

## **Pedagogical Communities Against Fascism: Resisting Together**

Ana Isabel Terminel Iberri

Teaching about power and oppression in a state like Arizona has been especially difficult given the normalization of anti-immigrant, white supremacist, and fascist discourse in everyday life. As a critical cultural communication scholar, I am committed to introducing students to tools that help us to analyze and understand the ways in which power is reinforced and reproduced in varied contexts. This is especially important in courses that do not typically include conversations about power, or those in which students do not expect to engage in such discussions. In my experience, these spaces can be exceptionally generative and can provide space for students to begin to grapple with their complicity in the oppression of others. This, of course, requires that I, too, grapple with my own complicity.

I often use my own experiences as a Mexican immigrant navigating the U.S. immigration system to highlight the ways that my life has been shaped by privilege and oppression simultaneously. In sharing personal details of my own journey, however, I sometimes open myself up to queries or unwarranted comments. Often these comments reflect the same fascistic discourses circulating in the media or political campaign ads. Questions about legality, the 'right' way to do things, and my reason for being here implicate my person. These moments can be exhausting and overwhelming. While these conversations begin at the personal level, they eventually turn to broader discussions about society and its problems. This point

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of local focus provides an opportunity to introduce students to the radical work of organizations like Trans Queer Pueblo<sup>1</sup>, a migrant queer and trans led organization that engages in advocacy work for the rights of queer and trans migrants of color. And while these community-centered conversations can be fruitful, they also become harmful and violent when students see them as an opportunity to share comments and opinions shaped by white supremacist cisheteropatriarchy, and their entanglement with carceral logics constituting Arizona. I often leave the classroom overwhelmed by feelings of inadequacy and questioning my own abilities as a critical pedagogue. Should I have shared less about myself? Did I handle the situation correctly? Should I have intervened sooner? Was I too harsh? Should I have been more direct?

I'm grateful for the contributions of the educators in this forum who share their ways of navigating this contested space in light of rising fascism. While the work we engage within classroom contexts is critical, I argue that navigating fascism within educational contexts necessitates an intentional turn towards a community of radical pedagogues. The concerted labor we engage outside of the classroom makes it possible for us to be intentional and strategic in our classrooms, while having the support of educators committed to an overlapping politic. As a Latina graduate student navigating academic borderlands, I learned to be critically relational with folks who share similar political commitments (Andrade & Gutierrez-Perez, 2019). My experiences teaching in Arizona have reinforced my belief that being part of a strong and radical community of educators is vital to our success as pedagogues. In *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks (1994) discusses the importance of building a teaching community, a space in which critical thinkers can "talk to one another, collaborate in a discussion that crosses boundaries and creates a space for intervention" (p. 129). Being part of—while co-creating—a community of radical educators has provided a space that I have longed for as a pedagogue; one in which I can show up as my full self and process my successes and failures, one in which I can acknowledge and *feel* the ways I have been harmed in the classroom, and one in which I can recognize the harm I have caused others with the goal of transformation in future educative contexts.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on the radical work of Trans Queer Pueblo, or to support their mission, please visit <https://www.tqpueblo.org/en>

The radical educational community to which I belong is relational by design, meaning the relationships developed extend far beyond discussions of pedagogy. These are people I consider my close friends, those with whom I laugh, learn, and struggle. Griffin (2012) explores the promise of critical love and its potential to build coalitions that embrace difference. She articulates that “an ethic of care rooted in critical love supports humanization, dialogue, and strong emotions” (p. 9). While norms of professionalism dictate emotional detachment in our academic endeavors, I am unapologetic in embracing the emotions that emerge from my engagement with/in educative contexts. The frustration, anxiety, and tears that result from difficult and sometimes violent classroom encounters require an outlet. I know that I can turn to a number of folks who will sit, listen, and let me feel the difficulty of the moment—without vying to resolve or ‘fix’ the discomfort. Rather than fearing vulnerability, this community recognizes the strength that comes with an embrace of our emotions, and a place to process them toward collaborative political ends.

While the emotional support we provide one another is vital, we also choose to exchange ideas, brainstorm possible solutions, and share classroom assignments. In this way, our community is also pedagogical. It is a space where we can hold each other accountable, call each other in, and continue to be critically reflexive in our pedagogical approaches. Calafell and Gutierrez-Perez (2018) assert that critical love is a concerted labor that demands a “continual reflexive turn” (p. 59). Indeed, reflexivity becomes a collective effort that nourishes our own presence in the classroom, while strengthening our coalition of pedagogues. Articulating the pedagogical orientation of these communities is imperative as it requires that we acknowledge our roles as forever students, while rejecting the assumption or position that we have already achieved a liberatory pedagogy. In doing so, we are better equipped to speak and fight back against fascism, not as it manifests in an individual or interpersonal encounter, but as a structural form of oppression.

While the individualist/isolationist design of the academy may have us believe that we need to do this work alone, we must remember that *we were never meant to*. Working towards liberatory futures necessitates collaboration and coalition building (Tristano, Jr. & Terminel Iberri, 2022). The sooner we can realize and embrace this, the sooner we can begin to experience the joy and support that emerges from belonging to a community shaped by radical political commitments. Garcia Peña (2022) reminds us that community is the most fruitful form of

rebellion, and that we must be intentional in building bridges with others to form “concrete plans to *sustain* our work and our lives” (p. 31). This community of radical educators is a constant reminder that our work is never done. We must be committed to the process of unlearning if we are to imagine a different future where we are free from oppressive systems of punishment and surveillance. And we must be willing to do this together.

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