

Lisa Harrison

Professor Aguilar

MAS 275

24 April 2017

Methods for Mexican American Integration, Dialogues, and Success in Diverse Classrooms

A significant body of research has been produced around integrating Mexican American Students into the classroom and the types of activities and methods which are most useful. This project highlights numerous teaching practices which align with Critical, Kantian, and Reality Pedagogies to create a more integrated learning environment for Mexican American students. The practices outlined in this project are symbolized by representative objects in a theoretical classroom. The theoretical base for the teaching practices examined in this study comes from a synthesis of three teaching philosophies. Critical Pedagogy is a teaching approach that encourages students to the ideologies and practices of the dominant society in order to reach critical consciousness. Kantian Pedagogy is a student-centered teaching approach that fosters students' realization of their own dignity as human beings by emphasizing student agency and duty in the classroom. Finally Reality Pedagogy emphasizes seamless connections between students' lived experiences and their classroom learning. Each object in the illustration represents both an actual physical object which could exist in a classroom and a corresponding method of teaching based on a synthesis of these three teaching philosophes. Since objects and methods impact the social setting of the classroom, they will inevitable also impact the students which inhabit that classroom.

Culturally responsive teaching has become a buzz-word in the world of culturally and linguistically diverse teaching. In this classroom, bulletin boards for "Cultural activities & Events," "People Who Inspire Me," and "Who we are" represent the breaking of the community-classroom barrier. Studies have consistently shown that Mexican American students achieve more in school when their learning incorporates elements of their home-life and culture. Having spaces in the classroom for students to post events going on in their community begins to bring the spheres of school and community closer together. A research brief on classroom integration sums this idea up as thus: "by working from and validating students' existing knowledge base, this teaching practice improves the acquisition and retention of new knowledge and develops students' self-confidence and self-esteem." (Padrón et. all). The "Who we are" boards provide a space for students to create a short biography with info about their family, interests, and dreams. This increases buy-in and agency while symbolizing the relationship that a teacher must form with each student as a human being as well as a learner. The importance of having cultural and academic resources for Mexican American Students has also made itself apparent in such research like *Excelencia* in Education's "What Works for Latino Students in Higher Education Compendium." The bookshelves at the back of the room show the necessity of having literature about and by Mexican Americans which relate to both cultural and academic subjects. The books that populate these shelves ought to be both by and about Mexican-American students. As researcher and educator Kathy Escamilla points out, many classrooms in the US suffer from including "lo mexicano" but not "los mexicanos." The theoretical classroom illustration that accompanies this paper tries to create a space in which *los mexicanos* can be nurtured as well as any other students in the classroom.

Cooperative learning is another teaching practice that is lauded in both Critical and Reality pedagogy theories as well as numerous other studies and is symbolized in the classroom by round tables and a flexible group work space in the back of the classroom. Cooperative learning places students in learning and teaching roles within the classroom and encourages cooperative rather than competitive learning scenarios. Christopher Emdin writes in *For White Folk Who Teach in the Hood* about the importance of assigning meaningful roles in the classroom, both on a large- and small-group scale. By giving students agency and a say in their learning, they are more likely to feel like a part of the classroom and as if they are valued within that classroom, both by their peers and by the teacher. By letting students create their own classroom rules, as symbolized by the "Classroom Rules and Roles" Board at the front of the classroom, the students create their own expectations, a sort of contract between the teacher and themselves that they *will* work to succeed and the teacher *will* work to support them in whatever way he or she can. Such rule and role-formation also parallels the ideal of community building and duty to a community that is emphasized in Kantian pedagogy. By placing such a strong emphasis on the students' classroom community, the students are more likely to identify with the classroom, to feel a part of the learning that takes place there.

By building classrooms that incorporate what the research recommends, the education of Mexican American's can be improved. By incorporating aspects of Critical, Kantian, and Reality pedagogies, teachers can more effectively aide their Mexican-American students in finding success in education.

Works Cited

- Escamilla, Kathy. "Integrating Mexican-American History and Culture into the Social Studies Classroom." *ERIC Digests Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools*, Sept. 1992, www.ericdigests.org/1992-2/mexican.htm.
- Examples of *Excelencia*. "What Works for Latino Students in Higher Education Compendium." *Excelencia in Education's*, 2016.
- Losey, Kay M. "Mexican American Students and Classroom Interaction: An Overview and Critique." *Review of Educational Research*, vol. 65, no. 3, 1995, pp. 283–318., www.jstor.org/stable/1170685.
- Padrón, Yolanda N., Waxman, Hersh C., & Rivera, Héctor H. "Educating Hispanic Students: Effective Instructional Practices." *Journal of CREDE Dissemination Center for Applied Linguistics*, Vol. 5, 2002. Web.