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Advancing Critical Digital Pedagogy: Teachers' Reflections on the Utility of Podcasting as an Instructive Tool Toward Youth Wellness

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Abstract

This paper explores the intersection of Ethnic Studies and youth wellness through the innovative use of podcasting, integrating the dialogic traditions of Black intellectual conversations and Chicana Feminist Pláticas. It centers the podcast *Drawing from the Well*, which serves as a platform for delving into racialized and gendered socio-historical phenomena. The podcast and accompanying paper integrate a wide range of critical perspectives, thereby enriching and diversifying approaches to knowledge production in attempts to challenge and disrupt traditional beliefs about youth wellness. The paper underscores how podcasting can bridge various theoretical frameworks in Ethnic Studies, providing deeper insights into youth wellness and Critical Digital Pedagogy. This approach highlights the transformative potential of digital media in both academic and social contexts, emphasizing the importance of alternative and inclusive educational methodologies.

Keywords: trauma-informed, ethnic studies, healing-centered, Indigenous technology, community empowerment, critical education, podcasting

Introduction

This article follows the origins and ideologies of the *Drawing from the Well* podcast. The podcast is a counter-narrative initiative that resists academic whitewashing and gatekeeping through an accessible digital platform for diverse voices, challenging dominant narratives through critical discussions on race, wellness, and cultural relevance in education. Additionally, the podcast examines stressors compromising youth wellness, particularly schooling, aiming to ultimately eradicate their harmful impacts

Influenced by Cherrie Moraga's (1981) *Theory in the Flesh*, our femme and queer-led production team offers unique social context, supporting the podcast to serve as a sonic reclamation space, focusing on community empowerment.

In each episode, host Tiffani Marie carries forward her passion for teaching and research, which combines public health, critical race studies, and education to enhance youth health outcomes. Co-producer Sharim Hannegen-Martinez incorporates her experiences and cultural intuition in examining the relationship between trauma, healing, loving pedagogies, and student wellness.
In this way, the podcast can be seen as an Indigenous technology addressing human needs like community health and a sense of life purpose, contrasting Western technology's exploitative nature (Somé, 1998). It aims to address listeners' needs by utilizing vital concepts such as trauma-informed, healing-centered, cultural wealth, and wellness.

Trauma-Informed: acknowledges the widespread impact of trauma, understanding that many behaviors and symptoms stem from such experiences. It emphasizes empowerment as crucial for recovery.

Healing-Centered: emphasizes culture, spirituality, civic action, and collective healing, viewing trauma not merely as an isolated experience but as a collective one.

Cultural Wealth: counters mainstream deficit thinking, surfaces and enumerates the array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed by marginalized groups, recognizing their strengths and contributions to the classroom and beyond (Yosso, 2005).

Wellness: refers to the harmony of mind, body, emotion, and spirit. It is cultivated and sustained through healthy relationships that acknowledge lived experiences and the historical and material conditions shaping them.

Overall, "Drawing from the Well" aspires to be a tool of resistance, a platform for unheard voices, and a digital apothecary healing collective traumas. It draws from the well of collective wisdom, aiming to decolonize narratives and forge a more radical and self-determined future for our listeners.

Methodology

Drawing on the rich dialogic history of Black intellectual conversations (Dyson, 1993; Hartman & Wilderson, 2003; Leeming, 1994) and Chicana Feminist Pláticas (Hannegan-Martinez, 2023), this paper employs a podcast format to bridge (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002) these meaning-making practices. It leverages the podcast "Drawing from the Well" to explore its relationship with Ethnic Studies, delving into racialized and gendered socio-historical phenomena. Influenced by critical thinkers like Derrick Bell (1992) and John Snow (Tulchinsky, 2018), the podcast challenges traditional beliefs about wellness and expertise, incorporating diverse voices to strengthen forms of knowledge production. This reflexive research practice (the examination of one's own beliefs, judgments and practices during the research process and how these may influence the research) provides deeper insights into youth wellness and Critical Digital Pedagogy through the innovative use of podcasting.

Drawing from the Well - Season 2, Episode 10

[cues podcast music]

Sharim: All right. Let's get started. Could you tell me a little bit about the podcast Drawing From the Well?

