Reading in Their Own Interests:
Teaching Five Levels of Analysis to U.S.
Students of Color in Urban Communities

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This article examines the usefulness of engaging culturally relevant texts with five levels of analysis to foster critical thinking and academic writing. Teachers who are not critical of seemingly a theoretical, ahistorical reading methods often overlook the ways that cultural biases in instructional methods ignore the cultural and critical needs of urban students of color (Bartolome, 1994; Morrell, 2008). Using five levels of analysis (explicit, implicit, theoretical, interpretive, and applicable) addresses this concern by challenging students to comprehend the central ideas of texts, interrogate in terms of social justice, connect concepts to their immediate realities and extrapolate useful ideas to apply to their everyday lives.

A text to be read is a text to be studied. A text to be studied is a text to be interpreted. We cannot interpret a text if we read it without paying attention, without curiosity…. If a text is difficult, you insist on understanding it…. To study is not easy because to study is to create and re-create and not to repeat what others say. To study is a revolutionary duty!

—Student cited *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World*

(Freire & Macedo, 1988, p. 77).

When I was an early career teacher, Freire and Macedo's (1987) *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World* helped me understand how urban schooling experiences were symptomatic of larger institutional practices that silence critical social analysis and foreground mendacious cultural narratives. These learning conditions are major contributors to a sense of academic marginalization that contributes to upwards of 50% national African-American and Latino high school dropout rates (Orfield, 2004). On average, African-American and "Hispanic" twelfth-grade students read at the same level as White eighth-graders (Office of

Vocational and Adult Education, 2002). Beyond youth of color, roughly 23% of all high school graduates are not ready to succeed in an introductory-level college writing course (ACT, 2006). Understanding the importance of critical literacy in this context serves to further clarify my conviction that in order for teachers to more effectively connect our objectives to the needs of urban communities we must construct critical and culturally responsive teaching practices that tap into the transformative potential of young people in our classrooms. In other words, our curriculum must offer students an opportunity to move across various forms of literacy by developing an analytical lens through which they can interpret their own reality and move towards a critical consciousness. Reading instruction, thus, must help students critically understand themselves and the world around them.

Instead, urban educators are often stockpiled with "teacher-proof," corporate textbooks aligned with state learning standards designed to transfer community-irrelevant content and rote skill sets without taking into account the social needs of its learners. In this high-stakes testing climate, urban teaching is done "in preparation for multiple choice exams and writing gobbledygook in imitation of the psycho-babble that surrounds them" (Courts, 1991, p. 4). As Macedo (1996) described, "Literacy for the poor is, by and large, characterized by mindless, meaningless drills and exercises" (p. 37). To more effectively respond to "'uncritical' literacy" (Morrell, 2008, p. 211), this article shares an approach to reading that guides urban high-school-aged students to read in their own interests. Delpit (1988) argues that there is a distinct culture and language of power that acts as an educational gatekeeper—a "silenced dialogue" whereby poor children, particularly poor non-White children, are never given access to the tools of academic and critical literacy. She contends that there is a set of rules through which power is mediated, "a culture of power," and that teachers must provide a bridge into that dialogue for students that come from socially marginalized cultures. Teaching students to read in their own interest addresses this by using the culture of students as an explicit pathway into academic literacy and the culture of power that resides there.

Reading the Word through Their World

To move towards alternative approaches to reading instruction, we could engage in what Gay (2000) calls "culturally responsive teaching." Utilizing culturally relevant pedagogies is a fundamental approach to creating engaging, yet rigorous, learning conditions for underrepresented students of color in working class communities (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Oakes, Lipton, Anderson, & Stillman, 2012; Sleeter, 2005). Gay described culturally responsive teaching practice as reflecting the following qualities: acknowledging cultural legacies in relation to the past and present, transitions between community and academic contexts and concepts; facilitating multiple learning styles; fostering intra- and inter-cultural dignities; and incorporating multicultural content in all subject matters (p. 29). Culturally relevant pedagogy begins with the cultural realities of

students from diverse ethnic backgrounds as the starting place of all learning. This work is critical in that it serves as a corrective measure for the alienating consequences that result from standard school curriculum. Starting with the cultural realities of the students helps them more effectively identify with the content they are engaging. The socially transformative quality in culturally relevant teaching is that it accounts for students' ethnic perspectives and social realities when mapping out course content, instructional method, and pedagogical purpose to fundamentally improve the academic success of historically marginalized students.

