

Plática as a Methodology for Creating Counterspace in Online Teaching and Beyond

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Abstract

In this paper, we reflect upon and (re)analyze a self-study of teacher education practices (S-STEP) inquiry that was focused on deconstructing the circumstances of loss and anxiety we experienced during the pandemic years and onward as we conducted our online teacher education classes. In seeking to repair, restore, and heal, we engaged with Chicana feminist thinking and centered on the methodology of *plática*. Our *pláticas* created intimate spaces to address entangled laborings, emotional work, and consider ways to address our statuses within the hierarchy of our institution. Based on our experiences teaching online during the pandemic and beyond, we illustrate the potential of *plática* as a methodology for intentionally cultivating counterspaces directed at fostering healing and facilitating relational engagement—not only for online teacher educators of varied backgrounds, but across diverse fields and instructional formats. *Plática* methodology offers additional opportunities for transformative framing to reimagine pedagogical connections between students and instructors.

Keywords: Chicana feminism, online counterspaces, *plática*, posthumanism, self-study of teacher education practices

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Practices of knowing and being are not isolable; they are mutually implicated. We don't obtain knowledge by standing outside the world...We are part of the world in its differential becoming.

–Karen Barad (*Meeting the Universe Halfway*)

Introduction

As our campus closed in April 2020, we were brought to grief. The realities of the pandemic had begun to emerge—family members and students were dying, institutional financial recissions loomed, and student struggles with health, employment, and more came daily. Anger. Fear. Sadness. Loneliness. We felt these. None of the platitudes from political and university leaders about how lovely everything was going to be when we could all just *get back to normal*—meaning “on campus”—were comforting in the face of these losses.

We were not the only ones feeling sad and having deep anxieties. Rice et al. (2024) edited a book about emotional labor in teacher education during the COVID-19 pandemic that highlighted the emotional realities of teacher educators in several countries. The authors of the various chapters in that book seemed to share a definition of emotional labor as a heightened relationality across time and through physical and virtual spaces that enabled online instructors to sympathize deeply with students and be motivated to change their practices and expectations so that students could have hope to continue with online classes and advance their learning. Rice and Dunn (2024) illustrated how emotional labors are in fact, so laborious, for online teachers because they are often *bantams*, or small in size, but many in quantity, and non-existent in their formal recognition on the university landscape. Further, Rice and Dunn (2024) argued that online teachers continually make bantam adjustments not merely to humanize pedagogy, but to reconcile the needs of humans alongside the requirements and limitations of technological infrastructure.

Recently, Selwyn et al. (2025) illustrated how so-called automated labor from artificial intelligence relied extensively on hidden human labor. Emotional labor might be included in understandings about hidden labor. Rice (2024) described her first online teaching experience with little support but an injunction to make her supervising professor—and by extension, the program, department, and university, *look good*. Yet, the students had many needs for support and wanted to write to her for comfort. Emotional labor carries an expectation that it should be given freely, and institutional pressures are exerted to make the institution look good. In some cases, there is also pressure to make online teaching, as an innovation, look good. While there is a great expectation to perform emotional labor, there is also an institutional stance that emotional labor not happening, not valuable, and/or being emotionally invested is problematic. Finally, there is a special feminizing of emotional labor—although any instructor could provide it.

In the current study, we are women. We did take up *labor* as a term in accordance with definitions of feminism around various forms of pain and deliverance through sisterhood in the literature of Chicana feminism (Arvin et al., 2013; Calderón et al., 2012; Delgado Bernal, 2001). Yet, we also understood it as a term associated with generating capital from which we are largely alienated from the benefits (Aksakalli, 2025). We sought a community where we could openly discuss the challenges of adapting online teaching under ongoing university directives, our emotional labors, and the frustrations we faced in trying to support our students amid limited resources during the unsettling times of the COVID-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020. While it might be tempting to think that the COVID-19 pandemic and

its aftermath are behind us—that we are *back to normal*—and therefore this study is tired and unneeded, we ask for reconsideration of that idea. First, we argue that because of global political and economic events, institutions of higher education in many, if not most parts of the world, are certainly not in a safer or in a more stable position than they were during the COVID-19 pandemic closures (Alawadi, 2024; Goodman, 2024; Hasan et al., 2024). Second, we suggest that although many universities have expanded online offerings considerably, many instructors would still be greatly un- and under-prepared for another crisis involving distance learning with online resources on an emergency basis for *all* coursework because institutions do not prepare for the traumatic toll health, environmental, war, and other disasters take on people who must teach and take courses (Brenya, 2024; Jones et al., 2021; Osegbue, 2025). Also, although internet connectivity was a major necessity for success and wellbeing during the COVID-19 building closures, there are still large parts of global infrastructure that are un- and under-connected (e.g., Amjad et al., 2024; Marques et al., 2024). Finally, although it is unpleasant to report, while there were about 100 years between the 1918 pandemic and the 2020 one, there is reason to believe that the next similar global health catastrophe could occur sooner rather than later (Liu et al., 2025).

