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# ESSAYS



# THE ADELANTE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

## A Site of Decolonial Potential in Transforming School Curriculum

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**ABSTRACT:** *This paper analyzes the decolonial potential of an oral history project based out of a predominantly Latina/o and low-income elementary school in Salt Lake City, Utah. Considering the history of colonizing school curriculums, practices, and institutions that marginalize students of color, this paper applies a lens of decoloniality (Anzaldúa, 1999; Fanon, 2008; Dei, Mazzuca, Melsaac, & Zine, 1997; Villenas, 2010) to understand how alternative educational projects can disrupt colonizing school curriculums to improve and enhance the educational experience of Latina/o elementary students.*

This paper explores the decolonial potential of an oral history project out of an elementary school in Salt Lake City, Utah. The Adelante Oral History Project (AOHP) is part of a larger university-school-community partnership called Adelante that seeks to increase the awareness and expectation of college attendance as early as kindergarten. AOHP seeks to promote academic achievement through the development and implementation of culturally relevant oral history projects that interject the histories, cultures, and experiences of the predominantly Latina/o and low-income students at Jackson Elementary. While this is the official goal of the oral history project and larger Adelante partnership, I aim to explore the decolonial potential of the AOHP for decolonizing school curriculums because I argue discourses around decoloniality applied within schooling institutions can positively transform the educational experiences of marginalized students and further humanize these students. While the goal of the Adelante Partnership is to promote an awareness and expectation of college attendance, I argue that through the AOHP, Adelante also exhibits decolonial potential by centering students', their families, cultures, languages, and life experiences in the

school curriculum. In developing and implementing assignments that allow for students to research and excavate their life histories, the AOHP challenges an ahistoric and colonizing school curriculum by presenting opportunities for decolonial moments. The following section provides an in-depth description and analysis of the AOHP's curriculum.

As a product of the Texas public education school system, I see parallels between the colonizing curriculum I was subjected to in the 80s and 90s as a young Chicana, and that of the current Utah core curriculum. In both curriculums, a colonizing discourse of Texas "Independence" from Mexico and "Pioneer-ism" and "settlement" in Utah reproduce dominant narratives of Manifest Destiny and white supremacy that vilify and silence *other* histories such as those of women, queer communities, Mexicans, Latinas/os, Africans, and indigenous groups. Educational researchers (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery & Taubman, 2006; Au, 2012; Calderón, 2010) and Chicana/o and Latina/o scholars in particular, have researched the negative impact of privileging Eurocentric epistemology and European histories in schools, creating colonizing curriculums and resulting discourses of European superiority (Anzaldúa, 1999; Pérez, 1999; Delgado Bernal, 1998, 2001, 2002; Flores Carmona and Delgado Bernal, 2012; Elenes, 2011; Calderón, 2010; Valencia, 1997; Montejano, 1987). Chicana/Latina feminist scholars have pushed educational research by employing a lens of decoloniality to not only name the oppression experienced at the intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, phenotype, and so forth, but to also provide a language in which to deconstruct colonizing discourses, curriculums, and practices: in schools, within our own communities of color, in larger U.S. society, and across the globe to begin imagining new ideologies that are anti-oppressive and socially just (Anzaldúa, 1999, 2002; Lugones, 2003; Sandoval, 2000; Pérez, 1999, 2003; Villenas, 2010; Calderón, 2010; Delgado Bernal, 1998, 2002). In line with the works of Chicana/Latina feminist scholars, I utilize a lens of decoloniality to analyze the AOHP's curriculum to locate its decolonial potential and inform curriculum development, particularly in k-12 schools.

## DEFINING TERMS

Chicana historian Emma Pérez's (2003) discussion of decolonization, particularly through her concept of a decolonial imaginary, is useful in analyzing the decolonial potential of the AOHP. She argues a decolonial imaginary can unravel 'colonialist ideology' that believes in a normative

language, race, culture, gender, class, and sexuality (2003). Pérez (2003) offers:

To decolonize our history and our historical imaginations, we must uncover the voices from the past that honor multiple experiences, instead of falling prey to that which is easy – allowing the white colonial heteronormative gaze to reconstruct and reinterpret our past. (p. 123).

