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## *A Nepantla Pedagogy Comparing Anzaldúa's and Bakhtin's Ideas for Pedagogical and Social Change*

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### **Abstract**

*This paper presents a nepantlan pedagogy that would simultaneously deconstruct and construct our societal discourses while complicating teachers' and students' understandings of the world. This idea emerged from my experience as an elementary educator, working in linguistically, culturally, and economically diverse schools, along with my endeavor to earn a doctorate degree in education. It is heavily informed by the work of Gloria Anzaldúa's theory of nepantla and Mikhail Bakhtin's ideological becoming. I illustrate their respective ideas with biographies of the theorists and review of their work to show how their ideas are similar albeit from radically different contexts. I further illustrate their ideas through my personal classroom pedagogies that called for mastery, absolute knowing, and perfection, and how I attempted a nepantla pedagogy that stood contradictory to this.*



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## **Nepantlan Pedagogy**

Nepantla is the site of transformation. The place where different perspectives come into conflict and where you question the basic ideas, tenets, and identities inherited from your family, your education, and your different cultures. Nepantla is the zone between changes where you struggle to find equilibrium between the outer expression of change and your inner relationship to it. Living between cultures results in “seeing” double, first from the perspective of one culture, then from the perspective of another. Seeing from two or more perspectives simultaneously renders those cultures transparent. (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 548-549)

Here, I argue for a nepantla pedagogy, a pedagogy that simultaneously deconstructs and constructs our discourses as well as complicates our understandings of the world. I hope that in the end it is a pedagogy that helps educators and students “see double.” Seeing double allows us to see the world through various perspectives searching for those ways of living that create and allow equality and freedom. Seeing double allows us to see what was previously unseen because it was hidden by our cultural standpoint. As an elementary school educator with a classroom full of diverse students along with my simultaneous reading of Gloria Anzaldúa’s work sparked my journey into a nepantla pedagogy that would challenge the expected and normalizing pedagogy in my classroom. Anzaldúa’s nepantla is a critique of our society, a society that situates knowledge as absolute, perfect, completely mapped, and unquestionable. This theoretical concept helped me to rethink classroom pedagogies, which called for mastery, absolute knowing, and perfection. This was evidenced through strong discourses of standards-based learning, which promoted singular perspectives and narrowed ideologies, high-stakes testing that judged, passed, and failed children, and a societal discourse that valued these as the ways that school should be.

Nepantla pedagogies are emerging in teacher education. Gutierrez (2008) used nepantla to explain the process that new science teachers experienced examining issues of equity and inequity in a science curriculum in an alternative urban high school. She found that although the school had a rigorous, inquiry-based science curriculum, it lacked science problems and experiments that resembled real problems in the students’ lives. This unexpected contradiction was a nepantla space that science educators could explore how to teach science that allowed students to explore their lived experiences. Additionally, Jaramillo and McLaren (2008) posited that a “nepantla pedagogy occasions its learners into knowing the way of historical contingency, a way of thinking about self and other and the relations between them through an analysis of the systems of mediation that sustain and reproduce them” (p. 198). Prieto and Villenas (2012) used nepantla to frame their testimonios of their Chicana experience in the US and in the US educational system. Their research showed how their pedagogical practices revealed cultural dissonance, consciousness with commitment, and authentic care; these ideas show how nepantla promotes a pedagogy that can start social change. This pedagogy will bring social tensions forward and position the students as the both mediator and the questioner of these tensions. For instance, students would actively contest the discourses that they are expected to consume, know, and reproduce in the classroom, while also transmitting these discourses in new and interesting ways through their work. I hope that educators and teacher educators will further read, understand, and apply Anzaldúa’s concept of nepantla and to seek out how we can use it to shape school pedagogies and frame our educational research (Gonzalez-Lopez, 2006; Keating, 2006).

Anzaldúa (1987) developed the concept of nepantla using a scholarly and literacy structure called, *autohistoria/teoría*, which is a way to write and create social theory using autobiography embedded in historical events. Likewise, incorporating *autohistoria/teoría* is vital to the development of nepantlan pedagogy. Educators must situate themselves / ourselves in nepantla to help situate others in the same state. We must experience the following.

We stand at a major threshold in the extension of consciousness, caught in the remolinos (vortices) of systemic change across all fields of knowledge. The binaries of colored/white, female/male, mind/body are collapsing. Living in nepantla, the overlapping space between different perceptions and belief systems, you are aware of the changeability of racial, gender, sexual, and other categories rendering the conventional labelings obsolete. Though these markings are outworn and inaccurate, those in power continue using them to single out and negate those who are "different" because of color, language, notions of reality, or other diversity. You know that the new paradigm must come from outside as well as within the system. (p. 541)

To demonstrate how “*autohistoria-teoría*” forces the autohistorian into nepantla, I share a personal classroom narrative that combines self-reflection, autobiography, and critical stance (Anzaldúa, 1987; Keating, 2005).

As part of my coursework at the university, I implemented an action research project in my classroom. My students were extremely diverse, including Mexican Americans, Guatemalan Americans, and recently immigrated Mexicans, African-Americans, and poor, White students. I was taking a course on bilingual education, and realized that my classroom practices were completely monolingual--that I was ignoring the linguistic knowledge that bilingual Spanish speakers had to offer. So, I began a yearlong project to bring Spanish into my English-Only classroom, despite the fact that I did not speak Spanish. I carried this project out successfully with students writing stories bilingually, and reading poems aloud in Spanish; however, my nepantla moment came on the last day of the school year. One student, Juan, asked to use my cellphone to call his Dad. I gave him my phone, and he began to speak to his father in a language that I did not recognize. After he hung up the phone, I asked him, “Juan, what language were you speaking? He answered, “Oh that was the language of my father.” After a few more questions, I realized that Juan was from indigenous Guatemalan family, with his mother speaking an indigenous language, his father another one, they all spoke Spanish, and the children spoke English along with those. How could I have been so ignorant not to ask if my students spoke languages other English and Spanish? Furthermore, I realized I also failed to include African American English in my project. My way of knowing and viewing the world, a place where indigenous languages didn’t exist and African American English wasn’t included in the classroom, had certainly violated these students' ways of knowing and being in the world. Nepantla came when I had realized that I had done this. It was not a pleasant moment, but it was a necessary one.

