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Reconstituting Youth Space in New Mexico: The Space Youth Occupy. Education Policy. Clarity. [1]

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Abstract

Because of the funding decisions being made in New Mexico related to public education, working as an educator has become physically, psychically, and spiritually demanding for the lead author, Trujillo Ellis. The lead author seeks clarity in understanding New Mexico youth space, or the conditions of New Mexico youths' lives, that better equips her, as a reflective practitioner, to "make decisions about teaching and learning based upon moral and political implications" (Olan, 2019, p. 173). New Mexican youth space is contextualized in terms of demographics, outcomes related to well-being, the fiscal landscape of the state, and the policies that govern public education. The lead author utilizes the first four tenets of critical race theory (CRT): 1) Racism is normal, 2) Interest convergence or material determinism, 3) Social construction of race, and 4) Intersectionality and anti-essentialism to support reflection and analysis of her experiences as an educator and instructional coach within the educational system in New Mexico. Co-authors, Trujillo and Davis, provide counter-narratives through the final tenet, 5) Unique voice of color, related to their work with vulnerable youth in New Mexico. Conclusions drawn provide clarity and insight that support the lead author in making decisions related to teaching and learning, as well as indicating efforts that broaden critical consciousness and praxis to support positive change.

Keywords: youth space, minoritized, political consciousness, remedies, retrenchment, critical consciousness and praxis

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[1] The title of this paper, *Reconstituting Youth Space in New Mexico: The Space Youth Occupy. Education Policy. Clarity.* was constructed using the concept of difrasismo, which is a stylistic concept in the Aztec culture where a pair of words is employed to refer to a third term or phrase. The third term reveals the hidden wisdom behind the paired dualities. In modern times we might consider a difrasismo as a dialectical space where two interacting themes exist in tension with one another (Rendón, 2014, pp. 133-134).

"A clearer understanding of the space we occupy in the American political consciousness is a necessary prerequisite to the development of pragmatic strategies for political and economic survival" (Crenshaw, 1988, p. 1387).

As lead author, Trujillo Ellis, my belonging is New Mexico. It is where I am from; where I was born, grew up, studied, and have worked as an educator for over two decades. I love and care deeply about the people and land. Conversations about education are personal and particular. They are contextual: embodied in my narrative as a Chicana woman from northern New Mexico, that of my siblings, of my parents and their siblings, of my ancestors, of my children, of my students, and community. The stories of education and how it relates to who gets to have a life of stability, health, wellness, and joy have specific names and faces; they are felt viscerally.

The people and land of New Mexico represent a powerful simultaneity of communities; our cultural landscapes include the ancestral homelands of Pueblo tribes, Apache and Diné reservations, and the descendants of Spanish settlers, in centuries-old villages, who identify ethnically as Nuevomexicano (P. Trujillo, personal communication, September 6, 2019). Growing up and living in New Mexico, I have always been conscious of both the wealth of strengths and assets in our history, culture, and traditional knowledge, as well as the contrasting poverty and privilege in our landscape.

The inheritance of my life's work as an educator is a generosity that took generations to uplift. While New Mexico became a state in 1912, my grandmother, Dolores Valdez, born in 1915, attained her Bachelor's in Education and taught for 48 years at Hernández Elementary in northern New Mexico. She was committed to bilingual education and social justice throughout her career. Known for providing food and clothing for her students, she understood that students' basic needs must be met for them to be able to focus on learning. My parents were also both life-long educators in New Mexico, in special education and bilingual education. Resilience is a strength I draw from generationally, as my grandmother and parents worked with the understanding that education is political (Freire, 1970/1993) and that it was important to gain security, not only for themselves, but for their families and community, in the context of dominant society.

My understanding of and dedication to the education of youth in New Mexico is situated and subjective (Gutiérrez, 2008). I derive meaning and purpose from my work with youth and

feel a responsibility to speak to my expertise and the community I represent (Packnett-Pod, 2019). Over the last decade, I faced a dilemma (Mezirow et al., 2000) as it became increasingly demanding physically, psychically, and spiritually, for me to work as an educator in New Mexico due to funding cuts related to public education. During this time, I worked with students and the school community at a high poverty and majority student-of-color middle school, through the lens of critical multicultural education and social justice (Banks, 1995; Grant & Sleeter, 2011) in various roles: dual language teacher, English language development teacher, gifted education teacher, instructional coach, and Student Assistance Team Chair.

Having witnessed the effects of the lack of resources on students, teachers, administrators, and families, I am prompted to question funding decisions being made in the New Mexico political consciousness related to public education. I wonder if, and to what extent, these decisions are in alignment with an understanding of the conditions of youths' lives in New Mexico. Therefore, as a starting point, I seek clarity in understanding the social space that youth in New Mexico occupy that better equips me, as a reflective practitioner, to "make decisions about teaching and learning based upon moral and political implications" (Olan, 2019, p. 173).

Context

In pursuing an understanding of the social space that youth in New Mexico occupy, it is necessary to understand their contextual landscape. Who is youth in New Mexico, in terms of demographics? What are their outcomes related to health, education, economics, and family and community wellness? What is the fiscal landscape of the state? What policies govern their education?

New Mexico's Youth Demographics and Outcomes

In New Mexico, in terms of population, diversity is the norm, as most youth, ages 0-17, are non-white (New Mexico Voices for Children, Kids Count Data Book, 2018, p. 58):

- 76% are students of color,
- 60% are Hispanic,
- 24% are Non-Hispanic White,
- 10% are Native American,
- 3% are Other Races,
- 2% are Black or African American, and

- 1% are Asian.

The New Mexico KIDS COUNT Profile (2019) of youth well-being is stark, with an overall national ranking of 50th, for the second consecutive year, on indicators of child well-being, as based on four domains (See Table 1).

All is *not well* with our youth. The narrative that the juxtaposition of the youth demographics and indicators of well-being in New Mexico tells bears attention. The composition of the nation's population is changing, and the current estimate, based on 2018 data, is that the youth population under age 15 in the United States is mostly non-white (Frey, 2019). New Mexico is estimated to have the second highest percentage of youth of color under age 15, at 76%, along with the District of Colombia. Hawaii is estimated to have the highest, at 85%.

