setting

The STC program in East Oakland takes place in an “intensely segregated” high school. The class had 30 students—16 Latin@s (10 girls and 6 boys) and 14 African American students (8 girls and 6 boys). All the Latin@ student participants are first-generation immigrants whose primary home language is Spanish, and they all will be the first in their immediate family to attend college. The African American students will also be first-generation college students, with the exception of one young woman who will be second-generation. The class was untracked (Oakes, 1985), although the overwhelming majority of the students in the class would have been considered low achievers by traditional measures at the start of the program. Approximately half of the students were recruited by a school leader based on their reputation as some of the most challenging students to work with in the school. The other half of the students chose the course from a list of several elective classes offered at the school. The school was on a block schedule, which meant that our class met three times a week for ninety minutes.

Duncan-Andrade, who has been a teacher and teacher educator in urban schools for 15 years, volunteers as the lead instructor for the STC courses. He teaches the courses while also serving as a tenure track professor at San Francisco State University (SFSU) in Raza Studies and Education. Hidalgo volunteers as the teaching assistant in the course and is also the research coordinator for the project. She juggles her research responsibilities with individual student support responsibilities, particularly for students confronting major social, economic, and/or academic challenges.

Methods

Using critical ethnographic and action research methods, this study analyzes the STC program over a three-year period (August 2005 to June 2008). Data collection techniques in the class include daily videotaping, analyzing student work and achievement data, and interviewing the STC students, parents, and teachers. Critical ethnography aims to challenge power structures, engage in emancipatory practices, and understand how schools are contradictory sites that both “reproduce and transform power” (Collatos, 2005, p. 131; see also Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In a critical paradigm, researchers “function as intellectual advocates and activists” and “use the tools of research to discover inequities and to find ways...to bring about change in inequitable distributions of power, cultural assets, and other resources” (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999, p. 45). Critical researchers “believe that institutions can be transformed, and they seek ways of using research to serve the transformation process” (p. 46). Critical ethnography utilizes traditional ethnographic data gathering techniques such as surveys, interviews, observations, and field notes, and adds the critical elements of subjectivity and intervention (Carspecken, 1996; Delgado-Gaitan, 2001).

The study also employs a form of action research methods (McNiff, Lomax, & Whitehead, 1996; Somekh, 2006) that we might call “inside research,” because the practitioners are using the tools of research to analyze their own work. Some treat this as a limitation and question the ability of practitioners to make valid claims about their own teaching (Huberman, 1996). Yet, action research takes the stance that “only those close to a particular situation can truly understand it” (Morrell, 2004b, p. 154). This study uses data triangulation to ensure the validity of our claims by comparing and contrasting them across multiple data sources, such as participant observation, surveys, and interviews (Zeichner & Noffke, 2001). Ultimately, our model for educational research is grounded in cariño (care), or relationships based on reciprocal care, trust, respect, and love (Duncan-Andrade, 2006a; Valenzuela, 1999). These reciprocal relationships aim to produce “real change in the schools where the research is taking place” (Duncan-Andrade, 2006a, p. 454).
Youth and Community Building

As teachers are asked to focus more of their energy on test scores, they often de-prioritize curriculum and pedagogy that builds critical consciousness, solidarity, and a sense of community among Latin@ youth. However, the national emphasis on basic skills, standards, and tests under the guise of increasing accountability for public education has not produced more achievement for youth of color, nor has it improved accountability. Equally as troubling is the fact that this approach to improving education for youth of color all but ignores most of the research on effective teaching, which overwhelmingly suggests that performance tends to be highest in classrooms employing curriculum and pedagogy that foster a sense of community among the students. This chapter is further confirmation of that expanding body of research that continues to prove that accountability and achievement are possible when teachers treat the classroom as one of the most important and logical places to build community with youth. We do not treat the idea of classroom as community lightly. So, we will argue that the results produced by STC must be understood as the outcomes of an intense commitment to the development of pedagogy and curriculum that create meaningful relationships between teachers and students, while maintaining a high level of critical intellectual rigor.