Our community consisted of an academic intergenerational circle of doctoral students, doctoral candidates. All but one of these students has now completed her doctoral degree and that student is scheduled for defense in the coming months. There was also an assistant professor that moved to the associate level and was granted tenure in 2022. Common ground emerged through our positions as online instructors at a southwest United States public university. As a diverse community linked through emotional laborings, we represented various positionalities: a Mexican woman immigrant active in community-based criticality-focused teaching at the elementary, secondary, and post-secondary levels; a white woman with over 25 years of teaching secondary social studies; a woman of Bangladeshi origin who taught internationally for 14 years; a white woman with over seven years of experience as a tutor in foreign language and research assistant; another white woman, who had been a teacher educator with more than 20 years of experience preparing teachers for initial certification, providing professional learning, and supporting advanced degrees. Though we had varying levels of experience in online and in-person instruction, we found commonality through our commitment to helping students, ourselves, and each other during this time.

We discovered that we had similar struggles, and we expressed feelings of frustration about our lack of access to decision-making and negotiation within the hierarchy of the institution during the COVID-19 outbreak. As non-decision makers, we felt that our recommendations and proposals could not break through within the larger spaces of our stewardship; within the margins of the university, we identified with descriptions of subaltern status (Spivak, 1988) that did not allow us a voice in the construction of COVID-19 policies or remediations. When Spivak (1988) spoke of the subaltern she was describing women with much less privilege than we as university women in the U.S. Yet, elements of Spivak's (1988) subalternity resonated with our predicament; rather than asking, "Can the subaltern speak?" we framed our conversation around the question, "Can the subaltern—or can people who are not primary decision makers—be heard?" (Zembylas, 2017). We found the answer was yes, but if we could figure out how to listen to one another, too.

The purpose of this paper is to theorize *plática*,—or the deliberate relational conversation that centers everyday experiences and emphasizes healing (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016). We achieve our purpose by contextualizing the place where we teach and providing more information about our initial study. Then we provide a review of previous

studies about supporting students through the pandemic. We also provide additional methodological information about *plática*, and how we layered it alongside S-STEP research. Finally, we discuss how *plática* might broaden from our study to other work to support online teachers and teaching.

Contextualizing the Study

Our university is classified as a minority-serving institution, more specifically, a Hispanic-serving institution. Because the Latinx identity is historically complex, racially varied, and even politically charged, there are many students and faculty on campus who identify as Black, Indigenous, and mixed race alongside claiming a Latino and/or Hispanic (sometimes Hispano) identity (Mena, 2022). The university also had historically hosted many international students because tuition and costs of living were low in this part of the U.S. Around 50 percent of graduating students are first-generation college students. While there might be temptation to consider the demographic characteristics a challenge or problem, instead, we considered how institutional structures can be more responsive to the needs of students (Smith, 2007). Also, as teacher educators, we prepare teachers to work with children; central to that work is to help our students see all children as being worthy of dignified treatment and of help when it is needed. Therefore, we feel it is important to demonstrate what it means to treat students as if they deserve education and that having struggles and needing help are not disqualifying.

The original study that we conducted (Dathe et al., 2024) discussed the ways in which we met regularly online for *pláticas* and examined our teacher personas in four specific areas: (1) our online teacher identities; (2) challenges of online instruction before, during and after COVID-19; (3) emotional laborings we encountered in online teaching during the pandemic; and (4) the role technologies played in affecting our praxis and emotional laborings during initial campus closures through to campus reopening. During that initial work we considered how our efforts to use *plática* were not just to comfort each other, but by attending to Chicana feminism as a way of knowing and being, we moved toward decolonial ways of knowing. Cornthassel and Hardbarger (2019) explained that colonial practices of claiming land/water and knowledge through deception and/or violence were not a one-time event, and therefore, community recovery—or (de)colonizing would not be a single unitary process. Instead, individuals who wanted to (re)consider what knowing is, how to know, and where to know, would have to participate together, regularly, as acts of healing and (re)claiming. *Plática*'s emphasis on blurring the private and the public was precisely the methodology that would support recovery (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016).

