

**Call to Action: Speaking to Educators on the Praxis of *Testimonio*  
and the *Nopal* Metaphor**

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*We may literally be too busy to notice or too concerned with the myriad tensions and needs in front of us—this is only normal. Yet, we can still provide Latin@ and Chican@ students and other students of color with moments (great and small) where an educator speaks to the very essence of their humanity and makes them believe it. That is what you can do. And that is what you can commit to doing after our time here together.*

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Hello and good morning. It is an absolute pleasure to be here with you today. I have been an educator in high school and university settings for a very long time and when offered this opportunity to speak with fellow educators who are interested in critical, anti-oppressive pedagogy I jumped at the chance. But I must apologize as I do not have a speech, at least not the one I planned on giving. Two recent events have made me question what it is that we actually *do* in the academy, and I thought that perhaps we might be able to make some sense of this together.

In the fall 2013 it was reported that a black, undergraduate student at a local public university had been the victim of hate crimes and systematic bullying at the hands of roommates and floor mates while on campus. On different occasions he had been harassed, tackled, had a bike lock closed around his neck, and was forced to live alongside a Confederate flag in the common area of his dorm (Murphy, 2013). The university president promised justice and attempted to acknowledge the obvious: "By failing to recognize the meaning of a Confederate flag, intervene earlier to stop the abuse or impose sanctions as soon as the gravity of the behavior became clear, we failed him. I failed him" (Kearny, 2013, para. 2). But it was soon discovered that the same president worked to hide "an in-depth study [that] found black students experienced troubling and sometimes racist behavior from

professors, coaches and other students” (Murphy, 2013, para. 1). A floor mate of the victim claimed that the abuse was not racist at all, but mere pranks and that she "grew up in the era where it (prejudice) doesn't seem present to us, it's just in the books. It doesn't seem like a big deal for us to do things like this...he's an easy target and he takes it well” (Bulwa, 2013, para. 16).

At roughly the same time of these revelations we learned about the passing of Nobel prize-winning author Doris Lessing. Lessing privileged and revered the story and the storyteller. Moreover, she identified their connection to the maintenance and constitution of our lives:

A need to tell and hear stories is essential to our species — second in necessity apparently after nourishment and before love and shelter. Millions survive without love or home, almost none in silence...It is our stories, the storyteller, that will recreate us, when we are torn, hurt, even destroyed. It is the storyteller, the dream-maker, the mythmaker, that is our phoenix, what we are at our best, when we are our most creative. (D. Lessing, Nobel Prize acceptance speech, December 7, 2007)

However, as I stand in front of you today the words from Lessing’s (2008) preface to her novel, *The Golden Notebook* resonate too clear and painful for me to utter while alone:

It may be that there is no other way of educating people. Possibly, but I don’t believe it. In the meantime, it would be a help at least to describe things properly, to call things by their right names. Ideally, what should be said to every child, repeatedly, throughout his or her school life is something like this: You are in the process of being indoctrinated. We have not yet evolved a system of education that is not a system of indoctrination. We are sorry, but it is the best we can do. What you are being taught here is an amalgam of current prejudice and the choices of this particular culture. The slightest look at history will show how impermanent these must be. You are being taught by people who have been able to accommodate themselves to a regime of thought laid down by their predecessors. It is a self-perpetuating system. Those of you who are more robust and individual than others will be encouraged to leave and find ways of educating yourself—educating your own judgment. Those that stay must remember, always and all the time, that they are

being molded and patterned to fit into the narrow and particular needs of this particular society. (p. xxi)

Lessing's passage depicts a struggle that exists inside many students and scholars of color. She does not speak for all, I understand and accept that, but her words so graciously pay homage to those of us who struggle, remain, or vanish and reinvent when faced with an education. It is difficult to *be* and to learn in this world. Hegemony and supremacy make difficult educating towards critical awareness, and sometimes along that path bad things do happen. It is more than enough at times to make someone give up. At other times we simply fold our hands as we whisper, "How can I possibly begin to make sense of this?"

You see I prepared a speech but that one will no longer do. Knowing what I now know, we are in need of something different. We need to discuss how we begin to make sense of what happens and occurs while on the path towards an education. Since I am always grappling with the particular issues of race, place, and higher education, I thought it best to share what I know—what I have gathered, so that we may construct a better understanding of what is possible for our students and each other within the academy and beyond.

