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Community Engagement in TPC Programs During Times of Crisis: Embracing Chicana and Latina Feminist Practices

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Abstract. Drawing on lessons gathered while teaching community engagement in technical communication courses during the COVID-19 pandemic, two Latina instructors, one in New Mexico and one in Florida, highlight the value that Chicana and Latina feminism can bring to technical communication pedagogies. The authors share course assignments and student examples that demonstrate their applications of Chicana/Latina feminist practices in technical communication. Through *pláticas* and testimonios, methodologies and methods grounded in Latina/Chicana feminism, the authors demonstrate how they navigate the challenges of the pandemic while also creating spaces for students to share, heal, and contribute to the activist work taking place in their communities. The article concludes by proposing a pedagogy of love as an approach for teaching technical communication through a Chicana/Latina feminist orientation.

Keywords: Chicana Feminism, Latina Feminism, Community Engagement, Testimonios

Community engagement has long been incorporated into Technical and Professional Communication (TPC) pedagogies, as TPC researchers and teachers recognize the value of providing students with opportunities to serve their local communities while learning new TPC practices (Bowdon & Scott, 2002; Scott, 2004; Scott, 2008). As Tatiana Batova (2020) explains, community engagement in TPC “shows students the real-life impacts of their writing, teaches them how to navigate complex problems and engage in course materials more deeply, and encourages them to take more responsibility for their own success” (n. pag.). Recently, TPC scholars have begun writing about the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic is having on community engagement TPC pedagogies, particularly when TPC courses are taught in condensed online modes during times of crisis (Batova 2020; St.Amant 2020). Kirk St.Amant (2020) proposes that “technical communicators can make important contributions to these situations by developing materials that meet local informational needs” (p. 211). Allowing students to experience the role of technical communicators as community-engaged practitioners helps them acquire important technical and soft skills needed in both their academic activities and their professional careers.

Drawing on these conversations, this research article outlines how we, two technical communication instructors, one in New Mexico and one in Florida, incorporated community engagement projects in our online TPC courses during the Fall of 2020. Using a testimonio methodology that foregrounds storytelling and collaboration (Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, & Carmona, 2012; Latina Feminist Group, 2001), we describe our approaches to community engagement in TPC courses during times of crisis, and we then share collective strategies that can be applied in other TPC courses focused on community engagement. In the sections that follow, we first begin by tracing ongoing conversations about the role that community engagement plays in contemporary TPC pedagogies. Then, we describe how we gathered data, through a testimonio methodology grounded in Chicana/Latina epistemologies, from two TPC courses that incorporated community engagement during the Fall semester of 2020. In this discussion, we will address the topic of this special issue by noting how community engagement pedagogies in TPC both challenged students who faced pain and loss during the pandemic, and how these pedagogies also supported students by providing avenues for them to connect with each other and with their local communities during times of increased isolation and disconnection. We will then explain how we connected our courses to current research in TPC, and also how we embraced Chicana/Latina feminist

epistemologies in our community-engaged TPC curricula. Through examples of student projects, class discussions, and student feedback, we argue that a Chicana/Latina feminist orientation can help instructors intentionally and successfully incorporate community engagement into their TPC courses, specifically by 1) fostering a pedagogy of love in and outside the classroom, 2) establishing methods for securing reciprocity and respect in community projects, and 3) encouraging ethical collaborations among students and their community partners.

Community Engagement in TPC

As TPC practitioners and researchers continue to find ways to better apply user-centered approaches, community engagement is gaining ground. Emma Rose et al. (2017), for instance, explain that “community-based research projects are highly localized,” and thus these projects have become an ideal approach to engage with underrepresented groups. As the global pandemic forces us to adjust to new realities, St.Amant (2020, p. 226) proposes that technical communicators engage with communities to provide meaningful contributions that address public health challenges. Further, Natasha N. Jones (2016) argues that community-based research positions the technical communicator not only as a mediator but as a community advocate by working collaboratively to address complex community issues. TPC practitioners can help address the needs of local communities during critical times by “developing materials for distribution via multiple formats” and working with organizations to “raise awareness of these resources within communities,” as St.Amant (2020) points out (p. 219). Similarly, Batova (2020) argues that using community-engaged approaches in TPC courses helps students experience content in real life contexts. TPC scholars have also discussed how community engagement helps students in TPC courses become “active participants and co-decision makers” while producing technical communication texts, especially when working in user-centered projects (Scott, 2008, p. 382). Engaging with communities through TPC projects helps researchers, practitioners, educators, and students experience user-centered approaches at a deeper level. Therefore, community engagement is key to provide technical communicators with opportunities to experience their role as community advocates.