As I entered this nepantla, I began to change my mind, or I began to become different, ideologically. As Bakhtin (1975/1981) claimed, “the ideological becoming of a human being...is the process of selectively assimilating the words of others” (p. 341). Juan’s language and words,

essentially the idea that he spoke four languages, disrupted my view of my classroom and my world. I began to assimilate my knowledge about multilingualism and multiliteracies with Juan's new knowledge. Then, my thoughts shifted and morphed, meaning that as I became aware of these countering ideas, I began to shift my values. Bakhtin claimed that ideological becoming is a hegemonic process. Meaning that, in this case, in the process of assimilating these ideas, I must choose what to value more, what is true and acceptable to me? In the end, I saw more languages as equally valuable and present in my classroom, as well as the histories and writings by people who used those languages became equally important.

Next, I further unpack Anzaldúa's work on *nepantla*, and to do this I reference Bakhtin's work on ideological becoming. Because of Anzaldúa and Bakhtin's very different background, the similarities among their work intrigued me. As I read their ideas, familiarity resonated within me; it was this familiarity that allowed me to understand their intentions and apply their ideas to my world. So in that spirit, this essay is a *nepantlan* act, a collision of ideas, and an act of ideological becoming, a hegemonic process to change our minds. It reveals similarity, familiarity in these scholars' ideas as way to "see through" their ideas, unraveling them for us. As Anzaldúa (2002) wrote, in *nepantla* a person is

exposed, open to other perspectives, more readily able to access knowledge derived from inner feelings, imaginal states, and outer events, and to "see through" them with a mindful, holistic awareness. Seeing through human acts both individual and collective allows you to examine the ways you construct knowledge, identity, and reality, and explore how some of your/others' constructions violate other people's ways of knowing. (p. 544)

By colliding Anzaldúa and Bakhtin's ideologies they can inhabit the same space, allowing their respective ideas to challenge and expand each other's. Ideological collision in *nepantla* can bring about "a change in the way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves, and the ways we behave" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 102) and gives us "a new story to explain the world and our participation in it" (p. 103). Bakhtin (1975/1981) said that ideological collision would produce "new ways to mean" (p. 346). Notably, each of these theorists focused on the use of legitimate and illegitimate languages to bring forth the new thoughts that are excluded in dominant discourses. Because language was a central aspect of both of these theoretical constructions, their work pushes borders and boundaries of acceptable linguistic genres by displaying that new thoughts and changes are possible through the use of varied languages. To help form a new story and a new pedagogy, I begin with a brief biography of Gloria Anzaldúa and a brief etymology of *nepantla*. Likewise, I follow this with a brief biography of Mikhail Bakhtin and definitional work of ideological becoming.

### **Nepantla**

Gloria Anzaldúa, a social activist, philosopher, writer, and poet, was born in South Texas, the oldest child of migrant farm workers who were of Mexican heritage, though she was seventh generation American (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2009). From 1964 to 1968, she financially supported herself while attending Pan American University, and she eventually graduated with a B.A. in English, art, and secondary education. In 1972, she earned an M.A. in English at the University of Texas (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2009). From 1974 to 1977, she studied in the doctoral program at the University of Texas (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2009); it was there that her new ideologies were

countered by the established ideologies of academia. This countering came when Anzaldúa's dissertation proposal that focused on Chicana literature and feminist studies was rejected by her doctoral committee. Her doctoral advisors deemed this topic an *illegitimate discipline*, not allowing her to pursue it. These actions led to her to quit the program and move to California to concentrate on her writing. In 1987, she published her most well-known work, *Borderlands/Las Fronteras: The New Mestiza*, and in this collection of essays and poetry, she created a new genre of writing that she calls autohistoria and autoteoría (autohistory or autotheory), a writing genre that blends personal histories with social theories through the use of multiple languages (English, Spanish, and Nahuatl) and multiple writing forms (essays, short story, and poetry). Anzaldúa (1987) described her authorial intent as a "struggle ... to change the disciplines, to change the genres, to change how people look at a poem, at theory or at children's books" (p. 233). Through this new genre, Anzaldúa demonstrated that the struggle among genres was actually a hegemonic struggle of accepted ideologies which manifested accepted value in genre. In turn, she changed these valuable, acceptable genres and even changed the disciplines by interrogating "existing discursive fields" (Perez, 2005, p. 6). She wanted to change the way the legitimized see the illegitimate; moreover, she wanted to change how sometimes the illegitimate even see themselves. She argued that returning to a previous epistemological concept held by the Nahuatl would allow people to do this; she called this nepantla.

### *Origin of Nepantla*

The etymological history of nepantla traces back to the Nahuatl; the Nahuatl live in the area now known as the US Southwest and predominantly northern Mexico (Anzaldúa, 1987; Maffie, 2007). There is debate concerning what the Nahuatl (also referred to as the Aztecs since the European invasion) meant by nepantla and when the term was used in Nahuatl as ideological stance concerning human existence (Maffie, 2007). Recent scholars (Mignolo, 2000) have argued that the Nahuatl conceived and articulated nepantla as a way to make sense of their ideological and physical collision with Spanish conquistadors, invaders, and missionaries. In other words, using this definition, the Nahuatl forged nepantla *after* the Spanish invaded, at a time when the Spanish ideology and actions countered Nahuatl ideology and actions. However, Maffie (2007) disputed this position by arguing that the Nahuatl *always* saw and some Nahuatl continue to see human existence through this concept, nepantla. Again, Maffie's argument stated that nepantla was the normal worldview for the Nahuatl before the Spanish ever invaded the Nahuatl's land. In his latter argument, nepantla is a permanent state of liminality that the Nahuatl used to view their world, rather than a temporal state of not knowing where one ideologically belongs as a result of the Spanish invasion. Maffie (2007) said that interpreting nepantla as a post-conquest ideology is a misinterpretation of Nahuatl thought, and furthermore, "*nepantla* was not unique to post-conquest Nahuatl life"; it "defined all of existence and reality" for the Nahuatl before and after the Spanish invasion (p. 22).

