Bridging Disciplines to Teach Community Psychology: Notes from a Transcommunal Classroom

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Abstract

This paper explores how an interdisciplinary pedagogy can amplify community psychology (CP) values in undergraduate education. Sociologist John Brown Childs' (2003) concept of transcommunality, which emphasizes working across difference through shared practical action via respect, understanding, and communication, illustrates how bridging disciplines can transform CP classrooms. This framework acts as a catalyst for teaching CP values of empowerment, citizen participation, wellness, diversity, sense of community, and social justice (Kloos, Hill, Thomas, Wandersman, Elias, & Dalton, 2012). A transcommunal approach grounded in power, privilege, and oppression are further examined to explore possible class assignments and activities to facilitate student interest and thinking about CP values in relation to a transcommunal society. The paper concludes with suggestions and an assessment of the (dis)advantages of these activities for instructors.

In her seminal book, *Sentipensante Pedagogy: Educating for Wholeness, Social Justice, and Liberation*, Laura Rendón (2001) examines how her Latino roots have shaped and shifted her pedagogy. She states that "at the heart of this effort is the reunification of the mind and the heart at the living center by which we know who we are, stay connected, and care for the world we are given to steward" (Rendón, 2001, p. xi). She encourages other educators to record their own journeys as a way to create an inclusive pedagogy of sharing that benefits learners, teachers, and our communities. She calls upon educators to lean in to these moments of reflection so that educators can cultivate transformative pedagogies that speak to diversity, voice, and inclusion.

This call for connecting the personal journeys of educators toward building an inclusive classroom community resonates with the elements of transcommunality (Childs, 2003). Described in his book, *Transcommunality: From the Politics of Conversion to the Ethics of Respect,* sociologist John Brown Childs'

(2003) writes that "transcommunality relies on concrete interpersonal ties growing out of...shared practical action from diverse participants...[and] from such practical action flows increasing communication, mutual respect, and understanding" (p. 11). As Childs (2003) connects positionality, power, and dialogue as central components to learning how to live together as one, Rendón (2001) suggests that educators should reflect on how our classrooms can facilitate this process through lessons on identity, collaboration, and diversity. As this special issue attempts to capture the current and future of undergraduate education in Community Psychology (CP), is it important to ask what a pedagogy of CP looks like. What does it mean to teach in the field of CP? How do we incorporate and bridge disciplines in our classrooms, as well as embrace our whole selves as teachers and students? How can we include CP values in and out of CP classes? Lastly, what does it mean to foster a transcommunal pedagogy of CP?

This paper is my pedagogical journey of developing a transcommunal pedagogy of CP. Entrenched within interdisciplinarity, I illuminate where this pedagogical approach derives from and why it resonates with my own identities and journey into the field. Next, I discuss how I utilize John Brown Child's (2003) theory of transcommunality to teach students CP values such as empowerment, citizen participation, collaboration, and sense of community (Kloos, Hill, Thomas, Wandersman, Elias, & Dalton, 2012). By charting out my pedagogical framework, I explain how I utilize a transcommunal pedagogical approach to classroom learning through three examples: social histories, radical speaking order, and praxis projects. Students' voices and reflections help illuminate the collective learning and lessons that can transpire from this approach. Lastly, I conclude this paper with my personal reflections on what a transcommunal pedagogy can teach undergraduate students.

A Genealogy of Thought: Connecting CP Values with Transcommunality

Before I outline my CP pedagogy, I believe it is important to explain why I have chosen this approach. For many individuals, teaching CP values in CP-based courses may seem obvious, albeit even effortless for some. This was not the case for me. I first learned about community psychology during my last two years of graduate school, where I was completing my degree in social psychology with an emphasis in feminist studies. Learning alongside undergraduates in an Introduction to Community Psychology course, I saw the importance of CP concepts and values. However, when it came time to teach the course as a faculty member, I struggled. As a first generation, cis-gender,

able-bodied, Latinx woman of color, there was disconnect between what I was teaching and how it connected to my identities embedded within my pedagogy. The struggle for me was not how to explain CP, but how to get my students to care about CP. Seeing their struggles with the material brought me back to that undergraduate classroom where I sat as a graduate student, flummoxed by CP. Many students have confided in me that, although they want to do "CP work," they struggle with how the field connects to their lives and lived experiences within their environment(s), rather than studying their communities. To understand CP was one thing, but to bring it to life in the classroom and have it resonate with students from various backgrounds, identities, and ages was entirely different.