Table 1

New Mexico KIDS COUNT Profile

Domain	Indicators of child well-being			
Economic Well-Being, Ranked 49th	Children living in poverty: 27% U.S. avg: 18%	Children whose parents lack secure employment: 36% U.S. avg: 27%	Children living in households with a high housing cost burden: 28% U.S. avg: 31%	Teens not in school and not working: 10% U.S. avg: 7%
Education, Ranked 50th	Young children not in school: 56% U.S. avg: 52%	Fourth graders not proficient in reading: 75% U.S. avg: 65%	Eighth graders not proficient in math: 80% U.S. avg: 67%	High school students not graduating on time: 29% U.S. avg: 15%
Health, Ranked 48th	Low birth-weight babies: 9.5% U.S. avg: 8.3%	Children without health insurance: 5% U.S. avg: 5%	Child and teen death rate per 100,000: 32 U.S. avg: 26	Teens who abuse alcohol or drugs: 6% U.S. avg: 4%
Family and Community, Ranked 50th	Children in single-parent families: 45% U.S. avg: 34%	Children in families where household head lacks high school diploma: 16% U.S. avg: 13%	Children living in high-poverty areas: 24% U.S. avg: 12%	Teen birth rate per 1,000: 28 U.S. avg: 19

Note. Percentages reflect data from 2017. Source: "New Mexico Voices for Children New Mexico KIDS COUNT Profile," KIDS COUNT Data Book, 2018 and 2019.

A review of the rankings of youth well-being (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2019) for states estimated to have the highest percentage of youth of color under age 15 (Frey, 2019): Hawaii (24th), Texas (41st), California (35th), Nevada (47th), and Arizona (46th) reveals an inverse correlation in their rankings between the youth population trend and well-being. Although the well-being of youth in the District of Colombia is not included in the national ranking, the indicators of child well-being within the four domains *are* specified and strongly resemble New Mexico's.

Fiscal Landscape in New Mexico

Fiscally, the enactment of significant personal income tax cuts in New Mexico in the early 2000s (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2015), accompanied by the sharp decline in economic activity of the Great Recession in the late 2000s led to poor fiscal policy, which:

> Cut spending on the systems that support our communities, families, and children—like education, health care, and public safety—rather than raise new revenue so we could keep these systems whole and ensure opportunity for all New Mexicans. (New Mexico Voices for Children, 2018, p. 7)

In the ten-year span of time after 2008:

- Funding to colleges and universities was cut by 35% on a per-student, inflation adjusted basis;
- The money in the College Affordability Fund, targeted to support students in need of financial aid, was exhausted; and
- K-12 education was cut by 14% on a per student, inflation adjusted basis. (New Mexico Voices for Children, 2018, p. 8)

The pronounced austerity practiced in New Mexico during this time period resulted in slowed economic recovery relative to the nation (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2015).

The youth demographics, indicators of well-being, and fiscal landscape in New Mexico beget the overarching purpose in asking, "What is it about the space our youth inhabit that causes them to be unwell?" The exploration of the question holds meaning and relevancy, not only for New Mexico, but for the nation, as well.

Education Policy in New Mexico

Governance of public education in New Mexico, in terms of Constitutional law, educational acts, and Court judgments, overwhelmingly directs provision of equity and access

to students. Espoused values view diversity as a strength and could serve as models for the nation. *De jure*, the youth of New Mexico have a wealth of rights.

Constitutional Laws. The New Mexico Constitution, approved by voters in 1911 (New Mexico Compilation Commission, 2019a), declares that:

- A uniform system of free public schools sufficient for the education of, and open to, all the children of school age in the state shall be established and maintained; (N.M. Const., art. XII, § 1) and
- Spanish-speaking children shall never be denied the right and privilege of admission and attendance in the public schools or other public educational institutions of the state, and they shall never be classed in separate schools, but shall forever enjoy perfect equality. (N.M. Const., art. XII, § 10)

Acts. Furthermore, advocates have worked over the years to establish policies and mechanisms to ensure equity and access through such measures as:

- The Bilingual Multicultural Education Act (1973, 1988, 2004, 2006, 2015) which "stands as an exceptional model for state legislation" (New Mexico Public Education Department, 2019) and formalizes the state's commitment to (New Mexico Compilation Commission, 2019b) "become bilingual and biliterate in English and a second language, including Spanish, a Native American language, where a written form exists and there is tribal approval, or another language" (Section 22-23-1.1.B.(1), NMSA1978). New Mexico is an English Plus state, having adopted the New Mexico English Plus Resolution in 1989 (New Mexico Public Education Department, 2019);
- The Indian Education Act (2003, 2004, 2005, 2007, 2019) which (New Mexico Compilation Commission, 2019c) "ensure[s] equitable and culturally relevant learning environments, educational opportunities and culturally relevant instructional materials for American Indian students enrolled in public schools" (Section 22-23A-2, NMSA 1978); and
- The Hispanic Education Act (2010, 2015) which provides for improved (New Mexico Compilation Commission, 2019d) "educational opportunities for Hispanic students for the purpose of closing the achievement gap, increasing graduation rates

> and increasing post-secondary enrollment, retention and completion" (Section 22-23B-2(C), NMSA 1978).

Proclamation and Decision and Order. In an appeal to the Court for relief, *Martínez v. State of New Mexico* (No. D-101-CV-2014-00793), a school finance and equity lawsuit, was filed in 2014, leading to the largest, most comprehensive education lawsuit in the history of New Mexico. Even though New Mexico has an equal funding formula, the plaintiffs in the lawsuit charged that educational resources are not equitably distributed in the state and, therefore, student performance is negatively impacted. In other words, the ways in which power has been produced in the political consciousness of New Mexico was being implicated as responsible for the differential achievement and wellness of vulnerable youth in New Mexico (*Martínez v. State of New Mexico*, No. D-101-CV-2014-00793).