I am interested in discussing what it means to stand and teach in critical-solidarity with one another so that students who are traditionally marginalized might be better able to flourish the elements of their own humanity. I will do so by utilizing and explicating my research in *testimonio*, both as a process and product, as well as make suggestions as to what we can do, here and now, to begin to better meet the needs of Latin@ and Chican@ students.

### **Why *Testimonio*?**

*Testimonio* is the intentional and rhetorical act of speaking and sharing one's story, history or narrative with a specific focus towards that which is experienced in and around issues of bias, prejudice, oppression, otherness, marginalization, resistance, and survival (Bernal, Burciaga, & Carmona, 2012; Reyes & Rodríguez, 2012). In doing so it is also the practice of attempting to raise a critical consciousness by depicting the ways in which we are interconnected among related and seemingly unrelated narratives (Bernal et al., 2012).

With roots in “oral cultures and in Latin American human rights struggles” and Chicana/Latina movements (Bernal et al., 2012, p. 363) *testimonio* is a process, product and pedagogy where “we are able to hear and read each other’s stories...with the goal of achieving new *conocimientos*, or understandings” (p. 367).

Listening towards reflection and action are also fundamental to *testimonio* (Espino, Vega, Rendón, Ranero, & Muñiz, 2012; Reyes & Rodríguez, 2012). Reyes and Rodriguez (2012) further suggest that an objective of *testimonio* is to flourish critical listening and reflection as a means towards liberation (p. 527). This particular positioning of the audience/listener/observer is what Cruz (2012) identifies as an opportunity to “travel,” where the “listener or an audience member is given the opportunity to become complicit as an observer and as a witness...[w]ithin this methodology of travel, it is important to contextualize *testimonio* in a critical multiculturalism that is concerned with the praxis of anti-racist and anti-oppressive pedagogies” (p. 462). Thus, it is not enough to simply *hear*, but one must be willing to (at *least* philosophically and critically) re-make hegemonic notions that fostered the realities of these *testimonios* to begin with. Negrón-Gonzalez (2009) reminds us that conceptualizing hegemony and a narrative of counter-hegemony, is a continual process of making and re-making sense—“that consciousness is also dynamic and ever-changing. One of the key ways that this tension is worked out is through the personal-political practice of *testimonios*” (Negrón-Gonzalez, 2009, p. 32). Perhaps a working-through is what is needed here today.

I tell you this because my hope is that through our time together perhaps we can begin to foster what scholars (Espino, Vega, Rendón, Ranero, & Muñiz, 2012) who utilize *testimonio* have called *reflexión*:

*Reflexión* entails an examination of the inner self and sharing that inner self with a trusted dialogue partner. Through *reflexión* we move beyond self-reflection and self-inquiry toward a shared experience where our dialogue partners reflect our truths back to us as they share their own life journeys... *reflexión* helps us situate and explain how our lived experiences exist within a broader set of social and institutional structures. (p. 445)

I cannot enact this literally, of course, as I cannot have an individual conversation with each of you in attendance here today. Instead, I am interested in what might come from the sharing of two specific *testimonios* from Olvia and Axel, their actual names at their request. I will also share my general reactions and sense making in response to these *testimonios*.

### **And Then There Were Two**

Recently I invited two wonderful and beautiful people, Olvia and Axel, to share their *testimonios*. Olvia identifies as Chicana and Axel as Latino. I asked them to share their experiences with education. I was intentionally vague about the definition of education as I am more and more interested in education that happens outside the walls of a classroom. What follows are excerpts of what they shared as well as thoughts I have about how we may be able to move towards productive pedagogies.

#### **Olvia, 27**

I met Olvia years ago at the offices of the Hispanic Scholarship Fund (HSF). I was a scholarship recipient and volunteer at HSF, and I quickly grew to like being around Olvia. A self-described smartass, she freely speaks her mind and often has me rolling in laughter.