As a graduate student, transcommunality (Childs, 2003) spoke to me. Amplifying the voices of his ancestors, the Haudenosaunee[1] society, John Brown Childs (2003) defines transcommunality as "a way to both maintain particularistic rooted affiliations and create broad constellations of inclusive cooperation that constructively draw from such diversity" (p. 8). To put it simply, transcommunality is a lesson on listening, mutual respect, collaboration, cooperation, and understanding in order to move toward pragmatic action. The synergies between transcommunality and CP values allowed me to see myself within this field and to surface these connections for my students, particularly my students of color that often feel like outsiders within the discipline. By using transcommunality to amplify CP values, I provide students with an additional framework connected to the field and indigenous ways of knowing. Table 1 illustrates the connections I have made between CP values and elements of

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[1] As chronicled by Childs (2003), the Haudenosaunee or "Iroquois" Confederacy resided in what is now upstate New York. It is through the lessons and ways of knowing of his

native ancestors that Childs (2003) conceptualized transcommunality.

transcommunality. I have chosen to group certain CP concepts together to illustrate how I make sense of the field and see them resonating within this framework. The intention here is not to fixate on the arbitrary grouping of these values, but on how the concepts can inform one another and utilized as teaching tools in the classroom. As Kloos and colleagues (2012) note that CP values build on one another, I follow their lead by building and expanding upon these values through an interdisciplinary lens.

Table 1

Connecting Community Psychology (CP) Values[2] with Transcommunality (Childs, 2003)

CP Values Connection	Transcommunality
Empowerment, citizen participation, practical knowledge, constructive & collaboration	Task-focused outlooks, shared disputing
Respect for human diversity & wellness associations	Creating of transcommunal
Sense of community & social justice propulsion of vision	Personal transformation & propulsion of vision

Facilitating citizen participation and empowerment through collaboration.

Community psychologists often view citizen participation as the ability for all citizens within a particular community to engage in shared actions that lead to a common goal (Kloos et al., 2012; Prilleltensky, 2001). I believe that in order to facilitate citizen participation within a group, those in the group must also have shared access and the skills needed to utilize these resources (Rappaport, 1981). Both citizen participation and collaboration require members to interact with groups different from themselves. In so doing, they may recognize their own positionality, both within their specific group and in the greater community.

To engage students in these CP values, I emphasize the transcommunal concepts of task-focused outlooks, shared practical knowledge, and constructive disputing. Tasked-focused outlooks require having a shared vision of a project goal and creating clear roles for individuals to take on to complete the goal. Tasked-focused outlooks are most effective when there is a shared practical knowledge among the group. This can range from a having a shared communication pattern, shared skills, a collective discourse, and/or life/academic skills. In non-homogeneous groups, shared practical knowledge is still possible despite individual differences that might arise. In a classroom, task-focused outlooks and shared practical knowledge give students a common goal and a commitment to cooperation and interaction among all participants. What transcommunality offers to elevate these CP values in a classroom is constructive disputing. Acknowledging that group work can be difficult at times, Childs (2003) states that constructive disputing should be expected and not avoided. Thus, to engage in transcommunality means to acknowledge the gaps between members and learn how to create bridges with one another to see through the groups' collective vision.

Respect for human diversity and wellness.
Respecting human diversity means not only

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[2] Adapted from Kloos, et al. (2012) and Prilleltensky (2001)

recognizing and honoring diverse groups in our communities, but it also means understanding the communities we work with (Kloos et al., 2012). This is particularly important given the field's commitment to wellness. Community psychologists often speak to individual and family wellness; in my classrooms, I emphasize Prilleltensky's (2001) concept of collective wellness. This form of wellness extends beyond the individual and calls attention to communities and societies (Prilleltensky, 2001). In order to facilitate collective wellness in collaborative, community-based work, we must consider and amplify the diverse needs and perspectives of the individuals involved.

The CP values of wellness and respect for diversity aligns with the transcommunal belief of developing transcommunal associations. Specifically, transcommunal associations encourages communities and/or groups to work together to create mutually beneficial change and learning to step aside when the work should cease. Childs (2003) is not arguing that once change occurs it is complete; rather, this element asks for the constant reflection upon the individuals involved to determine if the change they are seeking is necessary and if they should be the ones still pushing for that change. This element requires reflection upon the individual's positionality and that of the group. Essentially, to engage in transcommunal action also means understanding how identities intersect with structural oppression, often hindering their ability to be empowered.