Critical pedagogy has many overlapping principles with culturally relevant pedagogy and multicultural education. As Gay (1995) argued, "Their terrains are closely juxtaposed and frequently overlap…. [Both] are driven by critical analysis, multiple perspectives, cultural pluralism, social activism, counterhegemony, and sociocultural contextualism in instructional processes and expected learning outcomes" (p. 158). At the center of critical pedagogy is the examination of education's role in reifying existing power relations in order to transform them. Its educational aims are to teach students to become critically conscious so they re-think what they think they already know in order to exercise their agency to disrupt oppressive social, political, and economic relations at the interpersonal, cultural, and institutional levels (Freire, 1970; McLaren, 1994; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). Together, culturally relevant critical pedagogies draw from students' cultural frameworks, lived experiences, and diverse learning styles to specifically engage students in critically democratic learning.

In relation to literacy, Freire and Macedo (1987) argue that reading the world precedes decoding of words. For them, reading "is to uncover; it is to gain a more exact comprehension of an object; it is to realize its relationship to other objects. This implies a requirement for risk-taking and venturing on the part of the student…" (21). Reading, in this sense, involves the ability to connect ideas. More than mechanically decoding written text, readers make sense of what they are reading through its relationships with other texts, concepts, and circumstances. Motivating students to read requires that teachers know their students and develop reading processes for them to critically understand texts in ways that illuminate the connections with and contradictions related to their concrete realities. Limiting our reading instruction to surface level understandings of texts does not awaken students' social consciousness as much as it stifles their abilities to think. As Freire and Macedo (1987) argued further, "That is why reading a text as pure description of an object…is neither real reading nor does it result in knowledge of the object to which the text refers" (33). In other words, to effectively engage youth in socially transformative reading, teachers must scaffold student learning from the context upon which youth draw their notions of reality.

Furthermore, the role of a critical literacy teacher is to help students become socially conscious of how they construct their realities. Morrell's (2008) notion of critical literacy echoes Freire and Macedo by arguing:

True revolutionary change of the self or the social necessarily begins with critical literacies. That is, how people come to interpret, deconstruct, produce, and distribute language and texts that name and ultimately destabilize existing norms and power relations is the cause of promoting change of the self and the social. (p. 208)

Using students' prior experiences to engage urban youth, Morrell applied the basic tenets of critical pedagogy by positioning youth as experts and apprenticing them as critical researchers of language and literacy practices of urban communities and cultures. Constructing a "pedagogy and praxis of access and dissent" in prior work, Morrell (2005) drew upon popular culture as a bridge to the English canon for youth who have not been traditionally prepared to access seminal literary texts (p. 314). While his research poses youth culture as a site to engage students in relevant research, this strategy can certainly apply to the use of other aspects of youth resistance and local "street" ideologies and discourses.

These theories reflect a pedagogy I constructed upon which I could mediate learning so that students could more critically understand the harsh realities facing them in their communities. Texts were chosen, literacy methods were modified, and the purpose for reading and writing was framed with the intent of challenging students to problematize anti-colonial, racialized, and gendered notions of social justice. They were asked to read their world and the word in ways that were culturally relevant and critical. This was done with the aim of transforming students' sense of hopelessness by fostering their culturally empowering and socially conscious analysis, increasing their level of academic engagement and production, and critically shifting their perceptions about themselves and the world around them. To accomplish this, I connected the readings and writing assignments and critical analytical methods directly to the interests of the youth. Doing otherwise might have left my framework and pedagogy vulnerable to my students interpreting the method and material as irrelevant to their most pressing needs.

Research Context and Design

Slauson High School[1] (SHS) had the city's highest Black student population (66.1%) for a large, comprehensive campus. Two weeks before the start of the 2005-2006 school year, the effects of a series of gang-related shootings were intensified by the murder of a recent graduate who was shot, point blank, in the immediate school community. Despite these realities, issues of intra- and inter-racial tensions, mourning, or any other form of social toxins (Duncan-Andrade, 2009) were not discussed to any degree during the multiple professional development days that preceded the opening of the school year.