Tiffani: The podcast is a community-grounded, interdisciplinary podcast originally produced by the Youth Wellness Movement. From the first two seasons, it is going to take a dramatic shift for the third season in terms of leadership. It has outgrown the house that it was in. It started as an effort to holistically merge or braid together community stakeholders, children, elders, teachers, parents, their voices and their experiences, situating them as people who we consider to be the most knowledgeable on what it takes to cultivate and sustain youth wellness. It also braids in who we would consider experts in the field, alongside powerful, intimate portraits of those same practitioners who are seen as experts, being incredibly vulnerable and critical of their practice.
So, it becomes a way for us to make sense of the devastating and overwhelming prevalence of stressors that are compromising youth wellness, including schooling, especially schooling, and youth voice, and community experiences as a way to attenuate those harmful impacts. We use a lens of Ethnic Studies to examine the social phenomenon that is present in every episode.

Sharim: Nice, can you talk a little bit about what your role was in the podcast and what that experience was and is like for you?

Tiffani: Hosting DFTW also meant co-producing. That process was very similar to lesson planning. It is one thing to have the pieces that you want to support in people's understanding of certain issues. It is another thing to be able to organize them and use the art of critical pedagogy to organize in a way that produces the most meaningful content.

It was just another way to learn more about myself, while practicing powerful ways of organizing knowledge and people's experiences. It was a space for me as a host to be challenged in the ways we co-created knowledge; I thought the process was incredibly revolutionary and aligned with the project of Ethnic Studies particularly.

Sharim: Yeah, it's interesting to hear you talk about the ways in which you grew as a host and how that was directly connected to your pedagogical practice as an educator. Because I'm thinking about the episode that I was on with you around being trauma-informed and healing-centered. And I felt so awkward. I don't know why, but I felt so nervous to be on this podcast, even though it's so directly correlated to the work that I do. And it's not the first time that I've been "interviewed," but I felt such a nervousness around how I wanted to show up and how I wanted to tell my story, knowing that we had little control over where that story would end up one day because it was on a podcast. And the way that you were able to engage me and really draw on so many ethnic studies pedagogical practices to make sure that I felt safe and protected and that my story felt valued. And the questions you were asking were so thoughtful and generative. So, I really appreciate you sharing how it helped you grow as an educator. Because I felt like I got to really witness and experience that.

Tiffani: Yeah, it was interesting to watch you, as one of the best public speakers I have ever seen, have this issue and challenge with the recording. Right. And stumble on that. Our ability to use this format that we are using right now, to generate, like you said, create a safer space and cultivate safer space through conversation and dialogue, enables us to access and tap into parts of ourselves that are already there. I think that is what makes it such a powerful pedagogy; the facilitator

supports in drawing out the wisdoms, right, in Drawing from the Well of knowledge we all possess. And it is really just this format of being able to create the space to draw it from folks, which I believe you are powerfully doing with me right now.

Sharim: And I think part of it too, for me at least, the nervousness was that podcasting is such a different modality, right? So, I can speak publicly in front of young people or teachers, and I know exactly who my audience is in that moment, in that very physical material room. And so that lends itself to a certain level of security and certainty. Whereas with podcasting, I think it really allows you to, in the words of Toni Morrison, "decenter the white gaze" and sort of just focus almost just on you, versus on who might this end up in the hands of. And so, I think part of the nervousness was that it lent itself to a different type of vulnerability and freedom and risk that I think doesn't always exist (in the same way) in other modalities. And it maybe doesn't exist in this one, but it existed with you because of the approaches and the conversations and the content that we were focusing on.

Tiffani: I hear that.

Sharim: So, if you had to think about what you would want people to get out of this, this pláticas that we are engaging in, what would be your hope for that?

Tiffani: Well, I think that Ethnic Studies, particularly what we call Ethnic Studies, was not always called Ethnic Studies. Sometimes it was underground lessons on fugitivity that happened inside, you know, under floors, in secrecy. Sometimes it happened right in MST movements in Brazil or in the Black Church. It was this process of us continuing to remember the power of who we are, the legacies that got us here as a way to inform how we continue to move towards self-determination. When we are thinking about this idea of youth wellness, particularly, that is at the heart of every person's movement, whether they say it explicitly or not. Most of the adages and proverbs in all of our indigenous backgrounds are: if our children are not well, we are not well.

Our children are a reflection of who we are, what we have been doing, and where we are going. One of the central aspects of Ethnic Studies is those remembrances as a way to inform our self-determination. So, the podcast becomes one powerful tool, a container for these histories, a time capsule, so to speak. To be able to outlast the state-sanctioned violence that harms us, to be able to outlast maybe even schooling as an apparatus. It becomes an apothecary to provide medicines through a digital platform.