Sense of community and investment in social justice. I strongly believe that two of the most valuable CP values we can incorporate into our teachings are a sense of community and an investment in social justice. A sense of community requires that individuals learn about one another, our differences, lived experiences, our

connections, and expertise. It requires understanding what it means to feel a sense of belonging and commitment that may lead to a collective goal or identity (Sarason, 1974). It pushes the community psychologist to think beyond the individual in order to foster change that is meaningful for the entire community. Community psychologists strive to make changes that facilitate social justice. There is not one fully accepted definition of social justice within the field of CP. I have chosen to use Prilleltensky's (2001) definition that calls for "fair and equitable allocation of bargaining powers, resources, and obligations in society in consideration of people's differential power, needs, and abilities to express their wishes" (p. 754). This definition highlights the importance of distributive (i.e., resources) and procedural (i.e., processes) aspects of social justice that the community psychologist should take into account in community work. Combined, understanding the community we are working with can help better define the social justice we are seeking.

Feeling connected to your community and an increased commitment to social justice, whether it is in the classroom or greater society, ties into the personal and group level transformative processes of transcommunality. For me, I approach these CP values through the transcommunal concepts of personal transformation and the propulsion of vision. In a transcommunal community, personal transformation is an ongoing, cyclical process strengthened by engaging in collective action and learning from one another. As interpersonal connections strengthen, adapt, and shift, so does the groups' collective vision of its purpose. Referred to as the propulsion of vision, this essential element emphasizes that the actions put forth by the group be grounded in social justice, equality, and peace. As a collective, the group must consider how larger political, historical, and institutional structures work to reinforce

power and oppression that may undermine the groups' vision. To ensure this, an understanding of diversity and structural oppression is key.

A Working Definition of Transcommunal Pedagogy

Transcommunality has changed how I teach CP. My pedagogical approach is praxis-centered and informed from interdisciplinary scholars such as Childs (2003), as well as my own lived experiences, both inside and outside of the classroom. I define a transcommunal pedagogy of CP as one centered on the practice of communication, mutual respect, understanding, diversity, and engagement with the intent of moving toward collective action. Aligned with CP, I emphasize praxis, the process of connecting theory to action (Freire, 1970; Kelly, Ryan, Altman, & Stelzner, 2000) in order to engage students in pragmatic projects connected to course curriculum, their intersecting

identities, and society. My pedagogy seeks to amplify voices often absent in mainstream curriculum or as defined by the dominant group(s). I take into consideration who is in the classroom and who is not, whom I can speak for and whom I cannot, and how to bridge these gaps for students. Power, privilege, and oppression are essential for students to understand why CP values should be a right, and not a privilege for some groups to thrive. This approach emphasizes the principles of the field by connecting citizen participation, shared power, change, sense of community, and social justice through a framework of identity and collective action. Moreover, it is a constant acknowledgment of the diverse experiences and voices of the students, their lives, and the context in which we teach and thrive. I truly believe that we must go outside of the discipline to prepare students for CP work that often requires them to engage in levels of analysis, collective well-being, social justice, and social action.

Table 2

Classroom Activities that Connect CP Values[3] with Transcommunality (Childs, 2003)

CP Concept	Transcommunality Connection	Classroom Activity
Empowerent, citizen participation, & collaboration	Task-focused outlooks shared practical knowledge, constructive disputing	Community agreements, radical speaking order, anonymous writing
Respect for human diversity & wellness	Creating of transcommunal associations	Social histories, silencing of dominant groups
Sense of community & social justice	Personal transformation & propulsion of vision	Praxis projects

Examples and Notes from a Transcommunal Classroom

Integrating the tools and lessons I have learned from scholars, teachers, colleagues, and students, I believe this pedagogy can foster a classroom environment that

emphasizes transcommunal action embedded within CP values. Table 2 offers different classroom activities that educators can use to develop their own transcommunal pedagogy of CP. In this section, I will analyze three different classroom activities that build from

[3] Adapted from Kloos et al. (2012) and Prilleltensky (2001)

one another toward the goal of transcommunality. The first two examples center on smaller scale course assignments and classroom management, while the third draws on a larger scale praxis project that attempts to engage students in transcommunal action. Although each can stand alone, I use the first two examples to prepare my students for the larger praxis projects. Additionally, I have included reflections given by permission from former students to capture their interpretation of my pedagogy. As past educators have taught me, our pedagogies are only as strong as our students' understanding and experiences of them; what is "lost in translation" can surface what needs to improve. By including their voices, I hope to illustrate the planned and unplanned outcomes from a transcommunal approach to CP.

