

Generating Transworld Pedagogies: Reimagining La Clase Mágica.

Edited by Belinda Bustos Flores, Olga A. Vásquez, and Ellen Riojas Clark. New York: Lexington Books, 2014.

Reviewed by Richard P. Durán

La Clase Mágica as a growing and flourishing afterschool learning network has an origin. As an introduction to this volume and its themes, it is important to note that the UC Links network of afterschool computer learning sites – like its progenitor the Fifth Dimension network – has served as a continuous spawning ground for social design experiments that explore making learning culturally responsive to the lives of participants. The Fifth Dimension started with a canonical design featuring an imaginary wizard guiding afterschool club members through a maze consisting of rooms filled with intellectually challenging computer games. The Maze established the landscape of activity while the Wizard mythologized the program as a cultural system. As youths mastered games they received recognition for their growing competencies in the linguistic and cognitive skills required by games and were labeled “Wizard’s Assistants.” As the Fifth Dimension evolved into the present UC Links network, implementers have experimented with variations on the original core Fifth Dimension model, opening up the framing of site artifacts and activities so as to make them more meaningful to the everyday lives of youths. La Clase Mágica has led the way in this regard with some of the most ambitious and productive social design experiments that provide a culturally resonant, transworld *mythos* of activity mediating the disconnect that exists between youths’ everyday experiences, linguistics and cultural resources, the growth and spread of technology affecting communication and learning, and the more narrow range of instructional practices encountered in traditional classrooms.

A Foreword by Kris Gutiérrez does an excellent job of exploring these historical contexts and then goes on to review the many creative accomplishments of La Clase Mágica, connecting these accomplishments to current theory and research in cultural psychology, the learning sciences, and related interdisciplinary efforts to create and implement social design experiments. The Foreword also does a fine job of overviewing the intent and contributions of the authors included in the volume.

The volume is organized into four major sections, clarifying the realization of its title as both a theory for how to implement culturally responsive learning through presentation of descriptions of site implementations. As discussed below these unique, but deeply interrelated, implementations embody key principles resonating

with the volume's inspirational title *Generating Transworld Pedagogy: Reimagining La Clase Mágica*.

Section I: Embracing a Transworld View

This stimulating section is made up of three chapters by Mayra Avidad, Ellen Clark, Belinda Flores, and Olga Vásquez covering four interlocking principles framing La Clase Mágica's transworld view of learning. These include: 1) attention to the dialogic method as central to learning via interaction; 2) Vygotskian notions of culture and human and social development; 3) bilingual/bicultural assets tied to asserting identity and consciousness of social justice issues; and 4) *cosmovisión* (cosmic world order) emanating from a living awareness of the "sacred sciences" drawing on the New World indigenous heritage of Latinos. The notion of "worlds" is opened up to include the many forms of consciousness associated with community members' encounters with worlds that constitute the day to day social and policy spaces that affect human interaction and self-identity. But beyond this, attention is given to worlds that constitute a grand *cosmovisión* drawn from the *Sacred Sciences* regarding the nature of reality. This is a unique contribution of the volume, and one that is important to foreground. The perspective reflects a quest for a unified ontology linking all forms of natural and cultural realities, including human evolution as generated by primal and still operative forms of energy transformation. These perspectives, e.g., are reflected in the mythic beliefs and literate practices of indigenous communities such as the Huicholes of Mexico. The cover art of the present volume drawn from a collection maintained by Vásquez is an excellent example of relevant imagery. Why should this appeal to *cosmovisión* be so important as a unifying theme to this volume?

The answer lies in the belief that the societal inequities encountered by Latinos underserved by the society in general are unnatural, and will be overcome by appealing to a deeper understanding of the human condition – one which reveals and makes accessible forms of energy and literacies that can cross and transform those inequities in worlds experienced by humans so as to enter and sustain a more harmonious and balanced natural order among all worlds experienced by humans reflected in the totality of nature.

Particular attention is paid in the volume to the world of teacher preparation as a vehicle to implement transformative transworld pedagogies embodying the four principles via local implementations of the La Clase Mágica. These local implementations are centered on Latino Southwest communities of Austin, San Antonio, and San Diego, though attention is also additionally given to a Gypsy community in Spain to demonstrate the breadth of the La Clase Mágica approach. The local implementations in the Southwest all create and sustain learning communities, bringing young bilingual learners (*protégés*) together with college and university undergraduate teacher candidates (*aspirantes*) for the purpose of exploring learning and civic engagement mediated by technology in a culturally responsive manner.

