

**Reframing Community Partnerships in Education:
Uniting the Power of Place and Wisdom of People.**

Guajardo, M.A., Guajardo, F., Janson, C., & Militello, M. (2016).
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In *Reframing Community Partnerships in Education: Uniting the Power of Place and Wisdom of People*, co-authors Guajardo, Guajardo, Janson, and Militello (2016) present their theory of change in action called, “Community Learning Exchange (CLE),” along with a model they developed and termed, “Relationships, Assets, Stories, Place, Politic, and Action (RASPPA),” to engage in social justice efforts. Though not explicitly stated, in my estimation, the authors incorporate into their CLE model the critical scholarship of *Funds of Knowledge* (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992), *Community Cultural Wealth* (Yosso, 2005), humanizing research (Paris & Winn, 2013), and Freire’s (1970) pedagogies of learning and teaching.

CLE and RASPPA result from the authors’ individual and collective lived experiences. These concepts arose during a gathering hosted by an outside broker—the Kellogg Leadership for Community Change. However, its full materialization was a continuous engagement in questioning, active boundary crossing, and reflection of their roles, or positionality, as educators, advocates, and community organizers.

For instance, for the Guajardo brothers—both PhDs and both raised in the south Texas Rio Grande Valley—family cultural values and the limitless creativity and imagination used during their childhood games in a farm labor camp were foundational to their intellectual development. In terms that Moll, et al. (1992) would describe as “funds of knowledge,” assets were discussed by the authors as key learning and educating practices, happening outside the classroom, yet integral to their academic success. Most importantly, their experience with socially structured poverty, covert segregation, and systematic inequality in agricultural labor gave them an awareness of the assets, strengths, and possibilities within their own community and its members to challenge and transform a socially unjust reality.

As a collective, the authors identify five circular axioms of learning forming the proposed CLE theory of change in action and RASPPA. These axioms shape the three central “ecologies of knowing”—the self, organizations, and the community. Interwoven and as a generative process, these schemas or frames of reference organize the ways in which thinking and learning happens, as well as the way in which life is experienced. It is through these life experiences that knowledge is created. Those pushed to the margins of society, the authors argue, are best suited to recreate knowledge of themselves, reimagine their existence, and to use their agency and transform everyday conditions of inequity.

Theoretically speaking, CLE is composed of the stories, storytelling, and lived experiences shared in “gracious spaces” or places of trust. Through an invitation to participate in questioning of concrete reality, and thus crossing intentionally established boundaries (conscious and unconscious, physical, and imaginary), participants reposition the self and engage in what Freire (1970) might describe as the dialogic process of learning, naming, and acting upon the world. These stories are fueled by ancestral knowledge, grounded in the freedom of imagination and creativity and are best told by those experiencing it and invited to re-experience it. This invitation is not just a formal entrance to a consciously and collectively created space, by means of social gathering; instead, this is an invitation to undergo engagement akin to what Paris and Winn (2013) propose in *Humanizing Research* as the “worthy witness” of the true self in the process of liberation.

Methodologically, the continuous, collective, and reciprocal process of relationship-building is at the core of the ecologies of learning and the CLE-informed RASPPA method. Through a process of questioning, acting, and reflecting upon social reality, CLE repositions individuals as subjects rather than objects, actors rather than acted upon, and assets rather than handicaps, needs, or deficits. This reconfiguration and re-authoring of the self and community can be achieved through the use of tools such as, but not limited to, asset and community mapping and two proposed “dynamic-critical pedagogies”—the *pedagogies of reflection*, which engage participants in a circular practice of appreciative listening, meaningful critical dialogue and the *pedagogies with and in community* that engage participants in strategic community action, defined by the active problem-posing and recognition of community assets (p. 91-92). Thus, individuals are reframed as capable, with the ability to make familiar the unfamiliar, to shift the lens from a deficit view of communities of color, and to instead focus on recognizing and

employing what Yosso (2005) has similarly conceptualized as Community Cultural Wealth (CCW): the wide array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities and networks possessed by communities of color but uncredited by dominant forces.

As a theoretical and methodological tool, this book is seminal for those interested in the creation of a more socially just society, including educators/practitioners, community organizers, administrators, policymakers, and researchers. However, readers may note the absent voices and experiences of women of color in the shaping of the theory proposed. Noting this omission runs the risk of falling into a solely gender-binary critique. This observation is thus made in the interest of acknowledging the power of the collective experience, documented by the authors, while also ensuring that we not ignore the detrimental effects of patriarchy, class, race, and institutionalized racism. Nonetheless, the inclusion of third-world feminist perspectives, such as interwoven *trenzas de identidades* (see Gonzalez, 2010), counterstorytelling and *testimonios* (Delgado-Bernal, 1989; 1993; 2002), and community examination through the intersectional lens of race, class, gender, ideological, and political forms of interlocking oppression (Crenshaw, 1991) can strengthen the power of the proposed CLE and RASPPA model and widen the tools needed for recuperating people's sociohistorical experiences and community memory.

Much work remains undone in achieving the full inclusion of the heterogeneous voices and experiences of communities of color. Rather than solely removing dominant deficit-based notions and practices when engaging historically disenfranchised communities of color, CLE and RASPPA re-center, honor, and privilege the lived experiences of those at the very margins of society. By allowing individuals and communities to re-gain new insight of their agency and imagination to design the much needed sustainable change, the framework presented in this book moves us forward in an effort to *raspar* (chip away at) and transform the existing historical structures of power hindering our collective humanity.

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