We frame our discussion of this approach to the classroom as a central site for community building with Latin@ and African American urban youth by drawing from literature on resistance and critical pedagogy, such as the works mentioned in the introduction. Our framework recognizes that young people’s opposition to inequities in their schools and communities takes many shapes and forms, including self-defeating, reactionary, conformist and transformative behaviors (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). By recognizing the potential of youth resistance to foment social change, this approach to working with youth moves us beyond negative reactions to youth resistance, and toward a plan that embraces the potential of youth resistance to be directed toward liberating purposes for communities such as East Oakland. This approach complicates how we understand our responsibilities to urban youth, forcing us to consider the value of pedagogical strategies that develop transformational resistance rather than devising strategies for eliminating resistance in youth.

Transformational resistance refers to young people’s behaviors that consciously oppose social oppression by engaging in actions that promote social justice (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). It is a form of resistance that responds to the structural mechanisms and cultural processes in schools that help reproduce social inequalities. Scholarship on socioeconomic and cultural reproduction contends that meritocratic ideologies and structural mechanisms in U.S. public schools such as academic tracking and ability grouping often work to maintain the social status quo (Althusser, 1971/1994; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Carnoy, 1974; Oakes, 1985). Several studies have documented how young people resist these schooling conditions through counter-school cultures or oppositional frames of reference (Fine, 1991; MacLeod, 1987; Ogbo, 1978, 1995; Willis, 1977). These studies suggest that students tend to resist schooling if they feel it is unlikely to result in social mobility, or if it conflicts with the values and beliefs of their communities or cultural groups. Each of these studies has connected students’ acts of resistance to detrimental consequences such as academic failure or dropping out of school, and these consequences have been connected to the process of social reproduction. However, by conceptualizing students as agents who actively resist structural constraints they recognize the possibility for young people to resist in ways that can disrupt the reproduction of inequalities and bring about positive social change.

Several scholars have reexamined the concept of resistance to account for the healthy and liberating ways that poor and working-class youth of color engage in actions that counter domination and exploitation (Ginwright, Noguera, & Cammarota, 2006; Robinson & Ward, 1991). Giroux (1983, 2001) characterizes resistance as behavior that critiques domination and struggles
for individual and social emancipation. This conception of youth resistance requires an analysis of the "range of oppositional behaviors" and an examination of "how subordinate groups embody and express a combination of reactionary and progressive ideologies, ideologies that both underlie the structure of social domination and contain the logic necessary to overcome it" (Giroux, 2001, p. 103). This reexamination moves beyond a narrow analysis of resistance as merely self-defeating to a more nuanced understanding of the multiple and contradictory ways that young people resist, the motivations and social critiques that guide their actions, and the possibilities for breaking the cycle of social reproduction in schools and the larger society (Akom, 2003).

Critical theories such as women of color feminism (Hill Collins, 1989; hooks, 1989; Hurtado, 1989; Zavella, 1991), critical race theory (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001), and Latin@ critical race theory (LatCrit, Fernandez-Truyol, 1997; Johnson, 2002; Valdes, 1996) also extend the analysis of resistance beyond oppositional behaviors that maintain current relations of power. By situating people of color's experiential knowledge and historical struggles against racial injustices, these theories reveal the abundance of "accumulated assets and resources" that low-income youth of color draw from their families and communities (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). These frameworks are mindful of the structural constraints under which poor people of color in the United States often live, and also highlight their strengths and daily acts of resistance against these oppressive conditions. They recognize structural commonalities, but emphasize the "intersectionality" or "multinatural" identity of multiple forms of oppression (e.g., race, class, gender, language, citizenship status, sexual orientation), which contribute to a range of social critiques, motivations, and resistive behaviors within cultural groups. In contrast to traditional conceptions of youth resistance, these theories contend that oppositional behaviors and worldviews can support rather than hinder social transformation.

