

## **Towards a Liberatory Pedagogy Grounded on a Husserlian Phenomenology**

by Andres Muro

### **English Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to examine how phenomenology can provide a lens to examine various pedagogical approaches. Specifically, it attempts to inform pedagogy by demonstrating how humans construct knowledge through logic, experience, memory and communication with others. Grounded on a Husserlian phenomenology, the paper discusses how different pedagogies may be consistent or inconsistent with liberatory educational practices. It particularly focuses on a US-Mexico educational context. It illustrates how oppressive pedagogies work in contrast to liberating pedagogies. It focuses on how the intentionality of the learner can be directed to domesticating tasks or to question the status quo. It draws from Dewey, Giroux, Freire and others to articulate the relation between phenomenology and pedagogy. Finally, it illustrates how an adult education program serving mostly women along the US-Mexico border has used philosophical and pedagogical theory to inform a liberatory practice.

### **Resumen en español**

El Propósito de este escrito es examinar cómo puede la fenomenología proveer un lente para examinar varios métodos pedagógicos. Más específicamente, intenta informar a la pedagogía demostrando que las personas construyen el conocimiento a través de la lógica, la experiencia, la memoria y la comunicación con los demás. Basado en una fenomenología Husserliana, este escrito elabora como diferentes pedagogías son consistentes o inconsistentes con prácticas educativas liberadoras. En particular, se enfoca en el contexto de la frontera Estados Unidos y México. Ilustra como pedagogías opresivas funcionan en contraste con pedagogías liberadoras. Se enfoca en como la intencionalidad del alumno se puede dirigir a tareas domesticadoras o a cuestionar el estatus quo. Se basa en Dewey, Giroux, Freire y otros para articular la relación entre la fenomenología y la pedagogía. Finalmente ilustra como un programa de educación básica para adultos que provee servicios, en su mayoría a mujeres, en la frontera de Estados Unidos y México, ha usado teoría filosófica y pedagógica para informar una práctica liberadora.

### **Resumo em português**

O objetivo deste artigo é examinar como a fenomenologia pode prover lentes para examinar vários métodos pedagógicos. Mais especificamente, a intenção é informar a pedagogia demonstrando que as pessoas constroem o conhecimento por meio da lógica, da experiência, da memória e da comunicação com os outros. Baseado numa fenomenologia Husserliana, este escrito elabora como diferentes pedagogias são consistentes ou inconsistentes com práticas educativas libertadoras. Atenção particular é dada ao contexto da fronteira dos Estados Unidos com o México, que é ilustrativo de

como pedagogias opressoras funcionam diferentemente de pedagogias libertadoras. O foco está sobre como a intencionalidade do aprendiz pode ser direcionada para tarefas domesticadoras ou para questionar o status quo. O artigo baseia-se em Dewey, Giroux, Freire e outros para articular a relação entre fenomenologia e pedagogia. Por fim, o artigo traz o exemplo de um programa de educação para adultos dirigido principalmente a mulheres na fronteira dos EUA com o México, mostrando como esse programa usou teorias pedagógicas e filosóficas para informar uma prática libertária.

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## Introduction

I often do workshops for teachers and students (of multiple ethnicities) and show them an image[1] similar to the following:



I ask participants what they see. The response by the vast majority is that they see a Mexican. I ask participants if they have ever seen a Mexican sleeping against a cactus, and the answer is always no. Participants agree that the image is obviously a stereotype of Mexicans, who are purportedly lazy, poor, drunk, etc.

Another photo[2] with accompanying narrative (below) stereotyping Mexicans was part of a presentation (July 2007) by an advertising company to City of El Paso officials to represent the image that El Paso supposedly has to outsiders. This was in reference to the need to redevelop the *Segundo Barrio* or Second Ward, the oldest neighborhood in the city, a predominantly Mexican neighborhood with a rich history and culture.

