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# Pedagogical Conocimientos: Self and Other in Interaction

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## Pedagogical Conocimientos: Self and Other in Interaction

**Josephine Méndez-Negrete**

*This essay illustrates the process of *conocimiento* in the context of instruction and at a roundtable/workshop at the 2013 National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies Regional Conference at the University of Texas-Pan American (UTPA), McAllen, and includes a discussion on classroom experiences with the guide. This pedagogical activity and discussion examines and illustrates the process of doing *conocimiento* as a teaching/learning approach for coming to knowledge about the Self in relationship with others, through a *conocimiento* guide designed for the activity. *Conocimiento* is a process that unfolds in the context of unearthing knowledge in relationship to the daily life we engage with others as we come to Self-knowledge. A discussion of the guide, framed inside the voices of those who have participated in this social learning activity, along with a reflection of the implementation of *conocimiento* at the conference are discussed.*

*Without a sense of identity, there can be no struggle.*  
—Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

In our round table/workshop—“Politics of Ethnic Identity: Pedagogical Conocimientos in the Classroom,” at the 2013 NACCS Tejas FOCO regional conference, Jesus Jaime-Diaz—doctoral student and advisee—and I facilitated a session on *conocimiento* as pedagogical praxis. Our experience with the process became the frame of reference for our work. It is not our intent to engage a theoretical discussion, although concepts such as funds of knowledge that speak to ways of knowing, as is the case with the work of Norma González, Luis C. Moll, and Cathy Amanti in *Funds of Knowledge: Theorizing Practices in the Households, Communities, and Classrooms*, may inform our work. These scholars conceptualize people as competent and knowledgeable because of their life experiences in a variety of settings, and *conocimiento* similarly conceptualizes human beings as able, capable, creative, and as carriers of knowledge. Because we begin with the premise of co-creations, *conocimiento* presupposes that the creation of knowledge must necessarily take place in a critical environment, following Paulo Freire tradition positing that teachers/learners are co-creators of knowledge. Moreover, this approach to learning contests institutional practices whereby students are treated as empty vessels

awaiting the banking of facts from those who possess expert knowledge, as Freire argued in **Pedagogy of the Oppressed.**

Knowledge about the social world departs from the general to the specific, depending on our point of departure. For example, examining the development of children and their cognition, Jean Piaget argued that a child's development determines her or his cognition based on assumptions that begin with the individual. Lev Vygotsky, on the other hand, places knowledge formation in the sociocultural context of environment that later becomes internalized in the individual—this is the notion of *educare* upon which much of the philosophy of *conocimiento* rests—we know ourselves through others in a multiplicity of settings. With his social constructivist notions of the world, Vygotsky more closely fits the ways in which *raza* conceptualize knowledge.

The aforementioned theorists, with the exception of Freire, whose notions of knowledge emerged in the context of the favelas in Brazil, examine middle class experiences, while Freire' emphasizes oppression rather than domination. Edén Torres, in *Chicana Without Apology*, takes on this contradiction as a potential way to blame the victim for their own oppression. In her text, one can conclude that unpacking power from the dominant perspective more readily opens up the possibilities for change through nuanced analysis of knowledge inside the dialectic of oppression/domination. Some of the above theories could frame the work of *conocimiento*. However, a genealogy of the theories informing the process would be a longer project to undertake.

In this essay, we engage a pedagogical discussion to examine and illustrate the process of doing *conocimiento* as teaching/learning strategies for coming to knowledge about the Self and others in a social learning environment. This process unfolds in the context of social interaction while actively coming to self-knowledge through reflexivity. The implementation of

conocimiento in the classroom and at the National Association for Chicanas and Chicanos Studies, Tejas FOCO facilitates discussion of this learning experience.

### **Why Use Conocimiento?**

When critical pedagogues rely on conocimiento to join in the creation of knowledge, we necessarily begin with the understanding that conocimiento implicates its dialectical quality of desconocimiento or not knowing, also known as “el no.” Through this teaching/learning approach, we become aware and move into consciousness in relationship to the material, social, cultural, and spiritual forces that frame our own coming to self-knowledge. This is particularly the case in relationship to notions of power. We are better able to make visible power inequalities when we tease out and unpack the ways in which conocimiento and desconocimiento inform cultural and ethnic identity and our sense of belongingness.