I agree with Maffie (2007) that *nepantla* is and was embedded in the Nahuatl belief system that places "people and things within a borderland" or within "a dynamic zone of mutual transaction, confluence, unstable and diffuse identity, and transformation" (p. 16). This means that the Nahuatl held a worldview that sees disorder as the normal of the world, "becoming and transitions are the norm-not being and stasis," and "androgyny is the norm-not male or female" (Maffie, 2007, p. 20). These seemingly chaotic descriptors of nepantla as an explanation of human existence and reality counter Western European philosophies that cling to stable human

constructions of the word; a world of permanent, absolute truths, and defined dichotomies, such as male and female (Anzaldúa, 1987; Bakhtin, 1975/1981; Maffie, 2007).

### *Contradictory Definitions of Nepantla*

Perez (2005) described Anzaldúa's constructions of Nepantla as an articulation of "our past to make sense of our present," and that Anzaldúa was not "merely seeking origins," but "she looked to that past to excavate hope for our future" (p. 9). To further understand how Anzaldúa's theorizing of nepantla would create hope for humanity's future, I traced her early uses of nepantla to her later uses of it in her writing. When I began with Anzaldúa's work as another origin of nepantla, at first I saw contradictions between the way scholars (as previously described in Maffie, 2007) defined nepantla and the way Anzaldúa did. However, contradictions existed only in the short definitional work surrounding the word nepantla in Anzaldúa's work.

For instance, beginning with Anzaldúa's first published use of nepantla in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), where she said that the mestiza, who is Anzaldúa herself, is "in a constant state of mental nepantilism, an Aztec word meaning *torn between ways* [emphasis added], la mestiza is a product of the transfer of the cultural and spiritual values of one group to another" (p.100). Then moving to 2009, Anzaldúa wrote that "art and la frontera intersect in a *liminal space* [emphasis added] where border people, especially artists, live in a state of 'nepantla'" (p. 180). She continues to define nepantla as "the Nahuatl word for an *in-between state* [emphasis added], that uncertain terrain one crosses when moving from one place to another, when changing from one class, race, or sexual position to another, when traveling from the present identity into a new identity" (p. 180). It is the crossing over and implied permanence of the new identity that at first appeared contradictory to the claims that Maffie (2007) made about nepantla not being a transitional space between permanence to permanence. Anzaldúa's use of "torn between ways", "liminal space", and "in-between state" imply that nepantla is marked by temporality. These definitional phrases suggest that a person only inhabits a nepantla for a certain time, then it is finished and one transitions to another permanent belief system. This appeared to contradict Maffie's statement (2007) that nepantla was a permanent state of being for the Nahua, not a temporary way of thinking. So, these unexpected apparent contradictions warranted investigation.

As previously stated, *liminal space* and *in-between* are problematic descriptors of nepantla because being in a liminal space implies that one moves from a permanence of knowing through a space of not knowing into another permanent state of belief (Maffie, 2007). In other words, liminal as a descriptor of nepantla implies that it is a temporal way of thinking about the world, and when one is finished with the consideration of an idea then one transitions permanently into new ideology (Maffie, 2007). However, if the concept of nepantla is based on the Nahua construct of it, then a nepantla epistemology contradicts these definitions that describe it as a temporary liminal experience and act, but instead, it is a state of permanent liminality. This means that being in nepantla does not mean that you transition from one permanent state to another; rather you are always in a state of ideological transition.

**Anzaldúa's nepantla expansion.** Anzaldúa's early definitional work of nepantla may appear contradictory to the nepantla stances of the Nahua. However, when I looked deeper and broader at her contextualization of nepantla, the seemingly contradictory definitions disappeared. I present an argument that her use of liminal and referring to people who only "for a time inhabit nepantla" (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2009, p. 180) is different than that other definitions that have

described nepantla as being marked only by liminality or temporality (Mignolo, 2000). Wiederhold (2005) described Anzaldúa as seeking to explore tensions and “contested arenas” (p. 116), and Anzaldúa “invoke[d] the word ‘nepantla’ to name a paradigm that steps beside western epistemology’s binary logic” (p. 116). Nepantla is situated on the tensions between epistemologies because it is where the change in epistemology manifests itself through social interactions thereby producing the world as it is. For Anzaldúa, an epistemology of the Chicana countered the epistemology of the White man, and Anzaldúa positioned herself in this nepantla, ever transitioning, epistemology. To clarify, Anzaldúa’s was not trying to position herself between nepantla and a Western epistemology; instead, nepantla situated her in a position where male/female dichotomies dissolved, and she could transition between subject positions. Nepantla subverted static, one dimensional subject positionings. Generally, western epistemologies have pushed for assurance and stability and have sought to remove ideological tension (Maffie, 2007; Anzaldúa, 2002). These epistemologies seek absolute consensus and homogeneity, and present a philosophy of that promotes consensus, homogeneity, and normativity as paths to peace and harmony. This contrasts to a nepantla paradigm, which says that thoughts are expected to shift, heterogeneity is normal, and dissent always happens and should happen.

Superficial readings of Anzaldúa’s definitions and theorizing of nepantla appear to contradict the Nahuatl constructions of nepantla. These contradictions appear in her terms for nepantla because she was writing about nepantla while she was within a different epistemological tension. For instance, nepantla beliefs permeated the Nahuatl social systems; however, nepantla beliefs do not, nor did they permeate the beliefs and social systems in which Anzaldúa grew up. She was positioned between an epistemology that produced a discourse that lesbians were abnormal people, and she, a lesbian, was not of value within a society that privileged heteronormative discourses. However, she returned to nepantla to produce a lesbian discourse to counter patriarchy, sexism, and the dangerous positioning of women in our constructed societies (Anzaldúa, 1987; 2002).

**Living in liminal spaces.** As Anzaldúa situated herself in nepantla most of the time, this meant that her ideas and discourses were flexible, subject to change. This way of life and thinking reflected the Nahuatl’s philosophy of border living. In the Florentine codex (Bernardino de Sahagun, 1590/1969), an ethnography documenting the Nahuatl’s way of life, a conversation between a mother and daughter described the Nahuatl living on a walk between the borders, a border walk.

On earth we walk, we live, on the ridge of a mountain peak <sharp as a harpoon blade? chichiquilli>. To one side is an abyss, to the other is another abyss. If you go here, or if you go there, you will fall, only through the middle can one go, or live. (p. 101; translation by Gingerich, 1988, p. 522)

This border walk or “straddling the walls between abysses” counters Western thoughts of walks of life as linear progression from beginning to end (Anzaldúa & Keating, 1981/2009, p. 38). Instead, the Nahuatl looked at the *process* of life, a process of constant betweenness, one of negotiations of truth, not a life of unquestionable truths. Given that our current society operates through extreme dominant discourse such as (i.e. Chicana theories are unacceptable, lesbians are abnormal, and Chicanos/Chicanas are dangerous social concepts) which want to homogenize and establish permanent truths. Anzaldúa argued that nepantla living, being liminal, situated on the border of thoughts, and allowed her to contest these truths and attempt to shift the thought.