**IMMERSION PERSONALITY IMAGERY**

**Old Cowboy**

- ❖ Male
- ❖ 50-60 Years Old
- ❖ Gritty
- ❖ Dirty
- ❖ Lazy
- ❖ Speak Spanish
- ❖ Uneducated



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Contrasting the perception of the lazy, dirty, poor drunk Mexican is the perception that a representative of a large company once shared with me. According to this person, the corporate perception is that Mexicans are a hard working, docile and very cheap labor force. In fact, most Americans may not realize that most of the food that we consume has been planted, grown, harvested, picked, processed, slaughtered or packed by Mexican immigrants. In addition to agricultural work, Mexican immigrants work in factories, care for our yards, raise our children, repair our cars, build our houses, cook and clean for us, and until recently, they made many of our clothes (Muro, 2005). Many also work as doctors, lawyers, engineers and teachers, and in multiple other professions. If Mexicans represent a positive force in the US, where do the negative images come from? I believe that the negative images serve the purpose of keeping Mexicans oppressed, docile and hard working.

In this paper, I use Husserl's Phenomenology to show how humans constitute the world subjectively and intersubjectively. I stress the Husserlian argument that while individuals can critically and reflectively constitute their own experiences (Husserl, 1999), many often rely on the other experts. I articulate that this is because our constitutions are coercively and persuasively manipulated by oppressive pedagogies and other media that normalize certain constitutions that are never critically and reflectively engaged in educational settings. The above images of Mexicans show how

the media has constituted and normalized an extremely derogatory, racist and actually false image that goes unquestioned by traditional pedagogy. In contrast, I articulate how a Freirian-Deweyan pedagogy represents a phenomenological alternative to traditional approaches and illustrate with a model implemented with immigrant GED students at El Paso Community College that resulted in the publication of the student Journal *Memorias del Silencio: Footprints of the Borderlands* which has been in existence for 10 years with 10 issues published.

## **Towards a Liberatory Pedagogy**

There is a medium in society that plays an important role in shaping people's constitution of experience and identity. The medium is the educational system that can liberate or oppress a student's intentionality and the constitution of experience. A phenomenologically grounded pedagogy can allow for a liberating constitution of experience and identity. While our experiences are socially constituted with other subjects, Husserl (1999) argues that each experience is primordially our own. Since we are the nexus of the experience, we have the possibility of freely and uniquely constituting it. Pedagogy can expand or limit the way we constitute our experiences and identities.

Suppose that I am a student in an educational setting and I experience an object. I touch it, play with it, handle it, and observe it. After a while, I determine that it is a marble storage bin and fill it with marbles. Along comes the teacher and informs me that the object is a coffee cup. I argue that it is a marble storage bin. The teacher may respond in a number of ways. One way is coercively. The teacher informs me that I am wrong, and that further identification of the object as a marble storage bin will result in punishment. A second, persuasive approach is for the teacher to repeat again and again that the object is a coffee cup, until I accept that it is a coffee cup. She may further show me examples of the object used as a coffee cup by the majority of normal people in society, and examples of deviants using the object in different ways. In this way, she normalizes my understanding and use of the cup. With the third, emancipatory approach, the teacher can explain to me how she experiences the object while asking me to share my experience.

The first two approaches are oppressive while the third one is liberating for both the teacher and the student. The first approach uses force to gain compliance. In Husserlian terms, my intentionality is controlled by the teacher who is dictating to me what constitutions (or *noemas*) are acceptable. With this approach, the learner may be intimidated and may not try to own experiences and constitute the primordial world as his/her own. Instead, the learner will wait for the teacher to define experiences.

With the second approach, the learner, with sufficient exposure, will grasp the "normal" understanding of the object and will know that any other interpretation will render him "abnormal". The learner may again wait for the teacher to define the experience in order to avoid a deviant identity.

With these two approaches, the identity of the learner will be constituted by the other. This is an example of what Husserl (1999) defined as a naïve perspective of the world. There is also a possibility of resistance (Ogbu, 1991). The learner may choose to ignore the teacher's interpretation, freeing his intentionality from the teacher's grip while choosing the identity of an outsider, marginal, weird, deviant, etc. For example, Ogbu explains that many Blacks and Chicanos consider accepting a teachers' constitutions that oppose their own as acting "whitie". They prefer to fail in academic pursuits than to accept the school's constitutions.

