

ARTICLE

Reading Alex E. Chávez's *Sounds of Crossing: Music, Migration, and the Aural Poetics of Huapango Arribeño* (Duke University Press, 2017), a Pedagogical Lesson

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Abstract

*In this article we argue for a slow, methodical, and collaborative approach to difficult texts. This article is the story of how, thanks to the efforts of the students and professor, a book that rewards diligent effort, and some creative pedagogical strategies borne of desperation, the experience of reading Alex E. Chávez's *Sounds of Crossing* became a highlight of our college experience. In this article we explore the differing perspectives of students and faculty, including the reasons students came to view this as a meaningful experience. Some of our significant findings include the following: 1) the reading of the book was meaningful even though it was difficult; 2) the meaningfulness of the reading was not diminished by how difficult the theoretical and musical material remained, even with close exegesis; 3) the difficulty was eased by specific pedagogical methods, mainly based on collaborative learning, that were found by the students to be effective for increasing comprehension and navigation of the text; and 4) the connection between the book and the students' lived experience enhanced the appeal of the text, their willingness to continue with it in spite of difficulty, their tolerance for confusion, and their overall satisfaction with the experience of reading it.*

Keywords: *ethnography; pedagogy; migration; teaching anthropology; collaborative learning*

Introduction

We are a group of authors, four students and a professor from Lehman College, a public liberal arts college in New York City. This article is a reflection on the experience of reading Alex E. Chávez's 2017 book, *Sounds of Crossing: Music, Migration, and the Aural Poetics of Huapango Arribeño* in the course *Societies and Cultures of Latin America* in the Fall of 2018. We had already successfully read and discussed two ethnographies: *Race and the Brazilian Body: Blackness, Whiteness, and Everyday Language in Rio de Janeiro* by Jennifer Roth Gordon (2016) and *The Extractive Zone: Social Ecologies and Decolonial Perspectives* by Macarena Gómez-Barris (2017). Having discussed issues related to race, racialization, language, indigeneity, gender, neoliberalism, art, social movements, Brazil, Chile, Peru, Colombia, and Ecuador, our third ethnography by Alex E. Chávez would address migration, music, politics, and identity, focusing on the US-Mexico border region.

In this article we argue for a slow, methodical, and collaborative approach to difficult texts. This article is the story of how, thanks to the efforts of the students and professor, a book that rewards diligent effort, and some creative pedagogical strategies borne of desperation, the experience of reading *Sounds of Crossing* became a highlight of our Lehman College experience. In this article we explore the differing perspectives of students and faculty, including the reasons students came to view this as a meaningful experience. Some of our significant findings include the following: 1) the reading of the book was meaningful even though it was difficult; 2) the meaningfulness of the reading was not diminished by how difficult the theoretical and musical material remained, even with close exegesis; 3) the difficulty was eased by specific pedagogical methods, mainly based on collaborative learning, that were found by the students to be effective for increasing comprehension and navigation of the text; and 4) the connection between the book and the students' lived experience enhanced the appeal of the text, their willingness to continue with it in spite of difficulty, their tolerance for confusion, and their overall satisfaction with the experience of reading it. We learned that a book does not have to be easy or become easy to be worthwhile, and on the contrary, a book that is challenging can be satisfying in ways that a more accessible book may not be. The experience of working through a difficult text in a supportive and collaborative environment can offer its own rewards. In the end, the experience of reading *Sounds of Crossing* was described as "life-changing" by some of the students and resulted in an alteration of their future plans. We hope that our experience will serve to reinforce the importance of reading full-length ethnographies in an undergraduate course, seeking out and assigning ethnographies that connect to the lived experience of students in a course, and persisting in spite of difficulty.

Below, the five authors of this article share our experiences. While we all worked on this article together, we use our names to indicate our own perspectives because each student (Bravo, Carrasco, Chuber, and Flores) and the professor (Gálvez) had a different

and unique perspective that we felt it was important to preserve. Portions of this text that are not designated with one of our names were written collaboratively by us all.

