

# TIAHUI: A Decolonial Framework for Pedagogy & Practice

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## Abstract

In this article we describe our decolonizing framework for pedagogy and practice with the intention of sharing a praxis-oriented model for Ethnic Studies practitioners. Our framework, TIAHUI (Nahuatl for “moving forward”), supports decolonial and rehumanizing pedagogy using three intersecting *circulos*: Community Agreements, the Nahui Ollin, and six tenets for decolonizing our pedagogy and practice. The TIAHUI framework is a living archive of resistance embodying Ethnic Studies organizing, decolonial pedagogy and Indigenous epistemologies, tying ancestral knowledge to the present context, as a living archive. This framework has been implemented by school districts and higher education institutions to reframe their policies and practices by including these critical and decolonial approaches in all areas of their curriculum and pedagogy, and more specifically, integrated into Ethnic Studies course work and curriculum development.

As a praxis-oriented model and a living archive, it is imperative to frame TIAHUI in a specific political and historical context. Emerging from the struggle for Ethnic Studies in Tucson (Acosta, 2007; Arce, 2016; de los Ríos, 2013; Delgado, 2013; Toscano Villanueva, 2013), our collective developed the TIAHUI framework as a living archive of resistance and a commitment to authentic and liberatory Ethnic Studies. In the decade since the dismantling of the Mexican American/Raza Studies Department (MARS) in Arizona, the Xicanx Institute for Teaching & Organizing (XITO) carried on the legacy and historic success of that program by training thousands of educators, organizers, school counselors, and administrators (Dominguez, 2017; Fernández, 2019; Zavala, 2018). With our cumulative experience as Ethnic Studies practitioners, scholars, teacher educators, and community organizers, our framework is a reimagining of the intersections between Indigenous concepts and epistemologies (Arce, 2016; M. Gonzalez, 2017; Toscano Villanueva, 2013), Ethnic Studies pedagogy, and community agreements that ground our work (Fernández, 2019).

Growing out of struggle, TIAHUI is not only a living archive of resistance, but also an Indigenous re-remembering, critical to the current movement for authentic and liberatory Ethnic Studies. TIAHUI is an ancestral historical memory informing a pedagogy of love and liberation specific to our political and historical context. As Ethnic Studies is once again coming under attack, in large part due to the inclusion of Palestine in an Ethnic Studies curriculum, we are in solidarity with all oppressed people and determined to push back against the neoliberal racism fueling this opposition (Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2022). Many teachers are up against state legislation

preventing them from teaching about colonialism, white<sup>12</sup> supremacy, the inclusion of trans and queer representation as well as a litany of content necessary for teaching an accurate history of the U.S. All of these attacks are framed in an “anti-woke” dogma designed to focus on individual feelings and detract from naming and understanding how systems of oppression must be analyzed, rather than individual notions of discomfort. Ethnic Studies directly challenges these attempts by our opponents, by helping our students develop a love of themselves and their *cultura*, build their critical consciousness, identify systems of oppression, and develop the skills and analysis to make change. TIAHUI is a pedagogical tool as well as a strategic response to the current social and political context educators currently experience.

### **TIAHUI As a Living Archive of Resistance**

The nationally renowned Mexican American/Raza Studies Department (MARSD) in Tucson, effectively interrogated and disrupted the educational colonial project by reintroducing indigeneity to youth of color via Chicax ancestral knowledge (Acosta, 2007; Arce, 2016) and produced measurable results that eclipsed the “achievement gap” (Cabrera et al., 2014; Cappellucci Williams, C., Hernandez, J. J., Nelson, L. P., Casteel, T., Gilzean, G., & Faulkner, G. 2011; Sleeter, 2011). Chicax students in MARSD engaged in the reintroduction to indigeneity, which led to transformation and liberation as assessed through human measures such as sense of hope, cultural identity affirmation, purpose, and agency.