The third approach fits with Husserl's phenomenology. The object is experienced by the learner from his/her own unique nexus of experience. While the teacher has a different interpretation, she doesn't try to impose or normalize her perspective. Rather, she validates the experience of the learner understanding that her nexus of experience is different. This approach allows the learner to understand the uniqueness of his/her primordial world of experience and stimulates the learner to constitute new experiences from his/her own nexus. At the same time, the learner understands that others experience the world differently. Finally, both the teacher and the learner may learn that something constituted as normal for one of them may not be normal for the other. This may lead them to free and expand their intentionality and to challenge the concept of normalization. Through this approach, people can learn to negotiate different constitutions of experience and decide to select an objectified experience that they can all agree on, or agree that multiple interpretations are acceptable. This approach can lead to empathy towards other subjects, and an intersubjective constitution of experience.

Nowadays, the pedagogical approach used in the United States is a combination of the first two approaches. The role of public educational entities is to normalize certain experiences. It is not up to the student to direct their own intentionality, or to own their own experience of the primordial world, but rather this is the role of the educational system. The educational system uses a combination of coercion and persuasion to constitute normalizing experiencing for the students. In many cases, it uses testing and grading as a tool to punish students who have unacceptable experiences and it uses repetition of ideas, images and texts, selected a priori, to persuade students of the appropriate normal experiencing. The educational system also uses decontextualized language in prescribed texts that do not allow the learner to critically engage language in lived experiences. The lack of opportunities for students to critically engage language and to direct their intentionality results in naïve and passive consumers who uncritically accept what the expert other presents and represents.

The public school is designed to help the students to master predetermined and decontextualized basic skills. Mastery of the skills is measured through systematic standardized testing. The curriculum is designed to ensure that the learners master those predetermined and decontextualized skills and the role of the teachers is to ensure that the curriculum is administered so that the skills are mastered. According to

Giroux, the curriculum is designed for the students to acquire *productive knowledge*: “Productive knowledge is concerned with means; the application of this knowledge results in the reproduction of goods and services” (Giroux, 1988, p. 49).

Giroux (1988) distinguishes *productive knowledge* from *directive knowledge*. Directive knowledge is concerned with the relationships between means and ends. Directive knowledge is a philosophical mode of inquiry in which students can question the purpose of their learning and how productive knowledge is being used. According to Giroux, the curriculum is divided between *questions raised* and *questions ignored*. The questions raised focus on *how to* or *what* problems, such as *how* do you solve this problem? And *what* is the answer to this problem? On the other hand, questions about *why* we are learning something, *who* benefits from us having this knowledge, and *to what end* we are learning this, are ignored. These *who*, *why* and *to what end* questions ought to lead to students having a decision making role in the selection of experiences or, in directing their own intentionality. Giroux also argues that schools should be arenas of contestation where conflicting experiences are explored in context and where students are asked to engage in “*border crossing*.” This is where students are asked to cross over to the context of different students and experience the world from a new perspective (Giroux, 1988). Phenomenologically speaking, students, each of whom has their own “here” perspective, are also asked to see the world from the “there” perspective. By asking students to ask *why*, *who* and *to what end* questions and by asking students to cross borders, Giroux is essentially broadening the intentionality and the horizons of the students.

In addition to the why, who and to what end questions, the “*how*” question must be explored, not just to elicit the correct response, but to help students to understand and constitute their own strategies in order to solve problems. According to Demetrian (2005), between the identification of a problem and its solution, a student engages in a number of practices that lead to growth. The growth is not only represented or described in the ability of a student to give a solution to a problem. Rather, growth includes all strategies, thought processes, and accommodations that learners engage in to solve problems. These may include scheduling time, organizing thoughts, reading texts and journals, consulting libraries and peers, accessing and using technology, and planning an approach to solving the problem. In the process of solving a problem, the learner not only acquires knowledge of a solution, but also engages in a number of cognitive activities. Educators refer to these cognitive activities as metacognitive learning strategies. This is essentially an intending of our own intentionality. When I intend my own consciousness in the process of learning, I can better understand the strategies I use in order to learn something. This understanding may allow me to consciously turn the strategies into habits.

