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Educational Sovereignty for Latin@ Students in Arizona

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Abstract

Educational sovereignty provides students and educators with opportunities to access educational resources. Without structures that support equal access in education, Latin@ students lack educational sovereignty and face continued obstacles to their success in school. Such obstacles may include segregation based on race, language, and social class, as well as exclusion of community-relevant issues and perspectives from instructional content. In Arizona, there has been a heightened level of discrimination against Latin@ students, their families, and educators. The state of Arizona has actively denied Latin@ students access to culturally-relevant material through the passage of English-only policies and the more recent Arizona House Bill 2281 (HB 2281). We will consider how efforts of Arizona's Latin@ communities to attain educational sovereignty within this context reflect Richard Ruiz' work surrounding educational sovereignty.

Key words: educational sovereignty, Latin@ students, discrimination, culturally-relevant, HB 2281, Mexican American Studies, critical consciousness, funds of knowledge

Educational Sovereignty for Latin@ Students in Arizona

We look to Richard Ruiz's work as the basis for our discussion about the current state of education for Latin@ students in heightened spaces of oppression and discrimination. We focus specifically on Arizona and public education. In their seminal writings, Ruiz and colleagues established the historical context of education for Latin@s and illuminated the far-reaching problems created by curricula and policy that have unintentionally neglected or purposely undermined Latin@ communities. In this paper, we consider how the concept of educational

sovereignty in particular is a tool by which the educational outcomes for Latin@s can be improved. This article will expand upon the concept of educational sovereignty in the context of Arizona and in the wake of recent oppressive legislation against ethnic studies. We discuss practices, events, and issues in Latin@ education that further emphasize the need to encourage and promote educational sovereignty. We will also introduce spaces where educational sovereignty is already prevalent in response to extreme oppression from the state of Arizona.

Educational Sovereignty

Educational sovereignty can be defined as the active resistance to traditional educational structures by students, their families, and educators. When educator Luis Moll introduced the term, he suggested that it is the product of collaboration among numerous scholars working to address issues of inequity in education. He explained, "We use the term educational sovereignty to capture the need to challenge the arbitrary authority of the power structure to determine the essence of the educational experience for Latino and other minority students" (Moll, 2002). According to Moll, educational sovereignty should serve as a means toward equity, and promote unification among various networks and groups as they work together to create "a cultural space that will enhance its autonomy, mediate ideological and programmatic constraints and provide adequate forms of schooling" (Moll, 2002). Moll called for communities with privilege to recognize the value of cultural resources and the right to self-determination among communities that are otherwise marginalized, emphasizing the idea that sovereignty would come through the collaboration between communities with less access to educational resources and those with more. Expanding upon this definition, Ruiz argued that in order for students of marginalized communities to achieve significant academic success, members of their communities, including Latin@s, must take agency in their local educational system by exercising voice and establishing authority in educational activities, thus pushing the system to better meet the needs of their students.

In an expression of educational sovereignty, members of the Tucson community and educators came together in 1997 to create a Mexican American Studies/Raza Studies curriculum for the Tucson Unified School District (MAS TUSD), acknowledging the need for culturally relevant material to engage and empower youth in this school district where Latin@s comprise over 60% of the student population by 2010 (www.tusd1.org). As detailed later in this article, MAS TUSD became a target for dissolution. By determining the program curriculum and instruction illegal and forcing its dismantling in 2012, the government and educational institutions created a disadvantage for students who were shown to be doing better than peers not in the program. The banning of MAS TUSD provoked the students, their families, and larger community to defend the program that was aiding students in academic success.

