

# Transforming Educational Pathways for Chicana/o Students

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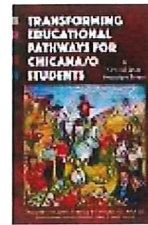
**Title:** Transforming Educational Pathways for Chicana/o Students: A Critical Race Feminista Praxis

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There is little debate that the Chicana@Latin@ educational pipeline is hemorrhaging students at every level. However, critical approaches to this issue rarely offer tangible solutions. When scholars or practitioners create innovative programs, their suggestions for scaling up tend to be overly prescriptive and only focus on one component of the educational pipeline. Dolores Delgado Bernal and Enrique Alemán Jr. deftly navigate this tricky terrain as they document their 10-year-long journey through the formation of the Adelante program in their exciting new book *Transforming Educational Pathways for Chicana/o Students: A Critical Race Feminista Praxis*. They offer a multipronged strategy for creating transformative ruptures in the Chicana@Latin@ educational pipeline. By transformative ruptures, the authors mean “those incidents, interactions, experiences, and moment where a disruption of pervasive coloniality, institutional racism, and systemic inequity occurs” (p. 28). Delgado Bernal and Alemán document the creation of a program that increased educational opportunity for Chicana@Latin@s throughout the educational pipeline and challenged systemic racism. It also remained open about their struggles in creating and maintaining this university-school-community partnership.

The first chapter offers a critical analysis of race-based educational inequity in the United States. Simultaneously, it contextualizes the educational needs of Chicana@Latin@s in Utah, where the intervention takes place. The Adelante program is a university-school-community partnership that brings together institutions, educators, and families to construct college pathways for Chicana@Latin@ students. It also establishes a college-going culture at their local elementary and feeder secondary school. Delgado Bernal and Alemán use the remaining chapters to demonstrate how this multilayered partnership among Jackson Elementary School, the University of Utah, and local educators, families, and students works to advance the educational opportunities for Chicana@Latin@ students.

Chapter Two introduces the conceptual framework of critical race feminista praxis used in the development, implementation, and analysis of Adelante. A strength of this book is the authors' extensive use of culturally-relevant concepts in constructing this praxis orientated framework. It includes, but is not limited to, Critical Race Theory, Chicana feminist theories, community cultural wealth, racial realism, intersectionality, *choque*, *nepantla*, *nos/otas*, spiritual activism, *transas*, and transformative ruptures. While defining each is beyond the scope of this review, they collectively advance a critique of structured inequality and oppression. Delgado Bernal and Alemán conclude this chapter by providing an overview of the multiple elements of the Adelante project. These include university mentors, university visits, social justice research, parent and teacher engagement programs, and academic and cultural enrichment opportunities.

Chapter Three powerfully documents the potential of students seeing themselves in the curriculum. It also demystifies the ivory tower by making it more accessible in the lives of L@s Primer@s, Adelante's first cohort of kindergarten students. Delgado Bernal and Alemán show how the different elements of Adelante (university visits, mentorship by college students of color, and culturally relevant projects like oral histories) serve as transformative ruptures to traditional schooling practices by integrating familial knowledge of L@s Primer@s

into the school setting while also exposing them to college pathways. They demonstrate through interviews and *pláticas* with L@s Primer@s in their high school years that Adelante fostered a deeper awareness of college. It also promoted higher aspirations for this cohort of students than peers who had not participated in the program.

Chapter Four offers an additional layer to this partnership by shifting focus from the students to educational leaders, teachers, and parents. In doing so, they uncover various challenges that arise when promoting a college-going culture in a school serving students of color. In particular, they deal with teachers who carry deficit-based views of Chican@Latin@ student abilities and parental investment in their children's education. Conversely, Adelante staff members were guided by social justice principles that recognized communities of color as creators of knowledge and skills essential to their success. Parents tended to hold high expectation of their children while seeing a lot of promise in Adelante's involvement in their students' ongoing success. These competing mindsets created tensions between Adelante staff and teachers. They also tended to foster trusting relationships between Adelante staff and parents. This chapter was particularly important because it demonstrates how messy educational interventions can be, especially when the expectations of teachers, parents, and Adelante affiliates are in conflict.

Chapter Five documents the evolution of a core partner in this educational intervention, namely Diversity Scholars Program. This program is housed at the University of Utah. It connected first-generation undergraduate students of color to Adelante participants by way of a mentorship program. The benefits of this program were far reaching in creating transformative ruptures throughout the educational pipeline. For these undergraduate students, mentoring Adelante learners positively impacted their racial or ethnic understanding of self, campus engagement, retention, and ability to challenge deficit-discourses about communities of color within the university. With respect to the elementary students, these undergraduates served as role models showing that students of color are scholars and community-based agents of change.

The final chapter outlines *consejos* or takeaways for engaging in a critical race feminista praxis aimed at transforming the educational trajectories of Chican@Latin@ students. These *consejos* are organized into the following three overlapping areas: daily negotiations to maintain a partnership program, disruptions to hostile campus climates, and the dissonance and messiness of activist research. The authors assert that they and their graduate student assistants or researchers' struggles to balance competing priorities (research, programmatic needs, and the material lives of community members) create a reflective opportunity to develop themselves as social justice workers engaged in both reading about Chican@Latin@ communities *and* producing knowledge to transform those communities.

Delgado Bernal and Alemán provide a rich description of this bold and innovative program while also sharing their personal journeys as critically engaged and transformative scholars who are oriented publically. They are open about the struggles involved in creating and maintaining the program. This serves as an important reminder that positive outcomes of educational interventions are not predetermined, even among well-conceived and carefully implemented programs.

We offer one critique of the application of critical race feminista praxis framework. Specifically, we would have liked to see more explicit engagement with gender. Chicana feminism, especially that using Anzaldúa theories as a foundation (e.g., Anzaldúa, 2007, 2015; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983), is also about disrupting patriarchy and heteronormativity. The descriptions of Adelante tended to strongly center race, but there was little about gender and sexuality. Despite this shortcoming, the collective power of the authors' documentation of Adelante and its guiding praxis lies in its decentering of the authority of university professors in constructing meaningful, community-based educational interventions. It also recognizes that marginalized peoples are holders of knowledge. Delgado Bernal and Alemán's account of Adelante offers an impassioned call to educators to move beyond researching inequality and become engaged community partners in transforming the educational pathways of students of color.

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