While there is a long history of community engagement research in technical communication, it’s important to note that community engagement is a field of study in itself that has deep roots in communities of color. As such, when working to incorporate community engagement projects, lessons, and approaches in our technical com-

munication courses, we as authors of this paper wanted to be intentional in centralizing the work of activist scholars of color in both our methods and methodologies.

For example, Chicana feminist educator J. Estrella Torrez (2015) explains that there are vast distinctions between service-learning models in education and critical service-learning or civic engagement orientations (p. 3). As Torrez (2015) clarifies, "Service-learning is best understood as a pedagogical tool incorporating community service into classroom learning to expand the students' understanding of course materials (Mitchell, 2008; Rimmerman, 2009). Service-learning can also be used to empower students to solve issues within communities in which they may or may not be community members (Farber, 2011)" (p. 3). With this focus on the student and course objectives (and lack of focus on community impact), service-learning is different from what Torrez (2015) describes as "critical service-learning" (p. 3). "Similar to civic engagement," Torrez (2015) explains, "critical service-learning is a political project," one through which "students develop the critical awareness in relation to what gives rise to the dark social realities of the present as well as gain the desire to remake the social world for the lives of all people (Porfilio & Hickman, 2011, p. xi)" (p. 4). Thus, rather than focusing on "serving" a community, "critical service-learning project's expectations are to interrogate systems of oppression, work to dismantle social inequities, and forge authentic relationships between higher education institutions and the community 'served' (Porfilio & Hickman, 2011)" (Torrez, 2015, p. 4).

Drawing on Torrez's definitions, we embrace community engagement through a critical service-learning framework that pushes both instructors and students to consider their own positionalities in working with communities outside the university, and that actively works to redress oppression. At the same time, we bring together Torrez's discussion of critical service learning with work in technical communication that highlights an emphasis on community accountability, reciprocity, and collaboration in communication design (Rose et al., 2017).

Testimonio Methodology

In this paper, we introduce grounded examples of how we practiced community engagement in two introduction to technical communication courses, one in New Mexico (Nora) and one in Florida (Laura). Our goal in bringing our pedagogical approaches together is to develop transferable strategies and takeaways for incorporating community engagement into technical communication curricula, particularly during the pandemic and other times of crisis.

To bring together two models for practicing community engagement in technical communication courses, we practiced testimonio methodologies. As two Latina instructors navigating teaching, grief, loss, and family care amidst the pandemic, testimonio methodologies allowed us to be in community and in relation with each other as we taught our individual courses, coming together to engage in conversations, or *pláticas*, about our classes at multiple points in the semester.

Testimonio is a methodology commonly used by Chicana and Latina Feminist scholars (Delgado et al., 2012; Latina Feminist Group, 2001). A testimonio can be both a product and process that “challenges objectivity by situating the individual in communion with a collective experience marked by marginalization, oppression, or resistance” (Delgado et al., 2012, p. 363). It is a personal account that links a collective experience to promote social change (Rivera, 2020). And yet this important methodology continues to be underutilized in fields centered around technology, such as TPC. Using testimonio methodology fosters community praxes important to both educators of color and students of color in TPC courses. For example, Norma Cantú (2012) argues that testimonios help Chicanas connect with careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) by allowing Chicanas to examine the roles of parents, teachers, and their community, and by reflecting on how these roles connect with their gender and ethnicity. Similarly, Laura Gonzales, Kendall Leon, and Ann Shivers-McNair (2020) used testimonio methodology to explore the need for more purposeful curricula development in Technical and Professional Writing courses within the context of HSIs. Testimonios have become a process of reflecting that promote resilience and solidarity through *pláticas* or dialogue (Flores et al., 2018). Reflective *pláticas* in testimonios, however, are not necessarily always external dialogues. Lisa Mendoza (2020) proposes testimonios as a methodology that can be used as a means to self-reflect on pedagogical practices which impact both the journey of scholars and the journey of students. Another important aspect of testimonios is its capacity for healing by releasing a *desahogo*, which is defined as a “cathartic act” that releases a “distressful sentiment that keeps a person on the brink of not being able to breath” (Rivera, 2020, p. 63). As Nora Rivera (2020) argues, through a *desahogo*, Latinas and Chicanas are able to restore ourselves and explore new possibilities amidst our ongoing struggles, including those faced during a global health crisis.

Testimonios are a valuable methodology that can help our TPC field by promoting both external and internal dialogues that reflect on individual experiences as they relate to our personal and professional

communities and to our advocacy praxes. We used this methodology to thread together stories about how we were navigating teaching during times of crisis, as we were also experiencing stress and loss. During the pandemic, our students and our communities are also experiencing stress and loss, so we embraced this project around the question: how do we teach and learn technical communication and community engagement through a pandemic? This is what testimonio allowed us to process and work through.