Sharim: Thank you for that. It reminds me of Proverbs and *dichos*– what Dolores Delgado Bernal calls the pedagogies of our home. Our voices, our sayings, and undergirding all of our movements, was storytelling or what critical race theorists would now call counter-storytelling. But it was sort of the way that we remember, the way that we preserve, the way that we safeguard that which we value, that which is sacred and that which we need for our survival; the podcast is really a way of using a western tool to document that which we know we need.

Tiffani: When we talk about digital pedagogy, as well as digital literacy in general, we know that the children and communities we work with possess incredible digital literacies. Our young people are the ones whose memes inform policy, and their engagement with platforms like TikTok and Twitter show up in the conversations of major stakeholders. It's not that we don't have

engagement, but the literature does not reflect that engagement or the barriers to digital platforms that both compromise and, quite frankly, steal our forms of knowledge production and abilities to participate in these digital spaces unharmed. Instead, it reveals that digital pedagogy and digital literacies are, for me, incredibly isolating and reflect a more Western way of examining specific phenomena that we haven't traditionally been a part of, even though we have greatly informed it.

Sharim: But I think that it hasn't been talked about enough as *how* we use this tool in particular to sustain ourselves, to disrupt power, et cetera. And instead, it's become another standard, so to speak, that we need a digital pedagogy because young people need to be able to type on the computer because they need to go to college. And when they go to college, then they need to get a job. And so, so much of our humanity is left outside of that conversation because it's not really about us, it's not about our stories, it's not about anything really that is important. As you said, it becomes a sort of maintenance of the apparatus of schooling and really capitalism at large.

Tiffani: The frightening aspect of what you're sharing is that I think Ethnic Studies is also used in the same way: as a carrot to support children who traditionally have not performed well in school. It encourages them to improve by using their histories and knowledge as a motivator for them to engage in, ironically, a project that Ethnic Studies at its core aims to undo.

Sharim: And then we'll say that Ethnic Studies worked because your test scores went up, your grades went up, your attendance went up, and therefore, the project of Ethnic Studies is quote, unquote, successful, right?

Tiffani: When it's tied to Western metrics of success, this approach seems antithetical to youth wellness. You shared earlier how these strategies are used to make young people and communities more invested in capitalist projects and understandings of success and wellness. Well, there has also been an emergence of people using digital pedagogies, particularly as a means of counter-storytelling. The rise of podcasting, for example, has become a powerful platform for underrepresented voices and experiences to engage in what I believe to be the most radical act: simply existing. What are your thoughts on the emergence of counter-storytelling and the recognition that our mere existence is radical and revolutionary within our society?

Sharim: Yes! I think that part is so often missing from the conversations around digital media, digital pedagogies, but also Ethnic Studies, like what does it mean to just be, and for my being to be enough? Not because of what I'm producing, but just because. And for my joy to be centered as a part of the project of Ethnic Studies.

Tiffani: And you, you know, and sometimes it's very simple, but it's not easy. And I want to add to the complexity of that; what you talked about is central to a lot of our communities, which is simplicity. So, like the art of sitting on the porch with parents and grandparents sharing stories, it's very simple, but it's incredibly complex in what's happening in those moments. There's the passing on of these sacred stories that are really centered in our sustainability. They're centered in our joy, and they're centered in all these tenets that contribute to our wellness. They're intergenerational. There are all these things that a lot of Ethnic Studies projects aim to perpetuate, but it's done in a way that is incredibly accessible, and it is happening through our very being. There's not someone there taking notes, saying, "So, what's happening here is..." There's not someone there who needs

to write up the implications of that. It exists, it sustains, and it's incredibly simple and happening through the state of our just being.

Sharim: Being, being together.

Tiffani: Yes, being—right, yeah. Being… existing, but we know that the state of our being cannot happen in isolation, right? That's a function of schools; that's a function of the West. So, when we do say "being," that has always been and needs to continue to be "being" in relationship to each other, co-existing.

Sharim: I also wanna highlight that when you're saying simple – like for folks listening– that simple isn't, doesn't mean easy. That there's also a craft to storytelling, right? That there is a skill, right? That I've sat on many porches with some skilled and not skilled storytellers where I'm like when will this story end? Why is it going so long? That detail was absolutely not important to the overall story, right? That storytelling is a skill that is honed in community, a craft that is considered very, very sacred to our communities. And so I just wanted to name that so that folks don't conflate the two—that we're not saying it's an easy thing that everybody can do.