Background

Gálvez: I assigned Alex E. Chávez's book, *Sounds of Crossing* in the course *Societies and Cultures of Latin America*. The course is a lower-level undergraduate course that is often selected by students seeking to fulfill their World Cultures general education requirement or as an introductory-level course for majors or prospective majors in Latin American Studies or Anthropology. Typically, the course has 25-35 students and I teach it in a seminar-style format. When I assigned the book, it had not yet won three book awards: the 2018 Association of Latina and Latino Anthropologists Book Award, the 2018 Alan Merriam Prize, presented by the Society for Ethnomusicology, and the 2018 Society for Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology Book Prize. Having taught this course for about a decade, I have a formula that I use for selecting course materials. Never having found a textbook that seems adequate for the course, and believing that an important aim for the course is for students to be exposed to authentic anthropological writing on Latin America, each term I choose three recently published ethnographies written by a diverse set of authors (favoring books by people of color, women, Indigenous, and queer authors) on different topics and locations in Latin America or the Caribbean. Then we read each book consecutively over the semester. Typically, ethnographic monographs have 6-7 chapters, and assigning one per session, meeting two sessions per week, we're able to read three complete ethnographies. Then, the students select a fourth ethnography to read on their own and analyze in a final paper assignment. When I first designed the syllabus this way, I worried that by opting to emphasize full-length ethnographies, we would be obliged to sacrifice comprehensiveness of themes; no three ethnographies could cover what a textbook could. I soon learned that I was mistaken. Selecting three recent ethnographies with as much topical and geographical breadth as possible, we somehow managed to touch on all of the main issues recurrent in the study of *Societies and Cultures of Latin America* in a way that is more relevant, timely, and accessible than in a textbook. I began to refer to this in my introduction to the class as "the magic of ethnography": its ability to comprehend so many diverse topic areas and spheres of human existence in a single study. The first week of class, I shared with students that I would be reading each ethnography for the first time along with them, modeling the process of becoming acquainted and comfortable with new terms, concepts, and cultural contexts as we go. As a research-active scholar with a heavy teaching load, this pedagogical approach has the added benefit of allowing me to keep up with recent ethnographies in my field, while keeping the course fresh and interesting every semester.

Reading *Sounds of Crossing*

Gálvez: *Societies and Cultures of Latin America* was the course I was most confident in semester after semester, until Fall 2018, when I feared I had ruined it. As I started to read Chávez's book, our third ethnography, I began to fear I was committing academic abuse. For the first time, I deeply regretted not previewing the entire book in advance. The book, at 440 pages, is more than double the size of the other books chosen for that semester. By the time I got to Chapter 2, which is 58 pages, I was terrified of the students' responses. As I negotiated the dense theoretical language, as well as the book's complex and in-depth musical and literary analysis of the poetic genre the *décima*—the basic building block of huapango arribeño, the musical genre on which the book focuses—I felt my own comprehension slipping, along with my confidence in teaching the material. I feared as a result of this book selection, students might drop the class. I was sure they would hate me.

Together the authors of this piece reflected on reading Chapter 2 and how we all realized in that chapter that this book would be more challenging than the books we read together previously. Flores represents the perspective of a student who was experiencing difficulty in that early stage:

Flores: It was somewhat difficult to adapt to the language used in the book, especially at the beginning. It was a little frustrating not being able to move when I came across a part of the book that needed more attention and it took various reads before I finally understood what the author was trying to say. I think this book really challenged us because there were so many layers to understanding the overall concept of the book. The other books were simpler in that the concepts were more straightforward. Concepts like "aural poetics" were more difficult to define than "undifference" or "art of correlation" [concepts from the other books we read].

Other students share their perspectives navigating the difficulties of Chapter 2, the most technical and lengthiest chapter:

Carrasco: I was intimidated and thought, in order for me to be able to move forward with Chávez's *Sounds of Crossing*, I was in need of additional resources when confronted with the musical components of huapango arribeño and *décimas*. The impact music and art has on people is extremely deep, and not being able to read music, I felt as if I was not grasping the full idea of Chávez's musical ethnography.

Bravo: There was a moment when I wanted to quit the book. I remember Chapter 2 began being a particular challenge for me because Dr. Chávez started mentioning musical terms and vocabulary that I believed only musicians knew. When he broke down the *poesías* and compositions, it made me feel confused. When I felt challenged it made me want to just stop reading the book, but in my mind, I knew this book was important to read for the class. I started underlining and taking side notes throughout the book.

However, a group of students also shared that the book's subject and its personal resonance for them gave them the determination to persist through the readings in spite of difficulty.