Olvia spoke about the guidance and messages she received about going to college:

*My high school counselor discouraged me from going to college, because she didn't think that I would be able to go to college. So she was one of those. And if anything that motivated me more. I totally coped an attitude with her. I was like wow, because she had said, and I had told her, after I had gotten my acceptance letter to SF state I handed it to her and said, "oh look, you know I got in and I was able to complete the application process by myself." And I was really proud to show her. And she said something like, "Wow I didn't think you were uhm, gonna get accepted." And I was like typical smartass Olvia, you know, in high school and I was like, "I can't wait to tell my Mom about your reaction." She didn't really say much after that.*

*So that was the kind of guidance I got during high school, but luckily I had a very supportive Mom, a very intuitive Mom because she's a teacher so she*

*knew the ins and outs of the system. And she always told me don't take any bullshit from your teachers. She was always there for me. She helped me a lot. She's definitely my rock and she always encouraged me. I mean not going to college was never an option for me at home. She was a single mom and she went back to school as a single mom after she got divorced so she knows how hard it is. And she didn't want me to go through that so she always encouraged me to go to college and follow through with everything I had to do at school.*

*Having that bit of background from my Mom, being told to not take any bullshit from my teachers, or anything like that, you know that kind of, that was always in the back of my head when I was in school. So I know, I know it kind of, it was good in that situation, but it probably wasn't that good, because I really didn't take a lot of my teachers seriously, but I did well academically. For me, I think it was the lack of motivated teachers, not all of them were like that, but the majority of my teachers in my high school were not very professional and they were, they were...burnt out, I mean I have to say. They were just burned out. They were there because they had to be there. And I mean, it was, it was one of those things where, you know you just did your work to get your good grades or you didn't and the teachers just really didn't care. It's kind of like it just...it was a poor high school, uhm...in San Diego and the teachers really didn't care. I had some teachers that were really engaging and did care, but the majority of them just didn't—they were there but they weren't present. You know what I mean?*

Olivia embodies a can-do attitude that she attributes to her mother's guidance and support. This attitude saved her from the clutches of an inept counselor and possibly others that might have derailed her high school and undergraduate education. She attended San Francisco State University where she says she took advantage of every opportunity available.

During our interview she described how she had recently been laid off from HSF due to downsizing and was currently temping and looking for work. She said she'd like to return to school to earn a teaching credential, but she is having a hard time justifying the cost of tuition. "The [local private] university was my top choice. I went to one of their open

houses and everything, but...the cost is so high. I just can't afford that tuition at all." I ask Olivia if she thinks that hard work and determination still pay off—if youth and young adults like her can still be all they can be, regardless of circumstance. "Of course we can. I have to believe we can, I mean...If we work hard enough anything is possible." Her answer is strong and self-assured. The friend in me is with her: anything is possible. But the teacher in me, the teacher who happens to be a professor at this private university begins to think, "I will not have her in our class, in our department." Through no fault of her own, Olivia is not able to pay the tuition for our program. She has done everything right and still become an example of what happens to good, hardworking people during a recession and on the path towards higher education. It is not her fault. But I begin to think about what we will miss out on in regards to the benefits of having students like her within our university. Olivia will find a program and earn her credential—that is not the issue—I know enough about her to see that nothing will stand in her way. But I am selfish, and I think about what we are missing out on, by pricing-out students like her. Are we then less successful in fulfilling the mission statement of our university and college?

### **Axel, 25**

Axel and I met through mutual friends. I was immediately struck by this beautiful and sweet young man. Axel radiates love and positivity. Axel believed in paying for school himself and was able to leave his hometown in Arizona and attend school at a state university in Northern California. He refused to take out loans for fear that he might default and ruin his credit. During his junior year he was no longer able to afford tuition, room and board and he decided to drop out. His parents drove from Arizona to pick him up and they brought him home.

*If you were to tell me, or if I were to of thought back then when I was 18, going to school, high school—actually I was 17 I hadn't turned 18 yet, I'd always get phone calls from recruiters and I was basically like, "Fuck you guys. I'm never gonna go that route. I'm going to school, I'm going to college." Oh little did I know, I went to school, I went to college...life's a bitch. It's hard. And like five years later went into that recruiting office ready to do this. I never thought I would be where I'm at. Uhm, my mom begged and pleaded with me to not join,*

*don't do it, don't do it. What do you need, what do you want? Like, I already made up my mind, I already...I'm gonna do it. The day before I signed my contract my mom sat me—she's like, we'll pay for your school.*