Critical Ethnic Studies educators continuously interrogate the educational system to eliminate colonial practices that dehumanize youth and their communities. Decolonial education provides educational spaces that cultivate a culture of rehumanization while equipping historically racialized youth with the skills to navigate and work to dismantle colonization through acts of resistance and remembrance, in this case using Chicax ancestral knowledge. The concept of self-love is fundamental and paramount in decolonizing Ethnic Studies programs. Chicax ancestral knowledge reminds us that our ancestors elaborated on a Mesoamerican Indigenous epistemology that fosters balance and harmony among all living creatures in an interdependent relationship. We draw on this Mesoamerican Indigenous epistemology to inform our framework for pedagogy and practice toward a decolonial educational ecology of rehumanization and remembrance.

### **TIAHUI's *Circulos***

The term *circulos*, meaning “circles” in Spanish, is used to name the structure of the TIAHUI framework as an intentional acknowledgment of Indigenous ways of knowing. Countering a western, linear method of understanding history and the world, *circulos* embrace collective solidarity, balance, and cycles that overlap and inform each other. The TIAHUI framework includes three *circulos* to provide a structure for decolonizing pedagogy and practice. Together these three *circulos* inform and provide the foundation and structure for a decolonial approach to teaching and learning. Specifically, each *circulo* represents components of a decolonial ecology integral to an Ethnic Studies program or class.

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<sup>12</sup> We use the lowercase “w” for white and upper case for all racialized groups as a counterhegemonic practice. We recognize that “white” is rooted in the domination and oppression of racialized groups, whereas “Chicax/Latinx, Black/African American” etc. are not rooted in domination but rather name specific racial and ethnic groups.

The outer *circulo*, TIAHUI, is the Indigenous framework for decolonial and culturally humanizing pedagogy and instruction composed of six tenets. TIAHUI is a Nahuatl word and concept that means to move forward and is the essence of positive and progressive movement through developing our critical consciousness and a sense of agency. TIAHUI's six tenets are: *Teaching Critical Consciousness*; *Interconnectedness Through Student-Centered Instruction*; *Agency Through Critical Praxis*; *Historical Literacy Development*; *Unity Through Community*; and *Intersectional Identity Development*.

The inner *circulo* is the *Nahui Ollin*- A Nahuatl concept meaning "four movements," a system of cultural relevance and responsiveness that seeks balance and harmony for self and community through curriculum and content thus providing structure. *Tezcatlipoca* represents introspection, self-love, identity, self-awareness, and curiosity; *Xipe Totec* represents transformation through counter-stories and critical consciousness; *Huitzilopochtli* represents our will toward positive action through civic engagement and asserting agency; and *Quetzalcoatl* represents knowledge and stability.

Finally, the center *circulo* represents the Community Agreements that establish the humanizing culture and climate while setting high expectations for conduct and intellectual engagement. The three concepts, all Mesoamerican Indigenous philosophies<sup>13</sup>, include *In Lak'Ech*, *Panche Be*, and *Xipe Totec*. *In Lak'Ech* asserts humility and mutual humanizing conduct, *Panche Be* advances the challenging task of the development of a critical consciousness that is historically contextualized, and *Xipe Totec* represents the perspective gained as a result of wrestling with cognitive dissonance.

The three intersecting *circulos* in TIAHUI inform the structure of a specific component in the decolonizing education ecology that seeks to humanize the endeavor of becoming stable human beings. All three are critical components and should be implemented for decolonizing education within Ethnic Studies programs and classes. The community agreements are foundational for creating humanizing spaces by informing how relationships are created through conduct that emphasizes self-love and respect for others. Additionally, they foster a collective positive and progressive movement forward. The *Nahui Ollin* informs the curriculum and content through decolonizing and relevant themes. Racialized youth engage with the content through the cycle of the *Nahui Ollin* toward the acquisition of self-love (*Tezcatlipoca*) for the development of a critical consciousness and transformation (*Xipe Totec*) expressed in our actions (*Huitzilopochtli*) that results in a mature human being with knowledge and stability (*Quetzalcoatl*). TIAHUI informs the critical educator in pedagogy and practice and explicitly outlines the liberatory practices. Next, TIAHUI advances the six tenets that embed the community agreements and the *Nahui Ollin*. Finally, TIAHUI outlines teacher and teaching indicators of an effective decolonizing Ethnic Studies/Chicanx Studies class and program.