It is important to preface that all these examples come from my classes taught at the University of Washington Bothell, a small public university that is the most ethnically and racially diverse in the state (Fast Facts, 2015). As our CP major resides in the *School for Interdisciplinary Arts & Sciences*, students often come to class prepared to engage in dialogue that transcends their chosen degree. What has worked for me as a first generation, cis gender, able bodied, Latinx woman of color faculty member may not work for others. Each example discusses the risks, challenges, and rewards, as well as possible adjustments for faculty from different backgrounds at institutions that are not as diverse as my own. I offer the following examples and notes for inspiration of what could be possible.

Transcommunal Classroom Example One: Social Histories

At the heart of Childs' (2003) conceptual framework of transcommunality is the importance of communication, mutual respect, and understanding. Separately, these can take the form of using one's voice, acknowledging one another's presence and learning to listen. Combined, these three concepts can be a difficult task to accomplish in a classroom, where students often enter as strangers and may lack trust, with their peers and/or the instructor. To engage in transcommunality, one must meet these three goals to develop a sense of unity that will lead the group to social action (Childs, 2003). As Childs' (2003) eloquently describes, this process is not about losing one's identity, but is about humanizing our experiences to challenge acts of domination.

In a transcommunal classroom, I use communication, mutual respect, and understanding to center our positionalities and amplify diverse voices. One way that I attempt this is through social histories. Taking the form a letter, I ask students to introduce themselves to me. I ask them to write about their family, childhood, education, identities, relationships, connections, and anything else they would like me to know about them beyond my own assumptions. I invite students to write sections or phrases in their home language, to use poetry to express themselves, or to include pictures or drawings. I provide no actual template or expectation for this assignment beyond beginning their letter with the salutation, "Dear Professor Silva". Given how personal these letters can be, I model this activity by writing my own social history letter to my students, sharing my story, identities, experiences, and photos. This assignment extends beyond the traditional in-class introduction given the amount of detail I choose to disclose about myself to my students. I ask that students keep my letter confidential, just as I will do the same with theirs. Rather than return these letters back with a marked grade, I use them for our first one-on-one meeting that takes place the first two weeks of the quarter.

The letter provides us with a starting point for our conversation, building a level of trust between the student and myself and allowing me to learn more about who is in my classroom.

On the surface, this assignment might seem mundane or irrelevant given the short amount of time we have to engage students in curriculum. However, this assignment is critical for my classes. If I want us to engage in shared practical action, task-focused outlooks, constructive disputing, personal transformation, and have a shared propulsion of vision, I believe it is important for me to understand who they are and where they are coming from. Understanding who they are allows us to work towards CP values of participation, collaboration, and builds a respect for diversity (Kloos, et al., 2012). I use *me* instead of *us* because I have found that the hardest trust to earn is between students and myself. As one student put it, "I don't trust folxs in power. I just don't. And I don't think folxs in power-even my professors-want to listen to anything I have to say. Schooling has taught me that they don't care about me, or how I need to be taught, or what I want to learn, they just want to get it done and over with. When you asked us to write you a letter, I thought, 'She's a little weird. Let's see if she can handle it [their lived experience].' So I wrote my truth. And when we sat down to meet and you asked me about what I wrote, I started to tear up. Because I realized you not only read it, but you cared. You asked me questions, but you didn't critique me or judge me for what I have been through. So when it came time to do other stuff, I was like 'alright. I can trust her. She cool.'" (Somalian, cis gender, working class, first generation male student, personal communication, 6/1/17). The social history assignment has become central to creating a transcommunal classroom that amplifies student voice and CP values through the process of writing and listening.

Risks, rewards and making it your own. It would be disingenuous of me to say that this letter assignment is an easy one for me, even after assigning it in over 40 classes. The first time I used this assignment, I stared at my computer for what felt like hours. It is very easy to give a surface introduction of myself; the struggle was with how honest I wanted to be with students who I would be meeting for the very first time, at a new institution, as a junior faculty member who was also a Latinx woman of color. As one of six Latinx faculty on campus, I was cognizant of how students of color and white students might perceive me. On the surface, my story is what many might call a "happy, normal childhood": raised by two loving parents in the same house my entire life, with a high achieving older sister, both of us graduating with advance degrees and no financial debt. It would be easy to tell that story. It was more difficult to tell the story of the personal struggles I faced based on my skin color, being first generation, my (constant) battle with imposter syndrome, and my physical struggles as a woman of color trying to fit a societal mold. Although I asked that students not share my letter, I knew I had no way of knowing if they would honor that. Like them, I had to trust that they would, just like they had to trust that I would.