This article drew on a variety of methodological approaches to gather interpretive data. Conducting qualitative research from a practitioner's perspective in a traditional classroom setting necessitated the use of methods that could effectively document the cultural, ideological, and academic nuances

as they surfaced. To create an existing set of qualitative data, field notes, student work and other artifacts, and classroom audio and video were gathered and analyzed. The study was grounded in the tradition of teacher-research applying critical pedagogies in urban schools (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Gutstein, 2006; Tan, 2008). This research was in line with Morrell's call to action:

> We need more teacher-produced action research that documents what the practice of critical literacy might look like in urban secondary contexts. We need university-based researchers to argue for the legitimacy of critical research within the academy. These researchers are charged with developing questions and methodologies that challenge problematic, reproductive pedagogies while developing conceptual and empirical pieces that point toward empowering literacy practices among urban adolescents. (p. 220)

I also made efforts to honor research principles grounded in *cariño*, "often translated as *caring, affection,* or *love,* but much is lost in this translation" (Duncan-Andrade, 2006, p. 451) and decolonizing methodologies (Smith, 1999). *Cariño* in educational research "recognizes the complexity of each individual set of conditions and encourages a sensibility of local agency and control for developing solutions for local problems" (Duncan-Andrade, 2006, p. 455). Decolonizing methodologies "retrench in the margins, retrieve what [colonized people] were [before colonialism], and [are intended to] remake ourselves" through data collection and interpretation (Smith, 1999, p. 4). Applied culturally relevant and critical pedagogical research grounded in *cariño* and decolonizing methodology is important because it focuses on teaching practices and research approaches that draw on the cultural frames and critical needs of students to reclaim the worldviews and ways of knowing of which ethnic people have historically been dispossessed.

Towards this end, I utilized an interpretive case study to illuminate an exemplar for a pedagogical paradigm of activity for applying a critical literacy frame in an urban school. The focal twelfth grade English class included 14 boys and 17 girls, with 27 Black and four Latina/o students. The student in this case study is an African-American young woman with a 2.1 grade point average who needed to make up 25 credits (5 classes) in adult school during her senior year in order to graduate on stage with the rest of her class. According to Stake (2005), "Case study concentrates on experiential knowledge of the case and close attention to the influence of its social, political, and other contexts" (p. 444). Through the case study I hoped to offer a grounded understanding of this reading practice applied in the actual school and community settings this critical qualitative study hoped to impact positively. Since "[a]chieving the greatest understanding of the critical phenomena depends on choosing the case well" (Stake, 2005, p. 450), I interpret the data through the lens of the theoretical frame and substantiate the paradigm of practice illuminated in this study. Similarly, I chose this particular student because the pedagogical moment we engaged in had the instructive quality I was looking for to illustrate the constructs in the article. This case study is part of an ongoing set of qualitative data, the

accumulation of field notes, student work and other artifacts, classroom video, and interviews gathered as part of my longer research trajectory[2]. Extensive coded field notes and video analysis of student learning are analyzed to determine the quality of critical engagement, pedagogical strategies for academic rigor, and shifting discourses representing different cultural, ideological, and community perspectives.

This case study adds to the limited body of work of critical literacy urban teacher-researchers, illustrating actual in-class instructional interventions to critically engage youth in transformative classroom practice. By foregrounding grounded descriptions and student voice, the process of identifying problems and researching solutions becomes reflective of the conditions this type of critical qualitative research seeks to change. This type of limited practitioner insight – desperately sought after by teachers and teacher-education programs interested in socially just practice—can help transform the learning of students in urban classrooms and communities.

Five Levels of Analysis

This article examines the usefulness of engaging culturally relevant texts with five levels of analysis to foster critical thinking and academic writing. For the unit from which this case study is drawn, students wrote expository, "philosophy for social change," essays comparing and contrasting at least two readings and created and presented group performance interpretations of their collective philosophies. For the sake of this article, I will focus mostly on the textual analysis that led to essay writing. Though students were able to engage with various culturally responsive texts in very critical, relevant, and comprehensive ways, experience taught me that they could have benefited from an analytical method to examine readings in ways that would translate effectively into academic essays. As Tovani (2004) noted, "It wasn't [students'] fault that they were making stupid connections. It was mine, because I hadn't showed them how a meaningful connection could deepen their understanding of the text" (p. 12). To assist students in developing analytical methods for their textual analysis, I introduced them to what I called five levels of analysis:

- **Explicit** – Requires reading for facts, seeking information that is straight from the reading, unarguable, and summative.