This agency in shaping and engaging in what was being taught in the classroom is what Ruiz and other scholars of educational sovereignty believed is needed in order to create educational systems that benefit instead of hinder Latin@ students. Moll and Ruiz (2002) stated that in an effort to achieve educational sovereignty, "communities create their own

infrastructures for development, including mechanisms for the education of their children that capitalize on rather than devalue their cultural resources. It will be their prerogative to invite others, including those in the academic community, to participate in such creation" (p. 362). Moll and Ruiz (2002) further argued that educational sovereignty is a method by which the control and agency of education is centered on students, families, and the communities. Educational sovereignty means that Latin@ communities expand the boundaries of education past the constructs of traditional schooling and to encompass households and communities.

Theoretical Framework

Two key theories frame this examination of educational sovereignty for Latin@ students. First, *critical consciousness* by Paulo Freire (1971) helps us to understand the ways in which Latin@ students, families, and communities develop educational sovereignty. While Ruiz did not explicitly use critical consciousness, it can be inferred from his work. Freire's concept of critical consciousness focuses on the ability of people to acknowledge various forms of oppression and advocate for change. Critical consciousness facilitates the student and community activism that Ruiz advocated and which became apparent in the work on ethnic studies programs in Arizona.

Second, *funds of knowledge*, developed by Carlos G. Vélez-Ibáñes and James B. Greenberg (1992) and further theorized by Luis Moll, Cathy Amanti, Deborah Neff, and Norma Gonzalez (2001), and González, Moll, and Amanti (2005), recognizes the knowledge and skills that students bring from their households and communities as resources for their success in school. Funds of knowledge posits that, rather than coming to school as empty vessels to be filled, students are equipped with information grounded in experience and which can facilitate their learning if incorporated into instruction and curriculum.

These frameworks and concepts inform Ruiz' work, particularly in relation to language and language policies and their connection to educational sovereignty. The following section provides a broad overview of these concepts within Ruiz' work and how they lay the groundwork for an analysis of the current state of education of Latin@s in Arizona.

Context of Educational Sovereignty

Ruiz' work on educational sovereignty focused heavily on issues related to language, language policy, and low income communities of color. In his study of the factors contributing to low achievement among Latin@ students in the educational system, he attributed the low rates to the alienation that Latin@ students experience in educational institutions. According to Ruiz, this is due in part to educators' inability to engage youth with the required material and a lack of cultural relevance within the classroom (Ruiz, 1995). He argued that the insistence on the assimilation of Latin@ youth and the failure to recognize this outdated method of education as ineffective, also impact students' experiences (Ruiz, 1995). In the U.S., the educational system was traditionally structured to reflect and perpetuate the ideologies of a western-centric society. Ruiz asserted that the antiquated and ethnocentric purpose of schools to aid in assimilation of immigrant populations does not and will not ever work for Latin@ populations.

He referenced the work by Delgado-Gaitan and Trueba (1991) when stating that if the institution does not recognize cultural pluralism, it will continue to fail and, more importantly, fail students and their communities (Ruiz, 1995). Whiles these are not the only issues within the system that serve as obstacles for Latin@ students, they are key in understanding the need to develop educational sovereignty within Latin@ communities.

Ruiz' work illuminates numerous injustices that are embedded in state education policies. His work on bilingual education in Arizona showed the emphasis on assimilation and isolation that arises, for example, when politicians and business leaders rather than educators and researchers develop policies related to education (Ruiz, 1995). Moll later explained that educational sovereignty was informed by research being done "in and with indigenous communities in the United States, addressing the need to challenge a long history of coercion and control in the education" of students (Moll, 2002). As such, he recognized the need to assess the ways that educational needs were being met, and to determine whether educational sovereignty was indeed present for communities that have experienced isolation and discrimination in the name of education. Moll and Ruiz established the following parameters to assess whether educational sovereignty is successful:

> 1) attend[ing] to larger historical structures and ideologies of schooling with the hope of making educational constraints especially those related to social class visible and unstable; and 2) Teaching and learning as part of a broader educational ecology, and 3) and tap into existing social and cultural resources in schools households, and communities. (Moll & Ruiz, 2002, p. 371)

Ruiz also argued for acknowledgement of community needs in educational policies on the part of the state. More importantly, perhaps, he argued for the involvement of community in the development of curricula and programs; and promoted community participation as an act of educational sovereignty.