In the Nahua epoch, *nepantla* is a space of constant change, where the change is accepted on both sides of the border that people walk along during their lives. Therefore, for *nepantla* to work in the epoch of thought that Anzaldúa lived in, then it had to be marked by temporality. In other words, for Anzaldúa, *nepantla* was a liminal position among a stasis that was produced by an epistemology that promotes absolutes binaries of male/female, white/black, and abnormal/normal.

During an interview in 1996, Anzaldúa referred to *nepantla* as her way of “theoriz[ing] unarticulated dimensions of the experience of mestizas living between overlapping and layered *spaces* (emphasis added) of different cultures, and social and geographical locations of events and realities – psychological, social, political, spiritual, historical, creative, imagined” (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2000, p. 268). Because she speaks of *nepantla* as being a space we live in most of the time, she implies that there is a permanence to the liminal, which disrupts the linear progression of *nepantla* that may emerge in other brief definitions of her use of *nepantla*. When the word “space” is used to define *nepantla*, it conjures up images of the subject positioned in flexible manner, instead of in a place of temporary transition. *Nepantla* puts a person in the “the overlapping space between different perceptions and belief systems, you are aware of the changeability of racial, gender, sexual, and other categories rendering the conventional labelings obsolete” (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 541). It is in the *nepantla* space that the contestation of discourse can happen.

*Nepantla* encapsulated/s ideas of expected contradiction, that to twist and change is normal. However, in Anzaldúa’s construction of *nepantla*, one side of *nepantla* attempted to normalize and establish one way to be. So, for her and for others, who wanted to live in *nepantla* within an ideological system that contradicts the premises of *nepantla*, a state of temporality is created for these people who she calls “*nepantleras*”.

**Nepantleras.** Anzaldúa (2002) described people who situate themselves in states of *nepantla* as *nepantleras*. She said that “*las nepantleras* know their work lies in positioning themselves--exposed and raw--in the crack between these worlds, and in revealing current categories as unworkable...they reframe the conflict and shift the point of view” (p. 567). Her naming of people as a *nepantlera* seems contradictory to the *nepantla* epistemology of the Nahua because in a Nahua belief system there would be no need to differentiate between those who took a *nepantla* viewpoint of the world from those who didn’t because arguably *nepantla* was the dominant belief system that permeated their society. However, Anzaldúa needed to distinguish the difference between those who are following a *nepantla* view or some other world view. This distinct naming of a person who acts in *nepantla* is only necessary while the *nepantlera* resides within a conflicting epistemology. *Nepantleras* are “in [the] between place of *nepantla*, [they] see through the fiction of the monoculture” (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 549). A *nepantlera* struggles to undo ideological fictions carried through discourses that normalize, stabilize, and often oppress.

Anzaldúa (2002) argued that “*nepantla* is the zone between changes where you struggle to find equilibrium between the outer expression of change and your inner relationship to it” (p. 548-549). Through *nepantla*, a person sees into other world views and unpacks the myths and histories that are carried with its subjective positionings. Likewise, Maffie (2007) spoke of *nepantla* as being a process that is “dialectical, transitional, and oscillating; centering as well as destabilizing; and abundant with mutuality and reciprocity” (p. 11). *Nepantla* is simultaneously destructive and creative,” it is also “transformative” (p. 11). Maffie’s descriptors of *nepantla* converge with Anzaldúa’s (2002) latest definition of *nepantla* as the place where you are “seeing

through human acts both individual and collective allows you to examine the ways you construct knowledge, identity, and reality, and explore how some of your/others' constructions that violate other people's ways of knowing" (p. 548). These ideas of constructing and deconstructing knowledge from individual and collective acts, seeing our knowledge as violating "other people's ways of knowing" allows me to shift to Bakhtin's concept of ideological becoming and define his terms that encompass how people become who they are through the discourses they consume and produce.

### **Colliding Anzaldúa's Nepantla with Bakhtin's Ideological Becoming**

The concept of ideological becoming emerged in Bakhtin's essay, "Discourse in the Novel," (1975/1981), and in this essay, I noticed the similarities between his concepts and those of Anzaldúa's. Although Bakhtin was born in Russia in 1895, a descendant of Russian nobility and received an extensive formal education, he did experience a struggle against established ideologies, much like Anzaldúa. Bakhtin lived during a Russian socio-political revolution, and during the revolution he was arrested for promoting anti-Soviet ideas. It was during this time that Bakhtin wrote his dissertation, which is now published and titled *Rabelais and His World* (1984). To understand Rabelais' work, Bakhtin (1984) wrote that one must have:

an essential reconstruction of our entire artistic and ideological perception, the renunciation of many deeply rooted demands of literary taste, and the revision of many concepts. Above all, he requires an exploration in depth of a sphere as yet little and superficially studied, the tradition of folk humor. (p. 3)

It not necessary to have read Rabelais or Bakhtin's entire analysis of Rabelais to understand what ideology Bakhtin is trying to promote. One, the claim here is that to be able to read Rabelais one must first think differently toward the ideas in Rabelais's writings. Two, this parallels with Anzaldúa (1987) when she says that before we can even act to change a discourse, we must first think differently about it. Also, his ideological becoming in his dissertation paralleled Anzaldúa's thesis rejection by her university committee. Bakhtin waited twenty years to defend his dissertation, only to have it rejected by his university opponents and receive a degree lesser than doctor (Holquist, 1981). The rejection was due to his blatant critique of the formalist ideas held by many opponents on the committee. However, to pull back into a nepantla state, Bakhtin was attempting to tear away at what people knew, to make them think differently toward what already was established and expected. These critiques deeply disturbed and disrupted the political and social beliefs of his opponents. Like Anzaldúa, Bakhtin collided ideologies, and a rupture in thinking occurred; through his other works that will be referred to later, he developed some terms that are useful for analyzing these kinds of ideological collisions. Although, Bakhtin's work originally analyzed literary works, his ideas have been taken up and used in many other research fields and traditions to look at language and power. In contrast, to Anzaldúa's work, which she herself claimed was used in limiting fashion; Bakhtin's work has driven the creation of a dialogic pedagogy (Matusov, 2009). Numerous educational scholars (Ball & Freedman, 2004; López-Bonilla, 2011) have taken up Bakhtinian ideas across global contexts of education and learning as a theoretical framing for their work. In my reading of Anzaldúa's work and the review of literature that uses her work, I, too, see that Anzaldúa's theories are used heavily to frame studies that situate themselves with immigrant, Chicano/a,

and/or Latino/a issues, however, few scholars are pushing Anzaldúa's work to frame studies that are not situated within those contexts.