- **Implicit** – Makes inferences based on suggested meaning, context clues, and reading between the lines; inferences made are arguable.

- **Theoretical** – Philosophical or conceptual interrogations are used to explain the meaning of texts; theoretical analysis enables readers to arrive at more sophisticated understandings and responses to information. Theoretical frameworks from disciplinary and social theory and philosophy can be used to focus and systematize analysis. In this case study, the theoretical question posed essentially asks, "What does this mean in relation to social justice?"

- **Interpretive** – This analysis is based on readers' emotional and visceral responses to the analysis conducted on the prior levels of analysis. It asks: How is this relevant? How do you feel about this?

- **Applicable** – This level of analysis looks to arrive at pragmatic implications. It asks: Now what? Based on the prior analysis, what should be done?

The concept of five levels of analysis builds off the more widely used *say-mean-matter* methods of reading comprehension, or Vacca and Vacca's (2007) three-level guide that "stimulates an active response to meaning at the literal, interpretive, and applied levels" (p. 324). The five-level analysis also takes into account Bartolome's (1994) claim that "an uncritical focus on methods makes invisible the historical role that schools and their personnel have played (and continue to play), not only in discriminating against many culturally different groups, but also in denying their humanity" (p. 176). Teachers who are not critical of seemingly atheoretical and ahistorical reading methods overlook the ways that cultural biases in instructional methods ignore the cultural and critical needs of urban students of color. These five levels of analysis address this concern by challenging students to comprehend the central ideas of texts, interrogate in terms of social justice, connect concepts to their immediate realities, and extrapolate useful ideas to apply to their everyday lives.

Five Levels of Analysis in Practice

To develop her philosophy of social change essay, Tatiana chose to do an analysis of Anzaldua's (1987) *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, focusing on Chapter Two, "Moviementos de rebelida y las culturas que traicionan," and chapters one through two of Freire's (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. During an after-school writing workshop, Tatiana and I applied the five levels of analysis to discuss her text-driven philosophy for social change. Summarizing parts of the Anzaldua's text, Tatiana wanted to make the argument that fear of rejection from society led women into gendered oppression and conformity. Providing first-level explicit textual evidence for this claim, she cited, "Most of us unconsciously believe that if we reveal this unacceptable aspect of the self our mother/culture/race will totally reject us. To avoid rejection, some of us conform to the values of the culture, push the unacceptable parts into the shadows" (Anzaldua, 1987, p. 42). This is an abbreviated transcription of Tatiana's implicit analysis of her explicit textual summary on conformity:

> **Camangian:** So what is that saying about the women? What is that saying about their conformity?
>
> **Tatiana:** That they're scared.
>
> **Camangian:** Ok, good, but they're scared by what?
>
> **Tatiana:** By patriarchy and society.

Camangian: Which means what? What does that mean?

Tatiana: Whatever they're really about ain't really important to them…

Camangian: Not important? Unless?

Tatiana: They are accepted by society.

(I encouraged her to take bullet point notes of this discussion and she did)

Camangian: So, what does this say about them?

Tatiana: They're not really being real.

Camangian: Ok, what's another way of saying that? (Pause) If they're scared, then they're?

Tatiana: Worried about what others think about them…. Their family. Their culture and the people in the community….

Camangian: What does that mean? What does that say about the women? What does that say about the men? What does that say about society?

Tatiana: That women who are worried about what [people] say about them are weak? I don't know another word for weak. Insecure?

Camangian: Ok. So, insecure about what?

Tatiana: What they're about…their desires. You know what I mean? You know, like, what they really want…. Umm, the choices that they want to make. Or, like you said, their interests…. What they really about… They're identity.

(Took time to write in her notes, "Insecure about their desires, choices, and their identity and what they really like.")