In an announcement from the presiding judge early in the case, the Judge declared public education to be a fundamental right of children in New Mexico, stating:

> It is difficult to conceive of a service that the State provides… that is more fundamental than the right to education. Nothing really promotes the ability to be a good citizen or be a productive member of society more than having an education. An educated populace is not only something that is fundamental to our current well-being, it is fundamental to our future well-being. (*Martínez v. State of New Mexico*, 2014)

Subsequently, in July of 2018, the First District Court's Decision and Order, on the consolidated *Martínez & Yazzie v. State of New Mexico* lawsuits, was in favor of the plaintiffs. The judge declared education in New Mexico to be unconstitutional and provided two kinds of relief:

- *Declaratory* relief by ruling that the State violated the rights of at-risk students in terms of programs, services, supervision, and monitoring; as well failing to provide *sufficient* funding to ensure all students equitable access and opportunity.
- *Injunctive* relief by setting the expectation that immediate steps be taken to remedy the situation and retaining jurisdiction in the case until the educational system is constitutional. (*Martínez v. State of New Mexico*, 2018, No. D-101-CV-2014-00793)

Although Constitutional law, in New Mexico, has historically asserted that students should have equal opportunity, heretofore, based on indicators of youth well-being, the law has not been successful.

Current educational policy in New Mexico is not working. Based on the indicators of youth well-being, it appears that there is a profound disconnect between students' Constitutional rights, the stated values in our governing document, and the *de facto* practices, the way we are in effect interacting with and treating our children because "power… is culturally produced in the wider society" (Merry, 1997, p. 268).

The judicial branch's landmark ruling on the school finance and equity case provides an opportunity for the governor, secretary of education, and public education department to address the disequilibrium inherent in youth space. It is a hopeful event and, yet, necessitates skepticism because

> Even those herculean efforts we hail as successful will produce no more than temporary "peaks of progress," short-lived victories that slide into irrelevance as racial patterns adapt in ways that maintain white dominance. (Bell, 1992, p. 12)

Understanding the reality that remedies may not reach the students for whom they are designed, how might we approach the work such that it has the best chance of doing so? In the development of remedies, the prologue must be a clear understanding of Gillborn's question: For whom is education policy constructed (2016, p. 44)?

Methodology: Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Based on youth demographics, indicators of well-being, the fiscal landscape, and a review of education policy in New Mexico, there exists an inferred out-of-balance relationship between the youth of the state and the "larger, systemic, structural conventions and customs that uphold and sustain oppressive group relationships, status, income, and educational attainment" (Taylor, 2016, p. 3). As such, contemplation of the task at hand, which is to elicit a greater clarity in understanding the space New Mexico youth occupy in the state's political consciousness, indicates critical thought and inquiry (Freire, 1970/1993). The tenets of critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) provide an appropriate framework for addressing the question:

1. *Racism* the normal, the common, everyday experience of most people of color in this country and the system of ascendancy serve important purposes, both psychic and material for the dominant group;

2. *Interest convergence or material determinism* advances the interests of white elites (materially) and white working-class people (psychically), so that large segments of society have little incentive to address the effects of racism;
3. *Social construction of race* derives from social thought and relations, and is not related to biology or genetics, but rather to categories that society invents, manipulates, and retires in response to shifting needs in the economy/labor market;
4. *Intersectionality and anti-essentialism* relate to the idea that no person has a single identity and, as such, everyone has potentially conflicting, overlapping identities, loyalties, and allegiances; and that people who are perceived to be part of a single group do not all think, act, and believe the same things in the same ways; and
5. *Unique voice of color/counter-narrative*, which holds that because of their different histories and experiences with oppression, people of color may be able to communicate matters the dominant group is unlikely to know. (pp. 7-10)

As a subjective individual taking a measure of responsibility in a situated and intersubjective (Gutiérrez, 2008) space, analysis framed by CRT to promote a clearer understanding of New Mexican youths space is essential because it is the relationships between power and economic oppression that effect students' opportunity and outcomes.

This work seeks specifically to illuminate a better understanding of the positionality of New Mexico's youth as a means of resisting the effects of legitimation and retrenchment on remedies and strategies developed on their behalf. It has direct implications related to the development of effective remedies and strategies, but their express development is not the focus of this endeavor. I present this work acknowledging that my viewpoint reveals some things, while leaving others in darkness, or perhaps even distorting them. Discourse about equity work and social justice is challenging to discuss because it is a matter of approximating understandings that often cannot be fully grasped by words.

The facility to discern one's reality more fully, to position one's control internally, and to animate one's creative, and therefore, re-creative power is a life-long journey. It is with humility and hope that the worth in this *testimonio* is the continued augmentation of awareness of matters that the dominant group is unlikely to know (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Conscious creation of the "conditions of the maintenance of a distinct political thought that is informed by the actual condition [of our youth and] focuses on their needs" (Crenshaw, 1988, p. 1387) is

critical, so that the strategies for relief that are developed reach them and have a positive and significant effect on their lives.

Discourse

What follows, therefore, is an organization of my Trujillo Ellis reflections and experience, based on my expertise as a participant and actor within the community and educational system, that utilizes CRT to seek a more rigorous and insightful comprehension of New Mexico youth space. The intent, of which, is to contribute to the evolving critical discourse and enrich the potential for "the development of pragmatic strategies for political and economic survival" (Crenshaw, 1988, p. 1387) for New Mexico youth that are efficacious in closing the opportunity gap.

Insights on Racism in New Mexican Youth Space

Eliciting greater clarity necessitates seeing and naming racism because "by every social indicator, racism continues to blight the lives of people of color" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 11) in that:

> Poverty… has a black or brown face… people of color lead shorter lives, receive worse medical care, complete fewer years of school, and occupy more menial jobs than do whites… African Americans in the United States would make up the twenty-seventh-ranked nation in the world on a combined index of social well-being; Latinos would rank thirty-third… [and] a large percentage of American citizens harbor negative attitudes toward members of groups other than their own. (p. 12)

Furthermore, as López (2018) explains, "without naming oppressive structures, such as racism, changes in education will not last, but merely become band-aid efforts" (p. 161). In terms of measuring disparity in opportunity in New Mexican youth space and keeping in mind that New Mexico Kids Count data ranks New Mexico 50th, last in child well-being in the nation, disaggregation of the data reveals that most of the disparity is located with youth of color.