### TIAHUI's Six Tenets for Decolonial Pedagogy and Practice

Using our decades of cumulative experience teaching, organizing, and leading in Ethnic Studies spaces, the XITO collective developed TIAHUI (Arce, 2016; de los Ríos, 2013; Dominguez, 2017;

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<sup>13</sup> Mesoamerican Indigenous philosophies are the knowledge systems, cosmologies, and cultural practices of "Mesoamerican" origin peoples that existed in pre-colonial times, and which now serve as decolonial knowledge systems, cosmological understandings, and cultural practices in contemporary times (Arce, 2016).

Fernández, 2019; Zavala, 2018). The six tenets for pedagogy and practice that drive the implementation of TIAHUI are a result of our work and analysis of what we see as most critical to include in a decolonial Ethnic Studies/Chicanx Studies setting in order to ensure that the pedagogy and practice is authentic, liberatory and rehumanizing. We developed six specific tenets, each with general descriptions on how these tenets can be applied to an Ethnic Studies/Chicanx Studies framework.

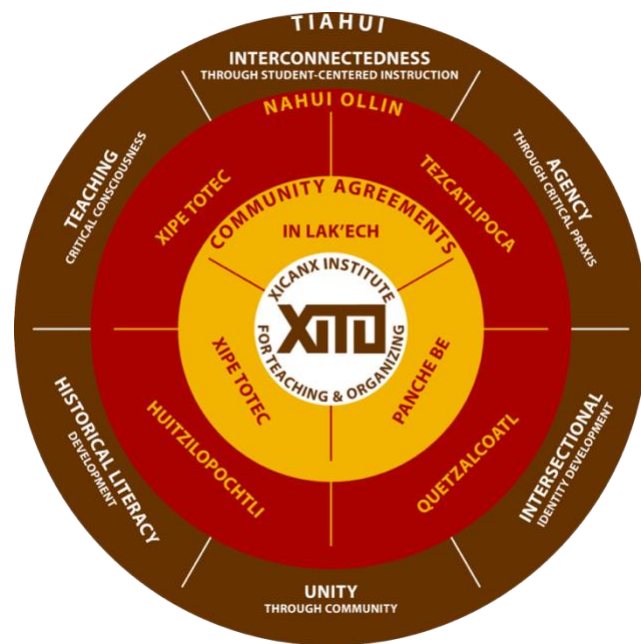
### **Teaching Critical Consciousness**

When applying the tenet of *Teaching Critical Consciousness* to an Ethnic Studies/Chicanx Studies framework:

- We understand that teaching is political and that traditional schooling reproduces inequity.
- We are critically conscious and encourage critical literacy development through praxis.
- We foster students' critical consciousness towards transformation and liberation.

We understand education and the transfer of knowledge is at its core, political as education preferences a language, a culture, a pedagogical approach, and a state-adopted curriculum deemed official (Apple, 2014; Darder, 2017; Freire, 2018; hooks, 1994). Education functions through erasing Indigenous peoples' cultural wealth and imposes the dominant culture placing racialized youth at a disadvantage. This erasure manufactures a socially constructed achievement gap resulting in disparate social material outcomes, reproducing and reifying America's social order (Bowles & Gintis, 2002; Darder, 2016; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Yosso, 2005).

We understand that youth of color in authentic Ethnic Studies/Chicanx Studies classes are educated to counter this destructive force by facilitating their conscientization and developing their critical literacy (Freire, 2018). As critically conscious youth of color, they become agents of change (praxis) who become aware of our institutions and their systems, which provides them the analytical tools for agency and to redress oppressive conditions and circumstances in their lives. As critically aware (Lopez, 2017) practitioners who work to facilitate this metacognition process with and for our students, we understand that youth of color's conscientization enables the student to read the world, thereby identifying oppressive conditions and circumstances initiating an empathic posture of action (praxis) allowing for redress of the oppressive condition and circumstances. Students who labor to be critically conscious can critically reflect and take informed action in and outside the classroom, thereby humanizing and creating creative, loving and healing spaces that transform education, their community, and society.