Tiffani: Mm-hmm. I agree. And, you know, I always joked that Harriet Tubman never put the underground route on Instagram, right? She didn't publish articles about her engagement in the Civil War. There were songs that were sung, and there was braiding of hair that happened; those were ways to communicate. But historically, and I would argue even contemporarily, sharing too much information and being explicit about it was not healthy. I think similarly, Ethnic Studies has taken an interesting turn where, because we've had a desire for it to grow and for it to be institutionalized, there have had to be some surrendering and capitulation around the power of it.

You know, to Toni Morrison's point, she said, proving will not get us anywhere because the more that we have to prove, there will always be more to prove. And I worry about particularly Ethnic Studies as a pedagogy of convincing, of presenting histories, contributions and such, to make the case that we matter. Like, who is this for? I am careful with not responding to or entertaining the white gaze.

Sharim: Yeah, so we can move onto to the findings, I did have some questions around it just because I think it's important for folks to know: so you did a really good job of talking about the relationship, the potential relationship that could exist between podcasting as a tool and the larger project of ethnic studies. And I'm curious with this podcast in particular, how you've seen that? What some of your learnings have been and then how it's being received and used out in the world?

Tiffani: What's been really powerful about this podcast is meeting people who I don't know, who come up to me and say, "I really liked this episode." And for people to be able to cite and quote, and it not be this article locked away in some journal that people either have to pay for.

But it is people who are grounded in really powerful community efforts who are appreciating this work. And so, the first really powerful reflection that I have on it is that it's being disseminated in a really powerful way and it's reaching audiences that it was intended for. I think a lot of our pieces, we've shared these really powerful works in traditional mediums, and then the people who we

write for and the people who we write to often can't access those knowledges. What about you? How have you heard about the podcast? Or how have you heard about the ways in which it's being shared or accessed?

Sharim: Yeah, I have seen...Ugh, I say yeah, at the beginning of everything, and if you don't edit some of those, I'm gonna be irritated. But part of how I've seen it used— I also similarly get comments. People randomly hit me up on Instagram or at conferences and they're like, "oh, I really loved that episode that you were on, on Drawing from the Well when you were talking about trauma," and it's wild to me because–I–sometimes it's folks I haven't really connected to or I don't really know. And I'm like, oh, you're listening to it? Like, that's tight, and I know of a few folks who have put it on their syllabus. I think part of what I have found really powerful about the tool, and I don't even know if powerful would be the right word, but I feel like something happened not just with how dope the podcast is, what the content of it was but also the time at when it came out.

Sharim: So, you know, I've been teaching for a long time. You too. And I feel like despite all of my knowing better that I haven't always done better and I've still continued to really engage in sort of traditional texts, so to speak. Right? I'm a university professor, so you have to read these articles by other professors. And, you know, I've incorporated some fiction here and there, but still have heavily relied, I think, on this very traditional notion of what a university classroom should look like. And then the pandemic hit. And my students were so– like all of us– so unwell and so overwhelmed. And it felt really incongruent with my pedagogical commitments, with my desire to see them be well, to continue to overload them with readings that I knew were dense, knew were heavy, at a time when it felt like even my brain was not really functioning.

Sharim: And the podcast came out at the same time. And so, I started to substitute so many of the readings in my class with episodes from the podcast and to give them different modalities to engage really the same thinking that I wanted them to be holding and, and processing. And students loved it. It was well received. They had such powerful things to say about the things that they were learning from the podcast. But in using the podcast I also felt like I really grew as an educator, that I was reminded that we have to center other ways of being and doing and learning and knowing that also create opportunities for our students to be more attuned to their own capacities, to their own modalities, to their own wellness. And so, it felt like such a pivotal moment for me in my own growth as an educator, even as somebody who, you know, is well over a decade into teaching. It shifted me in ways that I think actually aligned with who I wanna be as an education and Ethnic Studies educator and scholar.

Tiffani: When I found out that our associate dean in our department did away with all his readings and replaced them with the podcast, that move was really powerful for me. His students shared: "I wept. I wept when I heard Layla talk about her experiences in schools, I wept."
They said, "Oh, it was so powerful to hear about this school in Oakland that I saw as the pinnacle for where we should be headed and for y'all to talk about the power of failure. It gave me the courage to be okay and to actually stop living in shame around my practices and the necessity of failure to be able to grow as an educator."