On *indicators of the economic well-being of children* in the state, the site of poverty is disproportionately youth of color. One-third of Hispanic children and almost one-half of Native American children live in poverty, consecutively 12% and 24% higher than the national average (See Table 2). With an overall ranking of 49th in the nation and 27% of New Mexico youth living in poverty, the percentage of Non-Hispanic White youth living in poverty is 13%, which is 5% below the national average. Therefore, it's important to understand that:

> Because children of color generally—and Hispanic children specifically—tend to fare worse in measures of child well-being, it is critical that policies are implemented that focus on racial and ethnic equity and that promote opportunities for children of color. (New Mexico Voices for Children, Kids Count Data Book, 2018, p. 58)

New Mexico youth, of all demographics cited in the data, fared worse than the United States average with respect to children, ages 0-17, living in families where no parent had secure employment. Yet the trend in the disparity holds within this indicator, in that Non-Hispanic White youth still fare better than Hispanic youth by 13% and Native American youth by 26%. Children, ages 0-17, living in households with a high housing cost burden is the one indicator in which all New Mexican youth cited fared better than the United States average.

Table 2

Indicators of Economic Well-being of Children in New Mexico by Race and Ethnicity

Race & Ethnicity	Children, ages 0-17, living in poverty (2017)	Children, ages 0-17, living in families where no parent had secure employment (2016)	Children, ages 3-4, not in school (2012-2016)	Children, ages 0-17, living in households with a high housing cost burden (2016)
Hispanic	30%	38%	63%	35%
Non-Hispanic White	13%	25%	55%	26%
Native American	42%	48%	49%	25%
United States	18%	9%	53%	47%

Note. Source: "New Mexico KIDS COUNT Data Book," by New Mexico Voices for Children, 2018, pp. 10-18. Estimates for other races and ethnicities suppressed because the confidence interval around the percentage is greater than or equal to ten percentage points.

On the *indicator of the educational well-being of children* related to teens not attending school and not working in the state, youth, of all demographics cited in the data, fared worse than the United States average (See Table 3).

On other *indicators of the educational well-being of children* in the state, disparity in educational opportunity is also situated with youth of color (See Table 4). The percentage of youth of color scoring below proficient in reading and mathematics, at grade four, is much

higher than the national average, whereas that of Non-Hispanic White youth is lower than the national average. The percentage of high school students not graduating in four years, in which they hold the 2nd highest rank, is the only indicator in which Non-Hispanic White youth do not hold the highest wellness ranking in New Mexico.

Table 3

Indicators of Educational Well-being of Children in New Mexico by Race and Ethnicity - ½

Race & Ethnicity	Teens, ages 16-19, not attending school and not working (2016)
Hispanic	9%
Non-Hispanic White	9%
Native American	13%
United States	7%

Note. Source: "New Mexico KIDS COUNT Data Book," by New Mexico Voices for Children, 2018, pp. 17. Estimates for other races and ethnicities suppressed because the confidence interval around the percentage is greater than or equal to ten percentage points.

Table 4

Indicators of Educational Well-being of Children in New Mexico by Race, Ethnicity, and Other Factors – 2/2

Race & Ethnicity	Fourth graders scoring below proficient in Reading (2017)	Fourth graders scoring below proficient in Mathematics (2017)	High school students not graduating in four years (2017)
Hispanic	80%	85%	29%
Non-Hispanic White	59%	64%	24%
Native American	88%	91%	39%
Black or African American	*	*	32%
Asian or Pacific Islander	*	*	15%
Male	77%	78%	33%
Female	73%	81%	25%

Low Income	82%	86%	34%
Students with Disabilities	**	**	38%
English Language Learners	**	**	32%
United States	65%	67%	15%

Note. Source: "New Mexico KIDS COUNT Data Book," by New Mexico Voices for Children, 2018, pp. 21-23. Low income refers to students eligible for free and reduced lunches. * Estimates for other races and ethnicities suppressed because the confidence interval around the percentage is greater than or equal to ten percentage points. ** Data not available.

On *indicators of health well-being of children* in the state, New Mexico youth, of all demographics cited in the data, fared worse than the United States average on three of four indicators: Children born at a low birthweight, i.e. born weighing 5.5 pounds, or less; Children and teens, ages 1-19, death rates per 100,00; and Teens, ages 12-17, binge drinking (See Table 5). On the indicator of children without health insurance, the percentage of Native American youth exceeds the national average by 7%, whereas that of Hispanic, Non-Hispanic White, and Black or African American youth is lower.

Table 5

Indicators of Health Well-being of Children in New Mexico by Race and Ethnicity

Race & Ethnicity	Low birthweight, i.e. born weighing 5.5 pounds or less (2017)	Children, ages 0-18, without health insurance (2017)	Children and teens, ages 1-19, death rates per 100,000 (2016)	Teens, ages 12-17, binge drinking (2017)
Hispanic	9.3%	4%	31	12%
Non-Hispanic White	9.2%	4%	28	12%
Native American	8.8%	12%	44	7%
Black or African American	16.7%	<1%	*	10%
Asian or Pacific Islander	12.7%	*	*	8%
United States	8.2%	5%	26	4%

Note. Source: "New Mexico KIDS COUNT Data Book," by New Mexico Voices for Children, 2018, pp. 25-31. *Estimates for other races and ethnicities suppressed because the confidence interval around the percentage is greater than or equal to ten percentage points.

Table 6

Indicators of Family and Community Well-being of Children in New Mexico by Race and Ethnicity

Race & Ethnicity	Children in single-parent families (2016)	Children, ages 0-17, in families where the household head lacks a high school diploma (2016)	Children living in high poverty areas (2012-2016)	Teen, ages 15-19, birth rate per 1,000 (2017)
Hispanic	46%	24%	23%	32
Non-Hispanic White	25%	4%	9%	16
Native American	N/A	17%	51%	34
Black or African American	*	*	20%	25
Asian or Pacific Islander	*	*	*	*
Two or more races	*	17%	17%	*
United States	34%	13%	12%	19

Note. Source: "New Mexico KIDS COUNT Data Book," by New Mexico Voices for Children, 2018, pp. 32-39.
*Estimates for other races and ethnicities suppressed because the confidence interval around the percentage is greater than or equal to ten percentage points.

On all *indicators of family and community well-being of children* in the state, disparity is located with youth of color, while conversely the outcomes of Non-Hispanic White youth are markedly better than the national average (See Table 6).

New Mexican youth space clearly reflects the understanding that, (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) "by every social indicator, racism continues to blight the lives of people of color" (p. 11). On 15 of 16 indicators, the average well-being of youth of color in New Mexico is much worse than the national average, while on 13 of 16 indicators, the average well-being of Non-Hispanic White children in New Mexico is either better than (10 indicators) or just beyond, but close (3 indicators) to the national average. In New Mexico, not only is there more of a lack of childhood well-being, those who are unwell are overwhelmingly youth of color. The gap between the wellness of Non-Hispanic White youth and youth of color is pronounced.