**Figure 1: TIAHUI Framework**

### ***Interconnectedness Through Student-Centered Instruction***

When applying the tenet *Interconnectedness Through Student-Centered Instruction* to an Ethnic Studies/Chicanx Studies framework:

- We integrate students' experiential knowledge through curriculum and instruction.
- We foster students' sense of belonging.
- We recognize the importance of student dialogue in the development of conscientization.

Interconnectedness through student-centered instruction fosters students' sense of belonging wherein youth of color can take intellectual risks in a humanizing space. In a student-centered authentic Ethnic Studies/Chicanx Studies classroom, students are provided the time to engage in knowledge co-construction to leverage the social aspect of learning and foster student voice. As a result, youth of color's ethnic identity is affirmed, and their culture is validated by integrating students' experiential knowledge when their culture is reflected in the curriculum (López, 2017). Centering students' lives in the curriculum is one way to foster a sense of belonging in what has historically been an exclusionary institution for youth of color. Once students see themselves as an integral part of the historical narrative, their engagement with the curriculum, and issues most impacting their lives, will develop.

### ***Agency Through Critical Praxis***

When applying the tenant of *Agency Through Critical Praxis* to an Ethnic Studies/Chicanx Studies framework:

- We guide students in the process of examining relevant social, political, environmental and economic issues.
- We provide the conditions for students to develop agency to make change to the conditions impacting communities.
- We embed the local community's vision of social justice into all aspects of the classroom and school site including the use of familial and community experts.

Freire (2018) reminds us that agency is predicated upon being informed (critical consciousness), and from this vantage point, one acts to humanize the space. Darder (2017) asks us as practitioners that our collective spaces be rooted in a notion of love. Accordingly, love can only be attained by developing one's consciousness. This cognition process of laboring to be critically conscious affords us the capacity to humanize human interaction and moves us to action in what is known as critical praxis. From this standpoint, students engage our learning spaces as subjects with their innate capacity to act, thus acting responsibly to help maintain a liberatory academic space.

### ***Historical Literacy Development***

When applying the tenet *Historical Literacy Development* to an Ethnic Studies/Chicanx Studies framework:

- We co-construct learning spaces with students to develop a critical historical literacy.

- We cultivate students' development of a historical consciousness and historical memory.
- We facilitate the analysis of historical counter narratives in opposition to the dominant or master narrative.

In accordance with the original tenets of Chicana Studies, and as prescribed with the discipline's founding document of *El Plan de Santa Bárbara* (Chicano Coordinating Council on Higher Education, 1969), the call for the development of a "historical consciousness" is foundational for the liberation of Chicana.

The role of knowledge in producing powerful social change, indeed revolution, cannot be underestimated... That is, it will help measurably in creating and giving impetus to that historical consciousness which Chicanos must possess in order to successfully struggle as a people toward a new vision of Aztlán. (p. 78)

Ethnic Studies/Chicana Studies educators can embed *Historical Literacy Development* through its TIAHUI decolonial framework by the privileging and analyzing of historical counter-narratives based in Chicana, as well as other racialized groups, and historical narratives. Because the historical narratives of Chicana/Latina, Black/African American, Native American/American Indian, and Asian American/Pacific Islander have been either completely erased or distorted in within public school texts and curriculum, the centering of the counter-narratives of these four traditionally racialized groups becomes necessary to correct these historical erasures and distortions as to ensure the historical memory, integrity, and well-being of these communities. Moreover, *Historical Literacy Development* affords Chicana/Latina youth, as well as other racialized youth, the opportunity to embrace themselves as historical subjects, as juxtaposed to being historical objects, wherein they can practice self-determination and create a more just future for themselves and their communities.

### ***Unity Through Community***

When applying the tenet *Unity Through Community* to an Ethnic Studies/Chicana Studies framework:

- We practice solidarity with other racialized and marginalized groups through intersectional analysis and organizing.
- We support students on the importance of engaging in solidarity through praxis.
- We develop learning spaces that are community-responsive and are built upon community cultural wealth.