Guiding Ideas for Educational Sovereignty

In response to the consistent and pervasive issues within the educational structure and little sign of structural changes, Ruiz and other scholars advocated that change could be generated by students and their communities. He recognized the need for communities of color, especially low income communities, to demand control of their local educational system in order for their students to achieve significant academic success. This active resistance to the traditional structure may be understood as educational sovereignty. Moll and Ruiz (2002) argued that educational sovereignty is a method by which the "control and imposition that characterize education of Latino students" (p. 362) in the U.S. can be challenged so as to put students, their families, and their communities at the center of the educational system. The negative impact of the educational system on Latin@ youth is undeniable and, therefore, the students and their families should engage their agency in education planning for their communities.

Moll and Ruiz (2002) explained that, in tandem with community expression of sovereignty, institutions must recognize "Latino self-interest or self-determination" (p.363) and limit the influence of traditional ways of knowing that have come from ethnocentric ideas about

learning, education, and students' cultures and communities. Educators and administrators, as well as policy makers, must acknowledge community identity and community knowledge as viable resources that support student achievement. Furthermore, educational sovereignty, according to Moll and Ruiz (2005), should be understood as a means by which communities can strengthen not just one school's educational strategy but other schools' and communities' as well. It is a means through which all students and communities are empowered. Ruiz stressed the importance of providing parents in particular with "a sense of ownership in the education of their children" (Ruiz, 1995, p. 373) as a vital strategy in educational attainment/success of Latin@ students. This is further emphasized in the importance he gives to the concept of funds of knowledge (Moll, 1992), that is, the knowledge students bring with them from their families and communities and that has historically been silenced by the institution or determined to be "disabilities" or deficits. Moll suggested that home and community knowledge are foundational for students and, if integrated into the school setting, contribute to learning.

We propose to establish how students, their families, educators, and larger community in Tucson, Arizona have inserted themselves into conversations about the educational system in Arizona to attain a level of educational sovereignty. This analysis adds to existing work by Ruiz and colleagues by showing how the local community in Tucson participated in the struggle for control over what is taught to their youth and in their schools in regards to the maintenance of cultural knowledge. While Ruiz' work focused heavily on language and language policy, this article aims to expand the concept of educational sovereignty by focusing on the struggle to include and maintain culturally relevant material in the classroom. We also consider how educational activism present at the university level and work done by students, their families, educators, and the larger community in the fight to save the MAS TUSD program exhibit educational sovereignty. The next section gives the context for why Arizona is the focus of this article, including its history of discriminatory policies up to the more recent Arizona House Bill 2281 (HB 2281). The following section details the activism in Arizona to keep culturally relevant material in classrooms.

Rationale for this New Perspective: Discrimination in the Educational System in Arizona

In Arizona, the educational system has been a testing ground for policies and practices that perpetuate discrimination against minority student populations. Historical forms of discrimination have included segregation based on race, ethnicity, and language (Ruiz, 1995; Moll & Ruiz, 2002). Since the racial integration of public schools in the 1950s, English-only mandates have been used to maintain the status quo in classrooms (Iddings, Combs, & Moll, 2012). Laws such as Proposition 203, known as Arizona's "English only" policy, have regulated how bilingual education is implemented and how non-native English speakers are mainstreamed in the school setting (Iddings, Combs, & Moll, 2002). Currently, English language learners are isolated from their English-speaking peers for four hours of each school day in classroom environments where English is the only language of instruction and the English language is the only academic subject taught (Combs, 2012). English language learners-- who, in Arizona, are primarily of Mexican origin-- receive limited instruction in core academic courses and limited

opportunity to learn language through methods that educators agree are critical, including ample opportunity to interact with native speakers and the ability to use first language knowledge to support second language learning (Iddings, Combs, & Moll, 2002).