Analysis of Delgado and Stefancic's (2012) first tenet of CRT, labeling racism/white supremacy as normal for youth space in New Mexico should not be inferred to mean that the poverty of Non-Hispanic White youth does not matter. The effect of material subordination of youth of color, which is "rationalized by a series of stereotypes and beliefs that [make] their conditions appear logical and natural" (Crenshaw, 1988, p. 1370) and "are linked to the serious economic disadvantages suffered by many whites who lack money and power" (Bell, 1992, p. 7) has the consequence of likewise subordinating poor Non-Hispanic White youth, as well.

Insights on Interest Convergence in New Mexican Youth Space

The subordination of youth of color in New Mexico is normalized and legitimized daily in the socio-political consciousness because "racism advances the interests of both White elites (materially) and working-class Caucasians (psychically)" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 8). Dominant society's appropriation of resources based on a history of exclusions and ideological practices (Gillborn, 2016) have created a reified space to the detriment of the state's most vulnerable children.

In researching the indicators of youth wellness, I found that cuts in the state had been made to "systems that support our communities, families, and children—like education, health care, and public safety" (New Mexico Voices for Children, 2018, p. 7). The finding caused me to wonder why the cuts had been made and conduct further research along this line of inquiry.

The austerity which led to spending cuts in systems that support children since 2008 came about because the state enacted significant personal income tax cuts. New Mexico was one of several states, such as Arizona, Louisiana, Ohio, Oklahoma, and Rhode Island, that did so, with proponents of this approach in the early 2000s "claim[ing] the tax cuts would improve the state's economic standing" (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2015). In actuality:

> Since enacting the tax cuts, four of the six states—Arizona, Louisiana, Ohio, and Rhode Island—have seen their share of national employment *decline*, and New Mexico's share of national employment has risen only slightly. Further, the jobs performance of New Mexico and Oklahoma likely has little to do with the tax cuts. Both states are major oil and natural gas producers whose economies benefited from the tripling of oil prices in the mid-2000s and the rapidly growing use of a new technique for extracting oil and gas that combines horizontal drilling with hydraulic fracturing, or "fracking." Indeed, these two states have seen their share of national employment *drop* in the last couple of years

> as oil prices stagnated and then declined sharply, reversing some—but not all—of the price growth from earlier years. More specifically, both New Mexico and Oklahoma have seen their share of national employment fall by 3 percent since October 2012. (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2015)

The cutting of state taxes as a strategy for improving a state's economy is ill-advised, with "most major studies published in academic journals since 2000 find[ing] that state personal income tax levels do *not* affect economic growth" (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2015) and furthermore, impede their functioning in a number of ways:

- States have to balance their budgets, so tax cuts have to be paid for by cutting state services, raising other taxes, or both. This slows the economy and offsets the benefits of tax cuts;
- State and local taxes help pay for important services. When higher taxes pay for better services, they may have no adverse impacts on business decisions on where to locate and may even have positive impacts (reduction in other business costs exceeds the tax cuts); and
- Other factors are much more important to a state's economic growth; such as trends in the national and international economy, a state's natural resources, the education of its workforce, proximity to major markets, and the mix of industries in the state. (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2015)

The functioning of the dominant political consciousness, a "regeneration of the problem" (Bell, 1992, p. 3) of racist policy, has clearly not been acting in the interests of the youth in the state, who would benefit from robust services and sufficient funding of education. The slowing of the economy has also impeded parents' ability to provide for their children, with 38% of Hispanic children, 25% of Non-Hispanic White children, and 48% of Native American children living in families where no parent had secure employment, the extremity of which lies in stark contrast to the nation's average of 9% (See Table 2).

Insights on the Social Construction of Race in New Mexican Youth Space

Delgado and Stefancic (2012) explain that social construction "holds that race and races are products of social thought and relations" (p. 8). The social construction of students' race is exemplified by references to New Mexico as a majority-minority state. With 76% of the children in New Mexico, ages 0-17, being youth of color (New Mexico Voices for Children,

Kids Count Data Book, 2018, p. 58), the phrase majority-minority is used to convey the understanding that although youth of color constitute most children, they are:

> A social group that is devalued in society and given less access to resources. This devaluing encompasses how the group is represented, what degree of access to resources it is granted, and how the unequal access is rationalized. Traditionally, a group in this position has been referred to as the minority group. However, this language has been replaced with the term minoritized in order to capture the active dynamics that create the lower status in society, and also to signal that a group's status is not necessarily related to how many or few of them there are in the population at large. (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, p. 5)

The minoritization of youth in New Mexico is highly related to adults' socialization, stereotypes, and confusion of students' culture with their own biases and inequities.

Adult participants, of all backgrounds in the education community, are challenged to perceive youth space clearly due to the hegemonic effects of dominant social pressure. The construction of minoritized youth takes place through the deficit mindset, which Gorski (2013) claims that "poverty is attributable, not to inequities or to an unequal distribution of opportunity or even to educational access disparities, but to the problematic 'culture' of poor families" (p. 54). Gorski (2013) provides a list of commonly held stereotypes, by educators, about people in poverty, which he dispels, including: 1) Poor people do not value education, 2) Poor people are lazy, 3) Poor people are substance abusers, 4) Poor people are linguistically deficient and poor communicators, and 5) Poor people are ineffective and inattentive parents (pp. 59-67). As an educator and instructional coach in New Mexico, for more than twenty years, the lead author has often witnessed the inscribing of minoritized youth as culturally deficient, engaging in misperceptions, such as:

- *Poor people as not valuing education*: A thoughtful, reflective Hispanic young man in high school who is committed to his education approached me to talk about an incident about which he was trying to make sense, as it did not align with his conception of self. He overheard a teacher, a White male teacher, at his school talking to a newly arrived teacher from the Philippines say, "You are working with the worst students, in the worst school, in the worst state."