Tara Yosso (2005) asserts that the "middle and upper-class hierarchical society" reproduces itself through the inculcation of a deficit belief in youth of color and their culture. Given that assertion, as authentic Ethnic Studies/Chicana Studies educators recognize community and youth of color cultural capital is essential in creating a sense of unity. Unity is fostered when solidarity among other racialized and marginalized group struggles and historical resistance are examined. The collective struggle is a primary source of examination, in an authentic Ethnic Studies/Chicana Studies classroom, toward action through praxis. Authentic Ethnic Studies centers the lived experiences of the community, on the terms agreed upon by those most impacted by the issues being addressed and is reflected within the content of the curriculum.

### ***Intersectional Identity Development***

When applying the tenet *Intersectional Identity Development* to an Ethnic Studies framework:

- We co-construct learning spaces and facilitate processes wherein students will develop positive images of themselves.
- We facilitate the development of positive and fluid identities through processes of decolonization through an intersectional lens.
- We provide opportunities for students to consider all systems of oppression - including but not limited to race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, and national origin - in order to transform and improve the conditions for themselves and their communities.

Intersectional identity development is essential for both students and educators to engage in Ethnic Studies classrooms. The process of *Tezcatlipoca* and applying critical consciousness are necessary for this development, which then leads to a deeper analysis and understanding of how the multiple aspects of our identities interact with systems of society. As Kimberlé Crenshaw (2017) reminds us, intersectionality provides a lens through which to analyze how our identities intersect with social forces and systemic structures (i.e., legal system, schooling system, medical system) and how those intersections then produce specific forms of discrimination.

### **TIAHUI's Community Agreements**

Given the nature of schooling and the United States educational history of ethnocide (Spring, 2016; Valencia, 2011), we began to reimagine our classrooms as spaces of possibilities, spaces of hope, and spaces for what Chela Sandoval (2000) has termed “decolonial love.” Our understanding is that schools are subtractive and, through policy and practice, violently strip our youth of their resources, specifically their home language and *cultura*, placing them academically behind their counterparts. As decolonial educators who developed a critical awareness of the schooling system, we labor to have our students reject their imposed inferior identities and work to create educational spaces that embrace academic risk-taking, divergent thinking, and a humanizing discourse that builds *confianza* (Lopez, 2017).

Authentic Ethnic Studies/Chicanx Studies as a discipline is contextual and situated within communities, highlighting the often-omitted history of resistance, resilience, and struggle for human dignity. Consequently, our classes in Tucson focused on introducing Mesoamerican Indigenous notions of being, which revolutionized the field of public education with Indigenous concepts and a worldview, a legacy that reflects our students and the community we served, worked and struggled with, and for (Acosta, 2014; Arce & Fernández, 2014; Arce & Montañó, 2022; Fernández, 2019; J. Gonzalez, 2017; M. Gonzalez, 2017; Serna, 2013; Toscano Villanueva, 2013). Below are the three Indigenous community agreements which create a classroom ecology that re-centers teaching and learning as places for humanization and collective struggle for student liberation and empowerment.

### ***In Lak'Ech***

*In Lak'Ech* is a Maya expression and paradigm that repositions humanity in human interaction by reminding us of our collective existence and an interdependence of all living things. This concept is paramount to human interaction, thus, an integral component for an Ethnic Studies classroom's culture and climate. In Spanish, this concept translates to "*tu eres mi otro yo*," while in English, "you are my other me." *In Lak'Ech* disrupts and ruptures colonial educational spaces where student voices are in competition with each other or the teacher's voice, and instead see the full humanity in one another. This humanizing discourse through the *In Lak'Ech* principle reinforces and teaches empathy, compassion, and the skill of listening to understand. The humanizing discourse builds *confianza* and does not destroy the *confianza* (hope), *confianza* (trust), and *confianza* (confidence) of their "other me." Fernández (2019) reminds us as critical practitioners:

By agreeing to practice *In Lak'Ech*..., participants can engage in a process that can be transferred into their own classrooms to create a re-humanizing space that allows for everyone to participate from their own starting point as well as allow themselves to treat others with compassion and love, regardless of how new or experienced they are with Ethnic Studies pedagogy. (p. 7)

### ***Panche Be***

*Panche Be* originates from the Maya peoples and is understood in Spanish as "*buscando la Raiz de la Verdad*" in English it translates to "seeking the root of the truth." This Maya concept symbolizes people being knowledge seekers, requiring inquiry and research. *Panche Be* requires an analysis that goes beyond the superficial and demands an interrogation of the conditions and circumstances governing the phenomenon one is attempting to understand. This community understanding in an authentic Ethnic Studies/Chicanx Studies classroom sets a tone of high expectations and critical examination. It establishes a work ethic of study that is an arduous and disciplined task of learning, requiring an investment in time and energy. The Indigenous concept of *Panche Be* works to humanize the human experience and helps students to begin to build a Freirean critical consciousness. Both concepts, *Panche Be* and being critically conscious, work in tandem, facilitating the humanization of people moving them to question the "why" and seek the root cause of the pathology or social condition, thereby allowing for redress in changing oppressive conditions and or circumstances. This analysis, alongside *In Lak'Ech*, facilitates a classroom ecology of empathy and personal as well as intrapersonal growth; a collective understanding.

### ***Xipe Totec***

Finally, *Xipe Totec*, a Nahuatl or Mexica concept, comprises the community understanding of transformation. *Xipe Totec*, Mictlani Gonzalez (2018) explains as:

Transformation. This is a place of cohesion and order to our thoughts whereby clarity is reached as a result of reflection (*Tezcatlipoca*). Through our reflection we can begin to make sense of the chaos associated with an issue and find order. Finally, by giving order to our thoughts, new perspective is gained that must positively impact our actions.  
(p.128)



As subjects with the capacity for agency, we encourage students to continue to evolve and transform as people, intellectuals, and classmates. This Nahuatl *energia* reminds us that change, or transformation, is a constant in life. According to the philosophical principles of *Xipe Totec*, change must result from a time of repose wherein we look deep into our hearts to find the solutions that will allow us to evolve, to grow, and not regress. These understandings are our shared community agreements, a commitment to a collective struggle to uncover meaning, and a code of conduct that governs this intellectual endeavor.

### ***The Nahui Ollin***

The distinguishing element of the former Mexican American/Raza Studies Department (MARSD) in Tucson, from other K-12 public education programs, and now a distinguishing element of XITO's professional development, was its decolonizing and liberatory pedagogical foundations which were based in Chicax Indigenous epistemologies. Specifically, the privileging and operationalization of the *Nahui Ollin* - the central space representing "four movements" within the Aztec calendar with its physical, spatial, scientific, and philosophical meanings - served as the main curricular and pedagogical framework within the former MARSD. Within the *Nahui Ollin* are the four principles of Tezcatlipoca, *Xipe Totec*, *Huitzilopochtli*, and *Quetzalcoatl*.

In this section, an analysis of these principles demonstrates how this framework within the *Nahui Ollin* informed the innovative, decolonizing, and liberatory MARSD, contributing to the development of strong cultural identities and the closing of the persistent and pervasive academic achievement gap for Chicax youth, which in effect created a Chicax Indigenous epistemological praxis. For these reasons, the *Nahui Ollin* continues to be operationalized within XITO's decolonial and liberatory professional development training and workshops with teachers who are implementing Ethnic Studies/Chicax Studies in their respective school districts.

