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# CARIÑO PEDAGOGY: A FRAMEWORK OF CORAZÓN

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*Abstract: Change in the world of education has never been new or unexpected. However, the pandemic that swept the world at the beginning of 2020 caused our world to spin off its axis and forced its practitioners into quickly re-evaluating their praxis, their priorities, and their professional responsibilities. Through this reflection, three BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) colleagues in the Teacher Education Department at a midwestern state university examine twelve months of teaching during the pandemic and the strategies they turned to, to stay true to their pedagogical values to ensure their students were taken care of personally and academically. This praxis process resulted in a framework that melds together five elements of pedagogical practice: Humanizing Pedagogy, Trauma-Informed Pedagogy, Teaching for Critical Social Justice and Equity Literacy, and Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Pedagogy. This framework is what we call Cariño Pedagogy.*

Although we did not know it at the time, our last classes on campus were during the afternoon of Thursday, March 12th, 2020. Students were receiving texts from friends about campus shutting down. They had so many questions, and we had few answers. Our department had tried to prepare with a big-picture sketch of what our classes might look like, but there was almost no time to work on what the day-to-day minutiae would require. It turned out that we would have to pivot and teach online for the first time two days later via Zoom, an utterly unfamiliar platform to us.

(FERIAL) I have taught for almost twenty years, more than half of it in a large public high school with primarily immigrant and refugee students. I have lived each half of my life on two different continents. I continually work hard on improving my teaching practice and have even won national awards for it. Despite this, I felt completely unprepared. Panic and doubt immediately set in. How would I ensure my students continued to build relationships with me and one another? How would I keep them engaged? How would I manage the stress and anxiety they all would undoubtedly be going through while also managing my own as both an educator and a parent of two teenagers? How would I continue to be true to every part of my teaching philosophy? Would I still be a good teacher? A good advocate and ally? Would I fail? I was teaching two undergraduate classes, one of which included a 60-hour practicum experience that would begin later in the semester and a graduate class that only met four times. All my classes focused on Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, and I knew I had to model what I was teaching and show my students how to be flexible, respond to changing needs, and ensure that they were cared for while still expecting that learning would happen.

(GABRIEL) Similarly, I experienced panic and anxiety upon learning of our quick transition to remote teaching. During that spring semester, I was teaching two undergraduate courses, including a course that explores the relationships among equity, language, and cultural literacy and its implications for programming and advocacy within school and community contexts. I also taught a course on classroom management that included a 50-hour practicum experience. After being a high school teacher, the anxiety I experienced mainly stemmed from being new to teaching at the university level. I had finished my first semester of teaching at the university in December, and I was just starting to develop my pedagogy and philosophy. I worried about how I would establish relationships with students and how the quality of my teaching would be affected. I also worried about balancing my teaching load while also being in the first semester of my doctoral program. How would I be a good teacher and student in this completely new environment while also establishing a new career?

(SANDRA) As my colleagues expressed, relationships with my students are essential in my teaching. The day that the university made the announcement, I was in the middle of teaching, and my students all looked at me stunned. I had a feeling that it was a formal announcement about the next steps for what we knew was becoming a global pandemic. My students shared the message they received from our university, and they started asking questions that I could not answer: What will happen now? What about the assignments due? Should I go home with my parents, or should I stay in my dorm? Are we coming back this semester? What about my school practicums? These concerns were legitimate as I taught an undergraduate class with a practicum component and another one with a service-learning component. I was also teaching a graduate class that met for almost three hours, and I was panicking that my internet connection at home was not stable enough. I wondered how I could redo my three courses to teach them through Zoom. How could I recreate the energy, feelings, and moments we experience in an in-person class? To say that I felt powerless and confused was an understatement.

This paper explores how we have answered those questions for ourselves in the journey that our students embarked upon with us during the last year and how reflecting on our practice has resulted in a new pedagogical framework. We have named this framework *Cariño Pedagogy*, which weaves together the work of critical pedagogues such as Paulo Freire, Angela Valenzuela, Paul Gorski, and others.