Ultimately, who, why, to what end, and how questions, and a focus on directive knowledge can broaden the students’ horizons of potential intentionalities and help students to understand the way experiences can be constituted by themselves and by others. This is consistent with Husserl (1999), whose phenomenology is a means to

understand how experiences are constituted. Such an approach presents a contrast to the productive knowledge curriculum where experiences have previously been constituted for the students and their intentionality is being directed by the teacher.

Telling students what problems they should solve and how to solve them is what Freire (1970) refers to as *banking* model of education. According to this model, students are considered empty vessels where knowledge is deposited. Students do not engage in a phenomenological constituting and experiencing of the world. Rather, experts have already constituted the normal experiences for students and all students must do is uncritically memorize these normalized experiences. Banking education directs our intentionality to an object and determines the way we must constitute it, while preventing us from focusing on other objects. In essence, it eliminates our horizons and domesticates our intentionality and our intuitions. Freire says, “Banking education inhibits creativity and domesticates (although it cannot completely destroy) the *intentionality* of consciousness by isolating consciousness from the world, thereby denying people their ontological and historical vocation of becoming more fully human” (Freire, 1970, p. 71).

Freire sees reality as a structure with a hidden base and a visible surface or superstructure. Through the banking model students are only allowed to direct their intentionality to the surface or superstructure while the base remains hidden. The hidden base includes the social, historical and economic forces that have shaped the superstructure. Freire argues that through a critical pedagogy students can redirect their intentionality to the hidden base. The process that allows the students to see the base is a process of conscientization. Conscientization, a term coined by Freire (1970), essentially means becoming conscious of one’s own oppression. According to Freire, society’s masses have been rendered unconscious by the banking model of education. The purpose of Freire’s critical pedagogy is to help people emancipate themselves from an uncritical and oppressive constitution of experience that leads to the exploitation of the masses. A critical pedagogy allows students to become conscious of their own oppression and leads to change (Freire, 1970, Freire & Macedo, 1987).

Freire (2000) described the pedagogical process that leads to conscientization with poor adult learners in Brazilian Favelas (extremely poor neighborhoods in Brazil). In Freire’s model, the teacher does not have a predetermined content of instruction. The teacher has to become familiar with the students’ social and cultural context. Then, the teacher brings to the class a picture of the students’ neighborhood. The teacher asks the students to take a look at the picture directing the students’ intentionality to the picture. This is the extent to which the teacher directs the intentionality of the students. The teacher then asks the students to talk about what they think about when they see the picture. At that point, the students’ intentionalities are set free to explore the picture and reflect on their experiences, memories and feelings related to the picture. The picture can direct the students’ intentionalities to specific objects in the picture, or open horizons for students to talk about past memories and experiences. The teacher’s role is to write down words and themes that students explore in dialoguing about the picture.

These words become the content for language instruction among the students. The teacher does not direct the intentionality of the students and restricts the students to specific objectivities. Rather, the teacher uses a picture of a context familiar to the students to open up the field of potential horizons of intentionality.

The purpose of Freire's pedagogy is political. When poor students explore their own context, they learn about their history, their culture and the social conditions as oppressed members of a society. By externalizing and objectifying their own context through pictures, the students can exercise *epoché* (Husserl, 1999) or bracket themselves out of their own realities. This allows them to acquire objective knowledge of their own context and objectively see what things need to improve in the objectified reality (Freire, 2000). They may, for example, report that they see or associate the pictures to no paved roads, garbage on the streets, abandoned cars, no hospitals, run down schools, malnourished children, lack of employment, lack of health services, etc. The students will then, collectively and intersubjectively decide on an issue that they need to improve. The purpose of the instruction is to help the students acquire the language, math, academic tools and other skills to bring about the desired change. Instruction may focus on teaching students how to write letters to politicians, how to repair things, how to document their own histories and realities, how to speak in public, how to organize pickets, how to write press releases, or how to organize themselves to put pressure on the authorities to bring about desired changes. Once the students intersubjectively decide on a project, they work with their teacher on implementing the project. Once the project is concluded, the students again step outside of their own context, take a picture of the new reality and start the process again. The role of the teacher is simply to facilitate for the students the skills that will lead to the mastery of the knowledge that students wish to acquire. So, rather than the students relying on the expert other to learn what is important, they are free to focus their intentionality on things that are important to them. Moreover, the students are then able to force the intentionality of the government authorities towards their problems.