Flores: There was never really a moment in which I wanted to quit the book. Rather, there were times where I would get frustrated and just want to skip to a part that I thought I would understand better, especially in parts of the book that dealt with more technical musical theory. What kept me going was learning more about how music allows listeners to transcend any physical border, especially because music is such a fundamental part of my own family's identity, like I am sure it is in many other immigrant households across the country.

Carrasco likewise noted: This book had a personal meaning to me, and meant so much more to me than perhaps to the average college student. As I sat in the course I reflected on myself and the privilege I have to be able to be a part of academia. Having Chávez's work as a part of our syllabus was incredible since there are very few scholars of Mexican descent that are a part of course materials in higher education.

Bravo similarly wrote: I found this book to be very informative. It wasn't only about music, it was about politics, immigration, society, culture, education, and people, just to name a few. This book was very broad in a way because many who have experienced these events can understand what the author was trying to say.

These students' remarks suggest that creating meaning by connecting the text's concepts to their own personal experiences is a crucial step in the learning process. We learned that meaning can be created even when students do not have a personal connection to the themes of the book. Students can be inspired by the personal connections others have, or they might find other ways to relate to the book's themes.

Pedagogical Methods for Coping with a Difficult Text

The book appealed to Bravo, Carrasco, Chuber, and Flores for different reasons. They were each open to reading it and were excited because of the evident connection of the book to their cultural heritage (Bravo, Carrasco, and Flores) and/or their excitement about studying migration and border issues (Chuber). But in spite of the compelling topic of the book for this group of readers, it remained difficult to read. It is notable that the persistence of the difficulty did not diminish the book's meaning, but enhanced it, perhaps because of the trust that was already built in the classroom.

Chuber reflected: I really trust the professor and my peers for the journey of reading and discussion. Whether we hate it, are confused, in love, or bored, all emotions are welcome when you have a good group of divers. When it gets good we can go deep together and when it's bad we can start building plans for other places to go. I will also say that this book came at the end of the semester when we already were starting to read

our individual books so the fact that we held on is really a testament to something: the class, the way people learn, I'm not sure, but I think that is amazing.

As Chuber remarked, having an active learning journey alongside the professor and students created a memorable learning experience.

This pedagogical approach can be generally classified as collaborative learning, a setting in which a group of two or more people, including the instructor, try to learn something new together (Dillenbourg 1999). There is a lot of flexibility in collaborative learning in relation to the active roles of each group member and how they choose to dissect different concepts and materials (Moore Howard 2001). Of the specific pedagogical methods Gálvez implemented, the following were found by the students to be more effective for increasing comprehension and navigation of the text.

Creating a collaborative glossary

One of the most useful pedagogical strategies employed was to create a glossary of terms and concepts, in a collectively-authored Google document, that were new or conceptually important to our exegesis of the text. Using a Google doc enabled students to collaborate with the professor to create a learning guide for each text. While some professors provide students with slides and study guides, this approach places the responsibility for identifying salient themes and concepts and developing mechanisms for assimilating those terms and concepts on the students, with faculty support. In this way, learning terms and concepts is not about memorization and retrieval, but rather is a higher level cognitive process of reading for meaning, identifying recurrent and salient themes, contextualizing those themes within the text as well as within the temporal and geographical context in which they are used (in this case contemporary Latin America and the Caribbean), and becoming versant in their use. While some students might initially balk at being asked to prepare their own study guides, essentially, they realize that they are accountable for the quality of the materials they create and that collectively they can produce a more valuable, relevant, and engaging repository than if they were handed one.

Carrasco writes: At the beginning I was confused about the many terms and concepts being presented to me. However, it helped to have a method for breaking down the terms and connecting them to previous courses I had taken as an undergraduate student studying Latin American and Caribbean studies. The vocabulary in this book is very complex. However, creating a list of terms/concepts and being able to share my understanding with everyone in the course helped me understand the vocabulary and concepts. I was able to read other students' thought processes and either add on or adjust my understanding of concepts.

We used a Google document to keep track of terms and concepts and Evernote was used for class notes, tracing and archiving the in-class discussions, visual materials, and quick in-class writing assignments.

Carrasco notes: As much as I put sticky notes all over my book, highlighted, annotated, and took down notes in order to better understand the book I know that I had a huge support system and space created by Gálvez to help me get through all the multiple “stop and think” sessions I had with myself. I knew there was always a place to ask questions or even think out loud.