The process we employ in conocimiento is complimentary to Gloria E. Anzaldúa’s philosophy “that guides your feet along the path, gives you el ánimo to dedicate yourself to transforming perceptions of reality and thus the conditions of life” (540). This praxis is one that initially began under the tutelage of Chilean scholars who immigrated to California’s South Bay Area after the coup in Chile. It was then that Chicanas/os and other progressive educators/activists took to the philosophy of Paulo Freire and devised variant approaches for engaging communities who desired to explore their own liberation. Chart pack papers or butcher paper pieces served as mediums by which citizens made visible their effort to document struggles in the barrios, as we organized our communities to fight for our rights.

Still, conocimiento was not just about struggle. Historically, those who worked in the development of this process include Roberto Vargas and Samuel Martinez—Berkeley students and activists (they published *Razalugia: Community Learning for a New Society* in 1982, Weird Books, and Roberto Vargas’s *Provida Leadership: Raza Student’s Guide to Social Transformation*,

published in 1985 by Razagente Associates, San Francisco, California). Others included Francisco Hernandez, Amalia Gonzalez del Valle, Kathy De Leon, Raymond Segura, Josie Torralba Romero. Soon our practice began to appear at college campuses, community meetings such as Trabajadores de la Raza, and in our work with families and youth in our respective employment sites and community involvements. In San José, California, in collaboration with Margarita Luna Robles, Jorge Gonzalez, Maria Oropeza, Rosemary Cadena, and others, I devised a poetologia conocimiento to encourage the creation and validation of barrio poets who wanted to share their work, and used it to continue developing their creative expression with conocimiento as the medium.

Our aim was to organize and document the struggles with which the groups contended, be they family or community issues, or struggles inside educational institutions as first generation students. The emphasis was not on knowing how to write or spell our ideas—it was on learning how to name and take on, in whatever way possible, the inequalities we experienced, often resorting to drawing and performing our experiences, as we moved beyond describing what it was we wanted to get across. Estos foros soon became sites of knowledge that mutually benefited listeners, speakers, and witnesses alike, as we created community and gathered the collective knowledge we gained as we practiced the reciprocity of knowing. With the belief that we all carry knowledge, have the capacity to know, and have variant ways to express it, we asserted that no one single individual can possess all knowledge—we all carry knowledge.

Anzaldúa (*This Bridge We Call Home*) provides a theoretical foundation for this practice, when she claims que “Llevas la presencia de éste conocimiento contigo. You experience nature as ensouled, as sacred. Éste saber, this knowledge, urges you to cast una ofrenda of images and words across the page como granos de maíz, like kernels of corn” (539). As she conceptualizes,

she clearly articulates the pain of coming to grips with our miseducation or our participation in substandard schooling that teaches to stereotypic notions about raza's intellectual capacity and abilities, based on tracking or normative knowledge from a Western perspective.

It is inside this hegemonic socialization that we re-experience nuances of institutional oppression and domination, as we navigate the everyday of our lives. That is, depending on our positionality in the context of power, some display notions of superiority and dominance over immigrants, working class, and—worse yet—undocumented students. Privilege by gender, class, and sexuality also play out in the dialectic of oppression/domination. In that context, *conocimiento* facilitates the unearthing of all the various social positions and locations that frame our identity—without our identities, we are no one.

With few exceptions, engaging *conocimiento* as pedagogical praxis results in the re-stimulation of the trauma or entitlement that shapes who we are as persons. Anzaldúa suggests that, “[b]y redeeming your most painful experiences you transform them into something valuable, algo para compartir or share with others so they may be empowered” (540). It is in this sharing that we gain a deeper and more insightful understanding of our selves and others. Thus, within the teaching/learning experiences we negotiate, we encounter negative expectations and stereotypes—those presuppositions and worldviews associated with knowledge that makes our group invisible or distorts our reality. Still, with *conocimiento*, as teachers/learners we encourage each other to open all our senses so that we may guide the process. As Anzaldúa writes: “Attention is multilevel and includes your surroundings, bodily sensations and responses, intuitive takes, emotional reactions to other people and theirs to you, and most important, the images your imagination creates—images connecting all tiers of information and their data” (542).