*Now, fast forward you know we struggled a lot, uhm...a lot, a lot growing up, financially, uhm. Now it's not...my parents aren't very well off, they're comfortable. They're not rich by any means. I mean they still drive old cars and stuff but they live comfortably, uhm can travel and do what they want. So my mom sat me down—you can finish school, you can finish your degree, you just have to live at home and I was like, you know...I love my parents but I cannot live at home any longer than I already had. And part of it is not that I don't want to live at home because I don't want my parents to tell me what to do—it's not that. It's the fact that I'm the youngest child and I don't want to be living at home. I'm like, you guys have done your job raising us, like you should enjoy each other. You know, like my mom and step-dad they should enjoy each other. They shouldn't have to worry about this, you know, kid still trying to figure life out. I was like I already made up my mind and this is what I'm gonna do. I went in and signed my contract on the day of my birthday, my 23<sup>rd</sup> birthday. We all celebrated by going skydiving. I'm 25 now. But I feel old, especially in the military, because I came in, you know, roughly 5 years after most people join. They join right out of high school. So we're in boot camp and I'm like holy cow these kids are so young. Like, you don't realize how young 18 looks until you're in a room of 50 of them.*

*You know that was the first time I failed at something. When I left school and dropped out, I felt like I let everyone down, I let myself down. And it took a long time to get over it. Definitely being in the military helped me get over it. I feel like now I am happy because I am doing something positive. I'm having a direct impact on people. And now, everything I have gone through, everything that has gotten me to the point where I am today, has helped me be able to help someone else. Now, I'm a Corpsman [medic] in the Navy and these Marines depend on us...they trust us with their lives.*

Axel said he succeeds and fails on his own terms, but he is also very aware of how money and resources make different choices easier for some other folks. He sees his current situation as empowering and beneficial, especially when seen in relation to the rapport that is generated between a Marine and a Corpsman. Axel says, “You aren’t just given the nickname ‘Doc’ outright. And Marines don’t like us, they don’t like the Navy, but when you stick with it and like you hear them say, ‘Hey, here comes Doc,’ you know you’re in and that’s it.” Axel, like Olivia, seems to embody a persistence and commitment that (although it may not fit a traditional, hegemonic idea of what educational success looks like) enables self-assuredness and the discovery of the benefits and accomplishments to one’s own circumstance. He does not feel sorry for himself and he most definitely is not asking for pity. Instead, he sees how all that has transpired to get him to his current situation is actually a good thing. He takes care of injured soldiers in some of the most dangerous of situations, and he does so as an openly gay Latino. I don’t think I have ever encountered a more resilient spirit than he.

### **Analysis and Suggestions**

Axel and Olivia are not failures and they do not see themselves as failures. Things may not have worked out as they had both planned, but they each view themselves as either doing something worthwhile or on the path towards realizing a better future for themselves. Olivia’s *testimonio* depicts how although one might encounter a gatekeeper such as an academic counselor, one is not beholden to that person’s biased notions of ability or deficit. Axel describes so beautifully how true fulfillment and empathy are able to flourish, even without a bachelor’s degree, as he helps Marines recover and repair themselves after injury. These elements from both *testimonios* are in part what makes perseverance and resilience possible. The ability to bounce back ‘cause you’re made like that—the ability to authentically recover from difficulty and adversity in ways that enable future success is key to keeping one foot in front of the other. So how can we take this and place it within situations so that Latin@ and Chican@ students and other students of color can feel empowered to be all they can be? As teachers we hold the key. And I think we hold a phenomenal amount of power when it comes to helping students feel heard, valued, and respected.

### **Praxis, Pedagogy and People-Skills**

It is not an easy thing to be a teacher, no matter the grade level, even in lesser trying times. Politics, policies, and people seem to increasingly adversely encroach upon and threaten any holistic approach to educating and education for reasons that we are not always meant to understand. Sometimes educators aren't listened to when it matters most. And even as many of us are asked to do exponentially more with significantly less, we do it. We show up. We do what we do not because it is easy but because it is fundamental, necessary work. Being present and facilitating a classroom when all things are attempting to pull us apart is what makes the teacher necessary in a time of doubt, disagreement, and danger. Violence, power, privilege, and access intersect with all things and suppressing dynamic conversations leaves us all in peril. The teacher is a facilitator, not a saint. Moreover, I believe they are something better. Teachers are wonderful, fallible, capable human beings and at their best they are weavers of critical thought, comprehension, and reasoned action. Simply put, teachers help people to help themselves. Moreover, “[t]o teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin” (hooks, 1994, p. 130).