## **Our Conceptual Lens**

As we sought to reflect and interpret our experiences during the pandemic, we found ourselves going back to the teachings of Paulo Freire, in particular the concepts of *praxis* and *dialogue*. Paulo Freire defines praxis as “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (Freire, 1993, p. 145). Freire argues that it is through praxis that true dialogue and critical action can be achieved. In Freirean pedagogy, dialogue is an encounter between men, mediated by the world, in order to name the world.... this dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person “depositing” ideas in another, nor can it become a simple exchange of ideas to be “consumed” by the discussants. (Freire, 1993, p. 88-89)

The Freirean conceptualization of dialogue is central to how we approach teaching during a pandemic because, according to Freire, true dialogue cannot exist unless all participants engage in love, humility, faith, trust, hope, and critical thinking. This view shows that dialogue demonstrates not only the positive connection between people but also the constant drive to transform themselves and reality. Therefore, dialogue becomes the sign and the central concept of true education, “without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication, there can be no true education” (Freire, 1993, p. 92). The three of us have constantly been reflecting upon action and engaging in dialogue with each other and our students throughout the pandemic so that we could hone our pedagogies and praxis towards the Freirian goal of true education, even in the face of a global crisis.

### *Positionality and Reflexivity*

Our positionality as participants in praxis and dialogue as Freirian scholars means that we need to reflect on our praxis to continue learning while in the act of teaching. Reflexivity is “the process of personally and academically reflecting on lived experiences in ways that reveal the deep connections between the writer and her or his subject” (Goodall, 2000, p. 137). As teachers, we need to remember Freire’s words: “whoever teaches learns in the act of teaching, and whoever learns teaches in the act of learning” (Freire, 1998a, p. 31). We know that we cannot be objective about our work because we are an inextricable part of it and because often, our responses are colored by our own experiences. We must be open about the power and privilege that we do and do not hold due to the different intersections the different pieces of our identities place us in society.

(FERIAL) I am a cisgender queer disabled Muslim immigrant of Indian and African ethnic origins. I currently live in the middle class (this depends on how much support I need to give my family back home). I spent the first half of my life living and studying in Kenya, and the second half living, studying and teaching in public education in the midwestern United States. I acknowledge the reality that we are all living in systems of oppression that include Patriarchy, White Supremacy, and heteronormative, cisnormative, and Islamophobic hegemony. While these systems have caused me a great deal of trauma due to most of the parts of my identity, I also benefit from them by being cisgender and middle class and having the privilege and power of a doctorate and position as an Assistant Professor.

(GABRIEL) I am a cisgender Chicano male and the son of working-class Mexican immigrants. I have lived my entire life in an urban Mexican enclave in the midwestern United States. I attended public schools my whole life,

and this is where I first experienced acts of racism. In college, I went on to study secondary education and became a public school teacher in the same neighborhood where I grew up. While I have experienced various forms of oppression throughout my life, I also acknowledge that I have benefited from being a U.S.-born cisgender male with a college education.

(SANDRA) I am a cisgender Puerto Rican woman who has lived a life of constant “vaivenes” (back and forth) between Puerto Rico and the United States (Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Nebraska). I attended a bilingual education program at a public school in Boston that influenced the paths that I have taken in my life. My school was a haven as I lived in the “projects” and had few opportunities to explore the world outside it. This was my first experience with racial and socioeconomic inequalities. Going back to Puerto Rico and receiving a public education that gave me access to a low-cost higher education changed my life and inspired me to pursue graduate education at Penn State University. Since then, I have been part of Predominantly White Institutions (PWI), where I am part of a “minority” group. My doctorate and becoming a teacher educator have given me a social and cultural capital that I recognize that many others are still struggling to obtain.

What the three of us have in common as BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) educators is that even though we have experienced racism, trauma, oppression, and socioeconomic inequalities, our education and access to networks have given us more opportunities than many others from our same background. These experiences have allowed us to be in a position of privilege, and we feel duty-bound and committed to paying that privilege forward to others, especially the students we serve.