While our narratives, identities, teaching modalities, routines, and futures were interrupted, even irrevocably changed during the pandemic, we felt it was important to document and dissect our stories as we continued to witness traumas, trials, and opportunities from this cataclysmic event. Isolated as we were during the many shifting protocols, we relished the time together to process and evaluate our diverse perspectives. Deleuze and Guattari (1972) deemed such events part of the natural deterritorialization and reterritorialization in which context is altered, mutated, and destroyed only to be reborn into new interactions, new ways of doing life, new teaching practices. “Creation takes place in bottlenecks...A creator who isn't grabbed around the throat by a set of impossibilities is no creator” (Deleuze, 1990, p. 133). Again, our way of knowing and being was that of making space for multiple simultaneous possibilities.

Braidotti (2022) defined these periods of flux, epidemic, and innovation as posthuman convergences, in which social, environmental, and technological factors merge to create our present historical condition. Braidotti (2022) explained that at the social level, there is increasing structural injustice through the unequal distribution of wealth and access to technology; at the environmental level, there are climate and pandemic issues to confront; at the technological level, robotics, nanotechnologies, and digital interconnectivities produce uncertainties generated by uncharted frontiers—all of which affected us in the academy. “The pandemic foregrounds the importance of human/non-human interaction and its destructive, as well as generative, potential” (Braidotti, 2022, p. 4). Beneath the surface of the worldwide upheaval, the global pandemic revealed that we can “no longer make do with disconnected ways of thinking and being, or onto-epistemologies, that emphasize dualisms, linearity, one-to-one correspondences, and essentialism” (Strom, 2021, p. 199). Living through these turbulent times, we encountered destruction and regeneration, bewilderment and clarity, uncertainty and resolve, grief and gratification. We chronicled our journey, widened our circle, and joined with others as we attempted to make sense of our odyssey through uncertain times (Dathe et al., 2024).

Our intention was to listen to each other as validation of the tears we shed, the ways we changed, and the emotions that remain close to the surface. This self-study concentrated on our teaching practices between spring 2020 and fall 2022 semesters; we investigated the entanglement of emotional work and identity issues as they affected our emergence and continued growth as online teacher educators through the lens of our peripheral roles within the institution. Our analyses were drawn from the various moments, including the initial shift to online teaching during the first days of campus shutdowns, and how subsequent shifts between asynchronous, synchronous, and hybrid instruction elicited different types of emotional, physical, and professional teacher identity questions and responses. We framed our emotional work in many dimensions, including our own affective reactions to various pandemic effects, our students’ efforts to process this unexpected and unsettling interruption of their academic progress, and our attempts to uphold pedagogical standards while supporting the oft-times distressing situations that developed within our own families and the families of our students and colleagues. Since our work with preservice teachers involved preparing those future teachers for their classrooms, modeling, structures, and workload expectations necessitated constant reevaluation, review, and revision. After all, we were now sending teachers into a radically different, radically shifting context as well.

Now we were engaged in the paradoxical *bantam* (Rice & Dunn, 2024) where we made many, but small modifications of modules, tiny, but on-going adjust expectations, and recognized the need to reorganize assignments to provide students with peer interactions while also making dozens of seemingly minuscule efforts to accommodate schedules and comfort students undergoing trauma that prevented strong group engagement. As Braidotti (2022) argued, though our posthuman laborings might make us seem catastrophe-prone at first sight, in retrospect, our reflections reveal a more complex and multilayered account of our circumstances, which highlight the positive potential of the posthuman assemblages that beset, bedeviled, and certainly, enhanced our virtual classrooms. New ways of knowing, self-understanding, and an appreciation of the rich, historical transition that any cataclysmic or tempestuous epoch produces—all these afford opportunities for tremendous growth in the educational community. As resilient teacher educators, we narrated our experiences and learnings about our own evolving teacher identities so we could support our students, but also so we could remember how we did this, so if called upon, we could do it again.

Through identification with aspects of subaltern identities, we desired control of our narratives, which evolved through pláticas, textual reminiscences, and artifacts. Our plática created a warm, secure, and inviting counterspace to deconstruct our feelings about larger issues within society, along with our own personal reflections on our academic and familial journeys.

Literature Review

Online courses in higher education were already increasing due to a multitude of factors (Lowenthal & Trespalacios, 2022; Lomellini et al., 2024). For example, online courses are assumed to provide some convenience and carry an expectation of flexibility to balance work and family obligations (Lightner, 2025). Also, a major shift in online instruction happened during the COVID-19 pandemic as many schools and universities quickly responded to the teaching continuity challenges by restructuring content delivery to online formats, which continued to be offered even after students returned to on-campus learning (Lowenthal & Trespalacios, 2022).