In seven years of teaching, I have only had one student ask for their letter back before I could read it. Appearing at my office immediately following class, the student explained she was not comfortable with me reading the letter just yet. I did not question her decision; I found her letter in the pile of work and handed it back to her, telling her that I hope she might feel differently as the course continued but completely understood if she did not. Slowly, this student started to attend my office hours each week to discuss the course and eventually revealing layers of herself, both in her assignments and in our one-on-one conversations. During the final

week of class, she handed me her letter and a card, thanking me for respecting her decision and stating she was ready to share herself with me. I learned a valuable lesson about this assignment from this student. I now tell students they can be as personal as they would like and can be as private as they choose. I often provide prompts now for students to help those who might not be comfortable divulging their lives on paper. The prompts address topics in the course I want them to consider and often ask them to reflect back on their lived experiences. For example, in courses where we discuss gender socialization, I write about the role of my gender and ethnic identities on my upbringing. In courses where we discuss gentrification, I spend time writing about what it was like growing up in a gentrified community and living on "the wrong side of the tracks". For faculty from other institutions or backgrounds that differ from my own, I would encourage them to begin this assignment by providing a set of questions or specific prompts you would like the students to address. For example, in a CP course, you might ask students to reflect upon a time they felt empowered in their lives and how it made them feel. For students who are afraid to be vulnerable with their faculty, guiding questions allow them to be selective in their writing. I also grade this assignment based on completion of assignment, not the context of the letter. Emphasizing that you will be grading them on whether they turn it in rather than what they share can also help reduce students' trepidations.

Transcommunal Classroom Example Two: Radical Speaking Order

This assignment allows me to engage students in the next step of my transcommunal pedagogy, radical speaking order. Adapted from feminists of color (Collins, 1999; Lorde, 1984) and widely used in community activist spaces (Davis, 2013),

radical speaking order asks individuals to step back and listen when the conversation ignores or silences their identities. It requires students to recognize their positionality and privilege within conversations about communities, social groups and social issues that they may possess knowledge about, but are not directly affected. It is not an act of silencing people. The intention is to create space for marginalized groups-often viewed as subjects in academia-to speak first, with the goal of raising awareness of diverse lived experiences. Dominant groups are then invited to speak, using statements that are based on their experiences and to avoid (when possible) relying on stereotypes or assumptions of groups they are not members. In all settings, whether it is the classroom or a community meeting, proponents of radical speaking order emphasize the value from learning to listen to one another and respecting diversity.

In my pedagogy, I strive to transform silence in the classroom into action through dialogue and uncomfortable conversations. It is more than acknowledging our intersecting identities and differences, but it is linking these differences to power, which I believe speaks directly to CP values (Kloos et al., 2012). If we want to train students to work with communities, they must first understand the structural oppression faced by certain communities. I think carefully about how I want to do this based on who is in my classroom. As a woman of color, I am often standing in front of a group of students from dominant social groups. I do not want to make these conversations about one specific group or to create a space that validates victim blaming (Ryan, 1971) or reinforces stereotypes. This is why creating a communal space is key. As Lorde (1984) states, "without community there is no liberation" (p. 112). This is not a call to ignore difference, but is a push to understand difference, power, and be in dialogue with one another.

There is a clear process I utilize in my classrooms in order to move toward a radical speaking order. As a class, we structure our community agreements to align with radical speaking order. On the second week of class, we cover our classroom walls in large butcher paper and start the process of recognizing who is in the classroom. Students use post-its to write down their identities anonymously and place them on the paper. This process has been quite moving for students. Although they may see someone who looks like them, this can often be the first visual acknowledgement in the classroom that someone else shares your same identities.

After we take time to recognize who is in the room, we then begin a conversation on intersectionality. Intersectionality teaches us how it is our intersecting identities that influence our lived experiences, interactions, and access to resources to create change (Collins, 1999; Crenshaw, 1991). Students have come to class prepared to discuss excerpts from hooks (1994, 2003) and Lorde (1984) to guide our difficult conversations on power, privilege, and identity. We use these texts to frame our roles in the classroom, including my own. We use guiding questions: When is the appropriate time to speak? When can we bring in our lived experiences? Is it okay to speak for other groups, as long as you know someone from that group? How do we include the majority of us in our conversations? How do we hold space for silence? What is silence? How do we choose to disagree? Is it okay to disengage when the conversation is too much? How can we ensure our classroom is a space where we all want to talk and where we will continue coming back? This activity takes the entire class period and sometimes requires an additional class session to complete. Some questions are easy; the majority are not. Students are encouraged to step back at any point and can use additional post its (if they choose) to stick to the whiteboard to explain why they stepped back and what might be done differently to change the dynamic. By the end of this class session, we have established our community agreements, begun to acknowledge one's presence and positionality, and are learning to listen. I provide students with hard copies of these agreements and we keep them on the board for each class session. We acknowledge that we might not always succeed in achieving these agreements, but are committed as a class to creating a sense of community intertwined within transcommunality.