A precursor to Freire, who also develops a contextualized pedagogy, is John Dewey. Dewey develops a pedagogy that, appears less political than Freire's and does not use the phenomenological language of intentionality. Yet, Dewey's pedagogy clearly frees the intentionality of the students to explore their own context and history, thus encouraging, as Freire wrote: "their ontological and historical vocation of becoming more fully human" (Freire, 1970, p.71).

Dewey (1966) believes that schools should operate as contexts where students experience their reality through recreation in shared social contexts. A pedagogy that encourages imitation, emulation and interaction in a real life environment, can shape students' habits and dispositions to help them develop into full participants in a shared social context. To this extent, Dewey's pedagogy is prescriptive. Yet, the methodology employed by Dewey is much less prescriptive and allows for students to fully and freely explore their social contexts. A Deweyan pedagogy is highly critical of prescribed textbooks and tests that decontextualize reality from instructional content.

Dewey (1916) believes that there is an artificial dichotomy between academic life inside and practical life outside of the classroom. Dewey wants to bridge this gap and integrate practical life with academic life. For Dewey, academic tasks should be used to explore and solve real life problems just like with Freire's pedagogy.

Dewey finds Geography and History to be highly significant subjects to be covered in a curriculum. He states that "History and Geography are the information studies par excellence of the schools" (Dewey, 1916, p. 210).

Yet, this is the extent that Dewey's pedagogy coincides with traditional prescriptive history and geography curricula. A Deweyan pedagogy calls for students to become historians and geographers themselves. And, as geographers and historians, students have a whole world to explore in their immediate surroundings; and have free reign of their intentionality to explore their own contexts by interviewing family members, mapping their neighborhoods, creating flow charts and genealogical trees, identifying the linguistic, social and cultural characteristics of their family members, antecessors, neighbors, friends and peers, and identifying and describing the geographical settings where family members, antecessors, neighbors, friends and peers live. The role of the Deweyan teacher is to facilitate tools for the students to engage in their explorations. As students become historians and geographers, they have the opportunity to read and learn about other people's geographies and histories. Rather than prescriptively directing and limiting a student's intentionality, a Deweyan pedagogy frees the individual's intentionality to constitute her primordial world within a social context, or intersubjectively. The Deweyan student is able to acquire a critical, reflective and phenomenological constitution of reality rather than having a naïve or unreflective perspective.

Husserl, Freire and Dewey provide the tools to re-examine the images of Mexicans provided at the beginning of the paper. The question is how are these images constituted? Cartoons, newspapers, magazines, movies, television and books, often portray Mexicans in similar fashion. Since traditional schooling does not provide students with the tools to critically and reflectively engage such images, society members naively consume them until they become ingrained in people's consciousness. Nowadays, the task of school is to teach us to read and write the word 'Mexican.' So, today, every adult in the US will likely be able to read or write the word 'Mexican.' Yet, since schools do not ask students to critically engage terminology, the schools participate as allies to discourses that are oppressive and derogatory towards minorities and other cultures. As a result, derogatory depictions can shape our constitution of Mexicans as lazy, drunk, illegal aliens, welfare recipients, drug users, criminals, etc.

Husserl (1999) articulates that both oral and written language work on a relationship between meaning intention and meaning fulfillment. If the intention of the speaker or writer is intuited by the reader or listener, then, there is meaning fulfillment.

