



Center for Critical Race Studies at UCLA

Research Briefs

June 2016 • Issue No. 1

Cultural Intuition: Then, Now, and Into the Future

Dolores Delgado Bernal
University of Utah

Cultural intuition, deeply informed by Chicana feminist scholarship, was first introduced to the field of education in 1998 to reimagine the notion of theoretical sensitivity (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Working from a Chicana feminist episteme, Delgado Bernal (1998) proposed that cultural intuition, the unique viewpoint that many Chicanas bring to the research process, draws from personal experience, collective experience, professional experience, communal memory, existing literature, and the research process itself. She stated:

A Chicana researcher's cultural intuition is achieved and can be nurtured through our personal experiences (which are influenced by ancestral wisdom, community memory, and intuition), the literature on and about Chicanas, our professional experiences, and the analytical process we engage in when we are in a central position of our research and our analysis. Thus cultural intuition is a complex process that is experiential, intuitive, historical, personal collective and dynamic (pp. 567-568).

Cultural intuition was proposed as the basis of a Chicana feminist epistemology in educational research. It was intended to be an evolving concept that allows for experiential knowledge, subjugated knowledge, embodied knowledge, and relational knowledge within the research process.

CULTURAL INTUITION REARTICULATED

Since 1998 education scholars have taken up, expanded, and rearticulated cultural intuition in ways that are more nuanced than originally outlined (see Calderón, Delgado Bernal, Pérez Huber, Malagón & Vélez, 2012). Whether grounded in critical race theories, Chicana/Latina feminist theories, anticolonial theories, or other critical frameworks, this next generation of scholarship has included intersecting ways of knowing based in spirituality, sexuality, place, and other sources of knowledge. This has allowed scholars to disrupt typical approaches to educational research and to theorize alternative anticolonial methodologies.

An important disruption to typical approaches of educational research is the way in which spirituality or spiritual activism (Anzaldúa, 2002) is present, explicitly or implicitly, in many conceptualizations of cultural intuition. Indeed, a sense of personal and political urgency to address educational inequities within Chican@/Latin@¹ communities is often linked to a spirituality tied to struggles for social justice. Scholars such as de los Ríos (2013) point to how a methodology born out of her own cultural intuition allowed her to weave

together her intellectual, political and spiritual work. Diaz Soto, Cervantes-Soon, Villarreal, and Campos (2009) connect the material and spiritual worlds within a pedagogy/methodology they call Xicana Sacred Space (XSS). In conceptualizing a XSS, the authors expand cultural intuition to include spirituality as “a fundamental tool for those seeking ongoing reflexivity and a more natural approach to research rooted within our mestiza consciousness” (p. 761). Cultural intuition conceived in this way gives scholars permission to incorporate our politics of spirit into the research process.

Expanding cultural intuition in another way, Revilla’s (2010) participatory action research with Raza Womyn, a Chicana/Latina women’s organization at UCLA, introduces what she calls a queer Chicana/Latina intuition. According to Revilla, a queer Chicana/ Latina intuition is “based on academic study, personal experience and connection to several Chicana/Latina queer professional and activist communities that bear with them a collective memory, shared secrets, and a different ‘discourse community’ than the one originally described by Delgado Bernal...” (pp. 44-45). Revilla’s queer Chicana/Latina intuition guided her research and was also present among the Raza Womyn members as they theorized their lived experiences. Importantly,

Revilla expands cultural intuition by centering a queer episteme that challenges heteronormativity, and she also reminds us of the colonial mechanisms, such as heterosexism, we may bring to the research process.

Calderón (2014) extends cultural intuition to include Deloria’s (2001) “power of place”—the embodied and living presence of landscapes and place that is central in many indigenous worldviews. Her subjectivity as an indigenous/Mexican/legal/education researcher who grew up near the border with stories about the river and the land inform an understanding of globalization that begins with European contact. She proposes an anticolonial methodology in education that interweaves a place-based indigenized perspective with cultural intuition to interrogate settler colonialism in the United States generally, and social studies curricula more specifically. Significantly, Calderón (2014) pushes us to understand how the collective experiences and communal memory, originally included in cultural intuition, can be intimately tied to the embodied experiences of land and place cultural intuition, can be intimately tied to the embodied experiences of land and place.