Much of Ruiz's work focused on language policy and bilingual education for students of Spanish-speaking families and communities. He argued that instead of valuing the language knowledge students bring to school, schools often label fluency in Spanish, or bilingualism in general, as a disability (Ruiz, 1995, p. 373). This undermining of linguistic knowledge and other cultural knowledge students bring with them stigmatizes young scholars and can prohibit their learning achievement. However, such language policies are not the only discriminatory practices in place. Ruiz' work on the alienation of and discrimination against non-English speakers and Latin@ students in particular called attention to Arizona's denial of access to culturally relevant information and its devaluing of the knowledge students can bring to the classroom.

Under the leadership of state officials (including the superintendent of public schools), Arizona has continued to show disregard and disdain for the Latin@ community and cultural knowledge through Arizona House Bill 2281 (HB 2281). This controversial law mandated the removal of instructional materials that were determined to promote ethnic solidarity or anti-American values (State of Arizona, House Bill 2281, 2010), assertions that were broad enough to justify consideration of anything that is presumed to present a counter narrative to the dominant historical perspective. In Tucson in particular, this has included materials that speak to the conditions and realities of Latin@ students. When it was introduced, HB 2281 was used to deny students and their teachers' access to culturally relevant books and instruction because state officials used the law to justify the removal of materials from classrooms. According to Mexican American Studies scholars Lydia Otero and Julio Cammarota:

> This legislation allowed [Tom] Horne to target Tucson Unified School District's (TUSD) Mexican American Studies (MAS) program. He had demonized this program for the previous four years, claiming it fostered 'ethnic chauvinism,' provided a breeding ground for 'racial hatred,' and referred to students in this program as 'rude' and 'insolent'. (Otero & Cammarota, 2011, p. 640)

The state's attorney general, Tom Horne-- who had previously served as the state superintendent of public schools and drafted early versions of the bill during that time-- singled out Mexican American Studies programs at the K-12 level (and specifically MAS TUSD) to establish restrictions against teaching ethnic studies on the basis that it promoted ethnic chauvinism and provided no educational value for students. Court-appointed investigators found no evidence to substantiate these claims (Cabrera, Milem, Jaquette, & Marx, 2014). In fact, studies have found that students' academic performance, health, and well-being are improved when participating in programs that provide culturally relevant curricula and instruction (O'Leary & Romero, 2011; Cabrera, Milem, Jaquette, & Marx, 2014). Researchers further found that participants in the MAS program were likely to perform better academically than their peers who were not students of the program (Cabrera, Milem, Jaquette, & Marx, 2014). But the state has remained determined to quash ethnic studies, and Mexican American Studies in particular, in the public school system,

thereby jeopardizing Latin@ students' access to equitable education. In essence, Arizona's educational system includes numerous obstacles for minority and non-English speaking students. The efforts to remove those obstacles are on-going inside the courtroom and classroom, as well as in the heart of the community.

Moving beyond language. While Ruiz often focused on the issue of bilingual education and related educational approaches to talk about the status of Latin@ students in education, we use as our model the state of Arizona and the crisis surrounding the role of ethnic studies. Arizona is an example of extremism, where legislators have adopted existing discriminatory legislation and gone to great lengths in order to discriminate against and oppress Latin@ students in particular. According to James D. Anderson (2004), there are a number of issues that are used to justify discriminatory laws, however, victim-blaming is at the forefront. That is, inequalities or failure to achieve are not caused by unjust policies but because of shortcomings among individuals and families themselves, shortcomings that are essentially stereotypes attributed to culture or ethnicity. Such justifications emphasize differences among cultures as negative, and divide communities rather than recognize similarities and use them to establish common grounds and strengthen interconnectedness for a common good (Ruiz, 1984).