Through listening to one another, students are gaining shared practical knowledge (Childs, 2003) that is central to working toward task-focused outlooks. Moreover, the assignment and class activity helps build interpersonal relations among the students who may hold assumptions about their peers based on perceived differences. Additionally, it can facilitate student empowerment (albeit limited to that specific class time and place) and a respect for diversity. As a Latinx identified student commented, "I liked that I was given a space to speak. And not just speak, but it was a space where others had to listen. Because we spent time getting to know one another and radical speaking order was explained to us, we didn't sit back and get upset. Well, some did at first. But after a while, we understood why we had to listen sometimes. Even me. That made me a better listener, thinker, and taught me to approach projects differently" (personal correspondence, 3/12/18). Social histories and radical speaking order help lay the groundwork that is necessary for engaging in CP work. To help create a sense of community (Prilleltensky, 2001) in the classroom, I use these two methods to move us toward a deeper understanding of who we are, what we each bring to the space, and how we can learn from one another to work collaboratively.

Risks, rewards, and making it your own.
The reason I use class-derived community agreements to engage students in radical speaking order is due to the inherent risks that come from this practice. As this practice asks that people recognize their privilege and to step back and not speak for groups they are not a part of, I am very aware and concerned that students will view this as silencing. Moreover, as a Latinx woman of color, I am cognizant that students from more privileged backgrounds (and even students of color) might interpret this as me being prejudice toward dominant groups. Due to these risks, I spend a considerable amount of time explaining this process and do not enact it until week three or four of the course. I also only attempt radical speaking order in my upper division classes. Personally, I am hesitant about using such a structure for first year students who are new to the institution and are still adjusting to college. Moreover, I would not recommend that faculty begin radical speaking order prior to having general class discussions where they can observe class interactions. If there is a high level of tension in the classroom, I would refrain from enacting radical speaking order in each class session. Instead, I would suggest proposing discussion questions-led by the faculty-to the class where students work in pairs. Each pair would have a set amount of time to discuss the question, with one person listening and not interjecting while their partner speaks and then transition. Eventually, I would consider making these groups larger, with the goal of having a class-based discussion that could utilize components of radical speaking order. It is important to be cautious and not risk the classroom community and to listen to students if they are not ready to engage in this process.

As illustrated above, radical speaking order can be very rewarding for students, both for marginalized groups that want to demystify stereotypes and for dominant groups. Not all students want to participate in radical speaking order. I do not require that all students speak when the discussion question pertains to their lived experiences. It is never the job of students from dominant groups to educate others about themselves. This is a very fine line in any classroom. This practice requires constant reflection on community agreements and checking in with students about classroom dynamics. I often use "exit tickets" or online polls to check in with my students about the process. We constantly revise the process for our classroom, always knowing we can abandon it if students believe it is causing harm.

Transcommunal Classroom Example Three: Praxis Projects

The above examples provide the foundation needed to create a transcommunal classroom and learning experience for my students to engage in praxis assignments. As stated earlier, praxis is the cyclical process of reflection and action. All of my classes require students to engage in a praxis project. These projects range in both size and scope: from 45 students to small groups of four, to projects focused on social change within our campus community and others involving collaboration with a community group (Silva & The Students for Diversity Now, 2018; Silva & The Students for Gender Equity, 2015;). Each praxis project asks students to be "pragmatic realists"; that is, to draw upon their knowledge and skills and address an issue in a manner that is feasible, attainable, and sustainable. Pragmatic realism draws upon CP values by focusing on practical and sustainable change that centers on transcommunal action and is driven by collaboration and communication. The praxis project I will be using as an example of transcommunal pedagogy is the k-5th grade social justice project.