The concept of transformational resistance was initially developed to describe Chicana students' participation in the 1968 East Los Angeles student walkouts and the 1993 UCLA Chicana and Chicano Studies protests (Delgado Bernal, 1997), which are historical moments that cannot be accounted for within traditional notions of youth resistance. The students who participated in these acts of transformational resistance against educational inequalities reported having access to transformational role models, or "visible members of one's own racial/ethnic and/or gender group who actively demonstrate a commitment to social justice" (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 322). They also attributed their critiques, motivations, and resistant behaviors to having relationships with transformational mentors, or those who "use...their own experiences and expertise to help guide the development of others" (p. 322). Educational research sometimes portrays family, peer, and community forces as hindering the academic success of low-income students of color (Phelan, Davidson, & Yu, 1998; see also Valencia & Solórzano, 1997). Yet, examining the influences of transformational mentors and role models reveals that family, peer, and community forces also serve as sources of strength and support for poor and working-class students of color, and nurture their critical sensibilities to fight for social justice.

Youth transformational resistance takes shape in both subtle and explicit ways. External transformational resistance is conspicuous, overt behavior that "does not conform to institutional or cultural norms and expectations" (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 325), such as participation in boycotts or protest marches. In contrast, internal transformational resistance refers to subtle or silent resistance in which students appear to conform, for instance, doing well in school in order to come back to their community (or a community like theirs) and use their knowledge of dominant institutions to implement social change. Solórzano and Delgado Bernal assert that educational researchers most often overlook forms of internal transformational resistance. They explain, "too often, external resistance is romanticized by liberal and progressive scholars while internal resistance is not identified, misidentified, or even ignored" (p. 326). To identify these internal forms and to avoid romantic notions of transformational resistance,
we argue that it is necessary to understand not only the motivations behind youth resistance, but also the day-to-day, on the ground processes that lead up to more overt or public moments of resistance.

Transformational resistance is a mode of behavior that strives for social justice outcomes, but should be understood as a complex process rather than a final or unchanging product. One's consciousness of structural inequities and motivation toward social emancipation is not static and is often "uneven" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2005). For instance, one might resist in transformative ways against discrimination based on socioeconomic class or race, but not against inequities based on gender or sexual orientation. Moreover, people may engage in transformational resistance some of the time, and at other times behave in self-defeating, reactionary, or conformist ways. The goal, however, is a lifetime commitment to resisting all forms of social oppression; a journey none of us may ever complete, but one that we can all be committed to developing in ourselves and our young people.

The problem is that there is a dearth of educational research on how teachers actually go about cultivating transformational resistance within a K-12 classroom setting, or what types of support are required to develop and sustain this type of resistance within structural and political constraints (Solórzano & Yosso, 2005). Further research is needed to better understand the ways in which transformational resistance can be fostered through teaching and learning among adults and youth in a classroom community. In an effort to fill this gap in the literature, we have been investing our own practice as educators by asking: (a) What does transformational resistance look like when it is implemented in classroom practice, and (b) What outcomes emerge for teachers and students engaged in such a process?

Cultivating transformational resistance in the classroom involves a critical pedagogy, which does not seek "to transfer knowledge" but to create the possibilities for the production or construction of knowledge" (Freire, 1998, p. 30; emphasis original). For critical pedagogues, knowledge is created in a process of co-participation, with the explicit aim of critiquing and responding to material and social conditions that are oppressive. Critical pedagogues act to create tangible change with rather than for students, and understand themselves to be servants of the people as opposed to leaders or missionaries whose goal is to "save" disenfranchised youth.