## **A Pandemic Pedagogy Framework: Cariño Pedagogy**

While we cannot single-handedly fix systemic oppression and inequity - including their effects during a pandemic - we cannot ignore them or pretend they do not exist while teaching and building relationships with our students. We - educators and students - are affected by multiple hegemonic and harmful systems daily. So we find ourselves trying to navigate them in a way that reduces as much harm to ourselves as possible while also trying to work from within to change them. Throughout all of our educational experiences, we have experienced the “banking concept of education” (Freire, 1993). As described by Freire,

Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the depositories and the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat. (1993, p. 72)

As we move away from the banking concept, we cannot emphasize enough that those of us from marginalized identities do not need to be fixed; the systems do. We do not need to be taught resilience and grit, or what Gorski (2019) calls *Equity Detours*, because we likely already embody both of these traits due to struggling upstream, and most importantly, we need to rid ourselves of those obstacles in the first place. The pandemic has only served to highlight and exacerbate the inequities and oppressions of the dominant hegemony. As educators, we have been forced to re-examine the framework of our practice to evaluate our priorities and change our pedagogical practices so that we can still meet the needs of our students, even as our world has turned upside down. This praxis process led to a representation of our *Cariño Pedagogy* - a revolving wheel of five asset-based, caring pedagogies that work in tandem (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1.** *Cariño* Pedagogy



In English, *cariño* can be loosely translated to care or caring. In Spanish, the term carries a deeper connotation of affection and love (Reyes, 2020). This affection and love are rooted in genuine respect and caring. In Angela Valenzuela’s (1999) ethnographic study of Mexican American high school students, she found that teachers exhibited two types of caring—authentic and aesthetic. Valenzuela explains that “schools are structured around aesthetic caring whose essence lies in an attention to things and ideas rather than a moral ethic of authentic caring that nurtures and values relationships” (p. 22). Our use of *cariño* reflects the type of critical and authentic caring Valenzuela (1999), Noddings (2013), and Prieto (2009) describe, combined with Paulo Freire’s (1998b) concept of “armed love.”

Freire (1998b) emphasized that love is indispensable for educators, but this love needs to “be an ‘armed love,’ the fighting love of those convinced of the right and the duty to fight, to denounce, and to announce” (p. 41). We found that in our practice, the pedagogies represented on the figure around the heart—Humanizing Pedagogy; Trauma-informed Pedagogy; Social Justice Pedagogy; Equity Literacy Pedagogy; Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Pedagogy—cannot stand alone as they all work symbiotically with each other. We realized that at the center of all of these pedagogical practices is our *corazón*, our heart. In the next section of this paper, we describe how each of the wheel components helped us go through this unique time in American history when a global pandemic affected our lives, students, and communities.

### *Humanizing Pedagogy*

We begin with humanizing pedagogy for a reason; we always see our students as human beings first and as students in our classes second. Paulo Freire (1993) defines a humanizing pedagogy as the teacher being a revolutionary leader who treats their students as human beings, who establishes a true dialogue with their students and thus builds confidence in students who may feel or be alienated from the educational process inside and outside the classroom. It is a method that “ceases to be an instrument by which teachers can manipulate the students, because it expresses the consciousness of the students themselves” (p. 69). In essence, a humanizing pedagogy centers the student rather than the teacher so that the students can learn with and from one another and learn from the teacher. The students gain a sense of belonging and ownership in the learning and are braver in taking risks and making mistakes from which they can grow. A student-focused approach (Biggs, 1999; Freire, 1993) means that we move away from the traditional pedagogical style of a non-interactive lecture where the educator does all the work and thinking, and the student is a passive and compliant listener. We live by the adage “Be the guide on the side, not

the sage on the stage” in our classrooms. We move instead towards the role of the facilitator who guides students through negotiating content themselves, using their lived experiences or “funds of knowledge” (Moll et al., 1992; González et al., 2005; Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992) and “cultural capital” (Bourdieu, 2001) as scaffolds to the learning and also the validation of their communities and experiences, thereby improving students’ engagement and sense of belonging (Salazar, 2013).