Saussure (1986) makes a similar claim. He argues that language is a system of signification between a signifier and signified. A word is a signifier that evokes an image or intuition in our head which is essentially the signified. So, the written or uttered word acts as a signifier which ought to elicit the meaning intention (signified) in the listener or reader. The associations between signifiers and signifieds are based on experience. If the word Mexican, acting as the signifier, is often tied to images or language of poverty, laziness, drunkenness, welfare, illegality or other negative association, after sufficient repetition it will elicit these associations. A critical pedagogy such as the one described may stimulate students to critically engage these images. Because there is no dichotomy between academic world and real life, the words that students are engaging in the classroom are associated to real life and critically engaged. The task of reading and writing about real life is what Freire and Macedo (1987) refer to as “Reading the Word and the World” in their book by the same title. The pedagogical act of “Reading the Word and the World” means that if a student reads the word ‘Mexican’ in class, the only purpose is not to learn to enunciate the word properly, or to spell it properly or to break it down into syllables. Of greater importance for Freire and Macedo is to understand what the word means, and the images that the word elicits.

Peter McLaren (1995) a Freirian scholar takes the argument a step further. He makes the case that the teacher’s role is not just to help students to understand meaning and critically engage it. The teacher’s role is to identify words that elicit derogatory images, and together with the students, elicit new images and meanings and to propagate these. In a McLarenean effort, students who encounter the word ‘Mexican’ can learn about the contributions that Mexican immigrants bring into the economy, their history and culture, the sacrifices that they make, and the students can challenge derogatory images and propagate positive ones.

## Practical Applications

The Community Education Program at El Paso Community College has embarked on a project that uses some of the pedagogical elements discussed above. The project is briefly described below.

Since 2005, the Community Education Program at El Paso Community College has published ten issues of poetry and prose journal written by economically and academically disadvantaged Spanish GED students from immigrant and migrant families. The journal is called *Memorias del Silencio: Footprints of the Borderland* (<http://bordersenses.com>). The purpose of putting together this journal was to enhance the educational experience of the students, and the community’s knowledge of the immigrant experience (Muro, 2005).

In traditional GED programs students engage a GED textbook and attempt to master skills to respond correctly to questions and problems presented in the text. Students have no control over their own learning and their personal knowledge and experiences have little value. Often, students find traditional learning uninteresting,

unrelated to their own experiences and inapplicable to real life. Some persist, knowing the value of a GED certificate. Others become bored, frustrated, and drop out (Muro, 2006). The intention of this project has been to avoid the pitfalls of traditional GED instruction. The effort has multiple dimensions, namely, pedagogical, historical, social, and cultural.

The pedagogical approach is grounded in the idea that GED instruction requires good reading and writing skills. However, many GED students have had little exposure to reading and writing. Developing these skills, a challenge in itself, becomes more challenging when the students are uninterested in the subject and have little familiarity with it. If students can build their reading and writing skills by documenting and reading their own experiences, they will be familiar with the knowledge and they will relate to it. They will also feel validated if their knowledge and experiences are documented for posterity. To help students develop their writing skills, they participate in creative writing workshops. Once the students build their reading and writing skills, they are able to apply these skills to new knowledge and new academic and real life problems. Moreover, students can relate better to other people's histories if they first explored their own. So, in this project, students not only became historians and writers, but also developed skills necessary to pass the GED (Muro, 2006).

From the cultural and social perspective it is important to give students a voice and for readers to learn from that voice. While we all know about the existence of immigrants, we know very little about their lives. We occasionally hear about them when the media, or politicians portray them, often in a negative light. This is sad, considering how much immigrants impact our lives, especially in El Paso (Muro, 2005).

Most Americans grow up learning that our ancestors came from Europe in the Mayflower and landed in Plymouth Rock. Yet, most El Pasoans have a very different history which is being written as we speak, by people coming, not from Europe, but from Mexico, in search of a better life. And, yet, we go about our lives unconscious of the fact that people have risked their lives, many dying in the process, and have struggled and continue to do so, to come and live here, just like the pilgrims did. Little do we know that the local economy and that of the US, depends on the labor of immigrants (Muro, 2005).