Online Teaching is More than Subject Matter

Online teachers must address issues other than content and technological challenges; student engagement, community, dialogue, and interpersonal relationships are factors that also contribute to student satisfaction, success, and perceived and assessed learning (Lowenthal & Trespalacios, 2022; Phirangee, 2017). However, online education is not usually perceived as the kind of education that is purposeful for relationship building (Anderson, 2013) or configured to foster authentic community (Hockridge, 2013). An online course “reduces, modifies, and eliminates” physical and social cues, which restricts social information about individuals, leaves online learners with unclear impressions of other students, allows for biased interpretations, and leads to less self-reflective communication” (Phirangee, 2017, p. 162).

While relational concerns were not the only concerns teachers had, online teacher instructors did face a host of relational concerns during the COVID-19 pandemic. There is no evidence that relational concerns have vanished as the pandemic immediacy has subsided (Alawadi, 2024; Goodman, 2024; Hasan et al., 2024). Novice and seasoned online educators have a theoretical option to not engage with students, except for the purposes of teaching content (Ozfidan et al., 2021).

Connecting Student Needs to Emotions

Attention to emotions for students has received some attention as emotional presence—where teachers are supposed to create space for student emotions (Cleveland-Innes & Campbell, 2012). The idea is that more emotions and more positive ones are better. Researchers like Jiang and Koo (2020) have found that authentic expression of student emotionality can be quite low. Moreover, attention to online instructors as having emotions during, but especially before and after teaching has not received much attention. In addition, our choice to talk about this as labor was born of the understand that it is more than just feeling a feeling but doing things—lots of things—often off script and behind the scenes to care for students because of shared emotionality (Rice & Dunn, 2024). In other words, attention to emotions and attention to emotional needs are very different propositions.

Students in online courses often experience unmet needs due to the distance between them and the teacher, and the fact that for some students, whatever is causing them to prefer to take the course online rather than come onto campus can mean that they are struggling in some way. For example, McPartlan et al. (2021) found that students had a variety of motivations for taking a class online. However, when that reason was many competing responsibilities, unsurprisingly, students struggled in the course. In online teaching, Jones et al. (2021) argued, “unmet needs emerge as visible behaviors or decisions: unresponsiveness to email correspondence, lack of accountability for assigned tasks, and feelings of insecurity” (p. 32). While students experience unmet needs, instructors also find that their intersecting social locations and laborings generate stress and insecurities in their own lives (Porter et al., 2023; Stewart et al., 2021).

Meeting Needs as Part of Online Teacher Labor

Institutions may not be able to require all online teachers to perform emotional labor with students, but there are benefits when they do. For example, Rollag Yoon et al. (2024) outlined the uncompensated labor that they provided while teaching online. This labor served to keep students enrolled in class, resulting in increased revenue for the university. However, there is also the possibility that the departments and programs gain or keep better reputations when there is a sense that a teacher is there and will help you. All online instructors were not required to engage in this labor—but Rollag Yoon et al. (2024) did so because of a commitment they felt to students. Yet, there is little acknowledgement or encouragement for doing emotional labor.

As teacher educators make decisions about how much emotional labor to do, they might also be confronting unfamiliar teaching realities—their responses have direct bearing on inequities within systems (Porter et al., 2023; Williams et al., 2021). The pressure to make up for systemic inequities as the course level might be especially high for online instructors who were already feeling marginalized due to their precarious status as temporary status instructors, their positions as graduate students, or because they are members of groups historically not well-served by educational institutions (Brissett, 2020).

Methodology

Both our original study and the reflection on that study for methodological insights drew on self-study of teacher education practices (S-STEP) research methodology (Dathe et al., 2024). S-STEP methodology accommodates myriad research designs and approaches centered on a turn to practice that supports teacher education (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009). Using S-STEP methodology required collaboration with a “clear and explicit focus on the self-in-practice” (Fletcher et al., 2016, p. 303). Specifically, LaBoskey (2004) highlighted how exemplar-based validation of findings improves practice as key characteristics of S-STEP work. Exemplars emerged through *plática*, we held to unpack our entangled laborings. Our efforts centered on two ideas: (1) engaging with the notion of the subaltern and (2) speaking with *plática*.

Engaging with the Subaltern

Intellectual discourse prioritizes Western forms of knowing by diminishing other forms of communication and articulation; Spivak’s (1988) *subaltern*, a marginalized figure within the academic community, must conform expression of self to normative or imperialistic ways of knowing the world. Only by speaking in the language and intellectual

formats of the empire are there opportunities for what has been pressed into subaltern spaces be expressed.