Too often, we have heard from our students that teachers and professors seem to separate them from their humanity; they see them as a student ID number (quite literally when they do not even learn their names!) and not as actual people. In reflecting on our combined schooling and teaching experience, we found that we each learned the most from educators who showed us that they care about us as people first and as students second, echoing what our students have told us in person and course evaluations about how our caring - and our explicit communication of that caring - is a huge part of their motivation, engagement, and success in our classes. We needed to keep this at the center of our practice during the pandemic so that our students could continue to learn. Humanizing pedagogy holds that students’ needs are centered and that they are treated as human beings through dialogue, and this is where *cariño* - caring - comes in.

Sharing power with our students is also a crucial piece of humanizing pedagogy. It engages students in the content and recognizes that they are teachers in the classroom as well. The three of us have often been the only person from our various identities in the room, and we are painfully aware of how it feels to be excluded and hesitant. Therefore, we have always been sensitive to and aware of our positional power so that we avoid having a negative influence on the learning process of our students. We knew that we had to continue to intentionally redistribute power that controls and sets boundaries on the student’s development and learning process, so they would understand that they still had agency and voice in their educational journey. This redistribution of power became critical in navigating the pandemic, and our students helped us figure out how to serve them better once the sudden shutdown changed our situations.

Typically, we set group norms alongside the students at the beginning of every semester where we let students know that we cannot assume what respectful, responsible, safe, and kind behaviors look like in every culture and background represented in the classroom, and so we need to tell each other explicitly what our ideas are for each one. We revisited these norms often during the semester and especially after the onset of the pandemic to ensure that our virtual learning environment continued to be as comfortable for us all as possible. In the Zoom environment, we thought about the psychological effects of having cameras on or off and checked in with each other if we noticed something was wrong. We also reinforced the importance of clear and prompt communication when we needed something and revisited what respect and responsibility looked like when people had increased stress due to illness and job loss. We were seeing professors on social media platforms complaining about students not turning on their cameras. Many professors complained that they “hated” teaching to black boxes, and they questioned if students were connected or not to class. As professors, it is not our role to judge, and we have given students the option of turning their cameras off. There are many reasons why students might not feel comfortable sharing their home environments, and they should have the power to decide to turn their cameras on or off. However, as we created a safe and engaging online environment for students, where their families, pets, and friends were welcome, we observed more students turning on their cameras. By the end of the semester, unless a student was having technical issues, they kept their cameras on and truly enjoyed interacting with each other through the chat. Humanizing our pedagogy allowed us to “respect the dignity and humanity of all students” (Salazar, 2013, p. 142).

We also wanted to ensure we avoided environments where students felt like passive vessels attending class to simply have knowledge deposited into them - the banking concept of education that Freire warned us against. We used our own experiences as students from marginalized and underrepresented backgrounds to demonstrate to our students the need to challenge traditional power structures of schooling, making a concerted effort to conduct our courses in a manner where teachers and learners share power. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, we gave students the power to influence the assignments for the course. The students were presented with the assignments that had already been designed and planned for, but they were told that to make the content of the course more personal to their plans and experiences, some of the assignments were open to modification or replacement based on the students’ needs and strengths. Many students stated that they had never experienced this type of power to direct their learning in any educational setting. A few shared that the closest they had experienced was the instructor giving them the perceived choice of some aspects of an assignment from a pre-selected list of options created by the teacher. After being given some time to think about their assignments, students voted to replace one of the major assignments of the course with a new action research project that they could customize to fit their own professional goals and circumstances during the pandemic.