Educational Sovereignty in the Midst of Oppression

In May 2010, Arizona governor Jan Brewer signed HB 2281 as a directive to the Mexican American Studies program in Tucson Unified School District (MAS TUSD). This bill only impacted the MAS programs and no other ethnic studies classes being taught in TUSD. The program, despite its success in raising high school student achievement in TUSD, was dismantled. While the fight for educational sovereignty might look very different in other parts of the country, studying what happened in Tucson can enable us to understand the ways in which the struggle in Arizona impacted the rest of the nation.

Youth-led Activism

According to Moll and Ruiz, it is essential for communities to reclaim agency and be actively involved in the shaping of youth education. Youth-led activism was at the forefront of efforts to maintain the MAS TUSD program. Students exercised agency by organizing and participating in walkouts at middle and high schools, speaking at school board meetings, taking control of board meetings by chaining themselves to the governing board's table, and organizing protests in front of the district administrative offices. Students often facilitated these events using social media and texting (Otero & Cammarota, 2011).

Communities for Culturally Relevant Curriculum

Latin@ community members in Tucson have always been proactive in the education of their children. Historically, Tucson's Latin@s have fought against policies that segregated and otherwise discriminated against youth. In addition to legal action, they have engaged in local protests and public calls to action. They have supported educators and programs that draw on the wealth of community knowledge and invite it into the classroom to facilitate student learning, including MAS in TUSD, which was created in 1997. When the program came under direct

attack of the Arizona State Legislature and Tom Horne, students and community members rallied for its support in multiple ways that enacted their sovereignty.

According to Ruiz and Moll, for families and communities to claim agency of their youth's education they often call upon others, such as academics, for assistance. Members of the community committed to teaching the MAS curriculum outside of TUSD so that the students would have access to the material, especially while the legality of the bill and the state's mandates were challenged in the courts. This included teaching a MAS curriculum at the John Valenzuela Youth Center in South Tucson. There was also the continuation of other MAS curricula in non-TUSD schools in Tucson, such as at Sunnyside Unified School District and the University of Arizona. In addition to its own Mexican American Studies undergraduate and graduate programs, the UA MAS faculty actively supported MAS TUSD and the fight to keep the culturally relevant program and material in the classrooms by joining the protests, attesting to the validity of the MAS curriculum, publically advocating the proven merits of the program, and raising awareness within the larger community (Otero & Cammarota, 2011; Cabrera, Romero, Meza, & Rodriguez, 2013; Cabrera, Milem, Jaquette, & Marx, 2014). While academics were not the only ones supporting the students and families in their fight to keep the MAS program, they were a significant support in the efforts.

Recently, artists from the larger community have participated in these efforts. One such example is the play entitled *Más,* written by Milta Ortiz and directed by Marc David Pinate for the Tucson-based Borderlands Theatre. Not only did the playwrights interview individuals who were active in the battle to save MAS, they sought input and clarification from the larger community during the writing of the play. The community's thoughts, opinions, and personal experiences about the events surrounding HB 2281 were central to the playwright's process. Students who were themselves part of the social movement were cast in key roles, further emphasizing the importance of centering the theater piece around the community and, in doing so, giving the community and those directly impacted by the bill and its aftermath agency in the telling of their history.

College and University Support

The efforts to sustain Mexican American Studies programs in Tucson exhibits educational sovereignty, a commitment to changing the educational system, and making spaces for Latin@ and minority youth. The impact of HB 2281 can be seen in the work of faculty and students in the Mexican American Studies Department at the University of Arizona. Under the direction of former faculty member Julio Cammarota, early programs such as the Social Justice Education Project directly engaged students, families, and schools in promoting youth participatory action research (YPAR) for students to claim agency over their own education and teaching students tools and methods to think critically and have agency of their own education (Romero, Cammarota, Dominguez, Valdez, Ramirez, & Hernandez, 2008). Cammarota has not been the only faculty member in the MAS Department to focus on increasing critical consciousness among students (Cabrera, Romero, Meza, & Rodriguez, 2013). In fact, the MAS Department has a community service component in their undergraduate curriculum and

applicability is a driving force of many, if not all, the MAS courses. Current works emerging from the program include several community-action based projects to promote student health and well-being, academic achievement, social justice, historic preservation, and humane immigration policies in the Latin@ community. The development of the PhD program in the MAS Department has increased collaboration with the Tucson community, and in research and practice involving Latin@ youth in particular.