The k-5th grade social justice project asks students to develop a 30-minute lesson plan to teach young people about social and community psychology to show the importance of teaching these concepts in schools (see Appendix for an example). In self-selected groups of four, students spend four weeks (one hour each week) identifying the concepts they want to include in their lesson, create an activity, and a short homework assignment for a randomly assigned grade level. To connect this project with the community, I collaborate with a local elementary school whose mission includes social justice and community action. As a class, we visit the school twice, observing different classrooms and spending time on the playground with students. My students have the opportunity to visit their specific grade level and speak to the teacher. In addition, I give students the school's demographics, community description, and school goals to inform their lesson plans for a specific target audience. During the last week, students present their lesson plan to the class and we collectively evaluate the plans for feasibility, illustration of concepts, level of engagement, and practicability. The elementary school teachers review the lesson plans with the highest overall score. The teachers then select one plan that they would like to adapt for their classrooms and the selected group co-facilitates their lesson. As a thank you for their partnership, the teachers are given all lesson plans to use.

Intended as a project that promotes pragmatic realism in action, the k-5th grade social justice project integrates CP values within a transcommunal framework. As both CP and transcommunality call upon the importance of social justice, community, collaboration, and action, this project, both indirectly and directly, attempts to bridge these frameworks. Students are involved in creating change within a school, but must attend to the needs of that school and its students. Although tasked with incorporating social and community psychology concepts within their lesson, school field trips provide students with the opportunity to get to know their audience and listen to their needs. During these visits, groups are encouraged to spend time in their selected grade level classroom, asking students for input on class activities and aiding them in their project. Moreover, as a group project, students are sharing power and collaborating with others not just in our classroom but also with the elementary school. Teachers provide them with a list of activities and projects their students have engaged in to help guide the groups. Additionally, the selected group collaborates with the teacher before they can teach the students their lesson. This project aims to give students a tangible example of the importance of CP values within a transcommunal approach.

As a praxis project, these CP values align with the goals and intention of transcommunality that I seek to bring into my classrooms. In order for the students to create change and develop a sense of community, both with their group and the elementary school, students must have defined task-focused outlooks and a propulsion of vision to guide their project. Shared practical action is important for students to think pragmatically about their goal. They must develop a project that is feasible and engages the young learners they will be teaching, while also meeting the needs of the elementary school teacher. Students must also learn how to work through constructive disputing, often requiring them to step back and listen. Listening, both to one another and to young students, is essential for them to develop a lesson plan connected to social justice. Interpersonal relations is what drives their project, strengthening the relationships they have developed with one another inside of the classroom.

For many students, this project becomes one of personal transformation. As a Filipino student wrote in his group reflection, "this wasn't just a class project where we had to turn in an assignment for a grade. This project served a purpose. Meeting with our first graders taught me how even young people have opinions and deserve to be heard, because they matter. This project was a lot of fun but was very hard. We each put so much of ourselves in the final lesson plan. I am grateful that I got to take part in a project with a purpose and that I get to see it through" (personal correspondence, 3/6/18). Similarly, one student noted the lasting impact of this project on her educational experience. Identifying as a Muslim, first generation woman of color, she wrote, "this project challenged me because I made assumptions about my peers. I didn't think they could understand what others were going through [their group topic was focused on introducing second graders to the Muslim community in their area]. I almost refused to do it. But I thought about what we learned and what you said about the importance of us learning from each other. So we focused on trust, because I told them I was [a] skeptic. And that helped us make something great. I learned how to argue and not hurt my peers and also how to take feedback that was critical but honest. I grew. I think we all did. And I think we all took a part of those lessons with us to other spaces, whether it was in a class or in a student club" (personal correspondence, 2/18/16). For students, what could be a mundane project with extensive group work this has become a project that engages students in transcommunal association through a praxis project.

Risks, rewards, and making it your own.
This project is one of the most rewarding projects I have implemented in my classroom but it takes a considerable amount of effort from the instructor. Building relationships with schools is not easy; finding a school that will welcome college students and collaborating with a teacher that will make time in their curriculum for this project is extremely difficult. I am fortunate to be at an institution where community-based classroom projects are encouraged. Being able to bring experts in to train students regarding conduct (particularly with young children) and community expectations is critical to the success of this project. If I was at an institution where I did not have this support, I would likely scale down this project to accommodate my own limitations. For this project, I have chosen to collaborate with a school because my research focus is the k-12 system; however, other faculty can adjust this assignment based on the community they are working with. It is important that your community partner approve of the parameters of the assignment, adjusting it to meet their needs while simultaneously meeting your learning objectives.

There are considerable risks that come with inviting others to a field site, especially for an assigned class project based on the course. Although some students may lack the motivation for this assignment it often changes after they visit the school. If students remain resistant to the project after the school visit, I would then give that group an option for an alternative project to not risk my partnership or sacrifice their learning. It took me two years to plan this project before I executed it. My advice is to take time with a praxis project, starting small before creating an assignment that might require more scaffolding than what is feasible during one quarter or semester.

