University of Arizona

From the SelectedWorks of Nolan L. Cabrera

2011

Review: Working from within: Chicana and Chicano activist educators in whitestream schools by Luis Urrieta, Jr.

Nolan L Cabrera, *University of Arizona*

Available at: https://works.bepress.com/nolan_l_cabrera/12/

PROOF COVER SHEET

Author(s): Nolan L. Cabrera
Article title: BOOK REVIEW
Journal acronym: RMMM
Article no: 614071
Enclosures: 1) Query sheet
2) Article proofs

Dear Author,

1. Please check these proofs carefully. It is the responsibility of the corresponding author to check these and approve or amend them. A second proof is not normally provided. Taylor & Francis cannot be held responsible for uncorrected errors, even if introduced during the production process. Once your corrections have been added to the article, it will be considered ready for publication.

For detailed guidance on how to check your proofs, please see http://journalauthors.tandf.co.uk/production/checkingproofs.asp.

2. Please review the table of contributors below and confirm that the first and last names are structured correctly and that the authors are listed in the correct order of contribution. This check is to ensure that your name will appear correctly online and when the article is indexed.

Sequence	Prefix	Given name(s)	Surname	Suffix
1		Nolan L.	Cabrera	

Queries are marked in the margins of the proofs. Unless advised otherwise, submit all corrections and answers to the queries using the CATS online correction form, and then press the "Submit All Corrections" button.

AUTHOR QUERIES

General query: You have warranted that you have secured the necessary written permission from the appropriate copyright owner for the reproduction of any text, illustration, or other material in your article. (Please see http://journalauthors.tandf.co.uk/preparation/permission.asp.) Please check that any required acknowledgements have been included to reflect this.

No Queries

Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development
Vol. 00, No. 00, Month 2011, 1–3

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

BOOK REVIEW

Working from within: Chicana and Chicano activist educators in whitestream schools, by Luis Urrieta, Tucson, Arizona, University of Arizona Press, 2009, xii + 210 pp., US$39.95 (hardback), ISBN 978-0-8165-2611-6, US$21.95 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-8165-2917-9

How do people become political activists? How can people navigate between criticism of systemic oppression and membership in the educational environments they criticise? How do activists maintain their idealism within institutions that are structured to stifle dissent? These are some of the many pressing questions addressed in this book. Following Grande's argument that 'mainstream' implies 'white', Urrieta uses the term 'whitestream' in order to 'decenter whiteness as dominant' (p. 181) and to highlight the value of non-whitestream cultural capital. He provides a succinct and clear rationale for the term – not in the text proper, unfortunately, but in an endnote.

The first chapter provides an overview of Urrieta's study, in which he interviewed 24 self-identified activist/educators. Either Mexican American or Chicana/o, they fell into one of four groups: undergraduates interested in becoming teachers; kindergarten, elementary- and secondary-school teachers; graduate students in education programmes; and education professors. When he began the research, the author believed that 'to be an activist and educator in whitestream schools was an oxymoron' (p. 9), but he describes how the participants in his study challenged his self-described cynicism by demonstrating that 'playing the game' did not necessarily entail 'selling out'. Urrieta's personal development thus became an additional component of the analysis, and he is honest about his continued struggle to be a critical educator, activist and researcher.

Chapter 2 outlines the literature that shows how whitestream schools marginalise Chicana/o students, and it is supplemented with a description of how identity-based social movements can combat oppression. In Chapter 3, Urrieta refers to the literature on whitestream schools to contextualise his participants' educational experiences. Interestingly, most of them were labelled 'smart kids' and had been tracked into upper-level classes where they tended to be separated from the other Chicana/o students. Many participants described looking down on their 'regular-track' peers, an issue they had to work through as they became activists. In addition, Urrieta highlights a number of key issues in this chapter. The men in his sample, for instance, tended to receive more college support than did the women – an important finding, since there are more Latinas than Latinos in higher education and there is an emerging discourse of 'male victimisation'. The Latinas in Urrieta's study had to overcome both racist and sexist obstacles, and their mothers tend to be key agents supporting their educational goals (frequently in defiance of the father). Urrieta also describes how schools often made his participants seem invisible through white-dominant curricula and how well-intentioned multiculturalism (e.g. celebrations of Cinco de Mayo or Black History Month) served to tokenise minority experiences.