Methods

Embracing a testimonio methodology, throughout the fall and summer of 2020, we engaged in monthly *pláticas* or dialogue regarding our courses. In these discussions, we reflected on how our students were engaging with the community engagement elements of our class, how they were managing our course's workload given the stress and anxiety of the pandemic, and how we felt as we navigated our own institutional politics while supporting our families, students, and communities. These monthly *pláticas* also gave us a space for *desahogos*, which helped us rebuild our commitment to our practice and explore new ways of approaching the challenges of teaching in the context of a global pandemic.

During each *plática*, we took notes regarding the specific strategies that we were using to navigate the current pandemic while teaching technical communication courses. While we did not transcribe or systematically code our conversations, following a testimonio methodology meant that we engaged in a process of listening and witnessing each other's journeys through the semester, and that we then applied lessons from our conversations throughout our courses. We did not wait until the semester was over to code and analyze our conversations and apply findings to our course design; instead, we engaged in *pláticas*, which often included *desahogos* throughout the semester, took notes on our conversations, and then applied lessons gathered from the process of dialogue to our course design in the moment. We then processed these pedagogical adjustments and their effectiveness in the next *plática* as we continued our reciprocal process of sharing and adjusting to the current situation. This process was especially helpful in navigating the pandemic, where the health situation, university protocols, and our own individual circumstances were changing consistently and thus pushing us to adapt our teaching methods and processes accordingly. Our data sources include the *pláticas* themselves, the notes that we gathered throughout the semester, as well

as the embodied experience of navigating and adapting our technical communication pedagogies throughout the pandemic.

As two instructors who centralize community engagement in their research and service work, in our *pláticas*, we discussed how we could leverage our skills and those of our students to better support our surrounding communities. Given that communities of color are disproportionately impacted by the pandemic due to racialized violence, we wanted to use our class time to engage in conversations about social justice with our students, and to provide an avenue for them to positively contribute to the advocacy work being done by technical communication practitioners in organizations within their local contexts. Throughout the semester, *pláticas* became spaces to process the state of the pandemic while also collaboratively developing common themes and takeaways about the possibilities and limitations of practicing community engagement in technical communication.

In the sections that follow, we first provide an overview of each course introduced in this article, focusing on the student demographics, the institutional context, and the specific course assignments and community partners. These materials reflect the changes we incorporated throughout the semester as we adapted our course plans throughout the pandemic and its shifting conditions. We share student sample projects from each course, before discussing how a pedagogy of love through a Chicana/Latina feminist orientation allowed us to teach technical communication effectively during the pandemic. These examples were central to our *pláticas* and thus represent how we collaboratively developed lessons, implications, and takeaways from our semester of teaching.

Nora's Course Description

As the global pandemic forced us to rely on digital technology, our new reality disturbed students' learning experiences and challenged our pedagogical practices at different levels. It is within this context that I designed a course aimed at providing meaningful learning experiences to students during the fall of 2020. Through my testimonio as a Latina educator teaching in a field where Latinx educators are largely underrepresented, I trace and interweave my individual experience with the collective interactions of students in and outside our digital classroom. I also show how our communal experience during the global pandemic taught me the various ways in which TPC classrooms can become more compassionate and inclusive spaces.

Like most educators around the world, I came to the fall semester of 2020 knowing that all my courses were going to be conducted ex-

clusively online. As I prepared for the classes, I considered the implications of what my curriculum might look like based on the backgrounds of my students. The university where I taught this course is a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) with a Hispanic student population of over 55%. Most undergraduates at this institution major in engineering and business areas, and my courses mirrored the school's demographics. As a Latinx faculty member in the Department of English of this HSI, it was important to provide students with a learning experience meaningful to their immediate context. Plus, as someone with industry background, I also wanted to give students real-world experience outside the classroom. Nonetheless, online learning amid the pain and loss that the pandemic brought to our community revealed a more pressing challenge. The pandemic brought an increased isolation that provoked serious apathy and depression among students, and thus I wanted my course to become a space for student engagement and collaboration.

My course had an emphasis on technical and scientific communication, and thus many of my students came from engineering majors. Knowing that this course was going to be conducted asynchronously, I wanted to provide a well-rounded survey of the field and its genres in a meaningful way, along with ample opportunities for students to interact with one another. To this end, I developed a syllabus that had at its core a collaborative community-based project, largely based on St. Amant's (2020) article "Communicating About COVID-19: Practices for Today, Planning for Tomorrow," which I will describe in detail in the following section. This course also had an individual project component that aimed at exploring technical communication from a problem-solving lens. Around these two projects, I constructed assignments and activities that gave students opportunities to interact through peer reviews and discussions. It should be noted that I was given two sections of this particular course, each consisting of 26 students, which I cross listed in my learning management system. Therefore, I will refer to these two classes as one single course of 52 students. Table 1 shows the specific structure of this course, as described in my syllabus.