In the above example of teacher-directed textual analysis, I presented questions for Tatiana to help probe her implicit comprehension verbally, on the board, and to document in her notebook. The progression of this analysis would later serve as the content of her philosophy for social change essay. Earlier in the week, I conducted whole-class five levels of analysis for Malcolm X's (1963) *Message to the Grassroots*, which students had read earlier in the unit. Many students, including Tatiana, attended the after-school writing workshop for five levels of analysis. In this process, I asked Tatiana a series of questions and follow-up questions to help her further think through her thoughts. In the dialogue above, she discussed how women's fear of standing out against patriarchal society is grounded in their insecurity as subordinated people. The following dialogue is a continuation of Tatiana's implicit analysis:

Camangian: What does this say about the men?

Tatiana: They like it that way? They don't even think about it. (She writes in her notes).

Camangian: (Writing on the board and saying aloud) "Men like this…" What do you want to call that?

Tatiana: Control

Camangian: Why do they like this control?

Tatiana: Cuz, they're bossy. They're players… Because everything goes their way… Cuz everything fits their needs?

Camangian: Ok, so men like this control because they, what, are the boss?

Tatiana: Because they are the oppressors.

Camangian: What kind of oppressors? How could you be more specific? Men like this control because what? Their needs as what?

Tatiana: As men?

Camangian: All men?

Tatiana: Sexist?

Camangian: Ok, there you go…

Tatiana wrote in her notes, "masses are threatened by change," "dehumanize those who challenge the norm," and "women of color submit to the needs of the sexist men and their own oppression."

Note my use of questioning to push Tatiana to think more thoroughly through her implicit analysis of the text. As she answered, the focus was not on getting the answers "correct." Instead, questions helped her consider the meaning of the explicit citation she was analyzing. Taking this implicit analysis further, I drew her attention back to the reading to locate textual evidence for the implicit analysis she was making. She then found the statement, "Deviance is condemned by their community" (p. 42). The following dialogue displays the ways in which we moved through her theoretical analysis of Anzaldua's chapter. At this point in the semester, students used their own philosophies of social change to come to a philosophical understanding of the readings, although they could have used concepts from other readings to analyze the texts they were focused on for this essay. In future assignments, students applied the theories studied in this unit to critique other texts. Note Tatiana's philosophy on the reproduction of oppression:

Camangian: So, theoretically, how would you evaluate this?

Tatiana: This for sure is a form of oppression.

Camangian: How is it a form of oppression?

Tatiana: Because women are forced to conform….

Camangian: So…you want to have a philosophical understanding about fear of rejection, oppression and conformity, ok? Based on that

philosophy, evaluate this (pointing to the notes on both the chalk board and in her notebook).

Tatiana: Women need to speak out.

Camangian: That's probably more applicable. Evaluate your implicit analysis.

Tatiana: (Whispering her notes to herself) "masses are threatened by change" and "dehumanize those who challenge the norm," and "women of color submit to the needs of the sexist men and their own oppression."

Camangian: What does your philosophy of social justice say about that?

Tatiana: Conformity keeps the cycle of oppression alive. Conformity feeds the life of oppression.

Camangian: Hmm, there you go. (Waited for her to write that down)… What else? If conformity keeps the cycle of oppression alive, then?

(Pause and silence)

Tatiana: If we always conforming, then oppression will always exist.

Camangian: Ok, that works. What happens if oppression always exists?

Tatiana: If oppression continues to exist, then won't the people continue to conform?

Camangian: Hmm. Don't know. Is that your philosophy?

Tatiana: Yeah, I guess.

Camangian: Don't guess. Do you believe that?

Tatiana: Yeah.

Camangian: Anything else?

Tatiana: (Silent)

Camangian: (I repeat her bullet points thus far)

Tatiana: Basically, society is gonna be under control through their own fear.

Camangian: Just under control?

Tatiana: They're going to be silenced, too.

Camangian: Ok. So, what does that mean?

Tatiana: That our oppression is a decision we make ourselves?