As we explored our subalternity, we found that our personal expressions through journals, artifacts, and photographic articles ignited our discursive group interchanges. Although Gramsci (2021) is credited with coining the term subaltern, Spivak's (1988) essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" demonstrated "to what extent historical circumstances and ideological structures conspire to efface the possibility of being heard...for those who are variously located as the others" (Morris, 2010, p. 6–7). Subalternity, as gendered muting, is not seen as an identity, but rather a predicament, a "structured place from which the capacity to access power is radically obstructed" (Morris, 2010, p. 8). Intentional measures should enable online learning communities and ignite meaningful communication—to inspire the learners to experience healing and remediation through the intimate and personal reflections of each learner about marginality, anticolonialism, and posthuman convergence. As such, *plática* offered opportunities for healing, which enables us to process self-study/narratives/reflections on what it means to know and be in a space through the lens of the subaltern.

Spivak's term *strategic essentialism*, which refers to solidarity for strategic action, which we defined through our positionalities, dovetails with Braidotti's (2022) fusion of posthumanism and feminist thought as a means of effecting change to elevate each other (Chakraborty, 2010). There must be intentional measures taken to enable online learning communities and ignite meaningful communication—to inspire the learners to experience healing through intimate and personal reflections of each learner about marginality, anticolonialism, and posthuman convergence.

Speaking with Plática

Plática as part of Chicana feminism builds connection and respects researcher/participants epistemic orientations. As a methodology *plática* embraces the stories and the experiences of researchers/participants and it fosters relationships. Researchers and participants in a *plática* are vulnerable and open to sharing intimate truths that contribute to collective knowledge (Fierros & Bernal, 2016). While *plática* is sometimes used as a strategy alone, Fierros and Bernal (2016) emphasize the importance of conceptualizing *plática* within the entire frame for knowing and being from which it is drawn: (1) it emphasizes decolonial feminist thought; (2) it is relational and centers upon everyday experiences; (3) it recognizes participants as co-constructors of knowledge; (4) it emphasizes healing; and (5) it is reciprocal and embraces vulnerability. *Plática* supported us in processing the experiences that, in many ways, marked and changed our praxis as teacher educators.

We analyzed data collected during the winter of 2022 and spring of 2023 from our *pláticas* of about 60-80 minutes each. *Pláticas* happened every three weeks for 15 weeks to share impressions and events during the initial S-STEP (North, 2017). In reviewing our own S-STEP work, our methods, techniques, and modes of inquiry we used were powerful enabled *plática* that made space for us to talk about how we could support students. We also held additional *plática*, monthly in 2024 through 2025.

Within our group, we used the familial milieu of *plática* to unpack our remembrances of the disruptions of the past few years as they affected our roles inside and outside of the university community. *Plática* occurred in a well-defined cultural space for dialogue where

feminist perspectives coalesced to engage in a community of intellectual theorizing (Fierros & Bernal, 2016). It represented a form of authentic talk that nurtures deep dialogue in affirming cultural spaces for the subaltern to engage in truth-telling, mutual emotionality, and sharing vulnerable truths (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2018; Hampton & Mendoza Aviña, 2023).

In revisiting and reviewing our prior use of *plática* alongside S-STEP, we realized that this intimate conversational methodology provided a useful platform for student interaction and engagement with issues in their personal, academic, and professional lives. S-STEP researchers are often encouraged to journal, to gather images, to produce artifacts that could deepen and describe intimate emotions (LaBoskey, 2004). While we did do some personal writing and sharing of photos and other images to discuss feelings, we did not want these moments when we let to feel like assignments where we had to share homework. Instead, we wanted to create an atmosphere that felt more like sharing at a kitchen table or in a living room. When our meetings had to be online, we took care not to force an agenda or protocol, although we did have a purpose, and we did record the meeting to help us with data collection. After the initial study, when it was possible to meet in person, we usually went to a café or sat in a park or other comfortable space. While these meetings did not have a video conference record option, we did take some notes, and we collected overall ideas and coalesced sentiments through emails and text messages when needed. All of us speak languages other than English, and we use these languages for conversation or to explain ideas where necessary. During the initial study period, the assistant professor convened the group, but afterward, other members shared in convening responsibilities. In this way, we do have multiple simultaneous methodologies that allow us to draw on our commitments as women to multiple simultaneous commitments (Braidotti, 2019).

Because we were operating within a complex conceptual framing, our conversations were about more than sharing experiences. Communal efforts to understand teaching experiences during pandemic times might help with reparative efforts in academic culture, this inquiry relied on a holistic approach. Through the methodology of *plática* as part of Chicana feminist knowing and being, we intentionally incorporated discussion and analysis of our public lives as teachers, including our multiple on-going efforts with students, and our private struggles. From this complex ecology of relationality and conversation, foregrounded by our original study, the key outcomes of this current inquiry emerged.