Table 1: Nora's Course Assignments

Class Activities (10%)	The class activities are activities designed to make sure that all of us are on the same page. Some of these activities will also help you test online applications in order to prevent problems in future assignments.
Profession Exploration (15%)	The profession exploration assignments are designed as an opportunity to learn about technical and scientific communication in your field. You will look at career options in your field, conduct an interview with someone who works in your area of study, and familiarize yourself with an academic journal in your field.
Community-Based Project (25%)	The purpose of the community-based assignments is to learn to create relevant and meaningful technical documents for a specific audience while practicing essential collaborative skills. Kirk St.Amant (2020) believes that technical communicators can make meaningful contributions to local communities by creating materials that address their specific needs. Drawing on St.Amant's work, you will collaborate with your team to produce materials that help address the current public health needs of a specific community. You will create instructions for identifying a condition, steps for shopping strategically, protocols for assessing sources of information, procedures on how to care for others, and instructions on how to interact virtually. Your team will also conduct and record a video presentation using a screencast application.

Problem-Based Project (25%)	This project is designed to create an opportunity for you to enhance your problem-solving skills. Based on your personal interests, you will identify a product, service, or process with a significant problem which affects multiple individuals. You will reimagine the product, service, or process you selected and redesign a technical description, recreate its instructions, specs, and/or procedures, and write a research report.
Peer Reviews (10%)	These assignments are designed as opportunities to practice giving and receiving meaningful peer feedback. These assignments will also give us the chance to learn to navigate through collaborative cloud-based software features with which we may not be familiar.
Discussions (15%)	The purpose of discussion posts is to cultivate interaction while reflecting on technical and scientific communication scholarship in multicultural contexts. Discussion posts are not meant to be used as debate forums where participants point out errors and debate who is right, but rather as reflective dialogues where participants learn from one another. We will be expected to contribute with thoughtful and meaningful ideas in a professional and respectful manner.

Laura's Course Description

My course was an introduction to professional communication class themed specifically as community engagement in technical communication. According to the course description:

“The purpose of this course is to engage in collaborative learning about what it means to study not only in a University, but in a community that extends beyond the walls of a single in-

stitution. Learning and growth cannot happen amidst a global pandemic unless we take the time to reflect on the many communities that we as human beings, students, family members, and more are constantly influencing and are being influenced by. Rather than pretend the technical communication classroom can be abstracted from what is happening in the world, this class will help all of us create a collective space for learning and reflection by pausing and engaging with each other, with our histories and lived experiences, as well as with the multiple communities and histories surrounding us. Through collective reading, storytelling, listening, and collaboration, this course will provide you with an opportunity to collaborate with a community organization on various technical communication materials."

I taught this course at a public state institution in Florida that enrolls over 50,000 students per year. The course consisted of 25 students whose demographics echoed those of this predominantly white institution: 4 students identified as Black, with two identifying as African American and two identifying as Haitian American, 4 students identified as Hispanic or Latinx from Puerto Rico, Brazil, and Cuba, one student identified as a Chinese international student, and 16 students identified as white.

Students in this course read technical communication scholarship about community engagement paired alongside activist scholarship from various fields and disciplines. For example, students read *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds* by adrienne maree brown and "Suspending Damage: A letter to communities" by Eve Tuck alongside Natasha Jones' "The Technical Communicator as Advocate," and Kendall Leon's "Chicanas Making Change: Institutional Rhetoric and the Comisión Femenil Mexicana Nacional." To prepare for their community engagement projects, students also read about the racial disparities of their local community, specifically reading the documents "Family Separation and the Sunshine State" by Smith et al., "Understanding Racial Inequity in Alachua County", and Common Data Set UF Enrollment Data 2017-2018. These links provided students with important context about their community. Since our university is located in what is commonly referred to as a "college town," many of my students had not spent time interacting with community members outside the university and its immediate surroundings. For this reason, it was important for students to learn about the racial disparities and racial histories of the city that often ignores these dynamics.

The course was divided into three major projects, each of which

centered community engagement while also providing students opportunities to practice common technical communication genres such as report and memo writing and technical documentation design. Table 2 includes the major project descriptions for the course as described on the course syllabus.