For some, the tools used, such as the online glossary of terms and concepts, helped them overcome their initial intimidation by the size of the book. Bravo: When I first saw the book I was like “WOAH! this book is very thick!” The vocabulary made me question words like “epistemology”; there were many words I have used and heard but this time I had to actually define them. I found it kind of difficult to translate some of the words into everyday English, so I tried to write down exactly what I meant or was trying to say.

Unpacking the book’s findings by contextualizing them within Latin American and Caribbean studies, anthropology, and students’ lived experiences was important for developing both collective and individual understanding. Carrasco wrote: I was able to understand what was presented in the book with my own perspective, personal/family experience, and other anthropologists’ work.

	A	B	C
1		Source (book, p. #)	Definition (add as much as you think you need to really understand)
92	Opacity		In which difference proliferates in a positive form/ Transparency and
93	Communism		A political theory derived from Karl Marx that advocated that all property
94	Capitalism		An economic and political concept in which a country's trade is controlled
95			
96	Scientific Classification	Page 18	The categorizing of all living things (Taxonomy).
97	neoliberalism		A modified form of liberalism tending to favor free-market capitalism.
98	Biodiversity		Being the opposite of monoculture, it's the variety of life in the world's ecosystem.
99			
100	Below this line, post terms/concepts from Chávez, Sounds of Crossing: Music, Migration, and the Aural Poetics of Huapango Arribeño		
101	American audio racial imagination	Chavez pg 42	Power of selective listening, what is ok and what is not in 'American' U.S. hears itself (2) what it hears itself against, this idea is adopted at the United States is the superior border country, it is the extension of and them, Mexico as the "other"- the unaccepted noise
102	Chicago neoliberal economics		Neoliberal economics do not allow government involvement. Trickle down associated with this. Creates inequality and produces extremes
103	criollista (creole) indigenist	Chavez pg 71	A Latin American who are of full or near full Spanish descent, distinct multi-racial Latin Americans and Latin Americans of post-colonial (and European immigrant origin.
104			poetics work with and build cultural memory through the experiential communication. The decima being a poetic format allows for growth confronted by crowd and the 'collision' of ideas and experiences from a culturally orienting framework built on associational links. The decima

Figure 1. Google doc of terms and concepts from each ethnography

Slow reading

While we had a system for navigating the difficult terms, as we read on, it became clear that we had to slow down even more and implement new strategies to make sure we were comprehending Chávez’s social theory. We spent an entire class period on one

page of the text, page 7. Working in groups, students were assigned a single sentence to “translate” from academic language to everyday language.

Carrasco wrote about the experience: The most meaningful part of the classroom was when we took apart one page of Chávez’s work. As everyone was assigned a sentence or two from one page, I remember feeling as if everything I’ve learned before all played a part together to make a bigger picture: Jose E. Limón’s work, Américo Paredes, Gloria Anzaldúa on borderlands. As I read *Sounds of Crossing*, this idea of stopping and making connections was extremely vital.

Gálvez: The decision to take this pedagogical approach was an improvisation, a panicked response to my fear that we were all (myself included) having trouble with some of the dense social theory in the book’s introduction. While generally when teaching I focus on keeping up a brisk pace, in order to “cover” all of the material, this time, I took an opposite approach: we slowed down, all the way down, to focus on a single sentence.

This approach to collaborative learning was intended to enable each student’s prior knowledge to advance the collective’s understanding. Carrasco was not sure this would work: I did not 100% disagree with this approach, but I did not anticipate that grouping people in order to break down concepts in the book would be effective. But the beauty of this is that, regardless of each student’s academic background and knowledge of Mexico, huapango arribeño, and migration, this gave us an opportunity to speak to one another and work as a whole.

Flores adds: I think what really helped in understanding the book was allowing us to work in groups with our classmates. When we all came together, it was easier to understand concepts because one person’s interpretation could fill in the gaps of another person’s understanding. Each of us (or those of us who actually read) were given the opportunity to contribute to defining a difficult concept.

Chuber reflected: I believe this was the day that I started to think maybe this text really was dense and close reading made it worth it. Even when I didn’t understand something, I knew that it was there in the fog for later, like layers. It made me trust the book, to be guided in deeper without fear. After that day, I think the majority of us were deep in, no returning.

Flores added: I definitely remember this day. I think it was that moment where I realized how much I wanted to read the book. I believe that day was crucial to understanding the overall book. Spending time on that one page was really the pathway to cracking open the idea of aural poetics, which is the center of the book.