Conocimiento processes or guides are not for entertainment purposes or empirical tools for collecting data (although with the appropriate approvals and design they could be)—the guides are living instruments that retrieve knowledge that has long been lost or hidden from sight. To become invested learners, we cannot hide in fear of the unknown, rather as critical educators we must, as Anzaldúa posits, confront our traumas and “work through your fear; playing safe could bury you” (544). It is only then that choice becomes an option in the process of *conocimiento*, as each participant begins to uncover and make visible those fears, secrets, or shames that have kept our family histories and institutional injuries hidden or silent. *Conocimiento*, thus, inspires a self and other confrontation as we unpack the contradictions of “living in despair, self-loathing, and hopelessness” (45). According to Anzaldúa, this is the only way that we can find order and meaning to the reality that we have experienced so that we can take our story to the world unblocked “from our own power” so that we can then “activate the inner resources” that motivate us to create social justice and social change. Finally, with this approach, we shift realities by developing “an ethical, compassionate strategy with which to negotiate conflict and difference within self and between others, and find common ground by forming holistic alliances” (545).

Throughout the process of *conocimiento*, and when we voice our experiences, teachers/learners begin to gain an understanding of the ways in which the United States imaginary defuses our power through structural systems that fragment our daily lives as persons marked with second-class status. Through *conocimiento* we can examine racialized ethnicity, socioeconomic, gender, and sexual inequalities and begin to peel off the embedded layers of colonization imposed on the self and our group, thus providing us an understanding of ethnicity in all its nuances, including the ways in which we disidentify with our roots.

José Esteban Muñoz, in *Disidentification: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, argues that disidentification serves as a concept to analyze the performative qualities of sexual identity. It unfolds “the survival strategies of the minority practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of the subjects who do not conform to the phantasms of citizenship” (74). I argue that, as is the case with queers, Mexican-descent individuals have had to devise variant strategies to negotiate ethnic identity as they interact with misinformation about who they are as persons of color in the context of a white supremacist society that derides them as second-class citizens and devalues them as ethnic members of a group.

Exposed to our racialization and derision we have confronted, through interactions and discussion of our historical legacies we gain insight into our ethnic identity and liberation. It is when we self-interrogate inside multiple identities that we gain agency as social actors, shedding desconocimientos or distorted realities about who we are as citizens of this nation—Americans in name only—and thus learn to contest stereotypes and inequalities that maintain us as internally colonized as devalued people. Still, for some of us, it is better to be second-class Americans, rather than have to negotiate a derided Mexican identity that marks us as non-American. We refuse “to confront the traits and habits distorting how we see reality and inhibiting the full use of our facultades” (Anzaldúa 541). As teachers/learners who have lived inside colonizing lived experiences, it is more comfortable to deal with what we know, rather than challenge the practices that define us as second-class or unequal citizens, just as it is safer to teach what we know.

Making visible and unearthing our histories through *conocimiento* gives us alternative explanations of our Self and our group. By sharing and voicing who we are, we come to self-knowledge as *conocimiento* brings us to awareness about our reality and into the threshold of



consciousness—a complex state of knowing that facilitates a critical examination of daily life. According to Anzaldúa, “[l]iving in nepantla, the overlapping space between different perceptions and belief systems,” (541) motivates us to question the ambivalence and uncertainty of being. It is in that in-between space that we become “aware of the changeability of racial, gender, sexual, and other categories rendering the conventional obsolete” (541). As teachers/learners we experience hegemonic cultural power when we use “[distorted notions of what it means to be Mexican] to single out and negate those who are ‘different’ because of color, language, notions of reality, or other diversity . . .” (541). If we are to change our communities, and ourselves, this approach to teaching shows the possibilities en concerns.

### **Conocimiento Experiences in the Classroom**

We modified our *conocimiento* guide to assess the ways in which we understand, examine, and engage ethnic identity, and how we begin to identify ourselves, for our workshop at UT-Pan Am. Each individual would have to examine a multiplicity of sociocultural, psychological, emotional, and spiritual sites we necessarily relate to in our daily lives, to reflect on the ways in which we become conscious and active participants in the creation of knowledge. The guide provides a frame of reference for extracting family histories from both maternal and paternal lines, beginning with various sites for the formation of identity, such as relationship to Self and place in the make up of the family.