Table 2: Laura's Course Assignments

Community Engagement Positionality Statement (150 points total)	This is a major course project with several pieces that you will work on throughout the semester. In this assignment, you will write a memo in which you: 1) provide your own definition of community engagement drawing on scholarship we read in this course as well as on what you learned through our guest lectures; and 2) provide examples of your own community engagement work. This can include examples that you created in this course as well as those created in other contexts. Your reading reflections, community journey box, community mapping project, community collaboration project, and other assignments can be incorporated into this statement. The statement will include both visual and written components and will be submitted in a digital format (using a content management system like Squarespace, Wordpress, etc.). You will present your community engagement positionality statement to the class through a video presentation at the end of the course.
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<p>Community Mapping Project (100 points total)</p>	<p>This is a major course project that asks you to apply your research about our local community to create a visualization that provides your own illustration of a specific aspect of the community. Using resources such as the Native Land app, the “Understanding Racial Inequity in Alachua County” report, several local organization websites, and research on the History of Gainesville and surrounding areas, you will create a “map” of the community. This map does not have to be only geographical; it can include different resources, landmarks, institutions, organizations, spaces, and places based on your own research and on our collective conversations. You will want to zoom in and be specific rather than just provide a general map of the area. The map can (and should) be both historical and contemporary. For example, you can create a map of bilingual schools in Gainesville, a map of how the city of Gainesville uses prison labor, a map of youth-oriented organizations in Gainesville, a map of the different languages spoken in Florida, a map that illustrates racial and class disparities in and beyond Gainesville, etc. These maps will be research-based and include both writing and visuals. Consider using a digital mapping tool such as Coggle.</p>
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Rural Women's Health Project Writing and Design Collaboration (150 points total)	As part of a community engagement course, we will not only read about and discuss but will also contribute to community engagement efforts by working with a local organization, the Rural Women's Health Project, to design materials that will be useful to the organization's mission. This project will require you to practice your participatory design and research skills to learn about an organization, listen to and apply feedback, and reflect on how to improve your collaboration strategies based on a community's interests and goals.
Weekly mini assignments and reading reflections (150 points total)	Each week, you will submit a mini-assignment and/or reading reflection that will be a building block for the three major course assignments. See the course calendar for descriptions of each mini assignment.
Total Possible Points	500

As evidenced by the two course descriptions, each of our classes had individual assignments and course readings that illustrate our different approaches to teaching community engagement in technical communication. During our *pláticas*, we discussed how our students approached our projects, where students struggled, and how we were experiencing the course as we navigated the pandemic on personal and professional levels. We also shared specific examples of our students' work, in order to draw out collective implications and strategies for practicing community engagement in technical communication, particularly during the pandemic.

Student Sample Projects

In this section, each of us shares student examples to illustrate how our students took up the assignments of each course. Through the discussion of these examples, we highlight the lessons that we collectively discussed during our *pláticas*.

Nora's Examples

Because my course was designed as a survey course, students were introduced to a wide variety of technical and professional documents through different projects. In the community-based project (CBP), specifically, students worked in teams of their own choosing. Then, each group selected a local nonprofit to partner with throughout the semester. This project was framed around the increasingly important social justice scholarship of recent decades (Jones, 2016; Jones, Moore, & Walton, 2016; Rose et al., 2017; Savage & Agboka, 2015) and around the important work on testimonios as a research methodology by Dolores Delgado, Rebeca Burciaga, and Judith Flores (2012), which students read throughout the semester. Most assignments in this project were modeled after Kirk St.Amant's (2020) article "Communicating About COVID-19: Practices for Today, Planning for Tomorrow." The assignments had the following outline:

- CBP1: Proposal
- CBP2: Instructions for Identifying a Condition
- CBP3: Steps for Shopping Strategically
- CBP4: Protocols for Assessing Sources of Information
- CBP5: Procedures on How to Care for Others
- CBP6: Instructions on How to Interact Virtually
- CBP7: Video Presentation

In the proposal, students identified and described their collaborative guidelines and responsibilities, including a description of the roles of all members, an explanation of how members of the group were going to communicate, how promptly they expected members to respond to communication, and how they were going to handle conflict. Students also created a timeline of their project and provided a detailed audience analysis of the nonprofit organization with which they chose to work. It should be noted that some groups selected nonprofits because at least one member of the group had a personal or professional connection to it. Table 3 lists and describes the nonprofits with which each group worked.

Table 3: List of nonprofit partners

Group	Nonprofit
Group 1	El Crucero A nonprofit that provides affordable housing for low-income families and individuals that are either at risk of being homeless or have been homeless.

Group	Nonprofit
Group 2	Boys and Girls Club An afterschool program for children between the ages of eight and eighteen.
Group 3	Children & Youth Program (CYP) A program within La Casa, Inc. which focuses on the well being of children who have witnessed domestic violence.
Group 4	El Caldito Soup Kitchen An organization that collects food to provide meals for the homeless and anyone in the community affected by poverty.
Group 5	Aggie Cupboard A food pantry program, part of NMSU, that provides food for free to students in need.
Group 6	La Casa, Inc. An organization dedicated to help prevent domestic violence through housing, advocacy, support, and counseling to domestic violence survivors.
Group 7	Mesilla Valley Community of Hope A local shelter that provides housing for the homeless.