- *Poor people as lazy and apathetic*: In a presentation to a group of educators, I shared the thinking behind my development of a school-level framework. This framework was designed to provide equity and access to all middle school students in a Title I high-poverty school. During my presentation, a Hispanic male assistant principal at another Title I middle school, questioned the efficacy of such models by asserting that teaching the youth at his school was like teaching his dog to whistle. He created a storyline in which he told his co-workers that he taught his dog to whistle. Later, he expanded, they gathered for a meal at his home and requested to hear his dog whistle. He responded, "Are you kidding me? You fell for that? A dog can't whistle." He likened the ability of the students at his school to learn to a dog learning to whistle.
- *Poor people as substance abusers*: In working with teachers, at a Title I school with a 97% student of color demographic, to develop culturally relevant and sustaining (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris, 2012) writing tasks aligned to the Common Core State Standards, a White female teacher had a profoundly negative reaction to the use of two articles proposed for a summarization task for 8th graders. The articles reflected positive images of youth of color in national trends related to smoking, drinking, and other such factors. Her response, during a planning meeting, was to say, "I hate this. I hate what these articles say. I cannot stand it. This cannot be true." She subsequently refused to use the articles for her 8th grade students.
- *Poor people as linguistically deficient and poor communicators*: As an Hispana-India woman and heritage language speaker from northern New Mexico, a White male bilingual educator, speaking with me about topics related to dual language education, characterized Hispanic heritage language students in New Mexico as not speaking Spanish adequately and, also, not speaking English adequately, and, as such, not really having language.
- *Poor people as ineffective and inattentive parents*: Over twenty-two years of teaching, I have often witnessed educators engaging in dialogue during planning sessions, lunch time, or hallway conversations related to *these* parents and *these* kids not being supportive or involved in their children's education. (Gorski, 2013)

The vignettes cited align to the social construction of race as it rationalizes the devaluation youth, but I feel it important to also clarify that while the experiences that I have documented *reflect too many* educators, they *do not reflect all* educators.

The effects of poor fiscal policy related to the funding of education created a situation of a lack of teachers, lack of professional development for teachers, cuts in electives and fine arts courses, and large class sizes. Such conditions exacerbate the challenges teachers face in responding to the needs of vulnerable students; such as those from economically disadvantaged homes, English language learners, and students with disabilities; *especially* in high poverty schools (Gorski, 2013, pp. 99-101). The resultant lack of sufficient support for teachers and their consequential overwhelm too often leading to the misperception of students and their families as the problem. The social construction of minoritized youth in New Mexico is profoundly important because the understanding of poverty and attitudes toward families in poverty impacts how youth are perceived and treated (Gorski, 2013). In these circumstances, "it can be easy for even the most well intentioned of us to inadvertently perpetuate stereotypes about poor people by implementing educational policies and school reforms that suggest we must 'fix' them instead of eliminating the inequities they endure" (Grineski & Lee, 2014, p. 157). The social construction of youth, through a deficit mindset, leads to a misapprehension of students' challenges as attributable to students' culture, rather than inequitable access to resources and opportunity.

Insights on Intersectionality and Anti-essentialism in New Mexican Youth Space

Delgado and Stefancic's (2012) concepts of intersectionality and anti-essentialism provide a nuanced and wholistic approach for understanding New Mexico youth space, as youth are multi-dimensional and have complex identities that overlap in myriad ways. Understanding how to respond to the intersecting identity needs of vulnerable students, requires a framework that articulates multiple levels of conceptualization (See Figure 1). Students' constitutional rights are subjected to the effects of "patterns of communication that have fractured into the power interplay of dominance and oppression" (Trujillo Ellis, 2019, p. 11) at the structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal levels of society (Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016). Strategies that place a disproportionate responsibility on teachers to remediate a "historical arrangement of power" (Wing Sue, 2010) will only serve to regenerate dominant patterns as individuals do not have the influence necessary to contend with such forces. Proactively

responding to minoritized students' needs requires openly and consciously asking: What are the power relationships that impact students' opportunities? How are they organized? How do we address them?

Vulnerable students, termed "at-risk" within the Decision and Order of the First District Court on *Martínez & Yazzie v. State of New Mexico* include students from economically disadvantaged homes, those who are English language learners, students with disabilities, and Native American students (Martínez, 2018). In my work as instructional coach, in researching frameworks to support the development of an academic masterplan that would support equitable access and opportunity, I found Tomlinson's (2014) framework of the Key Elements of Effective Differentiated Instruction, developed to respond to the needs of students with disabilities, and Hill Collins and Bilge's (2016) framework of the Domains of Power, a framework that reveals how inequality works at the different levels of society for minoritized groups. The placement of Tomlinson's (2014) and Hill Collins and Bilge's (2016) frameworks side-by-side creates an intersectional organizer that further clarifies youth space in the educational setting. It provides a critical and insightful reference in having conversations for school improvement and how the elements in youth's educational space flow from, feed, support, enhance, and rely upon each other.

Ongoing challenges in understanding and responding to the needs of diverse youth in New Mexico include further developing consciousness of the complexities of youth's identities in New Mexico. The plaintiffs found to have standing in the lawsuit are largely, but not fully representative of vulnerable youth in the state. A nuanced understanding of vulnerable youth requires the inclusion of youth who are Black or African American, twice exceptional, and have complex ethnic identities. Likewise, it's necessary to understand the distinctions between youth who emerge from a history of genocide, colonization, and immigration (Beegle, 2007; Gorski, 2013; Ogbu, 1998). Furthermore, the journey toward stability is multi-generational and the struggles of working-class families, who have gained some educational and economic leverage in society to provide their children resources and experiences, also require consideration.