Carrasco went on: This was one of the most significant and vital new methods I’ve learned to use in order to understand the reading really well. And I know this may sound so obvious to do while reading and is something you’re first taught in 7th grade English class, but the amount of work that goes into the breakdown process opens doors that

you may not have thought about using or may have even skipped over without the one page reading strategy.

Bravo: I remember reading page 7 on my own and thinking some key terms meant something else, but when we went over it together, it was the total opposite. I knew I would have to search for definitions of certain words. But it also made me realize the effect music has on us. This was the page that made me realize the importance of hearing vs. listening. It brought together all the feelings and emotions we get through music. But I believe that it was very helpful that we went over it together because I think I wouldn't have understood on my own. What helped me so much was going over the definitions in a group and the professor printing out or referring to one page of the book to study as a class. Each one of us had a line to say what we thought it meant and as a class we supported or adjusted each answer. I felt very confident that my professor had a goal for her students. Maybe many of us didn't understand what we were going to learn from the book, but I believe we learned a lot more than what we expected. We learned new concepts and approaches and our professor was open to our ideas.

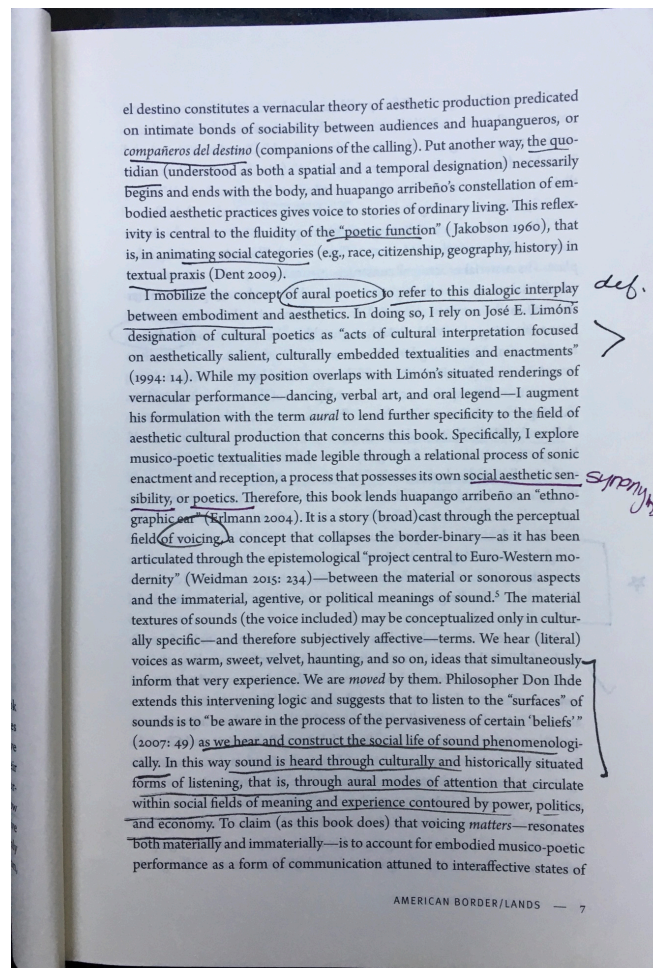


Figure 2. Page 7 of *Sounds of Crossing* as distributed to students

Preparing to speak with the author

There were other pedagogical strategies to the book that were found by students to be helpful. Bravo wrote: The most meaningful part for me was when we wrote down any questions we would ask the author because I believe that many of us had the same questions. When we actually Skyped with him and he discussed the book, it made it clear what he wanted the reader to know. The experience of just speaking to him and having read the book made a deeper connection from author to reader. Coming up with a question has as much meaning as the answer.

Coping with Difficulty and Finding Connections

Our reflections on reading *Sounds of Crossing* make it clear that aside from the collaborative pedagogical approach taken, the connection between the book and the students' lived experiences enhanced the appeal of the text and their willingness to continue with it in spite of difficulty.

Bravo wrote: I felt confused with some terms and concepts. At a point I felt that it was too much information to absorb and there was a lot going on at the same time. I knew it was acceptable because the author had an idea and maybe some of us understood it and others didn't. But I knew he wanted us to get a message which I feel influenced how we felt about the book and what we took from it.