Pérez's discussion of colonization as it relates to and is enacted through history, highlights how colonization is not only the violent takeover of land, but is also ideological, privileging the beliefs, practices, and languages of the colonizer. To decolonize, Pérez offers we must not only begin to imagine what other histories might look like, but also move to locate and (re)write those histories. Pérez's theoretical concept provides a lens for understanding how dominant histories have been written and privileged within school curriculums. In doing so, educational practitioners and researchers can look to alternative educational projects, or imagine other histories within an educational context. Beginning with our own families and communities, we can facilitate a process of decolonization within our schools and school curriculums (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Flores Carmona and Delgado Bernal, 2012; Calderón, 2010).

Thinking of decolonization through the works of Chicana/Latina feminist scholars like Pérez is relevant to this research on Latina/o elementary youth because it is situated within a discourse of borderland experiences, or what it means to live 'in between' borders, in between two cultures, two countries, two languages, and resulting and competing identities (Anzaldúa, 1999; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Elenes, 2011; Villenas, 2010; Saavedra and Nymark, 2008). Chicana/Latina feminist scholars highlight the messiness, contradictions, pain, but also the potential transformation associated with borderland experiences (Anzaldúa, 1999; Villenas, 2010; Elenes, 2011; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Flores Carmona and Delgado Bernal, 2012). As such, borderlanders, like Chicanas and Latinas, are able to see beneath the surface of dominant narratives that misrepresent and/or vilify women and communities of color. In this way Chicanas/Latinas locate and name their unique histories and subjectivities. Moreover, in regards to processes of decolonization, Chicana/Latina feminist scholars recognize that colonization and decolonization are situated within specific histories and contexts, and as a result, decolonial movements do not follow a particular template or formula. Chicana/Latina feminist scholars also recognize the colonized, or marginalized groups, can never completely escape colonization, white supremacy,

racism, patriarchy, or heteronormativity. Historically colonized communities must constantly develop strategies to navigate, confront, resist and eventually transform those ideologies and practices in place that oppress women and people of color (Anzaldúa, 1999; Pérez, 1999; Lugones, 2003). In my analysis of the AOHP's decolonial potential, I recognize no one can ever live outside of colonization – that colonization is all around and even within us, our families, communities, and institutions. I use the term 'decolonial potential' to recognize this process as one that is ongoing, never-ending, complex, yet necessary. 'Decolonial potential' recognizes and honors a commitment to constantly striving to transform schools and curriculums and to move towards an educational system that is anti-oppressive.

## DATA COLLECTION AND METHODS

I have worked as an AOHP co-coordinator since the fall of 2010. The AOHP is a collaboration between second through sixth grade dual immersion teachers, Jackson students, and AOHP coordinators, myself and my colega Socorro who work to develop culturally relevant oral history projects. Once the projects begin, AOHP meets weekly for one hour each week in each dual immersion classroom throughout the academic school year. These weekly meetings culminate in a multimedia presentation at the end of the school year, usually held in the school library. The Adelante Partnership receives IRB through the University of Utah to audio/video record any events, curricular projects, interviews, focus groups, photos, and pláticas that take place at the elementary school. The curriculum analyzed in this paper comes from the 2011–2012 academic school year. Data collected include: participant observation; informal pláticas with students, Jackson faculty and Adelante staff; and analysis of student work.

## AOHP CURRICULUM'S DECOLONIAL POTENTIAL

The Adelante Oral Histories Project began in 2007–2008. Jackson Elementary teachers expressed a desire for culturally relevant classroom material for their students (Flores Carmona & Delgado Bernal, 2012). As a response, the Adelante Partnership developed the AOHP to collaborate with Jackson teachers, students, and families in creating and implementing culturally relevant projects that reflected, or at least created a space, for the students' histories and experiences. Informed by the scholarship of Delgado Bernal (2002), the AOHP operates on the belief that Jackson Elementary students, families, and the larger community embody

wisdom and knowledge that can contribute to the curriculum, and more importantly, can enhance students' education. To do this, the AOHP emphasizes qualitative research methods, such as interviewing and note taking, in its curriculum.

Jackson students, teachers, parents and families collaborate “to co-produce intergenerational knowledge that centers the epistemologies of their families,” (Flores Carmona & Delgado Bernal, 2012). The AOHP aims to draw from the everyday teachings and learning that often take place within the home, usually through family histories (Delgado Bernal, 2001; 2002). Previous oral history projects include students researching the history of their name; genealogical research; migration stories; stories of familial events; and digital stories written during literacy time and produced during computer class (Flores Carmona & Delgado Bernal, 2012).