In Tatiana's theoretical analysis, she became clearer with the dialectic between conformity and oppression – oppression generates conformity while conformity reinforces oppression. Even further, Tatiana recognized that the oppressed, in part, sustain their subjugation to social control by submitting to their own fears. I simply walked Tatiana through her own philosophical

understanding of fear, oppression, and conformity. During this unit, students often deviated between their various levels of analysis. At these times, I found it necessary and important to support students in understanding and conducting the different applications properly so as to foster their learning more effectively for the future. Similarly, part of my instruction with Tatiana helped remind her of the prior implicit analysis while focusing on her theoretical level of comprehension. In sum, this process helped her clarify the theoretical understanding she came to this point in the exercise. The following is an excerpt of Tatiana's interpretive analysis:

> **Camangian:** How do you feel about [your first three levels of analysis]?
>
> **Tatiana:** Disappointed
>
> **Camangian:** What else?
>
> **Tatiana:** Sad that we keep living this way.
>
> **Camangian:** Why?
>
> **Tatiana:**   I'm just mad that we choose to submit… and [I'm] ready to change (she documented this in her notes).
>
> **Camangian:** If you're ready for change, that means you're what?
>
> **Tatiana:** That I'm prepared.
>
> **Camangian:**   Some people are ready, but not prepared. Are you prepared?
>
> **Tatiana:** Yeah
>
> **Camangian:** If you are, then what? What kinds of emotion do you have as a person who's ready for change?
>
> **Tatiana:** Excited
>
> **Camangian:** What else? If you're ready to do something with your life, what are you?
>
> **Tatiana:** Determined, (pause) passionate, confident
>
> **Camangian:** What else?
>
> **Tatiana:** Motivated

During this exchange, I sensed a quiet sense of realization and conviction. Her answers moved from a questioning tone during her explicit, implicit, and interpretive levels of analysis to firm delivery, eye contact, and strong conviction in her answers. My questions, here, were intended to stimulate Tatiana's subjective response to her prior textual analysis. In this way, Tatiana was aroused by the social implications of her prior findings. This part of Tatiana's reading process incited feelings of frustration that led to her own sense of inspiration. Expressing her frustrations with this part of her reading put Tatiana in touch with emotions she did not articulate earlier. Part of this frustration was, perhaps, a response to a deeper level of textual analysis. To complete Tatiana's

five levels analysis for this part of Anzaldua's chapter, we moved through an applicable level of analysis to help her think about the usefulness of the information studied. This was our exchange:

Camangian: Now that you have this knowledge, how do you apply it?

Tatiana: Women need to speak out even when we afraid of rejection.

Camangian: For that to happen, what needs to happen?

Tatiana: We can't care about what others think.

Camangian: What else? Is there anything in the way of that?

Tatiana: We have to know what we want. What we believe in. And, to create a new way of life.

Camangian: …But if that's the case, then what?

Tatiana: We have to get rid of our fear.

Camangian: Is it that easy? What needs to happen for that to happen?

Tatiana: We have to confront each other when we're afraid. Encourage each other.

Camangian: To do this, what?

Tatiana: Women need to unite. We need to understand that we're not alone.

Camangian: Meaning?

Tatiana: We have to respect each other. We have to listen to each other.

Camangian: What else?

Tatiana: Pay attention to what's happening to us and to one another's ideas and experiences.

Camangian: What needs to happen for that to happen?

Tatiana: We have to speak out and take action when we feel threatened and afraid

Camangian: And if this happens?

Tatiana: If we could do this, we could really overcome our silence.

Note the continued emphasis I placed on thinking through prior ideas and statements more thoroughly. I also urged Tatiana to consider the necessary and interrelated actions she thought women needed to take in order to resist conforming to patriarchal society. With the help of my questioning, Tatiana asserted the importance of women taking a stance against the norms of a male-dominated society even when faced with their own apprehensions. She also articulated the seriousness of a caring, collective accountability among women who could imagine a dignified social future for them. Even more, Tatiana claimed that women needed to be in solidarity by understanding and validating one

another. For her, this would help women have a stronger voice to transform much of their conformity.