To partake in social learning and share knowledge about *conocimiento*, we handed out each guide, reminding the participants that the process is one that facilitates our coming to knowledge about Self in interaction with community. We encouraged our students or workshop participants to refrain from thinking in binary response of right or wrong, pointing out that our aim is to use *conocimiento* as a tool that unearths the knowledge we carry, including what we have amassed from formal, informal, official or alternative sites.

We allotted fifteen minutes—with an additional ten if necessary—to complete the *conocimiento*. We asked the participants to suspend the notion of the *conocimiento* guide as a questionnaire or survey that taps into their knowledge, emphasizing that the activity is one created to pull together the knowledge we carry about our Self and others, including our relational interactions with family, community, and other institutional arrangements. Moreover, we pointed out that there are often gaps or lack of knowledge about family culture and social histories for any of us. Further, we instructed students or participants to not second-guess themselves, but to write the first concept, idea, or response that came to mind. In addition, we reassured them that we are not concerned with spelling or the ways in which they write their response, so long as the writing is legible.

After completing the process, participants were encouraged to review their answers as they waited for others to complete the process. Students/participants were then instructed to interrogate what they had learned about themselves or others, as they identified trends or patterns in the information, along with clarifying or adding any thoughts or feelings that came to mind by way of *reflexión*—brief discussion and analysis of what they have learned. At this time, they were also encouraged to engage silences or empty spaces in their narrative, as they were urged to write additional reflective narrative on the comments or free write sections. Finally, as a learning community, participants individually shared their *conocimiento* with the group or in smaller groups to later contribute what they learned with the larger community, where they share information and begin the process of community building where respect, reciprocity, and mutuality are common grounds that trumps invisibility and anonymity in the creation of knowledge.

With very few exceptions, this type of instruction is outside of the students'/participants' experiences. Thus, as teachers/learners we must reassure each person to

share only that with which they are comfortable as facilitators deal with the emotional discharges that surface in the community building process.

**Illustrating Conocimiento:**

SELF		FAMILY...		
Name	I like to be called	My family type is	I rank # _____ in the family	Our family ethnicity is ...

Depending on the course content, ontology and pedagogy merge to provide foundational questions to create a conocimiento guide. For example, in Latina/o Cultural Expressions, a Mexican American Studies (MAS) course I instruct, the categories that guide our conocimiento focus on three generations of both paternal and maternal lines, and includes open-ended statements about: Religion, Work and Education Legacy, Ethnic Identity—Self and Ancestral, Personal/Social Identity, Gender, Place of Birth, Immigration, Family Income, among others.

RELIGION: For each relative listed below, identify each with their respective religion ...						
			Maternal (MG) Grandparents		Paternal (PG) Grandparents	
Self	Mother	Father	MG-mother	MG-father	PG-mother	PG-father
WORK LEGACY: Identify each job held the longest by each member of your family line ...						
			Maternal (MG) Grandparents		Paternal (PG) Grandparents	
Self	Mother	Father	MG-mother	MG-father	PG-mother	PG-father
EDUCATION LEGACY: Document the years of education for each member of the family ...						
			Maternal (MG) Grandparents		Paternal (PG) Grandparents	
Self	Mother	Father	MG-mother	MG-father	PG-mother	PG-father

The section outlined above facilitates an examination of status and class locations. The emphasis is on education and employment, as these concepts are often associated with class mobility, albeit the relationship also shows the influence of religion. In Mexican Americans in the Southwest, another course for our BA in MAS, the ways in which structural patterns or systemic designs shape the historical legacies for students emerge as they examine the formation of a dual wage system and a separate and unequal education.