Lehman College is a very diverse college with students from all over the world, and in this class, several students happened to be the children of Mexican migrants. The connection between the book and the cultural experience of several students in the class enhanced the meaning of the book for everyone.

Carrasco wrote: The verse lyrics stood out to me the most as I skimmed through the book. They were presented in both English and Spanish. This widened the audience's comprehension, enabling speakers of both languages to approach it in the language they preferred. To those readers who are bilingual, the song lyrics they were reading had two different meanings. Through translation, words do not always have the same meaning, and with this in mind I've thought about the other elements we think about when we identify as "Mexican-American" and what it is like to have insight into both cultures. My experience with reading *Sounds of Crossing* was a great one; I felt at home and felt the stories of my parents and other migrants mattered. I know we should never judge a book by its cover, but that was one of the biggest connections I had with Chávez's work. I instantly knew this was a book that connected to my raíces. The cover photo of two huapangueros in La Florida, Querétaro, reminded me so much about the men back home in San Miguel Comitlipa, Guerrero, Mexico. Two huapanguero men waiting out the fog with sombreros, button down shirts, blue jeans, boots, and dark brown skin represented the lifestyle of what it is like living in the borderlands in Mexico, and in the United States.

Bravo wrote: I am really happy to have read this book because it expanded my musical knowledge such as understanding new key terms. It made me relate to how I was raised regarding culture and traditions. I have never heard of huapango arribeño until I read this book and it made me question, "What else don't I know about my country?" This made me eager to learn more about Mexico and its music. I found many events that Dr. Chávez mentioned in this book that took place and are taking place nowadays very crucial and important. My connection and personal experiences made this a significant book to me.

Chuber wrote: I am not Mexican. Reading with my Mexican classmates taught me more; there was already built-in knowledge to grow on within the class. It was actually really amazing because many classmates were from different regions, different states of Mexico, so certain words held different meanings for each of them. We were all growing off of Chávez's work. Everyone had a different definition of "rancho," for example. This is a beautiful testament to the diversity of culture, experience, language, and Mexico. Though I do not know the highlands where huapango hails from, I know the Tennessee and the Texas backyards the author describes, and I know the aural poetic feeling, the ritual of shouting across time and space to connect with far away loved ones. I think that we all connected to this research in different ways and being able to share and communicate is one of the beauties of the classroom and maybe more specifically the beauty of Lehman College.

As a group, each of us came away with a new appreciation for tackling difficult texts and tolerating confusion. Carrasco wrote: I think in academia, I am comfortable being a bit confused at the very beginning; that is the idea of learning. There will always be room to struggle but if there is no progress then I think that is when many people give up. With Chávez's book, I struggled the most with concepts and music background. I definitely thought that it was acceptable for me not to fully understand the chapters where he described the music of huapango and how it is created, the instruments used and how exactly the lyrics were to be fit in order to be considered huapango arribeño. I thought it was okay for me to struggle here because I do not necessarily come from a strong music background, and I allowed myself to be taught by Chávez through his book. However, I knew that I would not master every part of his work since I came into his "class" (the book) with little to no musical background in academia. I did not give up on the book because other than the musical aspect of it and the literal representation of how music is formed, I knew I was stronger in other topics in the book such as history, migration, previous anthropologists work, and my personal connection to Mexico and migrants.

For Carrasco, this had a lasting impact on her inside and outside of the classroom: While reading, I would always speak to my mom about Dr. Chávez's work on huapango arribeño and Mexican migrants. There were certain aspects in Chávez's work that I believe have been overlooked. Like the Mexican saludo: in an ordinary Mexican celebration there are many people reaching out to the Sonidero in order for him to read

their shout-out for their families back home to hear or for the people present in the party. Parts of the book like this are when sounds of crossing and bridging together all made sense. But as I was speaking to my mom, I would catch myself being a part of the aural poetics and the impact of the Huapangueros' destino. It was their music that started this chain of dance, song, community, and coming together regardless of what side of the borderland you are on.

Successes and Shortcomings

While not everyone in the class was as drawn into Chávez's book as this article's co-authors, the book was the most successful of the three ethnographies we read. While we did not conduct a systematic quantitative study of learning outcomes, we agree that compared to the other books, and other courses we were each involved in the same semester, students were deeply engaged and this engagement was reflected in their performance on the short writing assignments and exams. For example, the quiz on this book resulted in far more As and fewer Fs than the previous two books. Reflecting on the experience of the course, Carrasco wrote: If it were up to me, I would love to take a course strictly covering this book alone. There were multiple things that motivated me to better understand Chávez's work. This included Gálvez's teaching style of class discussion, our glossary of terms and concepts, quizzes, and exams.