Like Calderón, drawing upon one’s cultural intuition has allowed a number of scholars to theorize alternative

methodologies for educational research. For example, Pérez Huber’s (2009) cultural intuition enabled her to propose testimonio as an important methodological approach for critical race studies in education. She points to how her cultural intuition and that of her research participants allowed for multiple sources of knowledge to inform and co-construct the research process. This, she argues, “not only brings testimonio to ‘life’ in educational research, but changes the process of testimonio from method to methodology by allowing for the co-construction of knowledge through collaborative data analysis” (p. 646).

Similarly, Espino, Vega, Rendón, Ranero, and Muñiz (2012) employ testimonio to document an intergenerational perspective of the academic socialization process for Latinas. testimonios that draw upon their cultural intuition, the authors uncover an innovative methodological technique for bridging testimonios across lived experience. They name this technique *reflexión* and point to how it enhances the level of knowledge construction that testimonio offers while also demonstrating that cultural intuition is integral to knowledge creation.

A final example of theorizing new methodologies is found in the work of critical race theory (CRT) scholars Malagón, Pérez

Huber, and Vélez (2009). They merge grounded theory and their cultural intuition with CRT to introduce a critical race-grounded methodology. They understand the process of cultural intuition to be instrumental in engaging the multiple sources of knowledge a researcher brings to her work because it is part of the theory building that occurs in a critical race-grounded methodology. They argue that, “By being more attuned to these sources of knowledge or forms of ‘cultural intuition,’ a researcher is more reflexive throughout the research process and is better able to ‘ground’ her work in the life experiences of People of Color” (p. 255)

LOOKING FORWARD

The ways in which cultural intuition has been taken up is significant because collectively this body of scholarship demonstrates that drawing upon Chicana/Latina’s unique sources of knowledge is a valuable means of theorizing and engaging in the research process. Future iterations of cultural intuition will continue to disrupt Western colonial assumptions while also providing alternative methodological tools and categories not yet imagined. Cultural intuition requires Chicana/Latina scholars to

understand ourselves in relation to our bodies, sexualities, place, communities, current sociopolitical realities, and a commitment to social change. While cultural intuition has been rearticulated from a Chicana/Latina/Indigenous feminist standpoint, future scholarship might ask how cultural intuition is relevant to Chicano/Latino/Indigenous males, gender queer people, or other marginalized scholars. That is, how do they bring their total selves and understandings of their bodies, sexualities, place, communities, and current sociopolitical realities to bear on their research? In whatever ways cultural intuition is taken up in the future, translating these understandings into meaningful research aimed toward improving the living conditions of Chican@s/Latin@s and other disenfranchised must remain a priority.

NOTES

¹ My use of @ at the end of labels such as “Chican@” and “Latin@” is a way to challenge the gender hierarchy and binary present in the Spanish language (the use of the masculine “o” at the end of words to refer to both males and females) and to recognize gender fluidity. I use “Chicana” when referring to females only.

RESOURCES

For a pedagogical tool please see the corresponding article and video:

- Pendleton Jiménez, K. (2014). The Making of a queer Latina cartoon: Pedagogies of border, body, and home. *Journal of Latino/Latin American Studies*, 6(2), 125-134.
- The film *Tomboy*: <https://vimeo.com/10772672>

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DOLORES DELGADO BERNAL, is a professor of education and ethnic studies at the University of Utah and a 2015 recipient of the Derrick A. Bell Legacy Award. Her scholarship addresses educational (in)equity, Latin@ educational pathways, community-engaged research, and Chicana feminist methodologies/pedagogies.

Center for Critical Race Studies at UCLA

1041F Moore Hall
Los Angeles, CA 90095
ccrs@gseis.ucla.edu



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This Brief Series was made possible in part through funding from the offices of the Dean of the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies (GSE&IS). For more information please visit us at www.ccrs.ucla.gseis.edu