## THE STORY OF MY NAME/LA HISTORIA DE MI NOMBRE

The second grade oral history project at Jackson Elementary is inspired by the book *My name is María Isabel/Me Llamo María Isabel* by Alma Flor Ada. The book, written specifically for youth, focuses on the experiences of María Isabel, a young Latina growing up and attending school in the U.S. The book focuses on the various encounters María Isabel experiences in a U.S. public school as a bicultural and bilingual student. For example, María Isabel's schoolteacher insists on simplifying and anglicizing María Isabel's name, without her permission, instead of taking the time to learn the correct pronunciation. As a result, María Isabel's schoolteacher renames María Isabel simply *Mary*.

This passage presents the opportunity to discuss the significance of naming in an elementary school classroom with second graders. Before introducing the oral history project to the Jackson students, the Adelante staff read this particular section from Alma Flor Ada's book then engage the class in a discussion about what María Isabel experienced. Students are asked if they have experienced anything similar with their own names, if they ever felt different because of their names, or if they knew the history of where their name comes from. AOHP coordinators also engage in a process of reciprocity by sharing with these youth their own experiences with their names – either wishing for a different one, or how it felt when people continuously mispronounced their names. After this *plática*, students are given a note to take home that explains the oral history project to parents and guardians and asks for their participation in answering interview questions that will help the students in



researching and writing the history of their name. The letters home are in both Spanish and English.

By inviting parents, guardians and family members to participate in the oral history project, the AOHP engages in a process of decolonization by not only centering the curriculum on the students, but also recognizing and validating familial and cultural knowledge. Parents, guardians and family members are welcomed into the classroom, disrupting traditional models of schooling and colonizing school curriculums that do not recognize nor value the epistemologies, culture, and histories of communities of color. While on the surface this oral history project meets state-mandated core curriculum standards in that it requires the students to develop their writing skills, prepare a rough draft, make edits, and rewrite a final draft, the students also exercise critical thinking skills, and further, engage in a process of decolonization. While not explicit, the assignment, in focusing on María Isabel's experience in school as a bicultural and bilingual Latina, highlights the historically colonizing and racist practice of *naming* within schooling institutions, which is tied to a history of 'Americanizing' /assimilating students of color into dominant white culture (Ruiz, 2008; Montejano, 1987).

Vicki Ruiz (2008), in her historiographic research on Mexican and Mexican American women of the twentieth century, documents the ways in which these women navigated racist social service programs available to them along the U.S. Mexico Border, aimed at their and their families' assimilation into the U.S., especially their children via Americanization programs oftentimes implemented via schools. Mexican and Mexican American mothers were taught how to 'properly' bathe their children and how to prepare 'quality' food based off the U.S. food pyramid (Ruiz, 2008). During this time after World War I and presently I argue, theoretical conceptualizations of childhood reflect white, middle class ideologies, creating dominant narratives of white childhood as innocent and pure and a contrasting and colonizing narrative of Mexican and Mexican American children as delinquent, criminal, dirty and thus, in need of discipline and 'Americanization'. Schools historically and presently function to 'Americanize' Latina/o children and other students of color with curriculums and discourses centered on Eurocentric ideas of history, citizenship, and democracy (Calderón, 2010). In doing so, schools function to control, discipline and assimilate youth of color, denying their humanity as these experience it through their culture, families and communities.

The oral history project aims to validate Latina/o students' experiences and celebrate their identities as a means to include their ethnic identities, through recognition and validation of their names, cultures,

languages, and life histories. In this way, The Story of my Name project is decolonizing because it is humanizing (Anzaldúa, 1999; Fanon, 2008). The project is humanizing in that it: 1) introduces Latina/o students to the experiences and histories of historically colonized communities and recognizing how institutions such as schools can contribute to their oppression; 2) it provides a space for these students to reflect on their own experiences with discrimination; 3) through a process of reflection, sharing, and writing, students engage in processes of healing by speaking back to moments when they felt their humanity was diminished, and can tell their own stories about their own person; 4) students learn about each other and learn the value of their name and their self; 5) students develop research skills that prepare them academically but also learn how to excavate knowledge from their homes, parents, families, and cultures.

From the students, we learn how parents consciously and thoughtfully searched for a name for their child that reflected their ideologies and family histories. Students learn about the stories behind the moments leading up to their birth dates, to their lives. They learn about ancestors, about special grandparents, or religious days and respective saints that provided the motivation for their names. They learn about indigenous histories and languages and that some of their names originate from the Nahuatl language or from bicultural lineage.