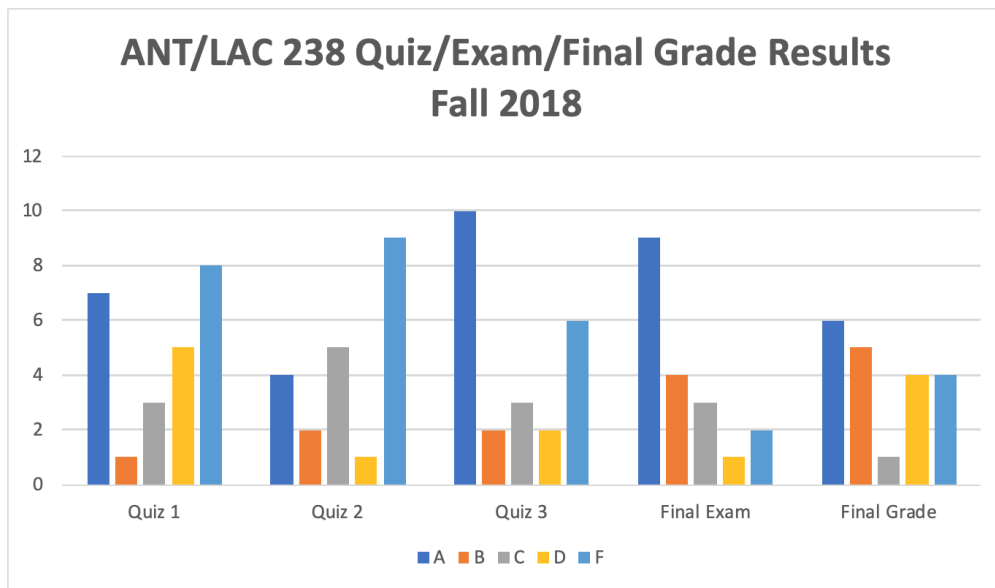


Figure 3. Quiz and exam scores for ANT/LAC 238 in the semester discussed. Quiz 3 corresponds to *Sounds of Crossing*.

In spite of what we view as the success of the pedagogical innovations and strategies based on collaborative learning for engagement discussed above, these nevertheless have limitations. Even though the level of engagement was much higher for some students (including the co-authors), others were still not engaged. This lack of engagement of some was perceived by and affected even the most engaged. Carrasco explained: I would like if all students were engaged in the classwork more. I believe since some students showed little effort, this may have had a ripple effect on the class's overall participation and engagement.

While the level of disengagement was similar to other semesters, it is evident that disengagement may not be resolved for all students in every class by implementing the strategies discussed above. Flores added: Something that really affected the overall learning experience was the classroom vibe. I believe more could have been covered and we could have gone more in depth if everyone was always on the same page. The study guide, paper, and quizzes definitely kept me on task with the readings. I did not see them as assignments, but rather as a part of the learning experience. It is one thing to decipher in class, but it's a totally different experience having to do it on your own. Both in-class discussion and individual assignments really helped me to solidify almost everything Chávez was trying to get across.

It is clear that the students depended more on each other than with other pedagogical approaches. Collaborative learning requires collaboration to be maximally effective, and the lack of involvement of some perhaps has a greater impact than in a traditional teacher-directed classroom. Bravo: The pace of the class motivated me to finish reading each book we were assigned. Each class we had a discussion of the book which we had to make sure we read in order to keep the conversation going, and it was our opportunity to ask questions. The quizzes and exams were a motivation to do better each time and know exactly what was expected from us. Each student had an opportunity to participate by adding words in the Google doc of terms and concepts. The Google doc helped me compare or contrast a definition I had in mind for the word, and if I felt confused about a word, my classmates' definitions helped me to understand.

Carrasco: Most of the classroom experience does affect me. It is as if our classroom lacked vernacular performance. The thought and ideas of Chávez depended on a response of the readers in the classroom to build on his ideas and those of previous anthropologists. Especially in a course in social sciences, in order for the course to be as effective as possible, everyone must have input into the course. We must all share ideas and relevant dialogue together: it is as if this was our research and we learn from not just the book but also each other.