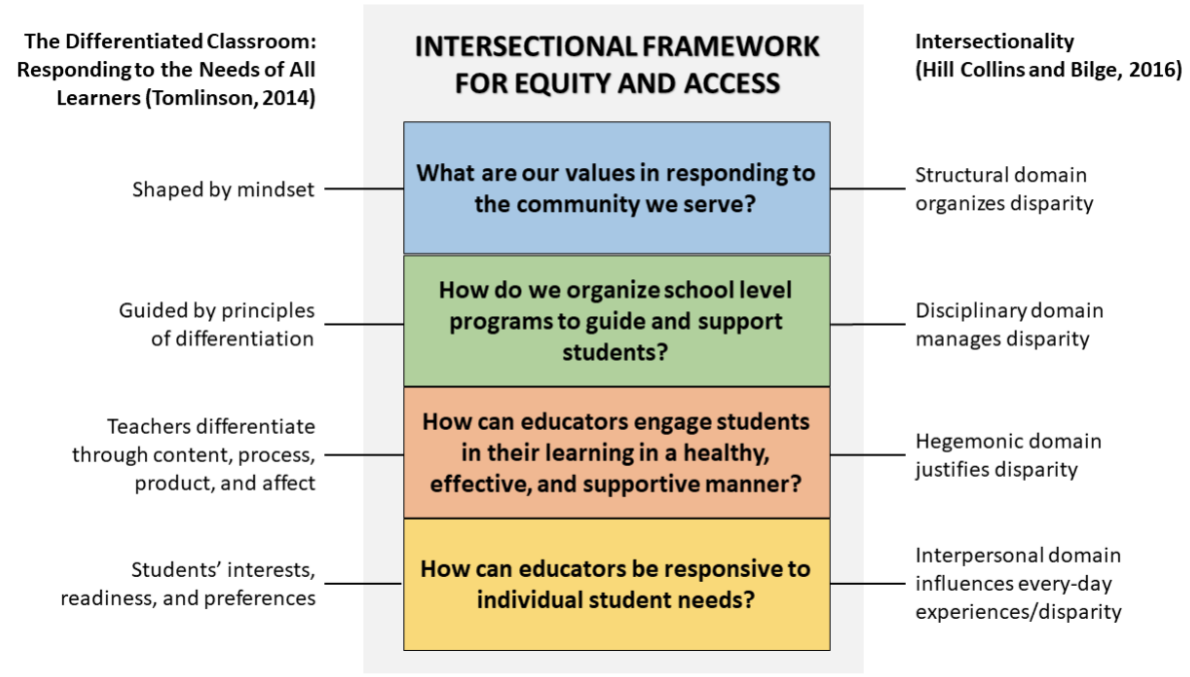

Figure 1. Simplified overview/understandings of the Intersectional Framework for Equity and Access. Source: Ellis, B. (2016). *Framing intersubjectivity to provide equity and access*. Department of Teacher Education, Education Leadership and Policy. University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, New Mexico.

It is pointedly important to understand the complexities of Hispanic youth space, a group that comprises 60% of youth in the state. While children in the state have a right to bilingual/multicultural education, only about 20% of Hispanic youth take part in bilingual programs. This group is comprised of students who come from both Spanish language dominant homes, as well as those who are heritage language speakers. A key finance question remains whether the state of New Mexico is providing sufficient funding, in keeping with the constitutional right of students, for the development of bilingual programs and teachers, so all students have access to them.

The multicultural education component of the Bilingual Multicultural Education Act is poorly understood and often mistakenly thought, even by educators, to apply only to students in bilingual programs. The effect of this line of thought is that about 80% of Hispanic children, as well as all other students in the state who are not in bilingual programs, do not have access to multicultural education and most teachers in the state do not benefit from related professional development (Sleeter, 2017, p. 35). The misapprehension of the value and relevance of multicultural education for *all* students in New Mexico given that a "large

percentage of American citizens harbor negative attitudes toward members of groups other than their own" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 12) is a profound failure to leverage a strength uniquely suited to remedy the express conditions harming students in New Mexico and to which students have a constitutional right (New Mexico Compilation Commission, 2019a, N.M. Const. art. 12, § 10).

Insights on Voice in New Mexican Youth Space

The concept of voice addresses the idea that minoritized people have valuable insight and "because of their different histories and experiences with oppression… [they] may be able to communicate to their White counterparts matters that [they] are unlikely to know" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 10). Too often, minoritized youth in New Mexico are rendered as deficient. An Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) program that has gained traction in the state and is geared toward preventing and eliminating childhood trauma takes as it's starting point, "FAR AWAY FROM YOU, on the other side of town, or the other side of the tracks, children live out perfectly miserable lives" (Ortega Courtney & Cappello, 2018, p. 2). Minoritized children are viewed, through a deficit lens, with trauma due to ACEs that needs to be treated prior to their being able to achieve, with an express goal of the program being the eradication of all childhood trauma.

This line of thinking reinforces a limited and binary understanding of the problem. There is value in understanding ACEs (Aspen Institute Education & Society Program, 2018, p. 4; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019), especially in developing adults' empathetic responses to youth, but doing so must be balanced with understanding the histories, experiences, assets, (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Yosso, 2005) hopes, and dreams of youth, as well.

The perception of minoritized youth as lacking results from a two-dimensional construct that falls short of discerning contextual inequities (Gutiérrez, 2008). Insight on what causes youth to be unwell is augmented by providing the contrasting approaches of critical practitioners at work in New Mexico who engage with children in ways that uplift, dignify, and value youth voice.

Right Relationship—Patricia Trujillo, Ph. D. What do we mean when we say right relationship? It is a concept that critically and creatively expands practices in education that call on systems and the people within them to have relationships with students, their families, and

the communities they serve. School systems often make claims to have relationships, but what is the quality of them? Often schools have unidirectional, linear relationships with their constituents, but rarely have adaptive relationships that are open to change. Adrienne Maree Brown envisions a more robust call for community organizing through her concept of emergent strategy; a concept that has evolved into:

> strategies for organizers building movements for justice and liberation that leverage relatively simple interactions to create complex patterns, systems, and transformations… ways for humans to practice being in right relationship to our home and each other, to practice complexity, and grow a compelling future together through relatively simple interactions. (Brown, 2017, p. 23)

Right relationship in Brown's (2017) conceptualization is multidirectional, non-linear and iterative and it invites us to see how the quality of our relationships, with careful attention to inclusion, "create complex patterns, systems, and transformations" (p. 24). In education, this means considering and approaching youth as equal partners in their education: to view them as having expertise, value their voice, and be open and responsive to the possibilities that result from the dialogue.

To be in right relationship means that the folks in traditional seats of power in educational systems need to be self-reflective, examine their use of power, and understand their positionality in the relationships they seek to build. Right relationship also requires critical, creative, cultural and empathic listening skills. It requires high quality presence. Right relationship with students and parents also requires a textual (issue at hand), contextual (historical, social, root causes of issue), and subtextual (knowledge of how systems work) analysis. Right relationship is "learning from the ways change and resilience happen throughout [the] entire interconnected complex system" and engaging from that connected complexity (Brown, 2017, p. 24). If right relationship sounds difficult, it is because it is, but part of the reframing of community and family-based education work is rigorous self-reflection on the part of practitioners in all fields who work with youth. That way, rather than focusing on fixing youth and regenerating patterns of subordination, the relationship we engage in with youth is healing and affirming.