Humanizing our students means being clear about caring for our students as people, encouraging them to take care of themselves, being vocal and explicit about our expectations via co-creation of norms, and ensuring our

practices remove barriers instead of creating them. We kept office hours virtual and flexible so that students who were sick or taking care of other family members could get help when they needed it. We were flexible about attendance, assignments, and deadlines while still keeping high expectations so as not to perpetuate ableism. We learned how to be better educators each time we implemented these strategies, and most importantly, we let the students know that what they thought mattered to us and that **THEY** mattered.

### *Trauma-Informed Pedagogy*

Part of caring for students means understanding the impact that trauma has on them. Trauma, as we are discussing here, is when people experience intense physical or psychological stress in response to one or more adverse event(s) or life circumstance(s) (SAMHSA, 2014). These types of events or circumstances can affect an individual's physical, emotional, social, or spiritual well-being (Crosby, 2015). While the literature has shown that trauma is not uncommon and especially present in childhood (Alisic, 2012), a recent report acknowledged that living through a global pandemic caused, exacerbated, and perpetuated more trauma, in particular when caused by heightened racial trauma (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2021). Our students also bring their trauma and its impact with them. In building strong and caring relationships with our students, we know that some of our student trauma includes suffering through racism, Islamophobia (Samari et al., 2018), homophobia, transphobia, natural disasters, loss, abandonment, chronic poverty, fear, war, or abuse (interpersonal and systemic). Trauma affects how our students do in our classrooms and may impact their ability to complete assignments, their relationships with us, their mentor teachers, and K-12 students in the field.

To mitigate those traumatic experiences, we used strategies that allowed our students to take care of themselves during our Zoom meetings. We asked our students what they would do to treat themselves the next day, and we shared our plans. We gave them a class period off with an assignment to do something kind for someone and focus on how it made them feel, and the ice-breaker for the next class was to share what happened. Sometimes we started the class off with a five-minute desk yoga exercise to model how to take care of our physical and mental selves while working. We honored their languages by learning key phrases, playing music in those languages as we admitted people into the Zoom for class. Even before class began, we sent them surveys to learn about their needs. We shared pieces of our stories to humanize ourselves for them as well.

Taking the time to do these activities during our sessions was instrumental in moving forward with class content. When students are in environments that ensure they are safe, validated, valued, and celebrated, they are more likely to succeed (Fiedler et al., 2008; Gay, 2002; Hammond, 2015; Steele, 2010).

### *Social Justice Pedagogy and Equity Literacy Pedagogy*

Teaching for social justice, specifically critical social justice (CSJ), is an attempt by educators to promote equity within their classrooms in light of high-stakes testing and accountability (Dover, 2013). The first step is recognizing that society is divided into people who experience life equitably and people who don't along social group lines, including race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability. The CSJ lens recognizes inequality as systemic and deeply embedded in every structure of society, and therefore it actively seeks to change this (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, p. xviii).

Equity literacy is along these same lines of actively cultivating equity while also becoming a threat to the existence of inequity. Equity literate educators constantly learn how students experience discrimination, bias, and inequity through policies, practices, institutional cultures, and ideologies. This learning occurs to change those aspects and ensure that we respond to these disparities in the short term while also redressing the structural issues that create how these disparities show up every day in our students' lives (Equity Literacy Institute, n.d.). Therefore, it is incumbent upon us to ask ourselves who the most marginalized students are in our classes and to ensure that rather than coming from a "deficit ideology" (Gorski & Swalwell, 2015), we redress what marginalizes our students rather than trying to "fix" the students themselves. We know that our most vulnerable students are low-income, single parents, BIPOC, English Language Learners, Immigrants, LGBTQ students, and non-traditional students. We recognize that they are targets of barriers to equity - both in our classrooms and colleges and in the K-12 system where they teach - that include "even the subtlest forms of bias, inequity, and oppression related to race, class, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, (dis)ability, language, religion, immigration status, and other factors" (Equity Literacy Institute, n.d.).