Flores: I think the positive experience can only be attributed to how willing everyone else is to complete the assignment at hand which, for the most part, was only to read. The only way I can see someone not considering the class "successful" is if the person

did not read the book with an open mind and was willing to allow themselves a different perspective.

Bravo: I believe that those who didn't have a positive experience or enjoy the book were not able to relate to many of the events or experiences that took place in the book. I believe that many may have gotten discouraged because this book was challenging to read. I think when a person sets their mind to an opinion it may be difficult to change. I believe if I would've said to myself, "I don't like this book," over and over I would make myself believe that. It also depends on having an open mind. Just because someone is Mexican or knows Spanish doesn't mean we all think the same or always understand what the other person is trying to say. People need to have an open mind in order to learn new things and learn about different cultures.

Conclusion

In this article, we have detailed our reading of Alex E. Chávez's *Sounds of Crossing* using collaborative learning methodologies and discussed how the experience revealed the value in reading difficult texts, reading full ethnographies, and charging students with leadership and collaboration in their own learning process. Coupled with the students' hard work and insights drawn from their own life experiences, these approaches aided us in having a deeply meaningful experience with the book.

After the semester concluded, the students retained a strong attachment to the experience of reading *Sounds of Crossing*. When the Latin American and Latino Studies Department had the opportunity to invite a guest speaker the following semester, the students advocated for a visit by Chávez. When he visited in February 2019 and gave a guest lecture, many students from the course, including the co-authors of this piece, were in the front row, asked many questions, and had a private meeting with the author (see Figure 4).

Remarkably, the book had an impact on the students' long-term plans. One student, Bravo, said that she decided she would like to pursue graduate education because of the book. Among our co-authors, two considered majoring in Anthropology and one considered majoring in Latin American Studies as a result of the book. The student authors of this article were also the core organizers of a new campus organization, the Latinx Alliance, formed in 2019. All described increased curiosity about Mexican culture, and for Mexican-origin students, this was accompanied with pride.

Carrasco wrote: This book challenged the way I thought about research. Something that I loved that Chávez made clear is that the Huapangueros are themselves ethnographers; his role was transcribing it all down. His work is a part of the community and it is there for and by them.

Chuber now considers the book part of her permanent collection: There were different stages of interacting with this book starting with dislike in what felt like theories

detached from human reality, to absolute enamored confusion, to now. Now, I hold this old book that is covered in notes and dog-eared colorful post-its and Chávez has joined my home of writers/thinkers/creators/livers that are just always on my couch doing their work, talking to each other.

Bravo: When everything finally became clear to me, reading the book was very enjoyable, especially the parts of the book where short vignettes and songs (especially *Caminos de Guanajuato*) were inserted. I could see my own father being reflected within the book and how sounds crossed the border with him, keeping him rooted to Mexico forever. This book really opened me up to looking at everyday immigrant experiences as a form of protest.

For Bravo, the book had an effect on her interactions with friends and family: Before reading the book and while I was reading the book, I mentioned it to my cousin who is a musician and a music teacher. He helped me understand many concepts and ideas in a musician's mentality. I learned that the word "son" can have so many different meanings in music. We spoke about many concepts such as what noise meant to each one of us and how there can be discrimination within music. There are so many experiences or events where I didn't realize how music has an effect. At weddings, family parties, funerals, there's always music that makes us feel different kinds of emotions. Some make us dance, cry, laugh. I went to Mexico in January. Each year there's a parade in my hometown and this year a group of huapangueros performed. They started off with poesías about a woman playing hard to get and the guy telling her he didn't want her anyway. The audience was laughing and I just found it amusing analyzing it in a different perspective because I understood it more. I learned from each part of the performance. This has reinforced my interest in music and I am excited to give a class/visit next month in Mexico to my cousin's students. I am eager to learn more about music, culture, and traditions. This book made me realize that behind every challenge there's a positive outcome. This is proof that a Mexican author can be successful even when there's discrimination, prejudice, and stereotypes that take place every day. Chávez gave a light and a voice to many immigrants.



Figure 4. Visit by the author to Lehman College. Pictured here (from L), Chávez, Liliana Ramos, Edith Carrasco, Kathryn Chuber, and Alyshia Gálvez. Photo by Marlen Fernández.

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