What is Possible: A Concluding Thought

As I reflect on my pedagogical approach and lessons that myself and my students have learned in this process, I go back to Rendón's (2009) *Sentipensante Pedagogy* and her

"invitation to make our classrooms matter" (p. xi). An educational manifesto, Rendón (2009) asks educators to consider the lived experiences that brought them to the classroom in the first place and to reimagine their classrooms as spaces that embrace their whole selves. As I move toward a transcommunal pedagogy of CP, my intention is to continue to reflect and rethink of the ways in which I can bridge disciplines to create moments of wholeness, respect, authentic dialogue, transformative knowledge, and inclusive participation as we move toward pragmatic, praxis-focused actions. I also remind myself of Childs' (2003) assertion that this "is a process-often difficult, slow, and even defeated at certain moments-that constantly creates, and when necessary rebuilds, structures of commonality among diverse peoples" (p. 76). For me, that means that failure happens. No classroom is perfect and oftentimes our plans must be adapted or even lost for the betterment of our students. Despite these potential failures, I believe our classrooms matter because of what is possible; for me, what is possible starts with transcommunality.

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Acknowledgements

Appendix A

Social Justice for Young People: The Elementary School Praxis Project: 130 points

Objective: This project requires you to work collaboratively, integrating diverse opinions and voices, to consider audience/community/community partner, integrate course material, and successfully execute a lesson plan appropriate for an elementary classroom.

Who is involved: You and your peers in this course, your professor, and Acorn Elementary School[4]

The project: You will be working in groups of four or five. This is largely an in-class assignment (meaning I will devote several class meetings to group work on this project) but you will likely have to still work on this project outside of class. Choose your group wisely. Over the course of the quarter, we will examine how social psychology intertwines with our daily lives and the importance of learning about these concepts in k-12 education, specifically elementary school. Your task will be to select two concepts (or more) that you think students in elementary school (k-5) should learn about. Remember, many people see these concepts as not "appropriate for young people". Through your lesson, you will have to show teachers (and provide an explanation for the lesson to guardians/parents) that young people should know these things to be empowered and motivated toward socially just change. What tools are you teaching them? Keep in mind…

-You are not simply creating a lesson plan to teach students about prejudice.

-You will need to determine how to teach this lesson to a particular grade and age level. You will need to understand (and research) how that particular age level thinks of these concepts.

Terminology might need adjustment. Outside research will guide your lesson.

You will have to develop a plan that will make students care and listen to you, and is feasible for the teacher. You must take into consideration what the teacher discusses with you during our class visits.

Grade levels are randomly assigned. Each group will present their lesson plan during the last week of class. The teachers at Acorn Elementary will evaluate your plans and will select the group that will come and co-facilitate their lesson in the classroom.

Acorn Elementary: To get to know our community partner, we will be watching a video presentation by the faculty, staff and students of Acorn Elementary. In addition, we will be visiting the school during two class meetings. The first meeting focuses on meeting the students and the faculty and staff. The second meeting will give each group time to spend with their grade level and an individual meeting with the teacher.

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[4] The elementary school was given a pseudonym.

Project Outline/Timetable:

Week Four	Select groups and brainstorm with class topics that could be covered in an elementary school; grade level assigned and tentative topics selected
Week Five	First class visit to Acorn Elementary; receive class overview from teacher and list of topics covered in class
Week Six & Seven	Research and begin lesson brainstorming
Week Eight	Second class visit to Acorn Elementary; groups can arrange additional visits
Week Nine	Lesson plans
Week Ten	Lesson plan presentation and final selection by Acorn Elementary

POINT BREAKDOWN:

Lesson Plan (70 points)
You will turn in **ONE written, descriptive, explanatory lesson plan**. Be as detailed as you need for someone else to be able to pick up your lesson plan and execute it. Lesson Plans should be <u>no less than 9 FULL pages double spaced</u>. You will need to explain your topic and justify the reasoning behind your lesson.

<u>Things to Keep In Mind While Planning:</u>
-Age appropriateness of activity
-Engagement
-Does it makes sense?
-What is the intended goal?
-Do you need to change the words to make them more student friendly?
-What will the teacher say to the students at the conclusion of the lesson?
-What will the teacher say to parents/guardians or the principal if they have concerns about the lesson?

<u>Remember, the goal is that someone should be able to pick up your lesson and execute it. That means the following:</u> a list of materials, handouts, detailed steps of your plan, teacher dialogue, <u>an</u> appropriate homework assignment for the students to do after the lesson plan to continue their learning<u>.</u>