Each group created content based on scientific research and designed documents that addressed the needs of, and appealed to, the audience of the nonprofit with whom they worked. All the internal communication within the groups and the external communication with the organizations was conducted using different technology platforms in accordance with the social distancing restrictions in the state of New Mexico during the Fall of 2020. At the end of the semester, each group created a video presentation that explained the process of working virtually with organizations throughout the community. In the video, students also reflected on this collaborative experience which allowed them to work with one another and with the community in the midst of a global pandemic.

Group 1, for example, worked with El Crucero, a nonprofit dedicated to providing affordable housing for low-income families, to assist them with resources that could help their audience navigate the daily nuances of the global pandemic. As Group 1 explained, helping with accurate and updated information was crucial because “many normal day to day activities, such as shopping, have become so much more complicated. So, if we can make things a little more clear, that just helps anyone.” Some groups worked with organizations they felt personally connected to. Such was the case of Group 5, who did not necessarily work with an organization but with a program, part of the university, dedicated to providing food services for students and staff members who have a difficult time paying for food. Working with this program within the university was important to Group 5 because, as they emphasized, during this difficult time “it’s very hard for a lot of people to get everything that they need. A lot of people are losing jobs, a lot of people are having trouble with money. So, having this kind of thing is important, especially for people that we are associated with.” Reflecting on the work they did throughout the semester gave students an opportunity to empathize with the audience with whom they worked and also provided an outlet for them to reflect on the communal experience of living through such challenging situations.

Students had to make decisions about the content and the design based on the audience analysis they conducted at the beginning of the semester. Nonetheless, choosing what type of information to add and how to place it in the documents was not always easy because some groups were working with an adult audience and some with young children. Explaining to children “how to tell if information is trustworthy” was a challenge for Group 2 as they wanted to show children how to identify reliable information while making a connection with them. This group relied on illustrations and pastel colors that would appeal to children. The group also chose to guide children through questions that this young audience could ask as they read information online. For instance, Group 2, suggested children to question everything they read related to COVID-19, “If the information is not coming from a doctor, make sure the website is a well-known one. Is the information biased? Even if the source is well known, try to look for reasons why they are writing the article. Is it to sell you something, or just to inform you?” Similarly, to promote safe habits when visiting the grocery store, Group 3 created an infographic that was “simple and efficient.” In their infographic, this group gave important suggestions to their young audience, like “Try not to touch items that you don’t want. Don’t touch other people, and don’t touch your face.”

Although creating technical documents for children was not as easy as they thought, students focused on emphasizing that doing one's part would help everyone in the community to move past these painful moments.

All groups gave special attention to CBP5, the document that addressed how to care for others during the pandemic. This was a special topic because some of the students were going through painful experiences themselves. Therefore, some of the information was sensitive not only to their audiences but also for them. Additionally, students also had to adjust this sensitive content to their specific audience. Whereas Group 1, for instance, gave information about hotlines to call for suicide prevention, domestic violence, and child abuse, Group 2 made the following recommendations to children:

Reach out to people you may know, and this will help cheer your mood. Another important thing to do is to be kind. Stay positive. Share positive news and acts of kindness with your community and family. [...] You can also donate and give back. Ask your parents to see if you can donate food for those in need.

Each assignment in the project gave students the opportunity to experiment with a new digital tool and/or with a new designing strategy. For example, in assignment CBP6, which focused on instructions on how to interact virtually, students created a video tutorial that explained to their audience how to use a specific digital platform in order to interact with loved ones. This assignment was grounded on theories of accessibility and usability, because, as one student explained, "it is important to apply these two concepts to digital media because they reach a wide range of audiences. These concepts were applied to my group's tutorial video by giving voice instructions and including captions in case some members of our audience had hearing problems." Another student pointed out that applying these concepts to digital compositions prevent others from "being left out" during this critical time.

Through this project, students were able to contextualize and internalize the importance of technical communication in these critical times. Group 1, for instance, emphasized that "the worst thing we could do as people is panic, and lack of information can cause it very easily." This project also provided students with the opportunity to experience the role of technical communicators as advocates (Jones, 2016). As Group 1 explained, "in times of a pandemic there are many unknowns, many we cannot answer ourselves, but if we can find information on some of them, it can ease the burden. [...] By provid-

ing these resources we are taking some stress off the unknowns.” This community-based project allowed students to experience the role of technical communicators during unprecedented times. Students engaged with important social justice theories and applied newly learned technical skills to solve real communication problems that addressed the needs of their own community.

While students encountered challenges throughout the process of the project, some caused by technology accessibility and some by personal matters, focusing our technical skills and our class time on helping the community through this difficult time also helped us. This project allowed us to experience a side of technical communication that is not often seen by our students. It clearly was, as some groups pointed out, a time for kindness and selflessness.