Critical pedagogy brings oppressed students' histories, biographies, and systems of meaning into the classroom so they can "name and authenticate their own experiences," which are often blatantly ignored by traditional curriculum and pedagogy (Darder, 1991, p. 80). This approach can help students to identify and analyze how oppression impacts their lives, and to understand themselves as agents with the ability to create positive social change. Thus, critical pedagogy is a pedagogy of resistance that aims to "construct different sets of lived experiences—experiences in which students can find a voice and maintain and extend the positive aspects of their own social and historical realities" (Darder, 1991, p. 90). This type of pedagogy helps to cultivate a "community of practice" (Wenger, 1998) in the classroom that engages in transformational resistance. Thus, the combination of the principles of transformative resistance and critical pedagogy aims to produce a critical transformative pedagogy. This pedagogy works to build a sense of community in the classroom and creates "a shared commitment and a common good," as well as "a climate of openness and intellectual rigor" (hooks, 1994, p. 40). The classroom community is joined in solidarity (Freire, 1970/2002), and relationships are grounded in cariño and love (Valenzuela, 1999). Ultimately, this pedagogical approach emphasizes a critique and resistance of social inequalities to foster student actions that fight for individual and collective empowerment.

Urban Sociology at an East Oakland High School

The remainder of this chapter will examine this critical and transformative pedagogical approach. We will present the "Doc Ur Block" project, the major class undertaking for the spring semester.
in the Step to College students' 10th-grade year. The project developed students as sociological researchers of their own communities taking them through the five stages of critical praxis: (a) identify a problem, (b) analyze the problem, (c) develop a plan to address the problem, (d) implement the plan, and (e) evaluate the impact of the plan (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). The curriculum that was used to move through these stages with students will be discussed in three segments.

**Segment 1: Identifying and Analyzing a Problem** The first two stages (identify and analyze a problem) took about eight weeks. The class was introduced to three key sociological terms using readings, lectures, films, and discussion. These terms were hegemony, introduced through excerpts from Gramsci (1971) and films such as *Bus 174* (Padilha & Lacerda, 2002) and *The Matrix* (Wachowski & Wachowski, 1999); counter-hegemony, through Freire (1970/2002), Solórzano and Delgado Bernal (2001), Malcolm X's speeches, Lolita Lebrón's life, and hip-hop artists such as Immortal Technique, GOODIE MOB, and Tupac; and habitus, through Bourdieu (1999) and *The Matrix* (Wachowski & Wachowski, 1999).

Next, the class developed a list of influential elements of youth popular culture that they believed promoted these three sociological concepts in their communities. Their list included television shows, movies, music, fast food, snack food, advertisements, videogames, fashion, and professional sports. Students were then placed in groups of five according to the neighborhoods where they lived. Each group chose a guiding sociological term to add to the above listed three core terms. These were sociological terms that we had discussed in class or that students had investigated on their own, such as "social degradation" or "social reproduction." In their groups, students used their selected term and the three core terms to conduct a sociological analysis of the various forms of popular culture that young people interact with on a regular basis. We did some initial modeling of this process with the class, after which the students spent a week doing their own research and analysis.

After their study, students used PowerPoint to develop 25-minute research presentations to explain the presence or absence of the four sociological terms in the popular culture they studied. Presentations were attended by members of the school community, including teachers, administrators, other students, community members, and parents. The presentations consisted of a literature review, in which they explained the terms they had learned to the audience. This forced them to rephrase much of the academic language traditionally used to explain sociological phenomena so that people without their level of training could understand their work. For instance, to describe the difference between "materialism" and "popular materiality" to the audience, Yamina explains, "Materialism is when you're greedy about your stuff. You want all the materials for you. But then materiality is when you want to get material things, but to bring them to your community. That's the difference."

Following the literature review, students presented examples from their research to reveal the existence of these sociological phenomena in popular culture and to explain their analysis of its impact on the community. Amadi exemplifies this in her analysis of popular songs:

Examples of counter hegemony in popular culture include TLC's song "Unpretty," Tupac's song, "Keep Your Head Up," and India Arie's song, "Video." The song, "Video," by India Arie is important because she encourages young women to be themselves because that's where true beauty comes from, being yourself. As a young woman growing up in East Oakland there are not a lot of positive things I'm used to listening to, so that's why these songs are so important.

Amadi notes that although much of the popular music she listens to contains lyrics that promote the dominant hegemony, she also finds examples that counter negative stereotypes and provide
positive inspiration. These types of investigations helped students become more critically aware of socially oppressive and socially transformative messages they encounter through popular culture on a daily basis.