Pineau (1998) beautifully depicts the classroom as “spatial and temporal sites where bodies rub up against one another literally and metaphorically. Despite our best efforts to inhabit that space democratically, our bodies always, already, are molded by our different social and institutional status” (p. 131). The teacher as facilitator faces an immense task in working towards a holistic pedagogy, and our reach is never, always perfect. For those of us who “get it” and want to “get it,” we are reflexive to a fault as we strive towards equity within the classroom and beyond. These actions of making and re-making to teach away from marginalization, otherness, and towards inclusion is “[t]eaching as a performative act” (hooks, 1994, p. 11). It is the material manifestation of thought and communication in realness and reality. Imagine then what is possible when we teach towards the agency of our students of color. Imagine what we could achieve. Yes, sometimes “teaching is seen as a duller, less valuable aspect of the academic profession. This perspective on teaching is a common one. Yet it must be challenged if we are to meet the needs of our students, if we

are to restore to education and the classroom the excitement about ideas and the will to learn” (hooks, 1994, p. 12). The question now becomes, what do we do?

*Testimonio* as pedagogy means that the act of listening to and witnessing one’s narrative and testimony can lead to new understandings (Bernal et al., 2012) and that also requires a *doing* on your part. And I offer you a challenge. Many times as young scholars and teachers interested in equity and social justice we might get tired of *just* sitting and talking. I myself have fallen victim to this misplaced emotion. Calafell (2013) encourages that for scholars of color, simply being and existing within the walls of academia is intellectual activism and presence in itself. If we then absorb the *testimonios* that were shared today, in this academic space, what then is possible if we allow ourselves to think differently about how we view these particular groups of students? I am not letting you off the hook by simply encouraging you to ponder. No, instead, I am arguing that any informed and reasoned action or micro-praxis that we make today must first come from beginning to understand the particular realities and existences that have brought the Olvias and Axels into fruition. For if they are already whole and not broken, and if they are already amazing and wonderful while they are simultaneously discovering what the world has to offer them, then how can we as teachers navigate through our critical consciousness so that we see our time with students of color, no matter how brief, as pivotal in adding to their repertoire of critical thought, agency, and humanity. What can we do to help shine and not hinder their light?

Let me be clear with you. There are systems of hegemony and supremacy that have and will continue to make difficult, painful, and unrealistic the path towards education for our students of color. It may seem odd for me to tell you this. The system is broken in many ways, but all is not lost. Even amid color-blind racist policies and campus climate surveys that “prove” all is fine, there is a wealth of tools at our disposal as teachers within higher education. And I believe with every fiber of my being that we here today can make a difference with our own communicative actions.

### **The Nopal Metaphor**

As I have been speaking with you today I have talked about students of color and specifically Latin@/Chican@ students, sometimes interchangeably. I want to focus in on our

Latin@/Chican@ students not only because I used to be one, a student that is, but I recently had the privilege and honor of working with a few colleagues on just this one thing. Sometimes the problems of this world are too big to handle, so at times it is best to begin by sitting down to work on one thing and that is what we did. We set out to create a method of approach that teachers could use in helping Latin@/Chican@ students conceptualize their agency and their success, without these things being tied to someone else's definition or notion of who they are or what they could be. We generated what we call the “*Nopal* Metaphor.”

The *Nopal* Metaphor (Figure 1) is a symbol and visual representation of the intrinsic wealth within our Latin@ and Chican@ students. It is also a tool for better understanding the situated complexities within their educational experience, from a standpoint of assets and not deficits. It is made up of six tenets that in sum speak to how Latin@ and Chican@ youth and students can resist, persist, persevere, and remain resilient while on their educational path, no matter where the education takes place. Lastly, the *Nopal* Metaphor is a concept that allows teachers and students to begin to conceptualize that which is already intrinsic to every single child.



Figure 1. The *nopal* metaphor. Image by Ricardo Sandoval

### Tenets and Structure of the *Nopal* Metaphor

- I. The *nopal* as representative of connection—that by virtue of its architecture and shape, the *nopal* is constructed with multiple connections, interconnections, and overlays. So, too, are the realities and identities of Latin@/Chican@ youth as they simultaneously navigate issues of race, place, ethnicity, citizenship, gender-sex

identity, sexuality, socio-economic class, ability, and with differing degrees of power, privilege, and access. In this way there is a privileging and understanding of the critical intersectionality of identities that exist individually, socially, and institutionally.