### ***Tezcatlipoca***

The etymology of *Tezcatlipoca* is from Nahuatl, starting with the word "*tezcatl*" which means "obsidian" and/or "mirror" and then "*popoca*" which means "smoking," which together translates to "the smoking mirror" (Arce, 2016). Tupac Enrique Acosta, Xicano nation elder, community/Indigenous/human rights activist describes Tezcatlipoca as:

A reflection, a moment of reconciliation of the past with possibilities of the future - not a vision of light but an awareness of the shadow that is the smoke of light's passing. It is the "Smoking Mirror" into which the individual, the family, the clan, the barrio, the tribe and the nation must gaze into to acquire the sense of history that calls for liberation. (Acosta, 2006, p.3)

The process of gazing into the "smoking mirror" - Tezcatlipoca - is a process to regain the historical memory at the individual and community levels, leading to individual and community liberation. This critical reflection of self not only affords Chicax youth to reconcile and embrace their personal, familial, and community histories, but it serves as the very foundation upon which Chicax can be creators of their own futures. Within XITO professional development workshops with teachers, as well as within our own Ethnic Studies/Chicax Studies classrooms, we facilitate

with teachers how to engage their students in *Tezcatlipoca* through intersectional critical self-reflections to include, but not limited to, race, class, and gender.

### ***Xipe Totec***

The origins of *Xipe Totec* are from Nahuatl, “*xipehua*” meaning “to shed” and then “*totecuhtli*” meaning “our guide/our dignitary” which taken together means “our guide to transformation” (Arce, 2016). Once students have come to embrace their own personal histories and their own intersectional identities, as well as that of their communities, they will begin to undergo processes of transformation. The ultimate objective of engaging in the *Nahui Ollin* as an Indigenous epistemological framework is transformation. This movement of transformation, as represented through *Xipe Totec*, is consistent with the natural life cycles, further demonstrating that the *Nahui Ollin* as a decolonizing and liberatory tool is not a static model, rather, it is one that is fluid, adaptable, and transformative. “Xipe Totec - transformation. Identified as our source of strength that allows us to transform and renew. We can achieve this transformation only when we have learned to have trust in ourselves” (Acosta, 2007, p. 38).

### ***Huitzilopochtli***

The etymology of *Huitzilopochtli* is from Nahuatl, “*huitzilin*” meaning “hummingbird” and “*opochtli*” meaning “left.” *Huitzilopochtli* - the will to act - literally translates from Nahuatl as “hummingbird to the left.” This is in reference to the heart being on the left side of the body and the hummingbird’s tenacity of work rate to fly and the strength of its will. It is also symbolic of the sun rising in the wintertime. This concept has meaning for the will of a person or people to be positive, progressive, and creative. *Huitzilopochtli*, as praxis, presents students with the will and courage to enact their positive, progressive, and creative capacities to create change for themselves as well as for their *familias* and community. In this sense, the social realities that students find themselves situated in can be directly acted upon to improve their overall conditions. The engagement of *Huitzilopochtli*, the will to act, demonstrates the agency held by Chicanx youth to critically reflect upon their past and present (*Tezcatlipoca*), consequently becoming transformed (*Xipe Totec*), and to take action as historical subjects in constructing their futures (*Huitzilopochtli*). This process constitutes a decolonizing and humanizing methodology where the practice of self-determination, a foundational tenet of Ethnic Studies/Chicanx Studies, by Chicanx youth signifies their engagement in *Huitzilopochtli* as Indigenous epistemological praxis.

*La voluntad*. Will. The warrior spirit born with the first breath taken by each newborn infant in the realization that this human life we are blessed with is a struggle requiring physical effort for survival. The exertion of this life-sustaining effort evolves into a discipline, a means of maximizing the energy resources available at the human command which in order to have their full effect must be synchronized with the natural cycles. (Acosta, 2006, p. 7)

Tupac Enrique Acosta’s perspective of *Huitzilopochtli* provides critical insight to understanding that self, familial, and community self-reflections (*Tezcatlipoca*), as well as the subsequent personal, familial, and communal transformations (*Xipe Totec*), are necessary in facilitating processes of decolonization and liberation with and for Chicanx youth; nonetheless, these processes of self-

reflection (*Tezcatlipoca*) and transformation (*Xipe Totec*) are inadequate unless they were acted upon through direct individual, familial, and community action.

### **Quetzalcoatl**

The root words of *Quetzalcoatl*, “quetzal” translated from Nahuatl meaning “beautiful and precious” like the iridescent feathers of a quetzal bird, and “coatl” translated from Nahuatl meaning *serpiente*/serpent, are representative of *conocimiento*/knowledge taken together is a concept meaning “precious and beautiful knowledge.”