Segment 2: Planning and Implementing through Street Sociology  In this segment we prepared students to move their research to the community. We spent a week-and-a-half giving students basic training in qualitative research methods. We began by introducing them to an adapted version of Burawoy’s (1998) “extended case method.” Burawoy’s approach has the ethnographic researcher conduct the following four steps: examine existing theory, enter the field as a participant-observer, document counter-instances of the theory, and reconstruct theory on the basis of those observations. We adapted Burawoy’s approach by putting the tools of study, research, and theory construction into the hands of the students themselves (Burawoy’s “natives”), rather than keeping them in the hands of the university researcher.

Each research group used their lived experience and the aforementioned studies of social theory and popular culture to develop a hypothesis about what they would see when they researched their community. The idea here was that they would take the prevailing logic about their community (dysfunctional, pathological, resource poor, disenfranchised, hopeless, hostile), including their own notions, and investigate whether these assumptions were borne out in fact or whether there was significant evidence to counter these opinions.

To prepare the class to carry out the extended case method in the community, students received a week of training on basic ethnographic research tools: digital video and still photography, observational field notes, formal and informal interviews, basic surveys, and artifact collection. Students practiced these techniques with each other and around the school and then hit the streets of their community over the next three weeks to collect information. We took out two groups each day, one group during lunch and another group after school. Each group had at least one video camera and one still camera to gather visual evidence and to conduct interviews. Groups were largely self-directed during their field research. They told us where they wanted to go, and they decided how to split themselves up.

Segment 3: Evaluating—Data Analysis and Research Conference  After the field research, the next four weeks were spent analyzing the data and preparing for a research conference that would once again be attended by key stakeholders in the school community. The groups had to prepare three main products for the conference: a 20-minute PowerPoint presentation, an 8- to 10-minute “Blocomentary” (documentary) film, and a 12- to 15-page research report. The division of labor for these products was the decision of the research group. The minimum requirements for each of the assignments were as follows: (a) the PowerPoint presentation needed to have slides covering their literature review of social theoretical terms, research methods, hypothesis, findings, and reconstructed theory; (b) the research report needed to have sections covering the same topics as the PowerPoint; and (c) the “Blocomentary” film needed to have visual examples of the social theoretical terms, counter-instances, and reconstructed theory.

Implications of a Critical Transformative Pedagogy

Gramsci (1971) wrote that “all [people] are intellectuals, one could therefore say; but not all [people] have in society the function of intellectuals” (p. 9). He went on to argue that schools are often the social institution used to validate this unnatural division in a society, one where an individual is cast as either homo sapiens (one who thinks/works with his or her mind) or homo faber (one who labors/works with his or her hands). Education should deconstruct the division between thinker and worker and replace it with a paradigm that values the intellectual potential in all people.
The Doc Ur Block project was a commitment to those principles by providing young people an education that prepared them to critically analyze their world. It put tools of critical thinking, research, and intellectual production in their hands so that they could counter-narrate pathological stories of their families and communities. Along the way, many students discovered that they also had come to believe the dominant discourse about their community and had lost sight of the countless indicators of hope and strength that are present on their blocks everyday. Shakari notes,

What we thought we would see was showoffs (people who are flashy and flaunt what they have) and wannabes (people who try to imitate the people who are flashy)...But what we saw on the block was counter hegemony, people wanting to help others instead of themselves. Most people in our community cared deeply about the neighborhood, wanted to contribute to the community, and were not overly concerned about material things.