ISSN 0143-4632 print/ISSN 1747-7557 online
http://www.informaworld.com

UNCORRECTED PROOF

Chapter 4 describes how the participants became activists. The process tended to begin with exposure to other activists and participation in student organisations like *El Movimiento Estudiantíl Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA)*, *Chicano Teatro*, *Danza* and *Balet Folklórico*. In conjunction with the experience of oppression and critical multicultural curricula, these activities all contributed to the development of a critical consciousness. Urrieta describes how this consciousness was translated into agency, particularly at college. Important here were marches, coalition-building, university committee work, youth development and 'teaching informally whenever possible in moment-to-moment opportunities as a form of day-to-day activism' (p. 105). Thus, the participants not only criticised oppression, particularly racial, but they also took proactive steps to combat it.

In Chapter 5, Urrieta focuses more closely on his participants' activism within educational contexts. His participants describe learning to 'play the game', continually walking a fine line. They had to be strategic in their educational activism while ensuring this did not lead to an abandonment of their core ideals and principles. This powerful chapter outlines the many ways in which the participants attempted to challenge oppressive educational practices, while understanding that their activism was always partly compromised. I was reminded of Ellsworth's (1989) question regarding critical pedagogy: 'why doesn't this feel empowering?' She criticised radical educators for focusing too much on utopian visions of equality and too little on day-to-day practice. In this regard, Urrieta's participants talked about the influence of such people as Freire, Fanon and Chavez, but when faced with the realities of standardised testing (to cite one example) they had to make strategic compromises. One participant described it as creating situations in which one would 'sell out 40 percent, live simply, and keep the 60 percent of yourself' (p. 121) – a calculation that helped him navigate between idealism and pragmatism.

In the final chapter, Urrieta considers what it means to be an activist. He argues that contemporary demonstrations tend not to have the impact of those during the Civil Rights Movement as they 'function more like spectacles, and protest acquires a carnivalesque nature' (p. 164). I think Urrieta used slightly romanticised the activism of the 1960s: after all, very few had the impact of lunch counter sit-ins or the other events that history remembers and glorifies. There was one key area in which Urrieta's participants made substantial progress relative to their predecessors in the 1960s: the ability to focus on racial justice while accounting for systems of sexism, classism or homophobia. This expanded awareness was sorely lacking in the 1960s activism, as a focus on gender was seen to distract from racial progress. Instead, Urrieta's participants offer a more developed and mature form of activism where (to borrow from Freire) the anti-oppression activist does not become the oppressor.

The power of Urrieta's analysis is that he frames critical consciousness and activism as processes engaged, not as ends met. His book makes the continued struggles of Chicana/o activist/educators accessible. His participants both criticised oppression and remained part of the institutions that reproduced it. These internal contradictions provide the basis for their personal struggles – there is no clear 'correct' path, but participants understood the implications of inaction: the persistence of whitestream education.

Urrieta offers a personal version of this struggle and contradiction. He was working to complete his book at the same time that anti-immigrant legislation – the *Border Protection, Anti-Terrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005* (HR4437) – was passed. He saw an obvious need for grassroots activism against a

UNCORRECTED PROOF

racist bill, but he also faced a looming deadline for a book being written to support and inspire the next generation of activist/educators. How does one balance these competing demands? What is an appropriate course of action? How does the course change with evolving circumstances? The paths Urrieta describes vary across contexts (high schools, universities, communities), but the narratives of both participants and author help the reader understand how some activists work through and resist the 'repressive myths of critical pedagogy' Ellsworth wrote about.

Reference

Ellsworth, E. 1989. Why doesn't this feel empowering? Working through the repressive myths of critical pedagogy. *Harvard Educational Review* 59: 297–324.

doi:10.1080/01434632.2011.614071

Nolan L. Cabrera
Center for the Study of Higher Education
University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ, USA
ncabrera@email.arizona.edu
© 2011, Nolan L. Cabrera

UNCORRECTED PROOF