Legal Action for Educational Sovereignty

While there are ways in which educational sovereignty is fought for, or achieved, on practical levels there are also examples of how students, families, and communities take steps to establish educational sovereignty for their youth and youth as a whole. As articulated by Ruiz, the achievements of one community in terms of agency within the educational system have rippling effects for all students, even those outside the immediate community. The current desegregation crisis in TUSD illustrates the problems generated by discriminatory policies and requires acknowledgement that the policies are grounded in a long historical legacy of discrimination aimed at minority youth, including Latin@s. In 1978, in response to a number of lawsuits filed by members of African American and Mexican American families in Tucson, TUSD was put under federal court supervision while it was ordered to desegregate its schools. The district created its magnet school system, which was intended to make schools accessible to students of any racial background interested in the designated focus of instruction (e.g. technology, fine arts, etc.) (Unitary Status Plan, 2013). Students were then recruited from around the district in the effort to diversify school populations. However, by and large, the schools have remained segregated based on where they are located in the district. In other words, school populations continue to reflect the local community in both racial makeup and socioeconomic status. As Gary Orfield, Erica Frankenberg, Jongyeon Ee, and John Kuscera pointed out in their discussion of the anniversary of Brown v Board of Education (2014), poverty is a factor in segregation or inequality. Poor schools in poor communities are not equal to those in more affluent schools and communities. Ruiz and Moll illustrated this when they explained that Latin@ students in low socioeconomic status (SES) will suffer in terms of the quality of the education and educational resources to which they have access. They asserted that "No white middle class child will ever face the pressures, abuses, and restrictive learning conditions imposed on these children" (Moll & Ruiz, 2005, 300-301). Hence, educational opportunities for low SES students across TUSD, the majority of whom are Latin@, continue to be impacted.

Researchers and policy makers. Desegregation and the end to discriminatory policies are not enough to ensure that Latin@ students have access to quality education. Moll (2010) argued the significance of teacher-student relationships; acknowledgement of bilingualism and language as resources in schools; and the integration of culturally sustaining pedagogies to improve education and foster student success. Culturally sustaining pedagogies look toward students' cultures as resources for the classroom and for student learning, not as deficits (Ladson-Billing, 2009). They also function to support student progress with their cultural knowledge, not by leaving it behind. Ruiz was a proponent of culturally sustaining pedagogies,

such as funds of knowledge. For example, he argued that culturally sustaining pedagogies are important in language issues and language rights (Ruiz, 1984; 1995; 2002; 2009). The prevailing attitude about language in the U.S. education policies and practices has been that English be treated as the rightfully dominate language in U.S. society. Rather than look at multilingualism as a benefit for individuals or society as a whole, it has been regarded as a deficit. Ruiz articulated this idea with respect to local language issues,

> Few pay attention to the fact that in Tucson there are old and vital communities where languages other than English live. If we would see these communities and their languages as resources, we would make use of them in schools. We would figure out some way to conserve, manage, and develop the languages in interesting and important ways in schools. But for the most part, we don't do that because we don't see them as useful in any substantive way. (Gutierrez, Asata, Pacheco, Moll, Olson, Horng, … McCarty, 2002, p. 337)

Within a culturally sustaining pedagogy, language knowledge would be respected as part of an individual's experience, valued for the benefits this language knowledge can offer to society, and protected from loss.