Outcomes

We honored collective and individual teaching experiences through the pandemic years amid a need to holistically address loss inside and outside the teaching machine (Spivak, 1993). We attempted to support an entanglement of needs, rather than a hierarchy of traumas. As we revisited our earlier study conducted during the pandemic years, we seek to examine how attention to affect in our context shifted healing and restorative justice within our teaching community to address feminist practices, decolonization in classrooms, and posthuman convergences pointing to the unequal distribution of wealth and access to technology (Braidotti, 2022).

Pláticas as a Counterspace to Foster Transformative Learning

Some educators have advocated for creating counterspaces (Artiles et al., 2025; Becerra, 2023; Morales, 2017), places for people on the margins to foster dialogue, critical

discourse, and transformation that foster a sense of community in much the same manner advanced by Oldenburg (1998) and others who envisioned face-to-face and online learning spaces that function as environments where students and instructors could dialogue informally, as one would in a coffeeshop, brewery or cafe. Counterspaces (Artiles et al., 2025; Becerra, 2023; Morales, 2017) considers surroundings that are separate from the usual spaces of home/work/school.

Counterspaces outline the processes that occur when marginalized groups of individuals gather with one another in a space “counter” to settings where they experience marginalization (Odera & Webster, 2024). In both spaces, these borderlands are ones that are open and inviting, comfortable and informal, convenient, unpretentious, conversational, and, in some cases, light-hearted (Oldenburg, 2023; Becerra, 2023). Counterspaces can be physical spaces, such as concerts or festivals where like-minded people converge, bookstores, or borderland areas where neighborhoods gather to discuss issues affecting marginalized individuals. In many cases, these spaces provide a safe realm where participants work against hegemonic constructs and dominant orthodoxy.

Postmodern, postcolonial, and posthumanist scholars like Said (1978), Anzaldúa (1987), Spivak (1993), hooks (1994), Bhabha (1994), and Braidotti (2019) along with Soja (1996) have all influenced academic discourse on the creation of zones/areas or counterspaces where power structures, marginality, subalternity, and oppression can be comfortably/freely addressed and analyzed. To address the issues of alienation, *otherness*, and detachment in online learning frameworks, the creation of a counterspace allows students and instructors to relate in an intimate and shared venue where time, space, generational disparities, and differing socioeconomic distinctions are erased.

In our original S-STEP study, we evaluated our own experiences with *plática* as a methodological tool to create an intimate space where all voices are heard and acknowledged and address the ways in which we feel that *plática* can be implemented in any online learning environment in the future. In this iteration of our research, we reflected on the lessons learned through our application of *plática* methodology, highlighting its potential to foster a more relational classroom environment in a wide range of online educational settings. As we illustrate in the following quotes, our *plática* revealed the counterspace that it was created to foster transformative learning amongst ourselves:

We were talking about children’s literature, but I couldn’t ignore the news, learning about what groups were more impacted by COVID-19. I think we made it part of the course. We were talking and discussing about the protests in the country, you know, the black lives matter, and everything that happened. Those events were, like, contextualizing that period and I couldn’t ignore that. It was like talking about what’s going on and how that was affecting people like us, people that were taking this course. I think that was also very emotional. It was a lot of emotional labor because I was trying to bring those topics for dialogue and talk about racism in humanizing ways. How do we talk about this without triggering more emotions?

Using *plática* we realized new efforts we making to create spaces for our students to discuss current events affecting their lives within the institution. *Plática* supported us in conceptualizing these spaces as counterspaces (Artiles et al., 2025; Becerra, 2023; Morales, 2017) both for our own *plática* and for use in our classrooms with the purpose of offering our

students a positive environment where vulnerability was embraced. Here is an example of writing from an author that we newly (re)interpreted.

Leading up to the closures, I was having a pretty miserable semester already. I was trying to do some things for my research to prepare for a conference and there were issues at the university and in the department that were taking up time. When I returned from the conference at the end of February, we had a little bit of time and then campus closed. I was not excited about the virus, but teaching online did not bother me and it seemed safer. What I wondered about was my sense of the range of feelings about online teaching and learning outside of the pandemic. While this is a major area of expertise for me, as a new professor I did not know what were useful and acceptable ways to bring the expertise to the college and department and I was not being invited because there is an expectation you will just push in as a faculty member.

