

Teaching and Scholarly Statement  
William Martínez, Jr.

My scholarly interests lie in theory of the Lyric; Reader response approaches to Literature; Latin American Literature, especially poetry; Mexican Literature and Culture; Chicano/Latino Literature, Culture; the dynamics of center and margin in literature, culture, gender representation, and academia (i.e. the problems of canonical vs. non-canonical texts.); and second language acquisition, specifically via communicative approaches that incorporate technology in the classroom.

Over the last few years, my research is focused in poetry and non-traditional literary texts. For example, I have had several papers published on little known poets in Latin America, specifically Venezuela. I have also been involved in the literature produced by women. This comes from my interests of how texts move from the margin to the center and then back to the margin again.

I have always had an inclination towards reading, especially poetry. I believe that different poetic movements are the souls of the period from which they came. The idea of how any language functions can well be illustrated by how poetry functions. This is perhaps, the most telling reason why I love to teach. Like poetry, every day becomes a new reading, a reading that modifies my environment, my students but mostly myself.

Professionally, the problem that interest me the most is how does a piece of writing evolve from, and connect to the historical, political and social context from where it rises? The question of an historiographic approach to literature serves several purposes beyond the mere analytical. It helps to understand the circumstances of that particular writer/time frame. It allows to view the world through the perspective of the moment when a text was created, and to understand the socio-historic implications that lead to its creation.

In a polytechnic environment, this question is primordial. For example, what are the ethical implications of creating texts in cyberspace? How well are they accepted? Why are they accepted over others? What political, sociological and cultural variables are entrenched in each text? How does technology affect the way we view the art in our world today? Are electronic texts considered marginal texts by their production? How do students approach the idea that web-based texts are more acceptable than other texts?

What implication does this have for teaching in a polytechnic environment? These and other questions have a serious impact on how and why literary and non-literary texts are written and taught.

Among my other research interests is the way texts (in this case all forms are communication) are learned and interpreted when different languages are in play. My work on teaching methodologies has led me to advocate the Vichian way, a multisensorial approach to language learning. While this approach, as it originally was intended, is more in keeping with learning a language in its initial state, I have modified the theoretical ideas to be expanded into intermediate and advanced levels of learning. How? By incorporating technology into the classroom, realizing that it is a tool and not the panacea for language and cultural learning. Thus, by using such things as sit-coms to teach theatre, or commercial to help students understand signs and semiotic relationships, I have been rather successful in bridging the Vichian approach to my own teaching.

Another area of strong interest is international education. In my years at Cal Poly, I've been able to start and maintain a summer language program in Mexico; to have an exchange program with ITESM in Cuernavaca for a full semester; to initiate a dialogue with other departments about study abroad, and to participate and fortify the Valladolid, Spain summer program. I have also been very active in the CSU International Programs as the Academic Council representative for the campus, the Student affairs Committee chair and the chair of the council. Under my leadership, we have given more students the opportunity to travel and study abroad than at any other time prior to my involvement. In my chairship two new year-long programs will be fully functional: Chile and China.

Communication is essential in our society today. If we do not understand each other, not much can get accomplished. The study of a different language and culture is becoming more urgent today, especially in California, than ever before. Bilinguality and biculturalism are now a necessity to survive in our pluralistic society. This is why I teach Spanish. In class I help students understand that speaking two or more languages is not a disadvantage, but a plus. Languages other than English gives students the edge to understand other peoples, and to be able to better communicate with them.