By probing the educational and employment patterns of the learning community, students/participants come to learn that their grandparents or parents did not have a choice for an education—rather their only option was to become employed in agriculture or

manufacturing—with very few exceptions of a great-grandfather, father, or few mothers obtaining a higher education. With the retrieval of their family history, however incomplete, students or participants soon link the knowledge they carry to those findings presented by David Montejano in *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986*, and Vicki L. Ruiz in *Out of the Shadows*, and other texts about Mexican American experiences. Other foci relate to the examination of contemporary or continuing issues we confront in our daily lives, such as immigration and wages:

My take on immigration is ...

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Family Income – To the best of my knowledge, our family income is:

- Under \$10,000
- \$11,000 - \$20,000
- \$21,000 - \$30,000
- \$31,000 - \$40,000
- \$41,000 and above
- I decline to disclose my family income

Those who participate in *conocimiento* learn to understand the ways in which socioeconomic class and other social constructions of identity obfuscate the power differentials complicit in the privilege and entitlement of wealth, race, and other social positions that mediate equality, justice, and fairness in our nation-state. Moreover, problematizing such

categories provides students insight into the conditions of their communities of upbringing. This peels the layers of internalized oppression or responsibility for the systemic inequalities they have experienced in their communities and in their education. Thus, knowing family income is but one way to analyze each student's circumstances.

Most learn to understand variant knowledges they carry, as they conceive of their families as a source of creating meaning for being in the world. A discussion of social positions allows the students or participants to interrogate gender arrangements and other structural concerns. For example, reflections about language use, education, and the values and beliefs upheld by family members become central in our discussions, as facilitated by the *conocimiento* focus below. Awareness about identity increases.

Check the response that most closely reflects your family experiences with housing:	Rent	Buy	Don't Know
All members of my mother's family ...			
Most members of my mother's family ...			
Some members of my mother's family ...			
No members of my mother's family ...			
All members of my father's family ...			
Most members of my father's family ...			
Some members of my father's family ...			
No members of my father's family ...			
<b>Household / Family Forms:</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>N/A</b>
I grew up with a stay-at-home mother ...			
I come from a single parent home ...			
Grandparents / other relatives were part of my family ...			
I grew up with a step-mother ...			
I was raised by a step-father ...			
I was adopted into the family ...			
My family consists of two moms ...			
Two dads make up my family ...			

Gender: (Check appropriate category.)      Female \_\_\_\_\_ Male \_\_\_\_\_

Language

My first language is ...	I am fluent in ...	I can read and write ...

Education (Fill in the first two cells, then circle the appropriate answer.)

The high school I attended was ...	Neighborhood I grew up is called ...	I attended public school ...		I went to private school ...		Attended public and private schools ...	
		YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO

My mother believes education is ...

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With education, my father believes I can ...

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For both sides of my family, education means ...

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Generation in College ... Mother's side \_\_\_\_\_ Father's side ... \_\_\_\_\_



## **The Meaning of Ethnic Identity—Conocimiento Knowledge**

Since 1999, when I first arrived at the university that employs me, I have used *conocimiento*. Premised on the beliefs that Hispanic or Mexican-descent students are knowledgeable about their ethnicity and how it frames their everyday experiences living in a community that has over 50 percent Mexican- or Hispanic-descent individuals, I learned that more often than not, this was not the case. Perceiving themselves as the majority population, most had not problematized the meaning of ethnicity inside the derisiveness of being Mexican in Texas (See *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986*).

Currently, this trend seems to be changing. In the most recent courses I taught, with a total of 60 students or 69 percent of the cohort, students displayed deep knowledge of ethnicity and the ways in which this identity contributes to their sense of self, as they connected it with family and community.

Starting with both paternal and maternal grandparents, students identified their ancestral ethnicity over three generations. Among this most recent group, twelve individuals identified as mixed heritage, with two Whites qualifying their identity as mixed with Portuguese and Mexican. Eleven named themselves Mexican across all generations, nine as Hispanic, and four adding the qualifier African opted for Black as their ethnic identity. One student, a MAS major, offered:

[Ethnicity] has become a REAL part of how I identify myself in society. I've embraced it because I respect the struggle of my family members and I know that I can help make a difference in our culture through education and mentorship for our youth.