In her essay, Tatiana's analysis above showed up in her writing excerpted below. Much of our discussion was found in the content of the essay she submitted, which she was working on for several days afterwards – showing her peers, editing, revising, and checking with me for feedback. Even more, she incorporated Modern Language Association (MLA) citations, transitional words and phrases, as well as topic sentences for claims that were all covered during different days in the form of mini-lessons. Overall, Tatiana's essay writing was technically and analytically complex. Here is the excerpt of writing that was informed by our meeting above:

Fear of rejection leads to oppression and conformity. As Anzaldua states, "To avoid rejection, some of us conform to the values of the culture, [and] push the acceptable part into the shadows" (42). In other words, the expectations set by cultural traditions discourage people from pursuing their own way of living because of their fear of rejection. Ultimately, Anzaldua argues that society is self-conscious of what people think of them. This shows that people are insecure about their desires, choices and values. They believe that any form of "deviance is whatever is condemned by their community," as Anzaldua argues (40). Instead of exposing their ideas, they hide their true feelings and silence themselves. This is what the system wants, to marginalize and dehumanize the masses. Because those in power realize that united, aware groups of marginalized people pose a strong threat to their dominant culture, they go to great measures to suppress the masses by controlling their thinking and by that dehumanizing them. In response, the powerless people allow this act of dehumanization. Thus, oppression develops into a continuous cycle.

This conformity feeds the life of oppression, making it continue for hundreds of years. However, along with conformity come fear and the desire to belong. In essence, society will be dominated and silenced through this fear – a decision made by those within society. Anzaldua says, "there in front of us is the crossroads and choice: to feel a victim where someone else is in control… or to feel strong, and for the most part, in control" (43). Unfortunately, society chooses to live a marginalized way of life—a life with no available opinions. It is sad to see how people allow themselves to live a restricted existence. Instead of seeking their voice to make change, they foolishly submit to their oppressors and live a silenced life. It is time that the marginalized voice their beliefs even when they are afraid of criticism. People need to be passionate about who they are and confident about their beliefs in order be free. They need to get rid of their fear and confront it by speaking out and taking action. They need to be motivated and determined to change rather than weak when they conform. If this is done, then society can overcome their silence and then their oppression.

In Tatiana's writing, she was able to use traditional academic forms to communicate ideas she had been consistently concerning herself with throughout the unit. There was a link between reading analysis conducted from her discussion of Freire's notion of "fear of freedom" and what she took away from reading Anzaldua. In fact, she went on to compare Anzaldua and Freire readings' discussion of fear in the second part of her essay. Tatiana interpreted both texts as having important concepts for resisting the dominant culture's silencing of marginalized people.

Conclusion: Reading in Their Own Interests

Early in this five-level analytical process, students often needed support with the method. As the year continued, a large majority began to have a stronger command of its usage. This reading strategy began with comprehension based explicitly in the text, specifically an understanding that required students to put together information from different parts of the reading. The implicit analysis allowed students to derive meaning from the readings based on perspectives often informed by their lived experience and funds of knowledge, while the theoretical evaluation came from their ideological understanding of the prior text-dependent levels of reading. Less dependent on direct textual inferences, the interpretive response was answered with the students' emotional reactions to their prior readings as they finished by considering the different ways they could apply the knowledge they derived from the first four levels of analysis.

By connecting reading and writing activities to students' lived experience and worldviews, this article provides insight for the socially transformative potential that five levels of analysis have in effectively helping youth read, write, and think in the interests of their communities. As Macedo (1996) suggested, "The development of a critical comprehension between the meaning of words and a more coherent understanding of the meaning of the world is a prerequisite to achieving clarity of reality" (p. 47). Five levels of analysis can help students achieve this "clarity of reality." Even more, working through these five levels helped students to cultivate philosophies that clarified existing power relations and informed how they should move forward with their lives as agents of social change.

In this sense, using five levels of analysis to critically analyze culturally relevant readings helped students narrate an alternative knowledge of themselves, their histories, and their futures. It also helped them understand, analyze, and question the social conditions that shaped their lives. Thus, their critical consciousness was further developed as they learned to see the world from their perspective while reading and writing in their own interests. In essence, connecting students to their reading of the culturally relevant and empowering word helped them critically make sense of their day-to-day reality, think through their liberation and oppression, and engage in academic work that was connected to the pressing needs of their community.

Endnotes

1. The name of the school, community, and student are pseudonyms.

2. University ethics and informed consent were acquired.

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