Laura’s Examples

For their community engagement project, all students in my course partnered with a health justice organization in our local community. Given the urgency of sharing health-related information with local community members, students in my course were asked to create materials that would help this local organization to better serve the local community. For this project, I gave students the option of working individually or in groups. Given the added stress and unpredictability of the pandemic, I did not want to require students to collaborate. However, in order to promote connection and community building during the isolation of the pandemic, I did incorporate multiple opportunities for students to work in groups during the class time itself, using Zoom’s breakout group function to have students give feedback on each other’s project and discuss how they are approaching the assignment.

Ultimately, all but two students chose to work in groups for the community engagement project, using this opportunity to distribute the workload of the assignment while also leveraging each other’s skills. For example, one group chose to work on designing “COVID Consejos,” a genre used by our partner organization to share COVID treatment and prevention information in short, bite-sized, and story-driven pieces. It’s interesting to note that in learning about the language access elements of our partnering organization, students organized themselves and their groups to best leverage the language skills of the class. For example, the “COVID Consejos” group included two students who designed the *consejos* in English, one student who translated the designs into Spanish, and another student who translated the designs into Haitian Creole. By reading information about the language needs

of the local community, students learned that Spanish and Haitian Creole are both widely spoken in the region, and thus they chose to create trilingual information materials. It's important to note here that our course discussions about technical communication specifically mentioned the importance of translation as a critical component of designing accessible technical content. Thus, in their final course reflections, 16 students mentioned translation as part of the contributions that the class made to their community through the community engagement project. For example, one student described how she used her language skills in her community engagement project, explaining, "This year, students in our class teamed up with the Rural Women's Health Project to provide materials to help reduce the impacts of COVID-19. I worked with two other classmates to translate COVID-19 tips from English to Spanish and Creole. We had four different Conejos and each tip was paired with a comic and caption. For another portion of the project, I recorded COVID tips in Haitian Creole and they were broadcasted on a Haitian radio. This helped us provide accurate information about COVID that was also accessible to the community in our area and beyond."

In addition to the community collaboration project, students kept track of their evolving orientations to community engagement, which they reported in their "Community engagement Positionality Statement." In this statement, which they were to write in the form of a memo, students were to provide their own definitions of community engagement based on both the course readings and discussion as well as on their experience in their community collaboration project. For example, one student used her positionality statement to explain how the community collaboration project allowed her to apply the course readings in the design of accessible information for women with HIV living during the pandemic:

"I've always felt drawn to reinventing the way we receive information. The times have changed and the way we process material has changed too. Alas, as I've ventured through traditional public schooling and university, I've found the methods of receiving material to be a little old fashioned. I want to bring a fresh new approach to the way information is given and received.

So backing up... I've always felt this inherit need to bring in fresh new ideas to outdated learning materials, but I didn't know how to use this skill to others' benefit. While taking a community engagement course in college I read the most interesting textbook that pretty much saved my life. *Emergent*

Strategies by adrienne maree brown was able to perfectly explain and advance my learning in how to look at life and how to look at change.

This book strengthened me when working with the women of the Rural Women's Health Project. I wanted to bridge the gap between women living with HIV and a young adult audience that may be out of touch with stigmas, their rights and responsibilities as a patient, and the power of journaling. I wanted to share a more practical and direct approach to the issue that I knew would be more graspable to a wider audience."

As evidenced through this example, students like the one featured above were able to understand technical communication work beyond the scope of what is considered "in the field." Pairing texts written by community activist, such as adrienne maree brown, with more "traditional" work in the field provided students with multiple entry points to understand the importance of designing accessible, effective communication. In their community engagement positionality statements, students did not draw hard boundaries around what is considered relevant to technical communication work, instead moving fluidly across genres and areas of specialization to consider important takeaways for working with communities.

Limitations

While we present successful student examples of community engaged technical communication projects, it's important to recognize that no teaching semester can go completely smoothly, especially during the pandemic. As instructors teaching during these difficult times, we also faced challenges when working with community partners who also have very busy schedules. At times, it was difficult to coordinate how students could get feedback on their assignments. Furthermore, many students did not have the time or energy to revise their community materials the number of times it took to actually make these materials useful to the community. Thus, the examples we present here are limited in both number and generalizability, since they only reflect the approaches of two instructors and their students. Since there was no traditional coding of data, our examples are not generalizable, but instead illustrate how two Latina technical communication instructors navigated the challenges of the pandemic in their teaching. Through these experiences, we developed takeaways and implications that we believe can continue to inform how technical communication teachers teach community engagement, both during and beyond the current pandemic.