This project did not attempt to shelter students from the harsh reality of urban life. In fact, while one group was conducting an interview on the block, they witnessed the shooting of a high school-aged student and chose to include the footage of the incident in their film. When they returned to the classroom to reconstruct their theory, they developed the term “habitus of hopelessness” to describe these types of self-defeating actions by community members. However, the project also allowed them to find counter-instances to negative responses to the conditions of oppression in the community. That same group called this the “agency of hope.” Every group reconstructed social theory to capture the strength and self-determination that they witnessed. As one example, Alejandro and Isabel made the following comments while presenting their group’s research at the American Educational Research Association’s (AERA) national conference. After introducing the research methods his group used, Alejandro stated:

Our findings were very polarized. Some people had hope that Oakland would change, some didn’t have hope, and these were people living in the same community. Based on this, my research group decided to come up with some terms, which were “habitus of hopelessness,” which is basically a pattern of behavior from lack of hope, and “agency of hope,” which is when people decide to make a change in the community.

To demonstrate the habitus of hopelessness, Alejandro played a clip from his group’s video documentary where students interviewed community members on their block:

[Alejandro]: Do you think Oakland will ever change/get better?
[Community member 1]: I strongly disagree.
[Community member 2]: Oh no, hell no, not in the Town.
[Community member 3]: There are a lot of things going on here like the Hyphy movement, everybody wants to have drugs, everybody wants to have this whole persona about themselves that they want to be thugs. That’s what it is.

After this film clip, Isabel walked to the podium to continue discussing the group’s research findings, and to explain their reconstructed theory and its implications for Oakland. In front of a standing-room-only audience of more than 150 graduate students and professors, Isabel said:

This interview data reveals what we term the “habitus of hopelessness,” which is a pattern of thinking, speaking, and behaving as if there is no hope. It gets reproduced within a social group, in this case, among our urban poor and working class communities...The implications of what you just saw in the video are incidences of violence, degradation of women, and a higher value placed on material things. This can help people feel hopeless, which
allows the problem to reproduce itself. But we also saw evidence of “agency of hope,” such as we see in this video clip.

To demonstrate this agency of hope, Isabel played a brief video clip of a community member telling the youth researchers, “And I love you little ones trying so hard. Nobody else is trying.” Then, Isabel turned back to the microphone and said:

What this shows is that there is hope in our community, and we are the hope. Every member of our class of 2008 tutors at Howard Elementary. Several times a week we go to the mayor’s office and to the Black Panther’s Commemorator and work with our community members. But most important, to quote Huey P. Newton, “We view each other with a great love and understanding, and that’s what sets us apart from other oppressed groups.” Quoting Gandhi, “We have to be the change we wish to see in the world.” And we saw multiple examples of people in our community doing similar things. What our research suggests is that as an individual in our community we have the choice to be hopeless, which will lead to social reproduction, or to be hopeful, which will make change. By our being here and continuing our work we choose the latter. We choose to take responsibility for ourselves and for the future of our community.

The students’ analyses and constructions of social theories as they applied to their communities are indicators of the power of the critical transformative pedagogical approach discussed in this chapter. However, the real value of this project rests in the way it helped students re-envision themselves, their communities, and their roles in creating and contributing to counter-narratives that promote hope and self-determination. Since they presented their findings to their community, students have presented their work on this project more than a dozen times to youth, educators, and educational researchers from across the nation. Additionally, they have distributed more than 50 copies of their documentary films, many of which are being used by teachers and teacher educators to develop curriculum projects for other urban students.

Looking Forward

The Doc Ur Block project allowed this group of urban Latin@ and African American youth to critically examine the impact of media and popular culture on their community. It also positioned them to take media production into their own hands in order to “document and publicly voice their ideas and concerns regarding the most important issues in their lives” (Goodman, 2003, p. 3; see also Duncan-Andrade, 2006b; Morrell, 2004a, 2004b). This critical transformative pedagogy creates the opportunities for youth to use the tools of literacy, research, and media to gain deeper and more critical understandings of the forms of oppression and resiliency within their neighborhoods. These tools positioned them as public intellectuals during their research and when they disseminated their findings to the community and national audiences of educators and educational researchers.