A culturally sustaining pedagogy fosters educational sovereignty for students and their communities. It encourages students' involvement in the process of their own education, which Cammarota (2011) argued is critical for student learning. Students should be encouraged to engage in their cultural and social environments to promote investment in learning. He asserted that,

> … much is gained from learning processes that allow young people to reflect positively on who they are, where they live, and how they might bring changes to the world around them. Once a young person realizes his or her efficacy and ability to transform his or her own and others' experiences for the better, he or she grows intellectually and acquires the confidence to handle a variety of challenges, including higher education, community activism, and organizational leadership. (p. 829)

The supporting of critical consciousness in youth (self-community-global awareness) benefits the individual student and the school and local communities as well. It looks to students, their homes, and their communities as holders of valid and valuable knowledge that should be utilized for student success in school and outside of it. While Latin@ students of low income communities benefit greatly from this type of instruction this method can be beneficial to all students.

The problem is not that research is generating little or invaluable information but that the policy-makers and funders are not taking heed. This is evident from discussions on bilingual education policies, as well as research produced on classroom size, learning styles, funds of knowledge, and even the amounts and types of play, rest, and mental stimulation that developing brains need. So, while educational research may continue to move forward in understanding and promoting better and best practices, it is not clear what is it going to take for change to happen at the institutional levels. Davis (2004) argued that teachers and schools should offer curricula that:

> ...recognize the significance of culture and honor a child's individual identity. [...] because we have not successfully maintained a level of meaningful diversity in many school settings, we might at least give students the tools necessary to operate in a society in which inequities and injustices occur, and in doing so, perhaps they will lead the way to change. (p.408)

It is the recognition of individuals and communities, and inclusion of their cultures and needs in the school environment, that can initiate progress toward equality in education. Incorporation supports the development of identity and self, both of which researchers have connected to student health, well-being, and academic success (O'Leary & Romero, 2011). These arguments are precisely those that advocates, including Ruiz, have made in the fight to preserve ethnic studies and multicultural education. However, efforts to purge ideologies or knowledge from classrooms persist.

Implications and New Directions

The recognition of the value of student and community knowledge and the importance of its inclusion in school curricula and pedagogies are reiterated in educational research. Ruiz asserted that the failure on the part of school systems to acknowledge the wealth of student and community knowledge is not just a shortcoming but a disservice. To foster relevant education and effective learning, schools should implement culturally responsive pedagogies. Student and community languages, cultures, and experiences should not be excluded from school or dismissed as having no value in that setting. Rather, they should be understood as rich resources that can serve as the foundation for meaningful educational experiences. This understanding is bound to Ruiz' concept of educational sovereignty, and drives the ethnic studies movement.

Yet, while the grass-roots movement to implement ethnic studies courses in K-12 education have gained momentum among communities across the nation, responses remain mixed. In California, Governor Jerry Brown vetoed a bill that would have required the development of an ethnic studies model to be implemented in the primary and secondary school systems. According to Brown, the bill would have initiated a redundant process for developing culturally inclusive curriculum (Ceasar, 2015). The state of Texas supported its already-existing policy of allowing school districts to develop and implement ethnic studies programs concurrently with the new "Special Topics in Social Studies" curriculum (TEA, 2014), but recent incidents show that the textbooks now used in the curriculum promote capitalism, Republican values, and watered-down or inaccurate versions of historical events (Rockmore, 2015). In the meantime, in Arizona, the state and district governing bodies continue to resist ethnic studies. TUSD has been developing a "culturally relevant curriculum" to fill the gap left by the now-banned MAS program, but it has been a difficult process involving community input as well as district and state approval. The current climate-- in which anti-immigrant sentiments and attacks on financial assistance for low SES families and communities dominate political conversations-- contributes to the promotion of policies like HB 2281 and restrictions on ethnic studies in the schools. Bringing awareness to the importance of ethnic studies programs and culturally

responsive pedagogies continues to be critical work that requires collaboration across many communities.