Ideological becoming is how you become the person you are. Our ways of being and doing are based on our thoughts. We form those thoughts based on the discursive interactions we encounter as live. Through living, our minds continually intersect with discourses such as books, magazines, media, speech, etc. As we consume discourse through reading, living, hearing, speaking, we then reproduce those discourse in our lives, albeit in an altered manner. For example, as White woman from Georgia, I consumed and produced the discourse that public school classrooms should be taught in one language, English. It wasn't until I intersected with contradictory discourses that I changed my practice. Also, ideological becoming is "an intense struggle within us for hegemony among various available verbal and ideological points of view, approaches, directions, and values" (Bakhtin, 1975/1981, p. 346). As we consume discourse we must decide, what is of value, what is true, good, and helpful, it is on those discourses that we will base our lives and actions. Here is where some departure from Anzaldúan theories becomes evident, in Bakhtin's work this hegemonic relationship does not appear as violent and gruesome as Anzaldúa (1987) portrays,

Attacks on one's form of expression with the intent to censor are a violation of the First Amendment. El Anglo con cara de inocente nos arrancó la lengua. Wild tongues can't be tamed, they can only be cut out. (p. 54)

She further demonstrates the violence that is embedded within this hegemonic process, the ideological becoming, of us to value English and devalue Spanish, with her memory of being caught speaking Spanish at recess.

I remember being caught speaking Spanish at recess-that was good for three licks on the knuckles with a sharp ruler. I remember being sent to the corner of the classroom for "talking back" to the Anglo teacher when I was trying to do was tell her how to pronounce my name. If you want to be American, speak 'American.' If you don't like it, go back to Mexico where you belong. (p. 53)

Anzaldúa's work applies ideological becoming, creating the text that shows how this hegemonic process happens in our lived experiences. For me, when I encountered the idea that silencing my students' home languages, which I realized by reading Anzaldúa's works among others, hurt and harmed them, I assumed a new discourse, and I began to teach differently.

At the center of ideological becoming is the collision between authoritative discourses and heteroglossia. Authoritative discourses pull ideas inward toward a normalized center, while heteroglossic discourses pull ideas outward in various directions that disrupt and alter.

**Authoritative discourse.** Bakhtin defined an *authoritative discourse* as a discourse that "demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own; it binds us, quite independent of any power it might have to persuade us internally; we encounter it with its authority already fused to it" (p. 342). Immediately, I connect this statement to strong circulations of patriarchy, heteronormativity, monolingualism, and Whiteness in American society. An authoritative discourse battles for central adoption of one ideology, and this discourse will "organize around itself great masses of other types of discourse (which interpret it, praise it, apply it in various ways), but the authoritative discourse itself does not merge with these" (Bakhtin, 1975/1981, p. 343). Bakhtin's comparison to the authoritative discourse needing a great mass creates an image

of a religious text that no one can trace the origin of, yet millions flock to it to guide their lives. To question such a text and its truth constitutes blasphemy. An authoritative discourse can be recognized by its need for perfection, accuracy, and inflexibility, and “it remains sharply demarcated, compact and inert; it deems, so to speak, not only quotation marks but a demarcation even more magisterial, a special script, for instance” (p. 343). Bakhtin used “static and dead” as descriptors for authoritative discourses, and they will carry, “but a single meaning” (p. 343). This discourse is not easy to change because it comes with its authority historically attached to it, making it impossible to question. On the other hand, heteroglossic voices will pull against this centralization of thought and normalized ideology and only one way to mean.

**Heteroglossia.** Bakhtin called the discourses that challenge and counter authoritative discourse, *heteroglossia*. An authoritative discourse is unified, without varied voice and perspective, a single perspective. Whereas, heteroglossia is a plethora of voices, representing a multitude of viewpoints and perspectives; it pulls away from an ideology that tries to unify and normalize. Clark and Holquist (1986) stated that:

Heteroglossia, or the mingling of different language groups, cultures, and classes, was for Bakhtin the ideal condition, guaranteeing a perpetual linguistic and intellectual revolution which guards against the hegemony of any “single language of truth” or “official language” in a given society, against ossification and stagnation in thought. (p. 22)

Bakhtin (1975/1981) called heteroglossia the place where “real language lives” (p.292), the “internal differentiation” in languages (p. 67), and also said that it is “parodic, and aimed sharply and polemically against the official languages of its given time” (p. 273). More specifically, heteroglossia includes those languages that disturb others, languages that must be corrected, and moreover languages that usually don’t demand respect.

**Internally persuasive discourse.** As people we *always* consume elements of authoritative discourses and heteroglossia. They are ever present in our lives through books, everyday talk, media, movies, and in many other forms of communication. However, when these discourses become embedded in a person’s way of thinking, then that discourse has become what Bakhtin (1975/1981) called the *internally persuasive discourse*.

The tendency to assimilate others’ discourse takes on an even deeper and more basic significance in an individual’s ideological becoming, in the most fundamental sense. Another’s discourse performs here no longer as information, directions, rules, models, and so forth-but strives rather to determine the very bases of our ideological interrelations with the world, the very basis of our behavior; it performs here as authoritative discourse, and an internally persuasive discourse. (p. 342)

One clear example is that Anzaldúa’s nepantla is an internally persuasive discourse for me. It has taken a vital place in shaping my thinking, writing, and teaching; in essence, it has become part of who I am. The discourses that *internally persuade* us are important to know and recognize. As an educator, I realized that strong authoritative discourses of prejudice circulated in my pedagogies and our educational system, and because of this, they had become internally persuasive in my mind, as well as my students’ minds. Here I present nepantla as way to disrupt authoritative discourses, an act, somewhat to restore balance in a knowledge system.