In this project, students do not have to disconnect their selves from their homes, families, ethnicities or languages like traditional curriculums and standardized testing have them do, and instead learn about, share and validate their names and origin stories. I argue this project and moreover the process of completing this project is humanizing academically, emotionally, and culturally. Through the AOHP's curriculum, second grade students not only have the opportunity to research and write about the history of their names, learning about their selves and family members in the process, but are also afforded a space in the classroom to think about and question the process of naming. What do names mean? Where do names come from? Why did their parents or guardians choose their respective names? Are names important, and why? What does it mean for a schoolteacher to mispronounce, or completely rename a student?

Through the AOHP Story of My Name lesson plan, the second graders engage in an assignment that contributes to a sense of empowerment, identity formation and validation when thinking of their selves and their families within an institution of schooling that has historically silenced and/or erased them. Through this curriculum, the students, their families, their names, and their stories are placed at the heart of the assignment and the students literally get to 'say' their selves through final

presentations where they stand in front of their classroom peers, teachers, parents and family members and introduce who they are and where they come from through a story of their namesake.

Although the oral-history project demonstrates decolonial potential, the project is not without its limitations. For marginalized groups, access to historical documents or genealogical information may be limited. Further, undocumented students and families may feel unsure and even fearful about sharing personal information. Additionally, students are often socialized to understand and produce assignments in a particular way; one that meets the teachers' exact requirements. As a result, students will strive to produce a work that is expected of them and closely resembles a particular model shared in class in order to receive good grades, rather than produce a work that may be more meaningful for them. Further complicating this issue is finding a way to assess whether a student produced a work in a manner most meaningful for them. These complexities and limitations in attempting to achieve decoloniality within a public schooling institution and curriculum will be discussed later in the paper.

## MUSIC OF THE HOME/MÚSICA DEL HOGAR

Another AOHP assignment is the fifth grade oral history project that is a digital story presentation focusing on Music of the Home. The students are asked to research and create a two-three minute multimedia presentation that showcases what they have learned about their families and selves in regards to the impact music has played in their lives. The idea for the Music of the Home project came from a panel at the 2011 National Association of Chicana and Chicano Studies conference in Pasadena, California. After listening to Wanda Alarcon share an essay on the impact of new wave music on her identity as a queer Chicana adolescent, scholar activists Emma Pérez and Alicia Gaspar de Alba reflected on the many liberatory possibilities of music. As I am developing in this essay, I would argue that developing the themes of Wanda Alarcon's essay into school curriculum demonstrates its decolonial potential. These mujeres were excited about developing an in-class writing assignment that would ask students to write about the impact music has played on their identities and lives, as a means to prioritize student experiential knowledge and also provide a space in which to explore students' positionalities. The AOHP co-coordinators were motivated to extend this idea to Latina/o elementary youth and develop curriculum for fifth grade youth to explore themselves and identity through music and digital media.

Student ideas for this project ranged from interviewing family members who are musicians and currently playing in bands, interviewing family members involved in danza Azteca, researching parents' or guardians' favorite musical groups and songs, and interviewing relatives that play musical instruments. One student enthusiastically offered he wanted to complete his oral history project on the New Boyz, a teen hip-hop duo out of Los Angeles, California that created the hit single, "You're a Jerk" which introduced the popular dance craze 'jerkin,' (Thurston, n.d.). This curriculum exhibits decolonial potential in that the focus of the project is away from Eurocentric values, epistemologies and histories that only value institutionally defined knowledge, and instead prioritizes the unique and varied experiences and subjectivities of the students and their families as valuable knowledge. The incorporation of music as a theme in which to examine the home and ultimately, positionality, provides a unique lens in which to analyze the complexities of identity beyond other oral history projects, like *Story of My Name*. Through music, this curriculum blurs, or queers (Pérez, 2003) identity and further, traditional school curriculums. Pérez contends we must learn to "queer" history, "queer" research methodologies and practices, and "queer" border theory to locate silenced voices and histories. In retraining ourselves to see with a critical decolonial queer gaze, Pérez (2003) hopes "for different possibilities and interpretations of what exists in the gaps and silences but is often not seen or heard," (p. 129). Pérez's 'queering' of history is especially useful in working with students of color and developing decolonial school curriculums. In the case of the fifth grade oral history project, the incorporation of music as a lens in which to explore family histories and identities pushes the AOHP to recognize and attempt to understand the complexities of identity and to "queer" our own expectations and understandings regarding how students identify themselves. This should open up new possibilities for students to express themselves from their positionality as youth of color growing up and attending U.S. public schools today, possibilities unimagined and unexplored by researchers and adults who may not have the context or experience to recognize the valuable epistemological contributions youth can contribute to curriculum that can help decolonize education.