Looking toward a future for both practice and research, Ruiz noted the importance of acknowledging the very similar experiences of Latin@ and Black youth in terms of educational achievement. Understanding those intersectionalities can facilitate collaborative efforts toward equity and justice for both groups. We stress the importance of recognizing the many intersectionalities that build Latin@ identities and experiences, and working within and outside the Latin@ communities to continue to reshape the educational system. It is critical that people of all backgrounds, but perhaps especially those who are marginalized by the current educational system, unite and advocate for one another's causes. This is the directive that MAS courses in TUSD worked to impart, articulated in the saying, "*Tú eres mi otro yo.* You are my other me. *Si te hago daño a ti,* If I do harm to you, *Me hago daño a mi mismo.* I do harm to myself. *Si te amo y respeto,* If I love and respect you, *Me amo y respeto yo.* I love and respect myself."

The continuing expansion of ethnic studies programs in the educational system also merits further research. The history of these programs at the K-12 levels has been the focus of many research studies, and rightly so considering the recent controversies. However, the development and fate of programs at the postsecondary level demands attention as well. In Arizona, for example, there has been concern that ethnic studies programs at universities will be targeted by the state. It was precisely in this climate, and under the leadership of Ruiz, that the University of Arizona expanded its Mexican American Studies program. Ruiz supported the faculty in the development of the PhD program, the first and only among Arizona's three universities. Research is needed to understand how the program supports educational sovereignty among its students and how they, in turn, can support educational sovereignty in the Latin@ community in general and students in particular.

Conclusion

Within his work, Ruiz strongly advocated for a reformed educational system that benefits not only Latin@ students but all students. He saw educational sovereignty as a way to reach that goal in light of minimal and unproductive changes from educational systems. Ruiz stressed the importance of students, families, and communities being active agents in decisions involving education. His work is vital in understanding the current state of education of Latin@ youth in the oppressive state of Arizona. While Arizona has set itself apart by passing some of the most discriminatory policies in education and law enforcement within the last few years, it has also proven to a beacon of community action and advocacy for immigration rights and educational sovereignty, proving the power that critical consciousness can have on youth and the positive impact they can have on society with help of their families and communities.

Authors' short bios and relationship to Dr. Ruiz

Andrea Hernandez Holm is a doctoral candidate in the Mexican American Studies program at the University of Arizona where her focus is on borderlands identities, Mexicana/Mexican American women's oral traditions, resiliency, and decolonialism.

"I knew Dr. Ruiz to be supportive and encouraging, creative and focused. I was honored that he served as a member of my master's committee and was looking forward to working with him on my doctoral committee. There is one incident in particular that stands out to me when I think about the influence his scholarship has had on my own work. During our class on social justice in education, Dr. Ruiz told us that when someone accuses us of trying to be 'politically correct,' we can understand that statement as an effort to silence conversations about injustices and inequities and it is in that moment that we have to decide how to move forward. Will we allow ourselves to be silenced or will we stand firm and advocate for the things we know are right? He, of course, hoped that we would choose to stand firm and continue to fight for what we know is right."

Yesenia Andrade is a doctoral student in the Mexican American Studies program at the University of Arizona (MAS). Her emphasis is in wellness in terms of place and intersectional identities as they impact the Mexican immigrant and Mexican American community. Her experiences as an instructor and lead facilitator for the Queer Trans People of Color Discussion Group have expanded her research interest to critical pedagogy, instructional practice, and intersectional identities of queer students of color.

"As a graduate student representative for my department, MAS, I began working with Dr. Ruiz after he became Department Head. I quickly learned that he would instill humor into even the most serious of conversations, and while at first his dry wit would leave me puzzled I grew to really appreciate and love that about him. We met often to go over concerns, ideas, or plans, related to the graduate student body and it was through these encounters that I got experience his unique and unforgettable mentorship. He was able to make any problem, regardless of size, seem manageable. He always went above and beyond to express that graduate students had a valued position in the department and highly regarded our thoughts, opinions, and concerns. What I learned most from him was to always provide opportunities to those coming up behind you, a lesson I hope to continue to implement as I develop as an academic. "

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