This author revealed vulnerability as *plática* unfolded. As a new professor, seeking her identity within the institution, she shared intimate details of her journey with graduate students, which is not a usual practice in the hierarchy of academia. Living in the *plática* as a counterspace suggested a milieu where trust is built over time and relationships develop through sharing emotional and relational laborings. Since the likelihood of other pandemics or natural disasters necessitating school/university closures is a possibility in the future and since students will continue to utilize online classes for personal and professional reasons, it was reasonable to hope that academic institutions could be prepared to maintain and expand digital infrastructure along with providing instruction to equip both students and faculty with the skills and knowledge needed to successfully navigate the technical, academic, and emotional aspects of online learning communities.

In our study, we incorporated *plática*, the practice of deliberate relational conversation that centers everyday experiences and emphasizes healing (Fierros & Bernal, 2016), as a counterspace which facilitated an understanding of the changes, challenges, and altered circumstances encountered by the community of learners-to serve as our counterspace. The mediating role of self-study methodology blending well with *plática* aided us, as online instructors, to address communication, marginality and subalternity, anticolonialism, and posthuman convergence as a means of reflecting on past and current crises which might affect our online classes. Psychological resilience and growth mandate a meaning-making, collaborative strategy in shared, intimate, and open conversations about the realities of the pandemic and/or other situational phenomena.

Each author's efforts, while personal and place-centered to a certain extent, were ones that perhaps will resonate with others who struggle and continue to labor through the disruptions and uncertainties of the past few years. Being intentional in connecting the online format with methods that invoke community allows *plática* to enable communication about the themes of marginality and anticolonialism and the angst many feel in dealing with posthuman convergence (Braidotti, 2022). *Plática* can be applied to any online learning community; however, it disrupts the routinization of the classroom and allows discourse on current issues and challenges that most have with online learning platforms. In this manner, we present a path to the possibilities that are inherent in the *plática* methodology, which combines ancient, indigenous, and elemental practices to confront the issues of marginality, anticolonialism, communication, and the posthuman convergence.

Revisiting Community in Online Teaching and Lessons learned from Plática

Feminist scholars have advocated for methodologies that bring public and private knowing and being together into classroom spaces (Butler, 1990; hooks, 1994; Delgado Bernal, 2001; Cariaga, 2019; Hannegan-Martinez & Griffin, 2024). While there are multiple feminisms, our critical post-humanist variety emphasized multiplicity and bringing together the human and (non)human in technological spaces (Braidotti, 2022).

Becerra (2023) described her use of plática podcasts as being transformative spaces for sharing knowledge, raising consciousness, and forging connections. From our experiences participating in our original S-STEP pláticas, we held discussions about healing, caring, resisting, and remediation of collective anxiety and alienation. One author shared the following.

So, as an online teacher during, though, and after the pandemic, we have students with challenges that are technological, and then those that would be there even if we were in person. Having been an English as a Second Language teacher for 10 years in public schools as a white woman, I had to learn that even though you love them, you must have high standards for learners and help them. If you don't match your care and concern with high expectations, then your respect for them and your appreciation for their struggles does not do them any good.

The author reveals her care and emotional labor in creating a community where collective anxiety and alienation can be discussed and explored. Through her reflection on students' needs that she exhibited a feminist positionality that care, and love are inherent in all aspects of the educational process (hooks, 1994). Plática allowed such reflections to be articulated and shared with the other participants in the hope of affirming everyone's emotional and professional laborings. The following quote illustrates another author's desire to consider the online classroom to reflect anti-colonial and post-feminist perspectives:

As I created my arts-based retrospective of my pandemic journey, I was reminded of the humor I injected into situations to ease tension, of the reliance on historical precedent which, for me, allowed reflection and opportunities for introspection, and of the many times I think I made a difference in the lives of my students as we collaborated on diffusing the sometimes-volatile situations that arose in their personal, academic, or professional lives. We were frontline for many of these students; some were so traumatized or isolated that we were their main contact, their only ally in this struggle to stay healthy, abreast of the classwork, and on top of daily commitments. That is a lot of emotional laboring – intense pressure to be there for our students 24/7.

The author revealed her desire to “construct a discursive community that cares about the state of the world and wants to intervene productively in it” (Braidotti, 2022). In this sense, the students' constructed realities are heard and respected through intimate interactions that are enabled by plática methodology.

Toward (de)colonization with online education, pláticas were counterspaces (Artiles et al., 2025; Becerra, 2023; Morales, 2017) to address and interrogate our own practices. During pláticas, we shared out feelings on how students were working to survive during this period of trauma due to socioeconomic complications, university policies that were not

always attuned to individual circumstances, unappreciated cultural capital that students might bring to the university context, and disrespect for individual community practices.