Yet, Doc Ur Block was part of a process that goes beyond apprenticing youth in critical research methods. The broader vision of the pedagogy used in this project, and the STC program, is to foster youth transformational resistance through academic resilience and achievement. This includes an explicit commitment to cultivating Latin@ and African American youth who resist social and educational inequities. Nationwide, Latin@ and African American students graduate from high school prepared for college in disproportionately lower numbers when compared to their White and Asian peers (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2006, 2007a, 2007b). East Oakland youth (predominantly low-income Latin@ and African American youth) are no exception. They graduate from high school and go to college in numbers disproportionately lower than
their peers in the district, the county, and the state. Of all 9th graders entering East Oakland high schools in 2002, only 32% graduated four years later, and only 10% were eligible to apply to the California public university system (UC/CSU). In contrast, all 26 students in this year’s STC senior class have applied to one or more four-year universities.

STC is not perfect by any means, and has faced some notable barriers. There has been some ebb and flow in the student enrollment in the program, but patterns of school persistence in STC continue to surpass those of the Oakland Unified School District. In the second year of the program (2006–2007), 27 of the original 30 students re-enrolled in STC for their 11th grade year. This 90% persistence rate for STC compares favorably to the district’s 75% persistence rate for Latin@ and African American 11th graders that year.

We are not arguing that the Doc Ur Block project alone will result in youth transformational resistance, but that it is a piece of the larger curriculum, pedagogy, mentorship, and advocacy that works to cultivate public intellectuals and “insurgent scholars” (Ladson-Billings, 2007). Doc Ur Block is one of several projects that have apprenticed the STC youth in research methods, media production, academic writing, and public speaking to help them “step to college,” as well as to “step to [a] consciousness” that encourages them to take action against the inequities they witness and experience daily. We describe their academic achievement and public intellectualism as transformational resistance because the STC youth are learning to use their academic skills and resources not to escape their community, but to foment social transformation and renewal in their community. Whether they plan to become doctors, lawyers, teachers, architects, interior decorators, or fashion designers, their aspirations for the future are linked to the well being of their community as a whole. This is captured in aspiring clothing designer Ismael’s comments:

I feel like I will contribute with my t-shirt design idea because I’m teaching somebody else and I’m not taking for granted everything I’ve learned in the STC program...For them to see a story in the t-shirt, that’s my vision, so for a person to look at my design and see the struggle and see the suffering and be like, there’s something we can do. They’ll just glance at the image that’s on my shirt, and I’ll teach them a little bit of knowledge by them just glancing at me. I’m still trying to claim better schools, and better stuff for our community, but with a career that I would like to do. And I think that everybody in this program should find that connection, whatever they’re going to major in.

In addition to nurturing a community-oriented sense of purpose for their lives, the STC community is also committed to building tight-knit family-like relationships, and providing the day-to-day support needed to attain college aspirations. In another interview, Marisol discussed the differences in the types of relationships, levels of support, and academic rigor she encounters in her STC class and her other classes:

You hear teachers be like, “Yeah you need to go to college. Oh, college this, college that,” but that’s nothing. Stop saying, “You guys need to go to college,” and help them go to college. We’re getting the support because of the STC teachers but other teachers just be like, “You guys have to go to college.” Okay. How?...You go to STC and you have this family thing right here, and we’re thinking way beyond the lines we usually think of. And then we go to our other classes and it’s like the level we have at STC just goes down...They make me feel like I’m grown [in STC]. They are talking to me like I’m not even a little kid no more. And then I go to my other classes and I’m over here like, okay I already know this...STC teachers make us want to come to the class...how you guys talk to us, what you guys make us do...And then just the fact that we have everybody and all the support there at STC...So you’re like, “fuck that,” you’re not going to just let that go. You have to take advantage of all that support
and go there. And then you go to [the other classes] and you're like, "Whatever, I can't wait for lunch, or I can't wait to go home."...To me it's just about getting my credits. I just want to get it done...And at STC it's like I'm getting ready for other stuff, not just getting my credits. They're preparing us for life.