This past year has brought many of these inequities into an even harsher light than before. A teacher candidate had to quarantine for two weeks because his mentor teacher during his practicum experience had COVID and had not been taking masking seriously. He lost two weeks of work and salary at his job at a moving company. This student's situation led to conversations with leadership in our department about how internships should be paid,

including practicums, not just clinical practices, especially if we want to diversify our teaching force. We also know that students who are parents cannot afford childcare because they cannot hold full-time jobs due to the intensive requirements of the program, which has led to many of them becoming insecure in food and housing as those full-time jobs turned into just part-time ones. Many had inconsistent access to transportation and internet access, so we had some students attending our classes on their phones.

We were able to mitigate some of these struggles in small ways. Our students appreciated our flexibility in office hours and attending them virtually so that vulnerable loved ones could be present. Remote synchronous learning allowed those who had to quarantine not to miss class and we allowed them to have their cameras off while still participating in different ways. Students could participate in class using the chat function in the whole group and then in small groups using Breakout Rooms and applications such as Google Suite, Padlet, Jamboard, VidGrid, and more. We shared with our students the contact information for resources such as food pantries, jobs, financial hardship scholarships, and grants, and we made sure we checked in often with them by phone or email. We realized that these efforts were just Band-Aids on a larger wound and that leaders needed to make more equitable decisions.

This past year we witnessed how when schools opened back up, our students were uncomfortable with attending practicum in person (and so were many of their mentor teachers) because of inadequate distancing, inconsistent contact tracing, no updated air filtration, inconsistent masking, and families attending super spreader events outside of school hours. However, many superintendents, school board members, and political leaders (primarily white and powerful men) insisted on opening schools due to pressure from wealthy, mostly white families who were intent on having sports and school dances, as well as other privileges. These decisions underscore the equity literacy piece of not fixing people but instead fixing significant oppressive issues that cause inequity.

### *Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Pedagogy*

In our practice, we use the work of three well-known scholars to describe culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy. Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994) describes culturally relevant educators as those who see teaching as an art, view themselves as a part of the community, understand teaching as service, encourage their students to give back to their communities, believe that all students can succeed, seek to draw out knowledge that students possess, and help students in making connections “between their community, national, and global identities” (p. 38). With culturally relevant pedagogy, teacher-student relationships move beyond the classroom. Developing relationships proved to be a challenge once our classes had to go to remote learning. Still, we intentionally built strong relationships with each student, created a community of learners among the students, and expected students to teach and learn from one another through collaborative work while using students’ cultural referents to scaffold new learning. Dr. Geneva Gay (2010) describes culturally responsive teaching as validating, comprehensive, multidimensional, empowering, transformative, and emancipatory. She explains that culturally responsive teachers are caring, supportive, pleasant, passionate, and flexible while also having and communicating high expectations of academic excellence for themselves and their students. Like humanizing pedagogy, culturally responsive pedagogy affirms, liberates, and empowers culturally diverse students because it honors students as whole human beings. We teach our students the epistemologies, languages, and codes of power while honoring their epistemologies, languages, and codes.

We are also aware of students’ differences, rather than painting them all with broad brush strokes, because educators who capitalize on students’ strengths versus holding deficit views based on stereotypes are more successful in ensuring their students thrive (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994). This was completely possible during the pandemic, and we made sure we modeled culturally responsive skills, knowledge, and dispositions for our students. We take our work further from relevance and responsiveness to *culturally sustaining pedagogy*. Dr. Django Paris (2012) describes culturally sustaining pedagogy as having an “explicit goal supporting multilingualism and multiculturalism in practice and perspective for students and teachers. That is, culturally sustaining pedagogy seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling” (p. 95). To do this, we must not only teach about the frameworks within culturally sustaining pedagogy, but we must also embody them in our work. Our university prides itself on being a part of the community and using service learning to meet its needs.