## Ideological Becoming as an Act of Nepantla

To bring Anzaldúa's nepantla and Bakhtin's ideological becoming together, or make them speak to one another, I focus on examples from their work that include their uses of the words, *collide*, *collision*, *border*, and *boundary*. For Bakhtin and Anzaldúa, when thoughts collide, change may happen, or the change may be silenced. Anzaldúa (1987) argued that "the coming together of two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference causes un choque, a cultural collision" (p. 100). These collisions happen at the border of thoughts where there is potential for a shift in an epoch of thought. Anzaldúa intentionally writes using heteroglossia to illustrate nepantla and even create it again; Bakhtin (1975/1981) said that when one writes intentionally with heteroglossia that it forces ideological collision. Anzaldúa (1987) wanted to collide ideas within nepantla at "a focal point or fulcrum, that juncture where the mestiza stands... where phenomena tend to collide" (p. 101) as way to bring about change in the way we see and think about people and their ideas.

Anzaldúa (1987) wrote the following passage as part of rewriting of the story of La Malinche, a young Nahuatl woman who was sold to Hernán Cortés, and she eventually became his interpreter. Often in Mexican discourses La Malinche is blamed for helping Cortés invade and conquer parts of Mexico:

Not me sold out my people but they me. *Malinali Tenepat*, or *Malintzín*, has become known as *la Chingada*-the fucked one. She has become the bad word that passes a dozen times a day from the lips of Chicanos. Whore, prostitute, the woman who sold out her people to the Spaniards are epithets Chicanos spit out with contempt. The worst kind of betrayal lies in making us believe that the Indian woman in us is the betrayer. We, *indias y mestizas*, police the Indian in us, brutalize and condemn her. Male culture has done a good job on us. *Son las costumbres que traicionan. La india en mí es la sombra: La Chingada, Tlazolteotl, Coatlicue. Son ellas que oyemos lamentando a sus hijas perdidas.* (p. 44)

In this quote from a longer section called, "The Wounding of *india*-Mestiza," Anzaldúa used intentional heteroglossia (Bakhtin 1975/1981), English, Spanish, and Nahuatl, to force a questioning of the authoritative discourse that subjected the Indian woman to a position of a good, an item bought or taken, then spent for the owner's profit. Additionally, Anzaldúa harvested a long discursive history around La Malinche.

Anzaldúa's rewriting of the discursive construct of La Malinche was a nepantlan act. Anzaldúa's takes this historical discursive formation and shows how it is used to shape and position the indigenous woman continually as one who deserves to be "fucked" because of her betrayal and untrustworthiness. Bakhtin (1975/1981) overtly stated that in these kinds of literary contexts, that "the important activity is not only (in fact not so much) the mixing of linguistic forms-the markers of two languages and styles-as it is the collision between differing points of views on the world that are embedded in these forms" (p. 360). I present Anzaldúa's theorizing of La Malinche as nepantlan act that is also an example of ideological becoming—"an intense struggle within us for hegemony" (Bakhtin, 1975/1981, p. 346). Anzaldúa had situated herself with a nepantla state through this discursive deconstruction of Malinche to force others into a nepantla state, as well. She acted on the same premise that Bakhtin (1984) proposed concerning the historical constructions of truth, when he wrote that:

while [we analyze] past ages we are too often obliged to “take each epoch at its word,” that is, to believe its official ideologists. We do not hear the voice of the people and cannot find and decipher its pure unmixed expression. (p. 474)

Bakhtin described these ideological outcomes as “open, in each of the next contexts that dialogize it, this discourse is able to reveal ever newer ways to mean” (p. 346). Anzaldúa (1987) took up nepantla to allow for new “ways to mean” by intentionally and literally writing “a new story to explain the world” (p. 103).

**New stories to explain the world.** Educators are often fed historical fictions, never questioned, to re-teach to the next generation of children. To disrupt these historical truths, Anzaldúa took up an historical fiction, the story of La Malinche, to critique it and write a new story to explain this historical event. To illustrate how classroom educators can do the same, I turn to a real event from my classroom practice. During our unit on the American Civil War, our state standards called for the students to learn that Harriet Beecher Stowe, the author of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1952/1998), and John Brown’s raid were vital in the abolitionist movement to abolish slavery. One concern is that both Stowe and Brown were White, and neither Black abolitionists nor Black historical figures from this epoch are mentioned in the state standards. As a way to invoke Nepantla in my classroom, I challenged the standards by offering a range of people and perspectives during this time in US history, including others’ stories, from Frederick Douglass to Nat Turner. This was an effort to rewrite the standard, the story, that we would learn concerning who was challenging the practice of slavery at that time. As well as, I pointed out to my students the absence of Black historical figures in our Social Standards to my students, and they became advocates, investigators, and authors of new stories about the Civil War for themselves, for me, and for our school.

I suggest that a nepantla pedagogy will, at times, contradict standards and/or challenge lesson objectives. In this pedagogy, no one would perform the same; much less think the same about an event, person, or story. Students and teachers would be “skeptical of reason and rationality ...question[ing] conventional knowledge’s current categories, classifications, and contents” (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 541). It will result in a multitude of thoughts and understandings on behalf of the students and educators. As Bakhtin (1975/1987) claimed, “heteroglossia...rages beyond the boundaries of such a sealed-off cultural universe” or in other words, heteroglossia lived beyond our sealed-off social studies standards, and by tapping into it, we subverted some dangerous subject positionings. However, this opening of “subversive knowledges” is not without consequence or risk (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 542). I, too, was deemed heretical by my school administrator for challenging the sanctity of standards-based learning and challenging the school’s practice of standardized testing along with its numerous practice tests. Anzaldúa explained that “those seeking alternative forms of knowledge have been demonized” (p.543) and that nepantleras risk being “stoned for [their] heresy” (p. 573). These consequences must be further developed by documenting the repercussions of nepantla pedagogies along with the authoritative discourses’ resistance to them.