In his statement, and in most other responses, there is an association to the individual and community, when speaking about ethnicity. As one stated, "It helps to group a person to a

culture, identity and community. It matters because it shapes a person's history." For them, understanding ethnicity facilitated coming to cultural knowledge, and knowing their ethnic allows them to "know more about yourself and your culture," as "ethnicity is a part of who we are and represents a meaningful past." One nuanced the inequality experience, when adding: "Ethnicity shapes how you will be treated and perceived and judged for the rest of your life," because "it is a part of your character and your identity."

Suffice it to say, students' notions of identity did not just focus on cultural expressions or understandings of culture, rather students recognized that, "[a] person's identity is shaped by their struggles and privileges that come with their ethnicity." Still, pointing out that even when they have the privilege of citizenship, "there is more to me as well and I want to know/learn." The two exceptions in this summative analysis were a mixed heritage student and one majority student. The Anglo-Mexican saw the point of privilege, when he added: "I'm proud to be of Hispanic ethnicity because more scholarships are available and it looks good on resumes," while the Anglo student became the one dissenting voice: "It matters but it should not define you as a person." This is a typical response for students who have never had to problematize their ethnicity or the entitlement of white supremacy.

In addition to documenting ancestral ethnicity, students provide their own ethnic identification by selecting from the options provided. When self-identifying, outside of their family history, 24 students or 34 percent chose a single identifier. Sixty-six percent opted to choose multiple identity categories, with a minimum of two identities and a maximum of five reflecting the ethnicity of their ancestors. Of those who opted to identify as mixed heritage, 66 percent were female, who selected three to five ethnic categories. While males represented only 34 percent of the population, they most often chose two categories, with one opting for three

and another identifying five. Ethnicity, in the lived experiences of these students, thus surfaced as multiple, fluid, and contextual.

Still, ten percent of the student cohort expressed that “Ethnic Identity does not matter.” In their comments, each student emphasized her or his humanity, not to sabotage ethnicity—as is most often the case with Anglo students—but to underscore its importance, as each expressed their right to equal treatment, implying awareness about living inside a culture that does not give them the same treatment. Capturing the nuances of identity, MAS major offered:

How can I know the person I am, if I don't know where I come from? The community where I live, my history allows me to understand my culture and why I speak the way I do, and practice the beliefs I have—from religion to *mal de ojo*—I am my ethnicity.

Once again, in this and most responses, an association with the individual and the community emerges. Some clarified: “It helps to group a person to a culture, identity and community. It matters because it shapes a person's history.” There is recognition for the importance of history as taught in the family. “Ethnicity is a part of who we are and represents a meaningful past,” and it “shapes how you will be treated and perceived and judged for the rest of your life.” Clearly, the students' notion of identity did not just focus on cultural expressions to describe a surface understanding of culture, rather they recognized that, “[a] person's identity is shaped by their struggles and privileges that come with their ethnicity,” with the caution that, “[i]t matters but it should not define you as a person.” This speaks to the ambivalence about being in an institution of higher education where they constantly negotiate their sense of belonging.

To cross-reference the talking and doing of ethnicity, students respond to open-ended statements. It is how they gained the option to examine the meaning of ethnicity in the context of sociocultural expectations, as outlined below.

Ethnic Identity:

The category or categories that reflect my ethnic identity is/are: (Check all that apply to you.)

Hispanic, not of Mexican-descent    Other \_\_\_\_\_

Mexicana/o

Chicana/o

Mexican American

Mexican

Latina/o

White, non-Hispanic

Black or African American

Ethnic identity – (Check statement that best reflects your beliefs, elaborating on the space provided.)

Ethnic identity matters because ...	
Ethnicity does not matter because ...	

Latino stereotypes I know about include:

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Mexican stereotypes: (Fill in a response in each of the boxes provided below.)

I've heard ...	Others have used against me ...	I use ...

When others use stereotypes to refer to others, I feel ...

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Other open-ended statements provide a writing space whereby students or participants have the opportunity to think through and reflect on the ways in which they have conceptualized themselves as ethnic beings. With the exception of Free Speech, which often becomes associated with notions of Americanization and equality, the prior two elicit information about the knowledge they gained through the *conocimiento*.