It became its only critical theory. But when I think of critical theory, I'm thinking of most of the white theorists that I read in grad school. That's my body's association with critical theory: that it's painful and you have to survive it. And there are rewards on the other end of that. But what

happens, or what I've been experiencing, is that our stories, our knowledges, our wisdoms are both critical, and those are theories that save our own lives, by sharing them, by receiving them, and by disseminating them.

Sharim: Yeah. I started with yeah again! Ok, but part of what I was listening to you say or part of what I heard from what you said is that podcasts allow for another way of cultivating, right, what Cherrie Moraga refers to as theory in the flesh (Moraga, 1981). That is really about our *being*.

Tiffani: Mm-hmm.

Sharim: And, podcasts really, I think allow a lot of space because they exist outside of the sort of traditional confines of schooling and the academy. They allow for people to share this embodied knowledge in really authentic ways that are true to who they are, true to, who they come from. And that essentially when we're allowed to show up in our wholeness that it also models for people who are listening, what it means to be whole and gives permission for them to step into that wholeness— flaws, mistakes, gifts, et cetera.

Tiffani: Mm-hmm.

Sharim: And that *that* is integral to the project of ethnic studies. That, *that* it has to be about, a return to and the preservation of our wholeness and that podcasting can create space for that.

Tiffani: Something happened in the sixties where you had Black folks in the Bay Area fighting for this movement for Ethnic Studies. And this thing happens where our inclusion into these spaces that previously disregarded us or denied us starts meaning progress. We start sharing our knowledges, our experiences in these realms. My colleague Kenjus Watson always quotes Saidiya Hartman who says, you know, "the university is such a weird space because they hire their enemies."

It's this strange space. And we forget that. And then through our acceptance and inclusion, we start to feel more comfortable sharing the sacredness of the very thing that actually needs protection. And we know this process by which culture is stolen and appropriated. It's studied, it's used in ways that eventually can work against us. We have folks who are incredibly excited to finally get some traction and then start sharing organizing plans, sharing movement plans with their enemies for review, for editing before it can be disseminated.

Ethnic Studies teaches us that we have to be cautious of that and study those histories. We know that there are literally rooms at UC Berkeley named after Black women who died in pursuit of being recognized. They named those buildings after them after denying them tenure and capital, and then naming the buildings after them once they die. So we have to be careful with conflating recognition and the widespread dissemination of our ideas as success. Ethnic Studies teaches us that we need to be careful of that. And when we think about this podcast and we think about our voices out there, we also have to consider what it means to continue to think of any platform that we access that we were previously denied as us inviting ourselves back into the white gaze.

And when we talk about digital literacy, we're talking about Western technologies. Malidoma Somé helps us understand that there are indigenous technologies that have held and sustained

us. So how do we use those technologies to both continue to exist in these critical ways, but also protect our stories, our experiences from being usurped, from being utilized to work against us? What are your thoughts on any of that? It was a lot.

Sharim: It was a lot. And I think they're important considerations for folks to have when they move forward, thinking about how we might utilize this tool. And I think the thing that I wanna lift up from the sort of the very real historical, contemporary lessons that you just shared is that, you know, tools can be used and they can be misused. And so, part of thinking about what it might mean to use podcasting as a tool is being really intentional about the purpose around the utility, around limitations of how we use that tool. And being really clear about the ways in which it is either being used or not used right. To support the wellbeing of our communities, and that as people who are choosing to engage that tool, we have to be careful, we have to be mindful and we have to be, I think, in a community that holds us accountable to making sure that we're utilizing the tool in our collective best interests.

Conclusion

Throughout this paper, we not only illustrate the transformative healing power of podcasts, particularly when grounded in a commitment to ethnic studies, but also share our personal experiences as facilitators and educators on how podcasting became an instrument of our own healing. By blending our own storytelling traditions with podcast methodologies, we illuminate the ways in which podcasts can be utilized as both a method and tool to center ourselves, each other, community, and ancestors in ways that challenge deficit and damage centered negatives (Tuck, 2007) and create space to share our wisdom and imagine different futurities. In this way, podcasting serves as an agentic device that we can utilize in our classrooms and communities to center the voices of those most harmed by the institution of schooling. Given the substantial research that schools are negatively impacting the health and well-being of Children of Color, we hope that in centering these intergenerational voices we can create a hub, an apothecary, that will support our healing and well-being, and ultimately not only transform, but dismantle the institution of schooling as it currently exists. Thus is the project of ethnic studies – one that honors our ancestors, allows us to see ourselves, to heal, and to build new future(s) – and we believe that podcasting can support those commitments.

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