Creating new stories is one aspect of a nepantla pedagogy; through rewriting, future thoughts can change; however, a change in thought often requires one to feel as though they are encountering an alien world. Anzaldúa and Bakhtin take up the word, “alien,” in interesting ways to speak of this phenomenon. Bakhtin (1975/1987) argued the necessity of

deeply involved participation in alien cultures and languages (one is impossible without the other) inevitably leads to an awareness of the disassociation between language and intentions, language and thought, language and expression. (p. 368)

In essence, we, educators, must force ourselves to interact, come face to face, with “alien” ways, so that “heteroglossia [can] wash over” our own culture, our language, penetrating us to the core, and in the end, disrupt our deeply embedded ideologies about the world (p. 368).

#### *Alien Words and Worlds*

Anzaldúa explained that people situated on ideological and cultural borders forge a language in which “they can create their own identity to, one capable of communicating the realities and values true to themselves—a language with terms that are neither *español ni inglés*, but both...we speak a patois, a forked tongue, a variation of two languages” (p. 76). Although, often unrecognized by speakers of dominant, imperialistic languages, everyone speaks a variation of many languages. If this is recognized, then other questions regarding language and its practice may come forward. For instance, what is the historical construction/s of the language/s we speak? By answering this, a person may see himself or herself as speaking a hybrid language within a complicated sociopolitical history, and the understanding of hegemony within language ideologies can open spaces for contestation of “official line[s]” of authoritative discourses (Bakhtin, 1975/1981, p. 345). Collisions and questions of ideology lead to an “alien consciousness” which Anzaldúa (1987) illustrated in her first encounter with the word “nosotras” (p. 99):

The first time I heard two women, a Puerto Rican and a Cuban, say the word “*nosotras*,” I was shocked. I had not known the word existed. Chicanas use *nosotros* whether we’re male or female. We are robbed of our female being by the masculine plural. Language is a male discourse. (p. 76)

To explain minor Spanish linguistics, a Spanish speaker would use feminine and masculine pronoun forms. For instance, *ellos* is a pronoun that means *they* in Spanish, and *nosotros* is a pronoun that means *we*. In a context, when a Spanish speaker needs to refer to a group of people that are both male and female, or entirely male, it is acceptable to use *ellos*, and only if the group is entirely female, then *ellas* is acceptable. This construct of language is akin to the English historical use of *man* to refer to both men and women, but one would never use *woman* to refer to both men and women. The same linguistic rule applies to the use of *nosotros* (*we*), but for Anzaldúa, she had never been exposed to the usage of *nosotras* (notice the ending) to refer to a group of women. Instead, everyone was *nosotros*, the masculine form, including a group of women. This nepantla act of deconstructing words explores the betweenness among the linguistic and discursive construction of *they/ellos/ellas* and *we/nosotros/nosotras* meanings. In Anzaldúa’s historical discourse, it was acceptable for one to view a group of women as *they/them/ellas*; a man could label women as women by calling them, *ellas*. However, a discourse was missing in Anzaldúa’s history; the discourse of women naming themselves, *nosotras*, was non-existent for her. In this instance, only when a labeling *the other* (*they/ellos*) is the *ella* construction available. This concept stripped women of the possibility of self-identification (in this linguistic and discursive moment) of the option of naming themselves, in other words, *nosotras* didn’t exist for women, so they could not use it to name and call themselves. A nepantla pedagogy seeks to speak new ways to exist into being, and this instance, nepantleras, the Puerto Rican women, spoke alien words into being for Anzaldúa.

I, too, had a nepantlera speak an alien world into existence for me. The nepantlera was my student, who wrote and illustrated a story that brought her alien existence into being, gave her an opportunity to name her world, name her position in it, and critique it. As my teaching experience comes from public classrooms in Georgia with majority Latino students, the term illegal alien was prevalent in our communities and classrooms. It was especially prevalent the year of 2008, when Georgia passed a law enabling police officers to act as immigration officials and starting a frenzy of anti-immigrant discourse sparking increased racism against anyone with brown skin in our state and furthering it across our country. I present below a quote by our county sheriff at the time that furthered alienating discourses. He presented this argument to justify the county's application to enact 287g, the law/ordinance that allowed county police officers to act as immigration officers.

Now at this same time, Hall County is seeing a dramatic increase in our Hispanic population, both legal and illegally, and unfortunately we're also seeing an increase in Hispanic involvement in many of our areas of crime. Most alarming was in the areas which most consider our major quality of life issues, that being drugs, gangs and violent crime. In fact, over a two- to three-year period, we saw illegal immigrants disproportionately involved in these areas. Examples included close to 90 percent of the volume of illegal drugs being brought in this community was being brought in from Mexico by illegal aliens. (This is not to say individual cases reflected 90 percent, but the actual volume of seizures.)

Our homicides during a two to three year period reflected one-third to one-half committed by illegal aliens. (In most of these cases the victims were also in the country illegally, many were drug or gang related.) And our gangs, although difficult to determine immigration status because of their age, are more than 80 percent Mexican street gangs. (Cronic, 2008)

Around the same time that these words were printed in our local newspaper, I implemented a literacy project called the Family Stories Writing Project. I asked my students to collect family stories from their parents, guardians, or anyone really. We were going to write the stories, hopefully bilingually, illustrate them, and publish them to share with the class, the school, and the community. Gisela, a Mexican-American 10-year old girl, wrote an unforgettable story, a story that was alien me, but told of her life experience. She wrote about how her mother was currently in jail, pulled over for a broken taillight, and arrested for being an illegal alien. Her story told of her father's desperate attempt to figure out how to free her, to Gisela standing with her mother before the judge and receiving the sentence to self-deport or the next time they would imprison her and take her children. Listening to the authoritative discourses of our community promoted the acceptance of 287g as necessary to deport dangerous Hispanic criminals, but if we listened to Gisela and her recount of the deportation of a wife, a mother, a person who loved and cared for her children, who worked outside and inside her home, we may come away understanding this alien existence, and not render them, alien, any longer.

**Dissolving borders.** Anzaldúa (1987) claimed that "borders are set up to define the places that are safe or not safe, to distinguish *us* from *them*" (p. 6). Borders *define*. They define personal property lines to political boundaries to picture frames and classroom walls. Borders *differentiate*. For instance, sometimes my elementary-age students liked to have more privacy when they worked, and using manila folders they would create make-shift walls around their desks. No one could see in, nor could they see out of their paper fortresses. To them, this small



border changed how they worked. Borders *change* things. It was during a classroom discussion about borders and immigration that I first thought, how can I dissolve borders?