Section II: Transcending Borders as Transworld Citizens

In brief, Section II consists of three chapters that discuss how implementations of La Clase Mágica intersect with educational policy worlds. Provocatively, Chapter 4,

by Patricia López and Angela Valenzuela, discusses how the Texas state legislative process in setting educational policies allegedly serving the interests of Latino and EL students actually ends up subverting implementation of progressive initiatives such as La Clase Mágica, because of anachronistic views of educational processes and what can count as sources of evidence of education outcomes (e.g., Standardized test scores). Chapter 5 by Lorena Claeys and Henrietta Muñoz discusses how the Edgewood ISD implementation of the La Clase Mágica was founded on developing a culturally responsive relationship between community families and the UTSA Academy for Teacher Excellence Program and the Making Connections Partnership program drawing on Latino values and folk wisdom. Chapter 6, by Patricia Sánchez, Timothy Yuen, Macneil Shonle, Theresa De Hoyos, Lisa Santillán, and Adriana García, describes how a UTSA educational technology team was able to use their advanced information technology and programming team to re-invent the La Clase Mágica “*laberinto*” (maze). The electronic *laberinto* was organized into multimedia rooms/spaces celebrating familiar Mexicano/Latino cultural events, celebrations, and cultural artifacts that motivated students’ engagement in site activities.

Section III: Enacting Transworld Pedagogies

This section of the volume consists of six chapters each describing in rich detail specific highlights of various La Clase Mágica sites that embody key principles associated with transformative transworld educational practices. Chapter 7, by Iliana Alanís, and Chapter 8, by Maria Arreguín-Anderson and Kimberley Kennedy, examine how mobile technologies help future teacher *aspirantes* communicate in a multimedia and culturally responsive fashion with other youth participants in La Clase Mágica. Chapter 9, by Lucila Ek, Adriana Garcia, and Armando Garza, extends these concerns to examining how youth participants in La Clase Mágica at their sites use multimedia technology to establish their voices as community members, with multiple forms of literacy connected to their bilingual and new technology skills.

An important contribution is made in the following two chapters that go on to look even more concretely at particular kinds of reasoning and problem-solving skills connecting La Clase Mágica activities to social justice, and skills targeted by schools. Chapter 10, by Carmen Martínez-Roldán, discusses dialogic interactions between teacher aspirantes supporting student *protégés* who are engaged in reading language/arts and science learning--mediated by technology--in an afterschool La Clase Mágica setting, tying classroom learning objectives to site activities. Then Chapter 11, by Craig Willey, Carlos LópezLeiva, Zayoni Torres, and Lena Khisty, describes teacher candidate *aspirantes* and student *protégés*’ learning of mathematics bilingually, in an afterschool site known as Los Rayos modeled after La Clase Mágica.

To end Section III, Chapter 12, by Margarita Machado-Casas, closes an important transworld pedagogies circle by linking schools, teacher candidate *aspirantes* and student *protégés*, to families and community members at large. It describes how La Clase Mágica activities in San Antonio support parents’ and community members’ access to technology, computers, and the Internet so as to make parents and community members partners with *aspirantes* and *protégés* in deep learning and literacy development, attuned to the four principles underlying implementation of transformative transworld pedagogies.

Section IV: Evolving for Innovation

This section closes the volume and presents a look ahead to the promise of La Clase Mágica as a base for progressive education transforming the learning and development of populations underserved by formal education systems. Two themes are pursued in this section. Chapter 13, by Beatriz Gómez-Estern and Olga Vásquez, explores the creative adaptation and successful implementation of the La Clase Mágica paradigm in the implementation of related sites in Spain, serving Gypsy community members in the Barcelona region, and in Sevilla in alignment with the four principles underlying transworld pedagogies. The key to this success has been to draw on the cultural traditions and resources of the populations served by these sites and to use technology as a tool for *conscientization* and community development. In the subsequent and closing final Chapter (14), Ellen Clark, Belinda Flores, and Olga Vásquez return to the importance of *cosmovisión* derived from indigenous sacred sciences as a root source for the wisdom motivating and enacted by La Clase Mágica sites.

Closing Comments

The notion of *cosmovisión* and the Sacred Sciences may strike some readers as a mystical, wishful pursuit of fantasy not deserving serious consideration as a foundational principle for education. Yet at the same time, the origins of cultural psychology as long ago as, e.g., Wilhelm Wundt, and the works of Jerome Bruner in more recent decades, have pointed to the central role of “folk psychology” as an important resource in human understanding of the nature of the human experience. It has also served as a strategy to cope with survival and social self-actualization. These understandings are arguably social constructions that have their own cultural historical evolution and social means of propagation across time and setting. The folk beliefs of the indigenous communities cited in this volume are of this nature. They exist and propagate among the descendants of indigenous communities and find shelter and nurturance more broadly in extended communities. They give meaning to life. They are alive in the communities examined in this volume, and serve these communities well as ongoing resources and tools for sociocultural self-actualization. This volume clearly delineates both the cultural significance and the instrumental power of this *cosmovisión* for the design and development of activities and pedagogies to promote learning among underserved youth.