The second grade oral history project on the history of students' names is an example of the decolonial potential students contributions may have in transforming school curriculums in that it situates their voice, history and culture. However, despite the AOHP's best effort to create a culturally relevant and inclusive assignment, there are still expectations held by the partnership on what a culturally relevant project should look like. For the predominantly Mexican and Mexican American

students, the expectation is that the projects will recognize and celebrate students' bicultural experiences as both Mexican and American students attending school in the U.S. From the second grade Story of my Name project there are certain unspoken expectations regarding the outcomes of the presentations. For example, my expectation is that students will share stories of being named after family members, grandparents perhaps, or for religious families, after patron saints. These expectations reflect a limiting and bounding representation of Mexican and Mexican American culture. Further, these expectations speak to assumptions regarding what culture is, or *should* look like. The fifth grade oral history project explodes these expectations through the incorporation of music. In the case of the student interested in researching the New Boyz for his oral history project, this student is already exploding expectations of culture and identity. Since the majority of the student population at Jackson is Latina/o, specifically Mexican and Mexican American, as a coordinator of the oral history project I sometimes expect the final presentations to reflect Mexican and/or Mexican American culture and music, such as rancheras or corridos. However, the student wishing to research the New Boyz explodes expectations regarding culture and identity. For this student, a young Mexicano born and attending school in the U.S., his identity reflects a hybridity of cultures, gender norms, musical genres, and experiences tied to his positionality as a young man of color. His connection to hip-hop as a representation of music of his home (he mentioned his father and his brother all listened to New Boyz together) represents a fusion of identity. The incorporation of music for this oral history project allowed for the AOHP to extend even further, pushing the project to not only carve a space for students of color in school curriculums, but to allow for fluidity within that third space (Pérez, 2003).

Through the use of music, the fifth grade Music of my Home project illuminated a hidden third space where intergenerational enjoyment of New Boyz music highlighted the influence of US cultural and gender norms on men in Mexican and Mexican American families. The assignment possesses decolonial potential by pushing Jackson teachers and the Adelante Partnership to broaden its scope when developing and implementing culturally relevant curriculum, creating a space for students' unique subjectivities to emerge, and exploding traditional expectations of culture and identity. Again, given that the AOHP's curriculum operates within a public schooling institution, there are limitations in how much this particular lesson can challenge traditional curriculum. The following section explores the potential challenges and limitations of developing curriculum through a lens of decoloniality in a public elementary school.

## LIMITATIONS

Although it possesses decolonial potential, the AOHP's work is only to interject the familial, cultural and community knowledge of Jackson students and their families into the classroom and curriculum. Neither the Adelante Partnership nor the AOHP clearly state in its mission or vision that one of the goals of the partnership and the oral histories project is to decolonize schools and school curriculum. If they would, it is probable that they would be confronted with institutional challenges and limitations that prevent it from fully engaging in a process of decolonizing the school curriculum. This is evident in the discourse surrounding the goals of the partnership and the AOHP reflect that of institutions of education, instead of goals of challenging discrimination, let alone any theoretical discourse centered on decolonization and colonialism. The limitations of following the rules of educational institutions reflects a major challenge of the Adelante Partnership and AOHP. In choosing to operate within a public school in Salt Lake City, Utah, Adelante is confronted with developing strategies to navigate this structure of schooling, which has imbedded within the school culture a history of functioning colonialism and colonizing schooling practices and curriculums. Choosing to operate within a public elementary school is purposeful in that the Adelante Partnership and the AOHP seek to attempt to transform traditional models of education and curriculums that affect the majority of school aged youth of color. However, the partnership and AOHP recognize this transformation must come strategically and incrementally.

