

BOOK REVIEW

The Chicana/o/x Dream is Much More than Individual Success

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The Chicana/o/x Dream: Hope, Resistance, and Educational Success.

By Gilberto Q. Conchas & Nancy Acevedo. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2020. Pp. 219. \$33.00 (paperback).

The Chicana/o/x Dream: Hope, Resistance, and Educational Success presents a framework informed by Chicana feminist theory for how Chicana/o/x students navigate education borderlands in community colleges and four-year institutions. Conchas and Acevedo introduce the framework first by establishing education borderlands as the “nexus of deficit and marginalizing practices, policies, and ideologies present in the education system that Chicana/o/x students confront” (23). They assert that the education borderlands has often been used to justify the exclusion of Chicana/o/x students because of structures of oppression such as coloniality and deservingness. Conchas and Acevedo use Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldúa’s notion of *atravesados* to describe Chicana/o/x students as *atravesadas/os/xs*, or those who live in the borderlands, crossing lines of normativity. They then introduce a Framework of *Atravesadas/os/xs* *Nepantleando* (FAN) to illustrate how Chicana/o/x students in the education borderlands contend with being *atravesadas/os/xs* by using their *facultad* to become *nepantleras/os/xs*. *La facultad*, a concept from Anzaldúa, is “the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface” (1987, 39). Beyond just having a critical consciousness, FAN illustrates that Chicana/o/x

students enact their facultad while navigating the education borderlands to become nepantleras/os/xs, and build bridges between the worlds held in tension.

The authors apply FAN to ten testimonios with students from community colleges and four-year universities. The narratives from these testimonios capture a range of identities such as scholar parents, incarcerated youth, first-generation, DACA recipients, queer, disabled, and individuals navigating mental health issues. Conchas and Acevedo foreground an intersectional and asset-based lens with these testimonios to demonstrate how the challenges faced by Chicana/o/x students in higher education are a product of systems of oppression not lack of ability or determination. The authors also highlight that educational success is more than graduation rates, but about improving the education borderlands for future generations of Chicana/o/x students. Of the ten narratives presented in the book, each student explained navigating the education borderlands to build bridges for their children, their familia, or their communities. Every single one of the testimonios illustrate that while these students struggle first as *atravesadas/os/xs*, they dream of how their success in higher education will support and encourage future generations of students like them. Each of the students in this book share their hopes of becoming *nepantleras/os/xs* and giving back. The book illustrates that the “Chicana/o/x dream” is not educational success in the traditional sense where a single individual achieves a goal, but is collectivist, familial, and community-enhancing.

This book is a contribution to the study of higher education using borderlands theory, deepening our collective understanding of Chicana/o/x college students from a critical perspective. The framework illustrates how Chicana/o/x students contend with the current structures and operate within them to achieve the dream of educational success. Within the testimonios were glimpses into the

nuance between how Chicanas perceived more intersectional understandings of structural inequalities, whereas Chicanos “invoked meritocratic and individual ideals of opportunity and success” (44). However, despite heavy reliance on Anzaldúa’s theoretical concepts as well as the development and application of FAN, there is room to further develop how this facultad and critical consciousness can dismantle and reimagine the current institution of higher education. According to Anzaldúa, navigating the seven stages of *conocimiento* means ending with a new reality; although the testimonios highlight a reframing of an educational success story, further research can expand on the radical reimagining and decolonial dreaming of higher education (paperson 2017).

The book ends with concluding thoughts on how to apply a *Nepantlera/o/x* Praxis and describes tangible ways the institution of higher education must shift to allow Chicana/o/x students to strengthen their facultad and critical consciousness. This book should be essential reading for educators who work with Chicana/o/x students in higher education or in secondary education, leaders in higher education looking to shape institutional programming and policy to support Chicana/o/x students using decolonial and feminist frameworks, and education scholars doing research on how students in the margins, in this case, Chicana/o/x students, navigate higher education with multiple oppressions and intersectional identities.

References

- Anzaldúa, Gloria. 1987. *Borderlands/La frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books.
- paperson, la. 2017. *A Third University is Possible*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