Embracing a Pedagogy of Love in Technical Communication Pedagogy

While there are many models and approaches for teaching community engagement in technical communication courses, the testimonio approach that we practiced in sharing our pedagogical stories as researcher/teachers for this project helped us frame important implications for other technical communication instructors. As Torrez (2015) explains, Universities often function through a meritocracy that maintains a student/teacher binary while also dehumanizing teachers by positioning us as members of the university without recognizing our humanity outside the institution. To this end, having a space for *pláticas* and *desahogo* helped us (re)connect every month with that vulnerable part of reflecting on our pedagogical practices and our own experiences as Latina educators in the midst of unprecedented circumstances. While these factors are always present in university contexts, the COVID-19 pandemic, which is still ongoing, highlights systems of oppression that continue to deeply impact the most marginalized members of society. It's important to recognize that the health crisis is happening alongside important racial uprisings across the world that denote ongoing anti-Black racism. Thus, while we as instructors experience the pandemic, our students and communities are also experiencing the impacts of this crisis on various levels inextricable from racial, gendered, cultural, and linguistic factors (among others). To practice community engagement in these contexts, for us as Latina feminists, means that we need to establish classroom spaces that push us and our students to acknowledge, process, and address our privileges, positionalities, and shifting conditions of our material realities.

From the brief student examples that we shared in this article, one can see that our students were able to recognize not only their own experiences within the pandemic, but also those of others. Students in both courses referenced learning about the struggles of marginalized communities who are experiencing additional needs during the pandemic, including access to food, housing, and to information in their heritage languages. As we think about how to continue practicing community engagement in technical communication courses, throughout and after the pandemic, we come back to Torrez's (2015) discussion of a "pedagogy of love," which she describes as teaching "in a way that claims the classroom, however obliquely defined, as a learning space founded in revolutionary love" (p. 103). Revolutionary love, in this sense, means building community with students beyond the instructor/student binary, and, drawing on the teachings of Chicana

feminists, “merg[ing] our knowledge from the home with the community” (Torrez, 2015, p. 102). This pedagogy of love resists the bifurcation between “school” and “community” that universities try to consistently uphold, showing students that engaging with the community is everyone’s responsibility. This includes, for example, recognizing the community’s needs as inextricable, rather than segmented from, the work of technical communicators. It also means that students were encouraged to bring in their home knowledges, including their heritage languages (e.g., Spanish and Haitian Creole), into the classroom, and consequently into the community. A pedagogy of love helped students see how skills typically deemed “non-academic” or “non-technical” could actually be of great value to their community projects. Thus, as instructors continue developing methods, approaches, and pedagogies for teaching community engagement in technical communication, we recommend engaging with the work of Chicana feminist mentors who consistently demonstrate how a pedagogy of love humanizes students, teachers, and our surrounding communities.

As part of embracing a pedagogy of love, we recommend that technical communication instructors encourage ethical collaborations among students in various groups and between students and their community partners. Community engagement projects should not just be transactional activities in which students create something for an organization. Instead, students should learn about the history and mission of the organization(s) they are working with, and should be guided to make valuable relationships and sustainable partnerships that extend beyond a single project or semester. In the case of the projects that we outline in this article, it was important for students in Nora’s course to collaborate with organizations whose mission aligned with students’ backgrounds and interests, so that the collaboration was grounded in reciprocity and respect fueled by genuine interest. For students in Laura’s class, the community partnership took place in collaboration with an organization that Laura has worked with for several months, where students were welcomed to be in relation with a longstanding collaboration and friendship between their instructor and the organization’s leadership. In this way, the partnering organization invested in mentoring students because there was an established trust with the instructor and an understanding that the commitment of this partnership would be long-lasting.

Conclusion

Despite ongoing research to streamline or solidify approaches to community engagement in technical communication, the truth is

that there is no perfect formula for fostering collaborations between technical communication students and community partners. In fact, static formulas and guidelines for community engagement often ignore or reduce the complexity of community work, particularly during a health crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, what we provide in this article is not a set protocol for teaching community engagement in technical communication. Rather, our goal was to highlight how our collaborative reflective praxis, specifically grounded in testimonio methodologies and Chicana/Latina feminisms, helped us and our students navigate unprecedented times, while also allowing all of us an opportunity to engage with the crisis head on by contributing to the work our community members are already doing. Rather than trying to neutralize classroom spaces by ignoring what is happening in the world, community engagement projects provide students and instructors alike with the opportunity to share stories and experiences of struggle while collaboratively developing moments of joy, reflection, and hope. Certainly, our students' contributions were generally minimal in comparison to the work that our partnering organizations continue doing for various communities. However, the incorporation and centralization of community engagement in our technical communication projects allowed us the chance to discuss how the pandemic is impacting various communities in different ways, and how our skills as technical communicators can continue contributing to the important rhetorical, cultural, linguistic, and activist work happening around universities that too often ignore their surroundings. Thus, as we share these teaching experiences, we also encourage other technical communication instructors to look to the work of activists of color, including Chicana and Latina feminists, when seeking important models for engagement in times of crisis, joy, and liberation.

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