Decolonial goals for education also face competition with the socialization process students have endured since the beginning of their academic careers in public education. Despite the decolonial potential of the AOHP's curriculum, movements towards decolonizing how students are taught to disregard their histories and selves can be derailed by divested and racist teachers, as well as teaching practices that enforce the culture of the school. During the 2011-2012 academic school year the AOHP co-coordinators worked with a Jackson faculty member who did not support the goals of the Story of the Name project. As a result, when she modeled examples of the lesson in the class, her examples were surface level and detached from a critical exploration of culture, history, ethnicity, and identity. This teacher presented an example of her own history of her name the students wanted to model – since she held the authority of the teacher. Her story was brief, did not involve qualitative research methods of interviewing, did not tell a story, and merely fulfilled the basic requirements of the assignment. However, when

an AOHP co-coordinator modeled the activity, she presented an in-depth account of the history of her name, her experiences with racial microaggressions regarding her name, how she would be renamed by people who struggled to pronounce, or worse, would not even try to say her name correctly. Even so, given that the Jackson faculty are the authorities of the classroom space, this particular teachers' enforcement of traditional authoritative power limited the decolonial potential of the AOHP's curriculum.

The authoritative power of teachers to determine the parameters of acceptable knowledge also reveals itself in the socialization students experience in schools. Many of the students interpret classroom instructions somewhat literally and rigidly due to a fear of reprisal for stepping outside the boundaries of acceptable knowledge. Reflective of a culture of standardized testing, many of the students are socialized to produce work in a specific format. As such, in creating oral history projects, some students expect direct instruction and a template of the final outcome of their projects. Rather than feeling inspired to explore and express their creativity, some students express uncertainty and concern over an assignment that allows for the students to excavate their own histories and create a presentation that is meaningful to them. Ironically, when students, such as the fifth grader excited to produce a project on the New Boyz, do find themselves inspired to express their creativity and think outside of the box, the AOHP, in collaborating with Jackson teachers, administrators and parents, express uncertainty in how to work within the discourse of the institution of schooling. Even AOHP staff struggle with helping students navigate the boundaries of acceptable knowledge in educational institutions without stifling the students' voice and creativity. How does the AOHP allow for this student to produce a work that reflects his hybrid identity, while also meeting mainstream expectations of a culturally relevant oral history project? Will Jackson teachers and administrators recognize this sort of presentation on a hip-hop group as valid and scholarly? Will his parents or guardians? Will this affect the sustainability of the AOHP and larger Adelante Partnership? Should the AOHP consider the expectations of teachers, parents and guardians when working with students to create their projects, or should students have free reign? These questions reflect the complexity, contradictions, pain and hope involved in developing and implementing the decolonial potential of school curriculums that prioritize the experiential knowledge students possess over the authority of educational institutions have in determining acceptable knowledge.

## POSSIBILITIES

Issahaku (2010) describes the process of decolonizing the education system as a “difficult but possible task,” (p. 46). The AOHP reflects the possibilities for decolonial moments, and as such, decolonizing the U.S. public school system and curriculum. While limited, the AOHP reflects hope for change. In some ways, the AOHP must navigate a presently colonizing institution, however its presence alone within this space is decolonizing. The existence of an oral history project that aims to center the experiences and epistemologies of historically marginalized students and their families in a public schooling institution begins to chip away at educational institutions that uphold the colonial goals. In colonial contexts, the histories and life experiences of these students, their families and larger communities are meant to be silenced, erased, and forgotten as a means of maintaining power over these communities. Even the renaming of these students demonstrates the colonial goal of negating students’ agency over the definition of themselves and upholding the authority of the institution to impose identifiers. The consequences of this in our world today are dire considering the imposed definitions of brown bodies that justify incarceration, exploited labor, and sexual objectification. However, if only even for a few moments, the AOHP provides a space for students to excavate and celebrate these silenced histories and define for themselves the significance being. Through an exercise of validating their experiential knowledge, students’ could begin to conceive of ways to self-determine what constitutes valuable knowledge and envision a future free from the colonial authority of educational institutions to set the parameters of acceptable knowledge.

While there are many factors outside of education that have to contribute to the decolonization of our society, the AOHP represents a real life attempt in a real school in Salt Lake City, Utah to chip away at the epistemic power of colonialism. Despite the many challenges and limitations the AOHP must confront in the face of a legacy of colonizing and imperialistic schooling, the AOHP represents an attempt to speak back. This signifies the recognition of unequal schooling practices and the refusal to allow these schooling practices to continue unquestioned and unchanged. Issahaku (2010) recognizes decolonization as a process, a “costly and time consuming undertaking,” but given the alternative – the acceptance and reproduction of colonialism – the AOHP recognizes for students in U.S. public schools and for society as a collective, there is no other option. The push for decolonial moments through decolonizing school curriculums via alternative educational projects is not only a



strategy, but also a commitment, and a never-ending mission. The AOHP reflects one way to engage in a process of decolonizing our schools that deserves attention, implementation, and further elaboration.

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