Other thoughts:

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Comments:

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Free Speech:

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### **Teaching/Learning Interactions in a Roundtable/Workshop Approach**

The *conocimiento* guide previously outlined facilitated our roundtable/workshop at the 2013 National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS) Tejas FOCO at the University of Texas-Pan American. Approximately twenty-five members attended, including two who arrived late into the process but remained to witness our interactions. Included in the audience were undergraduates, graduates, and recently minted doctors, as well as three professors from Texas and California. Co-facilitator Jesus Jaime-Diaz assisted.

To start our *conocimiento*, we began with brief introductions—first name only and institutional affiliation—followed by a discussion about teaching/learning pedagogical strategies for coming to knowledge about the Self in the context of our learning interactions with each other, clarifying that regardless of rank and status each person would participate in the process. Moreover, we stated that it was our intent to impart and share our knowledge about *conocimiento*—Jesus as a mentee-in-training—by sharing our completed guides. Before they put pen to paper, however, I instructed the participants to refrain from thinking about

their responses as right or wrong, rather to see this as an archeological process where they were unearthing knowledge they carry, including what they have amassed from formal/informal and official sites of knowledge, as well as their lived experiences and cultural legacy.

They were given fifteen minutes to complete the guide and reminded that the *conocimiento* design was to explore knowledge about the Self in relationship to others, including family, community, and institutional everyday interactions. Cautioned to not second-guess or doubt themselves, all were encouraged to enter the first concept, idea, or response that came to mind.

### **Memories and Emotions in the Unearthing of Hidden Histories**

With more than twenty years of experience of doing *conocimiento*, I have learned to come prepared to engage emotional work and to mediate the energy that often surfaces for those who do *conocimiento*, and to expect resistance from those who fear exposure and are not the sharing-type. As teachers/learners, we must be prepared to engage emotional discomfort when those who are participating experience internalized oppression or domination, depending on the trauma or entitlement inscribed in those who are participating.

Compassion and love are the paths that guide this teaching learning/experience, and we begin with the recognition that each person has had a life path that deviates from our own. Each one of us brings unique ways of understanding our relationship to each other, communities, the nation, and the globe. For these reasons, when those participating show their discomfort or uneasiness, facilitators must be ready to guide and place in context their experience, affirming their right to express the emotions that emerge as a result of speaking or making visible something they did not previously know or recognize.

After they completed and reviewed their responses—to identify the gaps, patterns, or trends that emerged in the workshop—participants spoke about the one thing they learned about themselves or their family. All had the opportunity to respond, with the understanding that they could pass, although I reserved the option to elicit their response, reminding them that we were creating a learning community and the best way to engage in social learning is by sharing the knowledge we bring into the process.

Emotions and new findings surfaced for every one present at the workshop. Each person learned something about the Self in relationships to others that might have not been previously obvious, including historical gaps and missing family connections that had been lost through migration and immigration of ancestors.

### **Conclusion: *Conociendonos* in Process**

In our 2013 NACCS Tejas FOCO session, roundtable/workshop participants learned the philosophical framework for *conocimiento*. They completed the guide, discussed the process, and engaged in the creation of knowledge in a collaborative learning environment whereby each participant did their part to illustrate and exemplify the meaning and context of their experiences. Those who participated expressed their gratitude for having learned how to use *conocimiento* and some verbalized the desire to continue using this approach in their teaching/learning experiences.

As the session closed, Jesus Jaime-Diaz and I made each other available to discuss the process with anyone who was interested. Several participants remained and asked insightful questions. Because we did not have an agreement for documenting the process, we are not able to speak to the specificities of our session. Each participant, including the facilitators, gained new insight and knowledge about the process.



I have argued that a discussion and illustration of *conocimiento* facilitates an examination of various structures of inequality and the ways in which these maintain or impose hierarchical power relations that keep people of color subordinated. It makes visible and problematizes sociocultural arrangements that keep people Mexican-descent subordinated. A historical analysis of prior generations and their educational and employment legacies and ethnic notions of their experiences served to create historical narratives in the making. Through this process, we created a space whereby students/participants critically examined their respective legacies by sharing a living history that provides cultural, social, and political frames of reference for understanding individual and collective experiences. A collective analysis allowed the participants to experience the ways in which oppressed racialized ethnic groups negotiate cultural hegemony in the United States.

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