Nonetheless, within culturally sustaining pedagogy, it is also necessary to communicate and be accountable to the community’s needs (Ferlazzo, 2017). We take our work from community engagement to culturally sustaining pedagogical practices by ensuring that we are centering our students’ languages, literacies, and cultural ways of being. We connect our students with the histories of racial, ethnic, and linguistic communities here and around the world. During this pandemic, we needed to find creative ways of encouraging solid relationships among our students. It was a way to mitigate the isolation and exclusion many of them were feeling due to the shutdown. A powerful way to do that was to use ice-breakers that built community, like “Connecting Stories,” which helped us



find “common experiences or themes between people” (Blahman, 2020). Connecting their stories made the students develop a sense of community even in the Zoom environment.

We took the time to connect their stories and learn students’ names, making sure we pronounced them correctly. This activity was essential to ensure that students felt seen, respected, honored, and included for all parts of their identities, even in a virtual environment. We used the “Name Story” activity to help the students learn each other’s names and emphasize for them the importance of using correct names to address each other and the students they will serve in the field. Our names are more than just names; when our names are used, our identities are honored, and we feel connected to the people using them. It gives us the feeling of caring, of *cariño*.

These ice-breakers were a small but powerful way to lessen the feelings of isolation and exclusion that a pandemic and other systemic traumas and injustices bring.

### *Cariño Pedagogy: Implications for Practice*

In reflecting on our praxis during the past year, we have found that our *Cariño* Pedagogy Framework is a reminder for teacher educators to focus on our teacher candidates and humanize our pedagogical practice. We need to remember that the authentically caring teacher is engrossed in her students’ “welfare and emotional displacement” (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 61). A caring educator demonstrates a combination of “concern, compassion, commitment, responsibility, and action” (Gay, 2010 p. 48). We cannot assume students know that we care about them; we have to be explicit in our communication. We have to tell them with our words and show them that this caring is present with our actions. We have to lead with *cariño*.

When we reflect on the five elements of *Cariño* Pedagogy - Humanizing Pedagogy, Trauma-Informed Pedagogy, Teaching for Critical Social Justice and Equity Literacy, and Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Pedagogy - we understand that what ties these five elements, in the end, is caring for our students. Humanizing our pedagogy is central to ensuring that students have a voice and that we lead with our hearts and not only with quantitative data (Freire, 1997; Salazar, 2013). As trauma-informed educators, we do not ask what is wrong with our students but instead ask what *happened* to them, in order to restore their humanity and tend to their well-being in all areas of their personhood (Crosby, 2015). Including equity literacy in our teaching acknowledges the systemic issues that burden our students, rather than blaming and trying to fix them when they are symptomatic of those systems (Gorski, 2019). Further, when teaching critical social justice, we examine those systems and do our best to dismantle or mitigate their damaging effects by leveraging our power and privilege as educators. Through culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy, we acknowledge that, even during pandemic times, relationships are at the heart of teaching (Nieto, 2018). Much of what we have learned and implemented through our *Cariño* Pedagogy during the pandemic can and should be carried forward into our practice as we come back on campus.

## **Conclusion: Lessons from the pandemic**

The pandemic reminded us that our hearts and our caring - our *cariño* - must be front and center in our work beyond the pandemic. Policies and procedures must be balanced by humanizing our students and centering their needs. Whenever we listen to talk about looking forward to going “back to normal,” we have some cognitive dissonance; surely, the world will never be the same again. A major pandemic that has caused the tragic loss of hundreds of thousands of human beings and that has disrupted the lives of everyone we know has permanently left its mark. It has forced us to engage in a praxis and dialogue process to re-evaluate priorities with a critical pedagogy lens. We had to go through this process and examine the systems that our teacher education field and our university have had in place for decades. We observed and experienced the barriers that have not only been ever-present for our students long before the pandemic but also risen more clearly to visibility during the pandemic. *Cariño* Pedagogy comes from *corazón*, and it means caring about our students and our communities enough to consistently do the hard work of learning with and from them, having the uncomfortable conversations to create real change, redistributing power and resources so that the most vulnerable among us can thrive, and opening our hearts and minds to the *real* purpose of education - liberation through love.

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