Indigenous Cognitive Change Process—Patricia Anne Davis, M.A. Context is the container for the interrelated conditions in which something exists or occurs as in an

environment or setting. Indigenous Education is in the context of an Indigenous thinking system that can be defined as "pure non-dualistic" (Renard, 2003) which is a language worldview that uses our built-in capacity of whole-brain thinking, a capacity that is not either/or dualistic thinking. Whole-brain thinking is affirmative in terms of cross-cultural personhood identity as part of the elements of nature, earth, water, fire and air; and, governed by natural order laws as the fundamental basis of equality. Thus, an appropriate tool for inter-domain collaboration is an Indigenous Cognitive Change Process (Davis, 2005) that is:

- Cross-cultural,
- Inclusive for collaboration,
- Universal in practical application,
- Intergenerational, and
- Translatable into other languages.

An Indigenous Cognitive Change Process (Davis, 2005) is a sequencing of phases for change that reframes thinking out of win-lose, no-one wins, destructive and death-producing decisions and outcomes; and into win-win constructive and life-affirming decisions and outcomes. The purpose is to link groups, who would otherwise be engaged in dualistic adversarial dialogue and competitive decisions and outcomes, not beneficial to the Chicano/Chicana Indigenous People.

The Indigenous Cognitive Change Process (Davis, 2005) I designed follows this sequencing:

1) Name the out-of-balance-condition & identify the root cause that perpetuates the out-of-balance condition;

2) Empty by undoing and dismantling the root cause;

3) Reframe to organize information out of adversarial dualistic thinking and into win-win constructive and life-affirming decisions and outcomes. Reframing is using whole-brain thinking power-within to have power-with others for the explicit purpose of eliminating the need for power-over; and

4) Apply wellness restoration leadership for designing co-creative solutions with unifying principles beneficial to all domains and clients equally. This eliminates the need for exploiting and victimizing participants and ensures decision making for community building and collective survival.

The approaches employed by Trujillo and Davis invert the perception of youth from being deficient to that of resilient; viewing youth from a strengths-based stance. Their use of an expanded three-dimensional critical lens (Gutiérrez, 2008) makes explicit the landscape features that highlight the voice of New Mexican youth.

Trujillo and Davis describe a renewal of youth space that leads to a reframing of youth as knowledgeable participants engaged in resistance and leveraging strengths to negotiate a landscape in which "weariness and despair are predictable and inevitable" (Taylor, 2016, p. 9). Honoring youths' lived experience, Trujillo and Davis orient themselves to the youth they work with as thoughtful, caring, and generative; validating their worth in the work of their community. Such practice, though, is not the norm and key to understanding youth voice is that "when equity and social justice are not in place, peace and conflict resolution merely reify the existing social order" (Gorski, 2008, p. 522). Authentic inclusion and consideration of youth voice is a powerful medium for enacting positive change.

Conclusions

Taking time to slow down and reflect is as important as spending time and energy in action to transform the institution. The work of transformation is not only about changing what's "out there"; it is about transforming what is "in here," our own internal views and assumptions.

(Rendón, 2014, p. 48)

As lead author, Trujillo Ellis, I confront a dilemma of being committed to working with youth in my community, while feeling overwhelmed and discouraged by the hierarchies of power and privilege that dominate public education in New Mexico. The centering of *testimonio* provides a means of privileging truth-telling that is based in a praxis of love and seeks a more humanizing future for our vulnerable youth. It is the values of gratitude for and responsibility to my ancestors and the community that have uplifted me coupled with the experience of witnessing the youth of my community struggle that compel me to resist defeat, interrogate the efficacy of education policy, and engage in an analysis of the socio-political space that youth inhabit in New Mexico. As a Chicana woman from northern New Mexico, I measure the validity of education policy on its significance, relevance, and accessibility for students. Is the support that is provided, the support that is needed? How do we know? Most importantly, does it reach students? Does it have a positive, tangible, remediating impact on their lives?

In confronting the ways education needs to be critiqued and problematized (Ladson-Billings, 1998), I analyze the socio-political space that youth inhabit in New Mexico due to questioning funding decisions being made in the New Mexico political consciousness related to public education. Delgado and Stefancic's (2012) tenets of critical race theory support my understanding of how power operates in New Mexico youth space in the following ways:

1. *Racism is normal* – Not only is there an extreme lack of childhood well-being in the state, as evidenced by the indicators of wellbeing, the youth who are unwell are overwhelmingly youth of color;
2. *Interest convergence or material determinism* – Cuts to personal income taxes at the state level do not serve the interests of vulnerable youth in the state who benefit from robust services and sufficient funding of public education;
3. *Social construction of race* – The construction of youth, through a deficit mindset, leads to a misapprehension of students' challenges as attributable to culture, rather than inequitable access to resources and opportunity;
4. *Intersectionality and anti-essentialism* – Understanding how to respond to the intersecting needs of vulnerable students requires a framework that articulates multiple levels of conceptualization, so that the power relationships that impact students' opportunities can be seen and addressed; and
5. *Unique voice of color/counter-narrative* – Critical practitioners challenge epistemological conceptions; view youth as resilient and from a strengths-based perspective; honor youths' lived experience and orient themselves to the youth they work with as thoughtful, caring, and generative.

The tenets of critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) are conceptually useful in terms of eliciting a deeper understanding of the out-of-balance relationship between the youth of New Mexico and the dominant, conventional structure. They also provide tools with which to address the imbalance (Stovall, 2005) by indicating efforts that broaden critical consciousness of 1) New Mexico history; 2) New Mexico education law and policy; 3) the distinction between equality and equity in educational justice; 4) anti-racism and developing intergroup empathy; 5) intersectionality; 6) strengths-based thinking; and 7) youth participation.

In working through the process of delving into research and organizing my experiences, I find myself engaging in a ceremony of re-member-ing and healing. As I expand my thinking

(Solórzano, 1998), I am brought back to gratitude for the community and tools that provide frames of reference and the hope they engender. I am brought back to love and responsibility by the indicators of youth health and wellness in New Mexico that beseech ongoing struggle for educational opportunity. I am brought back to the value of *testimonio* as a medium for making meaning with our youth in reconstituting their space in New Mexico.

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