While this pedagogical approach has theoretical support there aren't many programs implementing such an approach. Yet, this effort is demonstrating that such an approach works. The students have improved their reading and writing skills, and have become published authors and leaders among their family members and peers. Their self esteem has grown exponentially and so has their desire to read, write, share their knowledge and acquire new knowledge (Muro, 2006).

The poem below, originally written in Spanish by Veronica Macias (2005), a Community Education Program Spanish GED student, was published in the first issue of *Memorias del Silencio: Footprints of the Borderland*. Through the poem, readers can understand both the historical and geographical context of the student even when the

instructor never taught geography or history. Rather, the student constructs the historical and geographical space out of personal experience. The following is the translated version.

### To my Beloved Farmworker

*To my beloved husband  
Refugio and to my sons Omar and  
Daniel*

In the fields you worked your hands,  
hand by hand with the chile,  
with the land to harvest,  
with your hat a little torn,  
and in the scarf your sweat.

At dawn  
your shadow begins to work.  
In your face the fatigue,  
but strong, green farmworker you are.

Your youth  
was left in the fields of Deming  
starting the tractor,  
harvesting the chile,  
preparing the land,  
waiting for the onion.

With strong arms you gathered the baskets,  
smell of wet soil in your clothes.

The harvested land became your brother,  
that is how you achieved your American dream.

*Translated by: Minerva  
Laveaga Duarte*

Because Macias chose poetry as her medium, history and geography were subtly incorporated into her piece. Since Macias was a GED student, she had to acquire reading and writing skills as well as learn American history. Writing about her own experiences allowed Macias to acquire writing skills, informing the content of her writing with her own knowledge. When she learned American history, she could do this by relating other people's experiences to her own. The fact that her experience was considered valuable gave her confidence and the poem became a source of inspiration for other students.

The following essay written in Spanish by Cresencia Atayde (2006) was published in the second issue of *Memorias del Silencio: Footprints of the Borderland*.

### **From the South**

It is a sad adobe hut surrounded by dry rockroses, stones cracked by the heavy wind. Dusty whirlwinds pass close to the soil along the road. Some gleam from the sun's rays can be seen in between the prickly weeds. Far away, a big mountain can be seen with its top filled with snow shining at dusk. Too far. The nearby rocks reflect the misery of the battered houses, abandoned by time. Dry wood doors, bent and broken.

An old couple lives in one of those houses. They wait for the day when their children will come back. Their only company is a white cow, chickens, a couple of pigs, and a dog. They wake up in the morning, and through an old window they reach to see the road to check if someone is coming. Sometimes their compadre arrives in his mule cart. He comes to bring them some supplies and water. When they finish eating, they throw remaining pieces of tortilla out the window to the dog and the chicken. Sometimes the dog moves his tail, and they turn their sights to the road.

Sometimes someone passes by, but never who they expect. One day their children decided to cross the river "to improve, to be able to bring them better things and a better life."

With a tired eyesight, her black dress, her scruffy apron, and her dusty shoes, the old woman turns to the sky and says a prayer for her children.

*Translated by: Minerva  
Laveaga Duarte*

Atayde, a woman over 50, did not complete elementary school as a child. By hegemonic standards she was not even entitled to an elementary certification. However, by the Community Education Program standards, she was entitled to become a published author. Authorship in a book is an entitlement to which many aspire. Atayde's writing skills, her aesthetic sense and her intimate knowledge of the lives of immigrants conferred her this privilege.

Through the *Memorias del Silencio: Footprints of the Borderland* collection, which has over 200 pieces of poetry and prose by immigrant students in its 10 issues, we may learn a little about the immigrant experience, directly from the immigrants. Hopefully, after learning about them, we may be able to say: "Thank you for risking your lives to come here to grow our food, raise our children, build our homes and care for

them. Thank you for landscaping our yards and sewing our clothes. Thank you and welcome. Is there anything that we can do for you?" (Muro, 2005).

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## Notes

- [1] Salias, D (2017) Sleeping Mexican  
[2] GlassBeach (n.d.) Old cowboy

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