During my last year of teaching fifth grade, my students and I were immersed in our unit on immigration. We read and watched stories of immigration, and many students connected to *My Diary from Here to There*, a story of a young girl's move from Mexico to the United States. Afterwards, a discussion began about who was really an immigrant and who wasn't one. In a classroom full of bilingual children and children of immigrants, the students would try to figure who was born where to figure out who was really an immigrant or not. Surprisingly, the children became envious of the term immigrant. Mandrell wanted to be identified as immigrant because his great-grandmother was from Nigeria. Samuel wanted to connect to immigration by saying that his ancestors came from Ireland. At the same time, Angelica wanted to point out that she wasn't an immigrant; she was born in the United States, on this side of the border.

Although this discussion prompted critical thought, I wanted an even more complicated discussion in which the students would compare and contrast their real, lived experiences. For instance, Samuel, the only White student in my class, had recently moved from a rural White community to a city apartment complex with mainly Black and Latino families. While this move brought complications and friendships into his life, it also brought him into other cultures that he needed to learn how to negotiate living in. However, there wasn't a space in my classroom pedagogy for Samuel to connect this experience with Elba's experience of moving from Mexico. My pedagogy divided and othered students, but my intent had been to connect student experience and dissolve the borders separating us. Likewise, *nepantla* is the place of the border, "el lugar de la frontera" (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2009, p. 176). So, I began to imagine a pedagogy that would do away with learning about immigration; instead, we would dissolve the borders separating us, and learn how people move and have moved for millennia. This kind of thought allowed us to explore the historical construction of political borders as well as disrupt the idea about who was really an American or an immigrant (Anzaldúa, 1987; Giroux, 1991). It was in *nepantla*, that I saw how borders were "the locus of resistance, of rupture, implosion and explosion, and of putting together the fragments and creating a new assemblage" (Anzaldúa, 1993/2009, p. 177). A *nepantla* pedagogy, helped me to create this imaginable, borderless space for students which allowed them to position themselves differently, see others similarly, make connections and disconnections across their varied lives.

## **Conclusion**

*Nepantla* and ideological becoming are theoretical stances that both articulate that people are in a continual process of forming ideas and that those ideas are birthed from historical and current discourses. Contesting and changing these discourses creates the possibility of living otherwise, which entails challenging essentialists and normalizing ideologies which constrain, restrain, produce dichotomies, and continually separate one person from another. Anzaldúa (1987) spoke of her work:

My "stories" are acts, encapsulated in time, "enacted" every time they are spoken aloud or read silently. I like to think of them as performances and not as inert and 'dead' objects (as the aesthetic of Western culture think of art works). Instead, the

work has an identity; it is “who” or a “what” and contains the presences of persons, that is, incarnations of gods or ancestors or natural and cosmic powers. The work manifests the same needs as a person, it needs to be “fed,” *la tengo que bañar y vestir.* (p. 89)

Again, Anzaldúa and Bakhtin’s stories of the world were rejected by those in academia who had the position to approve or disapprove the stories they told. To accept these ideas would “feed” the continuance of those disturbing ideologies, and it would mean a questioning of long historical truths of the world. Perhaps, they would need to decide that previously held ideas are and were wrong. Moreover, people imbue ideas, so questioning ideas means questioning the person, and people who are in *nepantla* would need to see their own participation in the establishment of truths. For educators to recognize a structure as imperialistic and colonizing then we must step aside and examine our beliefs and actions that continue to perpetuate this truth. Anzaldúa (1987) said that *it* must first exist in our mind before *it* exists in the world. We produce ourselves according to our thoughts first. Those thoughts produce actions, which produce similar thoughts in other people. *Nepantla* helps us understand how thought comes about, which can help us see new ways for thought to come about differently, and thinking differently means acting differently. *Nepantla* and ideological becoming show that it is the interaction, *the conflict*, between multiple constructions of the world that opens way to change, analyze, and apply ideas that lead to multiple ways to be.

As for educators, we must situate ourselves in *nepantla*. For instance, reading this essay and asking ourselves: How do I violate other people’s ways of knowing? How do I render others alien to me? Why do I accept account of history without question? Or taking Bakhtin’s recommendation: How do I let an alien world wash over me? These are all ways to invoke *nepantla*. For teacher educators, we can add Anzaldúa’s work to our readings and unpack *nepantla* with dialog and personal experience. For classroom educators, we must appropriate her work for our students. Seek out new stories, question alienating ways, reveal how one’s beliefs can violate those of another, and bring all of it into open spaces. To say this would be a uniform outcome would contradict my previous claims of a *nepantla* pedagogy, in fact it may have chaotic outcome. The process of *nepantla* reflection and views, with action as *nepantleras* may be where we find the harmony and symmetry among us; however, the results of what happens in each classroom or context may look very different.

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George Dei, *OISE/University of Toronto*  
Stephen C. Fleury, *Le Moyne College*  
Kent den Heyer, *University of Alberta*  
Nirmala Erevelles, *University of Alabama*  
Michelle Fine, *City University of New York*  
Gustavo Fischman, *Arizona State University*  
Erica Frankenberg, *Penn State University*  
Melissa Freeman, *University of Georgia*  
David Gabbard, *Boise State University*  
Rich Gibson, *San Diego State University*  
Dave Hill, *Anglia Ruskin University*  
Nathalia E. Jaramillo, *University of Auckland*  
Philip E. Kovacs, *University of Alabama, Huntsville*  
Saville Kushner, *University of Auckland*  
Zeus Leonardo, *University of California, Berkeley*  
Pauline Lipman, *University of Illinois, Chicago*  
Lisa Loutzenheiser, *University of British Columbia*  
Marvin Lynn, *University of Illinois, Chicago*  
Linda Mabry, *Washington State University, Vancouver*  
Sheila Macrine, *Montclair State University*  
Perry M. Marker, *Sonoma State University*  
Rebecca Martusewicz, *Eastern Michigan University*  
Peter McLaren, *University of California, Los Angeles*  
Brad J. Porfilio, *Lewis University*  
Stuart R. Poyntz, *Simon Fraser University*  
Kenneth J. Saltman, *DePaul University*  
Özlem Sensoy, *Simon Fraser University*  
Patrick Shannon, *Penn State University*  
Kevin D. Vinson, *University of the West Indies*  
John F. Welsh, *Louisville, KY*