Posthuman convergences as the merging of technological advances and accelerated ecological degradation, along with global interconnectedness were also present (Braidotti, 2019). Our students experienced lack of internet connection, unequal access to financial resources, loss of cultural identity due to the necessity to cope with an urban versus rural environment, caring for children and parents—sometimes simultaneously, working multiple jobs, and other factors affected by the ongoing technological transformation of society and late-stage capitalism, seemed be general sense of anxiety and angst in our online educational classes that might not be captured with emotion gaging instruments for measuring presence.

With the rapid acceleration of technology coupled with ecological and environmental crises, many students needed to discuss the disruptions and feelings of alienation they were experiencing. Through our own experience with plática, with its intimate, artifact-based, conversational nature, we gained insights into how to provide an area where students felt that their voices were being heard. The need to discuss and address various sociopolitical, economic, and environmental crises did not abate during the study and (anecdotally) has not since we began exploring pláticas.

Discussion

Our work is important because using plática as a frame for knowing felt authentic and relational to us. Our contribution to the field centers on the need for online teachers—and students—to make more spaces to explore multiple frameworks and locate what resonates with them as they take up online teaching and learning. During both the original study and our revisit of it, we saw the opportunity for healing as an on-going process rather than something that can be done in one moment (Corntassel & Harbarger, 2019). In the more recent past, we find ourselves and we find our students remain socially and politically unsettled; although we were also undergoing various pressures, recognizing the entangled laborings with our students represented an effort to provide a frame for building support for each other and students.

Since we found the plática methodology to be helpful alongside S-STEP commitments, we anticipated that sharing it might be useful within online teaching. Our stories, while personal and place-centered, extent, may resonate with others who performed emotional labor through the ensuing collateral hardships during and in the aftermath of the pandemic. Through research and revision, we hope to contribute to relational scholarship that provides intentional possibilities of deeper engagement in examining teaching and context (Alawadi, 2024; Goodman, 2024; Hasan et al., 2024). We also understand that our ideological differing from dominant thought is not always welcome. Said (1978) wrote of this phenomenon in *Orientalism*. Indeed, the point of the was to learn to live as being and thinking not like the institutions, while trying to figure out how to stay a part of them so we can help students (Spivak, 1988).

Doing and Being within a Plática for Online Teaching

What does a functional plática, look like for online teachers? While we emphasize that plática is a way of knowing and being and not merely a strategy, we suggest that those who might want to try plática should form groups with people who share similar ethical

commitments to students (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016). They should plan casual times to meet in comfortable places. If they want to conduct a formal study, they could agree on how and what to record (Dathe et al., 2024). Then they should be prepared to think about how learning from initial conversations and learning from the analysis results in various forms of understanding about emotional labor and possible efforts toward community making and healing. For online teachers, special considerations are necessary for communicating at a distance, understanding the entangled demands between teachers, students, and the technological elements—including devices and infrastructures (Braidotti, 2022).

We also suggest that students, particularly if they are future teachers, might also benefit from plática-based community building and relational counterspaces (Artiles et al., 2025; Becerra, 2023; Morales, 2017). For our own continuity as a community, we anticipate long-term goals might include using plática with students to challenge individualistic perspectives of academic success; solidarity and mutual respect; challenging hierarchies of all manner; authentic communication which demands authenticity from other members; compassionate and unselfish collective action which addresses the needs of all (Chakraborty, 2010). Collecting data about plática for students might look different. Sometimes there is a tendency to use plática to begin an interview or focus group to make students comfortable or because it is supposed to signal familiarity with some conception of *Latinx culture* (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016). However, this is not regarded as being in the ethical traditions and commitments of plática. If teachers have a desire to create healing counterspaces (Artiles et al., 2025; Becerra, 2023; Morales, 2017) for students, they will have to make commitments to (re)examining teaching practices to become more relational. The way that the plática operates as a community makes it difficult to claim relationality, but also to do emotional labor while attempting to avoid emotional burnout.

Conclusion

We offered S-STEP and plática alongside one another for scholarly considerations on how to combine deep analysis on our own online teaching and the connections with other pedagogical and methodological approaches that deepen and transform online teaching and learning. Plática, as an intimate, feminist online counterspace within the larger educational institution, can initiate care, repair, and remediation by addressing issues pertaining to anticolonialism and the posthuman convergence (hooks, 1994; Spivak, 1998; Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016; Braidotti, 2022). As we have experienced first-hand the greater possibilities of plática methodology as an affective and effective plan of action to build stronger online teaching relationships, we advance the ideas of plática as well suited for remedy and repair for research as well as pedagogy within our classrooms, across disciplines, and throughout our academic and social communities.

Declarations

The authors declare no conflicts of interest. The authors declare no funding associated with this work. The authors declare that the University of New Mexico declared the data collected in this study does not constitute that which is governed by human subject review because it was collected from individuals who are listed publicly as authors.

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