2. The *nopal* as (re)generative—the *nopal* itself can be moved, split in two, or can donate a part of itself and that piece will be able to take root and flourish even in the harshest of conditions. This does not mean that systems, policies and practices that seek to separate and displace our youth are acceptable, but this tenet addresses how our youth need not be broken to the point of obliteration or beyond repair. Especially salient when looking at issues of nationality, citizenship, and the fracturing of families due to undocumented immigration, and although a fractured family is not ideal in the least, it is *still* a family and there is always the potential for nurturing and growth, even in the harshest of conditions.
3. The *nopal* as self-protective—*picos* and spines work to keep away major predators and harm, but nothing that grows in this world is ever completely safe. Instead, we can teach our young to enact brave spaces—situations and realities where one looks for support, affinity, and guidance among self-identified networks that teach and enact practices of critical self-care. Again, this does not imply that pain from inequity or bias be accepted, not at all. Instead we encourage Latin@/Chican@ youth (and adults) to seek out and nurture collaborations that grow strength and resilience in numbers.
4. The *nopal* as resilient—it may lay dormant, but it is never dead. Often times the *nopal* must conserve energy and resources when the environment has turned hostile. But with time, added water and room to grow the entirety of the plant itself will not only return to its previous size, but it can continue to grow and prosper. Not all environments are conducive to the growth and holistic nurturing of our Latin@/Chican@ students, as many of them have already experienced. But this does not negate their ability to adapt and thrive even in small and meaningful ways. A hostile environment does not define who they are and who they can choose to be.
5. The *nopal* as fundamentally and intrinsically unique—fundamental to its structure and growth is the reality that there will never be another one like it. And with time, the great uniqueness of the *nopal* is evident as it grows, completely and fundamentally

unique, like a giant fingerprint. Enabling our youth to see themselves as beautifully unique, especially within our collaborative and collectivistic cultures means that their variance can be seen as positive and not a threat. Whoever they choose to be and whatever their results, no one else could ever replace who they are and what they bring into this world. In essence, they are magical and quite real.

6. The *nopal* as the bearer fruit—the *nopal* is meant to flower and fruit, a celebration of what it takes to exist and thrive in this world. No fruit and no flower is ever exactly the same. Latin@/Chican@ students can begin to determine what success looks like and feels like for themselves. It is not about preconceived notions of perfection and success, instead, they are able to see themselves and their movements through this world as part of a path towards and through education (inside the classroom and out) as successful accomplishments in a world than can be of their own making. They can blossom and thrive and this should/will run in direct counter to dominant hegemonic discourses.

### **Your Call to Action**

As educators you must teach, speak, listen, interact, console, encourage, push, and facilitate in line with what this metaphor dictates in regards to the potentiality of every Latin@/Chican@ student. I am asking you to see your praxis, pedagogy, and people-skills used consistently in ways that do not diminish the light within each of these students. I used to believe this kind of work was impossible, but it is not. Let me explain. What I am asking of you today, my fellow educators interested in critical, anti-oppressive pedagogy—especially and specifically at a time when bad things continue to happen on our campuses, between students, staff, faculty, deans, and presidents—is to begin to see that every movement you make in this world is an opportunity to constitute a living example of your moral politics (hooks, 1998) as you treat and teach others in-line with that which is socially just and severely interested in diminishing inequity. These micro-movements and small actions that I term *micro-practices* are valuable, because as teachers we do not always know how long we have our Latin@/Chican@ students—not all of them. Simply put: some stay and remain while others dissipate, disappear, or vanish. Some never even make it to our office or classroom. And some interact with us in moments that are as fleeting as hummingbirds. We

may literally be too busy to notice or too concerned with the myriad tensions and needs in front of us—this is only normal. Yet, we can still provide Latin@ and Chican@ students and other students of color with moments (great and small) where an educator speaks to the very essence of their humanity and makes them believe it. That is what you can do. And that is what you can commit to doing after our time here together.

Axel and Olivia's *testimonios* are testament to how once students leave our halls, they are out in the world whether we consciously remember it or not. We owe it to our students and to one another to use our everyday interactions as fodder for authentic, humanistic, and altruistic communicative practices so that every student, and especially our students of color, moves through this world feeling validated, encouraged, respected, and heard.

It is true. The world does not always make sense. And bad things do indeed happen. But all is not lost, ever. You can use your voice, your presence, to speak towards someone's humanity. I leave you with that gift and with that challenge.

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