From the memory of our identity, the knowledge of our collective history we draw the perspective that brings us to contemporary reality. From this orientation we achieve stability, a direction found in time tested precepts that allows our awareness and knowledge of the surrounding environment to develop. This awareness and knowledge merge to form the “conciencia” of a mature human being. (Acosta, 2006, p. 8)

*Quetzalcoatl* provides the merging of our critical self-reflections and the regaining of our collective memory with the obtaining of an awareness of knowledge (both a historical and contemporary understanding of our lived realities, which are consistently subsumed in public schools) to facilitate the development of *conciencia* within our students. Analogous to the Freirean principle of “conscientization,” students engaging in the Indigenous epistemology of *Quetzalcoatl* are critically analyzing the social realities that are steeped in their collective historical memory, identifying barriers that impede their progress in becoming fully human, and from this state of critical consciousness, they have the ability to envision, or in the words of Chicana scholar Emma Pérez, to imagine liberatory possibilities of the future through a “decolonial imaginary” (1999) to take action to transform their reality.



XITO colleague Curtis Acosta (2007), describes *Quetzalcoatl* as “precious and beautiful knowledge. Learning about our history follows self-reflection. Gaining perspective on events and experiences that our ancestors endured allows us to become more fully realized human beings” (p. 37). Within our XITO work with teachers implementing Ethnic Studies/Chicanx Studies, we guide them to accurately teach the histories of the racialized students that they serve, the histories of their ancestors, all that they endured, and the resiliency and strength to not only survive, but in fact thrive within the colonial conditions which Chicanx youth have been subject to. Chicanx youth, as well as other youth of color, engaging in *Quetzalcoatl* affords them the opportunity to see themselves as individuals within the larger Chicanx community, and as active subjects and creators

of history. *Quetzalcoatl* enables students to counter the master U.S. historical narrative that is taught throughout K-12 public schools which perpetuates Mexicans/Chicanx (and other youth of color) in the United States as mere objects of history without agency.

### **Moving Forward with Clarity**

As a framework that emerged from a long political and legal struggle for the inclusion of Mexican American/Raza Studies to remain in Arizona schools, we offer a methodology that is both research-based and ancestrally informed by Indigenous epistemologies. Built from ancestral archives, TIAHUI manifests ancestral knowledge as a generative archive of knowledge which is co-constructed in the classroom and community. This Indigenous, ancestral knowledge, as archives of our communities, places and lives, remains a living archive of resistance, love, and cultural intuition. It is more critical than ever to ensure that Ethnic Studies/Chicanx Studies is being taught in a decolonial and liberatory manner and our TIAHUI framework offers one way to do so. In order for our youth to develop self-love, build their critical consciousness, and gain the skills to counter the hegemonic systems they endure, we must draw on the past to inform the present while understanding the current political climate. TIAHUI is a framework for pedagogy and practice but without educators' deep, critical self-identity work, the application of this framework will remain surface level rather than authentically decolonial.

TIAHUI is an intersectional tool for liberation that can be applied to any Ethnic Studies/Chicanx Studies course or program regardless of the demographics of the students, by applying the six tenets of pedagogy and practice, applying the community agreements to the educational space and integrating the four elements of the *Nahui Ollin* to provide ancestral knowledge to an Ethnic Studies/Chicanx Studies class. While the Mesoamerican Indigenous philosophies embedded in TIAHUI will connect most directly with Chicanx/Latinx youth, the elements are applicable to all youth as humanizing practices.

As we approach a decade of engaging in professional development that centers our framework, we are reflecting on the next decade ahead and how decolonial and anti-imperial Ethnic Studies/Chicanx Studies will be critical for students to have access to if they are going to address the social, economic, environmental, and political climates they have been handed. We are re-imagining a future where decolonial, anti-imperial theory and practice are the expectation rather than the exception to our youth's education. TIAHUI is an offering for that movement forward in a decolonial and humanizing way, as an offering of ancestral knowledge and a living archive of resistance.

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