Marisol identifies several key aspects of the STC program that help prepare her for college and life in general: (a) rhetoric is accompanied by actual support, (b) it's a family-like community, (c) teachers have high expectations of students' intellectual capabilities, and (d) course work makes students feel more mature by engaging with issues that are relevant and meaningful to their lives.

A more comprehensive analysis of the extent to which the STC program is enhancing youth transformational resistance would require attention to the daily practices and struggles within the STC classroom and the students' social and personal lives within and beyond the schoolhouse doors. It would also entail an examination of the range of "oppositional behaviors" these youth engage in (e.g., reactionary, self-defeating, conformist, transformational), and the various forces that influence those actions. We need to look beyond observable behaviors to gain a deeper understanding of the factors that lead to transformative resistance. That is, an in-depth comprehension of the critiques and motivations that inform their behaviors is also necessary (Giroux, 1983, 2001; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). We contend that the ability to cultivate and understand resistance at this level is enhanced when relationships among participants, teachers, and researchers are based on cariño (Duncan-Andrade, 2006a). Such family-like relationships within a classroom community cannot be created through intent or rhetoric, but only through sustained actions over time.

As we pursue these deeper understandings about cultivating transformative resistance in our community, we can say with certainty that Latino and African American students participating in STC are achieving levels of social and academic success that are rarely found in Oakland public high schools. Their skills as critical thinkers, writers, researchers, and public speakers continue to show measurable improvement. They have found the motivation to persist and pursue college in a school district where less than 10% of their peers find similar results. As educators and educational researchers, we attribute the successes of STC to a number of factors that have been discussed in this chapter. However, perhaps the most significant of these factors is STC's commitment to using critical pedagogy to develop a classroom community focused on transforming the habits of hopelessness.

We cannot argue that this program has fully met the challenge of cultivating classroom success for all of our students. But, we do believe that our work adds to the growing body of evidence that suggests there is a profound impact on the achievement of Latino and African American urban youth when classrooms are comprised of academically rigorous material, critical pedagogy, and committed and caring teachers. When these conditions are put into place in schools, they serve as key institutions for building transformative communities both in and out of the classroom. Such a pedagogical approach not only produces college bound students, but also prepares those college students to come back to serve the community. To truly build a transformative community with youth we must provide critical spaces that prepare young people to serve. These are the preconditions for transforming our communities.

Notes

1. An "intensely segregated minority school" is a school that enrolls more than 90% students of color (Oriﬁeld, 1996; Rogers, Terríquez, Valladares, & Oakes, 2006).

2. There are discontinuities and critiques between women of color feminism and critical race theories, but they share in common a complex analysis of the intersectionality of oppression, a focus on the
experiences and histories of communities of color, and an understanding of resistance that moves beyond self-defeating oppositional behaviors.

3. Data for Asian American students are not disaggregated. Current statistics "primarily reflect East Asians' overall academic successes and obscure the scholastic struggles of groups such as Southeast Asians and Pacific Islanders" (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2007).

4. District-wide, 46% of the original number of entering ninth graders in 2002 graduated from high school four years later, and 76% were UC/CSU eligible. Countywide, the rates increased even further to 70% high school graduation and 33% UC/CSU eligible, which surpassed the California's state-wide rates of 67% high school graduation and 24% UC/CSU eligible.

5. Data from http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/DstEnrAll.asp?cYear=2005-06&cChoice=DstEnrAllSelect=0161259---OAKLANDUNIFIED&Level=District&myTimeFrame=S&cTopic=Enrollment&cLevel=District&TheName=Oakland

6. This phrase came from an audience member's response to Hidalgo's presentation on Step to College at the 2007 American Anthropological Association conference.

7. In their 11th-grade year, STC students completed research on the quality of their school and created a viable plan for school improvement. During their 12th-grade year, they are researching the presence and/or absence of human rights in classic literature and popular films, as well as within their schools and the Oakland community. The youth analyze why these human rights are essential to a person's quality of life and how to fight to gain access for those who are denied their basic rights.

References


Nicole D. Hidalgo and Jeffrey M. R. Duncan-Andrade


